

“Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps?)”: Critiquing representations of women throughout the 80s in *Fangoria* magazine

Critiquing representations of women, their bodies and their sexuality is an established tradition in horror studies. Indeed, the 1980s is a particularly important era for analysing the (mis)representation of women in horror. Such critiques are primarily based on analyses of the woman-on-screen as seen through the gaze of characters, creators and imagined audiences. This article takes an altogether different perspective, focusing instead on discursive representations of women, their bodies and sexuality in the words of actors, creators, critics, fans and journalists in *Fangoria* magazine throughout the 1980s. This retrospective insight highlights the legacy of women’s place in horror and its implications for the relationship between popular culture(s) and contemporary political economies of gender in/equality.

Keywords: 1980s, corpus linguistics, critical discourse studies, *Fangoria*, feminism, final girl, horror culture, representing women

Introduction

The horror genre ‘[translates] political discourse and social life into meaningful cinematic narratives’ (Platts, 2015: 149). In part, the political currents of the 1980s were represented in the genre’s response to ‘sexual liberation and women’s emancipation’ (Pisters, 2019). It is no surprise, then, that creators and audiences responded to this resurgence of feminist politics and its artistic portrayal in horror both positively and negatively. That is, horror films – and arguably the slasher film synonymous with early 1980s horror (Kendrick 2009), in particular – are seen as either ‘one of the most blatantly misogynistic cinematic genres’ and as important vehicles for exposing misogyny in society, depending on the angle taken in critique (Markovitz 2000: 211). Indeed, there are complex nuances in the relationship between feminism and horror that therefore makes straightforward critique without ‘political interrogation’ inadequate (Clover 1992: 18). Inspired in part by Farrimond’s (2020) discussion of feminist horror and the opinion economy, this article offers a retrospective insight into responses to and representations of women in 1980s horror culture. With a focus specifically on the (re)production of gendered discourse(s) by critics, creators, journalists and fans, I seek to explore the relationship between horror-as-culture and the political-economic currents in the 1980s through the lens of lifestyle journalism.

The ‘privileged place [of women] in horror film’, specifically, is arguably one of their ‘social, political and philosophical othering’ (Harrington 2018: 1). In the general, women are variably represented as – *inter alia* – victims of punishment for their dangerous sexuality (Trencansky 2001) or monstrous sites of reproductive and sexual horror (Harrington 2018; Farrimond 2020). These archetypes of women in horror mirror perceptions of women in other real-world contexts, more widely (see, for example, King, 2015). The specific female protagonist, then, is often held up to particular scrutiny as either feminist or anti-feminist paragon (cf. Christensen 2011; Clover 1993; Freeland 1996). Scrutiny has also extended to the actors portraying such characters, more generally, based on hierarchical perceptions of both gendered behaviour and the (low) cultural status of the horror genre in the cinema industry (cf. Nowell, 2014). These existing analyses of horror-as-art and horror-as-industry serve to interpret how the genre *reflects* contemporary gendered and sexual in/equalities in wider society. However, Heather Langenkamp herself (Nancy Thompson in *A*

Nightmare on Elm Street [1984] and its sequels) questions the fruitfulness of existing research on gender and sexuality in horror:

I read a lot of these PhD thesis' [*sic*] that talk about the final girl, sexuality and sexuality of horror ... they're kind of on to something but I don't know if they're onto the right thing. One theory goes that Nancy is not a particularly feminine hero; she's not androgynous but she's not scarily beautiful and as a result she can easily [be] identified by both men and women and I don't know if that's the key to her popularity. I think that people like these movies at a time in their lives when they're also understanding who they are sexually so it makes sense that they make connection and they see things in these movies that express who they are. (Samuel 2011)

This article therefore takes a slightly different perspective to existing research on the place of women in horror, focusing instead on horror-as-culture and the *representation* of political and social life in the words of horror community insiders. That is, instead of analysing the woman-on-screen as seen through the gaze and choices of characters, creators and imagined audiences in filmic narratives, I focus on the discursive representations of women by actors, creators, critics, fans and journalists in *Fangoria* magazine. Drawing from socio-cognitive critical discourse studies as an approach to understanding the mutually constitutive relationship between discourse and society (see van Dijk 2015), I seek to identify the cognitive models underpinning discursive representations of women in *Fangoria* throughout the 1980s. I argue that, by exploring how and why personal and public representations of gender, sex and sexuality were navigated for – or at least, in correlation with – socio-political currents in the 1980s, conversations may be opened for navigating similar ongoing critical issues today. Indeed, today's social media technologies and yesteryear's popular culture journalism – with their celebrity persona commodification and fan contributions – have significant parallels as manifestations of popular culture and as mainstreamed politicisations of critical issues. As such, this retrospective insight highlights both the legacy of women's place in horror and the relationship that holds between popular culture(s) and contemporary political economies of gender in/equality.

Lifestyle journalism, *Fangoria* magazine and horror-as-culture

If horror film makes meaning of political currents by translating them into artistic narrative (Platts 2015), it stands to reason that journalistic discourses(s) responding to such narratives offer a further meaningful translation. This article aligns with Fürsich, who cites lifestyle journalism as having significant 'political and civic potential' (2012: 12) through its 'connection to the ongoing cultural social and economic situation' (2012: 16). Lifestyle journalism therefore represents and reconstructs articulations of socio-historically situated cultural moments and identities. As a "discursive reconstruction of reality" (Carvalho, 2008: 164), journalism serves to frame existing social structures through ideological lenses and shape the cognitive models of its readership (van Dijk, 1995). Indeed, McClain and Lascity (2020: 20) explicitly claim that music journalism is a 'priority site to learn about critical issues' through popular culture. I argue, then, that the same holds true for lifestyle and cultural journalism, more generally. I therefore seek to do just as McClain and Lascity intend, exploring lifestyle journalism as a microcosmic manifestation of culture, identities and political-economic currents.

Herein, I focus on *Fangoria* magazine, which is self-cited as 'The World's Best Horror and Cult Film Magazine Since 1979' and 'required reading for the horror community' (©2022). In 1986,

Philip Brophy discussed the semantic cross-referentiality of the magazine's title as comprising 'gore, fantasy, phantasmagoria, [and] fans' and described *Fangoria* as 'an ever-growing cult journal [that] expands and contracts a critical voice for a mutant market – that of the contemporary film: a genre about genre; a displaced audience; a short-circuiting entertainment' (1986: 3). Indeed, its simultaneous emergence and the resurgence of the popularity of the horror genre in the late 1970s (Brophy, 1986) make the symbiotic relationship between this magazine and horror culture in the 1980s one of particular interest. Moreover, insofar as its early readers of the 1970s and 1980s are now 'winning Oscars for their contributions to, and expansion of, the [horror] genre' (*Fangoria* ©2022), *Fangoria* is particularly well placed to consider how its legacy might continue in – and contribute to explanations of – the relationship between women and popular culture today.

Corpus linguistics and socio-cognitive critical discourse studies

The data for this study comprise all 86 regular issues of *Fangoria* magazine published throughout the 1980s, which were digitised for machine-readability using optical character recognition software. After removing external advertisements, this process of digitisation resulted in a corpus comprising 3,391,954 words. This article therefore relies on a corpus-informed approach to discourse analysis, relying on large-scale linguistic data for identifying both quantifiable patterns of language use and their more qualitative, contextualised manifestations (cf. Baker, *et al.* 2008). Using a corpus-informed approach enables identifying 'patterns of meaning ... and attitude' (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008: 6) around phenomena of interest prior to more in-depth critical linguistic analysis. In so doing, I aim to understand both general and specific discursive representations of women, their bodies and their sexuality.

As its primary orientation, this study uses a socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse studies (e.g. van Dijk, 2015) in its critique of manifested gendered discourse(s) in *Fangoria* magazine. Most approaches to critical discourse studies rely on an iteration of a model that distinguishes between three levels of interrelated context in its analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; 1995): (1) text practice – language as it is used; (2) discourse practice – processes of production, consumption and distribution; and (3) social practice – the political-economic conditions influencing texts, their production and interpretation(s). The socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse studies (SC-DS), then, explicitly considers *cognition* as the mediator between discourse and society. It draws from the assumption that meaning-making is a cognitive process that 'reflects the needs, interests, and experiences of individuals and cultures' (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007: 5). *Social* cognition, then, is how people make sense of their position in the social world and how this understanding is constructed, used, and/or represented (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The manifestation of shared cognitive models are referred to as socio-cognitive representations (Augustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006; Koller, 2012). Such socio-cognitive representations provide a meaningful reduction of the complexity of the social world (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000) and can be considered a reflection of discourse practice. Social practice in the socio-cognitive approach refers to the ideologically grounded 'socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions' that influence the cognitive processes of discourse practice (Koller, 2012: 26). The simultaneously *social* and *cognitive* orientation of this approach make it particularly appropriate for understanding the discursive representations of women, their bodies and their sexuality in *Fangoria* magazine throughout the 1980s – and how such representations have a lasting legacy for understanding political economies of gender in/equality today.

The first stage of analysis in this article relies largely on quantitative insights, prioritising words and their collocates to understand the ideological and ideational structure of the discourse under analysis. Collocates are two words that habitually co-occur with one another in a corpus (see Brezina 2018). Analysing these relationships enables an exploration of connected and associated meaning. That is, we can interpret meaning by exploring 'the company that words keep' (Firth 1957:

6). In the case of a specifically socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse studies, analysing collocations enables a quantifiable understanding of shared conceptualisations of specific phenomena, generating insights for more in-depth qualitative analysis (see Webster 2018; 2021). When quantifying relationships between words, I rely here on two measures of collocation – mutual information (MI – conventional significance = 3) and *t*-score (conventional significance = 2) – to identify true collocational relationships (see Baker, 2014). This use of quantitative corpus analytical techniques prior to in-depth critical discourse analysis is intended to ‘[provide] quantitative support to qualitative arguments’ (Webster 2019: 133). More specifically, this initial stage is designed to identify ‘global meanings, topics or themes’ (van Dijk 2009: 68) surrounding representations of women, their bodies and their sexuality in the local discourse context.

The subsequent qualitative analysis is primarily focused on the representation of social actors and their actions. Specifically, I adapt the strategy Koller (2012: 27) identifies in her socio-cognitive analysis of identity constructions:

- What identities are constructed in a particular text?
- How are those identities constructed in a concrete text?
- Who is involved in the discursive practices around the text and in what role?
- What social factors impact on the text and discourse practice?

This process illuminates the ‘cognitive interface’ that ‘[influences] social structures’ (van Dijk, 2015: 64), including the groups’ ‘properties and their relations ... as well as their interests’ (van Dijk, 2015: 73). Furthermore, pragma-discursive structures – or contextualised discursive strategies constructing social subjectivities (Webster, 2018) – are identified that illuminate socio-cognitive representations of women in the discourse context under analysis, which inform the ideological and ideational structure of the cultural imaginary. Critique is achieved via this unveiling of ideological bases for contemporary gender in/equality in the local discourse context. What is more, a potential contribution to political-economic change in society, as is the impetus of critical discourse studies, can be identified for analogous present-day contexts.

Quantitative analysis – *wom*n*, *girl, *she* and *her***

In order to identify general representations of women – and the *meaning* of those representations – in *Fangoria*, I identified and analysed the collocates of gender-indexing nouns and pronouns: *wom*n*, *she*, *her* and *girl**.¹ In terms of nominal identification, van Dijk (2015) refers primarily to specific identification with a given social categorisation (i.e. *woman*; *girl*). The socio-cognitive approach distinguishes between nominalised identification and the use of pronouns in referring to social actors. Indeed, pronouns may be ‘the single most appropriate linguistic system for the analysis of social identity constructions and representations’ (Webster, 2019: 134). As such, these terms were identified as the most salient for understanding general representations of women as social actors for the purpose of this article.

As a means of ‘[striking] a balance between capturing frequent linguistic phenomena and restricting the scale of analysis to a feasible number of phenomena’ (Webster 2018: 211), three criteria were imposed for identifying collocates: (1) lexical items must occur within a ±5 word span of the word under analysis; (2) lexical items must occur more than five times in collocation with the word

¹ The use of an asterisk in corpus analysis as a ‘wildcard’ allows for the software to identify any letters in the place of the asterisk. For example, in the case of *wom*n*, the software will identify both the words *woman* and *women*. In the same vein, searching *girl** will yield results for – *inter alia* – *girl*, *girls*, *girly*, *girlhood*.

under analysis; (3) lexical items must score at or above the level of conventional significance on two measures of collocation (mutual information – MI – and *t*-score). Additionally, and to generate an understanding of general meaning ascribed to nouns and pronouns via their collocations, I used the UCREL² semantic analysis system (USAS). The USAS comprises ‘21 major discourse fields’, subdivided into more specific semantic categories (Archer, Wilson, & Rayson, 2002), giving each individual word an indicative field of meaning. This broad – and semi-automated – overview of collocate meaning gives an indication on the overall cognitive model underpinning representations of women in the corpus (see Webster, 2018). Finally, concordances – or ‘instances of a word or cluster in its immediate co-text’ (Baker et al. 2008: 269) – are reviewed to identify greater nuance in the typical use of collocations.

Wom*n – attractive, topless, Amazon women ...

The collocates of *wom*n* comprise a variety of semantic categories and discourse fields, though the primary forms of collocation are adjectival descriptions referring to standards of femininity – or lack thereof (see Table 1). Many of these collocations also co-exist with one another as film titles in the science fiction and horror genres, including – among others – *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, *Wasp Woman*, *Wrestling Women vs. the Aztec Mummy*, *Amazon Women on the Moon* and *The Cavern of Amazon Nazi Women*. Such films are primarily from a bygone era of science fiction and horror, which are recalled by industry insiders, journalists and fans as varying instantiations of good – and bad(!) – contributions to the genre(s). Despite the films not being produced in the 1980s, harking back to an earlier age of science fiction and horror film titles gives insight into the representations of women in the genre(s), more broadly. Indeed, the comparative lack of titles including *wom*n* from the 1980s is perhaps indicative of a shift in horror away from the danger – metaphorically alluded to in the form of excess height and strength – of female empowerment. As such, the absence of collocates comprising film titles may arguably signal the response of horror to female empowerment and sexual liberation (Pisters, 2019), moving away from the objectification and masculinisation of women who do not fit into preconceived notions of physiological femininity.

TABLE 1 HERE.

Of course, the objectification and sexualisation of women is never entirely absent. *Beautiful*, *attractive*, *topless* and *nude* are each collocates of *wom*n* in the corpus. Interestingly, *beautiful*, *young* and *attractive* are most typically used in generic constructions with no identifiable referent (i.e. *a beautiful young woman* or *very attractive young women*). Occasionally, there is specific reference to actresses as either *beautiful* or *attractive*. This focus on physical attractiveness for both generic female referents and identifiable actresses indicates a persisting cognitive model of female sexualisation in the magazine. However, the collocation of *wom*n* with *topless* and *nude* tells a slightly different story. That is, their use in context is often used in flippant critique of the over-use of nudity and toplessness in the representation of women (especially as generic victim) in film. For example, the use of topless women as victims of vicious torture is cited as ‘establishing a trend of exploitation’ (Balun 1989: 16). Reference to nudity is perhaps less universally negative, with one interviewer asking Tobe Hooper whether or not it was ‘easy finding a woman willing to parade around nude’ and the latter discussing the ‘aesthetic need’ for nudity in his film and that his wife’s presence may have eased actor’s reticence to audition (Golberg 1986: 37). However, there is also an explicit linkage from a fan

² University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language

between gore in the ‘slash & hack horror film’ and the sexualisation of women in other – more tame – genres in how they censor their young daughter’s film consumption but simultaneously laud artistic expression using nudity, gore and immoral narratives (Dixon 1984: 8). These contrasting and variable representations of toplessness and nudity reflect a nuanced complexity in the relationship between art and audience as well as between sexual liberation and objectification. As such, representations of women throughout the 1980s in *Fangoria*’s horror-as-culture arguably also reflect the blurring of boundaries (see Harrington, 2018) and the complex relationship between feminism and misogyny (Clover, 1992; Markovitz 2000) in horror-as-art.

Girl* – naked, teenage prisoners ...

Given the subject matter of this article, it is entirely appropriate to consider the representation of girls as separate – and at the same time entirely inextricable – from the representation of women.

Collocates of *girl** in the corpus mirror the theme of sexualisation identified in collocates of *wom*n* (see Table 2). However, where *topless* and *nude* were occasionally used in collocation with *wom*n* to critique the gratuitous nudity in horror, the use of *topless*, *naked* and *nubile* in collocation with *girl** presents less nuance. One actor – as late as 1988 – states ‘whenever [the director] can get a girl topless, she’s in there’ (Warren 1984: 16). Another, in 1986, recalls Robert Englund saying ‘It’s a kick to run around with knives on my hands and chase naked young teenage girls – what could be better than that?’ (Rabkin 1986: 29). The evident difference in discursive representations of *topless/nude* women and *topless/naked* girls arguably represents a shared cognitive model among the authors and audiences of *Fangoria* magazine of differences in the level of respectability of and/or attitude towards women of different ages, appearances or other characteristics.

TABLE 2 HERE

Other evident themes in the collocates of *girl** are vulnerability and victimhood. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the slasher film that is ubiquitous with 1980s horror film most often makes use of teenage victims and critics cite such films as “‘dead teenager” ... [and] “teenie-kill” movies (Kendrick 2009: 17). Indeed, Clover (1992) specifically coined the female protagonist of such slasher films the ‘final *girl*’. On a surface level, there is an indication of difference in the representation of women and girls, with the latter being – perhaps by dint of their youth – more vulnerable and prone to victimhood. Lexical items of particular interest, then, include *blind*, *killed*, *possessed*, and *trapped*.³ Most often, the collocation of these lexical items with *girl** are made with reference to specific filmic narratives and plot. The vulnerability and victimhood inherent in the meaning of these collocates serve to reinforce the infantilisation and vulnerability inherent in the meaning of *girl*. Once again, this difference between collocates and discursive representations of *wom*n* and *girl** highlights a shared cognitive model in horror-as-culture of a women’s place and the place of a woman-as-girl. That is, political currents of women’s empowerment and the discursive manifestation of such empowerment in *Fangoria* are bypassed by referring to and infantilising women – primarily the woman-as-character – as girls.

She – agent or victim?

³ Like in collocates of *wom*n*, some collocates were exclusively a result of film titles, including *Girls in Prison* and *Girl on a Chain Gang*.

Third person pronouns function as anaphoric reference to specific individuals and, in the case of gendered second person pronouns in English, can also function as generic, symbolic reference to social groups (Wales, 1996). As such, an analysis of the words collocating with *she* can provide insight into both generic and specific representations of women in *Fangoria* magazine. Moreover, the grammatical function of *she* as a subjective pronoun, or one that refers specifically to a subject engaged in performing – or receiving, in the case of passive sentences – the action of a sentence’s verb, allows for an interpretation of the generic and specific woman’s agency as discursively constructed in *Fangoria*. That is, agency – or the capacity to engage in meaningful action that makes a change in either the natural or social world – is represented in discourse in the grammatical role (Halliday, 1994) and lexical description (van Leeuwen, 1996) assigned to individuals and groups. The agency of women represented in horror-as-culture is of particular interest in this article, given the contemporary socio-political context of resurgent feminist politics and women’s empowerment in the 1980s (Pisters 2019). Indeed, ‘linguistic manifestations of agency and action can [...] even influence societal values and public policy’ (Darics & Koller 2019: 219). The verbs that comprise the majority of collocates of *she* in the corpus are, therefore, particularly revealing (see Table 3).

TABLE 3 HERE

The processes occurring in collocation with *she* are primarily mental processes (i.e. *decides, discovers, learns, hears, thinks, realizes*). Mental processes, then, are those actions that ‘[construe] sensing – perception, cognition, intention and emotion’ (Matthiessen & Halliday 2009: 18). Where there are material processes, or those that denote specific action in the material world (i.e. *attacked, stabbed*), *she* is discursively represented as the subject of a passivated sentence and the recipient of the material action (e.g. *she’s stabbed, or she was stabbed*). Other processes the *she* subject is engaged in include behavioural processes, like *chuckles* and *smiles*, combining both ‘physiological [*material*] and psychological [*mental*] behaviour’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 301). Particularly interesting, then, is that where mental and material processes are reserved for re-telling filmic narratives of female characters’ actions, behaviours like *chuckles* and *smiles* are reserved almost exclusively for ascribing actions to interviewees of the magazine, including actors and other film community insiders. A particularly egregious example of such representations of woman’s behavioural docility include a reference *non sequitur* to Jennifer Rubin ‘[fluttering] her eyelashes and [smiling]’ (Nutman 1988: 46) when describing the strength of emotion and seriousness of her role in *Bad Dreams*. Behavioural and mental processes represent a smaller degree of agency than material processes (see Hasan 1989). The trends in the data, showing the *she* subject as almost exclusively activated in behavioural and mental processes and passivated in material processes reflects an underlying ideology of women’s disempowerment (cf. Darics & Koller 2019). As such, *Fangoria* was perhaps not as quick to address the political current of women’s empowerment in the 1980s as its artistic and filmic narrative counterparts. Once again, however, this reflects the nuanced complexity of horror’s relationship to women and feminism (Clover 1992; Markovitz 2000) and add a further layer of complexity for understanding the boundary between horror-as-culture and horror-as-art.

Her – families, body parts and nightgowns ...

Where *she* has polyfunctionality as both anaphoric and generic reference, *her* has polyfunctionality as both an objective and possessive pronoun (see Wales, 1996). As the object of a sentence’s verb, *her* can provide as much information regarding agency as can *she*. In the case of *Fangoria*, collocates of *her* that indicate its use as grammatical object mirrors the findings of powerlessness in collocations of *she* (see Table 4). That is, verbs like *abused, grabs, kidnaps, kills, murdered, and strangles* are used in

representing either specific or generic *her* as the recipient of violent action – almost exclusively performed by men. This is again no surprise, given the penchant of 1980s slasher films for the gratuitous torture of young women (cf. Kendrick 2009). However unsurprising, the absolute lack of collocation between *she/her* and positive action or women’s agency is representative of horror’s strained relationship with feminism and misogyny. Indeed, the dominant themes in collocates of *her* – in its possessive form – may reinforce the reading of this difficult relationship.

TABLE 4 HERE

Collocates of *her* in the possessive form indicate three dominant themes: *kinship relations*, *anatomy* and *clothing*. Such themes construe a regressive cognitive model of hyperfemininity focused on sexualisation and women’s traditional place in relationships (cf. Murnen & Byrne 1991). In particular, the focus and over-representations of anatomical body parts reflects ‘an over-determination of sex differences’ on the basis of ‘secondary sex characteristics [...] and in non-sexual, albeit arguably gendered, physical characteristics’ (Webster 2018: 208). Whilst *breasts* – as historically overtly sexualised physical characteristics of the female body – offer perhaps an obvious reading of sexualisation, other body parts are also referred to in the sexualisation, or at least objectification, of the female body. Specifically, there is a clear over-arching occupation with non-sexual but historically gendered sites of sexual attractiveness and (sexual) violence, including *mouth*, *throat*, *legs* and *lips*. Of course, this ‘interplay between female victimhood and the overt display of female sexuality’ is not a surprising finding in horror (Harrington 2018: 13; see also Trencansky 2001). Indeed, paired with collocates of specific items of women’s clothing (i.e. *nightgown*, *gown* and *robe*), the inherent vulnerability of the woman in horror is reinforced. That is, the focus on women’s un/dress in the liminal spaces between sleep and/or waking cement the vulnerability of women in horror. Of course, this can be variably read as misogyny writ plainly or a critique of man’s predation in horror-as-art (cf. Markovitz 2000). However, in horror-as-culture, the lack of an explicit critique regarding women’s sexualisation, vulnerability and victimhood reinforces the suggestion that *Fangoria*’s shared cognitive model may have been slow to pick up on the nuances of its filmic counterpart’s socio-political commentary.

Qualitative analysis – Jamie Lee Curtis and Heather Langenkamp

Whilst the analysis of nouns, pronouns and their collocates yield interesting results regarding the *general* representation of women in the corpus, this section focuses on the discursive representations of specific women. Given the ubiquity of the slasher film in the 1980s and the articulation by Clover (1992) that 1980s horror cinema introduced us to the concept of the ‘final girl’, this section therefore focuses on discursive representations and constructions of two specific actors, Jamie Lee Curtis (Laurie Strode – *Halloween* [1978]) and Heather Langenkamp (Nancy Thompson – *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [1984]). Though Laurie Strode was first introduced to us in 1978’s *Halloween*, Curtis is ‘seen as the quintessential American scream queen of her generation’ (Nowell, 2014: 129) and the *Halloween* franchise arguably paved the way for the slasher film – and, by extension, its ‘final girl’ – throughout the 1980s. Heather Langenkamp’s Nancy Thompson, then, has been contrasted with Laurie Strode as an alternative model of feminism in the slasher genre (Christensen, 2011). Indeed, whereas Curtis’ star was already on the rise in the 1980s, Langenkamp’s appearance in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was her first leading role and catapulted her into horror stardom in the mid-eighties. I argue, then, that an in-depth critical analysis of how these two major players in horror culture, as actors and characters, are discursively represented will unveil ideological and cognitive understandings of women’s place in horror – and in society, more broadly – in the 1980s.

Focusing primarily on one interview of each Curtis and Langenkamp, this qualitative analysis critiques the representation of both actor and character as women in horror. I argue that there are gender(ed) ideologies constructed in *Fangoria's* interview with Curtis that construe little boundary between character and actor, reflecting a sexualised conceptualisation of the woman in horror and her place as an object of both desire and fear. However, just as there are other nuanced complexities in the relationship between horror and feminism so far, the interview with Langenkamp presents a very different portrayal of the woman in horror as one worthy of professional respect and admiration. As such, I contend that the complexities of specific discursive representations of women in horror are underpinned by aspects of discourse and social practice (i.e. interviewer, socio-historical context, film-as-art). I also argue that these findings have clear implications for popular culture today and the precarious – often complex and sometimes dangerous – place of women in such spaces.

Jamie Lee Curtis – 1981

Fangoria's first interview with Jamie Lee Curtis in the 1980s appeared in issue #15 and was titled 'Jamie Lee Curtis: In her final encounter – only this time, the maniac is carrying a tape recorder!' (Martin 1981). In terms of conducting a socio-cognitive critique of discursive identity construction (e.g. Koller, 2012), the identities constructed in the title alone are particularly telling. In this intertextual reference to the plot of her breakthrough horror film, *Halloween*, the title chosen for the interview piece does two key pieces of identity work: (1) for Curtis alone, deconstructing the boundary between Curtis as an actor and as the character, Laurie Strode; and (2) for the interviewer, positioning himself as akin to the male antagonist of a/the horror movie. Of course, this can simply be seen as a reification of how the horror genre 'relishes in the complexities that arise when boundaries [...] are blurred and dismantled' (Harrington 2018: 1). However, when considering a 'political interrogation' (Clover 1992: 18) of this identity construction, it raises some questions about the place of women in horror – and their safety, vulnerability and victimhood as perceived by themselves and others within the horror-as-culture community. That is, whilst boundaries can be blurred in art for the purpose of excitement and entertainment, when boundaries in culture – and most often between people – are blurred, many dangers and problems of social (power) inequalities can arise. Indeed, insofar as Curtis is implicitly equated to her character – whether as victim or victor (cf. Christensen 2011) – she is socially and ideologically positioned as the potential victim of psychological terror and physiological brutality. When reinforced by the interviewer's self-positioning as her antagonist in the interview, he has implicitly taken the indelibly gendered power of horror's male predator and she his prey.

The narrative constructed by the title alone is carried forward throughout the piece, especially in Martin's description of Curtis in the interview preamble. Whilst Curtis is implicitly described as within the categorisation 'the most talented people [...] the 'kindest, the most generous, and the easiest to speak with' (1981: 20), she is also frequently described in terms of her physical appearance. For example, upon meeting Curtis, the interviewer remarks:

"In person, she is taller and bustier than those who know her best as Laurie Strode might expect, and her manner is lively and outgoing. In fact, it seems rather hard to imagine her being intimidated by anyone—even a knife-wielding maniac. Her hair remains the light blonde color that was required for the Stratten role; as one result, she more sharply resembles her mother, actress Janet Leigh, particularly when she purses her lips in vexation.

She was in something of a giddy mood – swooping like a mock airplane [*sic*] as she crossed the lobby to meet us and, later, gushing like a fan when she recognized 13-

year-old pop singer Stacey Lattislaw, who was also being interviewed at the Berkshire. When we commented on her new hair color, she said, ‘Isn’t it an amazing transformation? It’s like *The Howling*; that’s why I look like a werewolf this morning.’ In fact, we found her lovelier in person than she is in her films – we were particularly impressed by the graceful arch of her eyebrows that give her gaze a special intensity.” (Martin 1981: 20)

Again, the boundary between Curtis and Strode is eroded in Martin’s description. Whilst she is implicitly inextricable from her character, the interviewer does offer some critique of the difference between the two. For example, given her evidently unexpected height, bust size and outgoing manner, Martin finds it difficult to imagine her in the role of victim. Yet imagine it, he does, as alluded in the title of the interview. Further, Curtis’ new hair colour and gracefully arched eyebrows make her ‘lovelier in person than she is in her films’, as though running from – and ultimately facing down – knife-wielding murderers should not normally detract from the loveliness of a woman’s physical appearance. This focus on Curtis’ sexuality – via physical appearance – is exactly the same kind of ‘merging of sex, desire and voyeurism (by both characters and the viewer)’ that represents a particular ‘account of a gendered power dynamic that recurs throughout the [horror] genre ... [and] the slasher subgenre’ (Harrington 2018: 13). Indeed, this focus also implicitly deconstructs and erodes the boundary between horror-as-art and horror-as-culture. That is, inasmuch as the interviewer cannot extricate Curtis from Strode, nor can he extricate himself as audience member and participant in the slasher narrative.

Findings from general representations of women are corroborated in this specific discursive representation of Jamie Lee Curtis as a woman in horror. Specifically, women’s height as an intimidating feature (or, at least, a shield against intimidation), the infantilisation of women as girls (e.g. ‘swooping like a mock airplane [*sic*]’ and ‘gushing like a fan’), a focus on kinship relations (e.g. explicit reference to her mother, Janet Leigh, several times throughout the interview) and a woman’s anatomy are all explicitly represented in this brief preamble to Curtis’ interview. There is evidently triangulation between quantitative and qualitative findings regarding women’s place in *Fangoria*’s horror-as-culture community. That is, women’s agency and power in this horror-as-culture space were arguably challenged by a shared cognitive model of sexualisation, infantilisation and hyperfemininity. The fact that Martin was also the editor of *Fangoria* at the time of the interview further cements this power relationship in the discursive practice of the interview itself and the magazine, more broadly. Indeed, his discourse access as editor with privileged controls over the modes and means of communication (cf. van Dijk, 1993) in the magazine grants him significant social power within *Fangoria*’s horror-as-culture community and, by extension, the capacity to shape the ideological and cognitive structures of his readership. Hence, the implications of his discursive choices have far wider-reaching implications than the local context of one celebrity interview.

Heather Langenkamp – 1985

Langenkamp’s interview with *Fangoria* in 1985 explicitly named her ‘the successor to Jamie Lee Curtis’ (Wooley 1985: 10). However, where Curtis was objectified and sexualised, the focus in Langenkamp’s interview was on her experiences of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, including the director, her co-stars, and the filming process. Indeed, the preamble of the interview focuses on her critical acclaim and career so far:

“Wes Craven's [sic] *A Nightmare on Elm Street* introduced horror movie audiences to Heather Langenkamp, and those audiences have been responding enthusiastically ever since. Praise for the 20-year old brunette's performance as the dream-haunted Nancy Thompson has come from places as diverse as Dallas, Texas — where the influential *Dallas Times-Herald* drive-in movie critic Joe Bob Briggs called her “the new Jamie Lee Curtis” — and Avoriaz, France, where she was given a “Best Performance” award at the fantasy and science-fiction film festival there.

Miss Langenkamp, who comes from Tulsa, Oklahoma, was working as a newspaper office girl a couple of years ago when Francis Ford Coppola came to town to film *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*. Responding to a newspaper ad, she got a role as an extra in the first film and landed a speaking part in the second, although her scene was cut out of the final print. Since then, she's played Joanne Woodward's daughter in the made-for-TV movie *Passions* and starred in the as-yet unreleased *Nickel Mountain*, a film adaptation of the John Gardner novel.

Currently, the ebullient Miss Langenkamp divides her time between acting in Los Angeles and studying at Stanford University.” (Wooley 1985: 10)

Whilst there are some references to her youth and physicality (i.e. ‘20-year old brunette’, ‘Miss Langenkamp’ and ‘office girl’), which corroborate the above quantitative results and hark back to the earlier *Fangoria* interview with Curtis, such references are arguably dominated by the focus on the facts of Langenkamp's career thus far. Despite only four years separating the Curtis and Langenkamp interviews, the difference between the two is stark.

Of course, the 1980s saw a resurgence of feminist politics that may well have taken until the middle of the decade to be realised among horror-as-culture audiences. Indeed, the role of the film and character in constructing a foundation for Langenkamp's interview cannot be discounted. I argue, then, that the difference between the two interviews actually demonstrates a furtherance of the inextricability and boundarilessness between actor and character in horror-as-culture. That is, insofar as Langenkamp's Thompson has been identified as ‘a stronger model of feminism in classical slasher horror cinema’ than Curtis' Strode by academic audiences (Christensen 2011: 24), perhaps Thompson – and, by extension, Langenkamp – was also seen as a stronger model of feminism by horror-as-culture audiences of the time. Hence, this narrative of Thompson's feminist credentials and strength is embodied by Langenkamp and responded to accordingly in the interview. This argument aligns with the notion that horror film narratives make sense of political currents (Platts 2015) and that lifestyle journalism translates them one step further from artistic into cultural narratives.

Indeed, the role of women in horror as feminist paragons, further eroding the boundary between actor and character, is also alluded to by Langenkamp towards the end of the interview:

“Fang: How do you feel about being called ‘the new Jamie Lee Curtis?’

Langenkamp: Actually, that's pretty much of a compliment. I think she brought a lot of respectability to horror movies. I think today that a lot of people will look back on their role in a horror movie and try to deny that they ever did it, or sort of push it under the rug and say, ‘Oh, that was when I was young and didn't know anything.’

But Jamie Lee Curtis was able to take that kind of role and really do something with her career, and I think that's what you should always try to do. I don't think you should do a movie that you're going to feel sorry you did.

Plus—this sounds pretty corny, I guess—as a woman doing a film, if you can't try to make your character look intelligent or at least someone you would sympathize with, then there's not much point in doing the film. I thought *A Nightmare on Elm Street* was one film where [sic] the girls in the film were the only people who really had any idea of what was really going on. The men couldn't see past their noses. And in that way, it's also pretty funny.” (Wooley 1985: 12)

Here, Langenkamp explicitly constructs a responsibility for women in their role as actors to make positive choices for their own career and in their role as characters to represent women in a positive light of intelligence, sympathy and awareness. Whilst this downplays the agency and power of men in the film industry to hamper these choices and write unintelligent and unsympathetic characters, it speaks to Langenkamp's empowerment as an actor and as her character, Nancy Thompson. As such, the boundarilessness of women's place in horror – as off-screen actor and on-screen character – is reinforced in this interview, just as it was in Curtis' 1981 interview with Bob Martin. This time, however, the explicit erosion of such a boundary is construed by the actor, herself, rather than the interviewer. However, the interviewer's role is not to be ignored entirely – it is he, after all, who wrote the preamble that focused on Langenkamp's career instead of her physicality. Indeed, this instantiation of discursively constructed boundarilessness shifts the narrative from one of victimisation and vulnerability to one of empowerment and agency.

Conclusion

This article has identified the role of women and their place in 1980s horror-as-culture as one transcending, blurring and challenging boundaries of – *inter alia* – actor and character, feminism and misogyny. Adding to existing research on horror-as-art, this boundarilessness and nuanced complexity in horror-as-culture further highlights the precarity of women's place in horror and the varying degrees to which women, their bodies and sexuality are represented and respected by industry insiders and their audiences. That is, there are – most often generically represented – women whose bodily autonomy and anatomy are respected and for whom torture, violence and sexualised nudity are seen as gratuitous and exploitative. On the other hand, there are – most often specifically represented in their role as on-screen characters – women and girls whose torture, victimhood and sexual vulnerability are par for the course. In retrospect, and in light of recent movements towards gender equality and making visible the physical and sexual dangers for women in the film industry, the eroded boundaries between character and actor and between audience and film in horror-as-culture make this finding particularly problematic.

Indeed, the legacy of women's place in horror has implications for understanding women's place in popular culture today and their precarious – often complex and sometimes dangerous – role in such spaces. That is, the retrospective lens through which data in this article are analysed allows for a recontextualization of findings to 21st century cultural contexts wherein anti-feminism, identity politics and misogyny abound. Arguably, in previous decades, the consumption of popular culture was engaged in asynchronously, at set schedules and compartmentalised away from everyday life. Now, in today's globalised instant gratification culture of social media consumption, this cognitive compartmentalisation is largely non-existent. As such, the boundary between *real life* and popular culture representations is further eroded than it has ever been. For women – and especially those with

cult fanbases and (micro-)celebrity status – this makes safety, respectability and autonomy in popular culture spaces particularly precarious. However, it is important to note that this is nothing new, not inherently the fault of new media technologies and not entirely up to women to resolve. Rather, just like in *Fangoria*, it is the place of community insiders to question and challenge gender in/equality both explicitly and implicitly in their behaviour. Where there is exploitation and injustice, it should be called out. Where achievements are downplayed for physicality or attractiveness, the narrative should be shifted. As such, we can learn at least a little about changing unequal popular culture spaces today from this brief exploration of 1980s horror-as-culture. Artistic licence is one notion, and characters are extensions of such art, but cultural communities include real people who are equally deserving of fair representation, empowered agency and *reasoned* critique. Boundaries are as important as ever.

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Tables

<u>Collocates</u>	<u>Semantic Category</u>	<u>Discourse Field</u>
<i>attack</i>	Calm/Violent/Angry	EMOTIONAL ACTIONS, STATES AND PROCESSES
<i>wrestling</i>	Sports	ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS & GAMES
<i>incredible</i>	Comparing – Usual/Unusual	GENERAL & ABSTRACT TERMS
<i>cages, captive</i>	Constraint	
<i>prison</i>	Crime, law and order: Law and order	GOVT & THE PUBLIC DOMAIN
<i>Nazi</i>	Politics	
<i>vs</i>	Warfare, defence and the army, weapons	
<i>murdered, undertaker, wild</i>	Life and living things	LIFE & LIVING THINGS
<i>ape, leech, spider, wasp</i>	Living creatures generally	
<i>jungle</i>	Plants	
<i>saga</i>	Speech etc: - Communicative	LINGUISTIC ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>voyage</i>	Moving, coming and going	MOVEMENT, LOCATION, TRAVEL & TRANSPORT
<i>Apache, Flats, Oklahoma, Yucca</i>	Geographical names	NAMES & GRAMMATICAL WORDS
<i>Mars</i>	Other proper names	
<i>Cabot, Collins, Marquette, Mesa, Susan, Vickers</i>	Personal names	
<i>foot, ft</i>	Measurement: Length & height	NUMBERS & MEASUREMENT
<i>shrinking</i>	Measurement: Size	
<i>invisible</i>	Sensory – Sight	PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>husband</i>	Kin	SOCIAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>needs</i>	Obligation and necessity	
<i>woman, women</i>	People: - Female	
<i>men</i>	People: - Male	
<i>slaves</i>	Power, organizing	
<i>mummy, voodoo</i>	Religion and the supernatural	
<i>Amazon</i>	Toughness; strong/weak	SUBSTANCES, MATERIALS, OBJECTS & EQUIPMENT
<i>transparent</i>	Colour and colour patterns	
<i>attractive, beautiful</i>	Judgement of appearance (pretty etc.)	THE BODY & THE INDIVIDUAL
<i>nude, topless</i>	Clothes and personal belongings	
<i>Aztec, Viking</i>	Time: General: Past	TIME
<i>prehistoric, young</i>	Time: Old, new and young, age	

Table 1 – Collocates of *wom*n*, including semantic categories and discourse fields

Collocate	Semantic Category	Discourse Field
<i>hits</i>	Calm/Violent/Angry	EMOTIONAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>scores</i>	Sports and games generally	ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS & GAMES
<i>reform</i>	Affect – Modify, change	GENERAL & ABSTRACT TERMS
<i>little</i>	Degree: Minimizers	
<i>chain, trapped</i>	Constraint	
<i>specify</i>	Particular/general; detail	
<i>possessed, snatchers</i>	Safety/Danger	
<i>prison</i>	Crime, law and order: Law and order	
<i>bombs, invasion</i>	Warfare, defence and the army; weapons	LIFE & LIVING THINGS
<i>killed</i>	Life and living things	
<i>underground</i>	Location and direction	MOVEMENT, LOCATION, TRAVEL & TRANSPORT
<i>cemetery, dragstrip, native</i>	Places	
<i>Barnes, Canaveral, Gypsy</i>	Geographical names	
<i>Amy, Herschell, Morgan</i>	Personal names	
<i>Bizarro</i>	Other proper names	
<i>figures</i>	Quantities	NUMBERS & MEASUREMENT
<i>blind</i>	Sensory: - Sight	PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>stepmother</i>	Kin	SOCIAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>boy</i>	People: - Male	
<i>friend, meets</i>	Relationship: General	
<i>gang, sorority</i>	Groups and affiliation	
<i>beautiful, lovely, nubile</i>	Judgement of appearance (pretty etc.)	SUBSTANCES, MATERIALS, OBJECTS & EQUIPMENT
<i>rod</i>	Objects generally	
<i>brains</i>	Anatomy and physiology	THE BODY & THE INDIVIDUAL
<i>clothes, naked, topless</i>	Clothes and personal belongings	
<i>valley</i>	Geographical terms	
<i>teenage, teen, young</i>	Time: Old, new and young; age	TIME

Table 2 – Collocates of *girl**, including semantic categories and discourse fields

Collocate	Semantic Category	Discourse Field
<i>attacked, stabbed</i>	Calm/Violent/Angry	EMOTIONAL ACTION, STATES AND PROCESSES
<i>frightened</i>	Fear/Bravery/Shock	
<i>chuckles, smiles</i>	Happy/Sad: Happy	
<i>actress, audition</i>	Drama, the theatre and showbusiness	ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS & GAMES
<i>eaters</i>	Food	FOOD & FARMING
<i>discovers</i>	Avoiding	GENERAL & ABSTRACT TERMS
<i>freak</i>	Comparing: - Usual/Unusual	
<i>specify</i>	Particular/general; detail	
<i>insisted</i>	Speech acts	LINGUISTIC ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>Cape, Canaveral, Flats, Yucca</i>	Geographical names	NAMES & GRAMMATICAL WORDS
<i>SS</i>	Other proper names	
<i>her, she, herself</i>	Pronouns etc.	
<i>decides</i>	Deciding	PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>astounding</i>	Expect	
<i>tested</i>	Investigate, examine, test, search	
<i>learns</i>	Learn	
<i>hears</i>	Sensory: - Sound	
<i>thinks</i>	Thought, belief	
<i>realizes</i>	Understand	
<i>marry</i>	Kin	SOCIAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>gal</i>	People: - Female	
<i>devils</i>	Religion and the supernatural	
<i>vulnerable</i>	Toughness; strong/weak	
<i>attractive</i>	Judgement of appearance (pretty etc.)	SUBSTANCES, MATERIALS, OBJECTS & EQUIPMENT
<i>wheels</i>	Objects generally	
<i>pregnant</i>	Anatomy and physiology	THE BODY & THE INDIVIDUAL
<i>nude, wears</i>	Clothes and personal belongings	
<i>nurse</i>	Medicines and medical treatment	

Table 3 – Collocates of *she*, including semantic categories and discourse fields

Collocates	Semantic Category	Discourse Field
<i>apartment</i>	Architecture and kinds of houses and buildings	ARCHITECTURE, BUILDINGS, HOUSES & THE HOME
<i>bedroom</i>	Parts of buildings	
<i>abused</i>	Calm/Violent/Angry	EMOTIONAL ACTIONS, STATES AND PROCESSES
<i>singing</i>	Music and related activities	ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS & GAMES
<i>ties</i>	Constraint	GENERAL & ABSTRACT TERMS
<i>rips</i>	Damaging and destroying	
<i>dug, practicing</i>	General actions, making, etc.	
<i>grabs</i>	Safety/Danger	
<i>kidnaps</i>	Crime, law and order: Law and order	GOVT & THE PUBLIC DOMAIN
<i>murdered, kills, strangles</i>	Life and living things	LIFE & LIVING THINGS
<i>vocal</i>	Language, speech and grammar	LINGUISTIC ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>branding</i>	Linguistic actions, states and processes	
<i>persuade</i>	Speech acts	
<i>conversation</i>	Speech etc.: - Communicative	
<i>sends</i>	Putting, taking, pulling, pushing, transporting &c.	MOVEMENT, LOCATION, TRAVEL & TRANSPORT
<i>her, herself, she</i>	Pronouns etc.	NAMES & GRAMMATICAL WORDS
<i>Agutter, Allison, Beswicke, Cassandra, Hayes, Helene, Jenny, Judd, Nancy, Nandez, Peterson, Spinell</i>	Personal names	
<i>repeatedly</i>	Frequency etc.	NUMBERS & MEASUREMENT
<i>abilities</i>	Ability: - Ability, intelligence	PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTION, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>impress, obsession</i>	Interest/boredom/excited/energetic	
<i>hypnotic, trance</i>	Mental actions and processes	
<i>unbeknownst</i>	Knowledge	
<i>aunt, daughter, father, fiancé, grandmother, hubby, husband, lover, marriage, marry, mother, sister, wedding</i>	Kin	SOCIAL ACTIONS, STATES & PROCESSES
<i>heroine, princess</i>	Power, organizing	
<i>boyfriend</i>	Relationship: Intimate/sexual	
<i>spell</i>	Religion and the supernatural	
<i>charms</i>	Judgement of appearance (pretty etc.)	SUBSTANCES, MATERIALS, OBJECTS & EQUIPMENT
<i>breasts, cheeks, legs, lips, mouth, shoulder, throat, unborn, veins</i>	Anatomy and physiology	THE BODY & THE INDIVIDUAL
<i>clothes, dress, dressing, gown, nightgown, nude, robe</i>	Clothes and personal belongings	
<i>Cure</i>	Medicines and medical treatment	
<i>debut</i>	Time: Beginning and ending	TIME

Table 4 – Collocates of *her**, including semantic categories and discourse fields