

GROWING UP IS MURDER: AN ANALYSIS OF COMING-OF-AGE
NARRATIVES IN HORROR FILMS

by

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Abstract

This interpretive thesis examines how the film genre of horror can be utilized to communicate a coming-of-age narrative to an adolescent audience, including bringing more attention to the sub-genre of “*coming-of-age horror*.” Many cultures place a high value on the “coming of age” for their young because it represents the process of growing up and achieving maturity through events that greatly and irreversibly change one’s life. The importance of representing adolescent growth and struggles on-screen cannot be understated, as they are one of the most vulnerable age groups when it comes to psychological stressors because of the sudden changes that occur during puberty. Therefore, it is important for producers and directors to create media that resonate with these audiences, and the genre of horror has the potential to do this. The main issue to be addressed in this paper is whether or not the horror genre is an effective way to relay coming-of-age narratives that the audience can identify with in the film and to also bring greater attention to the potential that horror has to relay meaningful messages to audiences. The horror film genre has a history of being viewed as a lesser form of storytelling when compared to other films, but there is potential within this category to tell an impactful coming-of-age story, whether through exploring the monstrous body, overcoming trauma, or managing the fear of overt teen sexuality.

Keywords: Horror, adolescence, coming of age, film

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Chapter I: An Introduction

Around the world, various cultures have different names for the process of progressing from one life stage to the next, specifically the transition from the innocence of childhood to adolescence, and then on to adulthood. The most common phrase used to describe that specific transformation is known as the “coming of age.” This period of life has immense importance to many, with numerous cultures having special celebrations to commemorate the once-in-a-lifetime occasion. For others, it represents a new beginning of sorts. Since the beginning of civilization, when we began emphasizing this transitional stage of life, people have passed down stories of boys becoming young men by conquering beasts of legend so that they may return home as heroes. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is one of many European fairy tales that serve as examples of this type of narrative. In *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the titular character transforms from an impoverished young boy struggling to make money to feed himself and his mother to a courageous and cunning provider. This change comes about due to Jack’s defeat of the giant who lived in the sky above. Through this victory, he attains not only great wealth but also a sense of maturity, as he becomes the sole provider for his family. As history proceeded, these coming-of-age narratives were adapted to different media such as literature, music, and film. They were also becoming more creative and inclusive so that more adolescents were able to self-identify with the protagonists.

Coming-of-age films are pervasive in our modern society. Many such motion pictures bear common household names, with *Lady Bird* (2017), *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), and *The Breakfast Club* (1985) being notable examples of such films. People of

all ages enjoy these films, but they resonate the most with adolescents since the nature of the issues the characters face are similar, if not identical, to the ones they face every day.

Film critics do not routinely acknowledge that horror films are just as capable of conveying interesting and technically sound coming-of-age stories to the audience as any other story-telling genre. Of all the mainstream film genres, horror is viewed by the broader public and critics as a lesser form of art due to its associations with overt violence and sexuality, although these components are not absent from other genres. It should be noted that, as of 2023, only 18 horror films have had the honor of receiving one or more Oscars. Of these 18 films, only one of them won the coveted golden statuette for Best Picture, *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), but many film fans and critics alike have attempted to distance this film from the horror genre and classify it as a thriller or drama. While it is obvious that horror films commonly contain gore and social deviance, these features, unfortunately, block appreciation for the aesthetic and reflective messages horror films can convey to modern audiences. I argue that the supernatural and monstrous elements of the horror genre are a strength that more realistic teen dramas do not have access to when it comes to telling a coming-of-age story. When the term monstrous is used, I am referring to something that could not occur naturally or is often misunderstood by society at the time, rather than an inherently malignant force.

Horror is one of the few genres that I believe is most capable of creating a compelling narrative about achieving maturity, another of which is fantasy, which contains many notable coming-of-age films that were well-received such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003), *Labyrinth* (1986), and the Studio Ghibli animated film, *Spirited Away* (2001). A world that is not bound to the same laws of our reality supplies

story-telling opportunities that cannot be found in other genres, in turn, allowing writers freer rein as to how far they can take a coming-of-age metaphor using these supplied elements and liberties. However, while the fantasy story-telling genre can take the same liberties with the laws of our reality as the horror genre can, I do not believe that fantasy settings can accurately depict the act of growing up as a pulse-racing and anxiety-fueled period of one's life that, to be frank, is not always as glamorous as discovering you're the "chosen one" for a great adventure or that there are hidden, magical powers lying dormant within oneself just waiting to make an appearance. As I will demonstrate in this paper, these story-telling devices employed by horror films can vary from using the lunar cycle and lycanthropy (i.e., the supernatural transformation of a person into a wolf) as metaphors for puberty in females, and an omnipotent killer clown representing childhood trauma, to a dream stalker with a bladed glove acting as a physical embodiment of teenage lust.

I viewed several of the highest-rated horror and coming-of-age films, a judgment made by combining the top choices from various lists made by critics and fans alike. I then viewed films that I believed to be intersections of the two. My extensive study of these films led me to notice patterns and themes in these films that have resulted in conceptualizing the subgenre of "coming-of-age horror" into three groups: the discovery that your body is not what you once thought it was (*Carrie* [1976] and *Ginger Snaps* [2000]); an awakening of sexual desires and what comes after (*A Nightmare on Elm Street* [1984] and *It Follows* [2014]); and trauma acting as a catalyst for growth and change (*Jennifer's Body* [2009] and *It: Chapter One* [2017]). Many of these films could, of course, fall into multiple categories due to the ways they merge trauma, sex, and

pubescent changes. However, my typology focuses on the essential moods and themes of the narrative. Throughout this paper, I will explicate my method for labeling a story as “coming of age.” I will argue that horror is an effective outlet for this narrative because the nature of the genre encourages strong, emotional reactions from audience members, an experience that becomes important when expressing a coming-of-age story that can be enjoyed by and applied to adolescents. I will also produce examples of horror films that hold coming-of-age messages and explain my conclusions. Finally, I will address the key point of this paper: is the horror genre an effective medium for telling a coming-of-age story?

Chapter II: What Makes a Coming-of-Age Film

There are many different interpretations of the term “coming of age” due to the fact that every society has its own distinct definition given differences in cultures. To suggest an idea, there is a special ceremony in Jewish households known as a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* organized for boys when they turn 13 and girls when they turn 12 to celebrate becoming a man or a woman. One coming-of-age ceremony that the Navajo practice for young women, *kinaaldá*, is a four-day ritual that occurs after a girl’s first menstrual cycle in which the community teaches the girl what it means to become a woman and the skills she will need in adulthood (Morales, 2018). For the sake of cohesiveness and to avoid any confusion or misunderstandings, I will define the term “coming of age” as *the realization of an adult identity, regardless of the age of the adolescent*. I also argue that there should be a noticeable change in personality, morality, and/or character in the adolescent(s) by the end of the film. For example, many critics and fans define Rob Reiner’s 1986 film *Stand by Me* as a coming-of-age film, even though the protagonists are between the ages of 12 and 13, just around the time that adolescent males hit puberty and begin experience biological changes such as the production of sperm (Hirsch et al., 1985). Yet John Hughes’ 1985 cult classic *The Breakfast Club*, which features a cast of characters that are assumed to be between the ages of 16 and 18, is also considered one of the most popular coming-of-age films of all time in the United States. This goes to show that the exact age of the transition to an adult identity is not static and varies based on one’s experiences and interactions with their environment. The question as to why this specific stage of life is important in the larger scheme of things and why so much

emphasis is placed on it may arise. For starters, adolescence is a period of sudden and ongoing mental and physical maturation, as well as the time when many begin developing core personality traits that will define their thoughts and actions as they reach full maturity. The adolescent period will have the most apparent “before” and “after” transitions because, when one comes of age, they have also achieved their own sense of identity and self that is independent of their families. As we will see, the coming of age does not just involve incredible physical growth, but the growth of character as well (Klimstra, 2012). While many of these personality changes will continue to change as an adolescent ages and enters adulthood, many of these core traits will remain, differing just slightly from their earlier state.

Regarding physical changes and maturation in pre-teens and teens, there are two specific medical terms often associated with the adolescent stage of life that I will be using in this paper: *spermarche*, the first occurrence of sperm in the gonads of young males (Hirsch et al., 1985), and *menarche*, the second medical term I will be using, which is the beginning of menstruation in young females (Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1982). Although these are the biological signs of reaching maturity, they are not the only markers of coming of age among adolescents. As mentioned above, not all change is behaviorally visible at this time, and much of it occurs in the maturing psyche of the adolescent as their brain continues to develop. It is around this very same time that the plasticity of an individual’s brain is much more intense and allows for more exceptional cognitive development. The plasticity of the brain, also known as neuroplasticity, refers to the ability of the brain to strengthen certain connections between synapses, resulting in faster mental processing (Kolb & Gibb, 2011). The pruning of synapses in the brain

occurs at a greater rate during this period as well, which is when certain synapses are no longer necessary after development, leading to the removal or “pruning” of them.

Because it is difficult to outwardly measure the cognitive growth of an individual without a functional MRI (fMRI), I will be using Christine Davidson’s definition of what it means to come of age as a reference instead, because I believe it perfectly encapsulates what it means to achieve this transformation, “For many, one particular change will mark a ‘coming of age’ where they attain their mature powers.” (2001, p. 15). Davidson’s statement is one that I think perfectly defines the moment when one truly comes of age: through one event that drastically changes one’s character and allows one to complete a metamorphosis into a more mature individual. The “mature powers” that Davidson is referring to here is the new, fully developed identity taken by an individual after they have come of age, and not literal powers (although this metaphor is explored later in this paper).

While one does not suddenly become an adult overnight, I argue that this defining moment in one’s life is the catalyst that leads one down the path of maturity. This journey isn’t an easy one. Many adolescent changes during this time are responsible for an increase in emotional distress that often leads to a rise in depression, anxiety, and other mental struggles. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a 2022 study identified suicide as the second leading cause of death in children aged 10-14. This is a staggering statistic that not only carries a heavy weight with it but also goes to show the emotional turmoil that youths experience as they undergo pubescent changes and begin to mature physically. This is not alleviated by the fact that with the onset of puberty comes a sense of shame and doubt about one’s

burgeoning sexuality, desires, and emotions. The confusion and perturbation felt by these adolescents are usually due to the contradictory messaging they receive from their families, schools, religious organizations, and the media, each with multiple, often extreme, stances on these subjects, like teen sexuality (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg, 1990). With this in mind, many young people grapple with the beliefs of those around them and their understanding of the world around them as they form an independent identity.

As shown by Albert Bandura's 1961 study of observational learning, we know that children learn by witnessing the actions of others (Bandura et al, 1961). Whether it be from watching their parents perform simple acts like washing their hands before eating a meal or observing an older sibling breaking curfew, every act in front of a growing child or adolescent that one might consider inconspicuous at first is internalized, influencing the way they will view and interact with the world around them. It isn't until pubescence that these individuals begin to form an identity that is independent of their parents or legal guardians when they begin discovering who they are as individuals. Forming an identity that is entirely separate from the authority figures in their life is one of the most critical changes that occur during adolescence. This leads them to search for support from their peers and to form groups with other adolescents who share their anxiety about growing up and reaching maturity. It is also during this time that support from peer groups is especially important, because as we will see in the films presented throughout this paper, this support can mean the difference between a successful transition into the next stage of life and being overtaken by the fear, shame, and doubt of this transformation.

Adolescents struggle to feel seen or heard by those around them, and though they may turn to their peers for support, this may not be enough for some, especially those who feel alienated from their peers. Media representation that acutely conveys the process of reaching maturity is incredibly important because it brings forth issues that adolescents face and can offer solace to those feeling as if they are unheard. Poor representation can negatively impact the mental health and mindsets of developing teenagers and children who are already under intense emotional turmoil due to their own experiences with aging and maturing (Fürsich, 2010). For these reasons, writers and filmmakers need to create narratives that not only have a clear message but are also executed in a way that makes the message accessible to all. Audience identification is necessary for these instances, because if a young audience cannot relate to the characters on-screen that are intended to be representative of them and their growing pains, then they will receive no real satisfaction or closure from the experience. It can be difficult for one narrative alone to accurately represent multitudes of people, but, as I will argue, the general themes of coming-of-age narratives are relatable to almost everyone on some level, because adolescent changes and anxieties are fairly common and inevitable, regardless of someone's background.

Unfortunately, even though progress has been made in recent years for more inclusive storytelling, I want to acknowledge that Hollywood still has a long way to go. This is especially true in both the genres of horror and coming-of-age films, where it is difficult to count on one hand the number of protagonists who are not white, cisgender, or heterosexual in films made before the 2010s. Unfortunately, despite my best efforts, I struggled to find inclusive coming-of-age horror films that fit my criteria, but I do hope

that one day I may revisit this topic with not only a more inclusive list of films. but a greater understanding of just how important accurate representation is in film as well. (For those seeking foreign language coming-of-age horror, I strongly recommend *Tigers Are Not Afraid* [2017] and *The Silenced* [2015]). Despite these pitfalls, a sociological study on diversity across film genres published in 2021, found that diversity in horror films is increasing, with horror films that pass diversity tests becoming more popular among mainstream audiences (Dhami, 2021).

The coming of age bears some resemblance to the monomyth, that is more commonly known as the *hero's journey* (Campbell, 1949). While the process of growing up is not a 1:1 match to Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth, many aspects of the hero's journey reflect the transition from childhood/adolescence to adulthood. The onset of puberty represents a "call to adventure" that acts as a driving force for more changes to come in the life of a young person, who may reject this sudden change, thus, the "refusal of the call", when the average adolescent will feel the discomfort with their realization as to what is happening. Some may turn to the adults in their life for help ("meeting with the mentor"), but some do not and journey down the metaphorical path alone. It is at this stage that the metaphor is somewhat lost in real-life adolescent changes, where the steps of the journey become more fantastical in nature; these are the other sections of the three-part narrative structure, "Initiation" and "Return." Although not applicable to the ordinary adolescent, these aspects are observable in most coming-of-age stories, including the films mentioned before. I will continue to reference Campbell's monomyth throughout and draw attention to how this structure is applied to coming-of-age horror films.

Of the coming-of-age films I have seen, I have noticed patterns that are what make a movie one that is labeled as such. Manifestly, the protagonist(s) must be between the ages of 10 to 19, because these are the ages when one is considered, by definition, an adolescent, therefore they have not yet come of age. Typically, the authority figures in these films are unreliable, leaving the adolescents to face their struggles either alone or with their peers. Another common theme in these stories is that there is typically a metaphorical cloud of dread hanging over the heads of the young protagonists, the almost gut-sinking realization that they are approaching the end of their youth and will soon have to enter the adult world. Some adolescents worry that, despite their best efforts, they will lead the same lives that their parents lived, and others grapple with the impending separation from their peers (whether this is due to graduation, moving away, or even death). Finally, the adolescents in this film struggle with their blossoming sexuality and gender identities, which, as mentioned before, are taboo subjects that they feel they cannot discuss with their families (Detora, 2006). These are all markers of a film that is labeled as coming of age.

Chapter III: Monsters as Metaphors

Now that it has been established what a coming-of-age narrative is and what exactly it means when one uses that term, it is time to elaborate further on why the horror genre is so well suited to tell such a story. Unlike most other genres, horror isn't confined by the boundaries of reality and can, instead, be as "unrealistic" as it needs to be in order to tell its story. Yet, even with this disconnect from reality, the problems brought forth in some of these films can feel very real when executed properly. If one were to go back several decades and examine the overarching themes of scary movies, one could conclude that the genre tends to represent society's current fears. The history of this film genre is a long one, but can easily be split into "cycles", in which many of the mainstream features released during that time share common ideas. An example of a horror cycle would be the rise of the slasher film in the 70s and 80s, where the underlying denominator was a ruthless murderer who would slowly exterminate members of a dwindling group until there was only one, the final girl (Clover, 1992).

It was not by sheer coincidence that the slasher horror cycle began amid the Vietnam War and continued to grow in popularity long after the end of the bloody war. Millions of families across the United States feared for the lives of their husbands, brothers, and sons as they were drafted into a war that many Americans did not support. Of these drafted soldiers, there were some as young as 18 years old when they went to an unfamiliar land to fight against an enemy that was unknown to them. This is merely an example of how the greater fears of American society influenced horror at the time. The same can be said about the rise of mutant and monster films in the 40s and 50s, a time

when a nuclear holocaust seemed to not only be a possibility, but a certain impending doom. Essentially, filmmakers have been using the liberties present in the horror genre to communicate very real fears for decades.

The horror genre is a very flexible one when it comes to narrative storytelling, and this works in its favor because it allows more abstract concepts and ideas to be brought to life through the supernatural, otherworldly, or impossible. While realistic horror exists as well, this paper will be focusing on scary movies with more fantastical elements to explore how narrative devices are used to represent adolescent troubles (although there are a few examples of more realistic coming-of-age horror, such as *Super Dark Times* [2017]). Another reason this genre of storytelling effectively tells a coming-of-age story is that the primary demographic for horror films in the present day range from early teens to twenties, making this the perfect audience to subject to these youth-oriented messages.

While some of the earliest horror films dealt with fully mature, adult protagonists, a majority of the horror films released towards the end of the twentieth century centered mostly around adolescents, with the occasional adult figure, though they rarely ever contributed anything meaningful to the plot. This is a noticeable change because an absence of adults leads the audience with no other choice than to identify with the teenage leads and their problems in these films. Many teen horror films during and after the 80s relied on the unreliability of authority figures to showcase how isolated these characters are from any outside help. Similar to how many teens struggle to confide with adults they once considered mentors about their pubescent struggles, mirroring the experiences of the on-screen scream queens and the occasional scream king. Nancy

Thompson, the protagonist of the first *Nightmare on Elm Street*, attempts multiple times throughout the film to alert any adult who will listen about the threat of Freddy Krueger, a demonic slasher who has the ability to harm and even kill people in their dreams, but she is ignored or deemed “crazy” by these figures whom she once looked up to. A recurring theme in both coming-of-age and horror films is the lack of a support system with adults in their lives. In both genres, adults are usually clueless, unhelpful, or actively working against the interests of the protagonists, whether it comes down to ordinary adolescent troubles or, on the other end of the spectrum, a shapeshifting demon that can only be defeated by a group of 12- and 13-year-olds from a small town. This is reflective of what many people experience as they grow up, a struggle to receive the support needed from adults who they once looked up to. Parents tend to feel a spike in anxiety and distress as their children enter the adolescent stage for plenty of reasons, but regardless, their ignorance commonly has dire consequences. They typically display a “refusal or inability [...] to see uncomfortable realities unfolding in their midst.” (Karlyn, 2011, p. 173), which leaves the characters in these films without any guidance, and they must learn to mature so that they may manage these problems on their own. This essentially leads to the adolescent becoming the adult that they needed due to the failures or inaction of the ones around them.

Horrific monsters, masked slashers, and supernatural phenomena are symbolic of the fears of growing up and the change that comes with it for adolescents, but what of the stories where our protagonists become the monsters themselves? This is certainly not uncommon. In fact, some of the films analyzed in this paper will do exactly that. I cannot deny the possibility that seeing a character with whom the audience is meant to identify

slowly become less and less of themselves can be irking, if not distressing, but I believe in the importance of acknowledging that the process of reaching maturity is difficult or even painful. In *Carrie* (1976), our titular character grows into her powers as well as her angst. In *Jennifer's Body* (2009) our deuteragonist becomes our antagonist after undergoing severe trauma, and in *Ginger Snaps* (2000) the audience must watch helplessly as Ginger succumbs to what can only be described as insatiable bloodlust. It must be noted that while these characters are going off the established definition, coming of age, so are their peer groups, who must adapt to each sudden and violent change as it comes. However, to reiterate a point made earlier, what is considered monstrous does not mean it is inherently evil, but rather something that is feared or misunderstood by others, and the teenage mind is almost incomprehensible to those who have grown past that stage of life. This isn't to say that once puberty ends, all adults forget their experiences, but there is a theory proposed by Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg in their studies of puberty known as *pubertal amnesia* (p. 62), in which it is difficult for fully mature individuals to empathize entirely with pubescent adolescents due to the time that has passed since they hit puberty. This leads to burgeoning adolescents seeking information, aid, and comfort from other sources because the surrounding adults cannot fully understand the emotional hardship they are going through due to how much time has passed and the gaps between generations.

Before I move forward, the distinction between teen horror and coming-of-age horror needs to be highlighted because they are two different subgenres of horror that can be confused for one another if one is not careful. The average teen horror flick may touch on aspects of adolescence and recognize the difficulties, but they are not the central

focus. For instance, *Friday the 13th* (1980) is, without a doubt, a teen slasher, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) is *also* a teen slasher; however, the latter focuses on teenage sexuality through a nuanced lens and employs symbolism to share its message, while the former simply shows and subsequently punishes teenagers who engage in sexual activities. A coming-of-age horror flick can have remarkably similar plot beats to teen horror but it should also focus on the struggles of being an adolescent rather than only showing these troubles but offering no commentary or messaging to go alongside them. In the following chapters, I will elaborate further on my claims about the metaphors and symbolism that can be spotted in these films if one only knows where to look.

Chapter IV: The Monstrous Body

One of the earliest and most apparent indicators of puberty taking place are physical changes and developments. Sudden growth spurts, fluctuations in weight, and acne outbreaks are all examples of the forms these changes can take place in. The two most associated bodily processes are spermarche and menarche, as explained above, indicate the true onset of puberty because this is when the adolescent body has made it apparent that it is in the process of maturation. These changes can be confusing, discomforting, and even frightening because you are not in control of what your body does during this time. Your own body has become something unfamiliar and unpredictable. This feeling of alienation from oneself is present in both the 1976 film adaptation of Stephen King's novel of the same name, *Carrie*, and the black-comedy horror movie *Ginger Snaps* (2000). In both films, we see the titular female characters reach menarche and experience radical changes to both their bodies and their minds as they begin the process of maturing. These narratives share the theme of losing control of one's body and trying to adapt to the rapid changes occurring, all while navigating high school and interpersonal relations with those around them.

Ginger and Carrie's transformations are much more dramatized and fictitious than what the average teenager will experience when they begin puberty, but it should be noted that the emotional turmoil felt by the characters isn't unrealistic. This goes back to a study conducted in 1986 at Iowa State University, in which researchers explored how puberty could impact the mental health of teenage girls. In this study, they introduced the concept of the *stressful change hypothesis*, which, according to the authors of the paper,

“[G]irls should experience the greatest emotional disturbance at the onset of menarche or shortly thereafter because it is the most discrete event representative of physical maturation and fertility” (Ge et al., p. 3387). Essentially, the sudden commencement of adolescent changes in teenagers has been linked to a rise in distress, and they are much more vulnerable to both internal and external pressure, especially when compared to their pre- and post-pubescent peers. While this particular study was only conducted with adolescent females, there is further research on how physical maturation correlates with psychological distress in both males and females (Prahaso et al., 2017). Because the two aforementioned films revolve around female puberty, the focus will be on how menarche and psychological distress can be related to one another.

When the audience is introduced to the Fitzgerald sisters, Ginger and Brigitte, in the opening of *Ginger Snaps*, it is already apparent that these girls are disconnected from their peers, with no intention of making said connections, choosing instead to invest their time in creating macabre scenes of imagined, yet gruesome, ways for them to die. The first shot of Ginger shows her holding a kitchen knife to her wrist, wryly brainstorming ways for the girls to kill themselves, as it is revealed they made a suicide pact together as children, “Out by sixteen or dead in the scene, but together forever.” Ginger reminds her sister. This sets up one of the central conflicts of the film: the sisters’ refusal to grow up and undergo any further adolescent changes. Brigitte, aged fifteen, and Ginger, who is one year her senior at sixteen, have not yet undergone menarche, and they are considered “late-bloomers.”

The sisters show clear discomfort when certain aspects of puberty are presented to them and believe their post-pubescent peers to be overly hormonal and irritating. Despite

these negative feelings, one night, while the sisters are out to create more faux death scenes, blood begins dripping down Ginger's thighs. Ginger has two lines of dialogue here that stand out, the first of which is when she remarks to her sister that she "got the curse" in reference to her period beginning and follows this with "[Y]our own body screws you." The latter of which proves to be true when, moments later, she is viciously attacked and dragged into the woods by a lycanthrope that was attracted to the scent of her menstrual blood, adding a layer of irony to her reference to menarche being a curse, as she is soon infected with lycanthropy as a result of this attack. Markedly, the monthly, cyclical nature of lycanthropy bears a strong resemblance to female menstrual cycles. Erin Harrington not only draws attention to this fact in her novel *Women, Monstrosity, and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*, but draws further conclusions from this phenomenon and makes the argument that menarche is typically used in horrific narratives to establish the birth of a feminine monstrosity (2017, p. 19). Notably, Brigitte does not undergo menarche at any point in the film and, save for a gambit she pulls at the end of the film in order to regain her sister's trust, she remains unaffected by "the curse."

Almost immediately the audience is able to clearly see how these changes have affected Ginger: she becomes much more irritable and isolates herself from her family. Her body begins physically changing at a rapid rate as she begins to grow a tail and body hair, and she begins acting out and engaging in risky behavior. These are all indicators of what the average teen going through puberty will experience, and this is acknowledged in a tongue-in-cheek scene where the girls meet with the school nurse and vaguely describe Ginger's condition, leading her to give the girls a gentle explanation of what happens to the female body during puberty, much to their chagrin. As Ginger's symptoms begin to

become more extreme and her actions become more reckless, the relationship between the sisters begins to crumble, with the pre-pubescent Brigitte expressing discomfort with her sister's changing body, even making a face of disgust at one point in the film when discovering Ginger's shaving supplies. Essentially, Brigitte can only watch as her sister becomes someone or *something* unfamiliar that does not reconcile with the image she had of Ginger before the night of her menarche and subsequent attack.

At the film's narrative climax, Brigitte willingly offers herself up to the now uncontrollable, fully lupine Ginger, and asks her to give her "the curse" so that she may placate her sister in order to inject her with the antidote she had prepared only scenes before that would cure her of her lycanthropy. By offering her humanity and, in a way, her childhood innocence to Ginger, Brigitte crosses the threshold of maturity and accepts that she must undergo changes if she wishes to not only survive, but to fully become responsible for her own life. In the end, Ginger, no longer who she once was, dies in Brigitte's arms after lunging at her and being impaled by the blade Brigitte had in her hands. As Ginger takes her last breaths, a distraught Brigitte looks around their shared childhood room, filled with their memories together, before draping herself over Ginger's transformed body, a blank expression on her face. The old Brigitte dies with Ginger, and, while the first film ends here, we see in the sequel that Brigitte has contracted her sister's "curse," thus continuing the cycle.

The importance of positive familial and peer relationships was highlighted in *Ginger Snaps* with the focus centering on the sisters' interactions and bonds with one another. It is when Brigitte's relationship with Ginger begins to wane that both girls, but mostly Brigitte, begin to experience the distress of being emotionally isolated from both

their peers *and* their family. The second film to be covered in this section, *Carrie* (1976), also explores the importance of having positive relationships while undergoing the process of puberty, but in a unique way.

At the beginning of the film, much like the Fitzgerald sisters, it is evident that Carrie is a social outcast, and not only that, but relentlessly and viciously tormented by her classmates as well. This is most obvious when, while showering after gym class, Carrie discovers blood and begins to scream hysterically. Carrie has undergone menarche, and as she scrambles around begging her classmates for help, they react in disgust and begin to mock her. As Carrie is backed into the gym showers again, she can only cower as her classmates begin pelting her with feminine hygiene products. The audience learns in the following scene that Carrie had never been educated about female puberty and genuinely believed she was dying at that moment, explaining her hysterical reaction. In the midst of her panic attack, the light above Carrie shatters, the first hint that a new power has been awakened in the young woman.

Rescued from the situation by her gym teacher, Carrie is brought to the principal's office so that the issue at hand can be dealt with. The principal, a middle-aged man who is not only far from his years of puberty, but unfamiliar with the female menstrual cycle, shows discomfort each time Carrie's menarche is brought up by her concerned gym teacher, one of the few characters in the film who displays sympathy for the girl. As the meeting goes on, the principal continues to use the wrong name for Carrie, her frustration building with each misnaming, an ashtray lying on the desk slightly shaking, until it crescendos. As she snaps, "It's Carrie!", the ashtray flips off the desk of its own accord.

This is the second instance of Carrie's growing power making an appearance, and it is implied that she is becoming aware of her new powers as well.

Like Ginger, her reaction to menarche is tied to violence and fear but unlike Ginger, Carrie does not have the support of a family member to try to help her adjust to this stressful change. The bullying and constant mistreatment that Carrie endures at school is a realistic depiction of the life of someone who has been othered by their peers. Carrie's mother, an incredibly devout Christian to the point of extremism, views the menstrual cycle as a result of sin and impurity, so when Carrie returns home, demanding answers, she is met with shame. "You're a woman now," her mother mutters ominously before striking her across the face and accusing her of sexual impurity. The punishment of a young woman for natural bodily changes that are unavoidable reflects the shame felt by adolescents for these awkward and often embarrassing changes in their bodies. Carrie can turn to neither her peers nor her emotionally and physically abusive mother. She must learn to adapt to these changes on her own "The horror derives from family and from the troubling ordeal of being a late-twentieth-century teenager." (Gill, 2002, p.16). And indeed, it does, as Carrie is locked in a closet and forced to pray for forgiveness for her supposed sins at her mother's orders.

Carrie, aware of her blossoming abilities as an *esper*, an individual with extrasensory perception (ESP), begins doing research alone in the library, having no one else to turn to. I view this as a parallel to instances where adolescents like Carrie, who were never properly educated about their bodies and what happens during pubescence, must discover on their own how to handle their sudden changes and turn to outside sources for information. It is through this research that Carrie begins to learn how to

channel her powers and have a better sense of control over them so that she can consciously use her power when she wishes. It is when she manages to understand her power that she begins to form her own identity separate from that of her mother, standing up for herself, being defiant, and even using her powers to regain a sense of control over her own life.

As Carrie begins to mature and develop, so does one of her classmates and former bullies, Sue Snell. Sue, who gleefully took part in the mob of girls tormenting Carrie in the opening scenes, realizes the weight of her actions. The day that Carrie underwent menarche and began to physically mature, Sue Snell began to come of age mentally, quickly changing her behavior once she saw things from a new perspective. She separates herself from her former group of friends who are unrepentant regarding their bullying and forms a plan to make Carrie's prom experience a truly positive one. Sue asks her willing boyfriend, Tommy, to take Carrie to the prom and ensure she enjoys herself as a way of not only trying to right what she had wronged, but almost like it was a punishment for herself as well. Although I believe it important to point out the parallel maturation of Carrie and Sue, it is Carrie's story that is given the most attention and is the most relevant.

After hesitantly agreeing to be Tommy's invitation to the prom, Carrie becomes more comfortable with her identity as a woman, sewing her own dress that, notably, is more revealing than her earlier attire in the film. When her mother discovers that not only is Carrie attending the prom with a boy but also wearing a dress with a v-shaped neckline, she begins shaming her daughter and accusing her of being indecent, warning her that men will lust after her. After making a comment about Carrie's chest, Carrie

boldly states, “They’re called breasts and every woman has them.” She has not only accepted her changing body, but also views herself as a woman now with her own identity and as someone deserving of respect. This also marks a turning point where Carrie attempts to liberate herself from her mother by using her powers to restrain her so that she may not interfere with Carrie’s dream of going to the prom with Tommy. The coming-of-age process often involves the separating of oneself from their parents or guardians to pursue an independent identity and to gain respect for themselves as a grown individual (Ojo, 2021, p. 45). Unfortunately, even though Carrie has almost fully completed the process of coming of age, her growth is ultimately stunted by the notorious dumping of pig’s blood over her head as she accepts the crown for winning the title of Prom Queen.

From this point onward, Carrie is a different person entirely, entering a state of shock because of the cruel prank and the unintended demise of Tommy, who is killed when the bucket that once contained the pig’s blood drops on his head. Carrie lets her power consume her as she destroys the gymnasium and everyone in it in her grief and rage. Here we, the audience, see the true horrors of coming of age without a support system in the image of Carrie, shell-shocked, stiff, covered head-to-toe in blood that isn’t her own. In this state, she has the natural response that most adolescents in her position would do: Carrie goes home. She cleans herself of the dried blood that sticks to her skin in the tub before sobbing into her mother’s arms, seeking the maternal comfort that she has been deprived of all her life. She doesn’t find it.

Carrie’s mother stabs her daughter in an attempt to kill her, declaring her a witch. In self-defense, Carrie retaliates and kills her mother. It is ambiguous whether this was an

intentional act, because soon after she brings the corpse of her mother into the prayer closet, she had been locked in earlier in the film, overcome with guilt. This can be interpreted as Carrie backsliding because she's right back where she started both physically and literally. Emotionally vulnerable and isolated, Carrie White's final act is to use the powers she obtained alongside her menarche to destroy the house around her. The home sinks into the ground, with Carrie still inside.

In both films, there are notable character developments exemplified in the leading protagonists and antagonists (depending on your view of tragic characters such as Carrie White and Ginger Fitzgerald), highlighting the changes that occur when coming of age. Ginger begins her story as someone waiting for the day that she will finally die so that she can avoid undergoing the stressful changes that come with puberty and entering adulthood. Brigitte, much meeker than her sister, entertains these fantasies alongside Ginger but doesn't seem as thrilled as her sister to commit suicide together. By the end of the narrative, Ginger and Brigitte have both accepted the changes in their lives, as Brigitte had begun forming a friendship with someone other than her sister and even stood up to Ginger in order to protect her, and Ginger had fully embraced her new, "monstrous" identity with stride, but ultimately succumbs to the pressures of her transformation. Carrie White's story begins with a quiet, repressed victim of daily bullying and abuse, but after menarche becomes a strong, feminine figure with an immense power that allows her to fight back against the forces that oppressed her. Although her story ends tragically, I argue that Carrie truly represents the process of coming of age, and if it were not for the incident known in-universe, meaning in the

universe of the narrative, as the Black Prom, she would have “successfully” completed her transition into a fully mature individual with an independent identity.

In both films, the titular characters experience their first menstrual cycle and with it, they obtain immense power that could be a positive influence on their lives, but also the emotional and physical hardships that come with the onset of pubescence. Ginger and Carrie both try to better their lives with their newfound strengths and femininity, but while one’s downfall is due to her power becoming too much for her to manage, the other’s ultimate fate was a result of alienation from both her peers and her family. In both cases, these adolescents face similar (though exaggerated) issues and conflicts to which audiences can relate. Some may see themselves in Ginger, growing up and maturing far too quickly after hitting puberty, while others can see Carrie’s struggles with fitting in and trying to gain independence from overbearing and abusive authority figures as something relatable. Regardless, these two films ultimately represented the growing pains of beginning puberty and attempting to navigate the world around oneself.

Chapter V: Sex Equals Death

Any fan of horror knows that when characters commit sexual acts on or off-screen, it's only a matter of time before they're disposed of in a gruesome fashion by whatever antagonistic force is hunting them down. Wes Craven even calls attention to this trope, a recurrent theme in a work, in his meta 1996 revival of the teen-slasher genre, *Scream* through the character of Randy, an avid film fan and almost-victim of the Ghostface killer. At the climax of the film, he explains the unspoken rules of scary movies, "There are certain rules that one must abide by to survive a horror movie successfully. For instance, number one: you can never have sex." This scene is not only iconic but also accurate to the genre in many ways.

During the 70s and 80s, it wasn't only common for sexually active teenage characters to be punished, but it was expected. These assumptions are likely due to two specific slasher-horror films that came out in 1978 and 1980, respectively, John Carpenter's *Halloween* and Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*. In the former, Michael Myers, aged six, murders his 17-year-old sister after witnessing her and her boyfriend go upstairs to have sex. Years later, he returns and begins a killing spree, with most of his victims being rebellious teens caught in various states of undress. *Friday the 13th* is the most obvious concerning punishing sexual activity, as it is revealed in the final act that the killer, Jason Voorhees' mother, was intentionally murdering camp counselors *because of their sexual exploits*. Her reasons for doing so are due to a young Jason drowning in the lake by the camp, and no one was around to watch him, because the camp counselors had all snuck off in pairs to find time alone together. There are in-universe explanations

for the punishment of sex in these films, but possibly due to both of them becoming commercial successes, other films attempted to follow this pattern. Thus, cementing what would become a long-standing, defining trope of the genre for decades to come.

It is common that, as hormones begin to fluctuate, many adolescents will begin to experience sexual desire. These feelings, while natural, are unexpected for many, and, similarly to when adolescents begin puberty, talking this through with authority figures isn't an ideal option. Two films that best represent the feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and fear that coincide with these changes are *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *It Follows* (2014). Each of these films deals with the topic of sex, but in separate ways. Despite their differences, the plots of both have underlying themes of exploring sexuality and sexual behavior through the lens of an adolescent. The first film represents an awakening of sexual desire and how it can drive a wedge between the relationships of children with their parents, and the second film handles the feelings of shame and fear that follow the sexual awakening and specifically with "unhealthy" sex, something that will be defined at a later point in this chapter.

A Nightmare on Elm Street is one of the most iconic horror franchises of the 80s and 90s, not unlike the aforementioned *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, and spawned numerous sequels that declined in quality. Despite this, the focus will remain solely on the first installment of the franchise. One of the first scenes in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* centers around a young woman, who we later learn is named Tina, in a pure-white nightgown running down a hallway. Historically, white has been used to symbolize innocence and purity, especially regarding female virginity. The same can be said about

the lamb that Tina stumbles upon while running, which bleats frantically as she tries to escape from the entity chasing her.

Freddy Krueger, the central antagonist of the franchise, is most well-known for his glove, which has four long, sharp blades attached to the fingers. He cruelly mocks the horrified Tina as he takes control of her dreams and changes the scenery around her while chasing her. After cornering her in a boiler room, Krueger swipes at Tina, ripping the front of her white gown and waking her from her nightmare. As she screams herself awake, it is revealed to the audience that her once undamaged nightgown had been ripped not only in the nightmare but in the real world as well, the shredded material acting as a representation of her loss of sexual innocence as she sits in her bed terrified and confused about what has just occurred.

The following morning, a slightly shaken Tina walks to school with her best friend Nancy and Nancy's boyfriend, Glen, passing by a group of schoolchildren, all of whom are wearing entirely white outfits, nailing home the theme of white representing innocence and purity. As the girls talk, it is revealed that Nancy had a very similar dream to Tina and even had the same mysterious and menacing figure chasing after them. Rod, Tina's rebellious, crass, and older boyfriend, meets up with the group and completes the quartet of Elm Street kids that Freddy Krueger haunts throughout the film.

After an uneventful day of classes, Glen and Nancy head to Tina's house and make plans to sleep over. This is followed by a scene of Glen lying to his mother about who he is staying over with, knowing that she would not approve of him being unsupervised with his girlfriend overnight. It isn't long before Rod shows up unannounced, essentially sweeping Tina off her feet as she asks the embarrassed Glen

and Nancy to stay behind as she goes upstairs with her boyfriend. The mood of the once-innocent sleepover shifts, and now Nancy and Glen are left alone in the dark. The audience is then subjected to parallel scenes of teen misbehavior, as Nancy and Glen begin to kiss, and Tina and Rod go to the bedroom. The tension established by Wes Craven, the director of this film, is palpable. Even those unfamiliar with the unspoken “rules” of horror have an idea of what’s coming next. Sure enough, as Nancy prevents Glen from taking their make out session any further, setting up her as the film’s virginal Final Girl, it is made clear to the audience that Rod and Tina are having sex just rooms away. “Unlike her girlfriends [...] she is not sexually active.” (Clover, 1992, p. 39). Nancy explains to Glen that they need to be alert to comfort and be there for Tina, who was still on edge after her encounter with Krueger the night before, and it is also clear that she is not ready to take that next step in their relationship.

As the other couple, Tina and Rod, begin to fall asleep, Rod makes a vague reference to nightmares he had been experiencing recently, which comes as a shock to Tina, who anxiously asks for more details. With her questions left unanswered, sleep eventually overtakes her, as does the man haunting her nightmares. Tina’s screams awaken Rod, who leaves the bed to see her writhing under the sheets, and the audience is shown the briefest glimpse of Krueger pinning her in place to impale her. Once again, he slices through and soils her nightclothes, but this time it proves to be fatal, as her torn flesh begins to bleed profusely. This violating scene of ripping clothes, bare skin, and bleeding after penetration undeniably mirrors the loss of female virginity, establishing Freddy as “an intense pubescent sexual yearning” (Degraffenreid, 2011). Tina’s death,

murder by her own sexual desire, leads to Rod escaping in a panic, fleeing the law enforcement that suspects him to be behind her death.

Nancy and Glen are both carted off to the police station to give statements, and the audience learns that Nancy's father is the sheriff and that her parents have an antagonistic relationship after a nasty divorce. Tina's mother had been away in Las Vegas with a boyfriend of hers, implied to be the latest out of an extensive line, and her father had abandoned the family when Tina was a young child. This shows what will become a pattern of authority figures in the film being unreliable from the perspective of the young protagonists. The entire *Nightmare* franchise, with a few exceptions, deals heavily with themes of absent, abusive, or apathetic authority figures that negatively affect the protagonists of these films and are sometimes even the cause of their adolescent struggles. As is often the case with adolescents, it can be difficult if not impossible to open up about sexuality and sexual desire with parents or guardians without fear of punishment or shame, and this often leads to adolescents having to figure these things out on their own or from their peers.

There are a multitude of reasons why many adolescents and their parents delay or avoid the topic of sex altogether, sweeping the dreaded "talk" under the rug. One explanation is that by ignoring the topic altogether it will be forgotten, which isn't true. "[T]he call for abstinence from sexual intercourse in the teenage years presumes that desire exists; otherwise, there would be little necessity to control it." (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg 62). Whatever the reason may be, the topic of sexuality and exploration is one that often has an imbalance of power because it is primarily understood by adults from experience or prior education, and adolescents typically have little to no

understanding, which leads to a lack of control in conversations about sex. This is represented multiple times in the film. For instance, Freddy himself dominates the dreams of the protagonists, bending the dream world to his whim in order to terrify and inflict violence upon them. In these moments, it is clear that these teens have extraordinarily little say over what happens to them in the real world and their dreamscapes. When Nancy, who begins investigating these dreams and realizes that Freddy is a real threat, tries to convince the police officers, medical staff, and her parents of the danger she and her (dwindling) group of friends are in she is dismissed as a hysterical girl in shock from the grizzly demise of Tina. This ultimately leads to Nancy having to navigate this world alone and discover her own sense of control so that she may overcome the danger she has been put in due to the uncooperative adults in her life.

As Nancy learns to fight back in her dreams and exercise the control that was taken from her, Rod and Glen are dispatched in retaliation, with the former being strangled by the sheets in the jail cell he had been locked in after being accused with Tina's murder before Glen is, in one of the most iconic scenes in the film, dragged inside his bed, leading to a bloody fountain emerging from where he once lay. Both of these characters, like Tina, had in some way engaged in sexual activity or innuendo, with Rod having sex with Tina and Glen, although more innocent, admitting to viewing beauty pageants solely for the purpose of objectifying the women involved. Nancy just barely manages to avoid a similar fate in the bathtub, where she drifts in and out of sleep as the disembodied hand of Krueger emerges from the water between her thighs, the second allusion to masturbation in the film (the first being the off-handed remark from Tina's mother that she needs to cut her nails after noticing her torn nightgown), before she

awakes. She remains the untouched, virginal heroine that was expected by audiences at the time. Unlike many slashers from this period, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* does not employ the killer point-of-view (POV) shot that was pervasive at the time. By doing so, the audience is given no other choice but to see things from Nancy's perspective, allowing them to identify with her as a character, and thus her problems and growing pains become those of the audience as well.

After the gruesome death of her boyfriend, Nancy formulates a plan to put an end to Freddy Krueger's killing spree and prove to her family that her dreams were more than the result of a traumatizing night with friends. This is when Nancy embraces her inner strength and becomes a woman taking control of her dreams, and later, desires. She booby traps her home and successfully lures Freddy into the traps, but it isn't the traps that ultimately defeat him, as they prove ineffective, but her own willpower. She comes to the realization that it is her fear of Freddy that is giving him so much power over her dreams, her fear of her sexual desires and impulses. She takes control of all these feelings and tells Freddy that she's no longer afraid of him and that he holds no power over her. Because of her show of strength and her willingness to embrace her sexual autonomy, Freddy is banished from her dreams.

A Nightmare on Elm Street effectively covers the journey of sexual discovery and how inexperienced adolescents navigate these feelings, but what about the other side of teen sexuality that comes after understanding one's sexual desire? If *A Nightmare on Elm Street* explores the beginnings of teen sexuality, then *It Follows* covers the next step of the process, which is navigating the world of sexuality. At the age of nineteen the female lead, Jay, in the legal sense, is an adult, but she still hasn't fully come of age. Jay is quiet

and reserved, mostly interacting with her close, small circle of friends that she has known since childhood. Much of her private life is left ambiguous or unsaid, but it is implied that her father was abusive, and her mother is a heavy drinker who is almost entirely absent from the film. Again, the pattern of inaccessible and unreliable authority figures is established, and the audience must identify with the adolescent leads.

The opening of this film is like the opening of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, with a young woman in white pajamas running away in fear. This unnamed girl dons red high-heeled stilettos, juxtaposing the innocence of pre-sexual encounters represented by the white outfit and the lustfulness and sensuality associated with red heels. Similarly to Jay, she still has some innocence despite no longer being a virgin, a much more progressive take on teen sexuality than the aforementioned product of the eighties. The audience is not shown what the girl is running from, only what happens after it finds her when her lifeless body is shown on-screen before a quick cut away. This stinger establishes and brings attention to the danger posed by this unseen force and creates an eerie atmosphere that will persist throughout the film.

It is after this brutal scene that Jay is introduced, getting ready for her date with a man named Hugh. She fusses with her hair and peers anxiously in the mirror for a few beats before going outside to meet with her date and accompanying him to the local movie theater. While in line for concessions, they begin to play a game where they choose a stranger in a crowd that they would want to swap lives with while the other tries to guess. When it's Hugh's turn, Jay fails to guess who he was thinking of, so he reveals that he imagined swapping lives with a young boy standing across the room. "You have your whole life ahead of you," He comments, bringing attention to how blissfully

unaware and happy the child is. This is Hugh's way of communicating that he longs for the innocence of childhood now that he knows the reality of the world of adults. This can be inferred only a few scenes later when the couple has sex and Hugh reveals to Jay that he transmitted a curse that she was now infected with. By revealing that he wanted to be the child in the movie theater, Hugh admits that he misses the days before he contracted a curse that is essentially a death sentence.

Bound to a chair, Jay is forced to listen as Hugh explains "the rules" of the curse, which must be transmitted person-to-person through sexual contact, acting as a venereal disease of sorts. The most recent bearer of the curse becomes the target of an unnamed entity that is constantly following them at a walking speed, taking the form of any friend, relative, or stranger, and disposing of them once it has finally caught up. The only way to delay this entity is to pass the curse on to someone else, as there is no known way to cure or end it entirely. Hugh keeps Jay tied in place until he sees a young woman, the form taken by It, walking slowly towards their location. This scene puts the audience in Jay's place as the camera lingers on the woman and we can now begin to understand the building tension and anticipation of an unknown, incurable threat that looks like any other person and will follow you for the rest of your life.

When Hugh finally drops Jay off at her home, it's a chilling scene. Her friends and sister immediately rush to her side when they notice her distressed state and begin asking about her condition and the events that took place, calling the police as well. As she's questioned about her encounter with Hugh, Jay states that while Hugh had drugged her and bound her to a chair, their interactions beforehand were entirely consensual. In the following days, Jay is in a state of depression, rarely leaving her bed and not speaking

with anyone, clearly upset with the revelation that she contracted something from her sexual partner. Similar to the way Hugh described his infection: “This thing, it’s going to follow you. Someone gave it to me and I passed it to you back in the car.”

The CDC statistics for sexually transmitted diseases in adolescents and young adults show that the 15-24-year-old age group was responsible for nearly 50% of newly transmitted venereal diseases in the United States in 2018 (2021). There has been an increase in the percentage of adolescents that become infected with sexually transmitted infections or diseases and there is currently no identifiable cause for this statistic, despite the efforts of educators and researchers alike. The curse in *It Follows* is a deliberate parallel to the transfer of disease, one that has no other cure than to continue to pass it on and infect others, creating an endlessly lethal cycle of infection. Notably, the only people shown or implied to be infected appear to be in their late teens and very early twenties, and this only drives home the point that unsafe sex practices that lead to the transfer of such infections and diseases are much higher in this age group and puts them at a greater risk.

At greater risk indeed, Jay becomes increasingly paranoid about whatever is following her around, suspicious and apprehensive around strangers in her classes. Jay confides in her friends about the nature of the curse that Hugh gave her, and while they don’t believe the supernatural elements of her story, they offer their help, nevertheless. Paul, a close friend who has harbored a crush on Jay since childhood, offers to stay on their couch and keep on the lookout for anything suspicious. “I haven’t spent the night here since we were kids.” “There’s a reason for that.” They exchange on the sofa later that evening after Jay joins him downstairs, unable to get any sleep. They reminisce about

their years spent together as children, recalling a time when the group of them discovered adult magazines and didn't understand why one of their mothers was so horrified. This was the day before all of them were given "the talk" according to Jay, and once again the thread of nostalgia and yearning for the blissful ignorance of childhood emerges. Something unspoken washes over the pair, and their conversation dwindles into silence, which is interrupted by the shattering of a window in Jay's kitchen.

Jay frantically runs through her home trying to escape It, which once again takes the form of a young woman, this time with ripped clothing. In a panic, Jay ignores her confused friends and runs away. When they finally catch up to her, they are joined by Jay's neighbor and another one of her friends from childhood, Greg. As they explain the situation to him, he has doubts. Greg continues to be skeptical of the curse even after the existence of the entity is revealed to the rest of the group after it grabs Jay's hair and injures Paul. When the prior situation leads to Jay being immobilized in a hospital bed, Greg offers to have sex with her, knowing that she is in no position to escape the entity if it follows her to the hospital, and she agrees. Although this encounter is consensual, it isn't an example of a healthy sexual relationship.

This is an important detail that I feel needs to be addressed. This film does not demonize or disparage sex itself, but instead, instances where the encounter is not considered "ideal." For example, Hugh failed to disclose to Jay that he was infected with something beforehand, or else she might have declined to have sex with him. With Greg, Jay does not participate out of a desire for him, but rather as a necessity and she shows little emotion or passion during this encounter, instead looking away blankly. This will be repeated later in the film, after Greg's demise, when Jay once again passes the curse to

someone else. She does not enthusiastically consent to these encounters, however, it's her only choice if she wishes to get rid of this curse. "[T]he film repeatedly implies that what once may have seemed innocently sexual can quickly take on sinister overtones when one lives under the stigma of contagion and sexual shame." (Church, 10). For Jay, these casual encounters could have been just that, casual, if it were not for the fact that she is the carrier of a transmittable death sentence, but because she follows through with these affairs without disclosing this, she sinks to the level of Hugh.

Even after knowing that Greg was murdered by the curse, Paul still asks Jay to transfer the curse to him, fully understanding the consequences. Jay declines, not because she has no feelings towards Paul, but because she doesn't want to put him in harm's way. She had assumed Greg was going to pass it on before It found him, but she underestimated the speed at which It would eventually catch up to him. However, their relationship would change after the climax of the film when Jay, Greg, Kelly (Jay's sister), and Yara (another of Jay's friends) attempt to physically defeat the curse by attacking the entity that follows Jay. The group has no confirmation as to what happened to the curse and the entity after a culminating encounter at a public pool, but after a trip to the hospital, it seems that the group's attitudes change when Yara reads aloud an excerpt from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1869) about knowing and accepting death's inevitability.

The tone of the film is heavy during the conclusion as Jay and Paul officially begin a relationship and have sex together. They both ask if the other feels any different and they both respond negatively. There's a cut to Paul slowly driving down nearly deserted streets, passing two sex workers, which recalls a scene earlier in the film where Paul suggests sleeping with a prostitute in order to pass the curse. It is unclear whether he

does so or whether he keeps his relationship with Jay monogamous, and the closing of the film leaves more questions than answers. As Jay and Paul walk hand-in-hand down a sidewalk, content together, in the distance behind them is a figure that follows them slowly.

Jay's coming-of-age journey in this film centers around her relationship with Paul, herself, and her status as a carrier of a curse, or in the case of this metaphor, a sexually transmitted disease. Prior to the events of this film, Jay had had sexual encounters, but she admits that they didn't mean much to her, so when she's confronted with the curse given to her by Hugh, her view of sex is altered. No longer is it something pleasurable or exciting, but rather dangerous and anxiety-inducing, "*It Follows* [...] sympathetically depicts the societal pressures placed upon sexually active women as threatening in their own right." (Church, 9). She spends the course of the film trying to cure or alleviate this curse, but without success, leading her to accept her status. With Paul, their relationship slowly grows more romantic throughout the film, and by the end, they have entered a committed relationship together after becoming physically involved. Together they have accepted Jay's condition and as a couple, they begin the journey of navigating around it.

As discussed earlier, the history of sex and horror is often one that leans towards conservatism and the punishment of such debauchery, but *It Follows* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* explore the topic in a more nuanced manner and manage to scare the audience at the same time. While there may be a 30-year difference in the releases of these films, they each have important and interesting themes of abstinence, sexual desire, and sexual shame. Nancy learns to take control over her own desires and embrace her autonomy,

standing up to and combatting whatever obstacles impede her. To this day, she is an example of a horror heroine who displays the resourcefulness and strength necessary to earn the title of Final Girl. Jay, older than Nancy but just as resourceful, is familiar with her sexuality but had not prepared herself for the darker side. Jay goes through various incidents because of what Hugh had infected her with, but by the end of the film she is able to accept her situation and, with the support of Paul, learns to make her way through life with it.

Chapter VI: Horror of Trauma

Approximately two out of every three adolescents will report experiencing an event they described as “traumatic” by the age of 16 (SAMHSA, 2023). Trauma can be defined as an occurrence that brings forth strong, negative feelings such as distress, agitation, and horror. The effects of trauma can persist for many years and can have a deep-seated impact on a survivor’s executive functioning. The nature of trauma is that there is no true way to rid someone of it entirely, but it is possible to minimize the negative effects to an extent with long-term treatment and support from peers. Coping with traumatic memories and events during the adolescent years can be incredibly difficult when added to the already stressful atmospheres of work, school, and peer groups. The horror genre is no stranger to unsettling and disturbing events, if anything, one could describe them as relatives due to how prevalent violence is in many of these films.

Traumatic events may be a staple for the horror genre, but not every film explores the topic itself and strives to dig deeper below the surface. There are a few exceptions, films that not only examine the effects of trauma, but specifically how adolescents deal with these issues in a horrific setting and how they learn to get to grips with their trauma-induced neurosis. The two examples I present are *It: Chapter One* (2016) and *Jennifer’s Body* (2009), both films that revolve around characters experiencing and dealing with harrowing situations that greatly change the course of their lives. The first film centers around a group of early adolescents who already have undergone a traumatic event or are currently in environments where they are exposed to traumatic sources over a period (abusive parents, peer violence, etc.). The second, *Jennifer’s Body*, introduces the

audience to the characters before they undergo a harrowing experience and the remainder of the film captures the ripple effect caused by this traumatic event through the relationship of two childhood friends, which changes greatly over the course of the narrative.

It: Chapter One, directed by Andy Muschietti, covers the first chronological half of the non-linear novel “It,” written by Stephen King, making this the second film adaptation of one of King’s novels to be discussed in this paper. To briefly summarize the premise of this film: a group of seven 12 to 13-year-old students, each with their own internal struggles, discover the existence of a dark presence in their small town that preys on children and adolescents while also manipulating the adults of the town so that they are either unaware or complacent in the violence inflicted. This entity can take any form and has insight as to what its victims' greatest fears are so that it may use that to its advantage when stalking them because It feeds on fear. This thing is omniscient, ineludible, and constantly changing the form it takes, making It a terrifying force and the perfect monster for inducing fear and trauma.

The seven protagonists, the Losers, as they dubbed themselves, each have their own arc over the course of the plot as they attempt to defeat and overcome the immutable presences in their personal lives that also haunt their town. Bill, the de facto leader of the Losers, is grieving the loss of his six-year-old younger brother, Georgie, who went missing eight months prior and is also experiencing neglect from his also mourning parents. Ben is the newest kid in town and slightly overweight, making him the target of vicious and cruel bullying that borders on torture. Eddie is the victim of Munchausen syndrome by proxy from his mother, as she convinces him that he is sick and needs

various treatments that are essentially placebos, unbeknownst to him. Mike is a homeschooled boy who lives with his uncle on a sheep farm after his parents die in a house fire that was racially motivated, as Mike's family was one of the few Black families in town. Mike also is the victim of racist harassment and violence from Henry Bowers and his goons, the very same teenagers that bully the other Losers as well. Beverly is the sole female member of the group; she not only experiences rumors about her alleged promiscuity but also faces her abusive, alcoholic father when she returns home. Stanley, also a victim of bullying, experiences the stress of his upcoming bar mitzvah, his literal coming-of-age ceremony that he feels underprepared for. Lastly is Richie, the jokester of the group who, ironically, claims his greatest fear is clowns. This is not the only thing plaguing Richie, but this will be explored in-depth at a later point when it becomes more relevant.

The film opens with the truth behind what happened to Georgie: It lured him from a sewer drain under false niceties before pulling him in and killing him. The timeline of the film jumps ahead to the following June on the last day of school when the audience is introduced to the group of social outcasts in various scenarios as well as their fears and traumas. Another important fact to note is how each character has some barrier between or disconnect with the adults around them, "If the adult world seems like a threat to children due to a lack of connection, so, too, does the instinctive and raw energy of children appear as something monstrous to grownups" (Roy, 2022, p. 46), the latter half of this quote becoming more and more apparent as Bill's father aggressively scolds him for not accepting Georgie's death, when the behavior exhibited by Beverly's father leads to her tearfully chopping her hair off in the bathroom, or as a couple in a car drives by

and looks on ambivalently as Henry cuts Ben with his pocket knife while the latter begs for help. For most of the adolescent characters in this film, home is not the safe place it is meant to be, but rather another environment where they are exposed to the pressures and mistreatments they experience in the outside world. This will be another consistent theme, because both Beverly and Bill are attacked by It in their own homes, proving that there is nothing protecting them from the malevolent force that is following them, even the places that should be the safest for an adolescent (Gill, 2002).

By happenstance, the group begins to form one by one as the plot progresses until the seven students are a unified group and discover the presence of It after telling each other about their various, frightening encounters with It. Bill saw ghastly mimics of his deceased brother, Stanley encountered a physical copy of a distorted woman from a painting that frightened him, Ben is chased by a headless boy in the library, Mike sees disembodied hands pounding and scratching from behind a burning door, Eddie's manifestation of fear is a man with leprosy, and Beverly becomes drenched in blood after a fountain of it shoots from her sink and covers her entire bathroom. Richie, in this film, does not encounter any manifestations of It until the group ventures to the old Well House where they suspect It lives. However, the reveal is made in the second film that Richie is a closeted, gay teenager who is struggling to come to terms with his sexual orientation and his rejection of his own sexuality. Regardless of what it is that torments them, the group finds comfort in being part of a group of peers that accepts them for who they are, and it is shown that the group is strongest when they're together. "Peer relationships, school relationships, and feeling an important part of the social network of friends are important resources for adolescent individuation and identity development."

(McCubbin et al., 1985, p. 53). The peer support exhibited by this group encourages each member to grow into a more mature identity, for example, when Eddie finally stands up to his mother at the climax of the film when Beverly is captured by It and admits that his friends are the people in his life who are really trying to protect him.

In *It*, the real monsters are not the illusions seen by the adolescents or the sadistic clown that is behind it all, instead, it is the community that remains complacent as these horrors continue. The monster, It, returns every 27 years, a cycle of violence in terror that haunts every generation, a reflection of how trauma can be inter-generational and inescapable for some. Henry Bowers is a fitting example of this; when introduced he's seen as a cruel and bigoted bully that makes it his mission to hurt anyone weaker than himself, but it is revealed that Henry's father is abusive (Hong et al. 2020). It is not revealed to what extent, but it is clear that Henry lives in fear of his father and that perhaps his behavior can be attributed to the abuse he suffers. It was concluded in a 2017 research study that adults who grew up with exposure to adverse childhood events such as abuse were far more likely to take part in those acts as adults, continuing a cycle of the abused to the abuser (Hughes, et al.). Henry shows obvious signs of this, as he acts aggressively towards other children, he is as much a trauma victim as the protagonists, but he also acts as a foil to Beverly Marsh. Beverly is also the victim of an abusive father, and while the abuse she suffers is not identical to Henry's, there are parallels between the two. Both suffer from abuse at the hands of their fathers and later fight back and attack, but while one internalizes the abuse and channels it into using violence against others, the other attempts to reject this cycle and break free (Roy, 2022). By the end of the film, Beverly does manage to escape her father and goes to live with her aunt, but Henry,

corrupted by It, continues to perpetuate violence and becomes both the traumatized and the traumatizer.

Beverly and Eddie are not the only ones who manage to cope with their traumas by the end of the film. Ben, Mike, and Richie are freed from the torment of their bullies, Stanley undergoes his bar mitzvah, and has his coming-of-age ceremony, literally, and Bill is able to accept Georgie's death and learn to move forward with his life while still keeping his brother's memory. Together, the group makes a blood pact to return to Derry and reunite if It ever returns, and by doing so they cement their bonds. Their traumas and bad memories are not erased or cured overnight, but significant steps were made that gave the protagonists the push they needed to begin healing and coping with the help of their peers, showing significant growth in emotional maturity.

In the cult-classic film, *Jennifer's Body*, our characters do not begin the film with trauma but will experience it during the narrative and battle with it for the remainder of the plot. The two characters who are central to the plot are Jennifer Check, a popular member of the school's flag team, and Anita "Needy" Lesnicky, her reserved and quirky childhood friend whose nickname effectively is her character as she is reliant on Jennifer for support. After a pep rally scene that establishes the dynamic, Jennifer invites Needy out to a live show happening at a local bar, Melody Lane, where an indie band from the city would be performing. Needy initially declines, citing that she had plans to hang out with her boyfriend, Chip, that evening, before reluctantly agreeing.

That night at the bar, the girls' lives are forever changed when a loose spark sets the mostly wooden building ablaze and leads to the bar patrons trying to frantically escape, stampeding over and crushing anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in their

path. Needy grabs a shocked Jennifer by the arm and navigates her way through the burning building to a window in the bathroom by which they could escape. Now outside and safe, Needy watches in horror as the bar burns to the ground, listening to the screams of people injured by or caught in the debris. This experience is one that is undeniably traumatic given the extreme nature of the events and the violence of it all. The normally peppy Jennifer is motionless and unresponsive to Needy, clearly struggling to process what had just occurred in such a short amount of time. One reaction commonly associated with trauma is psychological shock, which is more formally known as an acute stress reaction that can involve feelings of disorientation, helplessness, and dissociation among other symptoms (Friedman, 2015). While Needy attempts to soothe her friend, the lead singer of the band, who had been arguing about whether Jennifer was a virgin earlier that night, attempts to lure the girls to the van, and much to Needy's horror, Jennifer goes along. Despite the protests of her friend, Jennifer steps inside the van alone, still slightly trembling. Needy would later tell Chip that when she watched Jennifer get inside the vehicle, she knew that something awful would happen, communicating the helplessness she felt at that moment.

Once home, the ash-covered Needy calls Chip and tearfully recounts the things she experienced, giving graphic descriptions of what she heard and smelled during the fire. She then begins frantically telling Chip that she believes Jennifer is in danger and they need to do something, but he reacts irritably, reminding her that people just died in a terrible fire and Jennifer chose to get into the van. Exasperated and exhausted, Needy wishes him a good night before hanging up and investigating a noise she hears in the kitchen. She's then attacked by Jennifer, who is pale and covered in blood, although it's

unclear whose. Jennifer doesn't speak, instead she gives Needy an ominous smile before vomiting a black substance across the floor and running out her front door, disappearing into the night. Unsure how to react, Needy, in her own words, spent the night scrubbing the "carnage off the linoleum". Almost as if she were trying to scrub away the traumatic and confusing memories from that night.

The effects of the tragedy from the night before are felt across the small town where the girls live and as Needy walks through school, she sees her classmates mourning those they lost in the fire. In class, the star quarterback of the school's football team begins shaking with sobs, and it is revealed that his best friend had been present during the event and had perished. Jennifer bewilders Needy by acting as if nothing has changed, despite both knowing this is not the case. After class, Jennifer approaches the football player from before, who now stares mournfully at the clouds outside the school and seduces him. The couple slowly walks into the forest outside the school, and after a little more flirtation, Jennifer quickly attacks the football player, now her prey, overpowers, and eats him offscreen. When a teacher finds the boy's remains after hearing his screams, the community is once again sent into mourning. A close-up shot of the player's memorial at the school is shown, showing how his premature death was another traumatic event in a noticeably short time frame that impacted the lives of many. Loss and the way people react to it is a theme that will persist throughout the narrative as Jennifer takes the lives of more people to keep herself alive.

A month after the death of their classmate, Jennifer consumes her third victim, a boy from Needy's creative writing class, and at this point, it is still unclear why she is behaving in such a violent way. The reasons for this are revealed later that night as the

two girls sit on Needy's bed after Needy has a vision of what Jennifer has done and drives home in a panic, finding Jennifer lying in her bed. Needy's vision closely resembles the way a person's trauma can manifest into post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychological condition that causes victims to feel as if they are reliving the event through night terrors, anxiety attacks, or flashbacks. Even a month after the fire and the murder, Needy still can't escape her memories and envisions the corpse of her classmate, still affected by the gruesome death. Needy confronts Jennifer, demanding that she leave, but instead, Jennifer answers Needy's questions about her changed behavior. As Jennifer recounts the events of that night after she left in the van with the band, Needy begins to understand that something else happened to Jennifer that night that left a permanent mark on her as well.

The members of Low Shoulder, after inviting Jennifer inside their van, take her into a heavily secluded area, openly speaking about their plans to hurt her. This causes Jennifer to exit her state of shock and process the danger that she was in, she then becomes frantic. Once exiting the van, the lead singer begins to explain that they plan to sacrifice her to the devil, believing her to be a virgin, in order to become famous and achieve mainstream success. Jennifer is then restrained, gagged, and subsequently stabbed to death. However, unbeknownst to her killers, Jennifer is revived mysteriously, leading to her encounter with Needy later that night. The revelation is then made that the football player had not been the first victim of Jennifer, but rather it was the foreign exchange student who had been present in the bar that night but presumed to have died in the fire. At this point, Jennifer has become somewhat of a sympathetic monster with this added information and insight into Jennifer's character. She was the victim of a sacrificial

ritual that heavily resembled a sexual assault, and this is apparent in Jennifer's initial dialogue when she realized that she was in an unsafe situation and began trying to convince the group to let her go, accidentally confirming their false suspicions of her status as a virgin.

These parallels seem intentional on the filmmakers' behalf, as many tongue-in-cheek lines of dialogue in the film satirize the over-eroticized lives of teenage girls, how they are portrayed in media, and how they're objectified under the male gaze. It's true that the violence experienced by women in horror has a tendency to be sexualized to a *far* greater extent than that of their male counterparts, these scenes also usually employ the killer's perspective, putting the audience in the mind of the monster and not the victim. But instead of doing this, *Jennifer's Body* uses Jennifer's perspective to show her death, thereby putting the audience in the victim's point of view, allowing us to empathize with her ordeal to a greater extent than if the scene were shown from the killer's perspective. It is this scene that ties me back to the larger argument of this paper that coming-of-age horror films can be representative of the everyday horrors that the average teen may experience. Audience identification is a crucial factor when it comes to representation, because if the audience cannot identify with the characters on-screen, then the emotional impact of the narrative is lessened.

The revelation that Jennifer is only doing what she must in order to survive and that her death and subsequent revival, an incredibly traumatic event one would assume, resulted in her personality and behavior changes as well, shocks Needy. She begins doing research into the occult, where she makes the discovery that Jennifer was never revived; she's still dead and has been transformed into a succubus, which is a demon that must

feed on men in order to maintain power. This means that when she is hungry, she becomes weak and appears sickly, making this the only time in which she is vulnerable to being killed for good. With every student murdered by Jennifer, the town re-enters its period of mourning, as if the entire community is trapped inside a cycle of trauma and grief. Before the climax of the film, which takes place at the Spring Formal, Chip's mother supplies him with mace, warning him about the murders and expressing concern for his safety. However, this does little to prevent Chip's ultimate fate.

Needy, determined to put an end to Jennifer's killing spree, even if it means killing her former best friend, attends the Spring Formal to seek her out. When she realizes neither Jennifer nor Chip are present, she sprints out of the school gymnasium and finds them in an abandoned indoor pool, far too late. Jennifer, figuring out that Needy was going to go after her, lured Chip away from the dance, falsely saying that Needy had been cheating on him and that she had always been attracted to him. After rejecting her advances, Jennifer grabs and throws Chip across the empty building and bites into his neck, mortally wounding him. After a short fight where the girls exchange insults and blows, Chip, with a last burst of energy, impales Jennifer with a loose metal pipe, causing her to retreat. Chip dies in Needy's arms, and this leads to the final confrontation between the girls in Jennifer's bedroom, where Needy stabs Jennifer in the heart with a boxcutter, ending her fleeting period of violence.

Depending on one's subjective opinion, the ending of this film can be seen as something tragically cathartic. Needy is institutionalized after killing Jennifer, and through narration the audience discovers that when Jennifer bit Needy during their struggle, Needy inherited some of Jennifer's power. Needy now carries Jennifer's trauma

alongside her own, and because of this, her entire character has changed. After escaping the institution, Needy goes on to follow Low Shoulder and puts an untimely end to their nationwide tour, avenging her former best friend and seeking some sort of release.

Although the end of this film doesn't end on the same optimistic note as *It: Chapter One*, I believe it is a great representation of the immediate after-effects of trauma and how it changes behaviors and interpersonal relationships. Seeing these very real and negative aspects of trauma in characters that are relatable to an adolescent audience can be helpful in representing the struggles of growing up and dealing with these subjects alone.

Trauma and horror are inherently related to one another, if something is horrifying enough it can be traumatizing, and even the act of being traumatized is something horrific. This topic was explored in different ways in *It* and *Jennifer's Body*, each having something to say that the other did not. The former focuses on abuses suffered by early adolescents such as peer victimization, the effects of these traumas, and how adults can be complacent. Yet at the same time, the film sheds light on the importance of healthy friendships and support groups as ways to cope with stressors. What *Jennifer's Body* does is specifically deal with the traumatic scenarios of death and sexual assault, rather than trauma as a concept, and the ending has a much different tone. Regardless, I find it important to highlight the act of giving pre-teens and teenagers characters that face similar issues, because it allows room for them to explore their own troubles at the same time and possibly even find emotional release.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Representing both the literal and metaphorical growing pains experienced by preteens and adolescents is something that I argue is incredibly important for these groups in the modern day. The key claim made at the beginning of this paper was that the horror film genre is an effective outlet for telling coming-of-age narratives, and after examining the provided films and breaking down the themes that tied them together, I argue that this is indeed the case. The idea of coming of age is something that has pervaded human society for centuries, emphasizing the significance of this period and transformation. As each generation passed, we found new ways to communicate stories that have coming-of-age themes to the next one, evolving from spoken word and song to writing and then, as I have shown, film.

The films I highlight in this paper are not the only examples of coming-of-age horror films I discovered during my research, but the list is not as extensive as I would hope. Despite this, horror is quickly becoming more respected in academic discussions surrounding film and media with the shift towards what many are dubbing “elevated horror”, which is a subgenre of horror that relies on atmospheric scares and metaphor in order to frighten the audience. Despite my own hesitations about putting certain types of horror against each other or engaging in discourse over the matter, I am appreciative of the attention that is being brought to the subject and can only hope that further research is done into this topic in particular. As I mentioned earlier, my desire to come back and revisit this topic is strong, and I would like to dive further into the subject itself and discuss the representation of adolescents who are members of marginalized groups, as I have an optimistic vision of more diversely influenced horror in the future.

By swapping the more whimsical elements of coming-of-age narratives for horrific and monstrous elements, the communicated message will not only stand for the process of reaching maturity but also the incredible difficulty that adolescents face during this process. Is it more harmful to show the pains of growing up rather than the end result? I can't give a definite answer, but I argue that by showing scenarios that detail the harsher aspects of adolescence, it goes on to show the audience within that age demographic are not alone in their struggles and can encourage them to seek further information on the topics. Erin Harrington's point that "[H]orror is fundamentally invested in the notion of becomings, and the monstrous can certainly be considered through the way it expresses 'blocks' of becoming." (2017, p. 24) is true in multiple contexts and, in a way, captures the entire spirit of my paper: the monstrous aspects of growing up and transitioning into adulthood, becoming someone new. John Carpenter, director of iconic horror flicks such as *The Thing* or *Halloween*, once said that horror is not made for "feminists, children under 17, and wimps," and while this is clearly a subjective statement, I have to make a point to disagree with Carpenter's sentiments. Horror is a genre that is made for those who feel out of place, misunderstood, or the targets of a society that is working against them, something that has been lost but also found again over the last decades. My thesis challenges the idea that horror is meant only for mindless scares, and nothing more and instead pushes for a greater appreciation and willingness to view horror films as a tool capable of communicating greater messages.

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