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**The Female Horror Film Audience: Viewing Pleasures
and Fan Practices**

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Abstract

The Female Horror Film Audience: Viewing Pleasures and Fan Practices

What is at stake for female fans and followers of horror cinema? This study explores the pleasures in horror film viewing for female members of the audience. The findings presented here confirm that female viewers of horror do not refuse to look but actively enjoy horror films and read such films in feminine ways.

Part 1 of this thesis suggests that questions about the female viewer and her consumption of the horror film cannot be answered solely by a consideration of the text-reader relationship or by theoretical models of spectatorship and identification. A profile of female horror film fans and followers can therefore be developed only through an audience study.

Part 2 presents a profile of female horror fans and followers. The participants in the study were largely drawn from the memberships of horror fan groups and from the readerships of a cross-section of professional and fan horror magazines. Qualitative data were collected through focus groups, interviews, open-ended questions included in the questionnaire and through the communication of opinions and experiences in letters and other written material.

Part 3 sheds light on the modes of interpretation and attempts to position the female viewers as active consumers of horror films.

This study concludes with a model of the female horror film viewer which points towards areas of female horror film spectatorship which require further analysis.

The value of investigating the invisible experiences of women with popular culture is demonstrated by the very large proportion of respondents who expressed their delight and thanks in having an opportunity to speak about their experiences. This study of female horror film viewers allows the voice of an otherwise marginalised and invisible audience to be heard, their experiences recorded, the possibilities for resistance explored, and the potentially feminine pleasures of the horror film identified.

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Introduction Overview of the study

It is often assumed, by both the producers of horror films and the critics of the genre, that taking pleasure in horrific or frightening images is a masculine trait, not a feminine one. While women may watch horror films, they do so only reluctantly and with displeasure, not least because of the representations of violence against the female body they contain. However, Mark Jancovich notes in Horror (1992, p. 18) that horror literature has a large female readership. Women were the primary consumers of Gothic fiction and writers such as Nancy Collins, Lisa Tuttle, Poppy Z. Brite and Anne Rice continue the tradition of female authorship today, whilst the female readerships of horror fiction, including that aimed at children and teenagers, are high.

Although horror literature is recognised as appealing across the sex and age ranges, the widely-held notion, both within and without the Hollywood film industry, is that the horror film is the preserve of the adolescent male and a situation has created in which films are produced and marketed with a male youth audience in mind. Some recent horror films such as Bram Stoker's Dracula and Wolf have been marketed as Gothic romances, but as Nina Auerbach observes in Our Vampires, Ourselves (1995, pp. 3-4), a female exclusion zone has been constructed around horror. Most studies of the horror film that have considered questions of gender and spectatorship have concerned themselves with a theoretical male spectator. From such a critical perspective, Linda Williams in When The Woman Looks (1984) does not regard the female gaze as a pleasurable one and the female spectator's act of looking is punished. For Williams, this explains why the female viewer of horror films refuses to look, often physically blocking or averting her eyes from the screen.

Whether most female spectators actually behave like this is another question. Demographic profiles of contemporary cinema audiences suggest that women can comprise up to 50 per cent of horror film audiences. As Carol Clover has acknowledged in Men, Women and Chainsaws (1992, p. 54), it seems inadequate to dismiss large numbers of women as 'male-identified' and account for their responses only as 'an "immasculated" act of collusion with the oppressor.' The presence of a large proportion of women in the horror film audience raises important questions about horror film consumption, gendered spectatorship and social models of femininity. In some segments of

the audience we might expect to find female viewers who do take pleasure in viewing horror films and who, in what could amount to an act of defiance, refuse to refuse to look.

This study recognises the increasing visibility of active female horror film viewers and seeks to explore this audience segment's consumption and appropriation of the genre. The aims and objectives of this study are therefore:

- to investigate the viewing patterns of active female viewers (that is, the female fans and followers) of the horror film;
- to investigate the tastes of active female viewers in order to ascertain whether any particular forms of the horror film are popular with this group and ascertain what factors make these films, as opposed to other types, appealing;
- to examine the reception of horror films by active female viewers in order to determine the reactions and interpretative strategies of horror by this group;
- to assess the consumption and appropriation of horror films within the context of horror fandom; and
- to establish how, if at all, active female viewers relate what they see on the screen to social issues such as feminine sexuality, female role models, violence against women, and other aspects of feminist discourse.

In chapter 1, a picture of the horror film audience drawn from surveys of cinema attendance and screen studies is presented, together with an overview of horror cinema and potential feminine codings of the genre. Chapter 2 presents relevant theoretical research into the female horror film spectator and explores questions which the existence of active female horror film viewers raise about gendered spectatorship. This presents a context in which horror film viewing by women might be understood. Such questions make an ethnographic study of the female horror film audience crucial and chapter 3 proposes a strategy for investigating the female horror film audience. Chapters 4 to 7 present the results and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected in the study, chapter 4 providing a demographic picture of the participating female horror film viewers and an analysis of the viewing habits and preferences of the participants. The suggestion that gender socialisation processes are important is investigated in chapter 5, along with an exploration into the attraction of horror for the respondents from a very young age. Chapter 5 also contains an analysis of the emotional affects reported by the respondents and how these responses contribute to their enjoyment of horror films. Chapter 6 investigates the interpretive activities of the respondents and

sets out a range of readings which might categorise active female horror film spectatorship. Chapter 7 examines the position of the female horror fan in relation to fan publishing and fan organisations. In particular, it looks at vampire fandom and the appropriation of vampire texts; this has links to the appropriation of texts by fans referred to by Jenkins (1992) as 'textual poaching' (after de Certeau, 1984). In conclusion, chapter 8 considers issues arising from this study which might necessitate a reconceptualisation of the active female horror film audience or indicate areas of further research.

Chapter 1 The Horror Film and Its Audience

Only the saddest of simpletons, one feels, could ever get a really satisfying frisson. For the rest of us [horror films] have just become a rather eccentric and specialised form of light entertainment, and possibly a useful means of escape for a housewife harrowed by the shopping. (Granger, Financial Times, 6 May 1957¹)

In the June 1992 edition of the woman's magazine Cosmopolitan an article by E. Lederman entitled 'The Best Places To Meet Good Men'² warned its readership against starting up a conversation with a man looking for horror films in the local videomart since such men have 'questionable feelings about women.' Lederman goes on to state that 'Whether buried deep within him or overtly expressed in his words and actions, his misogynistic tendencies make him a man to avoid.' As in the above quote from Granger's review of Hammer's The Curse of Frankenstein, this attitude illustrates that the horror film audience has always been regarded as completely Other, the fans dismissed as 'them' in contrast to the normal 'us'. Unlike the 'saddest of simpletons' of the 50s however, the 90s horror fan is a danger to women. Granger's quote recognises that in the 50s women too gained gratifications (albeit simple escapism) from the horror film, but by the 90s the horror film represents only a threat to women, not only on the screen but in real life. Since the rise of the slasher film in the late 70s, the horror film audience has been regarded as consisting primarily of adolescent boys and men under the age of twenty-five. Twitchell's observations of horror film audiences (1985, p. 70) lead him to the conclusion that 'most of the audience are in their early to mid-teens', whilst Clover (1992b, p. 6) claims that 'the proportions vary somewhat from subgenre to subgenre and from movie to movie ..., but the preponderance of young males appears constant.' This supposition is also evident within the Hollywood industry. In part, this may be because the Hollywood-based film industry sees its primary target audience as males between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four and consequently aims many of its films and much of its marketing and publicity at this demographic group (Kramer, 1998). In this model, women may watch horror films, but only reluctantly and with displeasure. As president of Miramax Mark Gill (interviewed by Hindes, 1997) states when expressing surprise that women went to see the slasher film Scream 2: 'Horror film audiences used to be heavily male. If they could drag their girlfriends along you were lucky.' The

horror film audience has not always been regarded as so resolutely male; just as in the 50s 'housewives harrowed by the shopping' may have been recognised as an important segment of the Hammer horror film audience (at least in the mind of the reviewer quoted above), in the 30s women were regarded as an important audience for Dracula and other Universal horror films. Likewise, contemporary surveys of computer games players, visitors to Madam Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors and the readers of Goosebumps and Point Horror pre-adolescent's and young adult's horror fiction have revealed that women continue to be as, if not more, attracted to horrific entertainment than men. These, and other, findings (which are given in more detail below) are supported by demographic data of actual cinema audiences.

Recent exit polls in the USA (see Hindes, 1997) showed audiences in the opening weekend of Scream 2 averaged 55 per cent female and 45 per cent male. If we are to believe the accepted model of a predominantly male horror film audience, a female audience share of over 50 per cent may seem unusually high. The demographic profile for Scream 2 is very similar to that for Titanic (which may be classed as a romance) where females outnumbered males 57 per cent to 43 per cent, whereas the Bond film Tomorrow Never Dies had an audience of 60 per cent male to 40 per cent female. The fact that Scream and its sequel are a pastiche on the original slasher films with strong female roles may well be one reason for the high numbers of women seeing this particular film; however, Dika (1987, p. 87) reports that 55 per cent of the twelve to seventeen-year-old audience for films in the original slasher cycle was female. Pinedo (1997, p. 72) concludes that Dika misread the statistics (Dika derived the figure from data given by the 20th Century Fox advertising and publicity department to the New York Times -see Dika, 1990, p. 142) and that this figure is wrong. Although Pinedo may well be correct in this, given the demographic for Scream 2, Dika's estimate may in fact be closer to the true figure than generally believed. The Cinema Advertising Association's audience profiles, derived from representative samples of the British population and highlighting the age, sex and social class of British cinema audiences for the purposes of selling cinema advertising space, also indicate that women may make up a substantially higher segment of the horror film audience than often acknowledged. The CAA estimate the female audience for the films Man Bites Dog, Silence of the Lambs and Scream at around 50 per cent, and whilst the female audience for other horror and horror-related films (Alien³, Reservoir Dogs and Natural Born Killers) is

lower, between 30 to 40 per cent, it still represents a sizeable minority. Overall, these figures suggest that just under half of horror film viewers are female (and that a similar proportion are over the age of twenty-four).³

The high female audience share for Silence of the Lambs, Scream and Alien³ may again be attributable to the strong female leads in these films. It should be noted, however, that all the films except Man Bites Dog could be classed as mainstream films and Clover (1992b, p. 6) predicts that mainstream horror films will have a higher female audience share (or rather, we should assume that the audience for mainstream films will reflect a distribution in terms of age and sex that is closer to the general population). The high female audience for Man Bites Dog is especially interesting. Why this should be is not entirely clear. Unlike Natural Born Killers and Reservoir Dogs which have a much lower female audience share, there was very little pre-publicity to link Man Bites Dog with other examples of what has been termed the New Brutalism despite it being a film in a similar vein (see Hill, 1997, for a discussion of this cycle of films). It may have been that the publicity for the former either dissuaded women from going to see them or persuaded more men to see them. Man Bites Dog had a limited release in art cinemas and posters highlighted the fact that the film was a black comedy that had won awards at the Cannes and Toronto film festivals, whereas publicity for Natural Born Killers and Reservoir Dogs played on the scenes of violence and bloodshed, and in the case of Natural Born Killers a high body count. Furthermore, the latter films attracted sensationalist media coverage which labelled them as dangerous: for example, Natural Born Killers attracted newspaper headlines such as 'Should this sicko film be shown over here?' (The Sun), 'It's splatter that matters' (Daily Mail), 'Our worst nightmare' (The Observer) and 'A splatter movie too far' (Today); reviews in the film magazines Empire (March 1995) and Premiere (March 1995) describe the film as 'an assault from start to finish' and 'as fascinating as it is repellent' respectively. This may have served to attract viewers hoping to see a 'nasty', more of whom might have been male (a report by the British Board of Film Classification indicates that teenage boys are attracted to violence and macho heroics - see section 1.1.2 below). Being a subtitled Belgian film screened in art cinemas may also suggest that Man Bites Dog attracted a more 'highbrow' audience than Natural Born Killers or Reservoir Dogs, though the CAA film profiles for class do not necessarily support this supposition: ABC1s composed 56 per cent of the audience for Man Bites Dog and Reservoir Dogs

and 57 per cent of the audience for Natural Born Killers. It may then be that marketing in the form of sensationalist advertising and press coverage is a more important factor for attracting a male audience (or dissuading a female audience pre-disposed to other horror films such as Man Bites Dog, Bram Stoker's Dracula and Scream). Hill's study of viewers of violent movies suggests this to be true (pp. 20-1); she quotes four male focus group participants who reported they were attracted to such films by the media hype and one female participant who was initially dissuaded from seeing Reservoir Dogs by the same media coverage.

The marketing for Bram Stoker's Dracula, by contrast, emphasised that the film was a love story (a prologue established that Mina Harker was a re-incarnation of Dracula's wife with whom he desired to be reunited) and pre-publicity for the film also concentrated on the young male stars, particularly Keanu Reeves who had a large female fan following (see Weaver, 1993). Weaver's audience survey at the time of the film's release in the UK indicated that **at least 50 per cent** of the audience were female, and this figure may almost certainly have been higher (p. 29):

The male-female split in both Phases of the survey was exactly 50:50. Since representative sampling occurred in Phase One, this was probably a fair reflection of Dracula's early audience profile. Since respondents in Phase Two were selected by quota sampling, the gender split for later audiences cannot be stated with any accuracy. It is worth noting, however, that some interviewers had problems in filling their quotas for male respondents in this Phase.⁴

Again, these figures support the fact of a larger female audience share than usually recognised and it seems this may be due both to film type and marketing.

The belief that the horror film audience is young and male and the niche marketing of horror films to this demographic undoubtedly marginalises the genre's not insignificant female audience. The horror film is therefore not perceived as suitable entertainment for female viewers and these women may in turn be further marginalised. The fact that an unacknowledged female audience segment does exist for horror cinema (even the more violent or graphic examples) raises important questions not just about the widely accepted classification of horror as a masculine genre but about patterns of consumption and appropriation by female viewers of horror.

1.1 Horror film audiences

In addition to the marketing of horror films to a male audience, genre criticism has also focused almost exclusively on the young, male spectator of the horror film. Like Twitchell (see above), Derry (1987, p. 163) describes teenagers as 'the major audience for horror films,' Dickstein (1980, p. 69) finds that 'those who submit to (horror films) are generally young,' and Evans (1973, p. 54, my emphasis) finds horror movies to be 'uniquely tailored to the psyches of troubled adolescents, *whatever their age.*' Evans seems to be suggesting here that some adults may like horror films, but he implies that they do so only because they retain the psychology of adolescence. This may well be an important reason why some older individuals retain their liking for horror films beyond their teens, but other factors may apply; the continued liking for horror may also be attributable to retaining a childhood love of dark fantasy as found in fairy stories and other children's fiction, for example, and this may have very little to do with adolescent psychosexual issues. Although Evans does not specify either male or female adolescents and discusses the onset of secondary sexual characteristics in both males and females, the assumption is that young males predominate (see also Clover's claim above). Kendrick (1991, p. 257) defines the 'horror maven' as 'most likely to be male, to be between fifteen and forty-five years old, and American.' These quotes reflect the perception of the contemporary horror film spectator as a young male in his teens or early twenties. This may in part be because the horror genre in the late-70s and 80s was dominated by slasher films.

In this period horror film criticism was primarily concerned with the slasher film and its audience and it is in this context that the horror film spectator has been analysed most frequently. As Dika (1990, p. 87) states:

The audience for the stalker film, as is typical of the horror genre, is overwhelmingly young: these R-rated films (no one under seventeen admitted without a parent or guardian) were frequented by adolescents between the ages of twelve and seventeen.

Dika's assumption that the slasher film audience is typical of all horror film audiences may not be entirely correct. Niche marketing, a high body count and high levels of blood and/or violence, peer group pressure and a predominantly teenage cast might mean that the slasher film audience is younger and more likely to be dominated by males than other horror film audiences. Another important aspect of the slasher film in attracting a younger

audience is the representation of teenage sexuality and resultant adolescent psychosexual and psychosocial issues that these films deal with. However, horror films operate on many levels and not just that of adolescent sexuality. The assumption that has been widely made that the horror film spectator is, like the slasher film spectator, an adolescent male is undoubtedly flawed. The CAA figures show that whilst the majority audience for many horror and horror-related films is young and male, older and female viewers can make up almost half or more of the audience.

It may also be that there are national or cultural differences in horror film audiences in the USA and the UK and since much of the genre criticism is American it may not be wholly applicable to British audiences. The Scream 2 exit polls, however, show that women can make up a large section of the horror film audience in the USA as well as in the UK. Kendrick's claim that the 'horror maven' is most likely to be American must also be questioned since horror films attract large audiences internationally and many national cinemas have their own horror film industries (notable horror cycles have occurred in Italy, Spain, France, the UK, Hong Kong and Japan, whilst the film industries in Canada and New Zealand have more recently produced very successful horror film directors).

The exact make-up of the horror film audience remains unclear since very little rigorous research has been carried out into audience demographics for a wide range of horror film types. Some general surveys of cinema audiences provide useful background figures, but most observations of horror film audiences are anecdotal. Anecdotal evidence makes a convincing case that the horror film audience is predominantly male, but it may be a mistake to believe as Clover (1992b, p. 6) does that: 'what formal surveys and informal accounts there are bear out with remarkable consistency ... that adolescent males hold pride of place.' Casual observation of some horror film audiences may confirm the impression of a male audience, but as the above figures from the CAA and elsewhere suggest, not all horror films have a predominantly (or even majority) male audience.

The dearth of reliable demographics for horror film audiences, in particular into the male-female and age group ratios, has led to the assumption that the audience is predominantly male and young (although it is recognised as ranging across race and class). As Brunt (1992, pp. 69-76) has indicated, it is not an easy task to undertake audience research: 'Audience studies are

inordinately time consuming and labour-intensive, and certainly in Britain unlikely to attract funding unless there's an obvious social policy pay-off or corporate enterprise function.' The study of horror film audiences especially has problems in this respect with the genre having an aura of disreputability, the majority of horror films being low-budget independent productions, and the producers of horror films frequently assuming a male audience (as does Gill when discussing Scream 2 in Variety). Additional problems arise if video and television audiences for horror films are to be taken into account - the video format in particular is where profits are made on many horror films and demographic profiles for these formats are not available. Since the male audience model may be concealing an unrecognised female audience, it is important to establish whether the high female viewership of contemporary horror films such as Scream 2 represents a new phenomenon (as Gill assumes) or whether women have always been an unacknowledged audience for horror (horror literature has certainly not been seen as age or sex restricted in the same way as horror cinema).

1.1.1 Composition of the horror film audience

Despite the fact that detailed and specific data have never been collected on the make-up of horror film audiences, a number of observations have been made of representative audiences which do support the above figures for female viewers. For example, Twitchell (1985, p. 70, my emphasis) made personal observations at a number of film screenings during research for his book:

The youngest viewers sit up front ... and are divided into small groups of five or six. Often a group will surround a couple that has managed to sit together, but usually they stay in little packs. Sometimes these are packs of all girls, *but rarely, if ever, have I seen all boys*. Behind them, another audience forms, this one more neatly paired with partners, not necessarily older, but certainly better organised. There are also groups within this larger herd ... The back half of the theatre seems dormant in comparison. For here sit disconnected young couples, intent on cuddling, not screaming; sometimes two or three older girls sit together; sometimes a few, sombre single boys; older, well-dressed couples; and on the perimeter those rogue males.

It is interesting to note the rarity of all male groups in Twitchell's observed audience and the inference from these observations is that a fairly large proportion of the audience is female (although Twitchell's theoretical work on horror cinema assumes a male spectator). Broadly this observed audience breaks down into (in approximately decreasing order):

- front
 - a) mixed sex groups (usually)
 - b) couples (often)
 - c) female groups (sometimes)
 - d) male groups (rare)
- middle
 - a) couples
 - b) groups (mixed sex?)
- rear
 - a) couples
 - b) female pairs or groups
 - c) lone males (old)⁵
 - d) lone males (young)

Even assuming that women make up only a small proportion of the mixed sex groups (these may well be dominated by males), anywhere between 25 and 50 per cent of Twitchell's audience could well be female.

Clover's breakdown of the audience (p. 6) offers a slightly different picture:

At theatre screenings ... the constituencies typically breakdown, in order of size, as follows: young men, frequently in groups but also solo; male-female couples of various ages (though mostly young); solo 'rogue males' (older men of ominous appearance and/or reactions); and adolescent girls in groups.

Clover did not collect any data or make any personal observations of the cinema audience, instead relying on data reported by Austin (1983). She did, however, conduct a small scale survey of video rentals (p. 6-7), but these were from a very small sample of video stores and should not be taken as statistically significant. Clover collected rental figures for two rape-revenge films from three rental outlets in the San Francisco area for four weeks. Results showed that between 80 and 90 per cent of renters were male and renters of both sexes were mostly in their early twenties. However, these figures are unlikely to give any indication of who viewed the film once it had left the store.

The mixed-sex group is notably absent from Clover's cinema audience. She also maintains that young men in single sex groups make up most of the audience, whereas Twitchell rarely or never saw such groups. Clover ranks all female groups as the lowest proportion of the audience, yet Twitchell's observations seem to contradict this. It may be that Clover and Twitchell are reporting on audiences from different geographical or class backgrounds, or different generic or historic audiences; it may also be possible that, while the adolescent male remains the majority viewer of the 80s slasher film, Clover

significantly underestimates the female audience for other types and periods of the horror film. (The neglect of the female spectator is, quite properly, a deliberate omission in Clover's work, since she is concerned only with identification in the adolescent male. It does however highlight the importance of studying other groups of horror film viewers. If they do not have the same stake in the horror film as the majority young male audience, it is important to establish what might be at stake for them.)

Clover's audience profile, then, may differ from Twitchell's and from the CAA figures because she primarily focused on low-budget slasher and exploitation film audiences - these film types may be less well liked by women and Clover herself supposes (p. 65fn) that the female audience for occult films, for instance, is larger than that for the slasher or rape-revenge genres: 'despite my impression that occult films have a greater share of female viewers than other sorts of horror (there are no reliable statistics), it would seem that the constructed viewer is also male.' Twitchell does not specify what type of horror films he observed his audiences at, but his ad-hoc survey may have taken in a wider range of post-slasher horror film types than Clover. It should also be stressed that Clover and Twitchell are both describing American audiences and their observations should not be assumed to be directly applicable to a British audience. Cultural differences in audience behaviour are well known. The descriptions of US audience behaviour (including the stratification of the audience with younger people at the front and older to the rear which Twitchell described) indicate that American horror film viewers, especially the younger members of the audience, are particularly active, calling out to characters in the films and passing comments on the action. In the UK audiences generally are much more reserved, however male/female audience splits may be similar, as the following observations of Scottish audiences suggest.

In order to ascertain an approximate composition of the horror film audience in the UK a survey of sex ratios in the audiences at six varied horror film screenings at the Filmhouse in Edinburgh was carried out as part of the design exercise for this research.⁶ The results indicate that horror film audiences contain between 28 and 36 per cent women (just under one-third of the overall total). These figures are not as high as the CAA profiles, but this may be because the films are older films being screened in a horror film season at an art cinema, most of which are not mainstream. This survey also

indicates that mixed sex groups and all female groups make up approximately 17 per cent of the audience which might be similar to that observed by Twitchell and is certainly more than Clover recognises. These groupings were recorded as the audience arrived at the cinema hall entrance to have their ticket checked and may not indicate groups meeting up inside the screening hall. The largest proportions are lone men making up 33 per cent of the audience (136 individuals), followed by mixed sex pairs making up 23 per cent of the audience (96 individuals), and then two men together making up 14 per cent of the audience (58 individuals). Other groupings are mixed sex groups at 10 per cent of the audience (43 people), then lone women at 9 per cent (37), then groups of all women at 7 per cent (28), followed by groups of men (9) and finally two women together (8) at around 2 per cent of the audience each. There were 5 older rogue males and 2 rogue females counted at the screenings (the latter was accounted for by an elderly woman at screenings of The Fly and Dementia 13 who frequents the cinema during the winter months to save on heating bills and was therefore discounted). In this survey, men seem most likely to go alone or with one other man. Women are most likely to go with one man or alone. Of other groupings, women are more likely than men to go in groups of three or more (suggesting perhaps safety in numbers), whilst men are more likely to go in pairs or alone than are women. (This may be a reflection of wider issues in society, such as women preferring not to go out alone at night because of fears about safety.) The fact that there are many people of both sexes going to the screening alone may be due (in addition to the possibility that they may be meeting friends inside the theatre) to the fact that the films were screened at an art cinema. This may account for the audience also being older than that described by Twitchell. This is to be expected at an art cinema showing a season of older horror films and it is assumed that many of those attending horror films in such a situation will be individuals who are long-term habitual viewers of the horror film.⁷ These figures confirm that substantial numbers of older and female viewers of horror films exist.

During the pilot study for this research, observation was also made of two electronic-mailing lists for the discussion of vampires and for horror in film and fiction and these revealed high levels of participation by women of all ages. See chapter 3 for details.

1.1.2 Cinema audiences and the taste for horror

One problem with the scarcity of demographic data on the horror film audience is that there is little historical material which could be used to track the female horror film audience over time. This information could be extremely important in ascertaining whether women have always been interested in the horror genre (as they were in the gothic horror literature of past centuries when they were regarded as the main readership - see below) or whether this phenomenon is, in the history of cinema, a recent trend. General surveys of cinema audiences could be useful, but the horror genre has not been found to be widely popular, does not score highly on lists of preferred genres and accordingly is not given much attention in any subsequent reports. Apart from mentions of the widespread dislike of horror films, general cinema audience surveys rarely contain any relevant demographic details on who does view horror films. This confirms the bi-polar split in the taste for horror observed by Wood (1979), yet horror films have proved enduringly popular and are a lucrative source of income for film companies. (During the late-80s and 90s the number of horror films getting a cinema release in the UK declined, however many horror films are extremely successful in the video market. The slasher film revival in the wake of Scream also emphasises the enduring popularity of horror.)

A major study on cinema attendance and preferences undertaken by the British Film Institute (Docherty et al, 1987) reinforces the fact that there is a dislike of horror films generally, and that there is a trend for this dislike to increase with age, but the report does not break down the genre preferences of the survey group by sex.⁸ A survey undertaken by the BBC Audience Research Department in 1965 (figures reproduced by Docherty et al., 1987) indicates a strong liking for horror films amongst sixteen to nineteen-year-olds (reporting that 24 per cent of this age group usually enjoy horror), but this declines sharply with age (3 per cent of twenty to twenty-nine-year-olds, 7 per cent of thirty to forty-nine-year-olds, and 2 per cent of those over fifty). Of interest here is the slight rise amongst the thirty to forty-nine-year-olds. This may possibly be explained by the fact that the this age group contains individuals who would have been in their late-teens and early-twenties when the Universal horror films and the early Hammer horror films were first released. Both these cycles were extremely popular moments in the history of the horror genre and it may simply be that individuals in this age group are recalling (or retaining) an interest in horror they had in their youth. A 1984

study by the Broadcasting Research Unit showed a similar overall pattern with 14 per cent of the sixteen to twenty-nine-year-olds placing horror as one of their three favourite film types, falling to 5 per cent of thirty to forty-nine-year-olds and 1 per cent of the over-fifties (reported in Docherty et al, 1987). Once again, however, these data are not broken down by sex.

An American study undertaken in 1942 (Handel, 1976) covers a wider age range (from twelve-years-old to forty-five and over); however, horror films are classed together with mystery films (horror has been regarded as a generic category only relatively recently, with what we now class as horror being called mysteries, thrillers or chillers in the 30s). This makes comparisons with other surveys somewhat difficult. Over the entire age range, 7 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women chose 'mystery and horror' as one of their two favourite film story types. Obviously, this cannot be compared with the other studies due to differences in cultural, social and historical situations, in question presentation and in the fact that respondents could only select two categories, but again it illustrates the low popularity of the horror film amongst cinema-goers as a whole. Again liking for horror decreases with age (from 9 per cent of the twelve to sixteen-year-olds to 5 per cent of thirty to forty-four-year-olds); the age bands not being broken down by sex.

Preferences by sex have been indicated in surveys of children and teenagers and these are more useful to this study. Barclay (1961) presents the results of a survey of 2,526 boys and 2,794 girls conducted by the Scottish Educational Film Association. The data analysed in this study suggest that younger girls seem almost as drawn to horror as boys of the same age (49 per cent of fourteen-year-old boys and 37 per cent of girls of the same age chose horror as one of the four film types they liked best, 41 per cent of fifteen-year-old boys and 56 per cent of girls of the same age chose horror). Girls increasingly professed a dislike for the genre as they matured (of sixteen-year-olds, the number of boys liking horror remains steady at 40 per cent, for girls the figure dropped to 25 per cent). By the age of eighteen, these figures have fallen to 29 per cent of boys and 15 per cent of girls who liked horror films; with 30 per cent of boys and 64 per cent of girls choosing them as one of their four most disliked genres (rising from 16 per cent of fourteen-year-old boys and 32 per cent of fourteen-year-old girls). The reason for such a pattern could be one of gender socialisation - the girls being discouraged from liking horror as it is seen as unfeminine, whilst boys, who are encouraged to

display their fearlessness, outgrow it more gradually (this is an extremely important issue which is followed up in depth in chapter 5). An important factor in assessing the results of any such survey amongst children is that the selection of horror may not be a genuine taste for the genre; the girls (and boys) surveyed were too young in most cases to have legally seen horror films at the cinema and, in going to see (or claiming to have seen) what were then X-rated films, there may well be elements of bravado in breaking the law, or of rebelliousness in being seen to be attracted to such material, or even simply of its taboo status and content. This should be borne in mind when assessing the value of any such surveys. Nevertheless, whether a genuine liking for or a desire - for whatever reason - to be seen to like horror, the apparently strong taste for horror in girls of around fifteen years of age is striking. More than half of all the girls in the survey name horror as one of up to four most liked film genres (out of a choice of fifteen). This result also suggests that the liking for horror films amongst teenage girls seen in a 1995 survey by Sierra On-Line is not a recent phenomenon.

The computer games company Sierra On-Line commissioned market research (Cumberbatch and Wood, 1995) to ascertain the attitudes of young people between the ages of thirteen and eighteen to computer games in the light of the company's then new game Phantasmagoria receiving an 18 classification from the BBFC. Data was also collected on the respondents hobbies and interests, including their film viewing habits. 305 teenagers were surveyed, 195 male and 110 female, and the responses of the female participants confirm that girls like horror films as much as or more than boys. It should be noted that there were forty-nine females in each of the younger age groups (thirteen to fourteen and fifteen to sixteen-year-olds) but that there were far fewer women (twelve) in the older age group (seventeen to eighteen-year-olds). The reason given for this (p. 1) is because 'Young people were surveyed primarily in or outside Computer Game shops ... In these locations relatively few females in their late teens were available for interview.' This could either be because they stop playing computer games or that they stop going to computer games shops; either way, it may be another aspect of the gender socialisation process. Girls may give up playing computer games for the same reasons they stop watching horror films, it is seen as unfeminine.

Respondents were asked: 'What's your favourite kind of film/video?' and could select one from: Animation, Action, Thrillers, Horror, Comedy,

Romance/Love Stories, Super Heroes, True Story or Other. Overall, 18 per cent chose horror. As with previous surveys, horror was most popular with the youngest age group and declined with age: 22 per cent of thirteen to fourteen-year-olds, 19 per cent of fifteen to sixteen-year-olds and 13 per cent of seventeen to eighteen-year-olds. 27 per cent of girls named horror as their favourite film type, as opposed to 14 per cent of boys. Boys much prefer Action films (44 per cent selecting it as their favourite type against 14 per cent of girls). It seems that, boys do not like horror **as much** as action films, whereas the reverse is true for girls. The BBFC report on screen violence (see Culf, 1996) confirms that boys prefer 'macho heroics' over horror.⁹

Cumberbatch and Wood express surprise that girls appear to like horror films more than boys (p. 6): 'There are a number of interesting points to be made here. Most striking is that Horror films emerge as the favourite film genre among the female respondents.' However, such a result should not be entirely unexpected given the film profiles quoted above and the long history of female consumption of horror. That surprise is expressed at all (and that it is repeated in an item on The Guardian's woman's page) underlines the fact that ideals of femininity which depict women as disliking horror are extremely entrenched in society.

The survey also indicates (p. 7) that large numbers of teenagers are claiming to have watched 18 certificated films and videos from as young as thirteen or fourteen-years-old: 88 per cent of thirteen to fourteen-year-olds, 92 per cent of fifteen to sixteen-year-olds, and 100 per cent of seventeen to eighteen-year-olds with no differences observed between boys and girls). The viewing of adult films (including but not exclusively horror films) from early or pre-teens does not seem to be confined to those playing computer games. The Broadcasting Standards Council research working paper on Young People and the Media (1996, p. 83) reports that 40 per cent of respondents claimed that they had watched videos that had an 18 classification. Presumably this figure does not include the viewing of 18 rated films on television, and therefore the percentage of ten to seventeen-year-olds having viewed adult material (presumably including horror) is likely to be much higher. The BSC report (p. 84) also provides statistics for a group of specified films including a number of horror and horror-related films (The Silence of the Lambs, Seven, Natural Born Killers and Reservoir Dogs). 34 per cent of ten to twelve-year-olds claim to have seen The Silence of the

Lambs and 13 per cent claim to have seen Seven. These figures rise to 54 per cent and 17 per cent of thirteen to fourteen-year-olds respectively, and 67 per cent and 34 per cent of fifteen to seventeen-year-olds. Survey respondents may be exaggerating their claims to have seen 18 classified films¹⁰, especially where they are asked about named films which have previously been given a high profile in the media and there has been some controversy, but such figures do suggest that high numbers of teenagers will indeed have seen some adult films (possibly including horror films) as reported by Cumberbatch and Wood. The BSC report (p. 85) states that there were clear gender differences with boys 'far more likely to claim either that they had already seen a film or that they would like to.' This difference from the report on computer games players is likely to be due to the fact that the BSC were researching attitudes to violent films in particular, rather than to 18 rated films or horror films, and these may have been more attractive to the male respondents (as seen in the CAA film profiles and BBFC research). The BSC qualitative research (p. 85) found that some male respondents were 'very keen on the straight-to-video releases which tended to be quite violent (such as martial arts films).'

Overall, these surveys confirm the assumption that many younger viewers watch horror films, but not necessarily that such viewers are predominantly male. Barclay's study and Cumberbatch and Wood's market research for Sierra On-Line in particular indicate that in some cases females might even like horror films **more** than males. Historically, this does seem to have been recognised on a number of occasions.

1.2 The feminine love of horror

Auerbach, in Our Vampires, Ourselves (1995, p. 3-4), recognises the fallacy of the exclusively male horror film audience and puts this down to the interpretation of horror films in adolescent psychosexual terms:

Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey reminds us that in the eighteenth century, horror was by definition a woman's genre, but today many women disclaim it (or try to), finding its alternative world alien, almost insulting. Here as so often, though, women's supposed resistance may unwittingly obey a taboo that originates in male exclusivity.

The most sophisticated and best-known experts on American popular horror insist that it is and always has been a boy's game. Twitchell, Skal and Kendrick construct a compelling paradigm of adolescent boys chafing against the smug domestication of the 1950s, but this paradigm assumes by definition that girls were contented domesticators. What about those of us who weren't?

Skal, in Auerbach's words, 'quarantines' girls from 'vicarious bloodlust': Skal (1990, p. 190) explains the late 50s interest in horror (which he calls 'monster culture') 'in a suburbanised, plasticised America' as answering 'a need among male baby boomers for haunted houses instead of tract houses.' This he puts down to a rite of passage in which the adolescent male is initiated into 'the mysteries of sex, death and metaphysics.' Likewise Twitchell (1985, p. 99-100), although acknowledging that adolescents of both sexes view horror, puts the appeal of horror films down to their basis in the 'Ur-myth of adolescence' derived from a Freudian view of an initiation into sexuality based on a patriarchal system and dealing almost exclusively with the fantasies of boys. Auerbach reminds us of the recent construction of a female exclusion zone around horror which may explain the marketing of horror and horror-related films almost entirely to male audiences and the gender socialisation which makes horror films unacceptable entertainment for women. It is interesting to note that in commenting on the high numbers of women going to see Scream 2 in the Variety article referred to above, Gill attempted to explain away this female audience by classifying the film as some other genre, saying:

Humour plays a big part in it, because it breaks up the tension. Also, it plays closer to a thriller than a gore-fest. Most of the terror is suspense. It also helps that it has a young sexy cast of women they want to be and guys they want to date.

A number of points should be noted here: i) slasher films, and other types of horror films, often contain high levels of comedy to relieve the tension; ii) the thriller and horror genres have always been closely linked and up until the 30s horror films were frequently typed as thrillers and mysteries)furthermore, fan discourse requires a fluid definition of the genre); and iii) the casting of 'women they want to be and guys they want to date' is hardly unusual in Hollywood cinema and horror films have been no exception to that. Scream 2 is not a typical horror film, nevertheless it plays on the conventions of the genre and relies on an audience with generic competencies. Gill's comment may illustrate the fact that when horror films attract a large female audience, they are often classified as something other than horror - see section IV below.

Jancovich (1992, p. 18), however, acknowledges that horror has a long tradition of female consumption: 'Despite claims that horror is primarily produced and consumed by men, and that it promotes patriarchal values, there

has been an important and enduring tradition of horror produced and consumed by women'. It has long been recognised that there exists a literary tradition of what Moers (1977, pp. 90-110) identified as 'female gothic.' Women were the primary consumers of this fiction, 'the willing audience of the literature of horror' as Halberstam says (1995, p. 165). Jackson (1981, p. 103) asserts that this tradition fantasises 'a violent attack upon the symbolic order and it is no accident that so many writers of a Gothic tradition are women.' This tradition continues to the present day, with a large proportion of horror fiction being written by female authors (for example, Nancy Collins, Lisa Tuttle, Anne Rice, Poppy Z. Brite, Storm Constantine, among many others). Even the female hero who emerged into contemporary horror in the slasher film, Clover's Final Girl, is recognised as having her roots in the Gothic tradition, specifically the female hero of the nineteenth century Gothic novel. (That some forms of horror represent a violent attack upon the symbolic order may remain a key to women's enjoyment of contemporary horror, some of which may form a kind of revenge fantasy for the female viewer - this is explored further in chapter 6.) There is evidence to suggest that, firstly, women have always enjoyed horror and continue to do so and, secondly, that women's consumption of horror may have been forced 'underground' or into other areas. The four points outlined below give evidence for this.

I. Children's horror fiction

Girls make up a large proportion of the readership of the young adult Point Horror books and Goosebumps horror fiction aimed at pre-teens. The publisher of Goosebumps and Point Horror, Scholastic Children's Fiction, could not supply a breakdown of the readerships of these titles by age and sex, but Red House Book Clubs who run the Point Horror club claim that in the younger age groups (ten to eleven-years-old) the numbers of girls and boys in the club is evenly split, whilst in the older age groups there are more girls in the club.¹¹ Red House assume this is due to the fact that boys tend to read less as they get older. This is confirmed by a survey undertaken by the Children's Literature Research Centre (Reynolds, 1996) which reveals that boys read far less (and less widely) than girls as they progress through primary education. R. L. Stine, the writer of many Point Horror and Goosebumps titles, is named as a favourite author by far more girls aged eleven to sixteen-years-old than boys (332 mentions by girls compared to seventy-eight by boys); Stine is less popular with younger age groups but still

more popular amongst girls and is named by fifty-four seven to eleven-years-old girls compared with thirty-six boys (figures derived from favourite authors of 8,834 children between the ages of four and sixteen participating in the study). Even taking into account the fact that girls do read more than boys, the liking for horror as a fiction of choice is significant. The following examples are representative of this trend:

I am twelve and I live in Douglas in the Isle of Man. ... My favourite [television] programmes are Are You Afraid of the Dark?, Clarissa Explains It All, Dracula, Real Monsters, Rugrats, Sister, Sister. Outside of school my main interests are soccer, ... playing the guitar, ... reading. My favourite books are Goosebumps, Point Crime and Point Horror. I love dogs! (ph001)

I'm fourteen years old and I live in Ireland. ... My hobbies are horse-riding, cycling and reading. ... I read The Saddle Club, Point Horrors and Point Fantasy. (ph002)

I will soon be twelve. ... I enjoy reading horror books (Point Horror) and horror films. My favourites are Candyman, Night of the Living Dead. When I'm not being scared stiff I enjoy swimming and netball. ... I really like Lee in 911, I also like Boyzone a wee bit and I used to like Take That. (ph003)

I'm a horse crazy thirteen-year-old Orcadian. I own a Hackney/Shetland mare called The Polka Pony or Tara to her friends. ... I'm in the Pony Club ... I enjoy reading Saddle club books, Point Horrors and Crimes and the Pullen-Tompson sisters books. I also enjoy cycling and swimming. (ph004)

These examples illustrate that reading horror fiction is a normal pastime for many girls in their pre- and early-teens, along with cycling, horses, pop music, swimming, netball and reading - these last all socially acceptable activities for girls in this age group (eleven to fourteen-year-olds). For some girls liking horror fiction may go hand in hand with watching horror films (as indicated by ph003 above); even though horror films may not be seen as suitable entertainment for children, evidence does suggest young people do watch many 18 certificated films (as the market research for the BSC and Sierra On-Line indicates). It is also possible that for many girls who like reading horror, the taste spills over not into watching horror films (which is discouraged for girls especially) but into other related film or television genres.

II. Adult horror fiction

Further evidence of women's enjoyment of horror as a hidden taste or pastime is evident in the large numbers of female readers of horror fiction who never watch horror films. Could it be that women who have been

socialised into not enjoying horror in the form of the visual images contained in these films, who have learnt to flinch or look away (as may well be the case with many female Point Horror readers as they mature), prefer to consume horror in the rather more private act of reading? An editorial in a special edition of the horror magazine Fangoria on 'Women and Horror' (Timpone, p. 6) indicates that this might be the case (my emphasis):

Several years ago, I bought this girlfriend, Christine, a videocassette of Night of the Living Dead for Christmas. Since she read Stephen King and Dean Koontz voraciously, I figured that the Romero flick would be a good introduction to celluloid terror for her. I couldn't have been more wrong. I later found out that Christine hates horror movies. *She scares easily. She can't bear to watch any fright flicks.* She even threw out my gift! I was really shocked over her actions; there is certainly more disturbing imagery in most of King's books than in some old black-and-white zombie film, I reasoned.

This typifies the stereotypical feminine response to horror. Telotte (1980, p. 22) states that 'the most effective horror films operate from a distinctly visual bias ..., and that this visual participation best explains why we find this particular genre so satisfying - in short, why we enjoy being scared by such films.' Obviously, some successfully socialised women who 'scare easily' and 'can't bear to watch any fright flicks' cannot deal with this visual participation but still retain an interest in horror entertainment by reading horror fiction (which they can more easily self-censor and thereby control the visualisation). Timpone's anecdotes of women in his own experience who have liked horror is also illuminating:

Most of the opposite sex that I grew up around *liked* horror and things macabre and unusual. At home, my mom introduced me to Dark Shadows, while my older sister turned me on to Godzilla movies, Spiderman comics and dinosaur toys. In the third grade, I would pal around with the class tomboy, Patricia Kelly. Pat shared my passion for Aurora monster model kits and 'spooky movies', and teachers frequently reprimanded us in class for talking about what Channel 9 would be showing that afternoon on Thriller Theatre.

This would seem to confirm the picture of women of widely differing ages liking horror as much as men, but the examples Timpone uses fit certain stereotypes which may be regarded in some ways as asexual, androgynous or otherwise sexually unavailable: female family members (mothers and sisters) and tomboys (pre-adolescent girls or, possibly, lesbians). Thus (hetero)sexual and feminine women are excluded (by this writer) from the group of females recognised as liking horror films. And even having known

several female horror film viewers, Timpone regards such women as exceptions:

Most of the women I know today, like Christine, don't enjoy watching horror but read lots of it. Reportedly, most of the horror fiction sold is bought by women customers. Some savour every page of Clive Barker's Hellbound Heart novella, but will race for the lobby in disgust during the movie adaptation, Hellraiser.

This denial of a female love of horror is typical of horror fandoms and fan publishing, and is investigated in chapter 7. Timpone does question why this might be:

Why can some women stomach the gore on the printed page but not on the silver screen? One female horror editor explained this contradiction to me as the Flinch Factor: a person reading a horror novel allows their mind to act as a gatekeeper, and will only 'let in' or visualise what is essentially safe and non-threatening to them, regardless of what appears on the page.

Timpone's (and the unnamed editor's) assumptions that women only visualise 'safe' horrors (a form of self-censorship) must be questioned and, although it would need to be investigated further in a study of female horror fiction readers, women are recognised as being interested in real events which might be termed horrific and enjoy visual reconstructions of such events as well as reading about them.

III. True life crime

Recent market research into the popularity of Madam Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors when investigating the Chamber's re-development (Saw Associates & Cantor, 1996, p. 13) is interesting in this context since it 'showed it to be more popular with women than men, with over twice as many women than men liking it'. Again, this reinforces the supposition that women are, if not more, attracted to horrific images as men:

A quarter of women (vs. a fifth of men) said that it 'wasn't horrible enough', nearly a quarter said it was 'too tame' and one in ten said it wasn't gory enough. Those women who were satisfied with the gore content actually said they enjoyed it because it was gory and many thought it was better than they had expected because it had 'stories of murders'. No men made mention of either of these two dimensions, instead talking about liking the realism, sound and light effects.

In a follow-up survey (ibid., p. 13) researching opinions of the re-developed Chamber of Horrors, more women than men thought 'the scene of prisoners being tortured was especially good'.

The report expresses surprise that women like horror - stating (p. 13) that 'the image of women as "shrinking violets" is certainly not supported' and 'this apparent steely female ability to cope with blood and gore better than men'. This mirrors the surprise expressed in the Sierra On-Line study (see section 1.1.2). That women might like horror does appear to be a constant source of amazement, however frequently research reveals it, and again illustrates just how pervasive is the idea that an interest in horror is unfeminine.

An important aspect of women's enjoyment of the Chamber of Horrors is that it depicts real-life murders, serial or mass killers and other horrific events. Recognition is widespread that true-life crime books have a majority female readership and there are large numbers of women who read magazines such as True Life Crimes (see Smith, 1994, p. 25), indicating that women in particular might be fascinated by violent events or psychopathologies. Very little demographic data on the readerships of such books is available, however a staff representative at Waterstone's bookshop in Edinburgh confirmed that the majority of customers purchasing true-life crime books are female and a male crime writer responding to a query in The Guardian's 23 April 1997 'Notes and Queries' column about female readership of masculine fiction stated that his books had a large female readership. An American author of true crime books states in an article in the woman's magazine Options (Rule, 1997, pp. 46): 'I can't count the number of times that someone - usually a young mother with a toddler and a baby in a stroller - has come up to me at a bookshop signing and said "I'm fascinated by your books".' It should be noted however that there is not a large overlap between the female horror film viewers taking part in this study and the readerships of true-life crime books - only 25 per cent of the survey respondents state they are regular readers of such material. Again, this suggests that women socialised out of horror film viewing might be indulging their taste for horror in other areas.

IV. Something other than horror

It may also be that horror fiction is more widely consumed by women than recognised since much of it has been classified as fantasy or a related genre other than horror (as illustrated by the reactions to Scream 2 noted above). For example, Jancovich (1993, p. 109) claims that horror fiction written by women 'does not fit the limited definition of horror which prevails in this country ..., nor does it fit the kinds of literature associated with women's, or even feminist, writing.' Women then have become a hidden readership of

horror, instead being labelled as readers of other types of fiction. A similar process can be seen within cinema where images, narratives and affects similar, if not identical, to those contained in horror films have been incorporated into other genres such as domestic and maternal melodramas and thus not recognised as horror, especially since such films do not contain the more typical representation of the monstrous as a supernatural and physically frightening figure (see, for instance, Fischer writing on the thriller in Cinematernity, 1996, pp. 131-61). As Doane (1985, p. 68, my emphasis) wrote when describing the woman's film:

The 'woman's film' is not a 'pure' genre It is crossed and informed by a number of other genres or types - melodrama, film noir, *the gothic or horror film* - and finds its point of unification ultimately in the fact of its address.

Women's films closely related to the horror film may include The Hand That Rocks The Cradle, Misery, The Accused and Mortal Thoughts - see Fischer and also Clover (1992a). The satellite and cable channel UK Living which is aimed at women with a mix of soaps, talk shows and cookery, fashion and home craft programs (its advertising claims it is 'the UK's only dedicated women's channel') also frequently screens films with horror content. During the summer months of 1996 these included David Cronenberg's Dead Ringers, films from The Stepford Wives series, a large number of thrillers about women being stalked (including more mainstream rape-revenge films), and many true-life dramas with Grand Guignol touches (one of which, The Texas Cheerleader Murdering Mom, even has a title which echoes that of the infamous 'nasty' Texas Chain Saw Massacre). Strictly speaking, these are not horror films, but many of them do fit into Clover's and Fischer's classifications.

In addition, gothic horror continues to be recognised as having a female audience, and recent examples have been marketed as romance, whilst some criticism of the films has centred on them not being true horror films or being ineffectual horror films (such criticism centres on a definition of horror in its post-70s 'gore' format rather than the more atmospheric earlier horror films - see below for a closer examination of genre definitions and boundaries). The advertising campaigns for the neo-Gothic horror films are markedly different to the campaigns for films such as Natural Born Killers and Reservoir Dogs; furthermore, several of the recent gothic cycle are either not acknowledged as horror films (for example, Wolf) or seen as unsuccessful (that is, not

frightening) horror by writers in the horror fan press (this has been particularly true of Bram Stoker's Dracula). The campaigns for Bram Stoker's Dracula, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Wolf and Interview With the Vampire all played up the gothic romance. Notable among such examples are posters for Bram Stoker's Dracula with the line 'Love Never Dies', a soft focus portrait of the stars of Interview With The Vampire under the phrase 'The sexiest bloodsuckers in town' and Wolf's moody sepia-toned poster (with the exception of Nicholson's glowing yellow eye, not unlike a photographic image from a Haagan-Daz advertisement) of lead actors Jack Nicholson and Michelle Pfeiffer which hints at the sexual overtones to the werewolf transformation with the line 'The Animal Is Out.' On the other hand, many recent films with strong female leads which have proved popular with women are not often marketed specifically with the female audience in mind. Films such as Aliens, Terminator 2 and The Silence of the Lambs with large production budgets have a correspondingly high advertising budget to attract as large an audience as possible (see Tasker, 1993, p. 3). Some media coverage does, however, highlight the female lead, and although this may be designed to attract male viewers, it also emphasises a strong or active female character. The advertising for Aliens, for example, proclaimed 'The bitch is back' (referring both to the alien creature and to Ripley). Posters for The Silence of the Lambs depicted a soft focus close up of Jodie Foster, her mouth covered by a death's head moth, and the tag line 'Clarice Starling, FBI, Brilliant, Vulnerable, Alone, She must trust him to stop the killer' (although this emphasises that the female lead must rely on a man to carry out her job, it also indicates that the character is an independent professional). And while the poster for Terminator 2 sold the film on the star presence of Arnold Schwarzenegger, many of the publicity stills used in press and magazine coverage of the film depicted Linda Hamilton dressed in a singlet which exposed her muscled arms and carrying a large machine gun.

The marketing of horror to women is not a new phenomenon, although in the past publicity focused as much on the horror as on the romance. Publicity surrounding Universal's Dracula emphasised the appeal of horror to female viewers. An interview with Bela Lugosi in the film magazine Motion Picture Classic entitled 'The Feminine Love of Horror' at the time of the release of Dracula (text reproduced in Skal, 1990, p. 149) quotes Lugosi¹² as saying:

But it is *women* who love horror. Gloat over it. Feed on it. Are nourished by it. Shudder and cling and cry out - *and come back*

for more. Women have a predestination to suffering. It is women who bear the race in bloody agony. Suffering is a kind of horror. Blood is a kind of horror. Therefore women are born with a predestination to horror in their very bloodstream. It is a biological thing.

Taken as an example of publicity encouraging women to see the film, it illustrates the attraction of horror to a female audience as well as a male one. The interview also quotes Lugosi on the audience for the stage version of Dracula:

When I was playing Dracula on the stage, my audiences were women. Women. There were men, too. Escorts the women had brought with them. For reasons only their dark subconscious knew. In order to establish a subtle sex intimacy. Contact. In order to cling and to feel the sensuous thrill of protection. Men did not come of their own volition. Women did. Came - and knew an ecstasy dragged from the depths of unspeakable things. Came - and then came back again. And again.

This material is sensationalist in nature, but Lugosi certainly received large amounts of fan mail from women who had seen him play Dracula both on the stage and in the film (Skal, 1990, p. 149). A more recent example of this phenomenon is reported in an interview with Anthony Hopkins in the film magazine Neon (March 1998, p. 9); talking about his role as Hannibal Lecter in The Silence of the Lambs he says: 'People ask me to do the fava bean speech. Women particularly like that sort of thing.' The sexual appeal of the character Hannibal Lecter was also the subject of much debate by members of the Horror in Films and Fiction e-mail list service during a period of observation of Internet-based horror fan discussion.

The belief that women might enjoy blood and gore as a result of their biological femininity also occurs in the Tussaud's report (p. 13):

Women tend to be more tolerant about visceral things because they have more direct personal experience of them. They cope with periods once a month, they go through childbirth and they are usually the ones who look after the bleeding and battered limbs when the kids take a tumble. They can put blood and gore in context and generally cope better than men.

It is simplistic to suggest that women enjoy horror solely or mainly because of their biology (though it might suggest a social tension in that women are socialised into finding fictional blood and gore displeasurable, yet expected to deal with it on an almost daily basis in social situations such as child care and 'female' careers such as nursing), nevertheless it illustrates the point that women enjoy horror and continue to view horror films for more complex

reasons than that they are attending the screening with their teenage date who can demonstrate his manliness by protecting them from the horrific images on the screen. Clover acknowledges this (p. 23): ‘girls too went to slasher movies, usually in the company of boyfriends but sometimes in same-sex groups (my impression is that the Nightmare on Elm Street series in particular attracted girls in groups).’

Together, these factors raise a number of important issues about female consumption of horror and in particular the female viewers of horror films. There is little indication of what allows some women to be able to watch or visualise horror films while others seem unable to do so. Are they adopting a male position vis-à-vis the horror film gaze (Mulvey, 1975) or do they simply possess some mechanism (innate or learnt) which makes them better able to deal with being scared than some other women are? Are those women who obviously enjoy horror fiction but cannot deal with film images of (fictional) horror adopting expected feminine reactions only superficially because they have been socialised into so doing? In public, women might make a pretence of being frightened or have learnt habitually to flinch at horror. Reading is private and horror fiction can therefore be consumed ‘legitimately’ or at least without attracting negative comment (this response may be related to the way in which female fans of soap opera and romance fiction hide their consumption from men for fear of being derided for it, thought to be one reason why women watch or read such genres alone or only in the company of other women). True-life horror and crime is similarly derided as low-brow or unhealthy and it too may be a hidden taste. This is not to say that women’s consumption of such material is unhealthy; indeed women’s consumption and appropriation of such texts is often active and enjoyable for these women (see, for instance, Radway on romance fiction readers, Ang on Dallas viewers or Penley on Star Trek fans). These issues, particularly relating to socialisation and the idea of being able to handle horror, are developed further in chapters 4 through 6.

1.3 The female horror film audience

Women then, do go to horror films, often in large numbers, and enjoy them. Even though, like many other writers on the genre, Clover continues the tradition of concentrating on the male horror film spectator, she at least recognises the failing of such a bias (1992b, p. 7): ‘My interest in the male viewer’s stake in horror spectatorship is such that I have consigned to virtual

invisibility all other members of the audience, despite the fact that their loyalty and engagement can be just as ardent and their stake in the genre just as deserving of attention.' This, and the fact that theoretically the female horror film spectator raises several problematical issues (as explored in the next chapter), suggest that the female horror film audience is an important subject for study. By focusing on female viewers of horror cinema, it is hoped to ascertain what is at stake for women in the audience, especially those who - contrary to popular perceptions - may enjoy the images of horror and violence that are on view.

1.3.1 The horror genre

Given that the recent preoccupation with the slasher film and the heavy bias towards psychoanalytically-based textual analysis may be limiting the understanding of the female horror film audience in terms of numbers and responses, and that women's consumption of horror may be diverted into other areas (due to socialisation and other factors), it is important to establish what films are of interest here. What are the parameters of the horror genre in this context?

As is widely recognised there are difficulties with definitions of any genre, both in outlining the generic boundaries and in classifying individual films which very often defy categorisation. Horror in itself is a very diverse genre with its origins in a number of different production styles, as well as in several national film industries outside America. In recognition of the fact that genres are not discrete, fixed or strictly differentiated (Neale, 1980), this study will not set out to define horror cinema (or a subset thereof); such an endeavour is not relevant to this project and puts restrictions in advance on the specific styles and films the research subjects (that is, members of the female audience) might consider to be horror. As Jancovich (1996, p. 10) has established, 'the differential distribution of cultural competencies and dispositions means that different audiences have different senses of how genres are defined and where the boundaries between them lie.' Since genre categories as defined by fans and different sections of the audience can be loose and indefinite, it is superfluous to define the horror genre; as Jancovich (p. 11) states 'the genre distinctions which usually dominate within film studies seem almost irrelevant.' In a study such as this one which focuses on the audience rather than the text, any definition of the genre is bound to be irrelevant since the individual viewers taking part in study will undoubtedly

hold their own ideas of what films constitute the boundaries of horror (or, indeed, what is horrific). Nonetheless, it is important to clarify what, in the context of this study, is meant by the term horror in order to ascertain: a) the range of emotional and physical affects which might be deemed part of the horror film viewing experience; b) any possibility that certain types or forms of horror are preferred by the female viewers (within their own definitions of what they accept as horror films); and c) whether female viewers might be reading horror films in particular ways. Since this study is concerned with one audience segment not usually taken into account in horror genre criticism, it is also useful to examine what might be meant by references to 'the horror genre' or 'horror films' by this audience. In calling for 'an altered research practice which would focus on the complexities of everyday cultural use', Radway (1988, p. 362-3) points out the danger of setting audiences 'in relation to a single set of isolated texts which qualify already as categorically distinct objects.' Rather, we should consider the nomadic character of the subjects, and indeed the subjects under study here are cultural users of a wide range of generic material (including science fiction, fantasy and historical costume drama) and make use of the cultural products in a number of ways in their everyday lives. It is proposed, therefore, whilst still attempting to keep focused on the fans and followers of a particular group of cultural texts, to take a broad view of the genre and for this reason films (and other cultural products) only marginally related to the horror genre must be taken into consideration.

Firstly, some definition is required in order to establish the parameters of the different types or styles of film classed as horror by the participants. As stated above, horror cinema is composed of a large number of heterogeneous film styles and narrative structures taking in atmospheric chillers, psychological thrillers, the various kinds of occult or supernatural films and the special effects-driven splatter and gore films, as well as the classic Gothic horrors and monster movies. Many subsets of the horror film are, theoretically, classifiable as quasi-generic groups in their own right, often sharing few characteristics with other horror subgroups. In addition, the horror film, although most often thought of as a low budget genre, is spread across a wide scale of financing from major Hollywood studio films through to B-movies or independent self-financed productions and this is often obvious in the differing production qualities of such extremes of budget as well as the marketing and distribution of the film and the stars or actors

associated with the different types or periods of horror films. As Waller (1987, p. 1) states: 'The modern horror film is an extraordinarily diverse group of texts.' This means that defining the horror genre as a whole, rather than focusing on smaller distinct sub-sets of films within the genre, is extremely difficult from a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, the genre has evolved substantially over time taking in, amongst others, German Expressionist cinema, Italian and British horror cycles, the films of the American studio Universal in the 30s, the 50s alien invasion and monster movies and American International Pictures' Edgar Allen Poe cycle. Although the most recent forms of horror are important in considering the contemporary audience, repeat screenings on television channels, the prevalence of the VCR and the large numbers of older horror films available on video mean that all forms and eras of the horror film have continuing relevance to the fan audience.

Definitions of the horror genre used in many theoretical studies are deliberately narrow, yet they raise important issues for this work. For example, Carroll (1990) takes as a starting point for his philosophical analysis of the pleasures of the horror film the concept of *art horror* which he defines as films in which the human characters within the diegesis of the film regard the monster as abnormal (p. 16), physically repulsive (p. 18) and frightening (p. 19). The problem with such a definition is that it potentially excludes what the audience considers to be frightening (indeed, Carroll's definition excludes with what he terms 'tales of dread' (p. 42) - films which contain a monster which is not abnormal, repulsive and frightening). Carroll excludes The Fly (1986) from his study, for example, because the heroine acts sympathetically towards the monster. This sympathetic response may be important in the context of readings of the horror film made by female viewers.¹³ Certainly, there are elements other than the monster within horror films which are abnormal, repulsive or frightening and the existence of a repulsive 'supernatural or sci-fi monster' (p. 15) is by no means guaranteed. In the case of The Fly the heroine fears, not the monster, but the embryo conceived with the man before or during his metamorphosis, and she is desperate to have the pregnancy aborted. It is this unborn child which is abject, appearing in her dream as a huge maggot, and she is unable to consider carrying it to full term even though it may be the monster's last hope of humanity. In other words, feminine aspects of horror may be elsewhere, but no less present, in the text of films with a sympathetic and human monster. (Carroll's thesis on the

paradox of horror - that is, why some people find enjoyment in the negative emotions the horror film causes - is nevertheless pertinent to this study.)

Many theories of horror and horror film spectatorship similarly limit themselves, but to specific subgroups or quasi-genres: Clover's study in Men, Women and Chainsaws (1992b) concentrates on post-60s examples of the genre including the slasher film, the rape-revenge movie, occult films and the city-country boundary film; Dika (1990) focuses solely on a core set of slasher films from 1978-81 in her consideration of cinema and the socio-political situation in Reagan's America; Creed (1993) is concerned with representations of the monstrous femininity within the horror genre and her selection of horror films containing feminine monsters includes a science fiction horror film, a psychological thriller and the rape-revenge cycle. These quite necessary restrictions are appropriate in works based on textual analysis which consider the theoretical masculine spectator, but do mean that theories of horror from recent research are not particularly pertinent in the context of the female audience. Creed's selection of films, however, emphasises the problem of keeping the definition of horror within its boundaries, as do Clover's (who examines low-budget exploitation cinema as well as horror).

Accordingly, a fluid definition of the horror genre is required. Tudor (1989, p. 6) proposes a 'catholic definition of the genre.' This allows consideration of many films which might be overlooked in a more specific study and is appropriate when considering how actual viewers might define the boundaries of the genre. In particular, it helps deal with problematical films on the genre boundaries or which are only peripherally horror films. Tudor (p. 17) performed a content analysis of 990 films released in the UK between 1931 and 1984 and found that: 'Almost 80 per cent of them fall quite unproblematically within the genre. The remaining 20 per cent occupy the genre boundaries in a variety of ways.' The 20 per cent of films on the boundaries of the genre are usually either films whose content is predominantly horror but which also contain elements shared with other genres (these are primarily science fiction films) or belong to other genres but contain major elements derived from the horror film (psychological thrillers, for example). This is clearly an unwieldy and over inclusive definition of horror for an textual study, though suitable for Tudor's content analysis and a similarly inclusive definition will, through necessity and practicality, be required in this work.

Despite the difficulties with genre classification (and the problems with genre theory itself), the horror film is one of the few generic types widely regarded, by audiences, the industry and the popular media, as a distinctive, if not easily definable, film genre. The horror genre is seen in a unique light, as Wood (1979, p. 173) states:

The horror film has consistently been one of the most popular and, at the same time, the most disreputable of Hollywood genres. The popularity itself has a peculiar characteristic that sets the horror film apart from other genres: it is restricted to aficionados and complemented by total rejection, people tending to go to horror films either obsessively or not at all.

The horror film, then, is expected to have a discrete and strongly loyal audience, the vast majority of film viewers either showing a strong liking for the genre or a total dislike, with little feeling in between these extremes. Barclay (1961), for example, reports that teenagers had strong feelings about horror films with 98 per cent of the sample selecting horror as either a most liked or a most disliked genre. Furthermore, as Newman (1992, p. 16) recognises, this audience tends to have a high level of generic competence: 'Few areas of cinema depend so much on the loyalty and inside knowledge of their audiences.' The industry markets the films accordingly, horror films are written about and reviewed in specialist magazines (many published and/or written by fans), while press reviews often apply the term horror to films in a pejorative manner in order to pass over a film or depict it as low-brow entertainment (as in the opening example from The Financial Times).

The notion of horror being easily definable may be a misconception (the horror genre being a collection of several different types of films); however in examining real audiences, it is important to consider populist or fan definitions of the genre since it is these, or similar, which the horror film audience are likely to use for their own concept of horror and to some extent - since fan participation is high in horror publishing - the popular definition of horror is audience led. A catholic definition of horror is therefore important in the context of this study since the audience members studied may be expected to have a similar, and similarly broad, definition of horror - even if they like horror films for different reasons. Within horror fandom the boundaries of the genre are extremely fluid as evidenced by the following examples:

- the Aurum Encyclopaedia of Horror includes mainstream thrillers such as Fatal Attraction, Blue Steel and Basic Instinct,¹⁴ other forms of the fright film such as Jaws and melodramas like What Ever Happened To Baby

Jane?, as well as avant garde, surrealist or otherwise difficult to classify films such as Picnic At Hanging Rock and Eraserhead;

- horror is closely associated with other genres in most horror magazines which cover a range of related film types: science fiction, fantasy, action adventures (including the James Bond films), animation, exploitation cinema and rape-revenge films;
- horror/science-fiction/fantasy magazines such as Cinefantastique use similarly broad classifications of horror - the latter's annual box office statistics regularly include a number of mainstream films. Almost 50 per cent of these films for 1991-2 could be classified as thrillers or comedies rather than horror (far more than suggested by Tudor's 4:1 split; although the very small sample size from a limited time period renders this statistically insignificant it does illustrate that fan definitions can be extremely dispersed);
- horror magazines often include features and coverage on a wide range of art films and filmmakers (including Jan Svankmajer, Peter Greenaway and David Lynch in recent issues of horror fanzines).

These examples may reflect the horror fan's nomadic interests rather than their classifications of the genre, nevertheless they illustrate the difficulties with keeping horror confined within distinct genre boundaries especially where fan discourse is concerned.

Whilst the falling number of horror films being produced is a major reason why the horror magazines are covering mainstream films (as well as the need to maximise sales by attracting the widest audience possible), it may also be a result of the movement of horror's generic conventions into mainstream American cinema, as argued by Clover (1992a). This needs to be related back to Clover's own hypothesis in Men, Women and Chainsaws that the audience for mainstream horror films contain a larger proportion of women. It may be important in writing about the female audience to argue that these films are a kind of horror film, albeit in diluted form, which are marketed differently from other examples of horror-related films (as outlined above). Horror retains the public image of a disreputable genre, and labelling a film horror may mean it is less acceptable to a mainstream audience. Further evidence is found for this in the horror press where film-makers are quoted as saying that their latest film is 'not a horror film' (for example, Wes Craven with The Serpent and the Rainbow, Cronenberg with Dead Ringers). The economics of the American film industry makes a necessity of maximising audiences, whilst the political climate (see, for example, Medved's attack on the film industry in Hollywood vs. America, 1992) has led to increasing unacceptability of more extreme forms of horror and violence in the media. These factors may play an important part in the kinds of films made in the

USA and the marketing strategies outlined above. However, the use of horror film conventions outside the genre has a long history. Prawer, in his account of horror cinema in Caligari's Children (1980, p. 38), traces a line of works which 'as a whole clearly do not belong to the genre in question but which embody references to that genre, or contain sequences that derive from, allude to, or influence it.' Examples of such films are, he says, Ingmar Bergman's Wild Strawberries and The Face, Citizen Kane, Rebecca and Sunset Blvd.

The overlap of horror with other genres is important in a study of the female audience since many of the horror-related films popular with women can be classified as forms of the woman's film (as thrillers or melodramas, for example). This should not be taken as a case for the existence of a feminine form of the contemporary horror film, but it does illustrate the difficulties of generic classification of possibly feminine forms of horror. This is a crucial point in the study of how female audiences respond to horror, since women reacting in pleasurable ways to images of horror or terror may - because the horror film is not regarded as suitable viewing for women - seek them out in various related film forms or genres such as psychological thrillers, true-life melodramas, fantasies or other similar film types (see section 1.2 above). If Clover's supposition in Men, Women and Chainsaws that the more mainstream a horror film then the larger the proportion of the audience is female is true, it may simply be that it is more socially acceptable for women to consume films categorised as mainstream.

In this respect, a potentially useful aspect of the classification of films as horror (and one which seems to be used by many of the fans) is where emotional affect rather than generic characteristics become the focal point of the definition. As Twitchell (1985, p. 8) states: 'Horror art is not, strictly speaking, a genre: it is rather a collection of motifs in a usually predictable sequence that gives us a specific physiological effect - the shivers.' Twitchell (p. 11) describes what he calls the shiver sensation as first and foremost a physiological response - for example, getting the goosebumps (horripilation). The *fantastic terror film*, a term used by Prawer (1980), is defined within a model of genre which is extremely fluid (p. 17) and is closely tied to 'sensations of safely terrifying shock' (p. 9). As already shown, the horror film does not have sole ownership of images or narratives that inspire or are centred on horripilation and other related emotions. According to Prawer, for example, the works of the surrealists and their successors are closely related

to the horror film in their intent to create displeasure in the audience. As will be shown, horror fans and viewers frequently rely on such affect in their own categorisation of films as horror and, although a reliance solely on emotional responses to films as a basis for the classification of horror can be misleading, this should not be a problem in the context of this study. (It might be that the viewers are responding to what they as individuals find horrific, but they are in the most part aware of this - see chapter 5.) Whilst it might be theoretically advisable to take into account, as Twitchell indicates, the narrative and generic motifs employed as well as affect when defining such a popular genre as horror, it is also necessary to listen and be led by the audience. As Jancovich maintains, such an approach is *bona fide*. In addition, Tudor (1989, pp. 3-6) states that: 'a popular genre is significantly constituted by the conceptions of it held by its audience as well as by the texts that instantiate it' and 'a genre is a special kind of subculture, a set of conventions of narrative, setting, characterisation, motive, imagery, iconography and so on, which exists in the practical consciousness of those fluent in its "language".'

A study of women's tastes within horror cinema has to recognise that their preferences will take in a whole variety of forms of the horror film and related genres. As Tudor (p. 6) states, a genre is a social construction; it is subject to 'variable understanding by different users at different times and in different contexts.' It is therefore not intended to provide a strict definition of the horror genre, which may well be a meaningless task in any case, as Waller (1987, p. 6) observed: '... given the diversity of the genre since 1968, it is impossible, I think, to define once and for all the essence of modern horror.' At this stage, then, it is proposed that a loose definition of horror should suffice; this is both useful in designing the audience research and also in locating the female audience with respect to the genre. Narrower definitions of categories of horror were nevertheless appropriate during the audience research, particularly in the design of the questionnaire and focus groups and during the analysis of results. This categorisation of horror was necessary only to help focus the study and enable the exploration of the specific tastes of the female audience and these are considered further in chapter 4.

1.3.2 Researching the female audience

Having established that a sometimes substantial female audience exists for some horror films, and having ascertained that the horror genre can be

defined in a loose fashion which includes forms of the horror film which women enjoy, something should be said here about the decisions which led to the original choice of the female horror film audience as a subject for study.

As noted above, individuals either love or loath the genre and regard themselves as being able or not able to view horror films. In terms of conducting an audience study, then, the horror film is an ideal choice because it has a readily identifiable core audience consisting of large numbers of fans who might be expected to read specialist or fan publications and participate in fan groups and events, making it potentially straightforward to locate those people who repeatedly watch (and therefore it is assumed enjoy) the genre. As the subject of such avid fandom, horror has generated its own publishing industry with a large number of magazines and fanzines dedicated only to horror films and related material, horror film festivals and conventions (often in conjunction with other genre fandoms such as science fiction - these fandoms often overlap quite significantly) are held frequently and a large number of societies and fan groups (again there is some overlap with science fiction fandom) exist which publish newsletters and hold meetings around the country. All these offer a means of making contact with fans and followers.

As a genre, horror is also widely despised: it is often considered as a low-brow form of entertainment (along with science fiction, comics, and computer games) and is frequently referred to in pejorative terms. Horror films are frequently cast as scapegoats, being blamed in the UK press for a range of social problems as evidenced by the outcry over Child's Play 3 after the murder of James Bulger, the banning or delaying of films such as The Exorcist, Natural Born Killers and Crash at the cinema or on video, the continuing debates about video nasties and snuff movies (which have never been proven to exist) and the linking of crimes, particularly murder, with films such as Scream and Natural Born Killers (often unsubstantiated). This evokes strong feelings in those people who do have a liking for horror (and who might regard themselves as well-balanced and normal members of society), and many are undoubtedly used to defending their tastes. Many horror film fans and viewers are thus likely to have thought about issues arising from the viewing of horror films and it was assumed a large enough number would be willing to make their views known in an academic study. This does have drawbacks since the participants may have read quite widely on the subject and be aware of at least some of the academic debate

surrounding the genre and in focus groups and interviews they may simply repeat what they think a researcher wants to hear or to re-state opinions widely disseminated in fandom. However, it is not felt that this should unduly impede this work as long as such biases are recognised and accounted for. Further consideration of the problems of conducting an audience study of this kind is given in chapter 3.

A further reason for the choice of the horror film audience as the subject of study is my own interest in horror and related genres (science fiction and fantasy) dating back to childhood. This provides a level of proximate knowledge advantageous in directing discussion during focus groups and interviews and is also useful in allaying fears concerning 'exploitation' or not being taken seriously when recruiting subjects. I am not the first to admit to such tastes. Other female academics and critics have described their liking for horror influencing their choice of research topic (in a similar way to that in which feminist critics admitted to their own pleasurable consumption of romance fiction and soap operas in the 80s - see Penley (1991b), for example). My own reactions and responses to horror films have also led me to question some of the academic canon of horror film spectatorship, just as Auerbach does in Our Vampires, Ourselves (1995, p. 3-4):

When I was twelve or thirteen, some enterprising ghoul began to televise 1930s horror movies on Saturday nights. These shadowy monsters were a revelation to my best friend and me. Trying to make us popular, our worried parents forced us away from Transylvania to dances and parties, where we spent most of the evening making vampire faces at each other with horrible contortions. We weren't popular (that beatifying condition of the mid-1950s); the monster-loving boys now supposed to have been prevalent in those years never showed up at our parties; but we did feel we had found a secret talisman against a nice girl's life. Vampires were supposed to menace women, but to me at least, they promised protection against a destiny of girdles, spike heels, and approval. I am writing in part to reclaim them for a female tradition, one that has not always known its allies.

For this reason, Auerbach questions the male-bias of much of the work on horror film spectators (see section 1.2. above). Similarly, Kryszynska tells of her own rather more specific liking for lesbian vampire films and it enabling her to explore her emerging sexuality (1995, p. 99):

Early in my teens, along with my best friend, I was seduced by the beautiful vampire who went by the name of Carmilla (Ingrid Pitt in The Vampire Lovers...). This vampire fed our growing curiosity about our bodies and presented us with the beginnings of a shared fantasy in whose arms we could begin to explore our

sexualities. The vampire offered an articulation for our fantasies, and as a result my fantasy life has been imbued by the icon of the 'Hammer Horror' female vampire of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Such examples (Pinado, 1997, is another) illustrate the very different (and pleasurable) reactions women have to horror films and especially the vampire film. For the lesbian viewer, these films open up avenues for the exploration of lesbian sexuality, whilst for the heterosexual viewer, the films offer an alternative form of desirable femininity, one at odds with accepted social norms. By and large, though, women's pleasurable responses to the horror film have been ignored in the research, marginalising the horror film spectatrix. Examining the responses of the female horror film fan, then, may provide an understanding of the horror genre beyond the theoretical and textual readings associated with male spectatorship, and explore what is at stake for the female viewer. It is also possible that such research can contribute to the reconceptualisation of an active female horror film spectator. The following chapter provides such a theoretical context for this study.

¹ Reproduced in Hutchings, 1993, pp. 7-8.

² Quoted in Crane, 1994, p. 18fn5.

³ Figures were supplied in a memo from the CAA. The selection of films was determined by those profiles available for recent mainstream films. Figures were requested for a number of other horror films (including the *Hellraiser* series, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Interview With the Vampire*) but these were unavailable. It would have been interesting to compare figures for a lower budget, less mainstream horror film, but again figures were not available. Several of the films are borderline horror or generic hybrids but have been included since they are often discussed in horror fandom.

⁴ Phase One of Weaver's survey took place during the film's opening weekend and Phase Two after the film had been on general release for two weeks.

⁵ These 'rogue males' are, according to Twitchell (p. 69): 'older men (never women) ... , usually sitting separately, often by themselves.' Twitchell goes on to say that: 'If you watch these men closely, you see that they do not act in step with the rest of the audience.' He claims that they are there to witness (and vicariously participate in) the violence against women portrayed in the films, whereas the adolescents are involved in cheering the heroine on.

⁶ The UCI multiplex cinema was also approached but would not give permission to carry out a similar survey. The reason given was that they were unwilling to reveal numbers of viewers in individual film screenings.

⁷ The term 'fan' has many negative connotations and some women in the study dislike the term or do not see themselves as fans (see chapter 7). The term 'habitual viewer' also implies that the viewer has little or no control over their consumption of horror films. This is not the case and many of the women in the focus groups objected to the idea that they were addicted to horror films. These viewers do watch a wide selection of films and their viewing of horror films is not always their first choice. The term 'follower' (as used in many fan studies including Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995) is therefore used in preference to 'habitual viewer' throughout the text.

⁸ Since this was a large scale and comprehensive survey undertaken for a major film institution it was hoped that the raw data might still be available, however neither the BFI nor the authors were able to provide access.

⁹ This may be worth further consideration in the light of Carol Clover's model of the theoretical young male spectator's identification with the 'final girl' of the slasher film, though there may be cultural differences at work here. Further research is needed in this area,

in particular an audience study of the male viewer and a comparative analysis between UK and US audiences.

¹⁰ The film Natural Born Killers for example had not received a television screening nor was it available on video at the time of the report, but it is of course possible that teenagers could have seen the film illegally at the cinema or watched bootleg video copies of the film.

¹¹ Information supplied by Magdalena Horner, editor of the Point Horror Book Club magazine.

¹² Skal, making reference to this interview in The Monster Show (1993), believes it to have been Tod Browning who was being quoted and not Lugosi (p. 126-7).

¹³ Such a response is captured in the film The Seven Year Itch in a scene which takes place moments before Marilyn Monroe's iconic pose over the subway vent. The lead characters have just seen The Creature From the Black Lagoon:

F: Didn't you just love the picture? I did. But I just felt so sorry for the creature. At the end.

M: Sorry for the creature? Why, d'you want him to marry the girl?

F: He was kinda scary looking. But he wasn't really all bad. I think he just craved a little affection. You know. Being loved and needed and wanted.

One focus group participant gave a similar response when commenting on the sequel Revenge of the Creature: 'I was so sorry for the poor monster, oh just put him back, leave him alone, stop poking him with that horrible electric thing, just put him back where he was.' (fg102)

¹⁴ It is also interesting to note that most of the films mentioned in this context, as well as many other marginal entries, are all concerned with women depicted as action heroine and/or psycho-bitch (see Yvonne Tasker, 1993). Images of strong, sexual or predatory females are often to be found in the horror genres - in the role of the predatory female vampire especially. This is often attributed to male fears of women, and may partially explain these films inclusion in this encyclopaedia.

Chapter 2 Spectators and Viewers in the Feminist Methodology

2.1 Female spectators and horror cinema

As the demographic profiles of contemporary cinema audiences - as established in chapter 1 - suggest, women can comprise up to 50 per cent of horror film audiences. Given, then, that active female horror film viewers do exist and may constitute a sizeable proportion of the total audience, and recognising that these female viewers may experience a multiplicity of pleasures in viewing horror, problems emerge in relation to established theory in the areas of spectatorship and identification. In particular, the findings of chapter 1 look to be at odds with the positioning of the theoretical horror film spectatrix as reluctant or emasculated and, at the very least, alternative models of generic and gendered spectatorship must be considered. This is not to dispute existing theoretical scholarship in this area, but does demand that further questions must be addressed if female audiences are to be positioned with respect to the theoretical subject. Not least amongst these questions is how any findings from the audience research reported here can be located within existing bodies of screen theory pertaining to the horror film and its spectators.

At least since the rise of the slasher film in the late-70s, the horror film audience has been regarded as consisting primarily of adolescent and young males under the age of twenty-five (see chapter 1) and, accordingly, the horror genre has been subject to psychoanalytic textual analysis focusing on adolescent male psychosexual processes. The work on gendered spectatorship and the horror film has associated the (male) gaze with the monster, the heroine-victim being the subject of both the monster's gaze and that of the male spectator. This led to a model in which female spectators watch horror films only reluctantly and with displeasure. If the horror film spectator is almost exclusively framed in these terms, what does this say about the large numbers of female viewers who find pleasure in horror film spectatorship? It is not altogether certain that feminist film theories can adequately explain such a phenomenon.

2.1.1 Horror and the male gaze

Whenever the movie screen holds a particularly effective image of terror, little boys and grown men make it a point of honour to look, while little girls and grown women cover their eyes or hide behind the shoulders of their dates. (Williams, 1984, p. 83)

The marginalisation of the female horror film spectator's pleasure arose in no small part because much of the body of work on the horror film focused exclusively on the male spectator's stake in the genre (reflecting industrial and popular perceptions of the audience as set out in chapter 1). In particular, since much of the work from the 80s onwards locates horror film spectators with respect to the slasher film, generic spectatorship is linked both to the extremes of violence against women perceived to play a major part in such films and to the acceptance of the adolescent male audience at which these films are aimed. Given that the horror film audience is widely believed to respond in ways similar to those summarised by Williams, it has been the constructed male spectator that has been the focus of debate about the pleasures of horror and this bias has been replicated both in the work of social-psychologists and in the popular media. Such analyses typically led to the assumption that horror is a problematical genre for female spectators (as set out by Williams). And since the female spectator's enjoyment of horror is thus rendered problematical, the existence of an active female spectator has been largely denied with the implication that active female spectatorship must be a form of immascultation. This has led to the marginalisation of female horror film spectators. (One important exception in this is the lesbian spectator of female vampire films; such films have been recognised as providing a route to identification for the lesbian viewer who reads against the grain in order to lay claim to images of sexuality unavailable elsewhere in the cinema - see, for example, Weiss, 1992, and Krzywinska, 1995.)

Wood (1979) linked the horror film to aspects of repression (derived from the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan), in particular the return of the repressed and the monstrous Other. This is important since Wood's work exposes ideological questions about the representation of gender power relations and of violence against women; in Beauty Bests the Beast (1983, p. 81) he concludes that 'women have always been the main focus of threat and assault in the horror film.' This approach reflects populist and feminist arguments against the horror genre as epitomised by Ebert (1981) in his article for American Film. Elsewhere the female body itself has been rendered problematical; Neale (1980, p. 44) considers the 'problematic of castration,' noting that the monster represents the lack that is inherent in the female, namely that she is castrated (though this was later disputed by Williams). Neale goes on to note that the monster 'functions so as to disturb the boundaries of sexual identity and difference,' but points out that the monster

is almost always male and that the object of its desire is almost always female (p. 61). He asserts (p. 39) that the monster of the horror film entertains the male spectator by disavowing castration, but this is at the expense of the female characters who are portrayed as victims. Questions of gendered spectatorship and pleasure are thus based on the assumption of masculine spectatorial pleasure. Evans (1973, p. 54) characterises the monstrous figure as representing the onset of secondary sexual characteristics and 'aggressive erotic behaviour,' and although he does make reference to female sexual characteristics, he refers to male adolescent spectators throughout. Twitchell (1985), while he recognises a fair proportion of the audience are female, does not differentiate between male and female responses and makes no allowance for a feminine response to the horror film.

For many feminist critics of the horror film it is the representation of woman as victim which leads to female displeasure, as Williams (p. 83) acknowledges: 'There are excellent reasons for this refusal to look, not the least of which is that she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation and murder.' Critics of the genre such as Halberstam (1995, p. 165) have continued to assume that:

Women watch horror films with reluctance and with fear, reluctant to engage with their everyday nightmares of rape and violation, fearful that the screen is only a mirror and that the monster may be sitting next to them as they watch.

Although the fact that the horror film portrays violence, particularly violence against women as Wood notes, means that it continues - quite rightly - to be the subject of much feminist and media debate, Clover (1992b) has refuted such straightforward simplistic links between on-screen representation and gendered spectator pleasure. Moreover, the fact that the primary analytical methodology for the analysis of horror cinema has been psychoanalytically based has also rendered actual horror film viewers' responses problematical, as Jancovich (1992, p. 12) states:

Psychoanalytic interpretations ... must be opposed to most people's experience of the texts which they seek to analyse. They define that which is conscious as inadequate or even downright deceptive. Consequently, any attempt to counter critically these interpretations with references to one's own experience of a text can be dismissed too easily as the product of repression or resistance. Psychoanalysis has a built in tendency to produce interpretations which not only have little or no relation to one's actual experiences of a text, but actively contradict those experiences.

In addition, the idea of female spectatorship itself is not unproblematical; Brown (1990, p. 201) points out that: 'when the tables are turned, when women derive pleasure from popular narrative forms, the process is viewed as a problem.' Contradictions of this nature emerge from Williams' description of female spectatorship of the horror film, and ultimately her argument denies that women can find pleasure in horror. In particular, Williams (p. 89) describes the female gaze at the monster as representing 'a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman' that acknowledges their 'similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing'. Thus, female spectator and monster are linked, but the former is 'given ... little to identify with on the screen' (p. 83) and the response is not, therefore, a pleasurable one. Furthermore, the woman's act of looking is punished, not least by having to gaze on the monstrous (feminised) body itself; female spectators have an affinity with, but do not find pleasure in the figure of the monster. For Williams' spectatrix, the horror film leaves 'no place for the woman's own pleasure in seeing' (p. 83). Although Williams offers an important insight into female horror film spectatorship, her analysis is couched in terms of a mastering male gaze which, despite the spectatrix's affinity with the monster, can lead only to a reluctant female spectator. How then are we to account for the large numbers of women who enjoy watching horror films?

Williams' horror film spectatrix, furthermore, refuses to look, often physically blocking her view or averting her eyes from the screen. Indeed, Creed (1993, p. 29) constructs an additional look (to complement the three looks described by Mulvey in 1975) which is a 'looking away' whilst viewing horror films; however, for Creed this look is not gendered since she notes that male and female spectators alike may avert their gaze. However, such acts of looking away are not universal and for many horror film viewers (as for Williams' 'little boys and grown men') continuing to look is an act of bravado or, more importantly, fascination, and this has become accepted as conventional horror fan behaviour (see Zillman and Weaver, 1996). Acts of self-censorship such as looking away clearly do occur amongst horror film spectators, but the assumption that the female spectator has to forego any enjoyment in the subversive act of looking may not always hold. Furthermore, the act of looking away need not in itself be a signifier of displeasure - as Pinedo (1997, p. 70) states: 'Williams fails to recognise the pleasure of not-seeing.' Clover has observed (1992b, p. 23) that: 'girls too

went to slasher movies ... sometimes in same-sex groups.' The question this raises, then, is: what, if the viewing of horror for the spectatrix is ultimately unpleasant, is the appeal of horror cinema, especially for those girls not seeking the comfort of the protecting arm or shoulder of a male date? Female spectators do take pleasure in viewing horror cinema, as has been noted elsewhere in the literature, particularly in relation to lesbian viewers of the female vampire film. The fallacy of Williams' assumption for some female horror film viewers is similarly underscored by audience research which suggests that female horror film viewers in the company of males often fake their refusal to look (Zillman and Weaver, p. 86).

Work such as that by Williams, based on feminist psychoanalytic criticism of the text, are predicated upon a masculine model of horror film spectatorship: when considering female spectators it is to privilege passivity - typically female spectators are depicted as being afraid to look, and this is taken to represent displeasure. This allows the female spectator little access to pleasurable responses to horror film viewing apart from that which comes from adopting the masculine spectatorial position. It is hard, as Clover declares, to accept such large numbers of immasculated viewers colluding with the oppressor.

2.1.2 Spectatorship and visual pleasure

As outlined in chapter 1, evidence points towards women having always reacted in pleasurable ways to some types of horror film and in recent years there has been an acknowledgment of that within the literature. Auerbach's and Kryszynska's responses to the horror films of their youth (see chapter 1) led them to question the academic canon of horror film spectatorship. Pinedo (1997, pp. 1-2), who declares herself 'a feminist and an avid horror fan,' states that horror films provided her with opportunities to overtly express forbidden feelings such as terror and rage, emotions that 'were otherwise denied legitimate expression.' Such examples (which indicate resistance to the social situation of women living in a heterosexual, monogamous and patriarchal culture) illustrate the potentially pleasurable (and gender-specific) reactions female viewers may have to horror films and especially to the vampire film.

It may be that in recent decades the peer group pressure (and hence the processes of gender socialisation) which coerced female viewers into reacting with fear and trepidation at horror film screenings may have lessened

somewhat and it may have become more acceptable for women to admit to or be seen to enjoy horror. Zillman and Weaver (1996, p. 86) suggest that as regular horror film viewers become habituated (in that the emotional intensity of the initial distress reaction decreases with repeated viewing), play-acting or pretence plays a large part in their responses to horror films, and this may be especially problematical for the female viewers who may be required by peer pressure to continue to exhibit fear. It may then be that habituated female viewers have simply become less inclined to play-act feminine responses to horror, especially when they are not dating, and they have thus become more visible consumers of horror. In respect of theories of feminine spectatorship (as described, for example, by Williams) it remains problematical to continue to deny the experiences of such women - as Clover acknowledges (1992b, p. 54). Entrenched models of female horror film spectatorship further problematise these viewers through the suggestion that female viewers, as has continued to be implied from Mulvey's thesis on gendered spectatorship (1975), adopt a masculine spectatorial position. Rather, we might ask whether female subjectivity in the viewing of horror films is possible? Certainly, Pinedo (1997, pp. 3-4) believes it is not just possible, but a recurring experience, and she calls for a focus on 'representation and reception as sites of multiple and shifting identifications.'

Clover's examination of gender roles and cross-gender identification in the slasher film and other forms of horror and exploitation cinema addresses this issue to some extent. The crux of Clover's argument rests on the assumption of the adolescent male horror film spectator identifying, across the gender boundary, with the female victim-hero of the genre. Clover looks beyond the 'sadistic-voyeuristic' male gaze (see Mulvey, 1975) and argues that horror, because it is far less static in terms of position and character sympathy than many film genres, is 'far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it' (p. 8) and also challenges the assumption that there exists a mastering, voyeuristic gaze (p. 9). Thus, because the roles of (feminine) victim and (masculine) hero are conflated in the figure of the Final Girl, 'the male viewer gives up the last pretence of male identification' (p. 60). Although Clover does not theorise what happens for the female spectator of such films, this approach does open up spaces for female spectators of the horror film, as Clover herself recognises (p. 54):

[W]hat about the women in [the audience]? Do we dismiss them as male-identified and account for their experience as an

‘immasculated’ act of collusion with the oppressor? This is a strong judgment to apply to large numbers of women These facts alone oblige us at least to consider the possibility that female fans find a meaning in the text and image of these films that is less inimical to their own interests than the figurative analysis would have us believe.

However, Clover’s preoccupation with the male spectator leads her to masculinise the surviving female - ‘those who save themselves are male’ (p. 59) - and to leave unquestioned a gender order that assigns activity to males and passivity to females. Pinedo (p. 83) rejects this approach since it is grounded in ‘feminist film theory’s slavish devotion to the heterosexual binary’ in which ‘active female desire can only be defined as a masculinised position.’ In its place she proposes (p. 84) that: ‘by breaking down binary notions of gender, the horror genre opens up a space for feminist discourse and constructs a subject position for female viewers.’ Such thinking has begun to overturn previous theoretical approaches to gendered spectatorship of the horror film which have tended to render female spectators as unwilling viewers, and victims, of the horror film. The problematic of horror and the male gaze has not been entirely resolved, but gendered spectatorship has been shown not to be as monolithic and concrete as might once have been suggested. In exploring the notion of cross-gender identification as a fluid- process, Clover recognises that female spectators of the horror film exist, that they ‘actively like such films’ (p. 54) and that, whilst still a minority, they may exist in greater numbers for certain types of horror film - in particular, for occult films (p. 66) and the more mainstream horror films (p. 6). Clover’s question about the women in the audience, however, remains to be adequately answered, particularly in respect of the pleasures of the horror film for female spectators.

2.1.3 Refusing to refuse to look

The body of work on spectatorship and the horror film, then, by and large constructs the spectatrix as refusing to look, implying that female pleasure is an immasculated collusion with the oppressive male gaze and male violence towards women - and this has only recently begun to be challenged. In addition, the female spectator is frequently discussed as the partner of a male viewer on whom she can rely for protection from the frightening images on the screen. In considering female spectators of the horror film, it must be borne in mind that there is a ‘tendency for audiences to be constructed as “imagined communities” rather than “actual beings living in a material world”’

(Brunt, 1992, p. 69¹). The accepted picture of male and female horror film spectators, as described by Williams, is centred on the idea that spectator responses are strongly divided along gender lines. This may well be the case; however, as Pinedo asserts, multiple gender positions, which include both lesbian and other active female subjects, must be considered. In doing so, the research presented here seeks to challenge the assumption that female horror film viewers refuse to look and do not find pleasure in viewing horror.

The spectatrix's extreme emotional displeasure is often little more than anecdotal and fulfils the writer's (and the viewer's) expectations of female responses (that is, a learnt or innate feminine inability to look). Derry (1987, p. 168), for example, chooses to highlight one female student's response to The Hills Have Eyes in a seminar on horror film: 'one woman retreated after the screening to the corner of the room, where she began sobbing quietly, "I don't understand these things," she said to me later, "I'm only a housewife."' Arguments such as those by Derry and Halberstam, whilst correct in linking everyday fears with images and ideologies contained in horror films, fail to acknowledge other modes of affect that horror films may have on viewers. Furthermore, such criticism also fails to acknowledge that horror films tend to divide potential viewers along taste lines regardless of gender (in my own experience of teaching classes on the horror film, men seem just as likely to have a response similar to that of Derry's housewife). The intended mode of affect of the horror film, it should not be forgotten, is to create displeasurable feelings and emotions in its audience and, paradoxically, this displeasure is, for fans and other viewers of the genre, in itself pleasurable (see Carroll, 1990). Critics such as Williams and Derry who observe displeasure in the female viewer may be underestimating or misinterpreting the pleasure of terror for fans and followers of the genre.

In one important respect, Williams and Clover underline the fluidity of identification. Critics of lesbian cinema, however, do allow the female spectator to experience identification and desire in the horror film. Amongst the lesbian horror film audience, female spectators can find pleasure in the horror film and do - in what amounts to an act of defiance - refuse to refuse to look. The female vampire is one of the few overtly lesbian characters available in the cinema and, as Krzywinska asserts of Carmilla in the Hammer film The Vampire Lovers when writing about her own discovery and exploration of her lesbian sexuality during her adolescence, the female

vampire offers an articulation for lesbian fantasies (p. 99). It seems illogical to suppose that such identificatory processes are available only to lesbian spectators. Might not, as Pinedo proposes, similar fantasies or other identificatory pleasures be articulated by heterosexual female spectators of vampire and other horror film types? Stacey (1994a, p. 28) has already argued for a position which takes into account: 'a fascination with an idealised other which could not be reduced to male desire or female identification within the available psychoanalytic dichotomies, but rather necessitated a rethinking of the specificities of forms of feminine attachment.'

In literary criticism, and other areas, horror has frequently been recognised as having appeal across the sex and age ranges. As Twitchell (p. 22) states, historically 'horror is not just an aspect of human experience, but a central part of it.' Furthermore, social-psychology research in the USA which has focused on the horror film audience and its behaviour (see, for example, Weaver, 1991 and Oliver, 1993a and 1994) suggests alternative models of spectatorship based on cultural and social issues. In linking adolescent horror film spectatorship with rites of passage, Zillman and Weaver (1996) conclude that horror films socialise teenage spectators into gender roles. They observe that rather than gendered responses being innate, teenage boys learn mastery over the affects of horror, whereas teenage girls learn to cower or cringe at horror film images - at least in front of their peers. This might explain why women are generally thought not to like horror; however, as Zillman and Weaver point out, for many girls and women this traditional feminine response amounts to little more than pretence or playacting.

It may then be that men and women respond differently to horror because of peer-group pressure, with gender representations in the films themselves depicting similar stereotypes - points which psychoanalytically-based textual analysis fail to account for. In particular, women who like horror may hide or repress their liking for it because they see such a response as unfeminine, and socially unacceptable in women. This may help to explain the contradiction between women's actual enjoyment of horror and the theoretical and popular perceptions that they are unable to enjoy horror films.

In practice, then, members of an audience seldom behave as the theoretical models expect them to; their viewing patterns and behaviour, responses to or readings of a film may deviate from those described by formal textual analysis. Many female horror film fans and followers claim they only rarely

or never refuse to look (67 per cent of participants in this study, as compared with only 19 per cent who claim to frequently avert their gaze - see chapter 5 for more details). In some segments of the audience, then, we might expect to find female viewers who do take pleasure in viewing horror films and do refuse to refuse to look. It is important, therefore, to determine what is at stake for the female fans and followers of the horror film and whether the refusal to refuse to look should be taken as a sign of immascultation or as some form of feminine identification - an act of defiance or rejection of social ideals of femininity, for example (although the spectatrix's immascultation should not be rejected entirely). In particular, it is important to identify the pleasures inherent in the genre for the female spectator. Critics like Williams and Halberstam who observe female spectator displeasure may be underestimating the pleasures for generically competent female viewers (that is, the fans and followers). What are these pleasures and are they to be found in all horror films or only in particular examples of the genre; and if this is the case, what are these particular (feminine) forms of the horror film? In order to begin to answer these questions and build up a profile of female horror film fans and followers, the decision was taken to conduct research via an audience study, rather than approach these questions from a theoretical perspective.

2.2 Investigating the female horror film audience

There remain important issues to be addressed concerning the female spectator and her stake in the horror film and it is hoped that research into the real audience can shed light on these problems and suggest areas in which further theoretical work might be undertaken. In raising a number of questions about the problematical female spectator who enjoys the horror film, Clover (p. 54) also questions whether the female spectator reads horror films in a fundamentally different sense to the male. For Stacey (1987, pp. 53), however, difference between women can be the site of production of desire and this has implications for the pleasures of female spectatorship. It is important then to focus, not just as Clover attests, on to sexual difference, but on to difference between women. Stacey proposes that a more complex model of spectatorship can separate gender identification from sexuality and allow multiple and dispersed differences to open up the possibilities of pleasure. Such a model could be extremely important for horror film spectatorship. Of particular interest here are aspects of the horror genre which generically

competent female spectators might be responding to and the implications these have for female spectatorship and identification. Other important questions are how viewing preferences construct a gendered identity and what the consumption of horror films by women might mean in this context. It is proposed that these questions should be addressed via an investigation of actual viewers, rather than the construction of a new model of female horror film spectatorship through a textual analysis of horror films. The range of female horror film fans responses might then be interpreted and understood in terms of different gendered spectator positions, and this will be revisited in chapter 8.

2.2.1 Negotiating the contradictions between viewers and spectators

Why choose to conduct audience research as opposed to performing textual analysis? Whilst the psychoanalytic methodology behind the work of Mulvey (Visual Pleasure, 1975/1989), Doane (The Desire to Desire, 1987), De Lauretis (Technologies of Gender, 1987) and others on which the bulk of feminist film criticism relies seldom deals with actual viewers, Stacey (1993) has highlighted the need to explore methodological practices other than textual analysis. Stacey's study of female film goers of the 40s and 50s (1994a) interpreted generic cinema (specifically, the woman's film) in relation to its audience. As Brunt (p. 70) has pointed out:

The sheer productivity of textual analysis often rendered any reference to actual audiences redundant as the audience-text relationship became unproblematically inferred from a particular 'reading' of the by now extremely problematised text. ... Interpreted only as 'textual subjects', audiences become primarily positioned, produced by, inscribed in, the text.

However, the female horror film viewer who refuses to refuse to look opens a Pandora's Box of problems with respect to the spectatrix who is monolithically positioned by the horror film text. As Fischer and Landy (1982, p. 63) state:

[The textual methodologies] have not taken into account film's impact on audience or the stylistic devices through which the text is materialised. Furthermore, they do not place their analyses within a broader consideration of the film's existence as a product in the marketplace, its relationship to film traditions and genres, and its interaction with other cultural practices.

Clover's study of the primary audience of the slasher film also highlighted the need to interpret generic films in relation to their audience. As Clover

demonstrated with cross-gender identification of the adolescent male viewer with the heroine of the slasher film, audience response may not always match the expected responses inferred from the use of theoretical spectatorship methodologies. Studies of actual audiences have been given more importance as these problems have emerged. Furthermore, Staiger (1992a, p. 3) argues that:

Whether you take the position of Richards, that a hierarchy of appropriate interpretive activities exists, or that of Barthes, that a celebration 'restor[ing] the place of the reader' is due, hardly anyone familiar with twentieth-century scholarly trends doubts the considerable theoretical implications of 'reader-response' or 'reception studies' work.

In addition, an investigation of the female horror film audience must not limit itself solely to viewer-responses; the consumption of the horror film is not solely explained by the text-reader relationship as the genre has become the subject of fan appropriation and discourse. The intention, therefore, is to also investigate female participation in fan practices, drawing in particular on the work of Jenkins (1992). As Freyling states (1981, p. xiii): any 'adequate assessment of "formula cinema" must not be reduced to any simple ideological or theoretic grid' which excludes questions about reception including: 'Why did audiences choose this film or this genre as opposed to that one?' This question is particularly apposite when considering female viewers who choose to consume a genre deemed to be masculine in both textual content and audience over other genres, either those deemed to be feminine, or indeed - if they are immasculated viewers - other masculine genres.

As Doane points out (1987, pp. 7-8), the 'discursively constructed female subject cannot be conflated with actual viewers.' This should not mean, however, that we should never consider real viewers in relation to theoretically constructed audiences. Stacey has already eloquently argued the case in Star Gazing (1993), where she has challenged psychoanalytical explanations of the text as privileging textual analysis over audience studies. As Stacey reiterates in Desperately Seeking Difference (1987, p. 51), whilst feminist film criticism based on the work of Mulvey, Doane and others has continued to address the problematic of female spectatorship, there is still a need to 'account for diversity, contradiction or resistance within this category of feminine spectatorship.' Important questions which Stacey poses in Textual Obsessions (1993, p. 263) concern a) 'the areas of overlap or

divergence ... between the textual analysis of films and of audiences' accounts of the cinema'; and b) 'whether it is possible (or desirable) to theorise the unconscious pleasures of the cinema through audience studies.' The audience study undertaken here is located within the areas indicated in the former, and may also shed light on the possibilities, if any, of the latter.

2.3 Studying audiences

The focus on actual viewers is long established in the field of media studies,² and there have been several recent investigations of cinema audiences; studies which have relevance to an analysis of female viewers include Stacey's Star Gazing which examined the responses of women to female stars of the 40s and '50s and Hill's Shocking Entertainment (1997), an examination of viewer responses to violent movies.³ What place, however, does a study of a minority audience segment have? Kuhn (1994, p. 202) has claimed that 'the future for feminist work on film would appear to lie in micronarratives and microhistories of the fragmented female spectator rather than in any totalising metapsychology of the subject of the cinematic apparatus.' Audiences are increasingly recognised as heterogeneous and the danger of talking about the female horror film audience as a discrete and self-contained category must be considered - as Steiger (1992, p. 13) has warned, there are problems with 'idealising' still smaller audience segments. Steiger considers that, although still inadequate, it is useful to recognise that 'each spectator is a complex and contradictory construction of such self-identities as gender, sexual preference, class, race and ethnicity.' In particular, her statement that 'the pertinence of each self-identity might at times dominate the others, perhaps overdetermine or contradict as well' could help in exploring the contradictions of women's responses to the horror film.

A number of avenues are available for the study of audience responses to cultural and media artifacts (see van Zoonen, 1994), but these methodological approaches have only recently begun to become established (or popular) within screen studies. It should be possible to investigate the responses of actual female viewers and seek, where possible, to relocate these in relation to theoretically constructed (gendered) spectator responses. This approach, however, is fraught with difficulties. Mayne (1993, p. 157) points out that there are problems associated with the 'rush to criticise apparatus theory,' notably that reception study does not give any more direct access to the spectator than does analysis of the text. According to Mayne (p. 158) many

reception studies attempt to discredit or problematise textual studies and instead she asserts that there must exist a middle course:

Between the notion that the textual system of the individual film is all, and the argument that exclusive attention to textuality is at best an academic view of the real, complicated, heterogeneous business of viewing, there must be alternatives.

The possibilities of audience research have been explored by Staiger in her work on the historical reception of American film, in Jenkins' aforementioned study of science fiction fan cultures, and in Stacey's work on British female audiences of the 40s and 50s. Staiger, in proposing a research methodology based on reception studies which examine what actual spectators say about the films they view (1992a), moves away from the 'idealised' spectator toward what she calls the 'historical' spectator who seldom behaves as she or he is 'supposed' to.⁴ She suggests that it makes more sense to look at what actual viewers say about their movie experiences than to conjecture about the probable responses of theoretical spectators. Jenkins draws on the European and American traditions of reader-response criticism in his study of fans and fandom (see Textual Poachers, 1992, and, with Tulloch, Science Fiction Audiences, 1995). Jenkins' core theoretical propositions are derived from de Certeau's description (1984) of reading as 'poaching,' an active process of appropriating and reworking found materials for the reader's personal and cultural needs. Jenkins applies this model to talk about the range of cultural productivity of media fans, particularly science fiction fans, drawing on empirical and ethnographic materials to examine reading as an active process. His work has shed much light on the consumption practices of particular audiences and is especially relevant in considering the female horror film viewer's participation in horror fandom.

In Star Gazing (1994a, p. 23-24), Stacey positions the actual viewer in the centre of the debate and attempts to draw in ethnographic approaches from the area of media studies into female spectatorship theory: whilst 'acknowledging the significant differences between these two bodies of work', she endeavours to 'highlight the increasing importance of areas of overlap and exchange within feminist cultural criticism in the 1990s.' If the methodological problems involved in such a multi-disciplined approach can be overcome, and Stacey (1994a, chapter 2) suggests they can, then a study of real viewers should be able to inform the debate on theoretical horror film spectatorship. Problems with qualitative or interpretative methodologies and

data analysis aside (these are dealt with in chapter 3), there are specific problematical aspects of such research strategies with regard to the female audience that are of concern here. As Stacey has outlined (1993), feminist film criticism has marginalised the investigation of female audiences when compared to analysis of the text and there is minimal consideration of the subject beyond textual positioning. One problem for a feminist research methodology is that using women's own accounts might illustrate how easily women have assimilated the very same patriarchal attitudes which feminist film criticism has sought to condemn. A strategy must therefore be found which enables the audience study which this research demands to avoid, or at the very least acknowledge, the ethical and political problems of this situation. In recognising that increasing numbers of audience studies are now being undertaken, Brunt addresses the issue of 'what cultural studies does or could do in this area - including rendering the notion of "audience" itself more problematic.' Brunt (1992, p. 73) criticises the cyclical methodology of research where a return to the audience becomes a return to the text (taking preferred readings, studying audience response, and then checking back against the textual readings); but neither should an approach which privileges or counterposes audience studies to textual studies be adopted. Brunt advocates 'thinking of the text-audience relationship in a less self-enclosing way' and proposes a theoretical understanding of the relationship between text and audience that must be above the level of description and concern groups and/or discussion.

One aspect of feminist research which must be considered is the acknowledgment by Dervin (1987) and other feminist scholars of the desire to allow women a voice in areas of society and culture which render them voiceless. In conducting a study of actual female horror film viewers the voice of an otherwise marginalised audience can be heard. Whilst heeding Modleski's (1991) warning that such an approach holds the danger of giving a celebratory and uncritical account of popular culture and pleasure, we should not underestimate the value of 'demonstrating the invisible experiences of women with popular culture' (van Zoonen, 1994, pp. 128-9). Indeed, a very large proportion of the respondents in this study expressed their delight and thanks in having an opportunity to speak about their experiences. It is, therefore, considered appropriate (whatever the limitations of the survey method explored in chapter 3) to undertake a study of active female horror film viewers in order to begin to determine the range of experiences of the

respondents, to explore the possibilities for resistance (if any) and to seek to identify any potentially feminine pleasures of the horror film. The results of this study acknowledge the experiences of an otherwise invisible audience and indicate areas where further investigation is required.

Finally, Brunt (p. 69) has stated that media audience studies must deal with issues concerning 'the relationship of the researcher to various formulations of "the people" researched upon.' It is in recognition of the female horror film viewers themselves that this study should, ultimately, be positioned.

2.4 Positioning the generically competent female viewer

The models of spectatorship described above, whilst they may be adequate in describing an idealised textual subject, do not take account of the generically competent female spectator who takes pleasure in looking. In particular they imply that female horror film spectators collude with male violence against women, accept their own bodies as monstrous and see themselves as victims. It is therefore important to consider actual female viewers in conjunction with, rather than separate from, the horror film spectatrix when analysing women's consumption and enjoyment of horror films. This audience study seeks, then, to illuminate issues raised by spectatorship theory by focusing on actual viewers, what and how they watch, and how they respond to horror films, particularly to films they find pleasurable. It will then attempt to position the female viewer, in the context of women's increasing visibility as consumers of horror films and poachers of the text, in relation both to populist conceptions of horror film viewers and to the theoretical spectatrix. This is with the aim of re-establishing the horror genre as having feminine aspects which have been denied by studies of gendered spectatorship and to set out how this impacts upon theoretical considerations of the female spectator.

This is not to say that theories of the male gaze and other important psychoanalytically based analyses of the horror film text are invalid or inappropriate. The processes of spectatorship remain crucial to debates about the horror film and they have major implications for an examination of the female viewer of the horror film. However, since real and constructed female spectators do look, their position as consumers of popular culture is of equal importance. The reception of genre films by real viewers may result in acts of resistance or reading against the grain - as many feminist critics have attempted to explore (Kuhn, 1982; Basinger, 1993) - and this form of response to the horror film may be particularly important. Whilst this project,

then, takes the form of audience research, it aims to remain grounded in theoretical analyses of the horror film and its spectators and there is no intention to supplant such theories, rather this work seeks to shed new light on the theoretical. Following Stacey's guidance on interdisciplinary research (1994a, p. 19), this study makes an attempt to combine 'theories of spectatorship within feminist film criticism, and work on gender and audiences in cultural studies.' Stacey (p. 47) asserts that 'theories of spectatorship need to begin to produce analyses of female spectators situated within particular viewing contexts.' This study is one such context and chapter 8 deals with the context of this analysis of female horror film spectators within theories of female horror film spectatorship. In particular, this work will attempt to position the female viewer who refuses to refuse to look in terms of the feminine subject and women's spectatorship.

¹ Quoting from Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, Verso: 1983).

² Much of the work on female audiences has concentrated on feminine genres - soap opera, romance fiction, the filmed melodrama. See, for example, Hobson (1982) on Crossroads viewers, Radway (1984) on the readers of romance fiction and Ang (1985) on Dallas viewers.

³ Also of interest here is Women Viewing Violence by Schlesinger et al. (1992).

⁴ Since Staiger's work relies on historical records (principally, film reviews, publicity material and oral accounts) of audiences responses it cannot hope to achieve the depth and understanding of contemporary audiences using ethnographic methodologies. Nevertheless, Staiger's sociology of the audience makes the important step from merely hypothesizing spectator responses to examining how actual viewers have described their responses to movies.

Chapter 3

Investigating the Female Horror Film Fan

Why do women choose to watch horror films? If horror films make for such unpleasant viewing (especially for women), what does this say about women who not only enjoy horror films but enjoy looking at horrific, terrifying, violent or gory images in these films? And what light does this shed on the theoretical debates which maintain that the constructed female spectator's response is to refuse to look? Are those women who enjoy horror adopting a male spectatorial position, are they immasculated viewers, or are there particularly feminine responses and reactions to horror? Do female viewers chose to watch particular kinds of horror and, if so, could these be said to constitute a feminine form of the genre? If this is not the case, what do 'masculine' viewing choices say about female spectatorship, especially if the female viewers respond in ways which do not show evidence of immascultation? Such questions can best be addressed through reception studies and research into actual, as opposed to theoretical, audiences. As Hill (1997, p. 7) states of the viewers of violent films: 'Unless researchers actually talk to consumers ... they will not be able to explain the appeal of such movies.' The same must be said of horror, an equally paradoxical viewing experience. Moreover, very little work has been undertaken into establishing the actual demographics of the horror film audience, particularly those audience segments not conforming to the accepted model of young male viewers, and both quantitative and qualitative data are required in order to establish both the demographic profile and the range of tastes and responses of the female audience.

This study is designed to gauge women's level of participation within the horror genre and whether there is any tendency for women to interpret films differently in key areas (gender representation and female sexuality) than their male counterparts. A question which must be addressed in this respect is whether the female audience can be considered as a distinct entity within the horror film audience as a whole and, more importantly, whether they watch horror films differently than male viewers. The object, then, is to ascertain i) who the women are who watch horror films, ii) why they are attracted to the genre and whether there are particular types, aspects or elements of horror they find pleasurable, and iii) their responses to horror films and the debates surrounding horror, particularly with respect to representations of violence

against women. It is hoped that any findings can then be used to re-examine and reposition the horror film spectatrix.

3.1 Designing the study

Three principal areas were considered in designing the study: assessing research strategies and feminist approaches in ethnographic and sociological research, locating the female horror film audience as a step towards recruiting female fans and habitual viewers, and determining a methodology suitable for studying an audience of this kind. Once such strategies had been assessed, a number of hypotheses were considered to determine the specific questions and areas of interest to be explored in the data gathering stages of the research. These hypotheses were modified during initial data collection from secondary sources and a pilot study. Much of this secondary data did not prove useful for the study undertaken here, just as Stacey's initial avenues of research for *Star Gazing* (1994a) resulted in dead-ends and U-turns, but nevertheless shed light on fan discourse. In common with many other research projects of this nature (see, for instance, Hill, p. 7), data collected during the study suggested as many new hypotheses as they proved or disproved, and the results of the qualitative research resulted in an extremely varied and productive data set.

3.1.1 Methodological problems and approaches

For sociological studies such as the one undertaken here a triangulation of methods for collecting qualitative data is often recommended (see Denzin, 1970). This system of using individual interviews, questionnaires and focus groups in combination theoretically provides a link between structure (quantitative) and meaning (qualitative) (Fielding and Fielding, 1986), although in practice divisions between the two are often not straightforward (see, for example, Mason, 1994). In practice, the use of triangulation often employs the quantitative survey as the primary method, adding qualitative data from interviews, focus groups and open-ended questions tacked on to the end of the questionnaire as illustration or explanation of the statistical results or to provide a 'human face' to the findings (Gunderson and Muszynski, 1990, p. 4). In effect, this leads to the use of secondary qualitative data to justify the results of the primary quantitative method. Although reversing this (using quantitative data in support of the qualitative) is no less problematical, such an approach leads to a more exploratory form of research (Porter, p. 70), and this is what is proposed here.

In this way it is hoped not to overemphasise the quantitative data, rather to make use of it in ways which will complement the findings of the qualitative data. Criticisms of quantitative data have also been raised by many feminist researchers (and others), such attacks often linked to the social relations that embody traditional quantitative methods and their association with patriarchal scientific method (Smith, 1987). As a result, feminist research has been linked with qualitative methods alone. Although this practice has an established record it has not been without its critics, but as Brunt (1992, p. 73) points out: 'There is ... no shortage of audience studies which ignore the text but also eschew mean-minded empiricism, proclaim the benefits of "qualitative research", and adopt the "unfocused discussion group" as a major technique.' Brunt (p. 69), in advising against constructing audiences as imagined communities, sees one aim of media audience studies as 'rendering the notion of "audience" itself more problematic.' She proposes that what is needed is a theoretical understanding of the relationship between text and audience that must be above the level of description and be about groups and/or discussion. As Brunt states (p. 74): 'The absence of statistics [is itself] no guarantee that the formalism of a survey approach has been replaced with the materialist analysis.' The use of quantitative methods in synthesis with qualitative methods, as would be the case using triangulation, is defensible then and is all the more necessary in research such as that undertaken here where little demographic or other data on the population under study is available.

The methodological pluralism that triangulation entails demands some comment on the problems which might arise from integrating two methods previously regarded as incompatible, although it should be possible to apply quantitative methods in a way that makes them more compatible with subjectivity as Stanley (1991) and others have suggested. Of particular interest here is what should be done if the different methods turn up contradictory evidence. There has been little discussion of such problems in the literature, although Porter (1994, p. 71) recognises that any contradictions must be acknowledged in the findings and suggests that these may provide particular information on the group as a whole rather than the individuals. As in Ang's study of Dallas viewers (1985) the aim of this research is to explore the diversity and contradictions of women's consumption of horror and, rather than being a problem, conflicting information turned up by the different methods may be just as much signs of negotiations with dominant ideology as

the contradictions and gaps within the qualitative data are (see also Stacey, pp. 44-5).

It was therefore proposed that a mix of methodologies would be used, with concentration on the collection of qualitative data via focus groups and interviews. However, since the practical and financial limitations of this study meant that a large number of individual interviews or focus groups was not possible, it was hoped that many of the participants would be prepared to answer a number of open-ended questions included in the questionnaire and/or communicate their opinions and experiences in letters. Rather than append the open ended questions to the end of the questionnaire (possibly giving the impression that this data was less important, as well as increasing the chance the questions would not be answered due to questionnaire 'fatigue'), it was decided to position them at relevant points throughout and relate the questions asked to the quantitative questions where possible, in this way, making the information seem more relevant and valuable. It was hoped that together the focus groups, interviews, letters and replies to open ended questions would provide a rich source of qualitative data. Although written data are perhaps not as comprehensive or as directed as may have been obtained with interviews, nor are they as informal or interactive as data obtained from focus groups, it was nevertheless thought to be the best proposal given the circumstances of the research. This approach to data gathering provides information on the tastes and responses of the female fan with which to test the various hypotheses about female horror film viewers, together with a demographic profile produced from the quantitative data provided by the questionnaire results and statistical findings with which to support or expose contradictions in the qualitative data. Whilst the demographic profile of the female fans and followers this provides may not be statistically significant and thus not representative of the female horror film audience as a whole, it does for the first time provide a profile of female horror film fans.

A number of issues relating to the study of fans and followers, groups of individuals which might be expected to have detailed knowledge of a particular subject, also require some comment at this point. Olesen et al (1994, p. 111) point out that 'the need for researchers in certain contexts to have technical knowledge in order to grasp specific issues and to frame or modify the findings' is an under-discussed area of qualitative research. Whilst

the study being undertaken here does not require technical expertise (such as would be required in clinical, scientific or social policy areas for instance), proximate knowledge of the subject is advantageous for the collection and interpretation of data from knowledgeable and opinionated groups of fans and followers. It has also been deemed important from a feminist research perspective for the researcher to be able to develop an affinity with her subjects, whilst ethnographers have come to recognise that the researchers pre-existing knowledge, understanding and cultural commitments have become central components of the research process. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, pp. 20-2) have acknowledged the value of proximate knowledge in studying fan culture, whilst other researchers such as Penley (1991b) admit to having become deeply involved in the fandoms they are researching. Modleski (1986, p. xi), warns against such involvement: 'critics today seem ... immersed in their culture, half in love with their subject, they sometimes seem unable to achieve the proper critical distance from it.' Whilst such a warning is not to be taken lightly, a knowledge of and liking for the subject one is investigating allows the researcher, according to Giddens (1984), to recognise the pleasures and meanings inherent in the fans' cultural experiences. Furthermore, it proved an advantage having a personal liking for the horror genre when recruiting participants; since horror fans can be subject to ridicule and misunderstanding, and since many female fans recognised that they were marginalised, the knowledge that the researcher did not hold low opinions of the genre helped put many potential participants at ease. However, the question of how the researcher deals with (and writes about) her own feelings can be problematical and it was decided that whilst making my liking for the genre explicit, this was not to be overplayed, nor would it be discussed in detail with respondents prior to participation in the survey.

3.1.2 Locating the female horror film audience

The major problem for the research, given that the audience under study is a largely marginalised and hidden one, was identifying female horror fans and followers for recruitment purposes. Attendance at horror film screenings would be one means of identifying potential recruits, but this does raise a number of problems. Although film audience profiles do indicate large numbers of women attending some horror films screenings, there is no guarantee that a sample taken from audiences of horror films recruited outside cinemas would contain sufficient numbers of female horror fans for this

study. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the tastes and responses of horror fans and followers, and not a cross-section of the general public. In addition, this method of recruitment was not promising for this study since access to screenings would be restricted to a few cinemas in small areas of the country for a short period of time. Similar constraints also applied to recruitment through video rental stores, with the additional problem here that the renter may not be representative of all the people watching the video once it had left the video store.

Aside from attendance at horror film screenings (or rental/purchase of video cassettes), the horror film audience might also be identifiable through fandom, that is, via fan and professional horror and horror-related publishing and through membership of horror fan societies and organisations and/or attendance at horror film festivals and conventions. One potential problem with both methods of identifying female horror fans and viewers is that since horror films are widely regarded as a male preserve women may be less likely both to attend cinema screenings of horror films and to participate in organised fandom. It was therefore decided to recruit via as many and varied areas of fandom as possible and these included fan clubs and societies, fanzines and horror magazines, fan conventions and film festivals, and electronic fan groups on the Internet.

It was envisaged that the majority of participants would be recruited primarily from the memberships of horror fan groups (including the loose network of university science fiction and fantasy societies, as well as large fan-organised societies) and from the readerships of a cross-section of professional and fan horror magazines, with additional participants being drawn from attendees at horror film festivals and conventions. In the case of fan clubs and societies, these were approached to either circulate their female membership with the questionnaires or with leaflets explaining the research, or, with smaller groups, to pass on details at meetings. Flyers explaining the research and calling for participants were circulated at conventions and film festivals and the magazine recruitment was via letters published on the letters page, small ads, or, in one case, in an editorial column. A number of local and word-of-mouth contacts from further afield were also included in the study, as were a few respondents contacted via newsgroups and electronic mailing lists (although since these tend to be dominated by American participants, these were fewer than initially hoped).

This mix of recruitment methods seemed to be the best strategy to achieve a mix of dedicated horror fans, more casual followers and those whose liking for horror is part of a wider range of genre and media tastes. Recruitment via letters and small ads in horror magazines and at conventions or film festivals does lead to a self-selected sample, but since the audience being researched is (or was expected to be) a highly motivated and opinionated one, having a preponderance of such self-selected recruits is not as problematical as it might otherwise be. This problem was also mitigated somewhat by the participation of the fan societies who circulated their entire female memberships with questionnaires.

3.1.3 Audience research: methodology, strategy and execution

The questionnaire which was to be the main source of data from participants outside central Scotland was designed to include a number of open-ended questions and topics on which the respondents were invited to write at length. Since this questionnaire was substantial (twenty-four questions, including nine open ended questions, spread over ten pages), it was proposed that the responses to the open-ended questions would be assessed (using the computer package NUDIST for the analysis of the qualitative data) as the completed questionnaires were returned and if it was found that frequent repetitions were occurring in the data received, further questionnaires containing only one open ended question (inviting any other comments) and slightly fewer quantitative questions were to be sent out. See appendix 1 for reproductions of the questionnaires used. Follow up discussion on an individual basis with selected respondents was a subsequent option used in a some cases.

Whilst this method of data collection is not an ideal substitute for data acquired through face to face interview (the potential exists for the respondent to more easily falsify or embroider information given in a questionnaire), all but eight respondents declined to give a full name and address for further contact, and it can be assumed from this that the bulk of the data thus collected was as reliable as possible under the circumstances (or, at the very least, was not substantially falsified). The quality of many of the open-ended question responses was also such that it is undoubtedly written as 'stream-of-consciousness' and not as pre-ordered or 'cleaned-up' material. A high proportion of participants also wrote at great length in reply to the questions and this provided large quantities of data.

Focus groups discussed the same set of open-ended questions as included in the questionnaire, and both were designed around a set of hypotheses about female horror film viewing. The qualitative analysis was aimed at investigating the following set of hypotheses:

- 1 That female horror fans make up a 'hidden', yet often substantial, portion of the horror film audience. (Since horror has always been a literary genre which women have participated in, both as readers and writers, the question must be why is it that women have been rendered invisible as participants in horror cinema?)
 - 1a That female viewing takes place in isolation, i.e. in the home, films viewed on television or video. (Women's consumption of other despised genres such as soap opera and romance fiction have previously been recognised as being consumed in private.)
 - 1b That female horror fans do not participate widely in organised horror fandom (since horror fandom, too, is largely male-dominated).
- 2 That female viewers of the horror genre prefer feminine forms of the genre. (Women's horror literature has often explored feminist themes and there are some similarities between women's horror fiction and the contemporary horror film which are explored elsewhere.)
 - 2a That they derive greater pleasure from viewing films with an erotic element between monster and victim, principally vampire films. (In addition to films such as Bram Stoker's Dracula being marketed to women, large numbers of vampire novels have been written by women.)
 - 2b That, as part of what they regard as their horror film consumption, they view mainstream films not always classified as horror but which contain elements or plot devices similar to horror. (As has been discussed by Doane (1985, p68) horror has aspects which may link it to the woman's film: 'The "woman's film" is not a "pure" genre It is crossed and informed by a number of other genres or types - melodrama, film noir, the gothic or horror film - and finds its point of unification ultimately in the fact of its address.')
- 3 That female horror film fans might enjoy the horrific images and elements in horror films (i.e. they refuse to refuse to look).
- 3a That they do not exhibit viewing practices observed in adolescent female horror film viewers (showing fear or fright at horrific images and relying on a boyfriend for comfort).
- 4 That female horror film fans do not consider the horror genre to be misogynist or disregard the fact that it is.

The scope of this study does not include an investigation of the behavioural effects of viewing horror films since these would be self-reported and could not be confirmed by large-scale observation and, since the sample is self-selecting, would not necessarily be representative of the whole female audience.

The initial set of hypotheses on which focus groups and open-ended questions were based were first tested against a number of secondary data

sources in order to determine their acceptability as the basis for research. As with other qualitative research projects, the wealth of information obtained - from both the primary and secondary data sources - provided other avenues of investigation and generated as many hypotheses as they proved or disproved (see Hill, for example).

At this stage of the research, participant observation of two electronic mailing lists was also undertaken and, although less useful than initially hoped because membership is mostly American, is worth mentioning briefly here. An area of fan culture which has emerged (and grown enormously) in recent years is electronic communication between fans via the Internet. Fans and followers of particular programmes, stars and genres now participate in a large number of discussion groups and mailing lists and/or create sites on the World Wide Web (see, for instance, Clerc on The X-Files on-line fandom in Lavery et al., 1996).

There are a number of public discussion groups (news groups) on the Usenet system which are related to horror films, including alt.horror, alt.vampyres and alt.cult-movies. Private electronic mailing lists also exist: in particular, on the subject of horror films and fiction, on all subjects related to vampirism, one devoted to horror fiction alone and one on supernatural/Gothic fiction. Newsgroups are open to all-comers and anyone (with access to the Internet) may read or post messages, whereas mailing lists must be subscribed to and all communications are sent via private electronic-mail. Any person with an electronic mail address may join mailing lists on various topics (hundreds of these lists exist with subjects ranging from Star Trek to particle physics). Mail sent by individual members to the list is circulated to all members on the list. (It was decided to observe the e-mail lists rather than the relevant news groups since the former have a formal membership list which is more likely to give representative and verifiable data.)

Observation was made of two electronic-mailing lists: a list for discussion of vampires (VAMPYRES-L) and one for the discussion of horror in film and fiction (HORROR). Women participated actively and in large numbers on both lists. Of the registered users on the horror list 31 per cent were female. It was much harder to ascertain the sex of members on the vampyre list since many adopted aliases (referred to as 'vampire personas') under which they registered and posted messages and these aliases were not necessarily of the

same sex as the writer. Thus, it is not always possible to establish the sex of individual members and posts from individuals are often difficult to validate.

Discussion on both lists was wide-ranging, but whereas that on the horror list was largely debate about films, books and (rather less often) real-life horror, the vast majority of material on the vampyre list was 'fluff' (messages in the form of fiction or poetry), much of it concerning the invented life-stories and adventures of the vampyre personas the members adopted. It was not felt productive to follow up discussions on the vampyre list, but observation of the horror list was continued for several months and the discussion proved useful in gauging the discourses common among horror fans.

The horror list discussion consisted mainly of debate on horror generally, reviews and recommendations for films and books, and sometimes heated debates on these topics. The members participate in group views (members take turns to choose a horror film which is viewed over a weekend and then discussed over the following week), group reads (members choose a horror novel which they read by a certain deadline and then discuss, these rather less frequent than the fortnightly group views), discuss new horror films and novels, and discuss the genre more generally (common subjects are what particular books/authors/films are liked, debates about whether gore or atmospheric horror is better, personal experiences such as how they came to be attracted to horror and discussions of real-life horror and serial killers). Participation in this list by women reflects the male-female ratio of World Wide Web users generally and is slightly higher than that found elsewhere on Internet discussion groups: of 433 non-concealed members (there were seven concealed members at the time the membership list was output), 122 were female, 276 male and thirty-five of unknown sex¹ - that is, 31 per cent of list participants where the sex is known are female. This is very close to the figure given by Georgia Institute of Technology Graphics, Visualisation and Usability Centre survey which identifies 31.4 per cent of the World Wide Web population as being female.² Since the vast majority of Internet users are American, both these figures are indicative of US trends. (The WWW population may also be quite different from the population participating in news groups and mailing lists since the latter involves potentially more active involvement than 'surfing' the Web.) Women also contributed at least 31 per cent of the postings to the horror list (397 mail messages can be positively

attributed to women out of a total of 1,220 messages during the period January 1995 to November 1996 inclusive). This is a higher active female involvement than in other similar mailing lists and newsgroups (or at least, in mixed sex lists; some electronic fan groups - for example, Star Trek and The X-Files - have all or mostly female lists, see Clerc for details). In Clerc's analysis of X-Files fans (of which she considers female participation to be high), she states (p. 48): 'On average, 25 per cent of the posts to alt.tv.x-files were from women (45 per cent men, 30 per cent of unknown sex) compared to 14 per cent of the posters on rec.arts.startrek.current (66 per cent men, 20 per cent unknown) and 16 per cent on rec.arts.sf.tv.babylon5 (69 per cent men, 15 per cent unknown).' One possible reason for higher involvement in mailing lists, as suggested by Clerc, may be that the sense of community - desired by women and unavailable on news groups due to their open nature and higher level of flaming, trolls and spamming³ - is obtainable to a greater extent in closed mailing lists. Several female members of the horror list have been participating for several years, and strong friendships have been forged between members and there is a strong sense of community amongst regular posters. Obviously, there may well be bias in the Internet population (and the figures above) since a large proportion of people will be young and/or come from a student or academic background. However, the female members of the horror list do seem to be fairly representative of the population at large and, whilst a higher proportion than the population at large are university staff or students, as a group they range across a wide age range and job profile.

Although useful information was collected on horror fan discourse from this source and the high level of female participation offered a potential wealth of material, since the list members were almost exclusively American, it was not felt that it was an appropriate arena either for data collection (since cultural and national differences would make such data inappropriate to a study of the UK horror film audience) or recruitment (although direct contact was made with members from the UK who went on to participate in the study).

3.2 Survey of Mass Market and Fan Publications

One method of assessing both the constituency of horror fandom and the responses and opinions of fans is via a survey of specialist publications aimed at the horror film viewer. The first stage in the research, therefore, was a magazine survey which examined both the content and the readers responses in a number of titles. This was undertaken as a first step towards designing

the study and assessing the possibilities for recruiting participants. Secondary data were collected from various fan sources; firstly, material written by horror film fans and published in amateur or semi-professional fanzines, and secondly, material in professional specialist horror magazines. The intention here was to provide a comparison with the collected data (principally to ascertain whether the respondents reproduce widespread or common fan discourses in their responses or whether there are points of divergence between the group studied and accepted fan opinion as recorded in the publications) as well as to incorporate fan discourses and published readings of horror films in the press and fan media into the focus group and face-to-face interview discussions. Since very little of the published material studied was produced or written by female fans, horror fanzines and magazines did not provide a good source of primary data on women's opinions of the genre.

However, a number of interesting findings emerged from this study which impacted upon the research. Most important was the extreme sexism of the vast majority of titles in the horror market and overall it was found that women did not generally actively participate in this area of fandom to any great extent. Since the results of this survey are relevant to discussion of horror fandom in chapter 7 they are presented in full in appendix 4.

Much of the information gathered from the magazine survey fitted into the areas covered by the hypotheses. An additional hypothesis concerning horror magazine consumption by female fans was devised:

- 1c That female horror fans are excluded from fandom largely because of the sexism inherent in fan publishing and fan culture.

3.3 The pilot study

A pilot study was first undertaken to test out the focus group and questionnaire formats and to perform an initial test of the hypotheses. This pilot study consisted of a questionnaire containing open-ended questions based around the hypotheses; this was completed by twenty-one test subjects. A focus group was set up to test similar topics. Although seven participants had been recruited to the focus group from amongst female horror film viewers and fans from Queen Margaret College, the University of Edinburgh Science Fiction and Fantasy Society and students from an adult education course on the horror film at Edinburgh Filmhouse (regional film theatre), only three attended (the low turnout was attributed to the exceptionally sunny weather on that day). The discussion was split into two sections: the first

being a focused discussion of the participants' horror film tastes, their viewing habits, their views on the genre and the part it played in their lives, and how they felt and reacted when watching horror films; the second was a more open discussion on particular films that they liked or remembered well.

The good responses to the questionnaire and the level of discussion in the focus group despite the small turnout was promising. The focus group discussion was kept informal in order to try to replicate, as far as possible under the conditions of observation and recording, a situation which might occur naturally. One thing mentioned by a number of questionnaire respondents was their feeling of isolation in not knowing any or few other women who liked horror films and it was felt that the focus groups would enable women to meet others with similar tastes. One participant was thankful for the opportunity to explore her liking for horror rather than having to defend it. The chosen format was considered successful, very little intervention had to occur and the participants appeared relaxed and spoke freely. Much of the discussion matched the data collected from the open-ended questions on the pilot questionnaire as well as observation of fan discourse in the magazines and Internet groups. However, the participants had very nomadic tastes and had a tendency to wander off the subject into discussions of other related genres and fiction. Much of this discussion, whilst interesting, was not of direct relevance to this research and it was felt that in the main study, especially with larger focus groups, discussion would need to be more directed in order to keep participants on the subject. However, attempts were made to preserve the informal atmosphere of the group, since this was felt to work very well. It was also felt that since all indications were that participants were likely to have a lot to say on the subject, focus group size should be kept fairly small.

Several points emerged from the pilot study data:

- There was some dislike of watching horror films in a cinema because of the behaviour of other viewers, although it was also felt important to view in a cinema because of the institutional processes involved.
- There was a feeling that many male horror fans were juvenile in mentality and had never grown up. There was a problem of being perceived as 'nerdy' and the opinion that there was no female fan equivalent of the 'fan boy'.⁴ On this subject, the participants were all in agreement that women did not become as obsessive about the subject as the male fans did. This was why two of the focus group participants would not consider or describe themselves as fans but would happily admit to liking horror. One considered that this might be the reason the female horror fan existed in isolation.

- Participants who were active in horror fandom reported instances of open antagonism from male fans at conventions and film festivals. One was called a 'bint,' another was asked what she was doing there and told this was not a place for women, and another was told in an informal discussion to refrain from offering an opinion since women didn't know anything about horror. Whilst acknowledging that such antagonism may exist in some cases, others thought it might be fairly isolated incidents reserved for the extreme edges of fandom (and they were not as heavily involved in fandom).
- There was general agreement over the types of horror preferred, films with haunting or tense atmospheres were preferred to those with explicit gore and violence.
- The discussion had a tendency to broaden out into SF and mainstream films and this led to some discussion of what the participants perceived the horror genre to be. The general consensus was for a very broad definition of what films could be considered horror.
- Horror fiction was brought up frequently as this was read widely. It was thought there was very little horror fiction written by women and even some dislike of the female horror authors currently published. The lack of female horror writers was questioned: was it because women weren't writing horror fiction or because they could not get published? There was a feeling that male readers did not accept horror written by a female author.
- There was some debate on what women would do if they made horror films - but depressingly found it very unlikely that women's horror would be acceptable to the industry because it would not attract the male horror fans.
- Science fiction was brought up on several occasions, in particular in discussing how science fiction and horror merged in several films, and in discussing fandom and female writing. Some debate took place on whether it was more acceptable for women to read science fiction and to participate in science fiction fandom.
- The best horror was felt to be that which tapped into childhood fears such as fear of the dark, of something under the bed, of bad dreams. Much mentioned was made of various triggers which gave the participants the chills or particularly horrified them (these were often considered to be personal and unique to themselves). It was important for horror films to be scary and there was widespread enjoyment of being scared when watching horror films; one participant said she didn't think she would enjoy horror if it stopped scaring her, though some did not find horror films scary. Several reported that they watched without taking their eyes off the screen.
- Portrayals of women in horror films had much to offer. Though female characters who screamed or got killed in their underwear were disliked (some rather enjoyed it when the screaming girls were killed), there was enjoyment of seeing women defeating the monster. Images of female monsters were enjoyed because they were deemed subversive; and there was enjoyment when they killed their male victims who asked for it or wanted it (this was especially true in the context of vampire film).

In particular, the final point about enjoying seeing men killed by female monsters led to the following addition to the hypotheses:

- 4a That the enjoyment of horror films by female viewers includes a form of feminist revenge fantasy on men.

3.4 Investigating the audience

I Recruitment

Despite having statistics on female attendance at a small number of horror films, and being able to infer a female audience of between 25 and 50 per cent depending on horror film type, it is not possible to determine (or even approximate) the numbers of female horror fans and habitual viewers in the UK and thus the population size from which the sample was drawn is unclear. It was therefore extremely difficult to ascertain how large a sample was required in order for the data to be representative (or indeed whether the respondents even constituted a sample). Stacey received 350 letters in reply to her request for information in two women's magazines and subsequently collected 238 questionnaires; Hill used thirty-six focus group participants. Since the female film-going population of the 40s and 50s from which Stacey drew her sample was much larger than the female horror fan population, it was felt unlikely that this level of participation could be achieved. Hill's research into the audience of New Brutalist films included both male and female viewers, so again the population from which the sample was drawn was much larger, and she also records (p. 13) that whilst the female audience for these films was theoretically quite large, there were difficulties in recruiting women to the study. The main reason given for this is that women were not prepared to participate in mixed sex focus groups. Since this investigation is concerned only with women, this was not a problem; however, as Hill experienced, it was often difficult to persuade women to join the focus groups and turn out was lower than hoped on several occasions. Since it had been decided to collect qualitative data via open-ended questions in the questionnaire and invitations to write letters, it was felt that this would adequately supplement the focus group data. It was decided early on to aim for at least 100 questionnaires and fifteen to twenty focus group participants. The final result was 109 completed questionnaires, additional written material (letters, electronic mail messages) from a further sixteen women, and fifteen women attended five focus groups held in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling. Two potential candidates were rejected since they were film studies graduates with an interest in women and horror. An additional five questionnaires were

from individuals who read horror fiction but hardly ever watched horror films. These participants were not included in the final analyses since the research was concerned only with horror film viewers. A follow-up study to ascertain why some women read but do not view horror would be appropriate. As data collection progressed it also became clear that the amount and quality of the qualitative data was such that it went a long way towards compensating for the low level of focus group participation.

Focus group participants were recruited from the science fiction and fantasy societies at the universities of Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow, from attendees at the Dead By Dawn horror film festival held annually at Edinburgh Filmhouse, from members of the Glasgow local group of the Vampyre Society, from attendees at a convention in Glasgow and from 'snowball' contacts. For the questionnaires, letters were printed in Hammer Horror and small ads were placed in three consecutive issues each of Shivers and The Dark Side, the editor of the fanzine Samhain wrote about the research in his editorial column, and a flyer was circulated with several smaller fanzines, including Demeter and Crimson. The British Fantasy Society and the Vampyre Society circulated their female memberships with copies of the questionnaire.

II The questionnaire

The open-ended parts of the questionnaire and the focus groups were both designed to collect similar data. A number of hypotheses were set up (see above), the aims of the study having been modified and expanded in the light of data collected during the pilot study, and questions oriented around these. The participants provided such diverse and large quantities of data that the hypotheses continued to expand as the research progressed. In addition, despite fears that the data collected via letter and open-ended questions might be a poor substitute for interviews and a greater level of focus group participation, the two data sets combined were not found to be lacking either in detailed information on specific issues or in the breadth and variety of information across the subject.

III Focus groups

Focus groups were conducted in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling (a pilot study focus group having been previously held in Edinburgh). People had been invited from the SF/Fantasy/Horror societies at the Universities in each city, from the local group of The Vampyre Society in Glasgow, and contacts made through Intersection - a science fiction/horror convention with several

panels about vampires on the programme. It should be noted that horror and science fiction tend to be common interests for many people. Each group consisted of between two and six people and discussion lasted around one to one and a half hours. The turnout was low in some cases and there were several possible reasons for recruits dropping out. Ascertainable reasons for non-attendance ranged from not feeling like attending a focus group (although questionnaires were completed) to claiming to not be very interested in horror films any more; illness and being too busy were also cited. The low turnouts did not affect discussion adversely since participants were very vocal and more than willing to talk at length on the subject.

IV Participant observation

During the data gathering period of the research, participant observation of the Glasgow local group of the Vampyre Society was also conducted. This group met fortnightly in a Glasgow public house and consisted of between fifteen to twenty members at each group. Meetings were informal and socially oriented; many members dressed as vampires.

The observation of these meetings was of relevance in the area of women's participation in organised fandom and is discussed further in chapter 6.

3.4.1 Data Capture

Focus groups were moderated with the assistance of a student from Queen Margaret College, with the moderators adopting a neutral role and a standardised set of questions and topics. Focus groups were taped, transcribed, read through for preliminary assessment of themes and identification of analytical categories, and finally imported into the NUDIST qualitative data analysis package to aid in the interpretation and analysis of the data. The transcription and coding process was repeated for the replies to the open-ended questions from the questionnaire.

Quantitative data were imported into the SPSS statistical analysis package for analysis. The results of this analysis are presented as a demographic profile of female horror fans in the following chapter, whilst other results are used in support of or to expose contradictions in the results of the qualitative analysis. Further details of the statistical techniques used, the focus group format and the questionnaire can be found in the appendices.

3.5 Further considerations

Given that female horror film viewers might be a largely hidden audience segment, a major research problem was to identify female horror fans and followers for recruitment purposes. Recruiting participants from those attending film screenings, whilst providing opportunities for the selection of a representative cross-section of the cinema audience, would not necessarily provide a representative sample of female fans and followers since it would exclude those who view films on video cassette or television broadcast. Identifying fans and followers through the institutions of organised or casual fandom, however, was just as likely to be skewed since it would exclude those who are unable or unwilling to join societies or buy magazines (because of time or financial constraints, for example), as well as those who are unaware that such societies or magazines exist. It should therefore be noted that although the profile of female horror fans and followers in subsequent chapters is of an active audience segment, it cannot be determined how representative this is. The diversity of recruitment methods provided a mix of dedicated horror fans and more casual followers (some of whom did not even consider themselves to be fans), but since it is impossible to determine the size or spread of the population from which they were drawn it cannot be called a sample. The participants were also inevitably self-selected; however, they do represent a wide cross section of the population in terms of age, education, employment, marital status and geographical location. They were predominantly white and middle-class and, therefore, differences of race and class have not been examined.⁵

This study, therefore, obtained information exclusively from self-selected British female horror film fans and followers and its results cannot be taken to apply to casual horror film audiences. However, since the topics that concerned the respondents in this survey broadly reflected those within the wider arenas of horror fan discourse (in magazines, fanzines and Internet groups), it can be assumed that the responses reported on here can be taken as fairly typical of female horror film fans and followers in general.

¹ Lists membership and statistics on postings to the list were provided by the HORROR listowner for the period of observation. Aliases are uncommon on the Horror list, most members of unknown sex are due to ambiguous names or giving initials only. This also indicates that the Horror list might be more reliable as a source of data than VAMPYRES-L or the news groups and thereby perhaps a better reflection of the horror film audience overall. It may be that women feel more comfortable in participating in such a list and indeed many women are active members on this list. The list owner is female.

² Statistics given on www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/user_surveys/survey-10-1996/ during October 1996. The WWW is a more recent development on the Internet and since men may lead usage of new technological developments, participation by women may lag behind men. However, according to the G.I.T. this sex split has been stable for some time.

³ In Internet jargon 'flames' are personal insults or attacks on the poster of a message, 'trolls' are deliberately provocative spoof messages and 'spamming' is the posting of irrelevant messages, often in large quantities.

⁴ The 'fan boy' is a fan (often adolescent) obsessed not just with the text but with trivial details about the subject of their fandom and with collecting associated merchandise and other spin-offs.

⁵ Observation at fan events suggests that there is little involvement in science fiction and horror fandom amongst ethnic populations in the UK.

Chapter 4

Profile of the Female Horror Film Viewer

The accepted profile of the horror film viewer, as described in chapter 1, is an adolescent male and it may be assumed from the social psychology research outlined in chapter 2 that the majority of the female horror film viewers, like their male counterparts, would be in their early to mid-teens. However, where demographic profiles of the horror film audience are available, they show that the audience does contain a high percentage of female and older viewers (see chapter 1). It might be expected that these viewers are individuals who have developed a strong liking for the horror genre and become fans or followers. This group might be expected to continue watching horror films through their twenties and thirties and possibly longer and may account for the older sections of the audience observed by Twitchell (1985). Indeed, the liking for horror is long lived amongst the survey respondents and persists well into middle age and beyond. However, these women may not appear in the profiles of cinema audiences because they mainly view horror films in the home, either on television or video. This may indicate that whilst the primary cinema audience for horror films is young and male, the secondary video and television audience contains higher numbers of female viewers (possibly because horror film viewing is socially unacceptable for women, but also because older individuals might have less opportunity or disposable income for visits to the cinema).

4.1 Demographics

Since demographics of the female horror film audience do not exist, it is important to first establish a profile of the respondents. Whilst this research is concerned mainly with the responses of the female horror film viewers and their participation in fan culture, a demographic profile is presented here in order to provide a background to the audience study. Although the respondents could not be described as a valid sample, they do represent a cross-section of female horror film fans. It should also be noted that since the population size is unknown, this does not constitute a profile of the entire female horror film audience.

4.1.1 Age of female horror film viewers

An initial hypothesis to be considered is that the majority of the female horror fans would be aged in their teens and early twenties (as might be expected

from a lingering adolescent taste for horror). The literature suggests that very few individuals keep watching horror films through their thirties and beyond (the existing audience statistics show the liking for horror declining sharply with age). There might be a possibility, however, that some middle-aged women might be more open about liking horror films: Cline (1992, p. 70), writing about rock music fans, claims that it is not socially acceptable for women to have fan obsessions except during 'two periods of hormonal lunacy (adolescence and menopause)' when it becomes excusable if not permissible. Cline supposes that fan behaviour is viewed as immature in adult women, but forgivable around middle-age when eccentric behaviour can be blamed on hormonal fluctuations. The age bands for analysis were selected on the basis of a teenage interest in horror declining in the early twenties and possibly being admitted to again during or after the forties.

The age profile of the respondents in this survey is much more evenly spread than might be expected. 34 per cent of participants are of the age that might be expected for horror film viewers (that is, twenty-four-years-old and under), it being assumed that an adolescent liking for horror films might stretch into the early-twenties. It is important to note that whilst few respondents are under eighteen-years-old, this is most probably due to limitations in the survey method and should not be taken as an indication that this age group does not like horror films. They do in fact seem to like the genre as evidenced by previous surveys particularly Cumberbatch and Wood's (1995) market research for Sierra On-Line (see chapter 1); however, it may be socially difficult for them to admit to such a liking, both because they are female and because they are under age. In part for this reason, but also for financial and other reasons (for example, not being aware of their existence), it is assumed that teenage girls are less likely to belong to the organisations and societies participating in the survey and less likely to read the magazines containing calls for participants.¹ Otherwise the respondents are spread across all age bands, although this might be less balanced if the teenage audience were to be included.

68 per cent of respondents are over the expected age; 30 per cent being over thirty-five, 15 percent in their forties or older. Few respondents are over-fifty but the oldest person in the study is in her sixties. The fact that few respondents are in their fifties and sixties may again be a result of the survey method with few in these groups being expected to read the magazines

concerned or belong to the societies (in fact, the oldest respondents came as 'snowball' recruits). There are some indications that larger numbers of older women like horror films than is normally supposed; several respondents mention their mothers also being fans of the horror film, as do non-horror fans and male horror fans who have offered information or opinions in the course of this research. One response to a call for participants was from a male fan requesting a questionnaire for his mother 'who is sixty-seven this month.'

Even given the absence of teenagers in the survey, it was not expected that the ages of horror film viewers be so spread across such a wide age band. It does confirm that the total horror film audience is much less age and sex skewed than usually assumed.

4.1.2 Background and social situation

Respondents are almost equally split between those who live with a partner (married or cohabiting) and those who live alone (single, divorced or widowed). However, the majority do not have children - 73 per cent without to 27 percent with. This skew is undoubtedly related to the age profile of the subjects, but is also likely to be due to the fact that women with children have less time and money for hobbies (possibly having less disposable income for books, magazines and hobbies or going to the cinema/renting videos, having less time generally to view films and little time or pre-disposition to completing questionnaires). Docherty et al's survey of cinema going (1987) suggests that people go to the cinema most frequently when young and single, stop going regularly when they marry, have children or buy a house, and then go back to the cinema when their children are approaching school age (at which time they see family films).

Overall the respondents appear to be well-educated or trained for a career. 54 per cent have university or college degrees, 10 per cent of these having post-graduate degree or diploma qualifications. A further 25 per cent have been educated to English A-level or Scottish Higher level, and 11 per cent have undertaken vocational or other training. Only 10 per cent have not undertaken any education above English O-level or Scottish Ordinary level.

The respondents also work in a wide range of occupations, although many of these are in areas of traditional female employment. A number of respondents gave multiple employment with most of those so doing

specifying writer in addition to a day job; in these cases the day job was considered to be their main form of employment. The largest group consists of students (22 per cent) and this is to be expected - they are mainly in the expected age range for horror fans (late teens to early twenties), and are also in the age group expected to go to the cinema most. For those in employment, the largest grouping (15 per cent) are in secretarial and administrative work, 8 per cent work in higher education or research and the rest are spread between a wide range of professions and jobs, many of which are traditional female jobs. These are computing, retail, librarianship, banking and finance, the civil service, education and child care, publishing, work with animals or agriculture, the health service and factory work. The large numbers in traditional female jobs in sub-professional categories is to be expected with a female sample and mirrors the results of Penley's study (1991a) of female Star Trek fans and 'slash' fiction writers.² 9 per cent of the respondents describe themselves solely as writers, artists, or working in an area of arts and crafts (for example, landscape painting or pottery). The large number of writers (including those specifying writer as a second occupation) is a reflection of the numbers of respondents active in fan cultures; many of these are members of the British Fantasy Society which is heavily involved with publishing and encouraging fan fiction. A further 9 per cent have no current employment outside the home and this figure includes those who are unemployed, disabled, and full-time mothers or housewives.

39 per cent are owner-occupiers, whilst 37 per cent live in rented accommodation. 16 per cent are still living in the parental home. Despite 22 per cent being students, only 8 per cent are living in student accommodation (the rest are in private rented accommodation or living in the parental home). This pattern reflects the age profile and the fact that many are still students, not having entered the housing ladder.

The picture of the female horror film fan or follower from these results is that she could be any age, but most likely somewhere between the eighteen and twenty-four-years of age, equally likely to be married or single, but less likely to have children. She is well-educated, having been to or currently attending university and, if employed, working in traditional female sub-professional employment. However, since the respondents are self-selected and may not constitute a sample, it cannot be ascertained whether this profile

is representative. What is clear, is that women who enjoy horror films are from a much wider age range than might be expected.

4.1.3 Other tastes, leisure activities and interests

There is also evidence that the respondents are nomadic viewers and readers in that they have wide interests other than horror. Interest in film and the cinema generally is high, with all respondents stating that they like at least one other unrelated film genre, though unsurprisingly the most liked genres other than horror fall into related categories with 85 per cent of respondents liking thrillers, 76 per cent liking science fiction and 61 per cent action films. All three genres (thrillers, science fiction and action) can be classified as masculine, but a liking for other masculine genres is not present with less than one-third of the respondents naming war films, westerns or cop films as favourite types. Traditional feminine genres are generally not liked, especially romances which are liked by only 16 per cent of the participants. There is, however, a relatively high liking for historical and costume dramas (47 per cent), and participants often relate a liking for this type of film to their liking for vampire films and Gothic horror. It seems that female horror film fans and followers do show some preference for masculine genres, but this is not always clear cut; principally they like those films which have some similarities to the horror film (often in emotional affect).

Interest in traditional female television programming is not high. Soap operas, talk shows, chat shows and games shows are not viewed regularly by large numbers of respondents. Rather, a preference for drama, comedy and factual programming is indicated. These figures may reflect the more high-brow tastes observed amongst ABC1s but consideration should also be given to the possibility that the results may be skewed because programming such as talk shows and soap operas (and their viewers) are denigrated and participants may not readily admit to being viewers (if this were the case, it would be ironic that whilst admitting to a liking for one 'low' genre, the respondents were hiding a liking for another). Although participants seem not to prefer feminine television genres, very few participants regularly watch traditionally masculine genres, particularly sports programmes.

Reading is an extremely popular pastime with 47 per cent of the participants listing reading amongst their hobbies and interests. Not surprisingly, horror is the most popular genre, read by 86 per cent of the sample, with fantasy and science fiction the next most preferred genres

(although few read only horror, fantasy and science fiction). Most of the participants read widely, although again the traditional female genre of romance fiction is read regularly by only 7 per cent of the respondents. True-life crime, which also has a predominantly female readership (see chapter 1), is read on a regular basis by 27 per cent of the participants. This does suggest that horror fans are not as interested in true crime or real-life horrific events as might be supposed. However, the low readership of this and romance fiction may reflect other skews in the sample, such as a higher proportion of ABC1s, which may not reflect the general readership profiles of these genres.

Magazine readership reflects the fact that the participants' primary interests are in film and television with film magazines and television listings titles being the most regularly read magazines. There is a broad spread of interest in other subjects, including one-third of participants regularly reading comics and graphic novels (which is undoubtedly related to the general interest in horror and science fiction). Again there is some bias against traditionally female titles though overall this is less than in other areas of consumption. However, other traditional male titles are not widely popular.

Participants have an extremely varied pattern of hobbies and interests outside horror. Reading is by far the most popular hobby, but writing, sports and other physical activities, additional areas of fandom, cinema, crafts of various kinds and art and music are all named as hobbies and interests, some participants naming up to ten unrelated interests and all having some hobbies other than horror or horror fandom. These fans and followers, then, do not conform to the stereotype of the obsessed or single-minded fan.

Finally, it has been noted that women are particularly interested in the paranormal (clairvoyance, the occult and other similar interests). Blackmore (1997, p. 683) found that 70 per cent of female respondents in her newspaper survey were believers in the paranormal. There is a similar high interest in the paranormal amongst the horror film fans. Interest in these and other alternative subjects is high; 67 per cent of the respondents having an interest in the supernatural (though some emphasise that this is a sceptical interest). In particular, there is a strong interest in ghosts, pagan subjects including Wicca (witchcraft) and clairvoyance. However, it should be noted that some participants stated that although they had an interest, for instance reading their horoscope daily, it did not necessarily mean that they took it seriously.

Overall, this group of horror film fans and followers demonstrate a wide-range of interests, hobbies and pastimes, but with some clear and very specific patterns:

- an interest in some male film and television genres, accompanied by low interest in many feminine genres; and
- a lack of interest in real life horror in the form of mass or serial killers or other atrocities, but an interest in unexplained or paranormal phenomena closely related to horror narratives.

The tastes in films, television programmes, reading material and alternative subjects do not indicate a strong level of immasculation and, although in some cases the viewing and reading patterns of the respondents tend towards what have been defined as masculine genres, the supposition that female horror film viewing is part of a range of feminine consumption is supported.

4.2 Viewing practices and preferences

Finally, it is important to establish the patterns of consumption of horror cinema exhibited by the respondents, including the viewing preferences. These are varied but do reveal some clear trends.

4.2.1 Viewing patterns

Nearly all the respondents watch horror films on all formats - under 3 per cent never watch horror on television or on video, 11 per cent do not watch horror films at the cinema. Cinema viewing is the most infrequent format for viewing horror films, but is partly explained by the low numbers of horror films released. Many horror films are released straight to video; these include films by well known Hollywood horror film directors - for example, John Carpenter's Village of the Damned and In the Mouth of Madness - as well as low budget horror films traditionally released straight to video (the survey was conducted before the recent cycles of slasher and vampire films). It may also reflect the fact that some respondents dislike the behaviour of cinema audiences or feel uncomfortable viewing horror films in public (see also chapter 7). Overall, the 11 per cent who never watch horror films at the cinema, together with the 67 per cent who watch at the cinema less than once a month, does confirm the hypothesis of an invisible female horror film audience.

The female horror film viewer predominantly watches horror films in the home, either on broadcast television channels or, more frequently, on video cassette. 31 per cent of the subjects watch a horror film on video at least once a week, another 25 per cent watch a horror video two or three times a month and a further 16 per cent once a month (72 per cent of the sample therefore watch a horror video at least monthly, while 56 per cent watch several times a month). Respondents view horror films slightly less often on television, though the distribution of frequencies is different. 17 per cent watch a horror film on television at least once a week, 37 per cent two or three times a month and 19 per cent once a month; overall, slightly more respondents (73 per cent) watch at least one horror film a month on television than on video. However, there are relatively few horror films broadcast on the terrestrial networks (although there are more on cable and satellite networks), and this may explain the different pattern of frequency of horror film viewing on television as compared to video. In each format (video and television), around one-quarter of respondents watch horror films less than once a month. This, as stated, may be due to relatively few horror films transmitted, but also to the particular horror films shown which may be older films seen before or of little interest.

The frequency of the subjects' total horror film viewing appears then to be high - 12 per cent watch a horror film two or more times per week, 34 per cent once or twice a week and 41 per cent two or three times a month. Thus just under half of the subjects (45 per cent) watch a horror film at least once a week. 14 per cent view fairly infrequently, although only 1 per cent watch less than one horror film a month. Cinema goers in general tend to be young, and may reduce their visits to the cinema once they marry and have families (due to the financial constraints of mortgages and young children - see Docherty et al's study of cinema audiences). However, a low rate of cinema attendance does not necessarily mean that the respondents stop watching horror films as the television and video viewing patterns confirm.

The respondents' viewing companions in the cinema are most likely to be an opposite sex partner (33 per cent) or a group of friends of both sexes (22 per cent). This reflects the patterns found in the audience breakdown at six horror films in Edinburgh (see chapter 1); however, the respondents do not seem to be going to the cinema in all female groups as observed in Edinburgh. 13 per cent, though, are going to see horror films at the cinema

with a same sex companion. When viewing horror films in the home, the most frequent viewing partner is an opposite sex companion (30 per cent), but 26 per cent view alone. Many of the subjects have boyfriends or husbands who also like horror films, but some of the married subjects state that their husband or partner does not like horror and they are forced to watch on their own. Many of the subjects who view alone are doing so because they live alone or are the only person in shared or family accommodation who likes horror. 13 per cent watch in the home in a mixed sex group, the majority of these are younger subjects (mostly students) for whom viewing horror films on video is a social activity.

The specific viewing choices and preferences of the female horror fans and followers are explored further in section 4.2.3.

4.2.2 Longevity of horror film viewing

It is clear, that for most respondents, the liking for horror is a not a short term phenomenon restricted to adolescence; in fact, the taste for horror persists throughout their lives. 79 per cent of the respondents have been watching horror films for more than ten years, 35 per cent for more than twenty years. Even the younger respondents consider their liking for horror to be long-lived (one eighteen-year-old considers herself to have been a fan for more than ten years). Unsurprisingly then, the length of time the participants have been watching horror films is strongly dependent upon age ($\chi^2 = 121.98$, $p = 0.00$). The common pattern is for participants to have started watching in early childhood and remained consistent viewers throughout their lives, indicating that a liking for horror is stable over the respondent's lifetime. For these fans and followers, the taste for horror is not an adolescent phase, begins well before adolescence and persists long after. Even amongst those participants who did not start viewing horror films prior to their late teens (often because of parental prohibitions), a liking for horror is dated from early childhood with these participants having developed their taste through reading horror fiction and then catching up with the films when they were considered old enough by their parents or were no longer subject to parental control. Although the actual population size of female horror fans and followers may be small, this does indicate that they comprise a audience segment distinct from that of the intended adolescent and young adult viewers. Since the oldest participants in the study show a similar pattern to the youngest, it can also be presumed that (although actual cinema going and viewing habits have

undoubtedly changed, with the advent of VCRs and the availability of films on video tape, for example) female horror film viewing practices and pleasures may have remained relatively stable at least since the late-1940s and 1950s when the oldest members of the study developed a liking for horror.³ In many respects, the female horror film audience might then be generic rather than historic. A study of this audience segment may then be an important contribution to horror film spectatorship theory.

The age profile is also confirmation that horror film fans and followers are a distinct audience segment separate from the majority teenage audience (although it is not known how many of the teen audience in the surveys or social psychology research reviewed in chapters 1 and 2 liked horror before or after adolescence⁴). The impression of the horror film viewer given in the literature is that they lose interest in horror as they mature. A core audience segment of fans and followers may remain, explaining the older segments of the audience (as seen by Twitchell). Even so, it is thought odd to like horror as an adult, especially for women, and this may be one reason why female viewers remain hidden. One proposition which this study illustrates is that women who like horror films keep their liking private and view alone or with one or two people close to them who also like the genre - as indicated above.

The liking for horror from a very early age is also important. As Cumberbatch and Wood (1995) point out, the majority of teenagers have viewed 18 certificated films. It is not impossible for underage viewers in the UK to gain entry to 18 rated films in the cinema and many more teenagers will have seen such films either on video or when broadcast on television. Video and television screenings may be the primary source for viewing 18 certificate films (including horror films). According to Cumberbatch and Wood (p. 7), 88 per cent of thirteen to fourteen-year-olds claim to have seen 18 certificated films or videos, rising to 92 per cent of fifteen to sixteen-year-olds and 100 per cent of seventeen to eighteen-year-olds. There are no differences in these figures between males and females.

The experience of women in this study echoes these figures. 50 per cent of participants claim to have viewed horror films before the age of twelve, rising to 80 per cent before the age of fifteen, and to 97 per cent before eighteen. Thus, the age at which the respondents first watched horror films may not be unusual when compared with the age at which the general population first view 18 certificate films. Nonetheless, it might appear worrying that 50 per

cent claim to have seen a horror film when they were eleven or even younger. Some individuals do claim to have been watching horror films from the age of five or younger. However, the films they claim to have seen at this age are either films which would not normally be labelled horror or are films suitable for children. In the main, the respondents named Walt Disney animated films and other children's fantasy films based on fairy tales as their first experience of horror. This is not all that odd: fairy stories have elements in common with traditional horror literature and many nursery tales are contain horrific sequences. Schechter (1984, p. 69) argues that a common source - 'that "symbol-inventing" level of the mind, that reservoir of primordial images, which is the matrix of all folk-dream and myth' - links folk tales and horror. The experiences the respondents report are of being enjoyably frightened by such stories or films based on them, a similar affect they obtain from horror films when they were older.

Many respondents' early viewing of horror also consisted of television screenings of Hammer horror films or older American horror films (often the Universal monster films, but also films such as 50s science-fiction B-movies, haunted house films or atmospheric chillers like Cat People). There does not seem to be any cause for concern that as pre-teens they were watching violent or hard-core horror films (although fg302 stated that her grandmother possessed several video nasties which she allowed her to watch in her early teens despite parental disapproval and ex001 tells how she illicitly watched her uncle's copy of A Clockwork Orange when twelve-years-old).

4.2.3 Horror film tastes

Clover (1992b, p. 66fn) notes that there might be a larger female audience for certain horror film types than others (she asserts the occult film as one subgenre popular with women), suggesting that female viewers might prefer particular types of horror. Indeed, clear trends do emerge in the preferences of the respondents. Choices offered in the questionnaire (see appendix 2) consisted of recent horror film cycles (for example, vampire films, slasher films, gore films) as well as classic horror film types (occult films, monster movies) and horror films from particular time periods or studios (for example, Universal, Hammer). Also included were some genres or generic hybrids often classed with horror by association (SF-horror, psychological thrillers and serial killer films).⁵ This gives an indication of viewing

preferences with respect to contemporary and older horror film types and to horror-related genres as well as popular contemporary cycles.

By far the most popular type of horror film is the vampire film: 92 per cent of the respondents liked all or most vampire films. This is followed in popularity by occult/supernatural films which are liked by 86 per cent (confirming Clover's assumption), psychological thrillers at 81 per cent, Hammer horror films at 76 per cent, and science-fiction/horror crossover films at 74 per cent. The liking of psychological thrillers also supports Clover's assertion that female viewers prefer more mainstream horror films. It may also be that it is more socially acceptable for women to like genres such as science fiction and other films which blur genre boundaries. By far, the least well liked horror film type is the slasher film, which is liked by 25 per cent of the subjects.

Correspondingly, the most disliked horror film type is the slasher film of which 54 per cent of the respondents who express a preference dislike all or most examples of the type. The second and third most disliked types are the serial killer film at 25 per cent and horror-comedies at 22 per cent, but conversely these types are liked by 53 per cent and 59 per cent of the subjects respectively. So it would seem that there are very few types of horror films which some members of the female audience do not enjoy. The slasher film would appear to be unique in its low appeal to female viewers. It should be considered, however, that the reported dislike of slasher films may well be because this type of film is heavily criticised (particularly for their representations of violence against women) and some respondents may simply be reflecting this bias. Other similar types of films (serial killer films, for instance) are not disliked to the same extent. Furthermore, many of the reasons given for disliking slasher films acknowledge but do not give great importance to this criticism, and the main reasons given for disliking slasher films are shallow characters and the formulaic nature of the narrative.

Very few subjects actively dislike the most popular types of horror film, whereas the disliked types manage to achieve a fair proportion of proponents who do enjoy them. So whereas only 1 per cent actively dislike the most popular type (vampire films), the most disliked type (the slasher film) is actively disliked by just over half the respondents and actively liked by just under one-quarter. The participants who like slasher films have very specific

reasons for this (these are explored further in chapter 7 which deals with reading strategies and opinions on horror films).

Some categories of horror film are neither highly disliked nor particularly well liked with a substantial proportion of the participants not being fussed either way about the type of film (silent films), or do not stand out because large numbers of participants have not seen many examples of the type (gore/body horror). In the case of silent horror films, this may simply be an indication that the respondents are unfamiliar with the conventions of silent cinema (respondent fg103 said that she did not like the acting style in Nosferatu, although she liked the look of the film). Similarly, many participants may not have seen many of the more extreme versions of gore and body horror due to their more limited availability in this country (for example, films such as The Texas Chain Saw Massacre and The Last House On The Left are still banned on video in the UK).

Supplementary information about the types or styles of horror film liked and disliked by the participants was derived from rankings of the three most liked and disliked horror film types specified by the participants. (Scores were based on the most liked choice being awarded three points, the second choice two points and the third choice one point. The same scoring was applied to the most disliked types: that is, three points for most disliked, two for second most disliked and one for the third.) A higher mean score therefore indicates that though fewer subjects like or dislike that film type as one of their three most liked or disliked types, those that do like or dislike that type tend to have stronger feelings about it. In other words, certain horror film types might be strongly liked (or disliked) by few individuals (but this should not be taken as absolute - these rankings are a guideline only to the strengths of feelings of the subjects about some horror film types). Thus vampire films are strongly liked and so are Hammer horror films (but by fewer subjects). The most liked horror film types are vampire films, supernatural films and psychological thrillers, followed closely by SF-horror hybrids and Hammer films. This reinforces the viewing preferences of the respondents. However, when the mean scores are examined, the top three horror film types are Hammer films, vampire films and films produced by Roger Corman at American International Pictures. This gives some indication of strength of feeling about the different film types by individuals. A few subjects do rank films by Roger Corman very highly, but in the overall preferences over half

the subjects are either not fussed (33 per cent) about this film type or have not seen this type (28 per cent). At this point it seems pertinent to note that since this study is of British horror fans and followers, a tendency to like Hammer horror films would be expected (these films are a part of British popular culture of the 60s and 70s, have been frequently screened by the television networks in the UK up to the present day and would therefore have been for many subjects their first introduction to horror films). The strong liking yet low score for Corman/AIP films may be due to the fact that Corman is American. Although some of Corman's films are regularly screened in the UK - for example, Masque of the Red Death (which was made in the UK), House of Usher, other Edgar Allen Poe adaptations and The Abominable Dr Phibes - they do not have as high a profile in British popular culture as Hammer. Where participants are aware of these films, they may express a stronger preference for them due to the star presence of Vincent Price, who appeared in many Corman films; Price is mentioned by several respondents as a favourite horror film actor. (An American audience might like AIP films for similar reasons to the British audience liking for Hammer films, but not be as aware of the latter; this seems to be the strongest indication of a possible cultural difference in horror film tastes in this study.)

The least liked and the most disliked type was the slasher film, again confirming the overall preferences of the respondents. The top 3 most disliked film types were slasher films, serial killer films and silent horror films. The slasher film was disliked much more than other film types, scoring 147 against the next nearest placing of fifty-three points for the serial killer film. The dislike for silent horror films is a strong profession of dislike by relatively few participants; it is possible, given that very few specify a general dislike for this type of horror film, that the dislike for silent horror films is simply due to difficulties with viewing films from early silent cinema (as suggested above).

Participants were also invited to name up to ten of their favourite horror films. Not all participants named ten films and a few named more. In addition, some participants named categories or directors: these included 'giant bug movies' (1), 'Night of the Living Dead films' (1), 'all the Scanners films' (1), Hammer Horror films (2), David Cronenberg films (2), 'anything directed by Sam Raimi' (1), 'anything starring Vincent Price' (1), and 'Abbott and Costello Meet (any of the monsters)' (1). In 2 cases the film was

not identifiable: 'Nosferatu (this version although modern was shot in black and white)', 'Vampyre (Murnau)'.⁶ In a number of cases where films have been remade on one or more occasions the version was unspecified, these included: The Blob (1), Cape Fear (2), Dracula (6), Frankenstein (2), Invasion of the Body Snatchers (2), Nosferatu (6). In total, 336 individual films were named by 107 of the participants. The most popular (i.e. the most frequently named) are: Hellraiser (which was named by thirty-three respondents as one of their favourites), Alien and Interview With the Vampire (both named by thirty respondents), followed by The Lost Boys, Aliens, Bram Stoker's Dracula, Evil Dead, The Hunger, the 1982 remake of The Thing, Night of the Living Dead, The Exorcist, The Silence of the Lambs, Nightbreed, The Haunting, Hellraiser 2, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Psycho, An American Werewolf in London, Army of Darkness - Evil Dead 3, Evil Dead 2 and The Omen which all named by between twenty-two and ten respondents. In addition, three films (Halloween, the remake of Nosferatu, Salem's Lot) received nine mentions; two films (Hellraiser 3, The Shining) received eight, five films (Alien³, Near Dark, Nosferatu (original), The Pit and the Pendulum, Warlock) were listed seven times, and a further ten (Candyman, Company of Wolves, Day of the Dead, The Devil Rides Out, Dracula - Prince of Darkness, Manhunter, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Misery, The Serpent and the Rainbow, The Wicker Man) six times. A further twelve films received five mentions, seventeen films four, twenty-six films three, sixty-six films two and 174 films one mention each.⁷ This is not meant to imply that female horror film viewers generally will be expected to like Hellraiser, for example, more than other horror films, simply to provide some guidelines as to what the respondents look for in their horror film viewing (analysis of this is provided in chapter 7).

Films which are not horror or closely related to horror⁸ account for approximately 24 per cent (eighty-two out of 344 including the named groups of films) of all the favourite horror films named by the respondents. This is only slightly higher than the 20 per cent of films which Tudor (1989, p. 17) claims are problematically classified on the fringes of the genre and demonstrates, particularly considering the strangeness of certain films some respondents classify as horror, that this segment of the audience at least conceives a broad definition of the horror genre and classifies films as horror based solely on emotional and/or psychological affect. Among the films which might not properly be called horror films were:

- comedies and fantasy-comedies
e.g. Beetlejuice, Carry on Screaming, Ghostbusters, The Witches of Eastwick
- fantasies and dark fantasies (including sword & sorcery)
e.g. The Beastmaster, Edward Scissorhands, Legend, Highlander
- science fiction
e.g. The Thing (From Another World), Robocop, Total Recall, The War of the Worlds
- thrillers, psychological thrillers, maternal melodramas and psychological dramas
e.g. Cape Fear, Sister, My Sister, Spellbound, The Tenant
- avant garde, foreign
e.g. Blue Velvet, Onibaba, Orphée, Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story
- other (war, western, action, crime, rape-revenge)
e.g. First Blood, Jaws, Mad Max, Rasputin: The Mad Monk

Among those films which are not usually classified as horror films are:

Apocalypse Now, Blade Runner, Brimstone and Treacle, Field of Dreams, Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, High Plains Drifter, The Hand that Rocks the Cradle, Jagged Edge, Jason and the Argonauts, The Krays, What Ever Happened to Baby Jane, Play Misty For Me, Marathon Man, The Name of the Rose and Saló: 120 Days of Sodom. Some of these films do have a high horror content and all illustrate the difficulties with drawing boundaries to the horror genre and with classifying some art or avant garde films altogether (see chapter 1). They also illustrate the fact that mainstream films can contain material which would be at home in a horror film. The selection of Laurence Olivier's Richard III by one respondent is a case in point.

The twenty most frequently selected films confirm the favourite film type selections with four vampire films (Interview with the Vampire, The Lost Boys, Bram Stoker's Dracula, The Hunger), three supernatural/occult films (The Exorcist, The Omen, The Haunting), two psychological thrillers (The Silence of the Lambs, Psycho) and three SF-horror films (Alien, Aliens, The Thing) in the list. The list also contains three films by Clive Barker (Hellraiser, Hellraiser 2, Nightbreed), and all three of the Evil Dead series (Evil Dead, Evil Dead 2 and Army of Darkness). The latter indicate that certain films within otherwise not widely liked horror film types (gore and horror-comedies respectively) can appeal to female fans and followers for very specific reasons (see chapter 5).

Some films are undoubtedly named by respondents because they are in recent memory, there being several examples in the list released shortly before

the survey was conducted (for example Interview with the Vampire, Bram Stoker's Dracula), but the majority of named films are older. Most are economically successful or widely popular horror films which would be expected to be liked by large numbers of horror film fans (for example Alien, The Exorcist and The Omen). More significantly, a number of the films on the most frequently selected list, whilst also being popular films, are notable for having major female characters. This and other issues with respect to the attraction of horror films for female viewers are reflected in the statements by subjects when asked why they chose particular films. These are explored in the following chapters.

¹ Further research into the viewing practices of this age group is indicated.

² Slash fiction is the writing of stories (almost exclusively by female fans) based on the romantic and sexual relationships between two male characters, for example Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock from Star Trek. It is often accompanied by explicit artwork of the sexual encounter.

³ This position is supported by several anecdotal stories relayed during the data collection period of the study about people's mothers or other female relatives who liked horror from the 20s onwards.

⁴ It has proved extremely difficult to find any women who liked horror as teenagers but then lost interest in the genre to talk about their changes in taste. A small number of word-of-mouth contacts were approached to take part in a focus group but all pulled out at the last minute citing reasons related to wanting to forget about it or not wanting to talk about it any more. (This may indicate successful gender socialisation in these individuals.)

⁵ Recent descriptive categories applied to groups of horror-related films such as the term New Brutalism (applied by the press to films such as Reservoir Dogs, Man Bites Dog, Killing Zoe and Pulp Fiction) were not included since they did not seem to have entered common usage and may have confused some respondents.

⁶ Werner Herzog's 1979 remake of Nosferatu was in colour, although the first respondent might have meant this film other versions exist with different titles; the second respondent may be referring to Murnau's Nosferatu or Vampyr directed by Carl Dryer.

⁷ Had the selections of unspecified versions of Dracula and Nosferatu been specific, a version of these films may have appeared in the twenty most frequently selected films (the original Nosferatu might have had up to thirteen votes, the remake up to fifteen; Universal's Dracula might have had a maximum of ten votes, the Hammer version eleven).

⁸ This figure does not include a small number of SF-horror hybrids which locate a horror film narrative in a science fiction setting (for example, Alien).

Chapter 5 Viewing Pleasures and the Attraction of Horror

My sister and I try to scare each other as much as possible, we usually turn out the lights just to prove we're not scared. As soon as the film starts, I concentrate totally on that. It is only horror films that can focus my attention like that. I am not bothered by noises in the house while the film is on, but afterwards the slightest creak will make me nervous.

As shown by the range of horror films liked by the respondents and their frequency of viewing as set out in chapter 4, female horror film viewers exhibit a strong attraction to macabre, frightening and horrific material. Like respondent hh116 quoted above, they experience pleasurable responses to and become engrossed in films designed to scare them. Furthermore, this respondent and her sister try to heighten the experience by scaring each other but also feel the need to show that they are not really frightened. It is important, therefore, to establish how the paradoxical liking for being 'frightened originated and developed. The work of social psychologists into audience behaviour and the emotional affects of viewing horror films is relevant here. In particular, research carried out into horror film viewers' reasons for attendance, including sensation seeking and the practice of gender roles, is especially relevant, as is research into what elements of horror films are thought to frighten young children, older children and young adults.

5.1 Gender socialisation

It was established in chapter 1 that, whilst the typical horror film viewer is thought to be an adolescent male, the audience does contain many females. An important aspect of the appeal of horror films for the adolescent audience is, according to Zillman and Weaver (1996), that the films represent a safe means for adolescents to learn and practice the gender roles that they will shortly be expected to portray as adults. In Zillman and Weaver's model, adolescent males can demonstrate to their peers that they can stand up to the frights and shocks offered by horror films and offer comfort and protection to their girlfriends, whilst adolescent females can demonstrate their sensitivity and need for protection. Attendance at horror films for adolescent females is thus part of the teenage dating ritual. Zillman and Weaver (p. 82) maintain that this process derives from ancient rites of passage characterised by 'strong gender segregation along protector-protectee lines.' In contemporary society, attendance at the cinema provides a social context which stands in for formal rituals which mark the passage into adulthood. Horror films are particularly

appropriate for this ritual since they allow males to demonstrate their fearlessness, bravado and protectiveness towards woman, whilst females are able to show their dependence on men and demonstrate their emotional reactions.

Comments by the respondents suggest that the female fan audience, being mostly outside the age group described by Zillman and Weaver, do not fit this pattern. The respondents enjoy horror films, watch frequently and habitually, and have done so throughout their lifetimes. Since they have been viewing horror films and other horrific material from early childhood, it is likely that they will have become habituated (the intensity of the initial distress reaction will have decreased with repeated viewing) by the time they reach their teens - the age of typical horror film attendance. They might not, then, be expected to fit the behaviour pattern of protectee described by Zillman and Weaver. Zillman and Weaver (p. 86) recognise, however, that since frequent horror film viewers become habituated, play-acting or pretence may form a large part of these displays, especially for adolescent females:

With repeated consumption of horror films ... even squeamish boys should soon be able not to express any residual distress. Eventually, they should not experience distress and be at ease signalling protective competence. Girls should analogously experience a lessening of distress reactions. Their task of exhibiting dismay and helplessness may prove difficult after habituation, and demands on play-acting may ultimately be greater on them than on boys.

If adolescent girls are to have a successful date in these circumstances, they will have to hide their enjoyment. This pattern does not seem to have occurred amongst the respondents. In fact, many of the respondents stated that they rarely dated at all. Several respondents stated that they did not have boyfriends whilst at school - fg201 typically states 'I never went out with anyone when I was at school, so...' - and certainly many admitted to not being part of their peer group or see themselves as being loners or outsiders at that age. It is not possible, then, to ascertain whether these women might have put their partners off by openly enjoying horror films. It may have been that either as loners or as girls who had revealed their liking for horror they were not seen as suitable 'dates' and therefore did not have as easy access to the dating experiences of their peers. Cultural differences may apply here, but a few respondents do report having problems with adopting the requisite gender role, as the following example reveals:

I've seen quite a few horror films at the cinema with boys and because I didn't find many frightening I didn't have the typical girl reaction of cringing and allowing them to put their arms round me to comfort me - so they didn't get the chance! But if there's a big bang or loud noise and I jump, they're there as soon as it happens with their arm around me, assuming that I need it, that I'll be scared and they'll take advantage of it. Of course, I'm aware of them doing that, but can sometimes use their stereotypes to my advantage - jump three foot in the air in mock fear during a film to encourage them to initiate something on the date if I want them to. It's easier than swallowing hard and plucking up the courage myself! (ex004)

It is also possible, of course, that in adolescence some respondents hid their liking for horror films and viewed alone, just as they do now. Respondent bfs159 has always watched alone, whilst hh119 'used to watch alone' but now has a boyfriend who also likes horror. A few state that they were only able to admit to a liking for horror when they were older; em103 says she 'used to watch them alone (or with my little brother) because I didn't want people to know I watched them; now I watch as many as possible and don't care who knows.'

One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that, whilst for many adolescent horror female viewers - including some long-term female fans - the gender roles displayed at horror films are a pretence (as Zillman and Weaver indicate), there may also be female fans who do not take part in the dating situation described by Zillman and Weaver, and thus are not subject to this form of gender socialisation. These women would not therefore be observed by researchers such as Zillman and Weaver who concentrate on adolescent cinema audiences. This is not to say that the respondents are not gender socialised in other ways, gender socialisation may be a reason why they keep their taste for horror private and view alone. Many do, for instance, seem to regard their liking for horror as odd. Nevertheless, their horror film viewing is well established. Given, then, that the respondents do not fit the accepted pattern of adolescent horror film viewing, are there other models which might explain the viewing patterns observed in this group of female fans?

5.2 Origins of the taste for horror

As noted in chapter 4, a pattern exists among the respondents: the taste for horror films is frequently dated to a very young age and almost always pre-dates the accepted age for horror film viewing (middle to late adolescence). As pointed out, the films which viewers (occasionally as young as 5 or 6, but

more commonly as older children and young teenagers) are naming as formative in developing a taste for horror are not often (or indeed ever) hard-core, graphic or violent horror films or even films classified as horror. Rather they are films (and sometimes television programmes) which provide a scary experience or present a fantastic or grotesque view of the world. For the respondents who first saw horror films in their pre-adolescent years, such early viewing was of horror films broadcast on terrestrial television channels and most of the films viewed in this way are considered to be relatively innocuous (low-budget and often laughable 'B' monster movies or comedies) or no longer thought to be as frightening or intense as when first made (Universal and Hammer horror films). Frequently they were not horror films at all, but television programmes (often episodic series such as The Twilight Zone or Doctor Who) which contain horrific or scary material. It should be noted that Carroll (1990, p. 3) links the increased markets for horror and horror-related material to the 'affection for horror ... nurtured and deepened by the endless re-runs of the earlier horror and sci-fi cycles that provided the repertoire of the afternoon and late-night television of their youth.' This supposition might be broadened out to include horror-related television programmes; current equivalents would be episodic series such as Goosebumps or Eerie, Indiana which are aimed at a pre-teen audience.

Cantor and Oliver (1996) describe the kinds of material which frightens or otherwise affects children as varying with age. Young children, they suggest, are affected by monsters, whilst older children and adolescents respond to endangerment and physical injury, with adolescents and adults also responding to social, political, economic and global fears. They categorise (pp. 64-9) the major causes of fright responses to horror films to be:

- the prevalence of dangers and injuries;
- distortions of natural forms;
- focus on the fear and endangerment of major characters; and
- arousal-enhancing stylistic techniques¹.

By and large, this model supports the pattern among the respondents who started viewing scary material at an early age.

I The childhood taste for scary material

Becoming interested in and subsequently developing a liking for horrific or frightening material generally (as opposed to horror films specifically) during childhood is often dated to a specific viewing experience. Typically, this is a

film or television programme which initially induced an extreme fright response but which was later dealt with by the child in such a way that she wanted to repeat the experience. The film or programme causing such a reaction may have been one aimed at an adult audience but was just as likely to have been a children's film or programme. Some respondents can name the programmes that scared them or attracted them to horrific material and the majority of these are Disney films, children's science fiction serials or adult science fiction films or television programmes. There is a sense in which these examples are taken as cannon within fan discourse, as when respondent bfs144 says that the origins of her taste for horror arose through 'the usual - Doctor Who, the original television version of 1984.' Other respondents who are not so involved in fandom cannot always name the programmes or films they regard as formative:

I can't remember what they're called. There was one where the statues came to life and there were people walking around with masks and I thought that was so scary. Things like that you don't really think of as horror but... (fg201)

What this respondent remembers more than the programme itself is the feeling of being scared. For most of the respondents, being scared was not an entirely negative experience and they enjoyed the emotional affects. For some a liking for being scared arose gradually, as for st101: 'Even though I was terrified in the first instance I gradually found that I liked this feeling.' Liking being scared in this way is often put down to the fact that the material was known to be fictional, respondent hh104 says: 'I liked the feeling of being scared, but knew it was 'safe scary' if it was on television.' This accords with Carroll's (1990) theory of art horror. There is also a strong fascination for the characters which they were scared by, respondent ed101 states: 'When I was very young (about 5 or 6) I was scared by the cybermen on Doctor Who, but I liked it. I was also scared by the witch in Snow White, but later became fascinated by her.' The fact that the formative viewing experiences took place within the family is also important for many of the respondents; hh113 is typical: 'It started when I was very young with Hammer films on television (my mother was quite lenient as to what I could watch).' These comments raise a number of points:

- that scary material is not always that designated as horror (or, indeed, that designated as adult);
- that children may have a fascination with (fictional) images, characters or stories that scare them;

- that they may like the scary feelings induced by these images or stories;
- that the memories of the emotion itself may be stronger than the memories of the material that scared them;
- that being scared may involve some level of pretence, or at least the acknowledgement that the scares are safe because they are fictional; and
- that parents may condone the watching of scary material.

As illustrated by fg201 above, it seems to be generally recognised by the respondents themselves that the material they found scary as children would not normally be classified as horror (the BBC version of 1984, for example). Nevertheless, for many respondents it does mark the start of their liking for horror and emotional affect would appear to be a crucial aspect of this. Some respondents clearly remember the emotion (fg201, st101) but have forgotten the specific film or programme which caused it (although they may remember the specific image or story element). This would seem to suggest that being scared is in itself the main pleasure, not the particular programme, film or genre. This would explain the broad definition of what constitutes the genre as seen in chapter 4. It also underlines the argument that being scared and learning to deal with fictional scares can be a part of a normal childhood, although it is perhaps difficult for some parents to see and deal with a child frightened by fictional material, as illustrated by the following response:

My liking for horror films developed from an early age by watching programmes such as Doctor Who, The Prisoner, Outer Limits, The Twilight Zone, etc. The Daleks scared me so much I used to hide behind chairs, but used also to create a fuss if my dad went to turn it off. (hh104)

This participant reports feeling scared - enough to make her hide behind a chair - but does not appear to want that feeling to end - she will not let her father turn the television off. This would seem to imply that she enjoys the feeling in some way and in the above statement links this to her continuing liking for scary material. It also suggests that despite physically acting out her fear she knew that she was safe because what was scaring her was a television programme (and obviously fictional) and that the source of her fright did not therefore need to be removed. Many participants report similar responses (including watching from under tables and from behind cushions).² The liking for horror, even as a young child, does involve an element of play acting at being scared, possibly because it elided the real fear, as is suggested by the following participant whose comment implies a confusion or contradiction as to whether her feelings were real or pretend or both:

I remember watching Doctor Who when I was small, that was playing at being scared, sitting behind the couch because I knew I was supposed to be frightened and I was frightened and I was like 'aaaaagh' every time the Daleks did something or whatever. That's probably the first thing I can remember watching in that sort of way. (fg201)

Despite this evidence being based on adult memories of childhood (and, therefore, spoken with hindsight or filtered through other discourses such as, in this case, Doctor Who fandom and media representations of fans), these examples support the argument that children are by and large fully aware of the difference between real life and fictional material, are aware of how they should behave when watching such material, and know that they cannot really be harmed by what they see on television.³ Although such material did scare them (sometimes quite severely), many respondents mention the dual feelings of fear and fascination and the paradoxical enjoyment of being scared. In addition, the majority of respondents have been drawn to the horrific for as long as they can remember, saying, for example: 'I've always been attracted to horror' (em110); 'I can only remember a vague sense of fear and fascination [which has] been with me forever' (ex004); or 'I have always been interested in horror and the supernatural - even as a small child my favourite books, comics, films and cartoons involved witches, ghosts, vampires and so on.' (hh106). Many do not know how or why this developed, as em106 says: 'I'd say that the attraction to creepiness and horror is something I was born with or learned by the age of 4,' but most feel it is a natural part of their personality. This early liking for horror is also mentioned as having developed through reading as well as films and television, bfs132 says: 'It grew from an interest in horror/supernatural fiction which I'd had since I learned to read at age 5.'

The taste for fictional horror developing at such an early age does raise questions (whether it is possible to be born with a liking for horror and to what extent parental influence accounts for the taste) which it is not possible to investigate further here. However, the majority of participants assume that an attraction to the dark side or a macabre streak is, and always has been, a large part of their personality. Respondent em126 assumes 'it's just a macabre personality I have... I remember reading Poe when I was six and loving it because it made me feel chilled inside.' It seems that a taste for such material can be instilled and fostered during the pre-school years possibly by

the behaviour of close relatives who also enjoy horror and related material (this is explored further in point II below).

The films that the respondents mention viewing as children are mainly older horror films containing supernatural monsters rather than that human slashers and stalkers of more recent horror cycles. Many respondents mention the supernatural generally as being attractive to them as children and the types of material mentioned as being frightening at an early age often involve fairy tale-like monsters or grotesque creatures (witches and Daleks being the most frequently named). The common childhood fear of the dark is also linked by some respondents in this study to the beginnings of their liking for horror:

I was afraid of the dark and had to sleep with lights on until I was about 11 or 12. One night I just told my mom to turn off the lights. Now I love the darkness. (em122)

Interestingly, this respondent notes a reversal from being afraid of the dark to loving darkness in much the same way as a fright response to a horror film or television programme is later reversed into a fascination with the genre. This might indicate that the propensity to develop a liking for horror is linked to the ability to overcome personal phobias.

Of Cantor and Oliver's categories, the second (distortions of natural forms) seems to be most crucial in the respondents' experiences in early childhood. Most of the examples the respondents' name as frightening fall into this category and take in the ghosts, witches and Doctor Who monsters mentioned above. Cantor and Oliver (p. 69) found that children up to the age of eight were frightened by the fantastic (for example, the dark, or supernatural occurrences and beings) and grotesque monsters (animals, mythological creatures, monsters, witches, etc.). Many films and other fictional material aimed at young children employ such elements (for example, The Wizard of Oz, Roald Dahl's fiction, traditional fairy stories and Disney films) and are widely thought to help children learn to deal with real life situations (see Bettelheim, 1988).

Disturbing, although otherwise unhorrific, instances in mainstream films or television programmes are also mentioned as being part of the childhood experiences with horror:

The thing that gave me the most nightmares when I was growing up was watching The Tale of Two Cities, there were aristocrats in a carriage and the horses ran over a small child and that gave me nightmares for years. (fg201)

I can remember having this dream about Battleship Potemkin. It's the first dream I remember having. I must have watched it when I was 6, I remember dreaming of that scene with the people coming down the stairs and being shot, that was horrible for me. It doesn't appear very scary now, but it was then. Big staring eyes... Maybe because it was black and white. (fg202)

The fact that a classic BBC serial and a silent film (as well as other children's films and programmes) can scare children suggests that parents cannot entirely protect their children from being frightened simply by restricting their viewing to non-horror films and television programmes. Instances of fright are just as likely to be found in mainstream programming and Cantor and Oliver's triggers of fright for younger children (those under 8 years of age), particularly the first - the prevalence of dangers and injuries, should be taken in a wider context, and not restricted solely to horror films. Cantor and Oliver (p. 70) also suggest that the younger children will be more responsive to 'the visually grotesque aspects of horror film stimuli.' This may help to explain the example given by fg202 above of being scared by the Odessa Steps sequence of Battleship Potemkin - the element she vividly recalls is the staring eyes which may have seemed grotesque to a child. The comment from fg201 also suggests that younger children can be disturbed by threats of danger and injury particularly, as is the case here, if the threatened character is a child of similar age.

As noted above, a large part of dealing with fright for children in many cases seems to be the reactions of parents or other responsible adults either to the material itself or to the reactions of the child. This study does not intend to investigate whether nurture or nature is the cause of a liking for horror, but it does seem that in many cases it can be passed on from parent, other close relative or older sibling. Having an adult help the respondent through a frightening fictional experience as a child seems to be an important element of developing a taste for horror films and fiction, but there are also indications that the acceptability of allowing children to view frightening material is another factor. The latter is an extremely important issue in contemporary British society which seeks to censor the media and prevent children from gaining access to violent or horrific material.

II Parental involvement in the viewing of horror

Cantor and Oliver (1996, p. 75) state that 'research on coping with media-induced fears indicates that the presence of a caring adult and discussion with a parent are potent fear reducers for children.' This may explain the high

incidence among the female horror fans of respondents who mention having a horror or science fiction fan for a parent (this is just as likely to be a mother as a father, thus providing a female role model). Since these parents could presumably deal with their own fear, they were in a position to help their children deal with theirs when it occurred and they may well have fostered or encouraged the child's fascination for horror. A parent who cannot themselves deal with frightening material is less likely to have the ability to relieve their child's fears. The child may also be imitating the parent, both in its own emotional responses to fictional material and in liking or disliking similar types of film, books or television programmes. Undoubtedly, some children like being frightened and this may be a learnt response (an imitation of one or more of their close relatives - who may equally be an elder sibling - who were seen to enjoy horror). Several respondents mention their parents or other close relatives introducing them to horror at an early age, hh003 says that 'since the age of 5, at which time my mother took me to see Jason and the Argonauts, I have been firmly plugged in to the Horror/Fantasy screen scene' and ex004 remembers that:

When I was 6 I was allowed to stay up late and watch television with my mother from time to time. Films like The Medusa Touch, Rosemary's Baby, The Amityville Horror and the looming figure of Vincent Price are very vivid memories. (ex004)

This example could be considered bad parenting, but it seems that the parent concerned - although perhaps unusually lenient by conservative socio-political standards - thought such material acceptable childhood viewing and, more importantly, supervised their child during viewing. Given a situation where parents are condoning, or at least not forbidding, the viewing of horror and other horrific material, how much does the parent influence the child in its likes or dislikes? There may, of course, be many cases of children whose parents introduce them to scary material who do not go on to become long term fans of the horror genre. One possibility is that the preponderance of such material available in the home (especially on television) and its acceptance as part of popular culture reinforces the taste for horror. The situation of viewing horror-related material on television at an early age, often instigated or condoned by parents, reinforces Carroll's supposition (1990, p. 3) that large audiences for the horror film from the 70s onwards had their origins in changes within society and entertainment in the 60s. He hypothesises that the 'affection for horror' amongst the baby-boom audience, 'the first post-war generation raised by television', was:

nurtured and deepened by the endless reruns of the earlier horror and sci-fi cycles that provided the repertoire of the ... television of their youth. This generation has, in turn, raised the next on a diet of horror entertainments whose imagery suffuses the culture.

Whilst there are some women in this study who are in their fifties or older, a high percentage (85 per cent) of respondents are under forty-years-old, making them children during the 60s and subsequent decades and putting them into the television generations Carroll describes.⁴ Although Carroll is writing about the situation in the US, British television channels have adopted similar patterns - although in the UK the relevant material tends to include Hammer horror films, as well as US imports including low budget SF/horror films, series such as The Twilight Zone and the Universal horror films. The current preponderance of horror-related programming for children (especially on the burgeoning satellite and cable networks) continues the trend noted by Carroll. Such programmes include Goosebumps (based on the pre-teen fiction series), Alone in the Dark (a Goosebumps-like anthology series), Eerie, Indiana (an X-Files-style programme for children) and Big Bad Beetleborgs (featuring classic horror monsters), as well as animated cartoons based on films such as Ghostbusters, Attack of the Killer Tomatoes and Toxic Avenger. In addition, horror film merchandise, including a series of figures based on the creature from the Alien films and Freddy Kruger (A Nightmare on Elm Street) gloves and Halloween costumes, is available to children. The environment of horror which Carroll describes is even more relevant today. The frequent viewing of horror, science fiction and fantasy television programmes or consumption of associated merchandise in childhood, supported by parental approval, would seem to be a strong indicator of a subsequent liking for horror.

Even where a parent is not mentioned specifically as liking horror themselves, their method for dealing with a child's fright is important. The response of the parent in a case where a child has been frightened by something she watched is, according to Cantor and Oliver, crucially important to how well the child learns to deal with her fears. In the following example, the respondent experienced an extreme fright reaction but was eventually able to deal with it through the actions of close family members. This example also illustrates that an adverse emotional affect - in this case to a frightening depiction of an insect infestation - may be extreme but not long term. The experience occurred at around eight-years-old (an age at which the child is

still susceptible to fears caused by monsters but perhaps also becoming subject to fears about danger and injury):

I joke about the Night Gallery earwig episode giving me a nightmare but it was really nightmares, a whole summers worth. It didn't matter that I was no longer allowed to watch the show, I wouldn't have anyway. I was a wreck. My grandmother and mother finally had me watch from the door to my room while they sprayed insecticide everywhere. That seemed to do the trick. (ex001)

This respondent, although initially very frightened, having dealt with the fright then became very taken with the programme that had frightened her (she also states that she now jokes about it and thus makes light of its effect on her):

I didn't watch Night Gallery again until the following year, and loved it. I even remember that first return episode. Something about a little girl and her monster friend (who looked like the nice monster from Sigmund and the Sea Monsters) and how the townspeople wall up the monster in a stone mound. The last scene has the girl talking to the mound.

The episode which this respondent remembers liking is about a non-human but friendly monster and was not frightening in the same way that the depiction of all too real insects was; this concurs with Cantor and Oliver's description of what frightens seven to nine-year-olds. It is also worth noting that the respondent's family helped her to deal with her initial fears by pretending to get rid of the source of the fright. This respondent's fascination for the genre continued and she also relates her experience of watching her first adult horror films at twelve-years-old (at which age, in Cantor and Oliver's model, the child is more likely to be frightened by instances of physical danger and death):

I saw Clockwork Orange at age twelve which was certainly too young for me. I was watching something I knew I shouldn't be. My cousin wanted to see it and knew my uncle had it on video. So John and I hid in the back room at Uncle Gary's house worried that we would get caught and watched the movie. I was not happy by the end. I started crying and couldn't stop. My uncle was so upset, he finally calmed me down by distracting me with another movie. It turned out to be Notorious which started my love of Hitchcock. (ex001)

Whilst Clockwork Orange is not specifically a horror film and does not contain any instances of monsters or grotesque creatures, it contains many scenes of extreme violence and is a film which a 12-year-old might have great

difficulty dealing with. A number of points relevant to this study should be noted here:

- The respondent links her liking for one form of horror-related material (Hitchcock films) to this experience, just as she links her earlier liking for Night Gallery to a distressing experience. This indicates that a liking for horror may be inextricably linked to being frightened, and later realising that the fright can be controlled and enjoyed.
- The respondent's uncle showed her another film to alleviate her distress (perhaps, reinforcing the fact that she was only watching fictional movies). This undoubtedly helped her deal with her fright.
- One of the main reasons given for watching the frightening material was that it was forbidden. In this case, the respondent notes that she was sheltered as a child, but children and teenagers are often drawn to taboo material.
- This example also illustrates a problem with having 18 certificated videos in the home. The banning or restriction of videos does not necessarily mean that children will never gain access to them - as this case illustrates (Clockwork Orange not being available legally in the UK, although copies can be imported from the Continent).

The penultimate point is supported by the fact that many horror films are designed for the adolescent audience and often appear to be widely condemned by adults, especially authority figures. The liking of horror is thus taboo and linked to rebellion. Getting into a cinema to see an 18 film when underage is a large part of the appeal of these films, as shown by respondent fg405's comment that: 'it was a great experience getting in to see an 18 film.' This factor does not apply only to horror films, as respondent fg403 explains: 'I remember going to see Fatal Attraction and our faces were plastered in make-up. We were so chuffed to have got in to see this film when we weren't 18 and it was wonderful.' This factor must not be underestimated as one reason why older children and teenagers want to see horror films (and other 18 certificated material) at the cinema. It might be expected, however, that since many of the respondents were encouraged by their parents or had parents who themselves liked horror, they were less likely to employ horror film viewing in adolescence as a form of rebellion and this may be another reason why they did not take part in adolescent horror film viewing rituals. On the other hand, those respondents whose parents did not condone the viewing of horror became attracted to the genre as forbidden fruit and their horror film viewing was often illicit. Parental rules against viewing horror films as reported by the respondents varied in their intensity, some parents permitting such activities to continue whilst not openly condoning it, others

making their dislike for horror explicit and forcing the child into more devious means of viewing. Respondent fg302 said:

My mum was really religious and she was totally against it. I'd go to my grandmother's house, she had all these video nasties, Driller Killer and Evil Dead, she'd had these videos before they were banned, and she'd let me watch them. I watched Driller Killer at my grandmother's house in Glasgow.

It is usually older children - since they will be allowed more freedoms - who gain pleasure from such illicit activities, although the respondent below claims to have been seven-years-old when she first started to watch Hammer films at her best friend's house:

Once a week I stopped over at her house, she had a television in her room and we would diligently remain awake to discover the latest mummy's curse, Frankenstein's latest plot and last but not least what the enchanting Count was up to. I don't ever remember feeling frightened, only excited. [We] thought ourselves so clever, never being caught watching these films and from the reaction of our contemporaries at the time thought we'd be in deep trouble. Years later we realised that a vent connecting [my friend]'s room with her mother's meant that her mum must have known all along. To this day I still think 'cool mum.' Those films certainly never did me any harm. (hh102)

As pointed out in chapter 4, many of the respondents who did not watch horror films prior to their middle to late teens because of parental prohibitions still dated their liking for horror from early childhood. They made up for not watching horror films by reading horror fiction and then catching up with the films when they were considered old enough by their parents or were no longer subject to parental control (see below for more details).

III The developing taste for horror in older children and adolescents

Older children are thought by Cantor and Oliver (1996) to be scared by situations of physical danger and death. They state (p. 73) that the fantastic elements of horror films 'should diminish in their ability to frighten as children mature,' with the other elements taking over. Given this model (that older children and teenagers are not frightened so much by the supernatural and grotesque as by injury, destruction or death), the typical adolescent preference for slasher or gore films is underlined. It seems that the respondents, however, remain fascinated by monstrosity and the supernatural throughout childhood and adolescence and into adulthood, although the fear induced by such elements does diminish. The main trends among the respondents in factors which fascinated them or drew them to horror as older children and adolescents, and continue to fascinate them as adults, include a

strong interest in an area which can be related to horror in some way. Frequently mentioned in this context are mythology and archaeology (particularly, in both cases, Egyptian); paganism, witchcraft or Wicca; and vampirism. For some respondents, as for hh102, this interest mixes fact and fiction:

I began to watch horror partly because as a child I wasn't supposed to, but mainly because I had started to enjoy reading literature related to horror: ghost stories, books on hauntings and books of a historical nature - for example, books on Egypt, which led inevitably to the legends of mummies. Upon reading of curses, like Tutankhamun, and of ghosts, vampires and werewolves, watching the films was a natural progression. As a child I found these stories, legends and myths exciting and more than a little intriguing. That excitement has always stayed with me. That such tales are still told and re-told today with such enthusiasm by film makers and writers reflects my own enthusiasm for the unknown. (hh102)

For others, as for em235, there can be an interest in a factual subject: 'I've been into horror since I was eleven-years-old, and checked out all kinds of books on witchcraft from the library. My mother sat me down and had a serious talk about messing with that stuff.'

Other reasons given for watching horror films in adolescence include:

- moving on from science fiction or fantasy to horror;
- the continued enjoyment of Hammer horror films (possibly related to sexuality);
- the chance to indulge an interest they had previously had in horror but which they were not allowed to indulge because of parental disapproval; and, to a lesser extent,
- peer pressure.

Many respondents state that an interest in a genre closely related to horror, usually science fiction or fantasy (although respondent hh112 also names disaster films in this context), eventually led them on to horror. They see this, in respondent hh112's words, as 'a natural progression.' Frequently, this progression starts with their reading material as the following comments indicate:

I graduated to films after reading C. S. Lewis and then all the yellow Gollancz SF books in the school library when I was about eleven. Horror was a natural adjunct to that. Part of the appeal of Gollancz was that their covers were very distinctive and easy to find, I distinctly remember that. That was how I first came across John Wyndham, whom I suppose is a cross between SF and horror. I still remember The Chrysalids which made a major

impact on me for its imaginative strangeness, but I've never re-read it so as not to break that spell. (in101)

Respondent bfs136 started reading her older brother's Edgar Allan Poe collection when she was 12: 'This was followed by Dracula and then anything "spooky" I could lay my hands on. Obviously, I longed to see it all on screen, so as soon as I could pass for ... 16 I began movie going.' Those respondents who were forbidden by parents to watch horror films as children had, as here, a fascination with horror which pre-dated their being able to view horror films. Their attraction to the genre seems to be very similar to that of the respondents who watched horror in early childhood, as shown by the following comment:

My parents did not allow me to watch until I was sixteen but after that I was allowed to decide for myself. I have always enjoyed ghost stories and horror stories and I collected books about ghosts and vampires years before I was allowed to watch horror films. (hh116)

In addition, one factor which a small number of respondents mention as a causative factor in liking horror are friends or boyfriends who introduced them to the genre. Respondent bfs102 is one of the few subjects who developed a liking for horror at a relatively older age: 'As a student, my best friend enjoyed horror films, so I started going with her.' However, it is more common for such peer pressure to work on those with who already have an interest in horror, as with respondent bfs101:

I started reading writers like James Herbert when I was about fourteen but I couldn't go to the cinema then (I looked young for my age so I couldn't 'sneak' in). I also had a school friend whose parents let her watch horror films on television and she used to tell me about them. Then my first boyfriend came along when I was 16 and it was he who introduced me to horror films.

The accepted pattern of adolescent horror film viewing driven by peer pressure is much rarer than other reasons given by the respondents, and where peer pressure is a factor it does not rule out expressions of mastery over horror. The model of gender socialisation set out above, in particular teenage girls being expected to show a dislike of horror, does not accommodate viewers who have a taste for horror predating their teens and are unwilling to play the protectee. Whilst this may indicate immasculation, it is just as likely that there is a failure to recognise that girls can have a liking for horror (even though other evidence, as presented in chapter 1, suggests they are). There may be other explanations for this situation, not least that

since many recent horror film cycles (including slasher and other films associated with teenage audiences) depict women as victims, the young female horror fan may choose not to watch such films, preferring to watch other types of horror film (such as Hammer) on television or video. There is no evidence that the younger respondents (closer in age to the intended slasher film audience) like slasher films more than older respondents. Certainly, there are no significant differences between the age groups in preferences for slasher films ($\chi^2 = 11.73175$, ns) or Hammer films ($\chi^2 = 4.12047$, ns); slasher films are liked least even amongst the younger subjects and there are no significant variations across the age groups for any other type of horror film.

What remains clear is that the vast majority of respondents, regardless of the age at which they first started viewing horror films, are fascinated by horror and fantasy themes and this is linked to an interest in related historical, New Age or paranormal subjects. It does not seem either that their preferences for particular types of horror change with age. However, there do seem to be crucial differences, which arise during childhood, between the female horror fans and followers studied here and the accepted model of adolescent horror film viewers.

5.2.1 Sensation seeking and risk thresholds

Since the respondents have liked horror from an early age and have learnt to deal with (and enjoy) their fear, aspects of horror films which are expected to frighten them as older children, adolescents and adults may be less likely to be sources of extreme fright. As *bfs101* says, part of the attraction of watching horror films was 'getting inured to the goriness, toughening up.' Although as children the survey participants were in most cases not watching hard core horror films, they were viewing material which induced fright responses and they accept this as an enjoyable childhood experience. These respondents appear to have developed a liking for the fright response itself as well as the films (or television programmes) which generated this emotion. These experiences, which are for many extremely memorable, were pleasurable and may be the origination of what Carroll (p. 8) calls the 'paradox of horror' - the enjoyment of watching something which is not in itself pleasurable. It may be that the respondents were able to deal with their emotions in a way that other children (who did not subsequently become horror fans) did not. The research into sensation seeking and risk thresholds

could offer one explanation for this. Sensation seeking is defined by Zuckerman (1996, p. 148) as 'a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experience'. Zuckerman defines four factors on his sensation seeking scale (SSS): (i) thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), (ii) experience seeking (ES), (iii) disinhibition (Dis) and (iv) boredom susceptibility (BS) (see also Zuckerman et al., 1964, Zuckerman, 1971 & Zuckerman et al., 1978). In many studies that have been undertaken, women tended to score lower than men on the SSS total - possibly explaining why women are more inclined to like certain types of supernatural or psychological horror film rather than violent and graphic examples of the genre. Men in the same studies scored higher overall on the TAS, Dis and BS scales, but scored equally with women on the ES scale. Experience seeking, defined as 'the desire to seek experience through the mind and senses and through an unconventional lifestyle shared with unconventional persons' (Zuckerman, 1996, p. 148), may thus be a more likely factor in women's liking for horror, particularly in light of their preferences for vampire, supernatural and psychological horror films and for their high levels of participation in vampire fandom and Goth subculture (see chapter 7).

Zuckerman (p. 152), drawing on evidence from Tamborini and Stiff (1987) and Tamborini et al. (1987), concludes that (among college students) 'interest in horror films correlated significantly with all of the SSS scales, with the Dis scale having the strongest relationship.' Attendance at horror films correlated most strongly with the Dis and TAS scales in both men and women. What is not clear from these studies is whether the Dis and TAS scores are higher for women who reported attendance at horror films than for those who expressed a dislike of such films. The results may also be flawed in that slasher films were still the most prevalent form of horror at the time Edward's study was carried out and, as has been shown, female viewers may be less likely to enjoy this type of horror film. It was outside the scope of this study to determine the sensation seeking scores of the participants, however many respondents' comments are typical of sensation seeking. An adrenaline rush is frequently mentioned as one reason why they watch horror films, which would possibly indicate thrill and adventure seeking (which Zuckerman defines as 'a desire to engage in certain kinds of risky sports or activities involving speed, defiance of gravity and exploration of novel

environments', physical engagement in such activities not actually having to take place). This behaviour may be behind comments such as respondent em115's that horror films 'excite me, much as very violent movies like Reservoir Dogs do - a real adrenaline rush' and bfs101 who says 'I found that I enjoyed the sensations - the tension, being made to jump.' The respondents also relate these sensations to being both safe and a safety valve:

The pulse races, the heartbeat increases - a definite adrenaline rush. Horror films are an adrenaline buzz without leaving the armchair, and they present us with nasty things we never ever expect to see in real life without the guilt of mentally 'passing by on the other side.' (bfs123)

Serial killer/psychological films I find most exciting; the biggest adrenaline rush. Usually I'm excited and elated, if it's been a good film. If it's been a particularly good film, the adrenaline rush usually leaves one feeling happy, excited and conversely helps relieve the daily stresses and tensions helping to sublimate tensions and anger in a positive harmless fashion. (hh104)

The hobbies and pastimes that the respondents participate in do not otherwise indicate any great level of thrill and adventure seeking (though this is recognised by Zuckerman as often being the case), however, a degree of disinhibition (that is 'a social-hedonistic philosophy ... seeking pleasure through partying, sex, gambling, and social drinking'; again either participation in the actual activities or an unfulfilled desire indicates disinhibition) is indicated for some. These respondents mention activities such as 'socialising' (vs204), 'getting drunk' (hh102) and 'bar drinking and clubbing' (vs210) among their pastimes and hobbies. Sports or physical activities which some respondents take part in and which may be deemed risky (at least for women) are rugby, football, judo and other martial arts, and snowboarding (see chapter 4 for more details on the respondents' hobbies). However, overall, few of the participants (approximately 11 per cent) regard themselves as athletic and a similar number (12 per cent) participate in team or competitive sports such as those listed above.

The link between boredom susceptibility ('an aversion to boredom produced by sameness or routine whether in work or in personal relationships and a restlessness when experience is constant' (Zuckerman, p. 149)) and attendance at horror films may be related to the finding from the BFI survey (Docherty et al, 1987) which established a link between having a boring job and a liking for horror films. This link is confirmed by the 48 per cent of respondents in this study who agree or agree strongly with the statement

'horror films relieve the tedium of my everyday life' (against 32 per cent who disagreed or disagreed strongly and 18 per cent who had no opinion one way or the other).

The sensation seeking research also determined (Zuckerman, p. 158) that individuals who achieve low scores on the SSS who do expose themselves to horror films may learn to enjoy them once they have become desensitised to them. This does not seem to be a key factor for any of the women contributing to this study (such women are unlikely to have been recruited), almost all having had a prior taste for horror. Habituation would not explain the change from extreme fright into fascination for horror reported by many of the respondents in early childhood, especially since for many of these women the change occurred over one or two occasions and the individuals concerned state that it was the fact that they realised they liked being frightened which was the key for them. This accords with Zuckerman's supposition (p. 157) that sensation seekers 'might react to brief arousal spurts, even to points above the optimal level, as fun, whereas the low sensation seeker might react to any increase above the optimal level as unpleasant.' It would seem, then, that many of the respondents are likely to be sensation seekers.

Though there are indications that the participants may be sensation seekers, discrepancies remain between the findings of this study and research into sensation seeking, most importantly Zuckerman's assertion that sensation seekers seem to quickly tire of horror films. However, the groups studied by Zuckerman and others were college students viewing slasher and gore films and therefore likely to come from the typical horror film audience, which might be expected to lose interest in horror films once they are in their twenties rather than the group of long-term horror fans which the respondents fall into. Desensitisation could however explain the liking for many of the women for more imaginative and unusual horror films, and the fact that some seek out more explicit or hard-core films which will allow them to experience the extreme fright they felt as children (see the discussion on emotional affects below). Sensation seeking then, may be a factor in the respondents' taste for horror, but is unlikely to be the only one. As respondent bfs101's quote (above) indicates, one reason for watching horror is to stretch one's own boundaries. This relates to theories of risk and viewers' testing of their personal risk thresholds (see Hill, 1998). In Hill's model, viewers test their

limits as to what and how much they can subject themselves to by watching violent films. This seems to be a factor for some of the respondents, as this quotes from respondent em121 illustrates:

If I think a movie will have scenes which I may not be able to handle (forget Reservoir Dogs - big shudder) I do one of three things - watch it with someone who has seen it and will warn me, send a friend to see it first and then watch it with that friend, or wait for the video and fast forward through the stuff I can't deal with.

The viewing practice described by em121 conforms to Hill's findings on risk thresholds and viewing choices; despite stating that there are very few films which she cannot watch (and the one film she mentions in this context is an example of Hill's New Brutalist films), she nevertheless chooses to view those films, albeit under special circumstances which offer her some protection from images which are beyond her threshold. This is not the case however for many of the respondents. Respondent em105 says: 'I ... like to figure out why something is frightening to me. And I like to think about frightening scenes; it's like toying with those dark, dangerous recesses of the mind.' This example suggests that some respondents confront and explore what frightens them rather than self-censoring in the way em121 does. Again, this emphasises variations from the models of horror film spectatorship offered elsewhere and indicates that fascination with horror might be a foundation of the profile of horror film fans and followers.

Other recognised factors in a liking for horror are curiosity about morbid events (CAME) and curiosity about sexual events (CASE) and these can both be observed amongst the respondents. However, Zuckerman and Litle (1986) found that women achieved lower scores on both CAME and CASE. For women, CAME correlated with horror film attendance and CASE with sex film attendance (for males, CAME and CASE both correlated with both types of films). Again, this may be explained by the fact that the studies were concerned with slasher and gore films (specifically, Halloween and The Texas Chain Saw Massacre) which the respondents like less than other types of horror films and suggests that the results obtained by Zuckerman and Litle may be skewed. Their results suggest that women who like horror films will be attracted to them more out of morbid curiosity, but less out of sexual curiosity. In fact, both factors seem to be high for the women taking part in this study and for many respondents sexual curiosity seems to play a major part in their liking for vampire films and Gothic horror films in particular.

Some respondents indicated high levels of morbid curiosity in childhood to which they attributed their liking for horror:

I became obsessed with all kinds of morbidity. I became well-versed in the old witch persecutions and methods of torture and execution, and investigated a career in mortuary science! Along with this came an interest in horror, especially vampire films. I recovered from my morbid adolescence, but I'm still pretty enamoured of the dark side and squeamish about very little. (em122)

I used to hold funerals for my dolls and later made coffins for the dolls I considered vampires. Many of my favourite children's books were about Halloween or witches. I had a wild imagination as a child and would imagine the most hideous things happened to my parents if they were even five minutes late. My love of horror was always a two-edged knife when I was young. I tended to be a bit morbid and very fascinated with the supernatural and occult and UFOs. (em106)

It may be that the attraction of many of the participants to the Goth subculture and vampire fandom is related to high levels of CAME. The sexual or erotic aspects of horror films are also an attraction of the genre: respondent em122 likes 'the erotic in horror films, whether it involves specifically sex or simply sensuality,' bfs159 finds some horror films 'sexually arousing,' and fg401 thinks that the appeal of vampire films in particular 'must be sexual - it's not something you actually think about - why you like them, but I think it probably is the erotic side of them.' As evidenced by the high proportion of females in the audience for films such as Bram Stoker's Dracula, it might be concluded that sex, eroticism and romance were the most important factors. However, for many respondents these elements must be mixed with other generic conventions of horror, as for respondent em123: 'I like a decent mix of bloodshed, suspense, sex, sensuality and a really good bad guy.'

It appears likely then that the respondents have high levels of both CAME and CASE and watch horror to see sexual or erotic events as well as morbid events. This may not necessarily imply immasculation, but may indicate a feminine form of horror film spectatorship. The attraction of horror for female viewers seems to be related to a particular form of feminine consumption, namely that of Gothic romance fiction. The viewing patterns and preferences of the respondents tend to be closer to other female viewing or reading strategies than might be expected. Gender roles may thus play a large part in the liking for horror, though not necessarily in ways previously suggested by the theoretical research.

5.3 Visual pleasures and modes of physical and emotional affect

How then do the female fans and followers respond to horror? Are their responses similar to those attributed to female spectators; do they show evidence of a male spectatorial position; or are there any patterns which can be identified as active female horror film spectatorship? The modes of affect of horror are wide ranging and include affects associated with other genres - namely, suspense (or the 'thrilling of intelligibility', as Barthes, 1978, termed it) and laughter, but are generally accepted to principally take the form of fright or terror (being made to jump or otherwise physically respond, or experiencing horripilation, the shiver sensation). In certain groups of horror film, notably examples of the gore film, body horror or other horror films with detailed and graphic special effects, the mode of affect may be revulsion or nausea. With all types of horror film, one of the most frequently acknowledged responses to horror is the blocking of vision or turning away from the images on the screen. Horror films are also thought to be emotionally cathartic and their role as a form of escapism or phantasy must be considered. A morbid fascination with the elements of horror may also be present. Carroll (1990, p. 27) describes the emotional affect of fictional horror as 'art horror', that is 'some state of abnormal, physically felt agitation' caused by the thought that the monster is 'a possible being' with the property of 'being impure' accompanied by the 'desire to avoid the touch of things like' the monster, whilst Twitchell (1985, p. 8) uses the term 'artificial horror' which he describes as 'what an audience searches for in a verbal or visual text when it wants a particular kind of frisson without much intellectual explanation or sophistication.' There are problems with both these positions. Carroll's definition, which requires that the monster is both threatening and disgusting (p. 28), excludes emotional affects which many of the respondents report as part of their responses to horror which they find pleasurable, not least the sympathetic appeal of the monster, whilst many (as shown above) also state that they look for far more than a simple frisson as Twitchell claims. Whilst fear, physical revulsion and the shiver sensation are undoubtedly major elements of art horror, they are not the only modes of affect this group of horror film viewers seek; other responses which are present primarily include erotic arousal and inspiration for the imagination or fantasy life.

A further important feature which must be addressed is that the supposedly unpleasant emotional responses to horror cinema are pleasurable for the horror aficionados; this is what Carroll (p. 8) has termed 'paradoxes of the

heart' and in his discussion of this he poses the questions 'how can anyone be frightened by what they know does not exist?' and 'why would anyone ever be interested in horror, since being horrified is so unpleasant?' The paradox of horror must include the problematic female viewer who - in contrast to the responses of the theoretical spectatrix - experiences pleasure in looking at the monstrous body or at the violated body of the victim.

5.3.1 Feminine viewing responses

The accepted responses of the horror film spectatrix (see chapters 2) are extreme fear and a blocking or averting of the gaze. Neither of these responses seem to be common amongst the respondents. Refusing to look is clearly not the case amongst this group of viewers (assuming that they are not attempting to appear braver than might be the case in reality - however, this is not borne out by their comments on their viewing practices and responses). It may be, though, that since this is a group of desensitised viewers (as shown in chapter 4 and explored further above, most respondents have been watching horror since childhood) they would not be expected to flinch at horrific or terrifying images in horror films. Whilst bearing the desensitisation factor in mind, it is significant that two-thirds of the respondents claim not to shut their eyes or look away during horror film viewing, with over 41 per cent stating that they rarely or never look away. Certainly, most enjoy horrific or terrifying images and, as shown above, there is a strong fascination with images of monstrosity.

Refusing to look and other self-censorship devices are mentioned by a small number of the respondents, but these are not always an unambiguous looking away or blocking of sight. Some respondents adopt particular strategies for self-protection; respondent em112 says 'I'll spend most of the scarier parts watching through my fingers on really scary movies, then I'll laugh my head off almost as soon as it's over' and hh118 says 'most horror films scare me silly, I watch them from behind a pillow when they get too gory.' These comments are revealing because although the respondents employ some form of blocked gaze as a method for self-censorship, they both state that they 'watch' through or from behind the protecting object (here, fingers or cushion). This indicates a form of potential rather than actual visual blockage, to be used only should the images become too disturbing to them, as though an easily accessible barrier offers comfort here rather than an actual blocking of sight. Other respondents employ comforting strategies which do

not involve the potential blocking of vision: hh116 says 'I sit on the floor, because otherwise I start worrying about things under the chairs.' This particular strategy of sitting on the floor might be related to fears of monsters under the bed or similar childhood phobias.

Any analysis of the respondents' refusal to refuse to look, however, is mitigated by their viewing preferences, and chosen films are generally not the type of horror film with excessive gore or special effects sequences which might cause many viewers to avert their gaze. Gore generally is not enjoyed (over 60 per cent disagree with the statement 'I enjoy gore', compared with 22 per cent who agree), whilst an interest in or a desire to watch special effects is not a primary concern (just over 29 per cent agree with the statement 'I watch horror films for the special effects,' whereas almost 35 per cent disagree). It does not seem, then, that the respondents are primarily interested in what Boss (1986, p. 18) calls 'the genuinely horrific features of the genre.' It may be that a form of self-censorship is taking place in the respondents' choices of viewing material in that they are avoiding films containing more horrifically disturbing images and thus they need not refuse to look. This would, for example, explain the preference for vampire films, classic horror films and psychological horror films and the dislike of slasher and gore films. On the other hand, the range of horror films liked by the respondents and their comments on what they enjoy about the films do not lead to a definite conclusion in this direction and some respondents do like more hard core films. Rather, it seems that the impression many respondents wish to give is that they find special effects or gore for its own sake pointless and boring (though again this may indicate disavowal). And whilst there does not appear to be widespread interest in gore and special effects in general, there is a strong interest in the figure of the monster (which many respondents are fascinated by): there is a desire to look at the monster, and in some cases an interest in the special effects and make-up that are used to create the monster. The following comment illustrates the dichotomy between liking atmospheric horror but also wanting to see the monster clearly:

I like seeing the monsters in the films. There are some films (like The Haunting) where the evil is unseen and the characters let you feel their terror. Normally I prefer daylight and if someone is going to the expense and trouble to create a great monster (Alien), what good is it in the dark. Fog and darkness are great for a good Sherlock Holmes story. If there has to be fog and darkness let the monster finally attack under a streetlight or headlights. (em231)

Whilst a substantial minority (42 per cent) of respondents prefer to see the monster, over a quarter (28 per cent) prefer the monster to be hidden, though 73 per cent of respondents claim that they prefer films which allow them to use their imaginations to fill in the gaps rather than watch elaborate make-up or special effects sequences. Respondent em107 is typical in not needing to see everything: 'Good storylines are most important - there has to be reason for the seemingly mindless killing. I don't have to see the actual murder, sometimes you can get a better response if you leave some things to the imagination.' Concern is also expressed that if the effects are done badly, the horror may not live up to their expectations, as respondent em107 says: 'If the special effects don't seem real, monster movies just fall flat regardless of the story - I can't take a polystyrene alligator as a scary thing.' This may be another factor in the preference for atmosphere rather than special effects in the viewing preferences.

Overall, however, the respondents do not have strong preferences in these three areas (gore, special effects and the monster), indicating that these are not the most important conventions of horror cinema for this group of viewers. There is a much stronger preference for the psychological effects of horror cinema, as em106 demonstrates:

I like the creepy hidden horrors, the horror from oneself, not necessarily from outside terrors. I like the unexplained supernatural movies for their 'theologic' theories. The 'what if' aspect. ... Less gore and more mind games are what I like.

Horror films allow the respondents to think about real life issues; em231 likes 'the questions that horror movies raise' and goes on to say: 'They seem to take the known and turn it into just enough of a question to make you a little more cautious going around the next corner or opening that closet door a little slower.' Others use horror films to spark their imaginations in creative areas, often related to fan activities, such as hh116's writing of fan horror fiction: 'My writing seems to improve in the days after a horror film, it kick-starts my imagination.'

These responses suggest a contradiction with Twitchell's assumption that the frisson of viewing horror is more important than the intellectual elements. Again, though, this may be a reflection of the particular types of horror films which the respondents prefer or that they do not wish to be seen as low-brow consumers.

Further comment needs to be made about those respondents who enjoy gore, special effects and watching violence or killing. Over a quarter of the respondents (29 per cent) claim that they like watching killings in horror films. These tend to be the respondents who like slasher films - there is a strong correlation between agreement with the statement 'I like watching killings' and liking all or most slasher films ($\chi^2 = 21.72573$, $p = .00023$). Unsurprisingly, there is also a very strong correlation ($\chi^2 = 29.23033$, $p = 0.00001$) between those respondents who like all or most slasher films and those who agree with the statements 'I enjoy gore.' There is also a correlation between liking serial killer films and enjoyment of gore ($\chi^2 = 17.73624$, $p = 0.00139$). It was predicted that younger respondents might prefer slasher films, given that these films are aimed at a younger audience, but, as already seen, age does not appear to be a significant factor in liking slasher films. Neither is there any strong correlation between age and agreement with the statement 'I like watching killings' ($\chi^2 = 8.61446$, ns). There is however a weak correlation between considering oneself a fan and agreeing with the statement 'I like watching killings' ($\chi^2 = 8.16567$, $p = 0.01686$). It may be that this is evidence of immasculated viewing with these respondents adopting a masculine gaze, and this possibility is explored further in chapter 8. Overall, however, the responses of this group of viewers do not seem to conform to that of Williams' feminine spectator who refuses to look or Zillman and Weaver's learnt gender responses, but do fit the model of enjoyment of fear and fascination put forward by Carroll. They also follow the pattern Cantor and Oliver observed in what scares viewers of various ages, although there is a tendency to remain fascinated by monstrous and grotesque creatures into adulthood.

5.3.2 Fright, suspense and other affects

A number of suggestions have been made in the literature as to the connections between the appeal of horror and the modes of affect which originate from horror film spectatorship. Carroll (p. 206) claims that fictional examples of violence or terror represent safe forms of entertainment which can command the audience's 'attention, curiosity and fascination,' but which might also allow the viewer to vicariously experience dangerous or disturbing events. Many respondents indicate that this is an important attraction of horror and horror film viewing is often compared to an emotional roller-coaster ride which offers vicarious excitement or thrills not available in real life (Brophy

[1986, p. 5] describes it as ‘not unlike a death-defying carnival ride’ in which the pleasure is ‘getting the shit scared out of you - and loving it’). Being frightened would appear to be the most significant of the emotional affects of horror, and one of the most important defining features of the genre. However, the scares generated by horror cinema are recognised as not being the same as the negative emotional experiences of real life scares or frights; ‘the horror genre gives every evidence of being pleasurable to its audience, but it does so by means of trafficking in the very sorts of things that cause disquiet, distress, and displeasure’ as Carroll says of his second paradox of horror. The question which remains is why some viewers enjoy fictional material which induces uncomfortable or unpleasant emotional responses. This paradox may be related to risk thresholds, which are individual and change over time, since different types of material or images seem to frighten individuals at different times in their childhood and adolescent (as discussed above), and trigger a developing taste for horror in different ways. However, some patterns do emerge. Whilst many of the respondents find horror films scary and many do admit to being frightened when they watch horror films, this is an enjoyable experience for them and does not take the form of the extreme fear (and hence dislike) that Williams, Halberstam and others expect to see in female viewers. As with the childhood love of horror demonstrated above, respondent em116 says that she has ‘always liked being scared,’ whilst em105 implies that her liking for being scared might be psychologically healthy:

I guess it’s an emotional extreme that I enjoy. I also like to figure out why something is frightening to me. And I like to think about frightening scenes; it’s like toying with those dark, dangerous recesses of the mind.

For others, being scared is associated with a personal phobia or psychological trigger:

Supernatural horrors ... I find most scary, particularly if understated. They play on the deep seated fears, almost race memory, we have had at least since childhood (the boogie man, haunted house, etc. etc.) and also about things we have all had contact with (religion, ouija boards, etc.). (hh104)

Respondent hh117 highlights the fact that the scares generated by horror films are controllable and this may be why they are so enjoyable: ‘When I watch them they make me feel excited, scared, a little nervous. Afterwards I calm down very quickly. It is rare that I feel scared for long after a film.’ The majority of respondents in the study (over 73%) claim to like being frightened

when watching horror films and this is related by respondent em230 to emotional catharsis:

Horror movies offer audiences the deepest, most powerful moviegoing experience, reaching beyond the scope of drama or romance to the true cathartic blow-out that only being scared nearly to death can achieve.

These responses (all forms of enjoyment of being scared) seem to encapsulate Carroll's paradox of horror. There does seem to be an ideal balance - though this level may be unique for each respondent - between being scared and knowing that the horror is fictional and therefore safe. Respondent bfs130 says: 'Not many horror films scare me as I know that they are fantasy and can detect the special effects.' This is related to age by respondent em111 when she says: 'At this age, I know they are not real, so I do not get 'scared'. It's more entertainment, pure fun.' For some respondents, including em231 quoted below, the perfect horror film should have a level of fright which outweighs the sense of fictional safety, but not by too much:

The reason I like monster and 'the unknown' movies is because they let me get away from reality for a short while. I like the feeling of dread and being afraid, but I like the knowledge that it is going to end with the movie. However, if a movie can make me scared even after I leave the theatre, I feel I've got my money's worth.

As this group of viewers have been watching scary material, if not horror films, since childhood, it might be expected that they have become desensitised and able to deal, as Zillman and Weaver's adolescents do, with the frights of horror films. This does seem to be the case for a good many of the respondents; respondent ex004 'can't remember feeling afraid by watching a horror film since I was a child.' Although many respondents are desensitised, it is not often so complete. Respondents describe their liking for horror films in terms of the scares which the films provide, though few seem to experience this as strongly as they did in childhood and there is a tendency to compare their feelings with those they experienced when they were younger - as with respondent st101: 'I now find that it takes a lot for horror films to scare me, so the films I watched when I was younger would probably not bother me at all now.' This might indicate that some horror fans might seek out more extreme or hard-core examples of the genre in order to be scared and this might explain the minority taste for gore and slasher films. Although respondent em234 reports a similar experience, she questions

whether this is due to her own feelings or the horror films themselves: 'My biggest problem is that as I get older I find it harder and harder to get scared at anything. Are horror movies just not as scary as they used to be or am I just desensitised?' One solution for bfs130 is in the viewing situation: 'I am more likely to feel scared if I am watching a horror film alone.' Although this may be one reason why some respondents might view alone, it is felt unlikely that this is the sole cause for the isolation of some female viewers and female fans are more likely to keep their taste for horror private because of social pressures. Other respondents find desensitisation to be useful, allowing them to watch horror films without experiencing too many difficult emotional responses. For example em115 finds that horror films 'used to really scare me too much, but now they scare me just enough.' Other respondents also indicate that they might not like to be scared in the way they were in childhood, em109 says 'I can't say any movie has scared the bejeezus out of me since I was a kid - I don't know if I'd like that or not.' Undoubtedly desensitisation has occurred but it seems to affect respondents in different ways, some attempting to recapture the level of fright they experienced in childhood, others regarding the desensitisation as something which allows them to enjoy horror without being too scared.

A few respondents claim never to have been frightened by horror films, even as children, although this seems to be an unusual response even amongst a group of fans and followers. Respondent hh104 claims 'I am never frightened, I hardly ever jump, I have never had to stop watching a film for any reason other than it being boring.' Respondent hh102 states that she does not 'ever remember feeling frightened, only excited. I have always found the leaps of imagination and logic that horror invites to be most stimulating.' Respondent ed103 says 'I rarely get frightened by horror movies - I can watch most films on my own, and prefer to do so.' This may simply be a case of bravado similar to that identified by Zillman and Weaver as the adolescent male's response to horror - in this case, female fans (like adolescent males) might wish to demonstrate that they can stand up to the frights and shocks offered by horror films (if only for the researcher) - or they may be performing the role (again, attributed mostly to male fans) of horror fan laughing in the face of gore, terror or shocks (see Sanjek, 1990). It may also reflect the fact that the female fan or follower became accustomed to the emotional responses generated by horrific material at a very early age and can no longer recall them. Again, this indicates desensitisation which does not

match the expected reactions of constructed viewers described in much of the literature.

Some doubts might be raised by the 19 per cent of respondents who state that they do not like being frightened, particularly as to why they might continue to watch horror films at all. In some cases, it is certain types of horror - namely contemporary horror, such as slasher films and gore films, which are heavy on violence - which scare them. Their viewing choices tend to be restricted to atmospheric and classic films. A major reason given for this is that slasher and gore films are too closely linked to real life fears, as expressed in the following comments

Previously films left me with a 'shudder' or 'shiver' which could be laughed off or dismissed. Today's films tend to either leave me sickened because of the excessive amounts of violence, blood and guts, or give me a feeling of unease which cannot be completely ignored. Many are a little too close to normal life to be enjoyable. (bfs104)

I watch the older horror films for entertainment. I cannot watch new horror, they appall and sicken me and I'm left wondering what kind of people enjoy all this carnage and what needs do these fulfil or indeed wake up in some? (bfs151)

Respondent em112 feels these films are too close to reality: 'I don't like serial killer films because they actually scare me. I don't mean "Oh, a monster is going to get that girl" scared, I mean terrified because it could actually happen.' Another respondent, bfs123, suggests that this is a reflection on contemporary society and this leaves her feeling uncomfortable: 'Since drama reflects reality, I believe this to be the attitude of people that whatever they want they have a right to, irrespective of cost. A means-to-an-end society, which has lost all its consideration for others.'

Whilst those respondents who state that they do not enjoy being scared are in a minority, there does seem to be a consensus amongst the majority of the respondents that events in horror films which are associated with real life fears are disturbing. These examples are similar to those which Cantor and Oliver suggest older adolescents and adults may experience. Respondent em109 demonstrates maternal feelings when she says: 'I do not like films that make me worry about my children, films in which children are threatened or in which children are evil.' More often reported are concerns about social violence, particularly women's issues; respondent bfs123 spoke at length about this:

I do not enjoy films that make me feel vulnerable to rape or serial killers. I am left with an irritating sense of disquiet. I'm left with all the symptoms of fear: racing pulse, thumping heartbeat, cold sweats, and the feeling of vulnerability - almost of paranoia. With real life horrors of the Holocaust, Vietnam, famine and so forth I will usually cry. And these images stay with me for some time. Often reappearing months later.

The fears expressed here are ones related to perceived dangers in society and current political and social problems (the issue most frequently mentioned is that of fear or rape and violence against women). Respondents commonly state that events (particularly natural and man-made disasters involving large numbers of people and/or children) on news programmes upset them much more than fictional events in films. As fg401 states 'People getting killed in horror films don't upset me, but I feel terrible seeing starving children in Africa or people dying in accidents on the news.' There are also strong feelings that watching horror films does not automatically indicate an acceptance of actual violence, respondent hh106 saying: 'Many people don't understand that just because I am interested in watching murder and monsters and gore on screen doesn't mean that I don't deplore real-life violence.'

This would seem to raise doubts about the arguments that viewing horror films desensitises the viewer to real-life violence or horror. Remarks by many of the female viewers in this study indicate that they feel they are desensitised only to fictional material and they react antagonistically towards media and social commentaries which imply otherwise. Respondent bfs101 says 'I couldn't watch a reenacted documentary. I once saw a programme about the Donner party and it made me feel uneasy all night.' There is little evidence here to suggest that horror film viewing is likely to desensitise the well-balanced viewer to social violence and other violent events in real life (although what this might contribute to the media violence debate is not considered here).

Although most respondents report that they are no longer frightened by grotesque monsters as they were in childhood and many claim not to be overly upset or frightened by danger, death or other events thought by Cantor and Oliver to affect adults, all seem to remain fascinated by horror. Many respondents watch horror films not only in order to be scared, but to experience other enjoyable emotions. Several respondents report a pattern of emotional affects other than fright contributing to their continued taste for horror. In these cases being frightened is linked to horripilation or other

mental forms of fright, what might be called the chills or shivers, rather than more physical forms of fright, such as revulsion, nausea or the jump effect. Respondent em109, for example, likes films 'that haunts me long after with wistful sentimental feelings, or eerie feelings or both.' In many cases, being scared is linked to suspense and thrilling of intelligibility (these are explored further below), as in this quote from em124: 'I love suspense and enjoy the thrill of being scared.' Regardless of whether they find horror films frightening or scary as adults, many respondents talk about the excitement of watching horror films, frequently referring to the 'adrenaline rush' that comes from viewing such films, as typified by respondents bfs123: 'The pulse races, the heartbeat increases - a definite adrenaline rush.' and hh113: 'It is exciting and makes me react in such a way that the adrenaline is really flowing.' Again, these feelings are enjoyed by the respondents, as by hh116 who is keen to differentiate between similar feelings in real life and the experience of watching horror films: 'During the film I feel very tense, but I love it. It's not like the sick tension before an interview or exam, it's more like the build-up before a storm - electrifying.' The excitement for some is linked to other risk behaviours, as typified by, for example, respondent em122's association of horror film viewing with fairground rides: 'sometimes I feel a little breathless, like you do after a roller-coaster ride' or bfs159's link to gambling: 'if it's psychologically scary, my heart will beat fast (almost excitement - like watching a race when you've got a stake on).' This would seem to confirm Zuckerman's (1996) findings with regard to sensation seeking and the liking for horror. Respondent em126's comment also suggests that at least part of the enjoyment of horror films is the anticipation of what will be shown in the film and viewer expectations would seem to be an important part of genre spectatorship for the respondents:

I ... love that feeling, that dread that something's going to happen, something horrible, and I'm going to be right there to experience it. ... It's a sort of dark rush, a knowledge of the hideous in a way that we don't have to feel guilty about.

The excitement and thrills mentioned above are related in many cases to suspense. Suspense seems to be another important element of horror film viewing in that 92 per cent of the respondents like horror films which are suspenseful. Definitions of the horror genre, such as Carroll's, are often based on the emotional affects of revulsion and terror and this also highlights the problems with fan-based genre definitions. The fact that respondents frequently classify mainstream thrillers or other types of films as horror

seems to be because they are using the feelings of tension and suspense in their definitions of the horror genre.

Nevertheless, some of the respondents do report that the jumps or shocks offered by many horror films, including slasher, horror-comedy and gore films, are an important part of their liking for horror; respondent bfs101 for example likes 'to be made to jump.' Again, there is reported enjoyment of this form of response:

I like horror films that are shocking, but not necessarily very scary. Gore-fests ... are often the most fun horrors to watch. I don't know why seeing someone being mutilated or attacked should be entertaining, but it's usually not too realistic, so I try not to analyse myself about it. Horror comedies are great because they can scare you but, as some funny moments are included you generally don't end up too mentally disturbed. (st101)

Horror films, at least many recent forms of the genre, are also designed to elicit a response verging on nausea or revulsion. According to Arnzen (1994), this seems to be associated in particular with recent forms of the genre and with the adolescent male fan. Respondents do find that some horror films have this affect on them, bfs159 says that 'Sometimes I feel sick - if there's a lot of gore.' Very few respondents find this an enjoyable prospect. Overall, the viewing preferences of the respondents indicate that they do not choose to view horror films which are mainly based around this type of affect. Several respondents state that they do not like being made to feel sick in this way - 'I like to be frightened without having the need to vomit!' (bfs151) - and it is something that they see as manipulation by the film-makers. Respondent bfs132 finds these films offer an inferior experience to suspense or horripilation: 'At best [I feel] intrigued and fascinated by the strangeness of the universe, worn out by the suspense, exhilarated. At worst, degraded, sick.' The opinions offered on the various responses to horror seem to suggest that the respondents are looking for (what they see as) emotionally positive responses to horror. Respondent hh104's comment typifies the majority dislike of special effects and gore: 'I really dislike ... excessive effects or gross out. The first is boring and the second laughable.' Revulsion is thought by many not to be scary, as bfs159's comment suggests: 'The sort of horror that relies on lots of blood and gore for its shock does not appeal to me at all - it just makes me sick (literally) - psychological horror is much scarier.' This suggests a particular position with respect to what can be defined as 'good' horror (and this exposes a crucial difference in what the

film industry currently markets as horror) and this exposes a difference from the adolescent male fan. Respondent em111 suggests that some respondents perceive male fans behaving differently from female fans:

The other females that I watch movies with usually do not like the gore. Instead we turn away and talk or go get something to drink. The guys really like these parts and often tease us for being squeamish. It does not sicken me to see these scenes, but it adds nothing to the movie for me. Seeing someone being stabbed is not the scary part, the stalking is.

This suggests another reason for the isolation and marginalisation of female fans. Some simply do not enjoy other viewers responses to the films, as ed103 states: 'Sometimes going to the cinema, or watching a horror video with a large group of people, ruins the film - a tense moment may be lost due to someone talking/laughing during it.' Some respondents do seem to take horror very seriously and do not like the way in which some forms of the genre illicit laughter or the way some audiences respond to horror films.

Laughter is, however, a common reaction to horror. The shocks or frights of several types of horror film are often accompanied or followed by jokes and this filmic technique is often thought to provoke laughter in order to relieve the tension of the film. Respondent em112's reaction suggests this might be true with respect to films as a whole: 'I'll spend most of the scarier parts watching through my fingers on really scary movies, then I'll laugh my head off almost as soon as it's over.' For many other respondents laughter helps them to deal with their emotional reactions: bfs101 questions why 'grossing out' makes her laugh and then suggests that 'there is a lot of relief that it's not real.' Respondent bfs159 thinks that 'laughing at what should really be terrifying is a good way of coping with the nastier side of life' and bfs123 considers that 'laughing in the face of horror makes one feel dreadfully brave.' This reaction, however, is not universal. Just over 40 per cent of respondents admit that horror films make them laugh, but as with other reported affects, this may well be a factor of the respondents horror film preferences and viewing choices. In particular, horror-comedies are not amongst the most well-liked examples of the genre and this could in part account for the low rates of reported laughter, other than specific examples of laughing as a way of dealing with fright. Otherwise, respondents laugh at badly made films or films which are deliberately over-the-top in their use of the effects and conventions of the genre. Many respondents will occasionally watch 'poorly done' films 'for a laugh' (this quote from respondent em101).

Respondent em112 states that although ‘poorly done horror movies just make me laugh,’ they are ‘still fun to watch.’ For some this might be a way of showing that a horror film does not work, em124 says that ‘if it is a poor film, I sometimes laugh at how ridiculous it is, in a very critical manner.’

Respondents who report enjoyment of jumps and revulsion and the types of films based on these affects are in the minority and also tend to be those who like slasher films (see the strong statistical correlation between liking slasher films and enjoying watching killings and violence reported above). Although the analysis above does not reveal age as a factor in liking gory or violent films, age does seem to be a factor in the choices of horror film viewing based on emotional affects for some respondents who report that their tastes and preferences have changed as they have grown older. This takes various forms ranging from preferring ‘the scary over the bloody’ as she gets older (em116) to losing the juvenile taste for gore - as shown by bfs154 who says ‘I’ve lost my taste for cheapo splatter movies and prefer something classier.’ Respondent em120’s remark that ‘at first it was the thrill of being scared silly, but later I grew to love the conventions and the campiness of the whole genre’ also suggests that horror film viewing can become a comfortable habit.

5.3.3 The continued taste for horror

If the emotional affects of horror films diminish with prolonged exposure and horror becomes a more comfortable viewing experience, what then keeps the respondents interested in the genre well into adulthood and for some middle- and old-age? Is it - as they think - a macabre personality or an attraction to the dark side, or are other reasons evident?

Docherty et al. (1987) identified a connection between liking horror films and having a boring or tedious occupation. The occupations of the respondents are extremely varied (see chapter 4), but it was not thought possible to clearly categorise the respondents occupations into tedious or not tedious since this may be a subjective opinion. There is correlation between job and agreement with the statement ‘horror films relieve the tedium of my everyday life’ ($\chi^2 = 12.88887$, $p = 0.00488$): those more likely to agree with the statement work in healthcare and nursing, finance and banking, work in a secretarial or administrative position, or are in full time education or have no employment (the latter including full-time mothers and housewives as well as the unemployed). Overall, though, there are too few respondents in the

factory and retail work categories for any statistical result to be taken as conclusive. However, this in itself is a not unimportant detail since the fact that many of the respondents are in professional or sub-professional occupations and have undertaken higher education itself suggests that Docherty et al's conclusion may not be valid for this audience segment and amongst this group the attraction to horror does not seem as clearly related to job as they claimed. The fact that women tend to be employed in traditional sub-professional categories may also skew any evidence here. Overall, however, slightly more respondents agree with the statement (48 per cent) than disagree (32 per cent). Some respondents simply do not see their lives as tedious - one respondent adding the comment 'what tedium?' on her questionnaire, and this is often attributed to the fact that respondents take part in fan activities such as writing fiction or simply see their horror film viewing as evidence that they lead imaginative private lives.

There may though be other connections between continued enjoyment of horror films and real life in that horror may offer a form of escapism from other pressures or boredom of everyday life unrelated to job. In particular, it may be a form of escape from women's social situation, particularly involving domestic activities. It may be that 'housewives harried by the shopping' (see chapter 1) continue to find enjoyment in the frisson of horror films - a form of escapism from the pressures of family or childcare experienced even by those in full-time employment (several recent surveys having indicated that women continue to do most household chores). Just over half (54 per cent) agree with the statement 'I watch horror films for escapism' (28 per cent disagree). There are strong similarities indicated in this to the romance fiction readers studies by Radway (1988) and this connection is explored further in chapter 6.

5.4 The appeal of the horror genre

Several very clear and important trends emerge from this analysis: 1) a long-term taste for horror dating from a very early age; 2) clear trends in viewing preferences, generally Gothic style horror films including vampires, dark fantasies, psychological horror and the supernatural are preferred over graphic or violent horror films, particular slasher films; 3) a strong fascination with horror and in particular monsters which in its most extreme form becomes an erotic fascination with the vampire. It can be hypothesised then that predictors of a strong liking for horror in later life are likely to be an

enjoyment of being scared, the ability to deal with fright by direct confrontation with such material on a continuing basis and a fascination with supernatural and/or grotesque characters. It seems likely that repeated viewing of horrific material at an early age (and approximately 50 per cent of this group claim to have first viewed when under the age of 12) may allow habituation to horrific images to occur more easily than in adulthood, this being because the elements which frighten younger viewers are fantastical in nature, less likely to reflect dangers experienced in real life and likely to have a strong impact on the imagination. This is borne out by the types of horror which the respondents enjoy as adults, favourite themes concerning supernatural or monstrous entities, particularly vampires, and films based on classic or literary, and in particular Gothic, horror texts. Other indicators are also present amongst the participants: principally, parents with a taste for horror, fantasy or science fiction; a tendency to be 'bookish'; and a feeling that one has a morbid personality or natural love of horror. There is a strong trend towards a preference for horror films which create emotional affects related to the shiver sensation, and a tendency to dislike films which aim to revolt the viewer.

Since no comparison study was undertaken, these factors do not necessarily suggest differences between male and female fans and followers and are not necessarily related to any biological or developmental differences between male and female children. Nevertheless, these factors may explain the occurrence of female fans and followers (those who date their liking for horror to a very young age and have a long-term taste for the genre) as a distinct audience segment, separate from those adolescent females who participate in horror film viewing as part of a rite-of-passage (although some of the former group may well have been part of the latter, albeit as a pretence, and it is also a possibility that some of the latter group may learn to enjoy horror films). Furthermore, the adolescent horror fan who participated in the viewing process as part of the rite-of-passage is expected to grow out of their taste for the genre, horror films having served their purpose as vehicles of gender socialisation, sensation seeking and, possibly, teenage rebellion. The female fans taking part in this study, however, have not grown out of it, although their tastes have frequently changed as they have matured. Again, the same may be true of long-term male horror fans. What remains, is the proposition that female horror film fans and followers are not immasculated

spectators but are participating in a form of feminine consumption. This subject is dealt with further in the next chapter.

In conclusion, therefore, it is proposed that female horror film viewers might not conform to the accepted profiles of genre fans. We might call this group of viewers 'experienced' fans and followers - they have a long-standing taste for the genre, prefer classic rather than contemporary forms of the genre and their tastes and responses do not vary across the age ranges - indicating perhaps that this particular audience segment is generic rather than historic.

¹ Very few respondents mentioned such affects in their accounts of viewing as children, perhaps being too young to recognise or appreciate cinematic or televisual techniques of this kind, although there were occasional mentions of theme tunes in this respect.

² The frequent references to Doctor Who should be noted. Although now a media cliché, stories about hiding behind the sofa to watch the Daleks or Cybermen are frequent and accepted by the respondents as a part of British popular cultural history - as demonstrated by bfs144's comment that her earliest horror viewing was 'the usual.' Doctor Who formed part of the entertainment of British children for decades and for many of the respondents this programme appears to have been formative in their liking for horror. Although it may be a possibility that the respondents frequently mention this programme simply because it is a widely talked about example of popular culture, it should certainly be taken here as an important example of early horror experiences. Although Doctor Who is widely regarded as science fiction, it frequently contained monsters which were a source of fright for young viewers. Reports of being scared and hiding behind the sofa - especially when linked to watching Doctor Who - are part of the fan and media discourses around the programme. There is a possibility that participants report such responses because it is typical or expected of fans. However, this does not detract from the importance of these responses in childhood.

³ The debate on the long term psychological effects on children (and adults) of viewing horror films - particularly those containing high levels of violence - is a separate issue and not dealt with here.

⁴ This is not to imply that there are not more women over the age of forty who like horror films, it may just be harder to recruit such women to a study such as this.

Chapter 6

The Interpretive Activities of Female Horror Film Fans

Having established the range of tastes and viewing preferences of the respondents, as well as their emotional and physical responses to horror films, it must next be determined how this audience segment interprets different types of horror films and what they think about the representations (in particular, of women, monstrosity and sexuality) or depictions of violence (especially violence towards women) in such films. An answer is sought to the question of what women who watch and enjoy films which are frequently thought to be misogynist or sexist and which are generally considered masculine entertainment get out of such films. What is at stake for the female viewer of the horror film? In answering this question, both the respondents opinions of the horror genre generally and their comments on particular horror films are analysed with the aim of ascertaining the range of interpretive activities and reading strategies of this group of viewers.

As shown in chapter 1, female viewers are not the intended audience of many horror films, nevertheless this research has established that women do seek out horror films for entertainment. There is a need, then, to explore the interactions between audience and text, especially in the light of feminist readings critical of the genre, 'people's lived relationships with popular texts,' as Nightingale (1996, p. ix) suggests. Work by Radway (1984), Ang (1985) and others on the interpretive activities of audiences has played an important part in changing the focus in feminist cultural studies. Radway's analysis of romance fiction readers remains important because it explored the meaning of cultural products in the context of everyday life. Her work demonstrated that women used cultural forms to actively react to and shape their own personal pleasures and desires and to make do with their social situation. This finding is important in understanding the interpretive activities of the respondents both as individual viewers and as a fan community.

6.1 Common patterns of receptions and readings

Although some recent horror films, such as Bram Stoker's Dracula, are marketed with a female audience in mind (see chapter 1), it is not possible to determine specific horror films which have greater appeal for women generally. Patterns of horror film preferences have been observed amongst the respondents (as set out in chapter 4). However, many different types and styles of horror are enjoyed whilst a minority have a strong liking for slasher

films, gore films and other violent examples of horror. In line with this, a very wide range of horror films and horror film types were mentioned and discussed by the respondents. In addition, at least for some respondents, the expectation that horror films should horrify, shock or scare them on an emotional level may be absent, these affects often being elided by more complex emotional pleasures. Furthermore, and more importantly, certain representations of monstrosity do not always appear to be frightening to women particularly because of the sexual attraction of those characters, but also because some monsters are seen in a sympathetic light. However, several clear trends do emerge from this discussion as to what makes particular films or film types appealing or pleasurable. Analysis of this discussion reveals particular aspects of horror which appeal to the respondents, including common patterns of reception and readings of horror films.

I General factors in the reception of horror films

Horror film reception is linked to the emotional affects and responses discussed in chapter 5 (with tension and horripilation preferred over shocks and revulsion) and these often form the basis of the respondents' interpretations of films. Subtlety of horror (by which the respondents mean a scary atmosphere) was also mentioned as a reason for rating particular films or types of films highly (The Haunting is commonly praised as an archetypal example in this respect). Low opinions are often stated for films which revolve around excessive or gratuitous displays of violence, gore or other techniques used to evoke revulsion in the audience. Respondent bfs123 dislikes 'gore for gore's sake' and bfs159 does not find 'the sort of horror that relies on lots of blood and gore for its shock' appealing and thinks that 'psychological horror is much scarier.' The lack of interest in gore and violence explains the preferences of the respondents for particular types of horror and this pattern is attributed by the respondents to being allowed to use their imaginations or to play with their fantasies.

I like horror for the scariness, not the violence. I have never liked movies like Friday the 13th, but always more mental horror like Nightmare On Elm Street or The Serpent and the Rainbow. I don't like horror like The Hand That Rocks the Cradle because it's not scary enough. (em105)

There is an attempt here to define horror and the trait of scariness as part of a cerebral process and it is films which make the viewer think which the respondents consider to be most scary. Respondent bfs136 says that although horror films often make her laugh and that sometimes she will 'sit and pick

holes in the plot,' she finds that it is 'not so funny when I'm alone in the dark!' This suggests that even when the film is seen to have flaws, thinking about the material after viewing (and this in itself might have the desired emotional affect) is an important part of the experience for some viewers.

The following comment from em121 attempts to explain the role of the imagination in this process in terms of a difference between horror and terror:

There is a difference between being horrified and terrified. I like to be terrified. ... To horrify is easy, it's things popping out from behind a door, it's gore and blood and seeing the knife held by Jason stabbing deep into that gorgeous young football hero. Terror is another story, it's the knife and the blood running down the drain as Janet Leigh screams and your imagination does the rest, it's the blood seeping under the door as you hear the girl being attacked in The Leopard Man, it's the dark shadows which trail Tim Robbins in Jacob's Ladder. The unknown is terrifying, the known is horrifying.

Whether such a difference between horror and terror is valid is irrelevant here; this example illustrates a process that seems to be at work amongst the respondents. Horripilation, which is more closely related to terror as em121 terms it than revulsion, is much preferred because the respondents allow their imaginations to dwell and embroider on what they find scary. This facility (being allowed to indulge the imagination) is not dependent upon horror film type, rather the respondents find examples of films which can provide this experience across the whole range of horror films. Respondent em120 goes on to say:

[T]hose movies that allow me to use my imagination and offer the frame and some atmosphere are more scary to me than any other horror film and, for the most part, you'll find some in almost every category of horror film.

This would explain why some respondents who otherwise dislike a particular type of film in general name a gory or violent example of that type as a favourite. If they consider a film to have a good story with interesting characters which they consider to be well made and imaginative it does not concern them that it is an example of a film cycle they otherwise dislike. In other words, the respondents are open-minded about all horror films and do not automatically dismiss all examples of a horror film type they usually dislike; this also illustrates that female horror film viewers do not necessarily have weak stomachs or are squeamish (as female spectators are often depicted) when it comes to gory and violent films. It is not the gore or violence per se which the respondents say they dislike, rather they state that

they dislike the unimaginative way these elements are often used in the film and that this does not provide them with much opportunity to dwell on the horror. Certainly, many respondents like to think about the horror films they see and like to discuss them afterwards (though only with someone they trust - many respondents feel uncomfortable with the reactions of many male acquaintances). Respondent bfs101 says 'I like to go back over bits, which is why it's good to go with a friend.' Other respondents use their horror film viewing in their imaginative and fantasy lives, some using the experience to help them in creative pastimes. Respondent hh116 said:

When a film is over I am so keyed up that I nearly have a heart attack on my way to bed. I hate the feeling I always get that someone or something is hiding in the shadows. The apparently endless time before I go to sleep is so horrible that I start to regret watching the film.

When I get to sleep, I feel entirely different. I usually have vivid nightmares, but I count that as a bonus. It's just like having more horror films to enjoy. My writing seems to improve in the days after a horror film. I think it kick-starts my imagination.

The range of films labelled by the respondents as horror is very fluid in this respect. Again, there is a preference for films which make them think about or dwell on the horror but it is not always necessary for a film to be horror in order for them to do this; respondent bfs105 says that she has: 'always enjoyed tense, thought-provoking films on what may be regarded as the edge of horror' and names Alien and Jaws as good examples of this. How much a film makes them think seems to be as important as other elements in the horror film viewing experience and this is related to how they see their horror film viewing in the context of their overall consumption of films and other media, and it is also related to their self-image. When respondent bfs159 says 'I think, ... I like "thinking" films,' she is implying that a liking for horror films is not a measure of (a lack of) intelligence or education. This classification of 'thinking films' is for many respondents related to their enjoyment of the film and the level to which they are drawn into the narrative. Respondent hh119 describes the process thus:

I get totally engrossed when I watch them - nothing else exists. I do get scared and feel relieved at the end. I often think about what it would be like to be in a situation that is happening in the film.

This quote also suggests that there is a cathartic element to the viewing of horror for this viewer in that she can confront her emotions and possibly situations which might reflect social problems such as violence against women. Undoubtedly, the fact that female spectators are often expected to be

emotional when viewing horror films (as they are with classic women's pictures and weepies) plays a part here and links back to the models of gender socialisation discussed in chapter 5. Williams (1991) provides a useful link to the emotional affects of cinema in relation to pornography, horror cinema and the woman's film or weepie. She posits (p. 3) that these 'gross' genres, all three being linked by the ecstatic excess of the spectator's response, have a similar anatomy. Most importantly, whilst pornography is gendered as active masculine with respect to its target audience and melodramatic weepies as passive feminine, the horror film spectator (albeit an adolescent male) is seen as 'careening wildly between the two masculine and feminine poles.' This link is extremely important in the discussion of the respondents' interpretive activities which follows.

There is also evidence that respondents are using horror films as boundary testing (see Hill, 1997) but again this is linked by the respondents to what is left to the imagination. Respondent bfs123 says:

I like to try and push out the boundaries of my particular phobias, in order to deal with them, but there are definite limits. I can just about handle Clive Barker's Hellraiser films, although some scenes sicken me. ... I like a little more left to my extremely fertile imagination - [some] films are too sudden and explicit. There's no time to tone down the shock.

Films like Hellraiser do prove problematical for some viewers because the levels of violence and the number of special effects threaten to spill over into excess. This indicates that some respondents are self-censoring by choosing to watch less graphic or explicit films or more atmospheric films with less special effects. There seems to be a link here to the fan discourse that reading horror fiction is a safer pursuit than viewing horror films because of the greater level of self-censorship available to the reader (see chapter 1). The contemporary horror genre has been defined by Carroll (1990) and others as dependent upon shocks and revulsion, but such a definition is rendered problematical when considered alongside the respondents' own uses of horror outlined above.

The concept of a category of 'thinking films' (however the individual respondent subjectively defines this concept) would then appear to be one of the primary reasons why the female fans and followers make the viewing choices they do and would explain why, in general, atmospheric horror films (the supernatural, vampire films, psychological horror) are preferred over gore films or violent films (slasher films, serial killer films, body horror).

Thus, the respondents seem to prefer the 'mode of telling' as opposed to the 'mode of showing' in interpreting horror films (see Brophy, 1986, p. 8). In some cases, the definition of horror itself is linked to similar opinions about 'thinking films' as evidenced by the respondents naming films such as The Krays, Richard III and Blue Velvet as horror (see chapter 4).

II. Quality and high-brow entertainment

Issues of 'quality' arise from the respondents' comments analysed above and films are frequently judged by the respondents on whether they are good or bad horror, regardless of subgenre or film type. Respondent bfs138 says: 'When deciding what to view I look at all that is available and choose what looks to be the most interesting or entertaining regardless of the genre.' In general, slasher and gore films are frequently regarded as being boring and predictable and therefore of low quality, whereas many of the respondents preferred to watch films they took to be imaginative, intelligent, literary or thought-provoking and thus regarded as high quality. Quality in an individual film was given as a reason for liking that film when the type was disliked as a whole. Lack of quality, defined in terms of weak or formulaic plots and stereotypical characters, was often cited as the main reason for not liking films and this tends to be one of the main reasons given for disliking slasher films, which were regarded as formulaic, badly written or made and thus boring and predictable. The preference for 'thinking films' and the mode of telling is linked by the respondents to notions of excellence and contributes to much discussion of what makes a 'good' horror film. Literary adaptations - the horror classics such as Frankenstein and Dracula and other films based on them, as well as more recent novels such as those by Anne Rice - were often cited as examples of 'quality' horror, along with historical or costume-drama films reflecting Gothic or Romantic themes in their design and narrative.

Quality for the respondents signified several aspects of cinema, including high production values in art direction, special effects and costumes. The quality of costumes and sets is rated highly amongst the respondents who also enjoy historical and costume dramas; respondent bfs136 picks out Interview with the Vampire because it is a 'very attractive film, visually' and generally likes horror films which she finds 'visually beautiful.' Respondent hh113 particularly likes the look of Interview with the Vampire, Bram Stoker's Dracula and The Pit and The Pendulum because 'they are bright and colour is important, they almost seem luxuriant and decadent.' Special effects also have to be effective and well-produced, bfs123 stating: 'I find it all very

silly, and the effects have to be very good before I feel any sense of horror.’ Believability, whether of special effects, story or characterisation, is deemed to be important - respondent hh117 saying that a horror film has to be ‘realistic enough to believe even when it’s ridiculous.’ Acting was frequently mentioned as being crucial in this respect, with individual actors (in particular Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, and Vincent Price) singled out as giving convincing performances or having star appeal.

In the main, however, the elements judged most important to the quality of a film were plot and character development, respondent em122 for example says that ‘if a film doesn’t leave me with a sense of satisfaction for a story well told, or catch at my imagination in some way, I don’t bother with it.’ Respondent hh102 names the Clive Barker films Nightbreed and Hellraiser as two particularly good examples of quality and, in addition to the ‘stylish special effects,’ picks out the ‘stunningly new types of monsters’ as the elements of the film which interest her, saying ‘[Barker’s] plots have always twisted and turned forcing the reader/viewer to follow him further and further into the myths he creates.’ Like respondent bfs136, many find horror films to be ‘most absorbing’. Respondent bfs101 says that:

A good horror film draws you in, makes you forget time, place and self to an extent. A part of me is detached, observing effects, techniques, and part of me gets carried along, especially if it’s a good story.

Respondent bfs154 also judges films on how much they respect the viewer’s intelligence:

I like a plot that keeps me guessing and is intelligent. I hate the lack of cause and effect in badly made films. I hate having everything explained too much as if I can’t work it out for myself. I hate it when plot and tension deteriorate into blood and guts or obvious violence and abuse - usually of a woman victim. I prefer subtlety to in-your-face nastiness. I also like sensuality as opposed to obvious nudity. Too many films cop-out about three-quarters of the way through and go out on a whimper. I like to be surprised, even shocked, but so much stuff is too predictable.

Several respondents, who regard themselves as intelligent and responsible individuals, also express dislike of the way horror fans are depicted.

Respondent sh201 considers it ‘most unfair’ that ‘people seem to find an interest in horror more disturbing in a woman.’ Many respondents do emphasise that their liking for horror is not a problem, but are concerned about others thinking it is. Respondent hh114 says:

It has pained me to hear how intellectuals and highbrows have dismissed horror and SF, how programmes like The Late Show tell me 'It's something one grows out of.' 'When?' is the question I would like to ask them. I am an intelligent woman who has held down responsible jobs all my life.

Generally, these viewers' discourses about horror films seemed to be at odds with the fact that horror films are widely regarded as low culture and viewed, as Crane (1994, p. vii) observes, as 'the entertainment of the young, minorities, the working class, or the disenfranchised', and frequently criticised by mainstream critics and moral guardians. In common with Radway's romance fiction readers, these women cannot easily be viewed as ignorant, dull, or misguided consumers of mass culture, nor can they be viewed as the impressionable, bloodthirsty viewers which the moral guardians of society associate with horror cinema. The respondents express choices and tastes (preferring quality and intelligence) in horror films which make them seem similar to a high-brow or film buff audience - despite the fact that horror films are widely regarded as low-brow entertainment.

III. Representations and strong female characters

A number of the films most frequently selected by the respondents as favourites have major female characters, a point that respondents drew attention to when asked to explain their choices. The most mentioned feature in the appeal of Alien (one of the most frequently named favourite films - see chapter 4) and its sequels was the enjoyment viewers obtained from watching a strong woman taking an active role. Many respondents felt that the representation of a strong, intelligent, and resilient female was a major change from the vast majority of female roles they had previously seen. In particular respondents like the fact that the character is intelligent and does not resort to screaming when menaced by the monster. Respondent bfs136 likes the 'strength and resilience of the female lead' whom she says is: 'surely the first non-shrieking horror heroine' and em125 says that she likes this character because 'she's the only one smart enough to survive and she's a woman.'

Thus, for many of the respondents, it is the representation of a strong female (and possibly the star performance, in this case that given by Sigourney Weaver - see below for more on the viewing pleasures associated with stars and star performance) which is the most important element of the film's appeal. Even though respondent bfs138 does not particularly like SF-horror films, it is chosen as a favourite purely because of this character:

I enjoyed it, but my main reason for including it is that it is the only film I've seen - or that I can recall seeing - that has a strong, competent and assertive heroine in it.

It has frequently been pointed out that the role was originally written as a male character and several respondents point out that Ripley is stereotypically masculine. For some, watching heroines who behave like heroes, in a masculine fashion, was itself attractive. Other respondents, however, enjoyed seeing feminine traits which they read as strength in the character.

Respondent em115 likes the fact that even strong female characters behave in feminine ways:

Movies like Alien and Nightmare on Elm Street have very good female roles. The women are strong, but usually show some typical female reactions. Ripley's strength in Alien is very female - a female level of practicality that movies like Predator don't have. The female lead in Nightmare On Elm Street knows what is going on and doesn't fall for all of the typical 'crazy female' coddling that everyone around her tries.

Similarly, respondent hh102 praises the 'excellent performance of Sigourney Weaver' which shows 'how wonderfully a woman can take the lead ... she shows her fear and then overcomes it to become a triumphant heroine.' In general, the respondents appear to enjoy watching strong, capable characters, and although some disregard the sex of the character (as respondent hh107 says 'I like characters who seem reliable or capable of being so' and then lists Sherlock Holmes, Mr Spock and Ripley as her favourite examples), others respond positively to the fact that they see the strong female characters as embodying both masculine and feminine traits and they regard the feminine characteristics as equally important to the representation of a strong woman. In a similar way, Bundtzen (1987, p.12) describes Ripley as 'an exemplary figure for women in her rugged independence, cool courage under fire, and resourcefulness' but also points out her endowment with a 'more traditionally feminine trait ... her loving, maternal nurturance of the young girl, Newt.' Many respondents are concerned that few strong, capable and emotional characters in horror cinema are female. When one does appear, as in Alien, the female viewers seem to focus on the film and this undoubtedly explains the popularity of certain films in this study. Other films with strong female leads, such as Terminator, its sequel Terminator 2 and The Silence of the Lambs were also often named by women as favourites. Respondent em108, for example, picks out the heroine in Terminator for much the same reasons as Ripley is enjoyed: '[Sarah

Connor] is a good character: feminine **and** smart. She's tough and resourceful when she needs to be, while still remaining very much a female.' Respondents would like to believe this represents a positive change in representations in recent years, but are sometimes unsure about whether this is a fallacy or wishful thinking as evidenced by respondent bfs127 who comments that 'more women are becoming the tough heroines and whether this is just a 80s/90s fad, I don't know.'

The respondents do, then, seem to seek out films with strong female roles, and many respondents appear to have adopted deliberate reading strategies which accommodate a range of representations of women and femininity in horror films, taking pleasure in both masculinised heroines and more traditional feminine behaviour in what they still consider to be strong female roles. Like Radway's romance fiction readers, the respondents seek out texts which foreground the strength and independence of the heroine and a link with feminist activism or beliefs is suggested.

IV. The problematic of violence

For most respondents, the violence inherent in many examples of the genre was a barrier to the pleasurable reading of horror films. Dislike was often expressed for films that contain excessive or gratuitous displays of violence, gore, or other effects used to evoke revulsion in the audience. As stated above, the respondents often preferred a mode of telling that left something to the imagination. Again, parallels can be identified with Radway's findings (p. 159): lack of character development and relationships together with high levels of aggression and violence are very similar to the reasons that romance fiction readers gave for defining romances as bad.

A few respondents did declare that they took pleasure in viewing the more violent forms of horror, but women who claimed to enjoy the visceral thrills of watching violence were a small minority. In the main, those who claimed to like horror films with gory special effects preferred such films to be over the top, unrealistic, or comic. Poorly executed special effects were enjoyed precisely because they were bad and unconvincing. If a gory or violent film was thought to have a good story with interesting characters and to be well made, however, some respondents who otherwise disliked this type of film might enjoy it. The respondents appeared not to simply dislike gore or violence so much as dislike the way these elements were used in the film.

There was a tendency to emphasise the distinction between real-life violence and what is depicted on screen:

I like horror films that are shocking, but not necessarily very scary. Gore-fests are often the most fun horrors to watch. I don't [know] why seeing someone being mutilated or attacked should be entertaining, but it's usually not too realistic, so I try not to analyse myself about it. (st101)

This emphasis on a difference between realism and faked gore, alongside the respondent's questioning of why she might find watching such material enjoyable, may be related to the screen violence debate and the linking of the viewing of violent material with a tendency to violence in real life. An example of this is given by respondent in101 who particularly dislikes horror films based on real-life cases of violence:

I loathe the perennial adolescent fascination with Jack the Ripper. He was a real serial killer who stalked women - this I do not find amusing or commendable. He turned up in 2000AD, Babylon 5, any number of books as a plot 'surprise' or twist. Why I like horror is that it is not real - the Ripper is real and real women died. It's not funny.

It is worth noting here that the respondent particularly dislikes fictional representations of a real-life perpetrator of violence against women and the issue of sexual violence is dealt with in more detail in section 6.3.

The possibility exists that respondents do not speak out about an enjoyment of violence being among the pleasures of horror film viewing because they do not want to be associated with the 'depraved' or 'corrupted' viewers of violent genres. However, a small minority of the respondents do express a delight in the more violent forms of horror (as distinct from those who enjoy 'bad' special effects films for the humour). A small number of respondents claim to enjoy the visceral thrills of watching violence and this is typified by respondent hh115, a member of a small female fan group who meet to watch horror, kung fu, and other similar films:

Since moving to Brighton we have formed a band of women who call ourselves Women In Favour of Movies with Mindless Violence which is a backlash to the PC of most of our members youth! We meet on average once a week to view such delights as John Woo and Sam Raimi films and are embarrassed to say are now becoming experts in the field.

Such women (or at least those who are open about it) remain a minority within this study, however they do expose some contradictions amongst female horror fans and followers. Are the members of this group

immasculated spectators colluding with male violence? Although a possibility, this may not be entirely true since the name this group has given itself and the reference to political correctness indicate an understanding (and rejection) of feminine stereotypes. Nevertheless, an element of doubt remains over whether the reinforcement of patriarchal attitudes towards women may be taking place in these women unconsciously.

Furthermore, the male spectator's identification with the monster or killer has been associated by Halberstam (1995), Ebert (1981) and others with social problems of male violence against women. As has been shown above, the respondents do enjoy watching violence while many express a fascination for or sympathy with the monster, but this seems to be a very different process - just as Clover (1992b) supposed - than an uncomplicated adoption of the male gaze and a 'collusion with the oppressor'. The issue of identification in this respect is problematical and the female viewer's identification may be shifting between the main protagonists (male, female and monstrous) on a continuous basis. Respondent sh205, for example, finds herself siding with both hero and monster, as well as male and female characters: 'Generally, I identify with whichever character appears most independent and assertive which can range from Ripley in the Alien films to Hannibal Lector in The Silence of the Lambs. Morality is not the issue.' As Clover has illustrated, the young male spectator's identification indicates a fluid shifting of identification across gender boundaries as well as between characters and the respondents' comments do seem to indicate a similarly shifting pattern of identification. Where violence is concerned, this is more problematical. Waller (1987, p. 6) has stated that 'there is no question that violence is a major element in the genre, as it is in virtually all dreams and all narratives of fact or fiction that we would label as horror stories.' For many female fans and followers, however, this may be one of the least important elements of the genre. Far more important to the respondents is the monster whom they see as central to the horror film.

V. Fascination with horror and the attraction of monstrosity

Spectator responses to the monster have been given considerable import in the literature (see, for instance Williams, Clover and Neale), but this work has left largely unexplored the appeal of the monster for female viewers. As shown in chapter 5, many of the respondents developed the taste for horror at an age when distortions of natural forms - supernatural monsters with a human face, for instance - are most likely to frighten them. Horror films share

the frequent representation of such monstrosity with children's fiction and films, and these representations are often mentioned by the respondents as a continuing source of fascination, suggesting that these viewers continue to be simultaneously drawn to and repelled by monstrous representations to those that had engaged them in childhood. Young children are more likely to be frightened by grotesque and supernatural monsters and sympathy or empathy with monstrous creatures becomes one of the pleasures of horror film viewing for the respondents in adulthood. A typical comment was provided by respondent hh104:

When I was very little, I used to collect 'monster cards' and one I remember was called 'the gormless blob'. It was a huge heap of green slime with one eye in the middle of its head, it was hideously ugly but it lived on love. If it wasn't loved it died. I had that card on my bedroom wall, near my bed and told it I loved it every night before I went to sleep. ... Monster films always make me cry.

There is an emotional response to monsters suggested here (telling a monster card that she loved it, crying for the monster in films) which parallels the emotional response to weepies (another of Williams' 'gross' films). This empathy for the monster continues into adulthood and may be one of the reasons why some types of horror film - vampire films, versions of Frankenstein, and films adapted from the work of Clive Barker, for example, all of which position a sympathetic monster as central to the narrative - are so popular with female viewers. As reported by Hoffner and Cantor (1985), children of primary school age and upwards are sensitive to a character's kindly behaviour regardless of monstrous appearance and feel sympathy towards that character. Respondent em122 states that she identifies with 'outcast or alienated characters' and sh205 says 'I empathise with the monster when it is an outsider who may perform acts of violence but can be seen as being driven to it by alienation or scapegoating.' It is possible that such identification is linked to the finding that many of the respondents have felt socially isolated in some way. Many respondents declared that they felt like loners or outsiders as children, describing themselves as 'school swot,' 'introverted,' 'bookish' or other similar terms, and their identification with the monster may be related to their not feeling part of a peer group. Respondents reported that, as they got older, the very fact that they were fans also contributed to their feelings of isolation. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, p. 4) describe the popular perception of the fan as other: 'The fan as extraterrestrial; the fan as excessive consumer; the fan as cultist; the fan as

dangerous fanatic.’ Jenkins (1992, p. 19) observes that ‘such representations isolate potential fans from others who share common interests and reading practices ... [and] make it highly uncomfortable to speak publicly as a fan or to identify yourself even privately with fan cultural practices.’ This status as outsider - the respondents seeing themselves or recognising that they are seen as fans or as belonging to a distinctive subculture - continues well into adulthood for some respondents. A number also comment on the fact that they are not always accepted in male-dominated fan circles (this issue is explored further in chapter 7) and this in itself is isolating. Regardless of whether the respondents see themselves as other, however, it does seem that fascination with monstrosity and feelings of sympathy for the monster are important factors in how the respondents read horror films.

A major element in determining whether the respondents feel sympathy for a monster is how human-like the monster is and this is also dependent upon the sexual or sensual appeal of the monster (see below). Respondent sh205 says that she particularly enjoys films which take ‘the viewer outside reality’ with ‘believable non-humans such as vampires who convey human traits taken to the limits’ and which ‘exemplify the limits of humanity and particularly the breakdown of identity.’ Whilst respondent fg102 says that she usually feels sympathy towards the ‘male or the female goodies’ she is also likely to sympathise with a monster such as the creature from the Black Lagoon: ‘in Revenge of the Creature I was so sorry for the poor monster - oh just put him back, leave him alone, stop poking him with that horrible electric thing, just put him back where he was.’ Respondent fg402 feels she identifies with ‘clumsy or helpless monsters’ like Frankenstein’s creature whom she regards as a victim. As a flip side of this argument, respondent hh114 finds that ‘what comes over as being most scary is man’s inhumanity to man no matter what sex or race (human or otherwise) that is, [these films] make me strive to be more tolerant to people who are different.’ The physical attraction of the identifiably human monster Pinhead was a major factor in the appeal of the Hellraiser films, also illustrating the respondents’ sexual fascination with monsters. Although the extreme levels of violence and excessive special effects render some horror films problematic for some respondents, with films like Hellraiser they can eventually be drawn to the human qualities of the monster. Respondent hh102 typifies this response:

When I first saw Pinhead I think that he really did scare me, he was incredibly good at being evil, the word is efficient. Pinhead

is the shark of the horror genre. It wasn't until Hellraiser 3 that he showed any weakness at all, but revealing his hidden human depths was an insight into one of [my] favourite monsters. I'm certainly very fond of him now.

Pinhead's status as sex symbol (the character has featured heavily in the advertising campaign for the Hellraiser series of films and become a pin-up in Japan) reflects the recent sub-cultural vogue for sado-masochistic and fetish fantasies, as well as body art such as piercing and scarification¹; Benschoff (1997, pp. 260-1) links Pinhead to the 'queer activist fashion sense that permeates Barker's work.' Clive Barker's source material in general was particularly well-regarded amongst the respondents for its sympathetic attitude to monsters. Respondent hh104 explained:

[Barker's] films are so beautiful, and his vision of the dark side is so complete. They are all scary, well-written and beautifully filmed, but I feel his vision is most beautifully portrayed in Nightbreed, where the monsters are the good guys. ... I think this may be a girlie film as most of the men I know don't like it much, but all the women do. A monster movie for people who love monsters.

Burns (1993) suggests another reason why women may find pleasure in the work of Clive Barker in its address to 'the mysterious inner powers of women' which draw on an imagery of blood and menstruation and in which femaleness is powerful. Similar associations can be drawn with vampires in particular and horror in general (see also Anwell, 1989) and this may be another source for the strong fascination the respondents exhibit for particular types of horror film. This association was not mentioned by the respondents, though it may be that they were uncomfortable discussing this topic.

If some degree of desensitisation has taken place in many of the respondents since childhood, resulting in their finding horror films less scary than they did at an earlier stage in their lives (see chapter 5), it seems likely that fascination with monstrosity - as suggested by Carroll (p. 190) - particularly aspects of the monster coded as feminine power, is an extremely important, if not the most important, pleasure of horror film viewing for these fans and followers. The attraction to monsters is typified by respondent hh102 who admits to finding 'some monsters highly attractive' and she even has 'crushes' on them. Again, it is a degree of humanity which she finds attractive: 'Some are ugly, some are beautiful, they are happy, confused and sad just like human beings,' but she also likes the fact that these monsters 'enjoy being monstrous,' suggesting a deep fascination with monstrosity.

She particularly likes vampires and the monsters in Clive Barker films, saying:

I like [horror films] for the dubious pleasure of the monster's company. The idea of a vampire, be it Christopher Lee or Brad Pitt, has always attracted me and left me with nothing but pleasant thoughts. I also have a tremendous crush on Pelquin, one of the leading monsters from Nightbreed. I should stress that I find these men attractive, not only when in repose but when they change into their full monstrous forms, fangs bared, blood flowing, etc. It is the entire image that I find attractive, not just the stars when they're looking human. Perhaps it's the power that these creatures wield to change your life forever, perhaps I'm just weird.

It is interesting that this respondent proposes that she might be 'weird' in having such fantasies. It may be that many women feel it is socially unacceptable to express fantasies about stars or characters of horror films, particularly to admit to a crush or intense attachment to monstrous characters in this way (and this may also be related to the fact that most respondents are above the age at which fan attachments to stars are seen as socially acceptable). Although the respondents mention many different kinds of monsters when describing what they like about horror films, vampires are by far the most frequently mentioned, often in terms of their sexual attraction and glamour, and this response is therefore examined in some depth below.

6.2 Erotic horror and viewing pleasures

The recent escalation in the popularity of vampire films has been explained by the fact that vampire fictions deal with the social issues of the time they were written (see Silver and Ursini, 1997, Freyling, 1991, and Gelder, 1994). There is clearly a continuing fascination with vampires and widespread curiosity about them; as Gelder (p. x) states, the vampire's enduring popularity 'lies primarily in their unfailing ability to fascinate.' For female fans and followers, however, the aspect of sexual fascination is one of the most crucial factors to emerge in this study. Respondent fg401 thinks that 'it must be sexual, it's not something you actually think about, but I think it probably is the erotic side of them,' whilst em122 says that she likes 'the erotic in films, whether it involves specifically sex or simply sensuality.' The fascination for the vampire and vampire sexuality is typical of many respondents, often related to the sexual appeal of the male stars playing the exotically handsome vampire popularised by Bela Lugosi and Christopher

Lee, or more recently Gary Oldman and Antonio Banderas. As respondent ex004 puts it:

I have a particular fondness for vampire films, a fascination with the vampire really. It originated as a sexual feeling evoked in me by the vampire character, and an admiration of his or her style - the elegance of their costume and their aristocracy. As I got older this became a real hobby for me, and I began to read a lot to discover the psychology at work behind that. I wanted to understand the evolution of the vampire and to unravel the intrigue surrounding its sexuality.

This respondent's fascination for the vampire and vampire sexuality is typical. She is fascinated by both male and female vampires, and two films she makes specific reference to in this respect are lesbian vampire films (Daughters of Darkness and The Hunger). Participants often make no distinction between vampire films on the grounds of sexual orientation and many seem equally attracted to both straight and gay or lesbian vampire films. It must be assumed that the polymorphous sexualities in vampire films open up sexual fantasies for many female viewers. The homoerotic theme of Interview With the Vampire seemed to be no deterrent to its appeal to a female audience. The respondent quoted above describes her use of the film as erotica:

I've hired vampire videos which I find particularly erotic and sat with my partner at the time watching them in a darkened room - Interview With the Vampire is one that I found particularly sexy, there's something intriguing about the homoeroticism between those beautiful young men. I didn't say anything but I think that my partner took pleasure in how I couldn't take my eyes off the screen, and obviously initiated something because of this.

Vampires are often portrayed in films as polygamous and bisexual and it would appear that for many viewers the vampire film reflects a perverse sexual fantasy.² Although the majority of the respondents are heterosexual, the vampire film seems to offer them a fantasy of an alternate sexual orientation. Respondent fg403 feels strongly that there is a sexual attraction to the vampire and for her this opens up fantasies about sexual behaviour not available to her in real life: 'it's the idea that you can go as far as you like because being dead isn't going to get in the way.' Several respondents admit to sexually perverse fantasies; em122 says that she has 'a somewhat perverse liking for films in which people end up being dominated' and in101 says watching vampires is 'like mental masturbation, you can do anything you like in your head because it's not real.' In particular, respondents like em122 find the vampire bite erotic, fg301 mentions playing sex games with her partner

involving biting rituals (Dresser describes such sexual behaviour in American Vampires, 1989, though no respondents in this study reported being practitioners of vampirism or blood cults in real life), and blood is often mentioned as a crucial element of the visual pleasures obtained from such films. Respondent fg401 thinks that finding vampires erotic is 'probably something to do with one's sexuality,' but her ability to articulate exactly what this might be is limited, although she does consider it to be feminine:

I don't mean if you're gay or straight, I think it's probably something to do with that, but I don't really know in what way. With women it's definitely got something to do with it, because it's more women than men like that sort of thing.

Such fantasies are also something which respondents such as hh116 wish to keep private and are one reason why she chooses to watch horror films alone or only in female company: 'I would not watch a horror film with a male friend, because one type of arousal is very much like another and while I am as passionate towards him as a glacier, he might get the wrong idea.'

It may be that the vampire film opens up various channels of pleasure, including homoerotic, for the female viewer which a closer analysis of the text-audience relationship might reveal. The fascination with vampiric sexuality and the identification with monstrosity could be read as a form of queer desire which, whilst not necessarily representing same-sex desire, nevertheless indicates something other than normative heterosexuality or traditional gender sex roles. In other words, a form of straight queer, or that which Benschhoff (1997, p. 5) defines as 'a more inclusive, amorphous and ambiguous contra-heterosexuality.' It is not appropriate here to put the respondents on the analyst's couch, but this does indicate that further textual analysis of horror cinema is required in order to open up debates about horror film spectatorship to active viewers such as the female horror fan or follower. The erotic appeal of vampires and a fascination with vampire sexuality has long been recognised as a pleasure for lesbian spectators (see Weiss, 1992, or Krzywinska, 1995, for example) and these aspects of horror cinema should be more widely acknowledged for female viewers of all sexual orientations. Stacey (1994a, p. 29) argues for opening up the meanings of the categories of identification and desire, thus enabling 'a fuller understanding of the pleasures of the cinema for female spectators.' The fascination for the vampire seen amongst this group of viewers would be a good starting point for such an analysis.

6.2.1 Reading the horror film as romance

Regardless of the theoretical debates which identification with the vampire opens up, these results link the consumption of horror cinema to other traditional forms of female consumption, particularly that of romance fiction. There is a common tendency to compare some types of horror film to the romance genre and the sexual appeal of the vampire seems to be extremely important in allowing the respondents to read the vampire film as romance. Respondent bfs123, for example, likes horror films with ‘a realistic and moving love theme within the plot.’ As might be expected, this reading of horror is dependent upon the leading male character (who may in fact be the monster of the horror narrative) and his relationship with the heroine. Respondent ps101 believes that ‘tragic hero figures’ such as Heathcliff or Lord Byron are not so different to the ‘magnetic vampire characters’ whom she finds much more appealing than the traditional hero, saying: ‘The vampires pose a striking contrast to the usual assortment of ordinary guys: hard-working, pleasant, thoughtful...and perhaps dreadfully dull.’ Respondent ps105 considers that:

The vampire film is the closest the horror genre comes to the traditional romantic film. Vampires have most often been portrayed in literature and film as handsome, often foreign, exotic men who seem to have an uncanny knowledge of how to give pleasure. Not so different from the old ideal of a movie star - how do you think Valentino made it so big?

Bram Stoker’s Dracula received many comments of praise despite the fact that the respondents did not find the film or the character of Count Dracula particularly frightening or repulsive; respondent bfs113 commented: ‘Dracula didn’t really scare me, but I like the storyline.’ The comment from respondent hh104 also confirms that the respondents may be reading this film not (only) as horror, but as romance (as the advertising indicated - see chapter 1):

Dracula is the nearest film made to the spirit of the Bram Stoker novel, although the story is still way off beam. However, I could forgive this film anything. ... [It had] amazing cinematography, completely beautiful to watch, amazing script, sets, acting, etc. and a completely coherent story. Very exciting, but not scary. A beautiful love story.

The sexuality and appeal of the male stars is another major factor for female fans. In Interview with the Vampire, Armand (played by Antonio Banderas, an actor described as having foreign matinee idol looks) is seen by several respondents as an example of the dark, handsome, exotic and charismatic vampire, whilst hh102 picks out the star appeal of Brad Pitt, saying that he

'excelled as Louis and visually he's perfect for the role.' Respondent bfs123 says that 'the Kurgan in Highlander is so horrible, he's loveable,' and describes the film as a 'sweet and tear-jerking romance and tragedy as well as highly incredible fantasy,' adding that 'it may not be everyone's idea of an evening in by the fire.'

Some respondents, then, would rather classify such films as romance than horror (although they recognise the overlap between genres) and many make their viewing choices on the basis of the romance elements of the film. In fact bfs123's comment about the way she watches Highlander recall stereotypical images of women alone for the evening with a box of paper-hankies and a weepie playing on TV. Respondent bfs105 says that although Terminator is 'sometimes classed as horror, often as SF,' she considers it 'to be a romance' and hh115 says that:

Films such as Dracula, Nightbreed, The Company of Wolves and many others would be classified as horror films, whilst all have me in tears. The first is a love story, the second a commentary about prejudice and the third a film about girls coming to terms with sexuality and becoming a woman.

These examples illustrate that it is not just the vampire film that works as romance for these viewers, although it is the predominant form of horror to do so for obvious reasons. Historical settings and themes more closely aligned with romance than horror are also a source of pleasure. Respondent bfs123, who describes herself as a 'history freak' and a 'long time Shakespeare and Classics fan,' selects her horror film viewing on the basis of 'an historical theme,' but says that she also loves 'more or less any historical drama.' Of the latter, she says 'I don't seek those of a particularly horrific nature, but I do enjoy historical characters placed into ridiculous situations that they are required to react to or escape from.' The taste for Gothic horror in particular is linked by many respondents to a liking for historical and costume dramas. This desire for historical settings and costumes and for recreating the fantasies they hold about the past is reflected in The Vampyre Society's organisation of weekend vacations and trips to Gothic locations (such as Whitby) and Victorian country houses and hotels where masked balls and other similar activities are held. The taste for historical drama also suggests that many of the respondents are nomadic subjects showing allegiance to other cultural products. Respondent fg403 says that, although she runs a Vampyre Society local group, vampire films aren't even her

favourite type of film, saying 'I like horror films, costume drama and French films; there's lots of different films I watch - Heathers, Betty Blue, Alien.'

The particular liking amongst this group of viewers for vampire films and other horror films based around a love story, then, may partly be explained by the fact that the respondents seem to read the films in very similar ways to romance fiction (although they do not much like mainstream romance - see chapter 4). In particular they identify the relationships between the vampires or between the vampire and its victim as a major source of pleasure. Like the subjects of Radway's study of romance fiction readers (p. 79), female horror fans judge the films on the basis of the relationships which develop between the characters and often chose to ignore the events and actions in the narrative that contradicted their reading of the heroine as strong and independent. Respondent em122 likes to view films that 'take the time to develop characters and have an interesting story' and ed101 likes the 'bad girls' who fall for the monster (she names Julia in Hellraiser as a good example) 'even if they do get punished or redeemed at the end - I can just ignore this since its so facile and clichéd most of the time, the images I take away from the film are of the woman in her glory.' Similarly, bfs131 likes Candyman whose heroine 'becomes a mythic figure of vengeance.' The ending must also give a satisfactory resolution to the story for some: respondent bfs123 says:

I find horror films with a love theme woven in leave one with the feeling that everything is OK provided someone cares. Something good comes out of the chaos. Afterwards I feel relaxed and satisfied if the baddies got their comeuppance; the hero is going to live happily ever after with the heroine; the plot has reached a satisfactory conclusion.

This respondent's comments reflect the appeal of elements of horror related to traditional feminine viewing tastes such as romance, namely love and the triumph of good, whereas bfs131 and ed101 seem to be reading against the grain and appropriating the female monster even though, as Jermyn (1996, p. 266) points out with respect to the female psychopath of the contemporary psychological thriller, there are no 'deliberately progressive or feminist intentions' in these films. Regardless of their feminist views, horror, like romance, allows the respondents to escape from real life and their social situations. Respondent fg402 says that she always finds the character of the vampire 'so much more exciting than guys I know' and likes 'the idea that it could be real because it's so much more interesting than our own little environment.' She likes to watch vampire films and fantasise about vampires

because 'you can be what you want to be; you don't have to worry about killing someone, what your friends are going to say or what your parents are going to think because you're dead and you've got those powers.' In this way the consumption of horror films, as Radway claims for romance, helps the respondents to 'make do' with their everyday lives, and also contributes to how they 'actively react to and shape their own pleasures and desires.' As Radway said of reading romance fiction, the experience 'offers participation in an imaginary world where the heroine is powerful, competent, desirable and successful - characteristics often suppressed in the reader's own life.' Similarly, the horror film can be 'subversive of traditional relationship patterns by keeping alive a version of the self which is often contradicted in everyday reality.' This accords with Auerbach's (1995, p. 3) view that vampires offered 'a secret talisman against a nice girl's life ... they promised protection against a destiny of girdles, spike heels, and approval.' And just as Pinedo (1997, pp. 1-2) recognises that horror films provided her with opportunities to overtly express emotions that 'were otherwise denied legitimate expression,' there is evidence from the respondents' comments that they too express emotions that are often discouraged in women. Respondent fg404 says:

The aspect that attracts me to horror films is that you're allowed to feel so much more of every kind of emotion, not just being in love with people, but aggression as well. That gives you the opportunity to perhaps be more open about violent feelings of all kinds.

The fact that vampire films and other horror films might be working not just to scare or disgust the viewer, but that they might be offering much more complex pleasures such as those associated with the romance genre, that they might offer an outlet for emotions not generally encouraged in women, or even that they might constitute a form of erotica or pornography for women, suggests that a wider reading of the genre in respect of the female audience is required. Putting aside questions about pornography for the moment (the issues raised by this, although relevant, detract somewhat from a debate about horror and the romance film), the above factors contribute to an understanding of why some female viewers are drawn towards horror as well as other similar emotionally exploitative films such as the melodrama or weepie. There is much here which accords with Williams' argument (1991, p. 9) for a new gender-driven genre criticism which allows female viewing pleasures once thought not to exist.

Sexual and erotic themes were important, then, to many of the respondents, particularly in vampire films with vampire and other perverse sexualities one of the most popular aspects of horror cinema enjoyed by the respondents. This may indicate that the vampire film can function as a form of erotica for women, providing these viewers with safe, if perverse or aberrant, sexual fantasies. The interpretive activities of the respondents can often be compared to the reading strategies of romance fiction readers, and in this respect horror can, like Gothic fiction, be coded as feminine.

6.2.2 Character relationships and construction of identity

The findings presented above with respect to identification, the appeal of strong female characters, the feeling of sympathy for the monster and the sexual attraction of vampires presents interesting parallels with the consumption of genres coded as feminine, not least with romance fiction. Whilst there is evidence of identification with the strong female of the horror film, the respondents exhibit a particular form of identification to emerge in this study - a 'subversive affinity' with the monster. The fascination or even sexual attraction of the monster can be related to identificatory practices observed amongst other groups of female spectators. In *Star Gazing* (1994a, pp. 138-170), Stacey identifies a number of identificatory fantasies and practices amongst female film fans in the 40s and 50s and a number of her categories are applicable to female horror film viewers (and especially viewers of vampire films). Stacey defines two categories of identificatory articulations of desire in which the viewer loses herself in the other (the star or character) which are appropriate here: transcendence (in which the spectators identity merges with that of the star or character in the film) and aspiration/inspiration (which takes the form of a desire for transformation of the spectator's own identity).³ These cinematic identificatory fantasies manifest themselves in a number of ways amongst the respondents, but the primary mechanism is a strong identification with the vampire. Some respondents state that they believe in vampires, others that they know the creature to be a figure of myth but like to fantasise about such creatures existing. Rocket (1988, pp. xiii-xiv) argues that people are drawn to horror because they 'unconsciously ... crave contact and even interfusion with a transcendent world beyond their own, or perhaps existing concomitantly with theirs, in another sublime plane of existence.' This appears to be an important factor in the appeal of horror for the respondents. Many report that they play at being vampires, frequently

dressing up in vampire costumes and wearing fangs, and many aspire to what they see as the glamour of the vampire in their appearance and behaviour. Such extra-cinematic indentificatory factors are dealt with in chapter 7. Many respondents, however, take pleasure in watching such glamorous creatures on the screen. Respondent ex004's description of her activities indicates a high level of obsession with vampire films which is related to her ideals of femininity and glamour:

The first video I ever bought was The Hunger, which I must have watched at least four times a week back then. I was always touched by the immense tragedy and sorrow of the vampire, and I suppose enjoyed the vicarious pleasure of the female sexual excess and expression in films like this and Daughters of Darkness. As a rather shy, mousy and introverted youngster it really filled a void in me. They were never so much role models, that style was far beyond me, but characters I could escape with into a fantasy world of glamour as I watched these films. I really found them arousing, exploring a sexual life which I had never had any contact with before - one that seemed otherworldly, and was glittering slick and soft focus on the screen, but beyond my imagination, confidence and certainty in 'real life.'

This respondent mentions that in addition to the erotic appeal of the vampire for her, 'there's also a sadness which goes with that - in the recognition of the vampire's status in society - being an outsider, a loner.' Thus, in addition to her aspiration to be like the vampires she is viewing on screen, she also seems to be finding a link between her own identity and that of the vampires in terms of the isolation they both suffer (the respondent describes herself as having been shy, mousy and introverted). There is a link here to the monster as other and an identification or fascination with monstrosity outlined above. The appeal of vampirism is linked to the enjoyment of historical genres and the romanticisation of the past explored above, with Hammer and other Gothic horror films providing a key source of images of this (imagined) past. These images then become an integral part of the respondents' indentificatory fantasies - and for some, as for respondent hh102, they become part of an idealised, yet aberrant, femininity:

Female vampires remain in my mind as a stylish image of dark beauty. The classically Gothic full length dresses and cloaks, the numerous high ceilinged rooms full of dark wood and velvet curtains are now, without a doubt, for me synonymous with grace and charm.

Visual pleasure for the respondents also comes from the viewing of historical styles of female clothing, though this is often linked with fetishistic

garments such as corsets and fabrics such as velvet. There seems to be an identificatory fantasy with the sexuality of the heroine:

I was also influenced by the female victims, because so often a Victorian setting was the basis for Hammer's Dracula and I was exposed to a barrage of images of beautiful frail thin and pale women in Victorian dress who were themselves sexualised by their relations with the exotic and erotic vampire. (ex004)

There is an indication here that the respondents are, rather than identifying with an innocent, non-sexual heroine, appropriating the monstrous-feminine and sexualised femininity. Again there are parallels with Radway's findings on romance fiction readers as this respondent seems to ignore events in the narrative that contradict her reading of the heroine as strong and independent. The acting out of these identificatory fantasies outside the cinema is dealt with further in chapter 7.

In constructing an identity around such fantasies (and some do change their appearance to match that of the vampire), however, many respondents feel this renders them odd or abnormal, but they express the belief that this is unavoidable since they also feel strongly that their liking for horror is an innate part of their personality (see chapter 5). Many, like respondent hh102 above, think that they might be 'weird'. Respondent fg405 thinks that she is 'just naturally odd,' and blames her liking for vampires and her predilection for wearing vampire-style clothing on being 'dropped on my head when I was a baby or something,' whilst ps010 says she 'can't help it' and ps006 asks if she is the only 'strange one.' All three mention that they have been subject to abuse in the street, fg405 complains about being called Morticia by members of the public and ps101 says that 'strangers have yanked their children away from me.'⁴ The fact that the respondents are willing to put up with such situations indicates that the identificatory fantasy might be very strong indeed.

Whilst some respondents construct identities around characters in horror films, others, such as hh104, feel that horror films reflect political opinions which they are in sympathy with:

Horror and SF have always been used for social commentary and exploring sensitive issues in a safe arena - ecology in No Blade of Grass, Soylent Green and any James Cameron film all of which carry heavy anti-nuclear messages; race issues in Enemy Mine, Alien Nation, Nightbreed; drug issues in Dark Angel, Alien Nation, Altered States; outcasts in Carrie, The Hunchback of Notre Dame. They make me want to be a better person and try to create a better world.

This suggests that there are additional forms of identificatory practice taking place amongst horror film viewers. One aspect of the horror film which is problematical for the respondents, however, is related to a lack of identification with violence and violent characters in the horror film which is evidenced by the dislike of many slasher films and an expression of boredom with films containing excessive and gratuitous violence. Non-consensual sexual violence and other forms of violence against women are commonly disliked. If female film fans and followers are reading the horror film as romance or using horror films as a form of erotica, what interpretive strategies do they employ for other types of horror, some of which are almost as well-liked as vampire and Gothic horror films, which cannot be read in the same way?

6.3 Representations and feminist discourses

Other interpretive strategies the respondents make with respect to horror films indicate that they take account of feminist debate about the genre, even if they do not agree with it. There are two aspects of sexism in horror cinema which concern the respondents, the representations of women in the films themselves and aspects of industrial sexism which create the environment for such stereotypes. Respondent hh107 bemoans the 'lack of roles for women' and hh101 thinks that 'to a large extent horror films are sexist' because:

It is always the woman who screams her head off and has to be rescued. Also, actors in the horror genre last longer. Women make one film and disappear but men repeatedly make horror films - Christopher Lee, for example.

Respondent bfs138 also feels that many sex scenes in horror films are very often 'wholly unnecessary to the plot' but are put into the film 'for no other reason than to get a half or fully naked woman onto the screen in order to pander to a certain section of the audience.' Similarly, bfs127 feels that 'women became the victims to bring in the sex appeal, and to show a little cleavage' and attributes this to 'the fact that women are often thought of as second-class citizens,' a situation which she hopes will change in time. Again, this is regarded as inequitable treatment of actresses and this respondent believes that 'male actors are not usually exploited in this way.' Nudity is a concern to many respondents who feel this is exploitative. Respondent hh106 says: 'One only has to look at the number of instances of female nudity compared to those of male nudity in films to deduce that the film industry in general is a fairly sexist business.' Respondent bfs138

blames the industry's limited attitudes towards women for the sexist stereotypes perpetuated in the films themselves:

In virtually all [horror films] women are portrayed as victims, passive, stupid, unable to act for themselves. In any film where women have a strong part - like Basic Instinct - they are portrayed as homicidal lunatics. As far as the majority of these film makers see life any woman who is not dead, naked, on her knees or terrified is a psychotic bitch.

There is a generally held view that because, as respondent hh106 says, 'there are few female directors, producers and screenwriters' working in the industry, 'it is inevitable that many films are going to be tinged with sexism.' Respondent ed103 also feels that this scenario is due to the fact that the film industry is male dominated, and uses this fact to explain the pandering to a male audience:

There are few women directors in the horror genre, which may explain the stereotypical 'bimbo' in a lot of horror movies (especially slasher films). Although I think there are a lot of strong female characters (Ripley from Aliens, the sister in Psycho) they are often overlooked - as if studio bosses think an audience may not identify with such a character.

A similar belief is also held by respondent bfs145 who says: 'Women are still portrayed as the weaker sex, men as the protectors. This is mainly due to men producing and directing films. How can men look brave and fearless if they don't have a feeble little woman to look after?' Some attitudes criticise the patriarchal ideologies inherent in society; respondent hh113 feels that women are treated badly in horror films because they are 'often seen as men's property.'

There seems, then, to be an acknowledgement of feminist discourses surrounding the Hollywood film industry and a belief that because the industry is pandering to the perceived pleasures of the male audience, representations of women are generally negative, unrealistic and out-dated. This is often contributes to how the respondents perceive the quality of the film. Respondent hh102 makes reference to 'bad' film makers:

Horror films often put women in danger, in pathetic or compromising situations because that is a clichéd way of representing danger. The watching audience knows that the situation is supposed to be frightening and a bad director will make no more effort than that, hoping perhaps that some of the victim's fear will wear off on the viewer.

These opinions may be related to the industry belief that the horror film audience is male dominated, and certainly the respondents feel that female

tastes are not accounted for. Respondent bfs134 is resigned to the fact that 'most horror seems aimed towards men anyway.' Issues of representation and identification are important here. Respondent hh102 goes on to say that it is a 'great shame that women are not given more serious lead roles' in horror films and that 'as a woman I would like to be able to take a few more lead women seriously when they play their roles.' This being true, we might expect these respondents to stop watching such films. However, this is not the case and they continue to watch and enjoy the genre. It seems that the pleasures of horror film viewing for these respondents outweigh the problems with representation or a lack of identification with the protagonists. Some respondents seem able to take up two contrasting positions at the same time; respondent ds207 says that:

From a woman's point of view I dislike the sexism and gratuitous nudity which is so common in these films, but speaking as a horror fan the odd shower scene doesn't offend me just as long as it leads to a nasty death scene.

It seems that holding feminist opinions and liking horror films are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although respondents do see these as separate aspects of their personality. They tend to suppress the former in order to allow themselves the pleasures of the latter. Respondent em105 thinks horror films are sexist, but says that she 'laughs it off' for two reasons: 'I don't believe the silly stereotypes presented and I don't watch to see how women are treated.'

6.3.1 Responding to representations of femininity in the horror film

The vast majority of respondents recognise and accept that most horror films contain negative female stereotypes. Several mechanisms are to be found amongst the respondents to refute accusations of sexism, or excuse the genre from such accusations. One tendency amongst the respondents is to excuse or ignore this on the grounds that all cinema is guilty of such portrayals. Respondent bfs113 thinks that 'horror films are no more sexist than any other genre' and bfs144 says 'it is not confined to the genre - it happens in most films.' These respondents do not let the representations which they find objectionable detract from the overall pleasures of horror films viewing. Respondent fg201 also gets 'quite annoyed' at the portrayals of women in horror films and states that she does not like 'seeing women being victims all the time.' However, she says: 'Throw a few men in there as well and I'm

happy.’ Respondent hh117 does not allow the representations to overwhelm her viewing pleasures, saying: ‘I object to these women who scream every five seconds but I don’t think women have to be the strong lead to make it a good film.’

The respondents, however, do make decisions about quality on the basis of such representations. Respondent bfs116 thinks that sexist stereotypes are found ‘not just in horror films’ and would ‘rate any film in which women were portrayed as merely victims or objects as questionable.’ Others, here bfs140, make viewing choices based on the assumption and prior knowledge of such representations: ‘because the treatment irritates me I tend not to watch these.’ This might indicate a form of self-censorship taking place, with a pre-selection of viewing material based not just on the individual’s threshold for horror or violence, but on some aspect of feminist interest or knowledge, if not activism. Many respondents do feel the need to make out a case that recent horror films contain more positive representations than older ones. Some respondents claim that the horror genre in recent years has included less sexist portrayals of women (many respondents base this argument on the Terminator and Alien films). Respondent bfs101, for example, thinks that ‘there are good role models’ in recent horror films, she names Ripley and the sisters in Night of the Comet, and feels that ‘the stereotype of the mother defending her children’ which she thinks might be ‘ambiguous as heroinism’ is ‘still probably accurate.’ Others state that they only watch examples of horror with female characters they deem to be positive role models or seek out recent horror films with what they consider to be less sexist portrayals. Again, films such as Alien and Terminator come in for frequent mention. Respondent bfs131 says:

A great many horror films are sexist, although some writers/directors make a point of having strong female characters (Clive Barker, for example), and those are the directors/writers whose work I would choose to see rather than those with sexist attitudes.

In addition, the sexism in older horror films is often glossed over on the grounds that films are historical documents reflecting the socio-political climate in which they were made, and thus reflect the gender stereotypes common at the time. There is a tendency amongst the respondents to make excuses for these films. Respondent hh110 blames cultural as well as historical factors: ‘American films are worse for treating all women as wimps in their films, even the modern ones. Hammer used to treat women like that

but it is acceptable as they were made a long time ago.’ Respondent hh119 says that ‘In Hammer films there is a certain amount of pathetic female victim syndrome, but I find it funny because it’s so predictable.’ However, she also seeks out strong female roles and feels that there are ‘a lot of old horror films where the woman have the upper hand, for example they become vampires and men are attracted to them and led to their deaths which seems like justice to me.’

Many respondents assume that misogynistic or patriarchal attitudes towards women are at the core of these negative stereotypes. Respondent bfs140 believes there is a ‘sexist assumption of inability and inferiority’ at work and bfs159 attributes it to the fact of ‘women being seen as the helpless sex, making them more vulnerable to threats both physical and psychological.’ Some respondents are also of the opinion that this has changed in recent years and furthermore they claim that recent horror films contain more positive representations than other contemporary film genres. Respondent fg404, who says that when she was a girl she thought ‘that all women had to do to be an astronaut was scream and cook, due mostly to the influence of Lost in Space,’ feels it is unfair to ‘separate horror from any other genre’ and thinks that horror ‘has never been any more sexist than any other genre and tends, especially in the 80s and 90s, to give women more strong roles than any other genre.’ Respondent hh116 reverses the argument and believes that it is the male representations in horror cinema which are negative stereotypes:

Women are treated better by horror films than in mainstream cinema. They often actively fight the vampire, werewolf or whatever. In other films they are often just bed-fodder or somebody to say ‘I don’t understand.’ Men get the raw deal in horror. A woman killed by a vampire tends to be seduced, a man is more likely to be savaged.

Other respondents are not overly concerned with feminist issues related to sexism and stereotyping. Some respondents, like st101, feel that the negative stereotypes of women do not matter because they do not believe that films affect the opinions of the people watching them:

I think that people don’t take films seriously enough to change their opinions. If you think in a sexist way already then it won’t make that much difference to you, you’ll only agree with the stereotypes, not rush out and become an axe-murderer victimising women.

Respondent fg201, on the other hand, feels that horror films provide opportunities to point out sexist stereotypes to male acquaintances:

Horror films show [femininity] up as a complete cliché. Whereas if you watch Hollywood romance it's everyday stuff and it naturalises it, in horror films it emphasises it. There's so many people that are so stupid they just don't understand things unless you actually point them out right in front of their faces - you can do that with horror films and you can't do it with mainstream things. You can't say 'oh look, she's eating an ice-cream, he's eating a ... whatever a manly thing to eat is.' They'd go 'oh don't be stupid.' But in a horror film you can actually point those things out. You'd go 'how many girls do you know who actually faint. None.'

Although some respondents may dismiss the negative stereotypes of women in the horror genre and many are prepared to make excuses for the genre, many do seem to express feminist opinions. It seems though that these are often dismissed, if temporarily, when it comes to the enjoyment of horror films. In addition, many hold stronger opinions on the linking of sex and violence in horror cinema. It is important, then, to consider not just representations of women but representations of violence and the opinions of the respondents on representations of violence against women, in particular how they deal with watching the abuse of female characters. If female spectators are not colluding with the male oppressor as Halberstam and others maintain (see chapter 2), the interpretive strategies of the respondents and how they rationalise or deal with such factors must be established.

6.3.2 The slasher film: contradictions and criticisms

The comments of respondents who like slasher films reveal a significant contradiction in the tastes and responses of these female fans. Surprisingly, perhaps, there was no significant difference between age groups in their preferences for these films. Those respondents classing themselves as fans, however, were more likely to admit to liking slasher films, suggesting that they may have more appeal to the more dedicated female horror film viewer (see chapter 5). Those respondents who liked slasher films felt the need to excuse their taste in some way, typically by stating that they like particular examples of the genre - Halloween, Friday the 13th and Nightmare on Elm Street, films which they regard as being well-made or original, are frequently named - and not others which were held to be formulaic or imitative. Some respondents preferred the funnier versions of the sub-genre, while others said that they had to be in a particular frame of mind to watch slasher films. Typically, many of those who stated that they liked slasher films made an

attempt to argue against the criticisms made of the genre. Respondent em122 argued:

There is no predominance of females being killed. Most slasher films ... have nearly equal numbers of male and female victims. I think an actual census of horror movie victims would show that females tend to be threatened but escape or are rescued; males tend to be killed. But people only notice the threats to the females and simply shrug off the male deaths.

Others, such as respondent em126, recognised the slasher film's depictions of violence toward women, but chose to ignore them:

I know that in a lot of slasher films there's definitely some bad treatment of women going on but at the same time, I enjoy the films, sometimes despite the fact that I'm protesting all these naked female bodies and stupid women who can't do anything but scream. It's foolish when it comes down to it.

As this comment suggests, respondents frequently recognised that their responses were contradictory. This extended to feelings about the victims themselves: the respondents frequently express opinions which come close to victim blame when discussing the death and abuse of female victims in horror films, particularly in slasher films. Respondent fg103 described her feelings about characters she referred to as 'bimbos': 'I tend to find that I don't mind these women being victims - they deserve to be killed off!' A number of the respondents feel that the female characters who are subjected to violence in horror films often deserve what comes to them; fg202 says 'sometimes I just think women are stupid and just don't care if they die.' In these cases the respondents feel that these female characters are weak, and they frequently ignore or laugh off these negative representations. They may not take pleasure in watching weak female characters, but this does not seem to spoil the overall pleasure of horror film viewing for them. These ambivalent attitudes may be related to the response given to victims of domestic violence that they deserve it. Certainly, there are similarities to the battered woman myth (Radford, 1993, p. 189) that says abused women are 'weak, damaged or less intelligent individuals, unable to "walk out" because they need someone to tell them what to do.' This myth in effect leads to blaming the 'violence-prone' woman for her own abuse, injury or death. This seems very close to the opinions held by the respondents on the female victims of the horror film who meet death at the hands of the monster - or more frequently the serial-killer of the slasher film. The victims (and these can be male as well as female) are deemed to be less intelligent and less resourceful than the 'final girl' and

therefore, say the respondents, they deserve their fate. In the main the respondents do not seem to be aware that such a parallel with real-life victim blame could be drawn and they insist that because they know the difference between reality and fiction this is not a sign of holding such attitudes in real life. It may though indicate an unconscious adoption of such ideologies, although the fact that the respondents do not regard such depictions seriously in horror films (whereas they do in more realistic genres - see below) does suggest a more complex response to such representations.

6.3.3 Viewing violence against women

Attitudes towards sexual violence or abuse in horror cinema, then, highlight some of the contradictions inherent in horror film viewing for women. Although both the atmospheric horror films and the gore films are likely to contain violent scenes, the latter have more often been criticised for depicting excessively violent attacks upon the female body. Weaver (1991, p. 390) determined that although male and female characters suffered violent attacks in similar numbers (confirming respondent em122's assumption quoted above), 'scenes portraying the death of female characters were significantly longer than those involving male characters.' In some cases, the threat of violence towards female characters is sexual in nature (Weaver, pp. 388-9) and this causes further divisions in how the respondents read these films. As established above, in the case of vampire films and several other examples of the genre, sexual violence or force is elided by sexual desire or the potential for sexual liberation in the victim which is a key source of identificatory and viewing pleasure for the respondents. Other interpretive strategies allow the respondents to continue to enjoy less erotic forms of the horror film in spite of the violence upon the female body. Some women make excuses for the genre in the same way they excuse the negative stereotypes; respondent fg404 reads the horror film as comedy:

I don't think the violence against women bothers me, because the formulaic quality of the genre is so recognised and has a sense of humour, you don't take it that seriously. Killing a beautiful girl in a slasher movie may objectify women, but it's less noticeable in the comedy context of the genre than the hatred inspired of a less passive woman with a motive.

This respondent says that 'at least when women are placed as victims we like them and sometimes admire their courage - we're rooting for them.' She finds it much harder to identify with female killers in films like Single White Female, Misery and Fatal Attraction, saying:

In these more recent films the audience is really encouraged to hate these spiteful, hysterical women (when I saw The Hand That Rocks the Cradle people actually cheered when the wife punched her!) and identify with the men who may have cheated on their wives or girlfriends but that's suddenly made fine by the excessive violence against them.

However, most respondents report feeling extremely uncomfortable with depictions of sexual violence. As Hill (p. 52) suggests: 'Rape is ... a complex issue for female participants, generating both fear and anger at fictional and real incidents of rape. ... Social/cultural typecasts of women as victims influences female participants' response to the issue of rape.' Many respondents report feeling uncomfortable when watching rape scenes; fg202 said 'I don't like rape scenes at all, I don't like to watch them' and bfs123 says that rape scenes leave her with the 'feeling of vulnerability.' For some respondents these feelings are tied into their general feelings about all fictionalised forms of violence. Respondent bfs154 says that she dislikes 'intensely graphic scenes of violent rape and women being beaten,' but also 'overt physical violence aimed at men,' whilst bfs123 says that 'what is wrong in any medium is violence, whether it be of a sexual nature or any other.' As Hill also discovered, issues surrounding fictional depictions of rape are complex and responses depend very much upon particular instances in particular films, as demonstrated by respondent ex004:

The only display of violence against women I've ever felt personally affronted by is I Spit On Your Grave because of the unnecessarily harrowing rape scenes and the heroine's torture. The executing of her revenge is obviously justified, but the way she did this ruined any pleasure which could be gained from her brutally avenging her torturers. To get the men into a situation where she could hurt them she seduced them and had to subject her body that they had already punished again. I hated that and in spite of the violence she inflicted on the men (castrating one of them) when the film ended there was no sense of relief or revenge. She seemed to be a victim even though she survived - the film ended with cold detachment.

There is no evidence, then, to suggest that female viewers enjoy depictions of rape and other sexual violence in horror films, nor do these seem to help the respondents to deal with difficult emotions surrounding fears of sexual violence in real life. Many respondents, however, do make a distinction between more realistic violence in other genres and horror films. Respondent bfs123 names The Accused as a film she found particularly difficult to watch: 'When we were recommended a Jodie Foster film which contains a twenty minute rape ordeal, we were both truly repulsed, and very suspicious of the

person that lent it to us.’. The fact that she finds this and other films like it much more disturbing than horror suggests this respondent makes a strong distinction between what is acceptable and what is not. Respondent sh201 thinks ‘the most important thing about horror films is that they aren’t real’ and bfs156 says:

I do distinguish between films with real violence such as Deliverance, Brubaker and Scum and horror film violence. The first kind is to do with reality and mental violence and it upsets me; I can’t watch it. On the whole horror violence is slapstick, over the top and watchable.

These results suggest that respondents see horror purely as fantasy (though it does raise questions about how fans define the margins of the genre with some drawing this distinction whilst others name films such as The Krays as favourite horror films; closer readings of violent films are indicated here to establish the mechanism for such definitions). For some, horror film fantasies may form some kind of defence mechanism against real-life fears. The following comment from respondent fg201 suggests that horror helps her deal with the reality of the threat of violence against women by allowing her to occupy her mind with supernatural dangers:

When I’m walking back through the park. I’m not really frightened of being raped or mugged but by being scared by someone, and getting uncomfortable. I know it’s not because I expect someone to come jumping out from the bushes and say boo, but I feel uncomfortable because it reminds me of films I’ve seen, like Superstition [where] something supernatural pops up.

In addition, respondent hh119’s comment that it ‘seems like justice’ that men are ‘led to their deaths’ by female vampires in a lot of older horror films and the remark from hh116 that ‘men get the raw deal in horror’ (both quoted above) might indicate that some horror films might fulfil some kind of feminist revenge fantasy for some female viewers, but there is little evidence of this elsewhere. The overall impression given, however, is that violence and sexual violence, whether directed against men or women, are not sources of pleasure for the respondents, but unlike Williams’ horror film spectatrix this does not lead to a refusal to look. Rather there is a disavowal of female victimisation which might in itself contribute to an acceptance of patriarchal attitudes towards women (Radway, 1984).

6.4 Reading strategies and resisting viewers

The most important finding from an analysis of the respondents’ readings of horror films is that representations of femininity and female sexuality within

the horror genre can be a source of resistance for female viewers. Most importantly, many vampire fans show evidence of 'reading against the grain' in that they respond to many vampire (and other horror) films as romance or as erotica. Certainly vampire films do in many instances provide quasi-legitimate forms of visual pleasure for many female viewers, but there is also a tendency for some respondents to enjoy gratuitous horror for its own sake. There are clear parallels to Radway's work on the interpretive activities of romance fiction readers. Radway demonstrated how a group of women united by their reading preferences used a popular cultural form to deal with their social situation and showed how they actively reacted to romance fiction, using it to shape their own pleasure and desires. Although the group of horror film viewers taking part in this study have a rather different demographic profile than that of Radway's readers (in addition to the obvious difference of nationality, the horror film viewers are far more likely to be single or childless and more likely to be in full time occupation than the romance fiction readers), there are strong similarities amongst their opinions or reactions to their chosen cultural texts and commonalities amongst their uses and gratifications of the texts. Her findings on the pleasures of cultural texts - demonstrating the ways in which women construct their identities around such texts and the meanings of those texts in their social situation - also have relevance to the fascination amongst the female horror film fans and followers for horror and for monsters. The respondents use horror films as a fantasy to help them deal with their social situation and they use their fascination with the vampire and other monsters to construct identities for themselves, but the pleasure that these viewers take in a form of popular culture does not preclude a feminist consciousness or an awareness of feminist issues. A number of points have also arisen in this discussion with respect to patterns of fan consumption and behaviour and these are explored further in chapter 7, particularly in relation to vampire fandom.

¹ The character has a grid scored onto his face and head, each intersection pierced with a nail.

² The Goth subculture, to which a large number of the respondents align themselves, models an idealised sexuality along similar lines. See chapter 8 for an analysis of Goths and horror fandom.

³ Other forms of identificatory fantasies and practices which occur outside the cinema are dealt with in the analysis of fan practice in chapter 8.

⁴ Respondent fg401 blames this on conventional ideas of female beauty and said that she had been subjected to similar insults because of her weight.

Chapter 7 Femininity and Fandom

7.1 **Horror fandom**

Horror fandom consists of publishing (primarily fanzines, but also books¹), the consumption and production of merchandise (including photographs and posters, models, masks, make-up and costumes, as well as professional publications), and fan gatherings (societies, conventions and horror film festivals). It is impossible, however, to consider horror fandom as having distinct boundaries and there is much overlap with other fan cultures; as Reeves et al. recognise in their paper on fans of The X-Files (1996, p. 32, my emphasis): 'horror/dark fantasy fan groups ... *exist on the margins of sci-fi fandom.*' A number of horror societies exist in the UK, although there are a much larger number of fan groups based around related genres such as science fiction and fantasy. Many horror fan groups are small, locally-based clubs (for example, the Gothique Film Society which holds monthly film screenings in North London). At the other end of the scale, the British Fantasy Society is one of the largest UK organisations which includes horror fans amongst its members, though it is a multi-genre and multi-media fan organisation which includes science fiction, horror and fantasy in its scope and is concerned primarily with literature in these genres. There is every indication however, that women do not belong to such societies in large numbers. At the time the BFS assisted in the recruitment of female fans for this research it had a membership of a little over 360, just under 50 of whom were female. This ratio (under 14 per cent) points towards a low participation rate by women in traditional organised fandom. This reflects the position in traditional science fiction fandom which is literary based and male-dominated (see Jenkins' description of the barriers to women in male-dominated fandom in Textual Poachers [1992, p. 48] and Tulloch and Jenkins' account of Star Trek fans in Science Fiction Audiences [1995, pp. 3-5]). As Jenkins has observed, female science fiction fans tend to congregate in specific areas of fandom dedicated to subjects with a greater interest for women (Jenkins writes about Star Trek slash fiction and Beauty and the Beast as particular areas of female interest).

One section of horror fandom which is particularly prolific and has a large number of societies and groups is that for vampire fans. At least ten national vampire societies exist in the UK, including The Vampyre Society, The Dracula Society, Thee (sic) Vampire Guild, The British Vampire Society, The

Whitby Dracula Society, The Spirit Undead, The Children of Darkness and The Vampire Connexion. As evidenced by the strong liking women have for vampire films (see chapter 4), it might be expected that more women are attracted to these groups. This is confirmed by membership of The Velvet Vampyre Society²: of membership of its local groups, the south-west area group based in Newton-Abbot has twelve members, half of whom are female and the Glasgow based group has fourteen regular members, eight of whom are women; of 218 new members (from lists published in the society journal) joining the society during the period 1995-6, 106 were women (that is, 49 per cent). It would seem then that certain sections of horror fandom are more appealing or accommodating to female fans than others (and certainly it reflects the popularity of vampires amongst female fans).

A number of horror film festivals and conventions take place in the UK including The Festival of Fantastic Films in Manchester, Vampyria in London and Dead By Dawn in Edinburgh, while the BFS runs an annual convention (FantasyCon), but in contrast with science fiction fandom the number of such events is relatively small. Large numbers of science fiction and fantasy conventions are run in the UK every year and observation indicates that horror fans often participate in these: for example, at Intersection (the 53rd World Science Fiction Convention) held in Glasgow in 1995, the four day programme included a large number of items on vampires, a number of panels on SF-Horror and H. P. Lovecraft, and this attracted a large number of horror fans and particularly vampire fans to the convention. The latter included a large number of attendees in vampire costume (usually some form of Georgian or Victorian style clothing with fangs, nails and other vampire accessories).

As with other media fandoms, a large number of horror fanzines are published by fan groups or individual fans and much of the participation in such amateur publication by female fans is the writing of fiction (26 per cent of the respondents write fan fiction as a hobby). These examples can be considered as forms of textual poaching and this is explored further below.

This situation, with on the one hand female horror fans taking part in a specific area of horror fandom and on the other being diverted into other fan cultures, may account (at least in part) for the invisibility of female horror fans. A publicly professed liking for science fiction may be a front for a love of horror, and several participants in this study have stated that they have not

made their love of horror public, hh106 stating that: 'People seem to find an interest in horror more disturbing in a woman, and I consider this most unfair.' Many of the respondents specified a liking for science fiction in addition to horror and several pointed out that they discovered their taste for horror through reading or watching science fiction. It should be acknowledged, then, that many fans are nomadic, being fans of horror and science fiction, and also of fantasy or other related genres. Accordingly, there are large areas of overlap in the membership of fan cultures. Higher levels of active involvement in science fiction fandom, including attendance at science fiction conventions, and vampire fandom may be attributable to a number of factors:

- a response to the scarcity of horror conventions and/or the lack of welcome for women at these;
- overlap in areas of fan taste (nomadic behaviour);
- a liking for science fiction or for vampires, whilst still portrayed as other, being more socially acceptable, especially for women, than a liking for horror.

The female horror film fan then is doubly marginalised within horror fan culture, female fans being, firstly, largely ignored by the mass market and fan-based horror publishing industry and, secondly, often derided by male fans. Any analysis of women's position in horror fandom is complicated by the fact that such fans are nomadic, horror film fandom overlapping other fan cultures (primarily, literary and science fiction fandom) and account of this is taken in the analysis which follows.

7.1.1 Models of fan behaviour

Since participation in horror fandom is not widespread amongst female horror film viewers, it may be necessary to investigate (and construct) an alternative fan profile. The term fan connotes fanatical viewers and, although the women in this study view horror films frequently and habitually, they do not, by and large, fit the image of the fan who watches horror films to the exclusion of other viewing preferences or pastimes (rather, as nomadic subjects, horror tends to form part of a group of subjects that they like, for example, science fiction, fantasy and horror, or costume drama and vampire films - see chapter 4). Many are isolated viewers with low rates of participation in fan culture or do not participate at all in fan activities, others are members of literary or multi-media fan organisations. Specific patterns of fan behaviour and consumption are examined in the following sections of this chapter, but one

question which must be considered first is whether the respondents think of themselves as fans, regardless of their level of participation in fan culture; in other words, do they define themselves as a fan in order to indicate a particular interest in a cultural product. Most of the survey respondents (84 per cent) were happy to describe themselves as horror fans, but 12 per cent rejected this label. 4 per cent were unsure about whether they were fans and this may indicate an ambivalence about fans generally or whether they fit the typical horror fan profile.

What, if any, are the differences in fan behaviour or consumption between those who would call themselves fans and those who would not (referred to as non-fans below)? And can any patterns of fan practice or viewing preferences explain any differences? A number of hypotheses present themselves:

- 1a that fans and non-fans like different categories of horror film (fans being more likely to watch hard-core horror - slasher or gore films - as opposed to psychological or mainstream horror);
- 1b that fans are more likely to participate in fan consumption (to read horror magazines and fanzines or to attend conventions) than non-fans;
- 2a that younger respondents (under twenty-five-years-old) are more likely to call themselves fans (as it has become more acceptable in recent years for women to openly admit to liking horror films than in the past);
- 2b that older respondents (over forty-five-years-old) are more likely to call themselves fans (from the suggestion by Cheryl Cline [1992] that menopausal women are excused fan behaviour);
- 2c that women are least likely to call themselves fans during their late twenties and thirties.

There are no significant differences in the proportion of respondents who think of themselves as fans within the above age groups ($\chi^2 = 4.90$, ns), nor is there any significant difference between the fan and non-fan groups in the readership of the most popular British horror magazine, *The Dark Side* ($\chi^2 = 5.86$, ns). This leads to a rejection of hypothesis 1b and hypotheses 2a to 2c. However, those who consider themselves to be fans are significantly more likely to like slasher films than those who do not think of themselves as fans ($\chi^2 = 5.86$, $p = 0.00$). A liking for slasher films, then, may be an indication of horror film viewers classing themselves as fans, but there are few other differences between fans and non-fans in their preferences for any other horror film type (although fans are slightly more likely to like Hammer horror films, witchcraft films, monster movies and body horror than non-fans, these differences are not significant at the 0.05 level). There is little indication,

then, in the tastes of the respondents as to whether they class themselves as fans or not. As might be expected, the fans watch significantly more horror films on video than the non-fans ($\chi^2 = 29.08$, $p = 0.00$), although there is no significant difference between the fans and non-fans in the frequency of viewing horror films on television ($\chi^2 = 12.88$, ns). Since it takes rather more effort and cost to rent or buy a video cassette than to watch a broadcast film on television, this suggests that those viewers who think of themselves as fans make slightly more effort to view horror films. There is also a strong correlation between the age at which the respondents first started watching horror films and whether they consider themselves to be fans ($\chi^2 = 32.78$, $p = 0.00$). This indicates that an habitual liking for being scared formed at an early age (certainly, pre-teens) is an indicator for classing oneself as a fan in later life. Those who were under twelve-years-old when they first watched horror films show the largest difference and are far more likely to consider themselves to be fans than to reject the label. Those who started watching horror films between sixteen and eighteen-years-old are far less likely to consider themselves to be fans. This could be related to adolescent gender socialisation in that female viewers in this age group may be discouraged by peer group pressure from admitting a liking for horror.

There are other possible reasons for not wanting to consider oneself a fan. Fans in general are depicted as other and horror is considered dangerous or corrupting. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, p. 4) envisage media perceptions of (in this case, Star Trek) fans as other: 'The fan as extraterrestrial; the fan as excessive consumer; the fan as cultist; the fan as dangerous *fanatic*' (see also Jenkins, 1992). Terms such as 'nerd', 'geek' or 'anorak'³ are often applied to fans (see, for example, Bains, 1991); and male fans are commonly depicted as spotty, adolescent boys wearing anoraks and carrying plastic carrier bags full of merchandise. Tulloch and Jenkins (p. 15) also recognise that female science fiction fans are similarly vilified, often being depicted as overweight, lonely single women to which the term 'kook' is sometimes applied, as for example, by Leershen (1986): '[Star Trek fans consist] of a lot of overweight women, a lot of divorced and single women... Kooks.'). Female Star Trek fans were further vilified by being labelled Trekkies by the established and more serious male-dominated literary SF fandom to echo the term, and imply some similarity to, groupies (see Tulloch and Jenkins, p. 11). Some respondents do not wish to be too closely associated either with geeky or nerdish behaviour or labelled as kooky or associated with the sexual

connotations of groupie. In addition viewers of horror films are often depicted as corrupted or depraved by what they watch and thus a danger to society; horror film viewers are often equated with perverts or dangerous criminals (rapists, mass or serial murderers) whose abnormal behaviour is blamed on viewing horror films (see, for example, the media coverage of the killing of Jamie Bulger which was blamed on the film Child's Play 3). This comes partly from the climate of censorship in the UK and the idea that 'video nasties'⁴ in particular have the potential to 'deprave and corrupt'. If, in addition, it is considered unfeminine for women to like horror films, such social pressures make it likely that many women would not willingly admit to a liking for horror films. This may also be an additional explanation for the difference in viewing frequencies, since such viewers may not wish to make their taste public by renting or buying videos. Those respondents who developed a liking for horror later in life - or are fairly recent viewers - may be more sensitive to these factors. Respondent em103's comment indicates that such sensitivity may fade with time: 'I used to watch them alone ... because I didn't want people to know I watched them; now I watch as many as possible and don't care who knows,' as does bfs144's: 'I am fifty-four years old, happily married for twenty-nine years, and very content. I may not conform to the usual horror fan, but I don't care!' The image of fans is so prevalent that respondent bfs144 feels obliged to point out that she does not fit this image (and her lack of concern about this might be evidence of Cline's menopausal fan).

It is no surprise to find that female viewers do not wish to be labelled as fans since this renders them abject on a number of counts - as fans they are geeks or nerds, as horror fans they are depraved, and as female horror fans they are unfeminine. It is for this reason also that some respondents would not consider themselves as fans - respondent fg103 stated that her self-image precluded such character traits, for example. Respondent fg401, whilst she had not publicly admitted to being a fan (although she did readily admit to participating actively in science fiction, fantasy and horror fandom by attending conventions and other events - interestingly she describes herself as 'in the closet'), nevertheless considered her 'nerdish' behaviour to be that of a fan:

I don't know about being a horror fan, I'm very much in the closet so to speak. There's a big stigma attached to it. It's basically the spotty anorak type - I think I probably am a female version of that actually, you know school swot and all that.

Such depictions are, according to Tulloch and Jenkins (p. 15), exaggerated caricatures which allow ordinary viewers to reassure themselves that their own media consumption is on the right (that is, normal) side of 'the thinly drawn yet sharply policed boundaries between normal and abnormal audience behaviour.' As indicated by the above example, some respondents in this survey are quite keen to be seen to be on the 'right' side of that boundary, even to the extent that they think of themselves as 'in the closet.' Certainly, the majority of female horror fans surveyed are keen to emphasise wide ranging interests outside of horror and many insist they are not like fans in their behaviour and/or appearance. This may partly account for female horror fans being invisible within large areas of fandom: they isolate themselves by not going to festivals and conventions and by not participating in fan consumption. Respondent fg101, the organiser of a horror film festival, stated that women frequently rang her up, having been drawn by the fact that a woman was organising a horror event, asking if it was okay for women to attend the festival since they had never dared to go to one before. Other respondents report negative reactions from male fans to their being active fans:

I think females who like horror are looked on as strange. I've had a lot of people come up to me and tell me I'm a bit strange because I'm female and I wear a leather jacket and I do vampire role playing and I run the science fiction society. They go 'oh, they're guy things, guys wear leather jackets, guys like science fiction' and I always think what does that make me, just because I like something different, am I supposed to be a man or something. (fg402)

Other responses from active fans indicate several other reasons why women may not wish to get involved in male-dominated fandom which range from not finding the men involved attractive - fg202 said: 'They have a science fiction society at Edinburgh University, I thought, that sounds like fun, I went to the societies fair, I had a look at the guys, I went oh no' - to not having the depth of knowledge required to participate in fan circles:

I don't read horror books, I'm not interested in magazines or anything, I only watch films. I can't even remember what most of the things I've watched are called. 'Oh, is that the one in the London Underground: a boy and a girl and the girl had really great boots on and really cool hair and then she got caught by this monster...' But I hadn't a clue what it was called. That's what I think of fans, like fans of football knowing every score for the last ten years. I don't know anything, basically I just watch the films and I don't know who the actors are or whatever. I'm just

not interested in all that in-depth knowledge in anything really.
(fg201)

There does seem to be a view that male fans tend to be more attracted to the acquisition of trivial knowledge, and fg202's comment suggests that she considers this to be a masculine attribute: 'I guess men get more attracted to knowing, they enjoy knowing all the directors and then telling you he's made this film and did that...' Respondent fg201's comments also suggest that some female viewers might be interested in a different set of trivial details, here, fashions and hairstyles.

The respondents also differ from the accepted profile of the typical horror film fan in terms of age. As shown in chapter 1, the typical fan is thought of as an adolescent who quickly 'grows out of' his (for it is most frequently a he) liking for horror. Many forms of fandom are similarly associated with adolescent behaviour - for example, the crushes teenage girls have on pop stars or actors described by Cline (1992). Again, this is normally seen as something which they will 'grow out of'. This is often the case, though as Cline states, individuals are often embarrassed in later life to admit to a continuing fan adoration, not least because of the idea that such adoration is unacceptable adult (especially female) behaviour.

The respondents' liking for horror does not fit the pattern of a passing adolescent fan interest. As described in chapter 4, many started watching horror films (or related genres) well before their teens and their liking for the genre has persisted well into adulthood. Those who consider themselves to be fans also regard themselves as having been such for long periods of time dating from childhood: almost one-third of those who class themselves as fans say they have been so for more than twenty years and a further one-third for eleven to twenty years. Again, this correlates strongly with age (the older the subject is, the longer one has been a fan), but some of the respondents in their late teens or early twenties who started watching or reading horror-related material during very early childhood are included in these groups.

Given that neither the fans nor the non-fans among the respondents fit the pattern of typical horror fans, it is more appropriate to consider different patterns of fan behaviour in ascertaining the reasons behind the fan/non-fan split. In his theory of preferred reading, Hall (1980) observed three reading strategies: dominant, negotiated and oppositional. Reeves et al. (1996) relate this to the three levels of spectatorship they identified in science fiction fans:

casual viewers, devoted viewers and avid fans. It might appear likely that those who describe themselves as fans in this study correspond to avid fans, whilst the non-fans are devoted viewers and the remaining 4 respondents (the readers of horror fiction who watch horror films infrequently) examples of casual viewers. However, since horror film viewing patterns and fan behaviour do not seem to be significantly different between the former two groups, this division may not be apt in this case. Several of the respondents who do not classify themselves as horror fans are members of fan groups and might therefore consider themselves to be fans of other genres such as fantasy or science fiction. It is more pertinent then to examine alternative patterns of fan behaviour. Lewis (1992b) identifies four types of female fans:

- the avid fan who demonstrates extreme behaviour, a high level of textual competence and is heavily involved in media interactions;
- the intense fan identified by a distanced perspective and whose fan behaviour is linked to life goals and is a product of use value;
- the follower⁵ who is a fan in the making, is led by others (even though she may dislike the fan object), or is using fandom to rescue her from conformity;
- the hater whose liking is subsumed or subverted in social rebellion and who may find political gratifications from belonging to a fan community.

There are a number of avid fans in this study, these respondents are very knowledgeable about horror films and have seen large numbers of horror films which they are able to discuss in detail. These respondents could discuss films at length and could provide details on the making of films. Respondent hh102, for example, demonstrates a high level of textual competency when discussing the work of Clive Barker. She can name the novels from which Barker adapted his films and shows a detailed knowledge of his work. In discussing Hellraiser and Nightbreed she says:

I have always enjoyed the imagination of Clive Barker because he takes a very obvious joy in the supernatural, the macabre and the downright weird. I have never seen anyone else create quite such a variety of monsters. I'm more than fond of the Nightbreed. I find their whole way of life a wonderfully attractive flight of fantasy. I suppose watching this film may be quite an exercise for some people's imagination given that the 'monsters' are the good guys and the really evil one is a man, a doctor no less, a modern psychiatrist with no connections to the Frankenstein mould but that's exactly why I enjoy this film. I should also say that I think Image Animation did some of their finest work on this film.

This participant demonstrates a knowledge not just of the films and the characters in them, but also of the director, his written work and can name the

special effects team that worked on the films. She also relates the examples she discusses to other works in the horror genre. However, these avid fans constitute the smallest group amongst the respondents and avid fan behaviour is something many respondents criticise as being a negative feature which they associate with male fans (as in the comments made by fg201 and fg202 quoted above in the context of masculine fan behaviour). There are indications that the rejection of or lack of interest in male-dominated fandom leads women to find alternative outlets in less formal fan groups, as with the small group of respondents who formed their own women-only club, Women In Favour of Movies with Mindless Violence, as an alternative to taking part in organised fandom.

Many more respondents match the behaviour of intense fans and the life goals which this fan is said to exhibit primarily take the form of writing fiction, film reviews or criticism and other articles, often for fanzines or on the Internet but many also hope one day to be published professionally. Respondent bfs109, who is active in the British Fantasy Society, reviews fiction professionally for the magazine Starburst. Other respondents are active in fan societies or organisations (for example, fg403 who runs a Vampyre Society local group and fg102 who organises a horror film festival). As the following examples show, many relate their writing to their horror film viewing:

I like to examine the way things are done - and in the same way, make note of the things I think best not to do. Writing hasn't so much lessened my enjoyment of horror films, but it has made me aware of the tricks of the trade, and understanding breeds contempt of the dross. (bfs123)

As a writer I need to keep abreast of changes in the genre - a friend once asked why I wrote horror/fantasy fiction as opposed to writing about 'real life', my answer was that I have to live 'real life', why should I have to write and read about it too? (bfs131)

Fewer respondents match the follower or hater patterns, though this is to be expected since fans in these categories are unlikely to have the same motivation to participate in a survey. Worth noting is the owner of the electronic mailing list HORROR who fits Lewis's follower category having been initially asked by her cousin to monitor the list since he did not have computer access. Her participation in this section of the horror fan community led to a realisation that she did indeed enjoy horror, although she continues to class herself as a 'weenie' and does not like most violent or gory horror films.

It may be that female horror film fans and followers are, if not as numerous, at least as avid as male fans but it may be that they are seeking different goals or pleasures in their participation in fandom which have thus far been accorded little recognition. There are links to patterns of fan consumption, particularly related to commodity purchase and fashion, as described by Stacey (1994a). Overall, however, the comments indicate that the female viewers think of themselves as simply enjoying the films for their own sake. The respondents' participation in key areas of horror fandom are explored in the remainder of this chapter. In particular, this analysis focuses on one area of horror fandom in which female fans participate in large numbers: that centred around vampire films and fiction. The high participation rates in vampire fandom reflects the strong liking for vampire films as described in chapter 4, but other reasons for the high levels of participation by female fans are suggested.

7.2 Fan consumption: Magazine and fanzine readership

Very few women in the study are frequent readers of the mass market horror publications. Of the UK magazines, only 13 per cent of all respondents read all or most issues of The Dark Side and 12 per cent all or most issues of Shivers; whilst 62 percent never read The Dark Side and 57 per cent never read Shivers. Regular consumption of the American magazines is even lower (most probably due to the fact that they are only available in specialist SF/comic shops not frequently visited by women): 9 per cent read all or most issues of Fangoria, whilst only 2 per cent read Cinefantastique regularly.

Whilst regular readership of horror publications is low, more read the magazines on an irregular basis: 25 per cent read Cinefantastique occasionally, 34 per cent Fangoria, 20 per cent Shivers and 26 per cent The Dark Side. This appears to be because women are choosy about which issues they buy, only purchasing a magazine when it has something of particular interest to them in it. As hh107 reports: 'I tend to buy issues related to specific films or topics such as design/special effects I'm interested in.' This suggests that the respondents may be interested in special effects not in their own right but in association with particular films.

Of those respondents who read horror magazines only infrequently, they are just as likely to read an American magazine as a British title. One possible explanation for this is because women are interested in specific films and, since most horror films are made in the US, these films are covered earlier in

the American publications than they might be in the UK because of the lag time for release dates in this country (some horror films are only released in the UK many months after their US release, whilst many more only eventually find a release straight to the video market or satellite/cable television networks). The respondents are also particularly interested in Hammer films and this explains the popularity of the magazine Hammer Horror. Despite the fact that this magazine was short lived, it does seem to have been popular with the respondents and seems to have reflected their tastes in horror (an interest in the stars of Hammer films, particularly Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing, as well the interest in vampires and Gothic and classic horror generally) more than other titles.

Regular consumption of horror magazines by female horror fans is by and large absent, and the reading of even one horror magazine is low, with 33 per cent of respondents never reading any horror magazines, and a further one-third reading one or more titles only irregularly. Of the one-third who do read one or more horror magazines regularly, less than half (or approximately 15 per cent of the total) read more than one title regularly. Fanzine readership is similarly low. Rather than women being hidden consumers of these magazines (as might be suggested by lack of published letters from women), it would seem that they do not often buy (or read) these publications. John Gullidge, editor of the fanzine Samhain, has confirmed that women rarely subscribe to his magazine.

Whilst the low readership of both magazines and fanzines may be due to the fact that the respondents do not like these publications or only buy them selectively, it may also simply be that such magazines are unavailable (especially outside of the major metropolitan centres). Some respondents have indicated that they are not aware of some or all of the titles - st101 says 'I have never seen any of these magazines in newsagents I visit' and hh119 (who read Hammer Horror) 'I have never come across any other horror magazine,' whilst others such as bfs113 find that they are not available: 'My main reason for not reading those magazines ... is simple - it is difficult to get hold of the issues. Interzone and The Dark Side are the only ones I have found in fairly local bookshops.' Access to horror magazines, then, is restricted and this is undoubtedly compounded by women's low rates of participation in horror fandom or association with other fans: knowledge of these titles is unlikely to be handed down by word of mouth to the isolated

viewer. Often the magazines are only available in specialist shops which women tend not to frequent in large numbers; where they are available in high street stores they are often located with teen magazines and, therefore, may be overlooked by this group of viewers. There is also a possibility that they are deliberately overlooked either because horror is not seen as suitable cultural consumption by women and it is consequently not socially acceptable for women to read them, or because they are aimed at a young male readership with its attendant emphasis on gore, sex and trivial facts. Several respondents find them distasteful. Respondent bfs132 says: 'I don't like most professional horror magazines as they seem to lay an emphasis on gore, which I'm not fond of' and bfs105 thinks they are 'appalling,' saying: 'I do not read most because they aim for the lowest common denominator and I find them rubbish.' Others take exception to the objectification of the female body:

I look through things like Fangoria to see what's coming up but most fanzines spend too much time on 'tits and arse' - they seem to have concluded that all horror fans are sex starved adolescent males who will drool over any naked female body, so cram the issues with glossy photos of scantily clad women. (em103)

The emphasis on gore as the reason for disliking most horror magazines reflects the tastes of the participants (as presented in chapter 4) and in particular the dislike of gory, special effects-driven horror films. In addition, as illustrated by em103's comments, the contents of some horror magazines are seen as near-pornographic and as perpetuating negative stereotypes or representations of violence against women (see the magazine survey in appendix 4 for more details). One British title, The Dark Side, comes in for particular criticism in this area:

I used to read The Dark Side but got disillusioned with the continual coverage of sado-porn videos in which I have no interest. I understand that the editor also edits a magazine devoted to the porn video industry and I think he may get a little confused as to which films should be discussed in which magazine! (hh106)

Respondents find this and other titles offensive. Respondent bfs113 says: 'I only buy The Dark Side when there is something of particular interest to me in it, as generally I find its attitude and coverage of certain subject matter deeply sexist' and bfs116 dislikes seeing 'naked babes' in the magazines: 'Mags like The Dark Side carry photos that can be frankly embarrassing.' Respondent hh106 feels the coverage of horror in such magazines does not accord with her definition of the genre: 'One reason that I stopped buying The

Dark Side was that it concentrated on the worst examples of sexism in the horror genre when the vast majority of horror films are not like this at all.' Although The Dark Side does come in for most criticism in this respect, it is still the most widely read magazine amongst this group of viewers - 13 per cent of respondents reading it regularly. This may indicate that some women are prepared to overlook sexist or pornographic content in their desire to find out more about particular films or subjects.

There is also some feeling that there is an obsession with trivia in the magazines: st101 says 'I did once see a Hammer Horror magazine and although I was tempted - I flicked through it - I thought it seemed quite sad to enthuse about horror in a fanatical way,' and this repeats one of the main objections to male-dominated fandom.

Reasons for reading horror magazines are varied, but the patterns do seem to conform to patterns of fan consumption existing elsewhere, particularly amongst women. Notably, reasons given are for the coverage the magazines have of horror film stars and favourite horror film characters:

I read Hammer Horror magazine because I ... really like the actors in those films. I think the magazine has good pictures, is very informative and has lots of little 'interesting bits'. ... I also hope (although he didn't do much work with Hammer) to get more info about Vincent Price! (hh119)

These respondents are searching for pictures of their favourite stars - respondent hh117 is looking for 'coverage of vampire films, pictures of good films, stories on horror actors like Vincent Price, Peter Cushing.' - and for respondent em114 this involves cutting out the pictures. This is similar to forms of fan behaviour commonly associated with fan adoration of actors and popular musical stars, particularly amongst teenage girls.

Finally, the supposition that science fiction is a more socially acceptable genre for women than horror might mean that female fans were more likely to read science fiction or mixed genre magazines than the dedicated horror magazines. There is little evidence to support this: the science fiction magazines (Starburst and Starlog) are less likely to be read by the survey respondents, readerships being slightly lower than that for the horror magazines on both a regular and occasional basis. This may be because the science fiction magazines are also predominantly written, edited and published by men. Like female science fiction fans, who are ghettoised into 'feminine' forms of fanzine publishing as Tulloch and Jenkins (1995, p. 12)

point out, female horror fans are similarly excluded from male-dominated fandoms which have grown up around the horror and science fiction genres.

7.2.1 Horror fiction fanzines

What is notable about fanzine readership is that two particular types of fanzine - namely fiction fanzines and society publications (produced by the British Fantasy Society and the various vampire groups and societies) are the most commonly read titles. Many of the respondents mention writing fiction and having (or hoping to have) it published in such fanzines, fan fiction writing being one of the most commonly reported hobbies amongst this group. This has echoes amongst other media and science fiction fandoms, particularly the female Star Trek fans discussed by Penley (1991a and 1991b), Jenkins (1992), and Tulloch and Jenkins (1995). This interest in particular types of fanzines (namely, fiction fanzines) may be because horror titles such as Whiplash Smile, Samhain and Shock Xpress have what Sanjek (1990, pp. 150-151) describes as 'an unseemly juvenile fascination with disreputable and illicit imagery, the domain of the horror film' and 'are suffused with ... grue and gore, most evident in their frequent inclusion of illustrations appealing to the lowest kind of prurient interest and guaranteed to offend.' Sanjek categorises the horror fanzines he looked at into three categories: sophomoric, archival and nihilistic. The types of fanzines read by women tend to be fan fiction fanzines (many of the respondents writing and contributing stories themselves) and female fans seem to be involved in fan cultures which seem more like those of science fiction fan publishing as described by Jenkins (1992) and Penley (1991a), rather than the horror fan press described by Sanjek.

7.3 Textual Poaching

The act of writing fiction itself is, according to Jenkins (1992), an appropriation of the text which he describes as 'textual poaching'. In particular, he states (p. 45) that: 'For the fan, these previously "poached" meanings provide a foundation for future encounters with the fiction, shaping how it will be perceived, defining how it will be used.' In this model, fans do not simply consume, but they produce their own stories and novels, artwork, films and videos, costumes and other manufactured items. An image of fandom has thus been produced which encompasses a world-wide social and cultural network. Jenkins (p. 47) has noted the importance of fan publishing for female writers and sees fanzines as 'a supportive environment within

which women writers could establish and polish their skills.’ Many of the respondents write fiction, vampire fiction being especially popular. Overall, more than 40 per cent of respondents state that they write horror (and other genre) fiction and/or write for horror fanzines and magazines (twenty-seven say that writing is their main hobby, with an additional thirteen giving writer as their - very often joint - job or profession). Some respondents publish their own fiction fanzines: bfs132 edits a ghost story fanzine, ex004 states that she has recently started a vampire/Goth fanzine and bfs156 is the one-time editor of a horror fiction fanzine titled Dementia 13. One reason why female fans might be writing vampire fiction in particular is suggested by Johnson (1993). She suggests (p. 77) that the subtextual aspects of vampire fiction can be appropriated by female writers:

If part of the current social project with which we are all (feminists and non-feminists alike) grappling, is the redefinition of social structures to eliminate abuses of power based on race, sex, and unequal access to resources, the vampire novel, whose central metaphor contains anxieties about these very issues, is a natural field for revisionary effort.

Women, then, can ‘revise the sexual and economic metaphor of blood drinking’ (p. 77-8) and rework a source of horror as a source of power. Fan fiction written by female horror fans would need to be analysed in order to validate this argument, but there is a clear indication here that such fan behaviour is again a feminine act and not a sign of immascultation. Many female fans write vampire or other horror fiction which they self-publish on WWW pages, the VAMPYRES-L e-mail list and other areas of the Internet (colloquially such fiction is referred to as ‘fluff’). It was outside the scope of this study to look at the content of such fiction in depth, but this is an area where further research would be desirable, particularly in light of Johnson’s conclusions.

In the light of this, several vampire fanzines which are edited or co-edited by female fans have been surveyed. These include The Chronicles, Bloodstone, Demeter VII and The Velvet Vampyre. In addition, a Goth fanzine, Bats and Red Velvet, which includes horror and vampire related material, and two literary/scholarly magazines, Udolpho and The Transylvanian Journal, (all edited or co-edited by women) were included in the survey for comparison. None of these titles is specifically dedicated to the cinema, but as in other aspects of female participation in fandom, the interest in vampires covers many different media and formats. Contributions from

women in these titles formed a higher percentage of the contents than the general horror titles surveyed (see appendix 4), reflecting the higher proportion of women participating in this fandom. Whilst none of the surveyed titles could be described as feminist, and articles which indicate a specifically female viewpoint or feminist slant are rare, a number of the above fanzines include contents which are not characteristic of the male-edited fanzines surveyed. It should be noted that male fans still contribute to and consume the above titles and that most of these fanzines do contain photographs and artwork of female vampires partially clothed, naked or wearing fetishistic clothing. Unlike the majority of horror magazines, however, which depict the barely clad women being menaced by monsters, these examples are more likely to depict the women in controlling poses and their clothing is not torn or in disarray (see figure 7.1). Here, then, the representations of women do not imply a threat or sexual violence towards woman, but the woman is depicted as the source of the threat. Some other specific female contributions worth noting include:

- Fiction which contains overtly heroic or intelligent females. For example, a spoof Gothic story 'Uncle Silage' (Velvet Vampyre, issue XXIX) which contains an independent heroine who put her cousin, described as an 'interesting example of the genus "lout",' into 'a headlock and begged him to try that [kiss her] again if he wanted a broken arm', threw 'the proffered gruel at the maidservant's head', asked her to 'fry me a couple of decent steaks, with potatoes and onions, and an egg on top' and 'dispatched the butler ... to the cellar to decant half a dozen bottles of port.' Also worth noting are the sexual and erotic overtones of some of the material, reflecting Penley's findings on female fan fiction. This example is from Demeter VII:

'Overpowered by piercing pain he sensed her soft cheeks upon his face, he sensed her tongue licking at the blood now trickling down her long fingers. Lydianne threw her head back in mocking laughter. He searched for mercy in her eyes. There was none. She smiled triumphantly her sharp white teeth now glistening with saliva in preparation for the feast.'

- Regular columns which reflect and parody the content of mainstream women's magazines, including a problem page 'Hearts At Stake' and a fetish fiction column by the Mistress of Pain and Pleasure (Demeter VII, unnumbered and undated), both written by the editor Vanda L, and a horoscope columns 'The Lady Raven's Vampiriscope' (Bloodstone). (None of the above examples are serious in tone, but their inclusion might be taken as some indication of the incorporation of feminine reading material into the fanzines with its transformation into pastiche.)
- A focus on female fictional vampires and historical figures, and on female authors and high-profile fans which is serious in tone. Articles include interviews with the author of 'pagan vampire' fiction Storm Constantine (The Chronicles) and analyses of the life of Erzsébet Báthory (Bloodstone).

- The emphasis on what is claimed to be non-sexist or feminist material. For example, this defence of the work of comics artist John Bolton: ‘He paints mainly female nudes ... but tries hard not to put women in submissive positions. ... The women painted may be naked but not vulnerable,’ and this introductory statement to the interview with Storm Constantine: ‘Her ability to create strong female characters without a corresponding weakening of the men is refreshing, and her adult take on sexuality can be breathtaking.’ (Both taken from The Chronicles)

Whilst none of these alone can be taken as proof of a feminine trend within vampire fandom, they can be used to emphasise many of the issues raised by the interpretative strategies of this audience. Further consideration of these issues and their implications is undertaken in chapter 8.

Figure 7.1 Vampire fanzine imagery (line art from The Chronicles)



In one respect, participation in Internet groups allows some respondents to make contact with other like-minded people and in particular other female fans and followers. A large proportion of the messages sent to the e-mail lists are from female subscribers: during observation of the horror e-mail list service over a three day period, fifty-six of the ninety-eight messages generated (57

per cent) were from female contributors. However, participation in these groups is largely American-based. The Internet does not appear to be a major area where 'poaching' and other forms of fan practice flourish for the UK respondents, though this may be changing as access to computer technology and the Internet grows. A number of respondents do participate in computer-based fandom and for them it has become an important area of fan practice and participation. Respondent em124, for example, reads 'e-mail "fluff" from Vampyres Internet list. I do not have enough time to read magazines, but I enjoy the fluff from Vampyres because of the originality of lots of it.'

Other aspects of poaching are also reported, and these primarily consist of the acting out of fantasies; respondent em126 says: 'I read horror, I watch horror, I play vampire role-playing games and so forth, I'm rather addicted; in the case of the role-playing you can sympathise with the 'bad guy', I can feel it happen.' Role-playing is particularly common amongst the vampire fans. For many this seems to be an acting out of the fantasy of being a vampire, as the comment above suggests. This particular aspect of fan practice and other areas of vampire fandom are explored in more detail in the following section.

7.4 Vampire fandom

With over 90 per cent of the survey subjects reporting that they liked all or most vampire films (see chapter 4) it might be predicted that female fans are more likely to actively participate in areas of horror fandom which focus on vampires. Active involvement in vampire fandom is to be expected amongst those respondents recruited from the vampire societies; however, respondents recruited from other sources also report being active vampire fans. Of the 9 per cent of the respondents who are members of vampire societies, the majority belong to the Vampyre Society with others belonging to the Dracula Experience Society and Thee (sic) Vampire Guild. Many vampire fans were recruited from the readership of the Hammer Horror magazine and it was singled out for its coverage of Hammer's vampire films and the actors who appeared in them.

There is nothing to suggest that vampire fandom is dominated by women (see membership demographics of the Vampyre Society in chapter 1) but female fans do seem to play a more active role in this area of horror fandom than in other sectors of horror fandom with female vampire fans founding societies (both the Vampyre Society and the Dracula Experience Society were

set up and run by women), running local groups, editing and contributing to fanzines, writing fiction and participating in conventions. As respondent ex004 implies when she says 'I started a fanzine (mainly with a gothic audience) mainly to give me an opportunity to explore my interest [in vampires] and share my ideas more widely' there is a level of involvement on a par with male participation in fandom (as described by Sanjek, for example) and women do seem to be more comfortable with participating in vampire fandom. Respondent vs201 states that the 'running of a horror/vampire society [and fanzine] editor' is her main hobby, and fg403 runs a Vampyre Society local group in Glasgow. Many respondents participate in vampire role-playing games and customisable card games.⁶ A more equitable female-to-male ratio in the vampire societies (than, say, in the British Fantasy Society) may be one of the main reasons why women are active participants in this area of fan culture, they being encouraged and supported by fellow female members and not subject to the negative remarks made by male fans in male dominated fan groups, such as those discussed previously.

It is useful at this point to look in some detail at women's participation in vampire fandom and what this might say about their attraction to vampire films. One area which many vampire fans participate in (and this seems to be related to the link with historical costume drama) is 'dressing up'. The wearing of vampire costumes - often consisting of period, usually Victorian, dress - is popular, and for some the making of these costumes in as authentic a manner as possible is important. Fans circulate sources for period costume patterns, instructions for making garments such as opera cloaks and Victorian or Elizabethan corsets, and shops supplying materials for these. There is a strong link in this to the Gothic or Goth subcultures. There also appears to be a relationship between the taste for vampire films (and adaptations of other classic horror stories) and a liking for historical drama linked to the appeal of costumes, sets and other historical detail.

7.4.1 Fans and subcultures: the female Goth and the vampire masquerade

The Goth subculture originated in the UK in the early 1980s amongst fans of a popular music genre with roots in the Punk and New Romantic subcultures (see Polhemus, 1994). Members of the movement dressed in vampire-like fashions consisting of predominantly black clothing, long, black dyed, crimped hair and white or very pale makeup worn with black or blood red

lipstick, heavily black-lined eyes and black nail polish. This style was adopted by both males and female - an androgynous look (with the male members of the subculture often wearing make-up, jewellery and articles of female clothing) being popular. Typical clothing was based around Victorian, Georgian and other historical fashions (frock coats, poet's shirts, cloaks and capes, fans, ornate walking sticks and top hats) as well as punk and fetish clothing with velvet, lace, leather and PVC as predominate materials. Styles borrowed heavily from funerary, religious, pagan or vampiric imagery (including crucifixes, coffins, skulls, and bats). Members of the subculture also frequently cultivate interests in Gothic fiction, the Romantic poets, funerary paraphernalia, pagan religions, vampire films and fiction, the paranormal and other related areas. Unlike other popular music movements (which tend to be short lived), Goth flourished throughout the 80s and 90s and spread to Europe (especially Germany), the US and other English speaking countries (predominantly Australia), and this may well be due to the fact that it is not centred simply around music (and fashion) but around other areas of fiction, history, and culture. Although the interest in vampires is strong, it should be pointed out that not all vampire fans would consider themselves to be Goths, nor indeed do all Goths have a liking for vampires.⁷ However, many of the survey respondents do class themselves as Goths - 'I've been out of college for 5 years and I still have the long black hair and dress in black.' (ps010) - and many others admit to having previously been a Goth or having adopted a Goth style when they were younger - 'I dressed in black, had the long straight flowing hair (only it was red) - the whole gothic thing.' (ps006), or having an interest in Goth without adopting the style.

Respondent ex004 is typical:

My enjoyment of horror films used to be evident in that I adopted a gothic style based primarily on my envy of those beautiful vamps in horror films and their exotic glamour. I began to feel ridiculous like this as I got older and grew out of it, but my interest in horror is as strong as ever.

For many of these women, their liking for horror and vampires was a reason for them being attracted to the Goth movement:

When I was 14 I started getting interested in Gothic music. So that's what happens when your parents buy you horror stories. The gothic scene watches horror movies so you get even more attracted to it. You have all this music and then you read ghost stories together and it goes on and on. (fg202)

This dual attraction to vampires and the Goth subculture seems to be strongly linked to an expression of femininity and the female masquerade. Rivière (1929/86) described the mask of femininity as the exaggeration of the female body through make-up, fabric, hairstyles, jewellery and colour which deflect the gaze away from the woman's interior; these excessive signifiers of femininity can turn the woman into a fetish object. The vampire look adopted by some vampire fans is an aberrant form of the feminine masquerade. As shown in figures 7.2 and 7.3, vampire costumes conform to (historical) extremes of femininity, particularly along the lines of Victorian ideals, and are predominantly black which, although symbolic of mourning or death, is also associated with a fetishistic (and dangerous) sexuality. This impression is reinforced by the wearing of underwear as outerwear (corsets over dresses, sheer or lacy fabrics exposing underwear or the body) and the use of fetishistic materials such as velvet, lace, leather and PVC. Preferring to base their appearance on images of predatory female vampires (none of the women participating in this study dress in the typical diaphanous sheer white of the Hammer film victim or play the unwilling victim), these fans adopt extremes of femininity which can be read as being in opposition to contemporary social norms. Details which mark this look as aberrant include: long, sharpened finger nails painted black, blood red, purple or other dark colours; exaggerated lips, again coloured black, purple or blood red; eyebrows plucked into extreme arches; excessive amounts of jewellery; the adoption of historical, particularly Victorian, modes of dress including corseting to emphasise the hips and bust and diminish the waist. The wearing of vampire fangs (and occasionally contact lenses) also renders the wearer as a figure of monstrosity or danger, which again does not conform to current ideals of femininity. This parallels a reversal of the Gothic role of victim which Gallafent (1988) has called the anti-masquerade.

The vampire masquerade, the act of dressing up, is very important to many of the vampire fans and the adoption of extreme, yet aberrant, feminine clothing and appearance forms an outward sign of the respondent's Goth or vampire identity. This masquerade takes place largely within fandom, at conventions, meetings and other fan group activities, but several state that they have worn Goth and vampire clothing on an everyday basis at some point in their lives. This has not been uneventful for some: respondent fg403 complained about people calling her Morticia in the street and fg404 stated that she was annoyed at fellow convention-goers when asked if she was

entering the fancy dress competition since she was wearing her everyday clothing. Others have a predilection for dressing up which appears to verge on the obsessional: one vampire fan interviewed at Intersection stated that she dresses up frequently at home, including the wearing of vampire fangs, 'only two or three times a week.' For a few, the appropriation of vampire imagery spreads to other areas of their lives such as how they decorate their homes and the naming of their pets:

Horror films influence my taste in clothes, objects and literature and give my imagination scope to roam. The clothes that vampires [wear] have influenced my dress sense, as the sets have influenced my taste in decor. I have named my black cat Louis (after the vampire of course), he has small sharp white teeth and I love him. (hh102)

It would appear that, for many vampire fans, participating in fan culture allows them to dress up and act out a fantasy. The Vampyre Society is based around local groups who meet regularly in various parts of the UK. In Glasgow, many, though not all, attend in vampire costume of various forms complete with fake vampire teeth (see figure 7.2 for an example of vampire costumes). The vampire society also organises weekend vacations to country houses where masked balls and other similar activities are held. This seems to indicate a desire to appropriate historical settings and costumes, and for recreating the past and may be linked to the liking for historical costume dramas. Baert (1994) states that the property of clothing in western culture is not a stable symbol, but a circulating sign; this mobility of coding contains the potential for destroying the dominant codes of gender. The 'bad girl' look of

Figure 7.2 Vampire fan costumes



the vampire masquerade, like the Punk street fashions discussed by Evans and Thornton (1989, p. 42), mangles sexual codes, confounds given meanings, valorises 'bad taste', advocates an unpretty look of menace and threat and pinpoints the mask of femininity. The Goth vampire costume thus works as subversive anti-fashion, but for the respondents it is a glamorous image which embodies (an albeit differently articulated) femininity. Such clothing may, as Evans and Thornton (p. 143) suggest, offer the woman a partial means to 'play her way out of ... the impasse of femininity.'

The adoption of the vampire masquerade seems related to a desire for a more extreme form of femininity (or, at least, a style of dress) than that currently favourable in contemporary society. As the catalogue for Victoriana Custom Clothing, a fan-run company selling handmade vampire and Goth clothing, states: 'We are English designers who yearn for bygone days of opulence and elegance. Our clothing reflects that yearning and hopefully appeals to your hidden passions and your sensual nature.' Whilst some vampire fans make their own costumes and clothing (several, such as fg404, name 'clothes design and dress making' or similar as among their hobbies), a number of small mail-order companies supply ready-made and made-to-order vampire attire. Usually run by fans themselves who started out making their own vampire clothes and then launched as a small business, these include Demone, Medusa and Victoriana. Damiana Ashe, owner of the shop and mail order company Demone, who makes 'Designs To Die In' (see figure 7.3), is typical: 'It was a hobby before I went to college as I used to make elaborate ball gowns for my dolls when I was eleven, which progressed to making all my own clothes.' Thus, a traditional feminine childhood interest has been subverted by an attraction to horror but, nevertheless, can still be coded as feminine. Young girls are seen as having an interest in dressing up in adult clothes and fancy dress (typically as a fairy tale princess or fairy); and the pleasure in dressing up for female vampire fans could be seen as an extension of this. However, it has developed into an aberrant form of dress (dark and vampiric, often highly sexualised or fetishistic) which lasts into adulthood and frequently spills over into everyday life (and occasionally other areas⁸); ps113 says 'Prance around in pink dresses all day? Huh. I don't think so.'

Such behaviour might also be seen as subversive in its association with Carnival and similar festivals (see Bahktin, 1968). According to Donald (1989a, p. 227), Bahktin's definition of carnival prevents polarities from

Figure 7.3 Demone mail order catalogue - sample page



becoming fixed. Mulvey (1987, pp. 16-7) states that, depending upon context, collective consciousness (unified by a ritual event such as Carnival) can either act as a spearhead for organised politics or provide a safety valve for discontent: 'In contemporary society, similar patterns may be perceived in the "rituals of resistance" associated with subcultures. A group can mark out its claim to liminal existence through clothes, music, emblematic loyalty etc.' Adoption of the vampire masquerade may, then, provide the female horror fan with a 'liminal moment outside the time and space of the dominant order' (Mulvey, p. 16) and may even allow entry into the language of politics for, as

Cosgrove (1984) says, the wearing of a subcultural costume can be 'an inarticulate rejection of the straight world and its organisation.'

Although these activities constitute patterns of fan behaviour, they do not indicate immasculation or collusion with patriarchally-inscribed feminine ideals. Rather, they can be related both to rituals of resistance against social norms of femininity and to other feminine consumption such as that of romance, historical and Gothic fiction. This offers further evidence that female horror film spectatorship, although complex and possibly contradictory, might be feminine in nature.

7.5 Extra-cinematic identificatory practices

As a pattern of female horror fan behaviour, the adoption of the vampire masquerade and the acting out of vampire fantasies in real life - possibly as part of the Goth subculture, is an important form of the appropriation of horror film texts. This behaviour conforms to Jenkins' modes of textual poaching (1992, p. 49): 'Fans possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own cultures built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides.' Along with the more recognised features of fandom, namely, fiction, artwork or videos, dressing up must be recognised as part of this poaching. Furthermore, the fact that the costume-makers discussed above are also making attempts to derive an income from their fan object matches Jenkins' (1992, p. 45) description of poaching where it diverges from de Certeau's model of opposing and entirely separate production and consumption. Although a proportion of science fiction fans (particularly those of Star Trek and other television programmes) wear costumes at conventions, the adoption of vampire costumes, not just at conventions but in everyday life, may be unique amongst genre fans. Nevertheless, this study indicates that for female vampire fans the adoption of vampire costumes and clothing is an important area of fan consumption and a source of pleasure. It can also be seen as a form of cultural resistance against accepted ideals of femininity, but again, does not break away entirely from patterns of feminine behaviour. This is linked to the relationship between style, fashion and beauty (and particularly commodity aspects of this) and female spectatorship. In particular, it can be seen as a form of commodification which links a film or star with a specific product (Doane, 1989). As consumerism, however, this remains in the realm of poaching and

is connected to extra-cinematic identification described by Stacey in Stargazing (1994a, pp. 138-170).

Two forms of cinematic identificatory fantasies described by Stacey were dealt with in chapter 6, namely, transcendence (in which the spectators identity merges with that of the star or character in the film) and aspiration/inspiration (which takes the form of a desire for transformation of the spectator's own identity). However, Stacey's extra-cinematic identificatory practices, in which transformation of the self occurs not just as a viewing fantasy but to various extents in real life, are most appropriate when considering the active female fans described in the preceding sections. Of Stacey's identificatory practices, pretending, imitating, and copying are relevant. Although the fan practices as described by Stacey are in relation to stars, these forms seem equally applicable when the fan object is a generic character type (principally, vampires). (Resembling, or fan practice based on a pre-existing shared physical resemblance, is not mentioned by any of the respondents in this study.)

Pretending to be a vampire implies that the fan is aware of the playacting involved and this appears to be a fan practice adopted by some of the respondents. Like Stacey's fans of Hollywood stars, this can involve a temporary physical transformation or adaptation of physical surroundings. It also takes in social practice since respondents are involved with other vampire fans in the make believe. For some respondents, as for em106, such fan behaviour relates to childhood playacting: 'I used to hold funerals for my dolls and later made coffins for the dolls I considered vampires.' Other respondents take part in adult forms of playacting through their participation in role-playing and card gaming. In Vampire: The Masquerade players adopt the persona of a member of one of a number of vampire tribes and dress and act according to the characteristics of their chosen tribe.⁹ These games are played at conventions, fan group meetings and even Goth clubs, as well as in the players' own homes. Respondent ex005 describes what this means for her:

I play the masquerade, and enjoy it very much. I am a tenth generation Malkavian with a split personality and an uncommon hate for sunlight. Basically all the masquerade is, is getting together with a bunch of friends, and acting.

As this comment suggests, the personas adopted by the players can be complex and the history given to the vampire tribes by White Wolf, the

producers of the game, is long and contains a detailed chronology. However, most players reinforce the point that they are only acting, as ex005 does. The wearing of vampire teeth and Victorian costumes is also adopted at meetings of vampire groups around the country. Participant observation at meetings of the Glasgow group of the Vampire Society revealed that the play-acting frequently broke down quickly once the members had settled down with drinks and to have a chat, particularly since the pointed vampire teeth many wore hindered such activities. Most of the personas adopted, either for gaming or during participation in fan group meetings or Internet groups, are for fun and most fans who do adopt personas seem not to take themselves seriously. Pretending is separate from imitating or copying since the former is restricted to special occasions.

In Stacey's model, imitating and copying are very closely linked, but Stacey uses imitating to describe the mimicking of behaviour and activities and copying to that of appearances. The adoption of the vampire masquerade seems to be the form of copying most prevalent amongst the respondents involving some form of self-transformation. It should be noted, however, that the figure these respondents copy is in itself a generic one and not directly related to any one film or character. All those respondents quoted in section 7.4 above appear to fit this category. It is worth noting that for one participant (hh102, see quote above) copying extends to her interior decoration and this is related more closely to commodity and merchandise fan consumption. Companies such as Alchemy Gothic exploit such markets by selling cutlery, candlesticks, wine bottle stoppers, trays and other household items in pewter or brass decorated with vampire bats or death's heads (although again this is generic and not linked directly to particular films).

Imitation, which would involve taking on some aspect of the vampire persona, is less common. There have been a number of incidences or reports in recent years of real-life vampires, psychic vampires or blood fetishists (see Dresser, 1989) and individuals claiming to be vampires or to drink blood have featured in the press and on television (for example, X-Rated Ricky screened on Channel 4 in August 1998), but this does not seem related to fans and followers of vampire films and fiction. Skal (1994, pp. 334-8) cites the case of a blood fetishist to help explain the popularity of vampires in popular culture, but there seems to be no overlap in this study between vampire fans and people who believe themselves to be vampires or indulge in blood

fetishes (most coverage in this area seems to be largely limited to the US and this may be an American cultural phenomenon). However, some respondents do profess a belief in the existence of vampires or state that they would like to believe in vampires (this applies equally to other monstrous entities such as ghosts and even aliens) but know rationally that this could not be true. This can cause divisions and disputes between fans. A change of leadership occurred in the Glasgow Vampyre Society local group when the former leader announced that he did not believe that creatures such as vampires really existed. When one focus group participant (fg404) stated that she knew 'lots of people that actually want to be vampires', another participant (fg401) interrupted with 'Oh dear!' Belief or interest in the paranormal is high amongst the respondents (see chapter 4) but there does seem to be deliberate suspension of disbelief occurring, particularly over the possibility of the existence of vampires. Respondent fg405 likes 'the idea that it could be real because it's so much more interesting than our own little environment,' whilst fg401 likes it because it's not real, explaining that 'It's the unreality I like.' Although they take opposing views, both respondents give the impression that such fantasies are to them much more interesting than real life. It would seem then, that the attraction to horror and to vampires is a form of escapism, and participation in vampire fandom fulfils some kind of fantasy for many of the respondents.

The fascination with vampirism does then seem to be an important fantasy for the respondents (though this is generic rather than star-based). Stacey's three non-identificatory fantasies (devotion, adoration and worship of the star) are thus not appropriate in this respect. However, the sexual appeal of horror film stars is important for a number of the female participants. The liking for horror stars does seem to be limited to the classic periods of the genre and is related to the liking for Hammer films and the 30s horror cycle in particular. Respondent hh101's favourite actors are 'the Hammer and Universal ones - Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi' and she says that 'if the acting is good it influences my overall opinion of the film.' Respondent hh116 says 'I like all Hammer's Dracula films because Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing are always so good; the irreplaceable Peter Cushing was always convincing.' These comments typify the appeal of Lee and Cushing in particular. Many respondents stress that this fan adoration is an admiration for the acting of the star and the fact that they appear to take the genre seriously; hh102 says of these actors:

They both take their jobs wonderfully seriously. ... Their dedication to the genre carried it through and gained it some of the respect it is due. Their films still stand the test of time for me. I still hold my breath waiting for Lee's Dracula to appear and my heart still beats faster when I see Van Helsing battle him to the death, and the awesome silhouette of Lee's Mummy still sends shivers down my spine.

In many cases, the choice of horror film viewing is not dependent upon the presence of a particular star, but respondents do choose their favourite horror films according to actor: respondent in101 claiming 'my favourite films usually [star] Vincent Price' and bfs123 stating that she watches films 'for the stars: Cushing, Price, Lee.' As discussed above, magazine readership also depends to some extent on the desire to read about particular stars. In addition, some respondents conflate the star with the characters they play, as the following example shows:

The Wicker Man is one of the most frightening films I have ever seen. The villain, Lord Summerisle, is like so many of Christopher Lee's characters in that he is charming, witty, sharply intelligent, suave and hospitable on the outside, yet quite obviously a calculating killer on the inside. (hh106)

As stated in chapter 6, it may be that many women feel it is socially unacceptable to admit to a liking for the star of horror films, particularly in terms of a crush or intense attachment. Note, for instance, how respondent hh102, who says that 'as a female I find some monsters highly attractive,' proposes that she might be 'weird' in having such fantasies.

7.5.1 Fan practices

In conclusion then, it should be noted that female horror fans follow similar patterns of fan practice to other types of fans, particularly in the areas proposed by Stacey for female fans of classic cinema. There are some notable differences, however, between female horror fan practice and the practices followed by male horror fans (notably, in the consumption of horror merchandise and magazines or fanzines). In this respect, the respondents in this study seem to practice fan behaviour of a form similar to other groups of female genre fans, specifically, female science fiction fans - principally in the area of fan fiction. There is much overlap in horror and science fiction fandom, and, although the respondents - like many other fans - can be described as nomads (focusing their attention on a series of different fan objects - see Jenkins, p. 36), the findings here suggest that female horror fans seek out spaces where feminine fan practices can be exercised without

attracting negative comments from male fans in particular and society in general. Avoidance of the latter may also go some way towards explaining the tendency for some respondents to disguise their taste for horror in related genres such as science fiction. In addition, the respondents go through a process of incorporating the fan object into everyday life - as Eco (1987, p. 198) states in exposition of what makes a screen text a cult, characters are regarded 'as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world.' This might explain the way in which some respondents choose to believe in vampires despite their knowing better, as well as explaining the way they incorporate vampire appearance, mannerisms and behaviour into their lifestyles.

A significant proportion of the respondents do not participate at all in horror fandom for various reasons: they are hiding their liking for horror; they watch horror films alone on television or video and so do not mix with other fans or followers; they are not able to talk about it with friends or family who don't understand the liking for horror, or they do not know any other women who like horror. Respondent em126 requests that 'If I'm the only female horror buff out there, I'd like to know' and the following example demonstrates why many women might view alone:

One reason I watch some horror on video is that I have no female friends who like this and it can be awkward going to the cinema on your own at night, when this is on the programming. Therefore, for purely practical reasons, video makes things easily accessible. (in101)

Others reject some forms of fandom, but may find other areas where they can indulge their interest. Respondent bfs154 says that 'I'm not all that interested in fandom' but there is an inherent contradiction in this respondent's comment since she is a member of a fan organisation (the BFA). It may be that a broad-based, literary-oriented and long-established fan organisation is more acceptable or accommodating to women than fandoms organised around popular genres, specific films or fan objects. Jenkins (1992) has previously shown such divisions exist between literary and media fans of science fiction. This indicates that even within fandom as a whole an 'us and them' mentality operates along similar lines to the general populations' view of fans as other (see chapter 1).

Obviously, much of what has been said in this chapter will not apply to the respondents who do not participate in fandom to any great extent.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to ignore them entirely, since it may be that such female horror film viewers form a 'silent majority' whose primary form of fan consumption is to view horror films in the privacy of their own homes either alone or with a trusted viewing partner, often a close friend or a husband or other family member. Other patterns of fan behaviour indicate that horror merchandise is consumed in private, respondent hh118 says that 'I tend to collect Hammer Horror mags. I have a habit of buying them for a few months without looking at them. Then when I get some time to myself I read the lot from cover to cover.' It may be that for these fans the main source of pleasure from such fan consumption is an enrichment of their fantasy lives, but that it may be a guilty pleasure (just as romance fiction reading or soap opera viewing is). It may also act as a form of reassurance that there are others out there with similar interests and that the fan is not abnormal in her tastes, as the following respondent indicates:

I ... read the magazines just to see why others make/write/like horror. I like to hear about how an idea got started, why it was done instead of another idea. I like to know about the people behind the horror... somehow, it makes me feel not quite so weird. (em126)

Areas of both fan practice and viewing positions explored in chapters 5 to 7 are reviewed in the context of popular pleasures and feminine subjectivity in chapter 8.

¹ Though horror film star biographies and 'making of' film titles are usually mass market, small press and self-published titles do appear; for example, John Martin's The Seduction of the Gullible (Procrastus Press, 1993) on the history of the video nasty campaign in the UK. Martin is an well-known UK horror film fan who has contributed widely to fanzines. The small-scale nature of such projects is illustrated by the fact that 1,000 copies of this title were published, each being numbered as a collectors item.

² Disbanded in 1998.

³ The term 'anorak' was first applied to trainspotters (after the item of clothing they wore as protection against the elements whilst standing on train platforms), but is now widely used to refer to other groups of fans and hobbyists.

⁴ Although this term officially applies to the 49 films banned under the Video Recordings Act (including but not limited to horror films), it is now loosely applied (especially by the tabloid press) to many contemporary horror and avant garde films.

⁵ The term follower here is used in a different sense than that used previously in this work, where the meaning is taken from Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995 to imply a rather more casual fan.

⁶ In a live action role playing game (LARP) several players improvise the roles of their vampire persona, one player acting as the storyteller who controls the game and acts out the roles of any additional characters in the story. Story outlines, guidelines, rules and characters sheets are included in a range of accompanying handbooks which can be purchased through gaming shops. LARPs also form the basis of customisable card games (CCGs) where each participant plays with a deck of cards containing a random selection of card types which can be added to and customised with additional cards. The main CCG with a vampire theme is White Wolf's Vampire: The Masquerade.

⁷ Indeed, there is evidence that this leads to frequent splits and heated debates in both camps.

One member of the Vampyre Society participating in this research expressed a dislike for the fact that many active members of the society were Goths and that it had been said to her that one had to be a Goth to have a strong liking for vampires and be in the society. From the evidence of this research, this is obviously not the case and some respondents are unaware of the Goth subculture. Conversely, discussion of vampires in Goth circles is frequently met with disapproval.

⁸ One or two participants indicate a liking for biting rituals as a form of sex play, find images of male (and in some cases female) vampires sexually exciting and indulge in vampire games with their partners. This was not an area which it was felt appropriate to investigate for this study; nevertheless, many more participants find images of vampirism erotic and as set out in chapter 7 this is a principal reason for their liking of the genre. See Dresser, American Vampires (1989) for a study of practitioners of vampirism and vampire rituals.

⁹ The Brujah, for example, are terrorists, revolutionaries and criminals who wear combat uniforms, grunge or other street fashions, or work gear; the Ventrue, who are aristocrats, corporate heads, rich businessmen or women and politicians, wear business suits and catwalk fashions; the Tremere are wizards who wear capes and top hats; and the Gangrel, who are shapeshifters with animal personas, wear peasant, Gypsy or hippie style clothing but players also wear prosthetic makeup to give them an animal-look. Fan websites giving advice on dress for each tribe exist (see <http://www.toreadors.com/> for a Toreador site, for example). In addition to the consumption of the gaming books and card games and add-on packs, jewelry and other accessories depicting the icon of each tribe can be purchased from fan artists.

Chapter 8 Horror Cinema and The Female Subject

8.1 Principal Findings

The primary objective of this research was to provide a small-scale study of female horror film fans and followers. As with other audience studies of this type (see, for example, Hill, 1997), the research raised as many questions as it sought to answer. It is also difficult to summarise or generalise from the results; as has been noted by Buckingham (1996, p. 303), such qualitative research 'does not easily yield "findings", or clear statements of proven fact.' Nevertheless, it is important to draw some conclusions which may contribute to accounts of the relationship between the audience and the film text, if not be of relevance to theories of female spectatorship and the debates surrounding screen violence. The data does indicate some contradictions, but a number of clear findings have emerged, as well as pointers towards future research. As set out in chapter 3 the research aimed to test a set of hypotheses. In summary, the following findings were revealed:

- 1 That female horror fans make up a 'hidden', yet often substantial, portion of the horror film audience.

It was not possible to ascertain the percentage of the horror film audience which is female, nor what percentage of the female population like horror films. However, figures do suggest that the female horror film audience is larger than often assumed.

- 1a That female viewing takes place in isolation, i.e. in the home, films viewed on television or video.

The primary format for horror film viewing was on pre-recorded video. Some respondents watch alone, however equally many watch with a partner or close relative who also likes horror films and as many again with friends. Some are put off viewing in large mixed groups by the behaviour of men when watching films and especially the males' responses to violence. Nevertheless, 89 per cent of respondents watch horror films in the cinema, albeit less frequently than on other formats.

- 1b That female horror fans do not participate widely in organised horror fandom.

Women might constitute up to one-third of fan organisations such as the British Fantasy Society and Internet based fan groups, but this may be a high estimate for other areas of horror fandom. However, women take part in vampire fandom to a much greater extent and may constitute up to 50 per cent

or more of active vampire fans. Women are very active in vampire fandom, publishing and contributing to fanzines, writing fiction, making costumes, organising local groups and running societies.

1c That female horror fans are excluded from fandom largely because of the sexism inherent in fan publishing and fan culture.

Some respondents who have taken part in horror fandom do report frequent instances of sexism or sexist abuse. Relatively few respondents read magazines and fanzines, but many of those that do find the attitudes of horror fanzines and magazines offensive, particularly the quasi-pornographic portrayal of women (although this does not appear to stop them reading the magazines concerned, especially when these contain articles on their favourite stars or films). However, many women also report not being interested in horror fandom and publishing because of other aspects of fan culture, particularly the obsessive attention to trivial details or over-emphasis on special effects and other technical areas of film-making.

Again, vampire fandom is the exception and it is not regarded as sexist in the same way, though this may simply be due to the larger numbers of women actively participating in this area of fandom.

2 That female viewers of the horror genre prefer feminine forms of the genre.

There are strong preferences for vampire films, psychological horror and the supernatural, with widespread dislike of slasher films. However, all forms of horror (including the slasher film) are liked by substantial numbers of the respondents and many others like specific examples of film types they have a general dislike for. It does not seem that any particular types of horror are coded as more feminine than others, however, certain elements or generic conventions (for example, a romance or a strong female protagonist) may be of more interest to female viewers, whereas others (sexual violence or an over-emphasis on special effects) less so, and these may all occur in any type of horror film.

2a That they derive greater pleasure from viewing films with an erotic element between monster and victim, principally vampire films.

The sexual attraction to vampires is very strong and one of the most important factors to emerge in the study. However, there is also a fascination with monstrosity generally and an identification with many sympathetic or ambiguous monsters, particularly where they are coded as victims. It also emerged from the study that the respondents read the vampire and some other

horror films as romance and obtain similar pleasures from horror films as readers of romance fiction do.

2b That, as part of what they regard as their horror film consumption, they view mainstream films not always classified as horror but which contain elements or plot devices similar to horror.

As a group of fans, the respondents do define the horror genre very broadly. Although they may consider many mainstream films to be similar to horror in their emotional affects however, there is a dislike or avoidance of many violent films sometimes associated with horror, especially those containing sexual violence. So whereas the viewers are likely to class mainstream maternal melodramas or psychological thrillers as horror (primarily because of the suspense and thrills), they are less likely to class rape-revenge and rural paranoia films such as Deliverance as horror because of the overly realistic nature of the sexual violence. This is based less on considered definition than on personal taste.

3 That female horror film fans might enjoy the horrific images and elements in horror films (i.e. they refuse to refuse to look).

Enjoyment is a major reason for watching horror films and the respondents watch because they find being scared pleasurable; the viewing of horror films is escapist entertainment. Viewing horrific scenes or shots of the monster is not something which the female viewers shy away from. Very few admit that they look away when viewing horror films, many have effectively been desensitised over many years of watching horror films. Some respondents do practice a form of looking away which involves partially blocking the gaze with some object (a cushion or the fingers, for instance), but this 'looking away' is in itself a pleasurable act.

Many respondents also practice a form of self-censorship which involves only watching those horror films which they know or think they will enjoy.

3a That they do not exhibit viewing practices observed in adolescent female horror film viewers (showing fear or fright at horrific images and relying on a boyfriend for comfort).

It was supposed that because the respondents enjoyed horror films they would not exhibit the usual gendered adolescent behaviour. In a few cases, however, the respondents did describe how they 'acted out' protectee roles, mainly to initiate a boyfriend's protector response. The vast majority, on the other hand, did not take part in such adolescent viewing practices - many because they stated that they did not go out with boys as teenagers. Many

thought of themselves as outsiders and did not participate in many peer group activities at school. It was also found that the majority of respondents dated their liking for horror films and first viewing experiences to a much earlier age than generally recognised in the gender socialisation model.

- 4 That female horror film fans do not consider the horror genre to be misogynist or disregard the fact that it is.

Most respondents feel that the horror genre is sexist in its representations of women, but generally they regard all film genres as sexist and some state that they find the horror genre to be less sexist than other types of film. There is a tendency to hold up strong female characters in a few movies as good examples that the genre is not sexist (or not as sexist as it used to be). Older horror films are recognised as reflecting the stereotypes of the time in which they were made. Many laugh off the sexist representations, whether in older or more recent films, due to the fact that they see them as being clichéd. There are also some suggestions that some viewers see the monstrous female or female killer as empowering.

There are strong feelings, however, about sexual violence, with many respondents finding this abhorrent whether within the horror genre or elsewhere. Generally, however, this is dependent upon how realistic are the representations. The majority of respondents find the horror genre fantastical and are not therefore as concerned about violence here as they are in other films which strive for realism in the depictions of sexual violence or abuse.

- 4a That the enjoyment of horror films by female viewers includes a form of feminist revenge fantasy on men.

There is little evidence of this. Rather, many respondents recognise that men are subject to negative representations in the horror film and dislike excessive violence or sexual violence against men as much as they do against women.

8.1.1 A model of horror film viewing

The analysis also revealed patterns which could be identified as part of a model of the horror film viewing process. These factors can be built up to provide a picture of both the viewing process and the horror fan herself. Not all factors are observed in all the viewers, and some appear to be contradictory. However, this does provide a descriptive analysis of the female horror film fan and follower and opens up a number of avenues through which theories of genre and audience may be explored further.

The identified factors in horror film viewing may be divided into three areas: a model of horror film viewing processes, which may be cinematic or extra-cinematic, and a model of the horror film viewer.

I. Factors in the cinematic horror film viewing process

• **The pleasure of terror, self-censorship and the desensitisation factor**

The enjoyment of horror film viewing is centred around the pleasures of being scared and experiencing the uncanny. Viewing pleasures are linked very strongly to the emotional and physical affects of horror, with a preference for the adrenaline rush of shocks, scares and thrills and horripilation (the shiver-sensation) and a dislike or rejection of films that elicit revulsion, disgust and nausea. The female viewer enjoys watching terrifying or horrifying films but prefers the mode of telling to the mode of showing. Self-censorship in the form of refusing to look is rare, but where this does occur it is also pleasurable. These pleasures may be muted by prolonged viewing which causes the viewer to become desensitised to fictional horror. Should this occur, other pleasures take their place.

• **Morbid fascination**

As Carroll (1990) suggested, viewers have a fascination with horror. Identification with monstrosity is often exhibited, viewers strongly empathising with monsters, in particularly an identification with monsters which embody human traits. The most prevalent viewing pleasure is an erotic or romantic identification with the vampire and other sympathetic or attractive monsters, and a fascination for erotic transgression. The viewers also exhibit a morbid fascination with death, including funerals and funerary paraphernalia, as well as undead creatures and other supernatural or paranormal phenomena associated with post-death existence.

• **The vampire and queer sexuality**

Identification with vampire sexuality, particularly of an active female form, allows the female viewer access to fantasies of queer (including straight-queer or other aberrant) sexualities. This is largely unrelated to either straight or lesbian sexuality, but is linked to extremes of active female sexuality and bisexuality. This is expressed particularly through the fantasy of the vampire's perceived glamour and the commodification of her appearance. For heterosexual viewers, the male vampire represents a sexual fantasy, whilst for lesbian viewers the female vampire offers pleasurable images of same-sex desire.

- **Romance**

The horror film is read as romance. The vampire is coded as an exotic, idealised lover; his victim as active, regardless of any narrative devices which redeem her to patriarchy (the vampire is almost always male, his victim female, although the erotic appeal applies to vampires of both sexes and all sexual orientations). This is broadly in keeping with the pleasures observed in readers of feminine genres such as romance or historical fiction, albeit in an aberrant form.

- **Strong heroines have feminine traits**

There is a liking for strong female characters, and an identification with feminine traits in the character. Narrative aspects which indicate patriarchal repression or oppression of strong female characters are ignored.

- **Thresholds**

Horror films are read as fantasy and not equated with reality. The violence inherent in the genre is regarded as fantastical and in this context viewing horror films forms a safe vicarious excitement for the female viewer or allows her to channel her aggression. She draws a sharp dividing line between horror fiction and real life. Even where the desensitisation factor has come into play, the viewer remains affected by real life versions of horror such as murder and natural disasters. Horror films are seen as entertainment, real life horrors or realistically depicted violence are not.

Realistic sexual violence in any genre (and against men as well as women) is anathema. As above, thresholds pertain to realistic sexual violence. With respect to rape, for example, the viewers have high awareness of their thresholds, but with respect to fantasy violence in horror films they claim to be unaffected.

- **Victim blame**

Where a sexually appealing monster is not involved, there is very little identification with the female (or male) victim of the horror film. The female victims who meet their death at the hands of the serial-killer of the slasher film are thought to deserve their fate. Beyond an acknowledgement that this may reflect the social oppression of women, there is little reflection on this (despite the similarities with the notion that victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse deserve it).

- **Laughter**

If the film is bad it can be laughed at and still enjoyed, in fact this is a form of typical fan behaviour. It is also recognised that horror films are meant to be

funny and laughter is a normal (although emotionally complex) response to many scenes of horror, particularly in response to the high threshold for graphic violence in many post-70s horror films (see Arnzen, 1994).

II. Factors in the extra-cinematic horror film viewing process

• **Discerning viewers**

All forms of the horror film are thought to contain at least some good examples, even the slasher film which is disliked by most respondents. Gothic horror film types and other horror films which create atmosphere, especially vampire films, psychological horror films and films about the supernatural are almost always considered to be good horror, but the respondents identify any horror films which work on the principle of horripilation as good examples of the genre. The respondents identify far fewer good examples of more graphic horror films, especially slasher films and gore films or other films containing extremes of violence and an over-reliance on special effects at the expense of plot or character development. Horror films are deemed to be good if they create plausible events and character relations, and if the special effects or elements such as violence are thought to be in context. Respondents like what they consider to be 'thinking films' regardless of type, in other words films which they consider to be thought-provoking or which inspire fantasies. Accordingly, good horror films are those with interesting characters, novel plots, and which the respondents consider to be well acted. Conversely bad films are those which they find formulaic, predictable or badly made. On the whole, though, the respondents are keen to present a case for horror being a serious subject and not just the lurid pursuit of adolescent boys and rogue males. In this way, the female horror fans and followers seek to distance themselves from the depraved consumer of popular myth.

• **Genre definitions**

The classification of films as horror is dependent on the desired emotional affects (horripilation and the thrilling of intelligibility), explaining the inclusion of generic hybrids such as the science-fiction/horror film and even mainstream films in their viewing preferences. Realistic horror or films depicting events very like real-life, especially sexual violence (such as the rape-revenge film, for example) are considered to be in a different category than horror which is primarily thought of as a form of fantasy.

- **Nomadic viewers**

Horror film viewers (although they retain the core interest) also show allegiance to other related cultural products. They watch a wide range of other genres and film types which interact with horror, including science fiction, fantasy, historical and costume dramas, melodramas and psychological thrillers. They also show allegiance to other media, such as horror fiction and comic books.

- **Self-censorship**

Self-censorship is conducted mainly through viewing choice. Viewers exhibit fan competencies and select their viewing with respect to their knowledge about horror films, thus avoiding films that are not to their taste. This does not necessarily relate to thresholds, but to whether the film is deemed to be a 'thinking film' and of high quality or has the desired emotional affects.

- **Social situation**

Horror films help the viewer to cope with everyday life and her social situation. Viewers use the horror film to explore fantasies which make their social situations acceptable - the 'compensatory experience' (Ang, 1985). This frequently involves sexual fantasies and fantasies about vampirism, as well as the release of negative emotions such as anger.

- **Fan communities**

The viewers gain a sense of community which comes through the shared experience of being a horror film fan, most prevalently within areas of vampire fandom which allow the fans to dress up and act out their fantasies surrounding the figure of the vampire.

The research shows that female horror film fans do form a media community around their taste for horror over and above their allegiances to both personal-domestic and social-cultural groups (Nightingale, p. 18) as the theory of audiences described by Radway, Ang, Hobson and others demonstrated. The viewer is most likely to associate with other female fans in areas of fandom not dominated by male fans. This may range from participation in national vampire fandoms to small independent groups or simply meetings of a few like-minded friends.

- **Carnival**

Horror fan practices are related to the concept of Carnival developed by Bakhtin (1965) particularly through dressing and acting in unconventional ways as a way of making fun of or challenging established social hierarchies and can lead to a form of empowerment for the respondents. The wearing of

vampire costumes at fan meetings and events (and in real life) provides an atmosphere of subversion in which the aberrant femininity on display parodies and renders grotesque socially acceptable gender roles.

III. Factors in the character of horror film fans and followers

- **Identity**

For feminist theorists such as Ang and Radway identity is a political issue and the pleasures of media texts demonstrate not only what women like, but also the ways in which women construct their identities around such texts. The viewer's identity is constructed around the taste for horror and ranges from a morbid personality to a queer vampire sexuality and is related to resistance against dominant gender roles. The viewer is also very likely to see herself as an outsider from childhood onwards, a fact which is compounded by liking horror.

- **An attraction to the dark side**

A strong sense of identity comes from the taste for horror. These viewers feel that it is natural to like horror with the belief that they were born with or acquired this taste very early in life. There is a sense in which many feel that the taste for horror is inherited, not in a genetic sense, but in having parents who also liked horror (or had the ability to cope with horrific material which the respondents, as children, learnt or imitated). Liking horror is considered to be a personality trait with the viewer thinking of herself as having a morbid or dark streak in her personality. The taste for horror appears to be life-long, these viewers continuing to seek out horror and horror-related material for entertainment well into maturity. It is linked to an imaginative inner life and nostalgia for the pleasures of childhood. This pattern appears to be a-historic and occurs amongst respondents of all ages.

- **Guilty pleasures**

Although the viewer regards her taste for horror as natural to her personality, many regard it as a guilty pleasure and something that marks them out from the norm. In this context, resistance is expressed as a form of rebellion against feminine norms and the appropriation of a taboo genre. Like Auerbach (1995), the viewer is striving against a 'destiny of girdles, spike heels, and approval' (though ironically, she may aspire to the wearing of restrictive Victorian clothing and corsets).

- **Gender socialisation and aberrant femininity**

Adolescent horror film viewing appears not to work as gender socialisation amongst the viewers. Rather than being successfully socialised into disliking

horror films, the viewer incorporates her taste for horror into aberrant patterns of femininity, frequently in terms of the vampire masquerade and a queer (or straight-queer) sexuality (or a fantasy thereof).

- **Resistance**

Resistance for the viewers takes the form of liking the genre in itself, what Brown (1994, p. 182) calls 'resistance at the macro level', as well as reading against the grain. The liking for a genre which is often vilified and seen as a particularly unfeminine taste is a form of viewer resistance as Chute (1983, pp. 13-14) points out: 'The gross-out aficionado savours his sense of complicity when the values of a smug social stratum, from which he feels himself excluded, are systematically trashed and ridiculed.' The horror fan Chute is describing, as evidenced by the use of the male pronoun, is the adolescent male viewer and he limits himself to teenage rebellion, but the feeling of exclusion he describes could equally apply to the female horror fan rebelling against Auerbach's female destiny (see above). Some viewers find pleasure in the taboo of liking horror and calling into question social and cultural norms, not least as regards vampires and the freedom of sexual expression these horror film characters offer.

- **Feminist activism**

Feminist activism or consciousness is not excluded by a liking for horror, in fact feminist opinions are widely held. Individual viewers are capable of questioning and rejecting ideological aspects of the horror film such as the positioning of women as weak. However, the viewers do not generally regard themselves as feminists and look on the debates about the genre which have been supported within feminism as overly politically correct. In this, they may be described as post-feminist.

8.1.2 The female horror film viewer

Female horror film viewers may fit the model in various ways, exhibiting different factorial patterns. For example, a vampire fan may read the vampire film as romance, may identify with the vampire, find the vampire attractive and use the figure of the vampire in her sexual fantasies. In addition, she may aspire in real life to the glamorous image of the vampire; she may dress up (she may be a Goth or attend vampire meetings where the members wear vampire costumes) and play role playing games in which she can act out a vampire lifestyle. In this she may be reacting against the norms of femininity and this may be a subversive act, although she may not be an active feminist.

Another viewer who likes slasher films may enjoy the pleasures that come from being scared and from viewing violent acts. This may be an outlet for the aggression women are not normally allowed to express. She may identify with a strong heroine who nonetheless exhibits feminine traits, though she may despise weak female characters and shrug off their deaths. She may laugh at bad examples of the genre and also at the fantastical nature of the violence. She may object to realistic depictions of violence against women, though again this may not indicate feminist activism. Both these viewers may believe that they were born with a liking for horror and have incorporated their horror film viewing into their identities. They may both use horror films to make do with their social situation. Both may also be nomadic viewers, but the vampire fan may position her liking for vampire films in relation to the glamour of historical costume dramas, whereas the slasher film viewer is attracted to the thrilling of intelligibility of mainstream thrillers and other suspense films.

The female horror film fan, then, may only rarely adopt the passive female spectatorial position when viewing horror films, refusing to look (Williams) and watching only with reluctance and fear (Halberstam). Rather, she seems to be adopting an interpretive strategy and taking up a subject position which is in many crucial respects close to feminine patterns of viewing observed elsewhere. Recent assumptions that horror film viewers are predominantly male, that horror remains a resolutely masculine genre and that horror film viewing is an unsuitable pleasure for women must also now be questioned. Most importantly, perhaps, these female viewers illustrate the fact that the horror film genre continues to incorporate feminine aspects that the literary horror genre has traditionally embraced.

Recent years have seen a shift in focus in screen studies away from an interpretation of the text onto the audience, nevertheless it would be wrong to abandon the text entirely since viewers have 'lived relationships with texts' (Nightingale, 1995). Radway (1988, p. 363) advocates the decentering of the text as the focus of analysis, recommending that discourse be retained but the link with specific texts broken. This analysis of the female horror film viewer's lived relationship with the horror film reveals a number of issues which in the theoretical context of female horror film spectatorship suggests a more diverse range of readings and pleasurable textual negotiations than often acknowledged.

8.2 Gender, genre and the female gaze

The findings presented above shed light on the difficulties with horror film spectatorship explored in chapter 2. All that remains, then, is to re-examine the theoretical context of the findings. Ideally, this would provide an understanding of the viewing process, particularly in terms of the audience's reading of the horror film as erotica, romance or escapist entertainment allowing a release of negative or 'unfeminine' emotions. This might initially suggest that the female horror film spectator is not, as thought, immasculated; she does not collude in her own oppression. The danger of reading too much into the audience reaction must be considered, however, in attempting to account for an interpretive community which reads the text, as the horror film viewers do, ironically or subversively (see Gripsrud, 1995). This study has also privileged gender over difference of race, class, age, sexual orientation, educational background, (dis)ability, and nationality, and it must be noted that, as Whatling (1997, p. 12) writes, 'within the fantasy investments of the desiring audience ... the tendency is to override difference in the pursuit of sameness.' Despite the contradictory and sometimes confusing array of responses manifested by the viewers (and these will have to be analysed with respect to difference other than gender elsewhere), it is clear that the viewers are proficient at appropriating the horror text and reading against the dominant grain of reception. Clover (1992b, p. 43) has stated that:

To the extent that the possibility of cross-gender identification has been entertained, it has been that of the female with the male. Thus some critics have wondered whether the female viewer, faced with the screen image of a masochistic/narcissistic female, might not rather elect to 'betray her sex and identify with the masculine point of view.'

In the female viewer's appropriation of strong femininity and predatory female sexuality, we cannot say that immascultation has occurred in any straightforward sense. On the evidence of this study, female viewers of the horror film do not adopt purely masculine viewing positions, nor do they simply, as Clover (p. 54) also indicated, respond to the literal level of the text. However, whilst Clover argues that a feminine male killer and a masculine female protagonist 'would seem to suggest a loosening of the category of the feminine,' the participants' responses to films like Alien suggest that for the female viewer the category of the feminine can be multiplied and dispersed. When given the opportunity, as in Alien, female viewers strongly identify with the feminised hero because of her literal femininity in combination with her figurative masculinity. Gendered

identification for the female viewer may not in this case be as fluid a process as Clover (pp. 62-3) proposes it is for the male viewer, but other interpretive strategies complicate the matter further. Although gendered identification is, in the case of Alien and other films with female heroes, strengthened, in other cases identification offers more complex pleasures. In the specific instance of vampire films, one of the most important classes of horror film identification to emerge in this study is the horror film's role in identity construction. Stacey (1994a, pp. 229-230) has proposed that perceptions of and relationships to cultural objects (including film) can be part of the processes of constructing the self. In following Wright (1984), Stacey explores the relationship of readers' interactions with the text through 'fantasy, idealisation and imaginative transformations.' Stacey describes how the processes of projection and introjection work in relation to the spectatrix's relationship with the star, but similar psychic processes can be seen at work in the horror films spectatrix's relationship with the vampire. In the case of vampire cinema, the spectatrix invests the vampire with qualities lacking in the self (projection). Thus, the pleasures offered to female spectators focus on the fact that the vampire embodies a desirable femininity expressed as active sexuality - also explicit in the vampire's glamour and appearance - which the spectatrix may have difficulty expressing. In this way, the vampire embodies transgressive or rebellious feminine sexuality, and therefore the 'bad object', which offers subversive pleasures to the spectatrix struggling against patriarchy. The spectatrix also incorporates into herself the desired characteristics of the vampire, transforming herself, often literally with the adoption of the vampire masquerade, and this latter may be equated with Stacey's (p. 231) introjective connection with commodity purchase. What is perhaps most unusual in this process is the fact that the feminine ideal is based on an aberrant femininity charged with otherness and difference. In this way, the position of the female subject in horror film spectatorship can be better understood, though only between self and ideal other. As for Stacey, these psychic processes do not wholly explain the pleasures of horror film spectatorship for women and the use of horror cinema as a form of female erotica must still be explored.

In this vein, the desire for quasi-human monsters such as vampires is indicative of a gendered look which offers further possibilities of pleasure. Stacey (1987) proposes a complex model of cinematic spectatorship in which gender identification is separated from sexuality (which she claims are too

often conflated in the name of sexual difference). For Stacey (p. 53) this would open up the possibilities of pleasure and multiply and disperse differences. The fact that the horror film spectatrix finds pleasure in images of aberrant femininity suggests that an aberrant scopophilic pleasure might be present too. Whatling (1997, p. 160) has argued that 'looking, the right to look, to interpret that look, and, if one wishes, to employ that look to facilitate visual pleasure, can also be appropriated as a subcultural category.' For Whatling, this category is lesbian, but in claiming that the look is 'not always obvious in its directions,' she opens up the argument for a feminine look that need not be coded in terms of its sexuality, but which, as Stacey proposes, multiplies and disperses difference. Such desire may, as for Whatling's lesbian spectator, secure a foothold 'within a medium which has been characterised by absence, misrepresentation and lack.' This investigation into the pleasures of the popular and feminine subjectivity opens up a form of aberrant or queer feminine horror film spectatorship: the queer-vampire look (by which is suggested aberrant feminine, though perhaps neither wholly heterosexual nor wholly homosexual, spectatorship). Not only do these different feminine subject positions break open the monolithic view of the female horror films spectator, loosening the female/passive/masochistic/feminine and male/active/sadistic/masculine binary, they present the possibility for pleasure in fantasies which appropriate and subvert the dominant gender representations.

The subject positions suggested above are not without their own problems and indicate that gendered spectatorship, particularly in relation to the horror genre, is fraught with tensions. The consumption and appropriation of the horror film text by female viewers indicates, particularly in the attempt to read against the grain, that the horror film is a site of struggle. Jancovich (1992, p. 15) has already pointed out that the horror text functions as a dialogic text enabling it to be 'consumed differently within different cultural contexts.' As Tasker (1993, p. 61) has stated, 'to suggest that meanings are obvious, necessarily excludes something of the complexity of popular films.' As good products, she says, 'films are polysemic, speaking or not speaking to different audiences in different ways.' Thus the horror film can be open to multiple interpretations not just by female viewers but by other audience segments (see Pinedo's reading of race in the horror film or Kryzywinska's appropriation of the lesbian vampire, for example). The horror film, then,

'thrives on ambiguity' (Tasker, p. 91), not least in its representations of aberrant femininity.

The problematic of horror and the female gaze has not been entirely resolved (further analysis of why some female spectators like watching violence is required, although Hill's findings also suggest a number of possibilities in this direction, not least in her question about how women might differentiate between representations of violence against women in The Accused and The Terminator - see chapter 6 for different possible readings of these films), but the impact of the findings allows a reframing of gendered horror film spectatorship. Williams' and Halberstam's assertions that the female spectator of the horror film can only refuse to look is belied by the pleasure that women in the horror film audience find in images of terror and gore and, in particular, in the body of the monster. The female spectator may indeed read horror films in a fundamentally different sense to the male (Clover, p. 54), and her appropriation of the text affords her many subversive pleasures. Refusing to refuse to look is, for such viewers, an act of affinity with the monster more subversive than Williams imagined. As explored in chapter 2 the theoretical body of work on the horror film audience does not acknowledge the active female viewer, but nevertheless there is a need to take active female horror film viewers into account in analyses of the genre, not least through the tensions suggested here.

8.3 Further research

A picture of the female horror film audience has emerged from this study which raises a number of questions with regard to both conceptions of the audience (particularly the audience of 'low film culture' as Clover termed the cluster of genres around horror) and studies of the horror film. Both are important to discussions within genre studies and confirm, as others have already observed, that popular cinema can be a site of pleasure for marginalised groups of viewers. At the very least it emphasises the requirement to analyse the horror film in terms of a heterogeneous audience. Further research incorporating responses to 'feminine' horror films such as Candyman, Alien, Interview with the Vampire or Hellraiser might productively open up debate in this area.

The production context of horror cinema also has relevance. A study of the viewer should not 'eliminate the need to examine production,' as Staiger (1992a, p. 3) warns:

I find such a proposition dangerous not merely for the reason that any radical historian might (it elides the incontestable force of the historical real to affect the reader) but because that inference only inverts fallacious binary oppositions: producer/consumer, author/reader.

It is important therefore to consider the context in which horror films are made, sold and consumed, particularly as women are, according to Muir (1989), under-represented in the film industry, especially within Hollywood. The horror genre has been coded as masculine at least since the late 70s and the Hollywood-based film industry has produced and marketed horror films almost exclusively to eighteen to twenty-four-year-old males. The implication of this is that films are written down to that demographic, whilst the marketing concept implies that the genre is of no interest to anyone outside that group (as Mark Gill is quoted as saying - see chapter 1 - the industry sees itself as 'lucky' if the audience includes the teenage male viewers' girlfriends). The former might explain the female viewer's lack of interest in the slasher and gore film (as opposed to its representations of women), whilst the latter contributes to the commonly-held belief that women do not like the genre. Further work on industrial contexts might then be appropriate to establish an historical overview of the production, marketing and exhibition of horror films as a context within which women's relationship with the genre must be understood (Nightingale, p.18). This must, at the very least, take into account that horror films produced for men by men are being consumed by women. There is a feminist interest in the political economy of popular culture (Radway's 'institutional matrix', 1984), and this may perhaps be related to the frustration of attempts to produce and popularise alternative women's genres. Furthermore, Creed (1993, p. 156) has claimed that if more women made horror films the unconscious fears and desires of the gendered subject would be explored more fully. Albeit in small numbers, women have been making horror films at least since the 1970s and studies of these films, including their production contexts and reception, are overdue.

The findings also demonstrate that film consumption does not only take place within the cinema. The fact that the respondents might in many cases be regarded as a secondary audience, more likely to view horror films on video or television broadcast, accounts for the fact that women are often not recognised as horror film viewers. The fact that some respondents feel uncomfortable viewing horror films in public or with male viewers indicates that more research is required in the area of film consumption over and above

an analysis of interpretive strategies. Film studies has tended to ignore this area in favour of textual analysis or histories of production and exhibition. This research indicates that viewing context may be important for marginalised audiences. At the very least, we need to look at how films are consumed (and used, or 'poached', by fans) over and above their cinema exhibition.

Finally, there is a need to reconsider the horror genre's position in the media effects debate. One aspect of horror films (and several other associated genres) causing much concern in Britain today is the perceived danger of viewing violence and the effect this is sometimes believed to have on the viewer. Many studies have been carried out into representations of violence in television programmes and films and whether such fictional representations carry the risk of damaging individuals and causing social violence is still debated (see Barker and Petley, 1997, for example). However, apart from Hill's study of viewing violence, little direct audience research has been carried out in this respect, particularly into viewers who find such material pleasurable and entertaining. Barker (1997, p. 29) states that 'we need to study how viewers who choose to commit themselves to a medium, genre or series differ in their understandings of them from those whose relationship with them is more casual.' The study undertaken here on female horror film viewers exposes differences not just with non-fans' opinions of the genre, but also between groups of fans. In addition, the early age at which many respondents began viewing horror suggests that children might be more than able to deal with images of horror (though no doubt there are those who would use the viewers' affection for the genre as proof of damage). Certainly, the female viewers taking part in this study do not seem to have been adversely affected and they see calls for the banning of screen violence or the demonising of horror fans as not just an unwanted control on their individual freedoms, but something akin to an insult. These questions have repercussions both within and beyond the study of horror cinema (for example, in the debates about screen violence, censorship and pornography).

8.4 Re-viewing the horror film

The recognition of the existence of oppositional cultural participation is not without its problems. A fear remains that the vicarious pleasures offered by popular culture reconcile women with patriarchy and prevent them from developing a feminist consciousness. It is clear, however, that pleasure in

popular culture by no means precludes the holding of feminist opinions (in the sense of challenging cultural preoccupations and routines concerning femininity and gender). Van Zoonen (1994, p. 152) recognises that the goals of research projects such as this one include what has become a recognised aspect of the feminist academic project, that is, to save women's experiences from oblivion and make them an accepted part of history and culture. Accounts of film history and theory have rendered the active female horror film viewer invisible and this study has at the very least raised her profile. This was something that the participants in this study recognised all too well and many were grateful for the opportunity to share their liking for the genre in a serious context. As Brown (1994, p. 131) states of her research into soap opera viewers, if women use their own fan networks to question rather than conform to their status, then they are 'restructuring ideological norms for themselves.' The horror fans taking part in this study resist dominant gender roles and in demonstrating that women do take pleasure into their own hands by appropriating or resisting what they see on the screen, this study has become a political act. This work endorses the value of the pleasures of the popular in women's real lives and suggests that the relationship between media communities and social communities may be subversive. The horror genre can, for women, be the 'source of an audience-generated critique of culture' (Lefebvre, 1971). Women's viewing is seen here in the light of macro-level resistance or opposition and, as many feminist critics whilst writing about soap opera or romantic fiction have recognised before, the viewer can freely admit to her own pleasures in consuming such material. Empowerment comes, in the words of bell hooks (1992), through 'the oppositional gaze.' The active female horror film viewer's acts of resistance and appropriation thus set the generic conventions of the horror film against the background of the contradictory discourses of femininity, feminism and dominant culture.

Appendix 1

Data Capture

A1.1 Guidelines for focussed discussion

The direction the discussion took was guided by the open-ended questions used in the questionnaire mailed out to a members of fan groups and other horror viewers throughout the UK (see below). Suggested questions and topics to be covered in each focus group included:

- What attracts the participants to the horror genre? What are the origins of their taste for horror films? Why and how did they become attracted to horror?
- How would the participants define horror? What kinds of films would they describe as horror films? Are there any films which are not horror films but which affect them in the same way as horror films?
- What kinds of horror films/stories/formats do the participants like or dislike? Why? What do they like or dislike about any formats/styles/aspects of horror?
- How do the participants feel when they are watching? Afterwards? In what ways do they find watching horror films different from watching other kinds of film?
- How do the participants relate to the characters (hero, heroine, victim, killer, monster, etc.) in the film? What do the participants think about female characters as portrayed in horror films (their roles in the plot, their treatment)?
- What fan activities, if any, do the participants take part in? What are their experiences of fandom? What do they think of horror magazines, fanzines, conventions, film festivals, etc.?
- How has horror, if at all, shaped or changed the participants lives (the people they mix with, other hobbies or activities, musical tastes, etc.)? How did liking horror affect friendships and dating experiences when they were in their teens?
- Do the participants family, colleagues, friends and acquaintances know about them liking horror? How do others see them or react to them when they tell them they like horror?
- What part does liking horror play in how the participants see themselves? Does it affect how they feel as women?

A1.2 The questionnaire

The following pages contain a reproduction of the full questionnaire. The short questionnaire was identical except that it did not contain any of the open-ended questions with the exception of question 9.

Patterns of horror film viewing

Thank you for taking the time to look at and complete this questionnaire. It is part of a research project I am undertaking at the University of Stirling Film and Media Department.

I am researching women's reactions to and opinions of the horror genre and am very interested in your thoughts. To this end, several of the questions are open ended and I may take quotes from your responses. I hope that you will take the time and trouble to put some of your opinions down on paper. I am most interested in your replies to section 2 and 3. Any extracts I may take from your replies will be quoted anonymously. The results of this survey will be presented in my doctoral thesis and are not intended for publication elsewhere.

Even if you do not normally watch horror films, please complete the questionnaire anyway - particularly section 4.

If you wish, you may give your name and address below. This is for cross checking my records and will not be used or disclosed in any way.

Name:

Address:

Ref: mm000

Section 1 : Your horror film viewing

1a. How often (approximately) do you watch horror films?
tick one box per location

- | | at least once a week | 2 or 3 times a month | approx. once a month | less than once a month | never |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| i) at the cinema | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii) on television | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii) on video | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv) other:
(e.g. club or film society) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

please state: _____

If you rarely or never watch horror films, or if you do not like horror films, please go straight to section 4.

1b. For those situations in which you view films, indicate who you usually watch with:

tick one box per location where applicable.

- i) at the cinema
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| in a group (single sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| in a group (mixed sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| with one other person (same sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| with one other person (opposite sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| alone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- ii) on video or television
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| in a group (single sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| in a group (mixed sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| with one other person (same sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| with one other person (opposite sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| alone | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Question 1b continued...

iii) other

please state

- _____
- in a group (single sex)
- in a group (mixed sex)
- with one other person (same sex)
- with one other person (opposite sex)
- alone

1c. Has the frequency with which you watch horror films changed over time?

please tick one box

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state how:

1d. Has who you watch horror films with changed over time?

please tick one box

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state how:

2a. At what age did you first start watching horror films? _____

2b. How long, if at all, have you thought of yourself as a horror fan? _____

2c. How did your liking for horror films begin and develop?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

3a. How often do you read the following professional horror magazines?
for each magazine tick one box.

- | | every
issue | most
issues | occasion-
ally | rarely | never |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| i) Cinefantastique | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii) Fangoria | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii) Filmfax | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv) Starburst | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v) Starlog | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| vi) Shivers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| vii) The Dark Side | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| viii) other | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

please state: _____

3b. Do you read any horror or horror related fanzines?

please tick one box

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give titles:

3c. Why you do you read - or not read - particular magazines (e.g. do you like or dislike contents, writers, style, pictures, coverage of particular issues, etc.).
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

Section 2 : Your horror film tastes

4a. Do you like or dislike the following types or styles of horror?
for each type tick one box.

	like all	like most	not fussed	dislike most	dislike all	don't know
silent horror films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. Nosferatu, Caligari)						
Universal horror	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. 1930s Dracula, Frankenstein)						
Hammer horror	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corman/AIP films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. Poe adaptations w/ Vincent Price)						
slasher films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
vampire films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
zombie/living dead	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
supernatural/occult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
witchcraft films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
monster movies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. Godzilla, giant insects, etc.)						
serial killer films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. Silence of the Lambs)						
psychological	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. Psycho)						
body horror	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e.g. gore films, cannibals, Cronenberg films)						
SF-horror	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
horror-comedies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	please state _____					

4b. For those types of films you have selected in Q4a as liking, place the top 3 in order of preference from 1 as most liked:

- 1
- 2
- 3

4c. For those types of films you have selected in Q4a as disliking, place the bottom 3 in order from 1 as least liked:

- 1
- 2
- 3

4d. What do you particularly like or dislike - plot/story, characters, special effects, etc. - about your most and least liked types of horror film and why?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

5a. List up to 10 of your favourite horror films:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

5b. What do you like in particular about any or all of your top 10 films?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

Section 3 : Your opinions of horror

6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
tick one box per statement

	agree strongly	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	disagree strongly	don't know
Horror films help me face my fears	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer films when the monster is hidden or unseen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I watch horror films for the special effects/make-up	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I empathise with the monster/killer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Modern horror films are too violent and gory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy being frightened by horror films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films let me use my imagination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I empathise with the heroine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films should be censored	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films make me laugh	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The gorier the horror film the more I enjoy it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like horror films with a lot of suspense	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films are more frightening than they used to be	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films relieve the tedium of my everyday life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is too much explicit sex in horror films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like watching people being attacked or killed in horror films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horror films corrupt children/young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I empathise with the hero	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have to shut my eyes/hide my face during horror films	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I watch horror films as a form of escapism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. How do you react to horror films? (E.G. how do they make you feel, how do you feel when you are watching them, how do you feel afterwards, what do they make you think about, etc.?)
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

8. Critics often claim that women are treated badly in the horror genre or that horror films are sexist. What are your own opinions on this subject?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

9. Please add any other comments you may have about your horror film tastes or viewing. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

Please go to section 5: About Yourself.

Section 4 : For those who DON'T watch horror films only

10a. What are your reasons for not watching horror films?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

10b. Did you ever watch horror films at any time in the past?
please tick one box
Yes No

**If yes, when did you stop watching and why?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.**

10c. Do you read horror fiction?
please tick one box
Yes No

**If yes, what is it that you like about reading horror fiction that you don't like about watching horror films?
please write as much as you like, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.**

Section 5 : About yourself

11. Age: _____

12. Sex: Male Female

13. Accommodation:

please tick one box

- Owner-occupier
- Rented
- Student accommodation
- Living at parental home
- Other

14. What is your job/occupation? _____

15. Marital status:

please tick one box

- Single
- Married/co-habiting
- Widowed/divorced/separated

16. How many children do you have? _____

17. What is the highest level of education you received?

please tick one box

- O level/ordinary
- A levels/higher
- University/college degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Vocational/other qualification

18. Would you describe the following personality traits as true for yourself?
tick one box per statement

	never true	almost never true	some-times true	true half the time	often true	almost always true	always true
Self-reliant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yielding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Defend own beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moody	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conscientious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Athletic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affectionate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatrical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assertive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flatterable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strong personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loyal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unpredictable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forceful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feminine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analytical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sympathetic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jealous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have leadership abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensitive to others needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Truthful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Willing to take risks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 6 : Hobbies/Other Interests

19. Do you like or dislike the following types of film?
for each type tick one box.

	like	not fussed	dislike	don't know
action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
biopics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
comedy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
cop/gangster	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
foreign language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
historical drama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
melodrama/weepy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
musical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
romance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
science fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
thriller	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
war/Vietnam	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
western	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (please state) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Which types of book(s) do you read regularly?

you may tick more than one, or none

biography	<input type="checkbox"/>
classics	<input type="checkbox"/>
crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
fantasy	<input type="checkbox"/>
horror	<input type="checkbox"/>
mainstream fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>
romance	<input type="checkbox"/>
science fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>
true-life crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
thrillers	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (please state) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 18 continued...

Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Secretive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make decisions easily	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compassionate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sincere	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soft hurt feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conceited	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dominant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soft spoken	<input type="checkbox"/>
Likeable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Masculine	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warm	<input type="checkbox"/>
Solemn	<input type="checkbox"/>
Willing to take a stand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tender	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aggressive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gullible	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inefficient	<input type="checkbox"/>
Act as a leader	<input type="checkbox"/>
Childlike	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adaptable	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individualistic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't use harsh lang	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unsystematic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competitive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Love children	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tactful	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ambitious	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gentle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conventional	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. What types of television programmes do you watch regularly?

- you may tick more than one, or none**
- sport
 - news/current affairs
 - documentary
 - soap operas
 - talk shows (e.g. Oprah, Kilroy)
 - drama series/serials
 - chat shows
 - comedy
 - games shows
 - sit-coms
 - other (please state) _____

23. Are you interested in any of the following subjects?

- you may tick more than one, or none**
- ufology
 - hauntings
 - seances
 - pagan religions/wicca
 - alternative medicine
 - fortune telling/horoscopes
 - western religions
 - eastern religions

24. Please list any hobbies/pastimes/sports you take part in:

22. Which types of magazine(s) do you read regularly?

- you may tick more than one, or none**
- crafts/dressmaking/etc.
 - current affairs
 - comics/graphic novels
 - computing
 - cookery
 - D.I.Y.
 - feminist
 - film
 - gardening
 - hobby (e.g. fishing, trains)
 - house/home
 - motoring/car/bike
 - music
 - sports
 - TV listings
 - womens, health/beauty
 - other (please state) _____

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Please ensure you have not inadvertently missed out any questions.

A prompt return of this questionnaire would be greatly appreciated. A SAE is supplied for its return. The return address, should you need it, is:

Brigid Cherry,
 Department of Film and Media Studies,
 University of Stirling,
 Stirling,
 FK9 4LA

If you would like to receive a short report on the result of this survey, please tick:

and complete your name and address on the front page of this questionnaire.

Appendix 2
Personal details of audience study participants

IDcode	Age	Accomodation	Occupation	Marital stat.	Children	Education
hh101	18-24	parental home	nurse	single	no	vocational
hh102	18-24	parental home	artist	single	no	degree
hh003	35-40	-	artisan	single	-	-
hh104	35-40	renting	psychiatric nurse, artist	single	no	vocational
hh105	25-34	parental home	animal husbandry	single	no	vocational
hh106	18-24	parental home	newsagent	single	no	A levels
hh107	35-40	owner-occupier	secretary	single	no	degree
hh009	-	-	-	-	-	-
hh110	<18	parental home	school student	single	no	A levels
hh011	18-24	renting	student	single	no	degree
hh112	18-24	owner-occupier	computer support	married	no	O levels
hh113	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
hh116	25-34	parental home	florist	single	no	O levels
hh117	18-24	parental home	sales assistant	single	no	vocational
hh118	25-34	renting	housewife	married	yes	O levels
hh119	18-24	parental home	student	single	no	degree
hh122	40+	renting	retired	widow	yes	-
ds207	25-34	renting	full-time mother	divorced	yes	O levels
ds208	25-34	renting	nanny	single	yes	vocational
ds209	18-24	renting	assistant manager (retail)	single	no	vocational
ds210	18-24	owner-occupier	clairvoyant/tarot reader	married	no	A levels
ds221	35-40	owner-occupier	secretary	single	no	A levels
ds222	18-24	owner-occupier	postwoman	married	no	O levels
ds223	25-34	renting	accountant	single	no	A levels
ds224	35-40	owner-occupier	illustrator	married	no	degree
sh201	<18	parental home	school student	single	no	O levels
sh205	35-40	owner-occupier	teacher	single	no	postgrad
bfs101	25-34	owner-occupier	sales assisitant	married	no	A levels
bfs102	35-40	owner-occupier	systems analyst/ programmer	single	no	degree
bfs104	40+	owner-occupier	primary school ancillary assisitant	married	yes	A levels
bfs105	40+	owner-occupier	writer	married	yes	vocational
bfs109	25-34	owner-occupier	civil servant	married	no	degree
bfs113	18-24	parental home	sales assisitant	single	no	A levels
bfs116	40+	owner-occupier	writer/mother	married	yes	vocational
bfs119	25-34	owner-occupier	bookseller	married	no	A levels
bfs123	35-40	owner-occupier	secretary/author	married	yes	A levels
bfs127	25-34	parental home	library assistant	single	no	A levels
bfs130	18-24	parental home	unemployed	single	no	degree
bfs131	25-34	owner-occupier	secretary-admin, writer	married	no	O levels
bfs132	40+	renting	editor, writer	married	no	A levels
bfs133	40+	owner-occupier	writer	married	yes	vocational
bfs134	18-24	parental home	clerk/typist	single	no	vocational
bfs136	40+	renting	civil servant	divorced	yes	vocational
bfs138	25-34	owner-occupier	computer analyst	single	no	degree
bfs140	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree

bfs142	40+	renting	artist/model-maker/writer	single	no	degree
bfs144	40+	tied cottage	retired (school librarian)	married	yes	O levels
bfs145	25-34	owner-occupier	playgroup worker, writer	married	yes	O levels
bfs151	35-40	owner-occupier	housewife/mother, writer/illustrator	married	yes	degree
bfs154	40+	owner-occupier	library assistant, writer	married	yes	A levels
bfs156	25-34	parental home	civil servant	single	no	A levels
bfs159	25-34	owner-occupier	stable lad, writer	co-habiting	no	degree
vs201	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
vs202	40+	owner-occupier	administrator	married	yes	vocational
vs203	25-34	owner-occupier	artiste	co-habiting	no	A levels
vs204	25-34	renting	civil servant	married	no	O levels
vs205	18-24	parental home	business administrator	single	no	vocational
vs210	18-24	renting	student	co-habiting	no	degree
vs211	25-34	renting	staff nurse	single	no	vocational
vs212	25-34	renting	unemployed	single	no	Highers
des201	25-34	renting	admin/secretary/pa	co-habiting	no	A levels
des202	18-24	parental home	bank officer	single	no	A levels
des203	18-24	parental home	clerk	single	no	vocational
cr201	25-34	owner-occupier	full-time mother	widow	yes	O levels
cr102	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	A levels
ed101	>40	owner-occupier	computer support	married	yes	degree
ed103	25-34	owner-occupier	biology researcher	co-habiting	no	degree
ed106	25-34	renting	temping	co-habiting	no	postgrad
ed221	18-24	renting	unemployed	single	no	degree
ed222	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
ed245	40+	owner-occupier	fine art historian	married	yes	postgrad
ed246	25-34	owner-occupier	student	co-habiting	no	degree
st101	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
st209	40+	owner-occupier	student	married	yes	vocational
in101	25-34	parental home	archeologist	single	no	degree
gl102	18-24	renting	student	co-habiting	no	degree
em101	25-34	owner-occupier	secretary	married	no	degree
em102	40+	owner-occupier	technical editor	married	yes	degree
em103	25-34	renting	teacher	single	no	postgrad
em105	18-24	renting	library assistant	married	no	vocational
em106	25-34	renting	museum assistant	single	no	degree
em107	25-34	renting	secretary/PA	co-habiting	no	A levels
em108	25-34	owner-occupier	secretary	married	yes	vocational
em109	25-34	renting	librarian	married	yes	postgrad
em110	25-34	renting	secretary	single	no	vocational
em111	24	renting	student	single	no	postgrad
em112	18-24	parental home	waitress	single	no	-
em113	35-40	owner-occupier	computer support	married	yes	degree
em114	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
em115	18-24	renting	administration	single	no	degree
em116	35-40	renting	retail supervisor	married	yes	A levels
em117	25-34	owner-occupier	writer	married	no	degree
em118	25-34	renting	student	single	no	degree
em119	25-34	renting	quality manager	married	no	degree
em120	40+	renting	teacher	single	no	postgrad

em121	25-34	renting	mother	married	yes	postgrad
em122	35-40	owner-occupier	bar worker	single	no	degree
em123	18-24	renting	student	single	no	degree
em124	40+	owner-occupier	computer operator	married	yes	degree
em125	25-34	renting	student	co-habiting	no	degree
em126	25-34	renting	teacher	co-habiting	no	postgrad
em227	-	-	-	-	-	-
em228	18-24	owner-occupier	sales assistant	married	no	postgrad
em229	35-40	renting	administrator	married	no	degree
em230	25-34	renting	writer/editor	married	yes	degree
em231	40+	owner-occupier	computer operator	married	yes	degree
em232	18-24	renting	student	single	no	degree
em233	18-24	renting	writer	single	no	degree
em234	35-40	owner-occupier	graphic designer	married	yes	A levels
em235	25-34	owner-occupier	computer operator	co-habiting	no	degree
em236	25-34	renting	veterinary technician	single	no	degree
em237	35-40	owner-occupier	supervisor	married	no	degree
fg101	25-30	renting	clerk/typist	single	no	A levels
fg102	25-34	owner-occupier	biologist	co-habiting	no	degree
fg103	18-24	renting	student	single	no	vocational
fg201	18-24	renting	unemployed	single	no	degree
fg202	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
fg203	18-24	renting	journalist	married	no	degree
fg301	25-34	renting	nurse	single	no	vocational
fg302	25-34	renting	unemployed	single	no	Highers
fg401	25-34	parental home	disabled	single	no	degree
fg402	18-24	renting	student	single	no	degree
fg403	18-24	renting	student	co-habiting	no	degree
fg404	25-30	-	housing officer	-	-	degree
fg405	18-24	renting	unemployed	single	no	degree
fg501	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
fg502	25-34	renting	student	single	no	degree
ex001	-	-	-	-	-	-
ex002	-	-	-	-	-	-
ex003	50+	-	-	-	-	-
ex004	18-24	-	-	-	-	-
ex005	-	-	-	-	-	-
ex006	18-24	-	student	-	-	degree
ex007	40+	owner-occupier	doctor	married	no	degree
ex008	25-30	renting	chemist	married	no	postgrad
ex009	25-30	owner-occupier	systems analyst	co-habiting	no	degree
ph001	<18	parental home	school student	-	-	-
ph002	<18	parental home	school student	-	-	-
ph003	<18	parental home	school student	-	-	-
ph004	<18	parental home	school student	-	-	-
ps101	>40	-	-	married	yes	-
ps102	25-34	renting	office worker	married	yes	-
ps103	25-34	owner-occupier	production editor	married	yes	-
ps104	>40	owner-occupier	librarian	married	no	-
ps105	>40	renting	librarian	married	no	-
ps106	-	-	lecturer	married	-	-
ps107	>40	owner-occupier	librarian	married	yes	-
ps108	35-40	renting	writer	single	no	-
ps109	<18	parental home	factory worker	single	no	O levels

ps110	35-40	-	librarian	married	no	postgrad
ps111	18-24	student housing	student	single	no	degree
ps112	35-40	-	library clerk	married	no	A levels
ps113	25-34	renting	student	single	no	postgrad
ps114	25-34	-	-	married	yes	-
ps115	25-34	-	secretary	married	yes	vocational
ps116	>40	-	data analyst	married	yes	degree
ps117	25-34	-	counsellor	married	yes	vocational
ps118	18-24	-	illustrator	co-habiting	no	degree
ps119	25-34	-	computer author	married	yes	degree
ps120	25-34	-	software engineer	single	no	degree
ps121	-	-	-	-	-	-

Appendix 3 Data Analysis and Tables

A3.1 Analysis of Qualitative Data

The computer software package NUDIST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising), designed for the qualitative analysis of unstructured data, was used for the initial analysis of data from focus groups, interviews, letters and open-ended questions from the questionnaire.

NUDIST:

- has a pattern-based search mechanism which can locate key text or text patterns on which an index system can be built;
- builds an indexing database into the data documents to be analysed;
- this index can be built up according to the topics, ideas and themes seen in the original data.

Retrievals from the indexing data base can be made using a set of Boolean and non-Boolean operators (for example, a search for ‘slashers’ or ‘slasher films’ and ‘like’ or ‘enjoy’). The results of such retrievals aided the development of concepts and theories from the qualitative data, as well as identifying common patterns in the data.

A3.2 Analysis of Quantitative Data

The statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) was employed in the analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire. In addition to descriptive analysis and tabulation of data, cross-tabulation and the chi-square (χ^2) test was used to test significance (that is, whether a relationship between two variables really exists or whether an apparent relationship has arisen by chance).

The tables relevant to the analysis in each chapter follow.

I. Tables for chapter 1

Table 1.1: CAA film profiles for selected recent horror and other related films

	Sex		Age				
	Male	Female	18-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45+
Man Bites Dog	46%	54%	6%	58%	29%	0%	8%
Silence of the Lambs	51%	49%	13%	34%	28%	13%	12%
Scream	52%	48%	24%	42%	21%	10%	3%
Alien ³	58%	42%	12%	33%	34%	14%	7%
Reservoir Dogs	62%	38%	14%	53%	18%	6%	10%
Natural Born Killers	71%	29%	15%	40%	26%	12%	7%
Average	57%	43%	14%	43%	26%	9%	8%

Table 1.2a: Preliminary horror film audience survey : m/f audience split
All films counted at two screenings, except The People Under The Stairs at one screening only.

	Male	Female	Total
The Exorcist	70% (170)	30% (73)	243
The Fly	65% (61)	35% (33)	94
Dementia 13	64% (46)	36% (26)	72
Near Dark	65% (83)	35% (45)	128
Les Yeux Sans Visage	71% (63)	29% (26)	89
The People Under the Stairs	72% (23)	28% (9)	32
Total	68% (446)	32% (212)	658

Table 1.2b: Preliminary horror film audience survey : sex groupings
Figures for groups were not available for The Exorcist screenings. All films counted at two screenings, except The People Under The Stairs at one screening only.

	female	male	total
single sex group	6.7% (28)	2.2% (9)	8.9% (37)
mixed sex group	4.3% (18)	6.0% (25)	10.4% (43)
single sex pair	1.9% (8)	14.0% (58)	15.9% (66)
mixed sex pair	11.6% (48)	11.6% (48)	23.1% (96)
alone	8.9% (37)	32.8% (136)	41.7% (173)
total	33.5% (139)	66.5% (276)	100% (415)

Table 1.3: Horror film preferences by age and sex
Reproduced from Barclay (1961).

age	boys		girls	
	best	least	best	least
14	49	16	37	32
15	41	29	56	42
16	40	24	25	42
17	35	25	19	54
18	29	30	15	64
14-18	39	25	30	47

Table 1.4: Favourite film types in order of popularity, gender differences
Reproduced from Cumberbatch and Wood (1995). Figures in brackets show percentage of total who most preferred that genre.

Rank	Males	Females
1	Action (44%)	Horror (27%)
2	Comedy (20%)	Comedy (23%)
3	Horror (14%)	Action (16%)
4	Other (7%)	Romance (11%)
5	Animation (3%)	True Story (9%)

Table 1.5: 18 rated films already seen by age
Reproduced from Broadcasting Standards Council (1996).

	10-12 years	13-14 years	15-17 years	Total
The Silence of the Lambs	34%	54%	67%	53%
Reservoir Dogs	18%	22%	38%	27%
Seven	13%	17%	34%	22%
Natural Born Killers	17%	18%	19%	18%

Table 1.6: Box-office surveys, 1991 and 1992, films classified as horror
 Reproduced from Cinefantastique, April 1992 and June 1993.

1991	1992
Silence of the Lambs	Basic Instinct
Sleeping with the Enemy	The Hand That Rocks The Cradle
The Addams Family	Bram Stoker's Dracula
Misery	Death Becomes Her
Nightmare on Elm Street VI	Single White Female
The People Under the Stairs	Sleepwalkers
Child's Play 3	Candyman
Ernest Scared Stupid	Raising Cain
Warlock	The Addams Family
Body Parts	Pet Semetary 2
Popcorn	Buffy the Vampire Slayer
	Jennifer 8
	Whispers In the Dark
	Dr Giggles
	Innocent Blood
	Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me
	Shadows and Fog
	Naked Lunch
	Gate 2
	Dead Again

II. Tables for chapter 4

Table 4.1: Age range of female horror film viewers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<18	2	1.9	1.9
18-24	32	29.6	29.9
25-34	41	38.0	38.3
35-40	16	14.8	15.0
>40	16	14.8	15.0
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=107 Missing cases=1

Table 4.2: Marital status

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
single, divorced	54	50.0	50.5
married, co-habiting	53	49.1	49.5
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=107 Missing cases=1

Table 4.3: Children

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
no children	77	71.3	72.6
has children	29	26.9	27.4
Missing	2	1.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=106 Missing cases=2

Table 4.4: Highest education level attained

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
none/still at school	1	0.9	0.9
O-level, Ordinary	10	9.3	9.4
A-levels, Highers	26	24.1	24.5
University, College degree	46	42.6	43.4
Post-graduate degree	11	10.2	10.4
Vocational, other	12	11.1	11.3
Missing	2	1.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=106 Missing cases=2

Table 4.5: Occupation field

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
education/child	3	2.8	2.8
high ed./research	9	8.3	8.4
health	3	2.8	2.8
sec/admin	16	14.8	15.0
computing	7	6.5	6.5
retail/service	7	6.5	6.5
civil service	4	3.7	3.7
library	5	4.6	4.7
factory	1	0.9	0.9
farm/animal	3	2.8	2.8
creative	10	9.3	9.3
student	24	22.2	22.4
none	10	9.3	9.3
publish	3	2.8	2.8
finance	2	1.9	1.9
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=107 Missing cases=1

Table 4.6: Accommodation

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
owner occupier	41	38.0	38.7
rented	39	36.1	36.8
student housing	8	7.4	7.5
living at home	17	15.7	16.0
other	1	.9	.9
Missing	2	1.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=106 Missing cases=2

Table 4.7: Film genre preferences (%)

genre/type	like	dislike	not fussed	don't know
thrillers	84.8	1.0	14.3	0.0
science fiction	76.4	6.6	16.0	0.9
comedy	64.2	4.7	31.1	0.0
action	61.3	6.6	31.1	0.9
historical/costume drama	47.2	15.1	36.8	0.9
musical	35.8	30.2	34.0	0.0
cop	32.4	16.2	50.5	1.0
melodrama/weepies	26.4	40.6	31.1	1.9
foreign language	21.2	35.6	38.5	4.8
western	19.2	37.5	42.3	1.0
biopic	19.0	16.2	51.4	13.3
war	16.2	44.8	35.2	3.8
romance/romantic comedy	16.0	39.6	44.3	0.0

Table 4.8: Television programme viewing choices
Percentage of respondents who watch regularly

programme type	% watch
drama series/serials	72.2
comedy (e.g. sketch shows)	66.7
documentary	58.3
news	56.5
sit-coms	43.5
soap operas	38.9
talk shows	22.2
chat shows	15.7
game shows	14.8
sport	7.4

Table 4.9: Reading choices
Percentage of respondents who read regularly

genre/type	% read
horror	86.1
fantasy	62.0
SF	54.6
classics	45.4
thrillers	44.4
mainstream fiction	37.0
crime	34.3
biography	32.4
true-life crime	26.9
romance	6.5

Table 4.10: Magazines and periodicals etc. reading choices
Percentage of respondents who read regularly

titles	% read
film	44.4
tv listings	39.8
comics/graphic novels	34.3
music	34.3
women's/health & beauty	34.3
computing	23.1
news and current affairs	18.5
cookery	12.0
hobby	12.0
craft (e.g. needlecraft)	11.1
feminist	11.1
gardening	4.6
house	4.6
motor	3.7
sport/fitness	1.9
DIY/home improvements	0.9

Table 4.11: Hobbies and interests

Hobby/area of interest	No. of participants
reading	51 (47%)
creative writing	28 (26%)
physical activities (e.g. cycling, hiking)	27
sporting activities (inc. golf, horse riding)	20
going to cinema, films, film society	18
fan clubs and activities	17
listening to music	17
art	16
music (playing musical instrument, singing)	15
competitive sports (e.g. tennis, rugby)	13
physical exercise/non-competitive sports (e.g. aerobics)	13
needlecrafts (e.g. tapestry, quilting)	12
socialising	12
costume/clothing design	11
computing	10
socio-political	10
New Age, paranormal, etc.	10
pets	9
gardening	8
role-playing games	8
travelling	8
collecting films, videos	7
writing letters, penpals	7
art appreciation	6
collecting	6
cooking	6
history	6
the Internet	6
photography, film/video making	6
sports spectating	6
watching TV	6
writing for fanzines	6
fan collecting	5

Table 4.11cont.

amateur dramatics	4
model/toy making	4
puzzles	4
study, learned societies	4
theatre, ballet	4
board games	3
camping	3
dancing	3
housecrafts	3
motoring, motorcycling	3
daydreaming, thinking	2
family	2
shopping	2
volunteer first aid	2
baby-sitting	1
bondage	1
restoring antiques/old furniture	1
tattoos	1

Table 4.12: Alternative interests

interest	% interested
ghosts & hauntings	67.6
paganism/wicca	61.1
horoscopes/fortune telling	53.7
alternative medicine	44.4
seances	41.7
ufology	38.0
eastern religions	30.6
Christianity/western religions	26.9

III. Tables for chapter 5

Table 5.1a: Frequency of viewing horror films - cinema

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
at least once a week	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2 or 3 times a month	4	3.7	3.8	3.8
once a month	18	16.7	17.3	21.2
less than once a month	70	64.8	67.3	88.5
never	12	11.1	11.5	100.0
Missing	4	3.7		
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases=104 Missing cases=4

Table 5.1b: Frequency of viewing horror films - television

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
at least once a week	18	16.7	17.3	17.3
2 or 3 times a month	38	35.2	36.5	53.8
once a month	20	18.5	19.2	73.1
less than once a month	25	23.1	24.0	97.1
never	3	2.8	2.9	100.0
Missing	4	3.7		
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases=104 Missing cases=4

Table 5.1c: Frequency of viewing horror films - video

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
at least once a week	33	30.6	31.1	31.1
2 or 3 times a month	26	24.1	24.5	55.7
once a month	17	15.7	16.0	71.7
less than once a month	27	25.0	25.5	97.2
never	3	2.8	2.8	100.0
Missing	2	1.9		
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases=106 Missing cases=2

Table 5.2: Frequency of total horror film viewing

No. of films	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
2 or more per week	12	11.1	11.9	11.9
1 or 2 per week	34	31.5	33.7	45.5
2 or 3 per month	41	38.0	40.6	86.1
1 per month	13	12.0	12.9	99.0
<1 per month	1	0.9	1.0	100.0
Missing	7	6.5		
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases=101 Missing cases=7

Table 5.3a: Most frequent viewing partner(s) - cinema

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
single sex group	2	1.9	2.1
mixed sex group	21	19.4	22.3
same sex companion	12	11.1	12.8
opposite sex companion	31	28.7	33.0
alone	6	5.6	6.4
multiple	22	20.4	23.4
don't watch/missing	14	13.0	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=94 Missing cases=14

Table 5.3b: Viewing partner(s) - television and video

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
mixed sex group	14	13.0	13.2
same sex companion	4	3.7	3.8
opposite sex companion	32	29.6	30.2
alone	28	25.9	26.4
multiple	28	25.9	26.4
don't watch/missing	2	1.9	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=106 Missing cases=2

Table 5.4: Length of time been watching horror films

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
≤5yrs	5	4.6	5.1
6-10yrs	16	14.7	16.3
11-20yrs	43	39.4	43.9
21-30yrs	25	22.9	25.5
>30	9	8.3	9.2
Missing	11	10.1	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=98 Missing cases=11

Table 5.5: Age first watched horror films

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<12	52	48.1	50.5
12-15	30	27.8	29.1
16-18	18	16.7	17.5
>18	3	2.8	2.9
Missing	5	4.6	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=103 Missing cases=5

Table 5.6: Horror film viewing preferences

percent (frequency)

Figures do not include those who have not seen any examples of the film type

	like all	like most	not fussed	dislike most	dislike all
silent	10.4 (10)	32.3 (31)	43.8 (42)	9.4 (9)	4.2 (4)
Universal	12.4 (11)	56.2 (50)	29.2 (26)	2.2 (2)	0.0 (0)
Hammer	27.6 (27)	48.0 (47)	17.3 (17)	6.1 (6)	1.0 (1)
Corman	12.3 (9)	47.9 (35)	32.9 (24)	6.8 (5)	0.0 (0)
slasher	3.0 (3)	22.0 (22)	21.0 (21)	31.0 (31)	23.0 (23)
vampire	30.5 (32)	61.9 (65)	6.7 (7)	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)
zombie	10.7 (11)	43.7 (45)	27.2 (28)	11.7(12)	6.8 (7)
supernatural	23.8 (25)	61.9 (65)	11.4 (12)	1.9 (2)	1.0 (1)
witch	22.1 (23)	46.2 (48)	24.0 (25)	5.8 (6)	1.9 (2)
monster	8.7 (9)	47.1 (49)	30.8 (32)	12.5 (13)	1.0 (1)
serial killer	10.5 (11)	42.9 (45)	21.9 (23)	18.1 (19)	6.7 (7)
psycho thriller	24.8 (26)	56.2 (59)	16.2 (17)	2.9 (3)	0.0 (0)
gore/body horror	9.0 (7)	35.9 (28)	34.6 (27)	10.3 (8)	10.3 (8)
SF-horror	18.3 (19)	55.8 (58)	20.2 (21)	4.8 (5)	1.0 (1)
horror-comedy	18.9 (20)	40.6 (43)	18.9 (20)	17.9 (19)	3.8 (4)

Table 5.7a: Horror film preferences ranked by like

Percent (frequency)

Figures do not include those who have not seen any examples of the film type

	like all/most	not fussed	dislike all/most
vampire	92.4 (97)	6.7 (7)	1.0 (1)
supernatural	85.7 (90)	11.4 (12)	2.9 (3)
psycho thriller	81.0 (85)	16.2 (17)	2.9 (3)
Hammer	75.5 (74)	17.3 (17)	7.1 (7)
SF-horror	74.0 (77)	20.2 (21)	5.8 (6)
Universal	68.5 (61)	29.2 (26)	2.2 (2)
witch	68.3 (71)	24.0 (25)	7.7 (8)
Corman	60.3 (44)	32.9 (24)	6.8 (5)
horror-comedy	59.4 (63)	18.9 (20)	21.7 (23)
monster	55.8 (58)	30.8 (32)	13.5 (14)
zombie	54.4 (56)	27.2 (28)	18.4 (19)
serial killer	53.3 (56)	21.9 (23)	24.8 (26)
gore/body horror	44.9 (35)	34.6 (27)	20.5 (16)
silent	42.7 (41)	43.8 (42)	13.5 (13)
slasher	25.0 (25)	21.0 (21)	54.0 (54)

Table 5.7b: Horror film preferences ranked by dislike

Percent (frequency)

Figures do not include those who have not seen any examples of the film type

	like all/most	not fussed	dislike all/most
slasher	25.0 (25)	21.0 (21)	54.0 (54)
serial killer	53.3 (56)	21.9 (23)	24.8 (26)
horror-comedy	59.4 (63)	18.9 (20)	21.7 (23)
body horror	44.9 (35)	34.6 (27)	20.5 (16)
zombie	54.4 (56)	27.2 (28)	18.4 (19)
silent	42.7 (41)	43.8 (42)	13.5 (13)
monster	55.8 (58)	30.8 (32)	13.5 (14)
witch	68.3 (71)	24.0 (25)	7.7 (8)
Hammer	75.5 (74)	17.3 (17)	7.1 (7)
Corman	60.3 (44)	32.9 (24)	6.8 (5)
SF-horror	74.0 (77)	20.2 (21)	5.8 (6)
psycho thriller	81.0 (85)	16.2 (17)	2.9 (3)
supernatural	85.7 (90)	11.4 (12)	2.9 (3)
Universal	68.5 (61)	29.2 (26)	2.2 (2)
vampire	92.4 (97)	6.7 (7)	1.0 (1)

Table 5.8a: Most liked film types

Rank	Film Type	Score	Entries	Mean Score
1	vampire	129	55	2.35
2	supernatural	82	42	1.95
3	psycho thrill	70	38	1.84
4	SF-horror	64	33	1.94
5	hammer	61	26	2.35
6	serial killer	22	13	1.69
7	horror-comedy	19	12	1.58
8	zombie	18	9	2.00
9	witchcraft	16	11	1.45
10	monster	16	9	1.78
11	body horror	13	7	1.86
12	silent	12	6	2.00
j13	universal	11	6	1.83
j13	corman	11	5	2.20
15	slasher	9	6	1.50

Table 5.8b: Most disliked film types

Rank	Film Type	Score	Entries	Mean Score
1	slasher	147	58	2.54
2	serial killer	53	26	2.04
3	silent	43	18	2.39
4	horror-comedy	42	21	2.00
5	zombie	39	19	2.05
6	body horror	35	18	1.94
7	monster	32	18	1.78
8	witchcraft	18	9	2.00
9	SF-horror	13	8	1.63
10	psycho thrill	12	5	2.25
11	supernatural	7	4	1.75
12	corman	6	3	2.00
12	hammer	5	3	1.67
14	universal	5	2	2.5
15	vampire	4	3	1.33

Table 5.9: 20 most frequently listed favourite horror films

Rank	Film	No. of times listed
1.	Hellraiser	33
j2.	Alien	30
j2.	Interview With the Vampire	30
4.	The Lost Boys	22
5.	Aliens	21
6.	Bram Stoker's Dracula	19
j7.	Evil Dead	17
j7.	The Hunger	17
j7.	The Thing (1982)	17
10.	Night of the Living Dead	15
j11.	The Exorcist	14
j11.	The Silence of the Lambs	14
13.	Nightbreed	13
j14.	The Haunting	12
j14.	Hellraiser 2	12
j14.	A Nightmare on Elm Street	12
j14.	Psycho	12
j18.	An American Werewolf in London	11
j18.	Army of Darkness (Evil Dead 3)	11
j20.	Evil Dead 2	10
j20.	The Omen	10

IV. Tables for chapter 6

Table 6.1: I shut my eyes during horror films

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	2	1.8	1.8
agree	19	17.4	17.4
not fussed	15	13.8	13.8
disagree	28	25.7	25.7
disagree strongly	45	41.3	41.3
don't know	0	0.0	0.0
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=109 Missing cases=0

Table 6.2: I enjoy gore

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	11	10.1	10.1
agree	13	11.9	11.9
not fussed	18	16.5	16.5
disagree	32	29.4	29.4
disagree strongly	34	31.2	31.2
don't know	1	0.9	0.9
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=109 Missing cases=0

Table 6.3: I watch horror films for the special effects

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	4	3.7	3.7
agree	28	25.7	25.7
not fussed	39	35.8	35.8
disagree	24	22.0	22.0
disagree strongly	14	12.8	12.8
don't know	0	0.0	0.0
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=109 Missing cases=0

Table 6.4: I prefer the monster to be hidden

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	9	8.3	8.3
agree	21	19.3	19.4
not fussed	31	28.4	28.7
disagree	30	27.5	27.8
disagree strongly	16	14.7	14.8
don't know	1	0.9	0.9
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=108 Missing cases=1

Table 6.5: Horror films allow me to use my imagination

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	35	32.1	32.4
agree	44	40.4	40.7
not fussed	14	12.8	13.0
disagree	10	9.2	9.3
disagree strongly	3	2.8	2.8
don't know	2	1.8	1.9
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=108 Missing cases=1

Table 6.6: I like watching killings

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	7	6.4	6.5
agree	24	22.0	22.2
not fussed	28	25.7	25.9
disagree	26	23.9	24.1
disagree strongly	23	21.1	21.3
don't know	0	0.0	0.0
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=108 Missing cases=1

Table 6.7: I enjoy being frightened by horror films

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	40	36.7	37.0
agree	39	35.8	36.1
not fussed	7	6.4	6.5
disagree	17	15.6	15.7
disagree strongly	4	3.7	3.7
don't know	1	0.9	0.9
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=108 Missing cases=1

Table 6.8: I like horror films with a lot of suspense

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	63	57.8	57.8
agree	37	33.9	33.9
not fussed	5	4.6	4.6
disagree	3	2.8	2.8
disagree strongly	1	0.9	0.9
don't know	0	0.0	0.0
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=109 Missing cases=0

Table 6.9: Horror films make me laugh

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	6	5.5	5.6
agree	38	34.9	35.2
not fussed	28	25.7	25.9
disagree	32	29.4	29.6
disagree strongly	3	2.8	2.8
don't know	1	0.9	0.9
Missing	1	0.9	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=108 Missing cases=1

Table 6.10: Horror films relieve the tedium of my everyday life

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	16	14.7	15.0
agree	35	32.1	32.7
not fussed	19	17.4	17.8
disagree	19	17.4	17.8
disagree strongly	15	13.8	14.0
don't know	3	2.8	2.8
Missing	2	1.8	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=107 Missing cases=2

Table 6.11: I watch horror films for escapism

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	26	23.9	23.9
agree	33	30.3	30.3
not fussed	17	15.6	15.6
disagree	23	21.1	21.1
disagree strongly	8	7.3	7.3
don't know	2	1.8	1.8
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=109 Missing cases=0

Table 6.12: Horror films help me face my fears

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	4	3.7	3.7
agree	19	17.4	17.8
not fussed	29	26.6	27.1
disagree	32	29.4	29.9
disagree strongly	17	15.6	15.9
don't know	6	5.5	5.6
Missing	2	1.8	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=107 Missing cases=2

Table 6.13a I empathise with the hero

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	2	1.8	1.9
agree	14	12.8	13.3
not fussed	34	31.2	32.4
disagree	43	39.4	41.0
disagree strongly	10	9.2	9.5
don't know	2	1.8	1.9
Missing	4	3.7	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 105 Missing cases 4

Table 6.13b I empathise with the monster

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	6	5.5	5.5
agree	17	15.6	15.6
not fussed	22	20.2	20.2
disagree	29	26.6	26.6
disagree strongly	31	28.4	28.4
don't know	4	3.7	3.7
Missing	0	0.0	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 109 Missing cases 0

Table 6.13c I empathise with the heroine

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
agree strongly	5	4.6	4.7
agree	14	12.8	13.1
not fussed	40	36.7	37.4
disagree	33	30.3	30.8
disagree strongly	13	11.9	12.1
don't know	2	1.8	1.9
Missing	2	1.8	
Total	109	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 107 Missing cases 2

V. Tables for chapter 8

Table 8.1: Percentage of respondents willing to describe themselves as horror fans

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
'I am a fan'	91	84.3	84.3
'I am not a fan'	13	12.0	12.0
Don't know	4	3.7	3.7
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Table 8.2: Length of time respondents have considered themselves to have been fans

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<5yrs	7	6.5	7.7
5-10yrs	19	17.6	20.9
11-20yrs	34	31.5	37.4
>20yrs	28	25.9	30.8
don't know	3	2.8	3.3
not a fan or missing	17	15.7	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Valid cases=91 Missing cases=17

Table 8.3: Horror magazine readership
Percentage (frequency)

Magazine	all/most issues	occasionally	never	missing
Cinefantastique	1.8 (2)	24.8 (27)	64.2 (70)	9.2 (10)
Fangoria	9.2 (10)	33.9 (37)	50.5 (55)	6.4 (7)
Filmfax	1.8 (2)	13.8 (15)	72.5 (79)	11.9 (13)
Starburst	6.4 (7)	23.9 (26)	60.6 (66)	9.2 (10)
Starlog	4.6 (5)	22.9 (25)	64.2 (70)	8.3 (9)
Shivers	11.0 (12)	20.2 (22)	61.5 (67)	7.3 (8)
Dark Side	12.8 (14)	25.7 (28)	56.9 (62)	4.6 (5)

Table 8.4: Fanzine readership

Value Label	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
does not read	69	63.9	68.3
reads	32	29.6	31.7
missing	7	6.5	
Total	108	100.0	100.0

Appendix 4

Survey of mass market horror publications

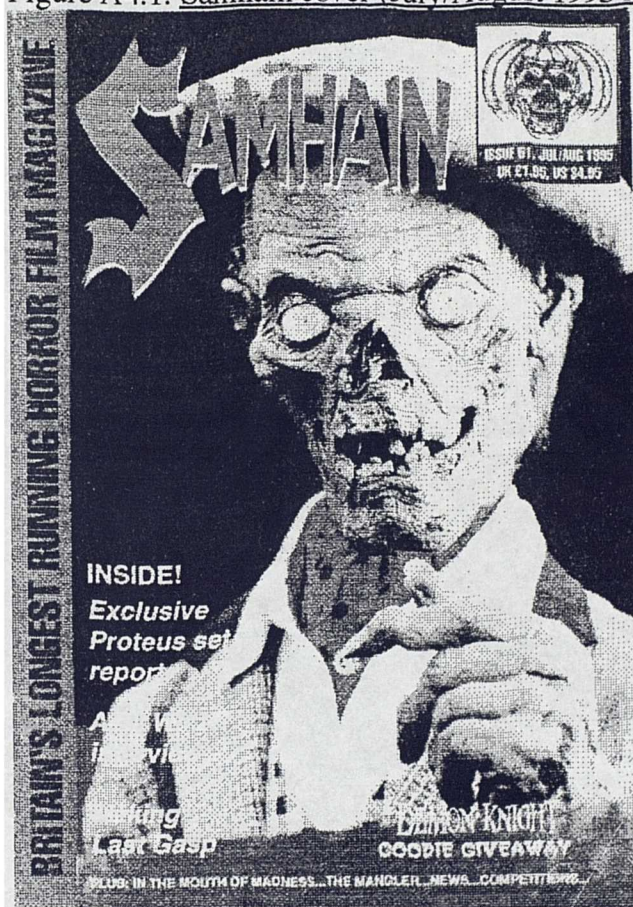
Mass market horror merchandise incorporates a number of professional magazines which are purchased largely by fans. In the UK, the main horror titles are Shivers, a sister-publication of the long-running Visual Imagination magazine Starburst which itself covers science fiction, fantasy and horror, and The Dark Side, launched by Maxwell Specialist Publications in 1990. Both these titles are distributed throughout the UK and available from high-street chains such as W. H. Smiths and John Menzies. There have also been a number of short-lived titles in the UK including Fear (published by Newsfield, a company specialising in home computer and games magazines), Fantasy Zone (a Marvel Comics title covering science fiction, fantasy and horror) and, more recently, Hammer Horror (also published by Marvel). The latter title, specialising in coverage of Hammer films, actors and directors, ran for only 7 issues before Marvel UK was re-organised (bought-out) in 1995 and the title closed. A number of imported American horror magazines are also available in the UK, though these tend to be carried mainly by specialist science fiction book shops or comic shops such as Forbidden Planet. These titles include Fangoria, which specialises in covering the special effects side of horror film making, and Cinefantastique, a broader based title which covers science fiction and fantasy films as well as horror.

Typically, horror magazines are garish, the covers containing detailed photographs (sometimes artwork) of horror film monsters and the titles frequently printed in red ink outlined with black (see figure A4.1); the content of many of the magazines is dominated by photographs from the films themselves or production stills showing make-up, monsters and the creation of other effects while titles, page furniture and occasionally the text itself is printed in red on a black background or vice versa. Cover lines and feature titles are equally lurid, typical examples including 'Diva of the Living Dead' (The Dark Side issue 54, March 1996), 'She Wants To Breed' (Fangoria issue 144, July 1995) and 'Terror Teeth' (Fangoria issue 146, September 1995). These examples reveal the obsession of such publications with both horror film actresses and images of monstrous or predatory femininity.

Horror fanzines are very similar, though because of their production methods (put together in fans own homes, on home computers, often photocopied or cheaply reproduced) often have an amateur appearance.

Samhain and Shock Xpress represent the semi-professional end of fan publishing, are sold largely by mail-order and use professional colour reproduction on their covers. Again, both magazines feature lurid titles printed in red, feature photographs of gruesome or monstrous horror film stills on the covers and concentrate on in-depth interviews with horror film makers and stars, often highlighting special effects. At the amateur end of the fanzine sector, colour is often absent and few if any photographs are included - these are replaced by fan-contributed artwork. Fanzines also frequently contain fan-written reviews and fiction which is an important area of fan activity.

Figure A4.1: Samhain cover (July/August 1995 issue)



Magazines like The Dark Side and Fangoria also publish large amounts of photographic material of horror film actresses (often referred to as 'scream queens' - a term which is frequently, but not exclusively, applied to actresses whose careers consist almost entirely of work in low-budget horror films and exploitation cinema). They are usually depicted screaming, swooning or cowering in terror, often in a state of partial undress, and sometimes with a menacing monster in view (occasionally, where a film includes a female

monster, the actress appears menacing or seductive in such shots). These shots are often photographed in a manner reminiscent of soft-core pornography (see, for example, figure A4.2). The exception is Cinefantastique, which has broader coverage and tends to be rather more up-market in presentation (its title, designed to look like film title lettering on a movie theatre exterior, reflects this). The publishers of Cinefantastique also produce Femmes Fatales, a title dealing exclusively with the scream queens. The covers of this magazine again show horror film actresses only partially clothed and in seductive poses (often holding guns), screaming or caressed by monstrous hands. Advertisements for this title in Cinefantastique invites the reader to 'Subscribe now to the luscious ladies of horror fantasy and science fiction,' suggesting that they are purchasing the scream queens themselves and, like pornography, rendering the female body a commodity (see Williams, 1989).

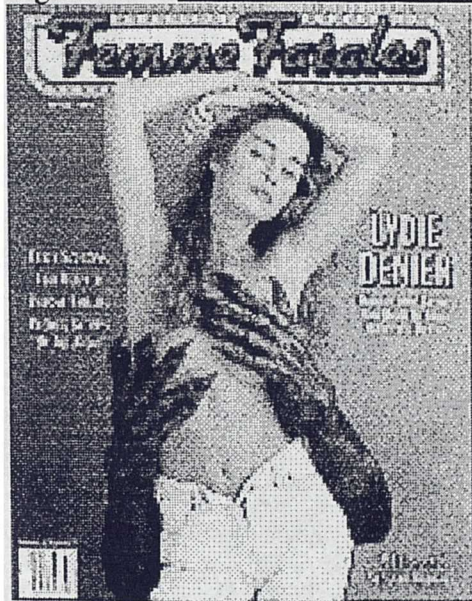
Figure A4.2: Illustration Horror Fan (Winter 1989, p. 22)
The caption reads 'In a typical scream queen situation.'



Issues of Femmes Fatales feature scream queens and a few mainstream actresses who have appeared in horror or related films (e.g. Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in the film Batman Returns) and the covers - a typical example is shown in figure A4.3 - mostly depict actresses who appear to be posing for the publication itself. The similarities to soft-core pornography are obvious and the way these images are being used to sell magazines indicates how women might be regarded within one sector of the fan industry. Whilst the depiction of actresses cowering in fear and/or in a state of undress reflects one

aspect of the horror films themselves and their intended audience, it also indicates the intended readership of the magazine. The heavy coverage in certain magazines of the scream queens accompanied by photographs in which they wear very little clothing or in which their clothing is torn or in disarray, suggests that horror publications are aimed at a male readership - this sometimes, though not as frequently applies to amateur or semi-professional fanzines as well as the mass market publications (most fanzines, if they include photographic material at all, rely on press pack stills and other free publicity material). Furthermore, it is likely that for the teenage male horror fan such horror publications offer a more legitimate form of pornography than the overt soft-core porn publications.¹ It should be noted that the Femmes Fatales magazine is sold in the Forbidden Planet chain of shops in sealed plastic bags alongside fetish magazines such as Skin 2, meaning shoppers are unable to browse through them in the shop (echoing the way pornography is made inaccessible in newsagents).

Figure A4.3: Cover of Femmes Fatales (Winter 1994)



In addition, the publishers of The Dark Side act as the UK distributors of Scream Queens Illustrated, a title only available by mail order. An advertisement for this title illustrates its semi-pornographic nature:

The breast-selling [sic] edition is packed full of stunning pics of popular horror heroines like Stacy Warfel, Veronica Carruthers and Melissa Ann Moore, and for those intellectuals among you who like to read something as well as dribble over the pictures, you'll find blood-curdling terror tales, film news, star interviews, comments from John (Night of the Living Dead) Russo and Fred Olen Ray, and a whole lot more! Dozens of new pictures, plus an exclusive profile of that Eurobabe extraordinaire, Black

Emmanuelle herself, Laura Gemser. Scream Queens Illustrated is a must for all horror fans who like a bit of cheesecake with their thrills. This magazine is simply too hot for UK shops, which is why we have to mail it.

The fact that an interview with an actress from a soft-porn film, Black Emmanuelle, is seen as suitable material for this title indicates that the horror angle might be an excuse for producing a semi-pornographic magazine or it may reflect the fact that the low-budget exploitation films themselves are seen as semi-pornographic by their makers and/or audience.² That the editor of The Dark Side, Allan Bryce, also edits a soft-porn video magazine (The Late Show) and introduces erotic films on a satellite porn channel, underlines the links, at least in this case.

That such an environment surrounds the horror publishing industry means the magazines themselves are unlikely to appeal to many female horror fans and may actively deter them from buying and reading such magazines. A letter published in Cinefantastique vol 22, no. 5 (April 1992) shortly after the launch of Femmes Fatales expressed such concern from one female reader:

I must assume most of your readers are male. I myself am not and was therefore greatly offended by the advertisement for your new Femme Fatales magazine. How utterly classless. The magazine is unprofessional: you are striving to make an extra buck ... off women's bodies. Femmes Fatales ... is an insult to the intelligence of your readers. Cinefantastique will certainly never attain any form of respect from its more intelligent readers and certainly not from any of the best directors you so greatly admire.

The editorial reply to this complaint is also revealing, ignoring the issue of sexism and defending the magazine against the accusation of unprofessionalism alone, as well as putting down the writer of the original letter:

Femmes Fatales will display the same standards of quality and professionalism readers have come to expect from Cinefantastique. Obviously, you're not the market for our new publication, but wait till you see the first issue before you judge us. We think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

How this aspect of horror fan publishing is viewed by the female horror film viewers is explored in chapter 8.

One possible source which can be used to verify the assumption that horror publications are aimed at a male readership and not widely consumed by women are the letters pages in the professionally published magazines and any additional reader's reviews and other contributions to fanzines. If the

readership of horror magazines and fanzines is largely male, the magazines themselves will not provide a good source of useful data for this study. A content analysis may, however, provide scope for assessing specific fan interests and discourses and where these differ from the interests, discourses and viewing preferences of the women in the study.

Stacey (1994a, pp. 55-6) describes the methodological problems with an examination of readers' letters in audience research. In her survey of film magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, she states that readers' letters are written in response to editorial material in the magazines (articles and features) and are therefore constrained by the agenda of both the editorial staff at the magazine and the film industry itself in the form of 'discourses of stardom'. Letter writers, therefore, tend to keep to the legitimate topics thus defined. This is true also for the letters pages of the horror magazines studied - the majority of letters are written in reference to articles in previous issues of the magazines and these mainly cover current films classified by the writers/fans as horror (but which may not always fit accepted definitions of the genre) or deal with classics of the genre. However, some letters do refer to favourite topics the writers think the magazine ought to cover and many writers are liberal with their own opinions, very often disagreeing with reviews in the magazine or giving opinions of films and books not covered by the magazine concerned. In the context of this research, this may simply indicate that horror fans generally are merely being vocal about the genre they love (the fact that so many amateur magazines are published by fans with fans themselves contributing most, if not all, the editorial content indicates that this audience group is extremely motivated to voice their own opinions; many professional magazine writers are also fans who have turned professional). However, it may well be that certain opinions are regarded as more legitimate within horror fandom (and not just within the pages of the professional publications). There is very little criticism, for instance, of representations of gender, class or race in horror films or discussion of the violence (either generally or against women) presented in many examples of the genre (it may be that the predominantly young male readership is not aware of these issues or that it chooses to ignore them). It does seem that whilst the opinions given by readers in the letters pages are varied and often contentious, the subject range is fairly narrow.

Another fear is that letters printed may not be genuine. The fact that horror fans are an extremely active and vocal fan community may reduce this problem somewhat, but a more specific problem arises. Whilst many writers (especially to the fanzines), are regulars, having letters published often and frequently³, letters which are obviously and deliberately faked or exaggerated are common, though this usually seems to be faking on the part of the writer rather than the editor. The third problem, as Stacey highlights, is that the letters published may well not be representative of the opinions of all those who write to the magazine or of the readership as a whole - letters expressing certain feelings and opinions may be suppressed by the editor, or readers may feel unable or unwilling to write in about certain taboo topics in the first place. Although this may not be true for the male readership (letters expressing minority or alternative viewpoints are frequently published), female readers may feel marginalised for the reasons outlined above. Certainly the horror film audience as a whole is not well represented, only those members of the audience devoted enough to the subject to regularly purchase the magazines (fanzines have to be purchased via mail order and even the professional publications are often stocked only in specialist outlets such as comic and science fiction book shops⁴) will be represented.

Stacey considers that analysis of readers' letters should not be dismissed entirely (as Staiger, 1986, has suggested) and they are examined here to give some background to the discussion of horror fandom. There remains, though, one outstanding problem for this work which shares aspects of all the problems mentioned above. This study is concerned with female viewers, and as has been shown above the publications under scrutiny are very much aimed at a male readership and may be for that very reason off-putting to any female readers. As stated above, most horror magazines, for example Fangoria, concentrate very heavily on the special effects industry (including a large proportion of advertising either selling masks and props or training material or courses for budding horror film-makers to do it themselves) and this seems to be an area of interest aimed mainly at a male audience. Overall, the letters pages are invariably dominated by male readers, see table A4.1, and confirm this bias.

Of course, the proportion of letters from women published should not be taken as a reflection of the readership profile of these magazines. The low number of letters from a small number of issues in some cases means that

Table A4.1: Horror magazine letter contributions

Any discrepancy in total numbers of letters is due to letter writers of unknown sex, either because of ambiguous name, use of initial only, anonymity, or alias.

	Type	No. of issues surveyed	Total letters	No. of letters from men	No. of letters from women
Cinefantastique	Pro (US)	24	106	94	6 (5.7%)
The Dark Side	Pro (UK)	8	94	77	5 (6.5%)
Fangoria	Pro (US)	45	359	288	37 (10.3%)
Fear	Pro (UK)	12	60	49	5 (8%)
Hammer Horror*	Pro (UK)	5	37	30	5 (14%)
Imaginator	Fan (UK)	4	13	13	0 (0%)
Samhain	Fan (UK)	24	103	92	5 (4.9%)
Shivers†	Pro (UK)	1	2	1	1 (50%)
Shock Xpress	Semi-pro (UK)	5	54	44	4 (7.4%)
Slaughterhouse	Pro (UK)	2	23	14	4 (17.4%)
Starlog	Pro (US)	15	159	90	56 (35.2%)
Whiplash Smile	Fan (UK)	1	6	5	0 (0%)

*One additional letter was from a group of people, 4 of whom were women, 6 male.

† The early editions of Shivers examined did not contain letters pages. Only one recent issue had a letters column containing only two letters.

these figures are not statistically significant (the figure for Shivers, in particular, should not be taken as representative). Overall, around 8.4% of letters are written by women (9.2% in mass market magazines and 5.1% in fanzines).⁵ It may simply be the case that males are more active in terms of their participation in this form of horror fandom (especially in light of the fact that the magazines are aimed principally at them). The letters are also selected by the editors of these publications and they may be selectively influencing the proportions either by ignoring letters from women, or even publishing all the letters they receive from women in an attempt to redress the balance. Other factors may influence the activities of women in this form of fandom. The letters in Shock Xpress, for example, are commented on in an extremely insulting manner; it must be assumed that only naive individuals or those willingly prepared to be so demeaned do in fact write to the magazine. The magazine Starlog is included in table A4.1 to provide a point of comparison; this magazine is primarily concerned with science fiction, although it also provides coverage of some horror and fantasy films and fiction. The large number of letters from women are dominated by comments about the television programmes Quantum Leap, Star Trek and Beauty and the Beast - all of which have large female fan followings (see Jenkins, 1992). This reflects the large numbers of female fans of science fiction, but also perhaps the magazine's concern with not alienating female readers in the way that some horror magazines seem to. It might be expected that science fiction

magazines such as Starlog are more widely read by female horror viewers, however, this is not verified by the survey respondents - see chapter 7. It should be noted that some of the magazines are American and will reflect a predominantly American readership. Nevertheless, the difference between the US and UK horror magazines in the proportions of letters from women (17 per cent and 12 per cent respectively) is not significant.

The relatively high percentage of letters from women to Hammer Horror may reflect a higher female readership since the largest number of responses to calls for participants in the horror magazines also came from Hammer Horror readers and it was mentioned by many respondents as being the only horror magazine they particularly liked (see chapter 8). This reflects the liking for Hammer films reported by the survey respondents (see chapter 5).

Despite the low number of letters from women, it was still thought appropriate to consider the contents of the letters from women since these may reveal some of the ways in which women think about the genre or participate in fan culture. This information (together with general information on fan discourses and observation of discussions on the horror mailing list) was used in refining and modifying the hypotheses investigated in the subsequent audience study.

In addition to concern about sexism generally (as illustrated by the example from Cinefantastique above), violence against women as portrayed in horror films or as reported in the magazines is the commonest issue of concern to female letter writers. In the letters from women in Samhain, for example, one is from someone protesting about coverage of 'most memorable screen rape' in an earlier issue. Another letter, this time in the magazine Slaughterhouse, is a protest against the depictions of violence against women and children in the genre. Another concern is an overemphasis on special effects. For example, one letter to The Dark Side underlines the emphasis such magazines place on this aspect of horror film-making and illustrates that the magazines cater for only one sort of horror fan (the young male): 'I am often put off buying ... horror mags because most of them seem to think "the gorier the better," and I don't agree with that at all. I love the old guys, the silent days, and the early talkies.' This attitude (in particular, a dislike for gore) is confirmed by the research into specific tastes of the female fans presented in chapters 5 to 7.

Of the letters written by women in Samhain, only one comments on either the magazine or horror films in the fashion typical for this magazine: the writer

describes her own preferences, commenting on Hammer films and Dracula films specifically (she gives her age as thirty-six). Of those letters from horror fans in other magazines, one writer in Slaughterhouse identifies herself a 'hard core horror fan' (and a thirty-year-old). Two of the women writing to The Dark Side are teenagers (a fifteen and a seventeen-year-old). The samples are far too small though, to be any indication of an age range of female readers, but they do indicate that female readers are wider in age range than the accepted audience profile.⁶

Other letters in Samhain are not from fans but from writers with specific professional interests in the genre; one is from the senior fiction editor of Pan Books commenting on a review of the 30th Pan Book of Horror Stories in an previous issue and another is from a student asking for questionnaire respondents for a undergraduate dissertation project on the Nightmare on Elm Street series of films (although she also specifies that she is a fan of horror films). This breakdown of subject matter would seem to indicate very particular reasons for women to write letters to the magazines outside of the usual comments on the magazine or the horror genre, though even these seem to indicate a liking for specific forms of horror (vampire films and Hammer films). Letters pages of these magazines usually also contain fake or inflammatory material which very rarely comes from women. One letter in Samhain from an individual giving their name as Dementia contains indecent suggestions about what she would like to do with the editor of the magazine. Since this letter is given under a pseudonym and may even conceivably be a joke from a male reader it is not considered relevant. However, it does highlight the problem of fake/joke letters in these magazines.

Overall, the letters reveal that horror film audiences are only too willing to talk about their own tastes in horror and take great pleasure in giving their own opinions about the subject and individual films. However, they do not seem to be an arena in which women can or do voice their opinions very frequently, quite possible because they are so male dominated. Much the same situation exists in the American publications.

There were two particular instances of note in the letters pages examined in the magazine Fangoria. In 1991, Fangoria produced a special issue focusing on women working in horror as writers, film directors and screenplay writers (though almost half the pages were given over to coverage of the scream

queens). A letter published in the September issue praises the magazine for doing so:

Just a quick note to let you know how much I liked your issue on women and horror. I am female, 24 years old and considered quite intelligent, yet some of my friends don't understand my interest in the genre. It's refreshing to read about females such as Lisa Tuttle and Edythe Swenson. ... Being an aspiring writer of horror and a hard-core fan, I wanted to thank you for spotlighting the women in the field.

The main comment worth noting here, though, is the attitude the writer has encountered that a liking for horror (in a woman) is seen as somehow antithetical to intelligence. This may be an additional factor in the reasons why women tend to hide their liking for the genre. This letter, however, was the only one published which commented on the special issue and it seems to have been a token attempt at focusing on women (which also compounds the marginalisation and virtual invisibility of women within horror fandom). Some male readers do seem concerned about the lack of coverage of women working in the genre, though this is tempered by an interest in scream queens. In October 1992, a letter commenting on a readers poll stated:

I've been a horror fan all my life, and I agree that everyone in the Fangoria Hall of Fame deserves to be there. But where are the women of horror? Come on, genre fans, there are many females who deserve the honour. How about director Mary Lambert or writers Anne Rice and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro - and don't forget such great actresses as Jill Schoelen, Linnea Quigley and Barbara Steele. These women have done a lot for the genre, and deserve the honour of being in the Hall of Fame. Don't forget the women of the horror world.

These letters, plus the fact of a single special issue focusing on women, would seem to indicate a male hegemony at work in the horror publishing industry mitigated by an interest in these issues from both male and female readers.

It is not known whether the female readers are consumers of the merchandise associated with horror and advertised in the magazines, nor what quantity of various items women purchase, but it seems likely that the masks, costumes and make-up courses which constitute the bulk of the advertising are aimed at young males (this fits the male-dominated readership profiles of the magazines themselves, though a few respondents in the study do mention building monster kits when young).

¹ Such consumers may be too embarrassed to purchase pornographic magazines or not wish to be found in possession of such material, whereas it may be more acceptable for them to

buy and possess a horror magazine. One can imagine a scenario where a parent may be unwilling to investigate a magazine with a cover depicting a gruesome or bloody monster further. Whether young men 'use' such magazines in the same way as pornographic magazines is not known and not investigated further here since it is outside the scope of this study.

² Many AIP/Roger Corman low budget horror exploitation or sexploitation films, for example, include erotic or soft-porn sequences. In Katt Shea Ruben's Dance of the Damned in which a stripper is stalked and seduced by a vampire there are several scenes which include explicit shots of her night club routines. Barbara Peeters has also complained that Corman had explicit sexual scenes between the monster and the female victim added to her Humanoids From the Deep (an exploitation version of The Creature From the Black Lagoon).

³ The fanzines in particular seem to have regular letter writers and long-running arguments arise on the letters pages between correspondents over several issues. Fanzines also regularly publish letters from other fanzine editors and from the people written about in the magazines (often authors of horror fiction). The latter is likely to be an attempt to raise the standing of the 'zine and the editor in the fan community.

⁴ These shops also appear to be frequented mainly by male fans. No figures are available, but observation seems to suggest that few women visit the shops. Observed numbers of female shoppers ranged from 5%-15% during a visits to Forbidden Planet branches in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

⁵ Letters in Starlog are not included in these figures as it is primarily a science-fiction magazine.

⁶ Letters indicate that the male readership is similarly wider in age.

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House of Usher (Alta Vista/AIP, Roger Corman, 1960, US)

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (RKO, William Dieterle, 1939, US)

The Hunger (Richard Shepard Company/MGM/United Artists, Tony Scott, 1983, US)

I Spit on Your Grave (Cinemagic Pictures, Meir Zarchi, 1978, US)

In the Mouth of Madness (New Line, John Carpenter, 1994, US)

Interview With The Vampire (Geffen Pictures, Neil Jordan, 1994, US)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Walter Wanger Productions, Don Siegel, 1956, US)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Solofilm Co., Philip Kaufman, 1978, US)

Jacob's Ladder (Carolco, Adrian Lyne, 1990, US)

Jagged Edge (Columbia, Richard Marquand, 1985, US)

Jason and the Argonauts (Columbia, Don Chaffey, 1963, UK)

Jaws (Universal, Steven Spielberg, 1975, US)

The Krays (Parkfield/Fugitive, Peter Medak, 1990, UK)

The Last House on the Left (The Night Company, Wes Craven, 1972, US)

Legend (Legend/20th Century Fox, Ridley Scott, 1985, US)

The Leopard Man (RKO, Jacques Tourneur, 1943, US)

The Lost Boys (Warner Brothers, Joel Schumacher, 1987, US)

Mad Max (Mad Max Pty., George Miller, 1979, Aust)

Man Bites Dog (Les Artistes Anonymes, Rémy Belvaux and Benoit Poelvoorde, 1992, Bel)

Manhunter (DEG, Michael Mann, 1986, US)

Marathon Man (Paramount, John Schlesinger, 1976, US)

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (American Zoetrope/TriStar/Japan Satellite Broadcasting/The IndieProd Company, Kenneth Branagh, 1994, US)

The Masque of the Red Death (Alta Vista/Anglo Amalgamated, Roger Corman, 1964, UK)

The Medusa Touch (ITC/Coategold, Jack Gold, 1978, UK/Fr)

Misery (Castle Rock Entertainment, Rob Reiner, 1991, US)

Mortal Thoughts (New Visions/Polar, Alan Rudolph, 1991, US)

The Name of the Rose (Neue Constantin/Cristaldifilm/Ariane/ZDF, Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1986, WG/It/Fr)

Natural Born Killers (Warner Brothers/Regency Enterprises/Alcor Films/JD Productions/Ixtlan/New Regency, Oliver Stone, 1994, US)

Near Dark (The Near Dark Joint Venture, Kathryn Bigelow, 1987, US)

Night of the Comet (Atlantic 9000, Thom Eberhardt, 1984, US)

Night of the Living Dead (Image Ten, George A. Romero, 1968, US)

Nightbreed (Morgan Creek, Clive Barker, 1990, US)

A Nightmare On Elm Street (New Line/Media Home Entertainment/Smart Egg Pictures, Wes Craven, 1985, US)

No Blade of Grass (MGM, Cornel Wilde, 1970, UK)

Nosferatu - Eine Symphonie des Grauens (Prana Film, F.W. Murnau, 1921, Ger)

Nosferatu the Vampyre (Werner Herzog/Gaumont, Werner Herzog, 1979, WG/Fr)

Notorious (RKO, Alfred Hitchcock, 1946, US)

The Omen (20th Century Fox, Richard Donner, 1976, US)

Onibaba (Kindai Eiga Kyokai/Tokyo Eiga, Kaneto Shindo, 1964, Jap)

Orphée (André Paulvé-Films du Palais Royal, Jean Cocteau, 1950, Fr)

Pacific Heights (Morgan Creek, John Schlesinger, 1990, US)

Picnic at Hanging Rock (Picnic Productions/BEF Film Distributors/South Australian Film Corp/AFC, Peter Weir, 1975, Aust)

The Pit and the Pendulum (Alta Vista/AIP, Roger Corman, 1961, US)

Play Misty For Me (Malpasso, Clint Eastwood, 1971, US)

Predator (20th Century Fox, John McTiernan, 1987, US)

Psycho (Paramount, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, US)

Rasputin: The Mad Monk (Hammer, Don Sharp, 1965, UK)

Rebecca (Selznick/United Artists, Alfred Hitchcock, 1940, US)

Reservoir Dogs (Live American/Dog Eat Dog, Quentin Tarantino, 1991, US)

The Revenge of the Creature (Universal, Jack Arnold, 1955, US)

Richard III (London, Laurence Olivier, 1955, UK)

Robocop (Orion, Paul Verheoven, 1987, US)

Rosemary's Baby (Paramount/William Castle Productions, Roman Polanski, 1968, US)

Salem's Lot (Warner Brothers/Serendipity Productions, Tobe Hooper, 1979, US)

Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom (Produzioni Europee Associati/United Artists/Les Productions Artistes Associés, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975, It)

Scanners (Filmlan International, David Cronenberg, 1980, Can)

Scream (Miramax/Dimension Films/Woods Entertainment, Wes Craven, 1996, US)

Scream 2 (Dimension Films/Konrad Pictures/Craven-Maddalena Pictures, Wes Craven, 1997, US)

Scum (Boyd's, Alan Clarke, 1979, UK)

The Serpent and the Rainbow (Universal, Wes Craven, 1987, US)
Seven (New Line, David Fincher, 1995, US)
The Seven Year Itch (20th Century Fox, Billy Wilder, 1955, US)
The Shining (Hawk Films, Stanley Kubrick, 1980, UK)
The Silence of the Lambs (Orion, Jonathan Demme, 1991, US)
Single White Female (Columbia, Barbet Schroeder, 1992, US)
Sister My Sister (Film Four International/British Screen/NFH, Nancy Meckler, 1994, UK)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Disney/RKO, David Hand, 1937, US)
Soylent Green (MGM, Richard Fleischer, 1973, US)
Spellbound (United Artists, Alfred Hitchcock, 1945, US)
The Stepford Wives (Fadsin Cinema Associates, Bryan Forbes, 1974, US)
Sunset Blvd. (Paramount, Billy Wilder, 1950, US)
Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story (Iced Tea Productions, Todd Haynes, 1987, US)
Superstition aka The Witch (Lightening/Future Film, James W. Roberson and James Robertson, 1982, US)
The Tenant (Marianne, Roman Polanski, 1976, Fr)
The Terminator (Cinema 84/Pacific Western Productions, James Cameron, 1984, US)
Terminator 2: Judgement Day (Carolco/Pacific Western, James Cameron, 1991, US)
Texas Chain Saw Massacre (A Vortex/Hankel/Hooper Production, Tobe Hooper, 1974, US)
Texas Cheerleader Murdering Mom (Frederick S. Pierce Company/HBO/Sudden Entertainment, Michael Ritchie, 1993, US)
Thelma and Louise (Pathe/Main, Ridley Scott, 1991, US)
The Thing (Universal/Turman-Focter Productions, John Carpenter, 1982, US)
The Thing (From Another World) (Winchester Pictures, Christian Nyby, 1951, US)
Titanic (20th Century Fox/Paramount/Lightstorm Entertainment, James Cameron, 1997, US)
Tomorrow Never Dies (Eon Productions, Roger Spottiswoode, 1997, UK/US)
Total Recall (Carolco, Paul Verhoeven, 1990, US)
The Toxic Avenger (Troma, Michael Herz, 1985, US)
Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (New Line/Bouyges, David Lynch, 1992, US)
The Vampire Lovers (Hammer/AIP, Roy Ward Baker, 1970, UK)
Vampyr (Carl Theodor Dreyer Filmproduktion, Carl Dreyer, 1931, Ger)
Village of the Damned (Universal, John Carpenter, 1995, US)

War of the Worlds (George Pal Productions/Paramount, Byron Haskin, 1953, US)

Warlock (New World, Steve Miner, 1988, US)

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (Warner Brothers/Associates and Aldrich, Robert Aldrich, 1962, US)

The Wicker Man (British Lion, Robin Hardy, 1973, UK)

Wild Strawberries (Svensk Filmindustri, Ingmar Bergman, 1957, Swe)

The Witches of Eastwick (Warner Brothers, George Miller, 1987, US)

The Wizard of Oz (MGM, Victor Fleming, 1939, US)

Wolf (Columbia, Mike Nichols, 1994, US)