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AMBIVALENCE IN GENDER PORTRAYALS IN *GOOSEBUMPS* (2015) AND *GOOSEBUMPS: HAUNTED HALLOWEEN* (2018)

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ABSTRACT

The horror genre is notorious for sexist depictions of female heroines, which heavily imposes traditional gender stereotypes. This paper analyses *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018), which are the movie adaptations of R.L Stine's horror book series. It aims to see the possibility of the female heroines and male heroes to defy conventional gender stereotypes and determine the female heroines' agency as horror movies tend to objectify the female characters. This paper uses the Cult of True Womanhood (Welter, 1966), Male Gender Role Identity (Pleck, 1981) and representation theory (Hall, 1997) to analyse the dialogues and interaction of the characters, and the agencies of the female heroines in the two movies. This research shows the apparent ambivalence portrayals as the text often contradicts the characters' depiction in the earlier part of the film and the ending. In the beginning of the movies, the female heroines are depicted as empowered and independent, but as the story progresses, they become characters that need male heroes' help and support to overcome problems.

KEYWORD: gender stereotypes; gender representation; *Goosebumps*; female heroine; horror movies

INTRODUCTION

For many decades, gender roles and stereotypes have been heavily debated in our society. Gender stereotypes specifically affect how gender is perceived and expected to fulfil its role in society (Martin & Dinella, 2001). Lippmann (1998) defines gender stereotypes as how everyone has a specific picture in their mind of what they are supposed to be. This idea stems from the constructed division of roles and positions of power attached to the two sexes. Stereotypes can be degrading, especially to women, since their characteristics are limited to emotional aspects, such as warmth and expressiveness (Broverman, 1972). They also affect the expected social roles between men and women with women having higher possibilities of being placed in a lower hierarchy of power (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Thus, stereotypes tend to create inferior images of women and unequal power relations.

These gender stereotypes are mirrored in popular culture, among others in horror movies. McGrail (2018) states that horror movies started as a reflection of "contemporary concerns" with society's collective anxiousness as its root. Although, gothic-themed literature was rooted in the classic works of the 1800s, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the trend of women as the victims only started in the late 1990s with the rise of slasher horror movies. In modern horror movies, women are typically given roles as the vulnerable victims of the monsters or the perpetrator. That the genre is often seen as anti-woman (Freeland, 2000). As a horror subgenre, slasher movies mostly revolve around a girl being chased by a monstrous killer. "The final girl" is the term used to describe the only survivor in slasher movies. As the female heroine, "the final girl" lives long enough to see everyone around her murdered and, in the end, kills the murderer herself (Clover, 1987). Overall, slasher movies create the narration of women being victimized or being placed as the female heroine but at the same time sexually objectifying them.

The horror genre for children and young adults begins with the cartoon *Casper the Friendly Ghost*'s released in the 1940s. Following the release of family-friendly horror movies like *The Addams Family* (1964), horror movies aimed at the younger audience are fairy tales for children with life lessons. However, the narrations and characterizations frequently include gender references or roles (Curtis, 2016). These gender references teach children about things that society assumed to be expected based on their gender. For example, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) is notoriously known for displaying traditional gender roles, and at the same time subverting those roles on their characters, particularly towards the main leads (Curtis, 2016). The female heroine Sally the Rag, who acts as Jack Skellington's love interest, exhibits stereotypical female traits like domesticity and passiveness. However, there are moments where she displays assertiveness and defies the stereotypes (Curtis, 2016).

Another example is the movie *Coraline* (2009), adapted from Neil Gaiman's novel of the same title published in 2002, which acts as the blueprint for young adults' horror and fantasy. The story revolves around a little girl named Coraline who discovered a magical world and a more sinister version of her family. One of the most significant changes in the movie adaptation of *Coraline* (2009) is the creation of Wybie, a male character who helps and saves Coraline in troubled times. Even though Coraline is still portrayed as a curious and independent girl, Wybie takes over the spotlight by dominating the action-oriented scene and saves Coraline during the most unexpected moments. The two movies expose the possibility of gender role ambiguity through the inconsistent portrayal of their female heroines. Furthermore, it also implies the message that men are supposed to protect women, and women are incapable of settling their problems without the help of men (Curtis, 2016).

Goosebumps (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) explore the world of horror with hints of supernatural and fantasy aimed at young adults. *Goosebumps* (2015) revolves around the new kid in the neighbourhood, Zach, who befriends the mysterious Hannah Stine and Champ. However, chaos ensues as they release monsters from the books in Hannah's father's office. Later, they discover that Hannah's father is the famous Goosebumps writer, R.L. Stine, who confine the monsters he wrote in those cursed books. They later team up to return the monster into the books and stop Slappy, the ventriloquist dummy and Stine's most evil creation, from taking over the city. The second instalment, *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018), has completely different characters and storylines. The story follows Sarah Quinn and her younger brother, Sonny Quinn. Sarah is preparing an admission essay to Columbia University, and Sonny is starting a garbage clean-up service with his best friend, Sam Carter. They accidentally unlock a manuscript and bring Slappy the dummy to life by reading the mantra. At first, Slappy acts friendly, but things change when his mischief escalates and disturbs the pair of siblings. The problem arises as Slappy

and other monsters try to take over the town.

Goosebumps series by R.L Stine is a highly acclaimed horror novels for children and young adults, especially in the early 1990s and late 2000s. The series landed its first television adaptation in the 1990s, which aired in 1995-1998 and lasted for four seasons. Scholastic Media publisher gave the adaptation license to Columbia Pictures in 2008 to adapt *Goosebumps* into a theatrical version ("Sony Gets Goosebumps," 2008). In an interview with Washington Post, R.L Stine admits that the secret of *Goosebumps's* success is the ability to cater to both girls and boys. His writings make it possible for boys and girls to go on an adventure and fight monsters, evil ventriloquist dummy, and other evil beings. Thus, the portrayal of the male hero and female heroine in these adaptations is crucial. Unfortunately, some viewers found the female heroines lacking agency in the two movie adaptations, especially *Goosebumps* (2015). Lenika Cruz from Atlantic.com finds Hannah Stine, inspired by Hannah Fairchild from *Goosebumps' Ghost Next Door* (1993), to be "flat" compared to her portrayal in the book. The lack of depth in her characterization and agency left Hannah Stine superficial compared to Hannah Fairchild. Even though not all characters in the movies are based on the books, the representation of gender through the main characters in *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) are still equally important as it reflects how modern society perceives boys and girls in horror settings. For instance, in *Goosebumps* (2015), Hannah Stine is also shown to exhibit her rebelliousness and adventurous side that is rarely seen in female heroines within horror settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research emphasizes the concept of gender roles in horror movies, specifically in slasher movies. Slasher movies are generally aimed at older audiences due to the direct exposure of blood, gore, and sexual activities. However, the subgenre involves female heroines under the term "final girl" as part of the narration, making it necessary to highlight as this research also focuses on female heroines. When it comes to the role of female heroines in horror settings, filmmakers always attempt to create heroic female characters yet somehow still depict them as idealised the feminine and sexual characters (Krahn, 2015). Not only that, female and male characters in horror movies are often identified based on their actions when facing the killer or enemy and how they express their emotions, which tend to undermine the female characters' capabilities (i.e. women screamed when the killer approached them) (Brewer, 2009). However, there is a noticeable shift in the portrayals of the "final girls" in slasher movies produced in the 1980s, as they are becoming more agentic and active to save themselves and kill the perpetrators with their own hands (Hernandez-Santaolalla, 2019). In recent slasher movies, "final girl" characters are given attributing features and capabilities to enhance their chance of survival (i.e., she is intelligent and capable of fixing cars). These "final girls" are depicted to be more androgynous compared to the traditional "final girls" (Hernandez-Santaolalla, 2019; Kvaran, 2016; Weaver, 2015). Similarly, Sa'eed and Jubran (2019) find that there are strong and independent female characters in horror movies. These characters show the capability to protect their loved ones and overcome problems. Sa'eed and Jubran discover movies like *The Conjuring* and *Scream 2* that successfully established powerful female characters that overtake the stereotypes in the partially sexist movie narratives.

Goosebumps (2015) and *Goosebumps: the Haunted Halloween* (2018) are released over five years ago, yet there is little to no research on them. Nevertheless, the discussion on female heroines' ambivalence or female characters in horror movies with young adult audiences has been explored in various research. For example, Coraline, the female heroine from Selick's *Coraline* (2009), is supposedly portrayed as a curious and brave girl; however, the movie

adaptation's heroic actions are overpowered by the male character, Wybie. Curtis (2016) finds the movie adaptation to have anti-feminist implication as it upholds an "active, masculine agenda" which subverts Coraline's independence as a girl by adding a male character that never existed in the Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002). Another research by Bond (2009) finds that the female character from *the Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), Sally, is vague as she acts assertive to the antagonist but submissive and nurturing to the male lead. The research notices Sally sending a "mixed message" regarding the concept of gender roles to the young audience. Thus, Curtis (2016) and Bond (2009) show that female heroines in the respective movies could have been strong and independent, but their attachment to the male characters prevented them from being so. From these findings, this paper will delve further into the topic of female heroines in horror settings, specifically horror movies outside the subgenre slasher and horror animation.

Goosebumps (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) offered horror mixed with fantasy and thriller that is very different from movies discussed above. The book series written by R.L Stine is also predominantly made with the genre horror-fantasy-thriller in mind. This paper argues that the female heroines of *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) can defy and conform to gender stereotypes, and their actions possibly show whether female heroines have evolved from the traditional portrayals of women in horror films. The two films attempted to defy gender stereotypes by depicting Hannah Stine from *Goosebumps* (2015) and Sarah Quinn from *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) as courageous, inquisitive, and intelligent girls. Unfortunately, there seem to be limitations to their characteristics as they also depend on the male characters, who accompany them and play the role of love interests for Hannah Stine and the role of younger brother for Sarah Quinn. Other than that, identifying the stereotypes on the male characters in *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) can also determine whether they are still heavily based on conventional gender stereotypes.

METHOD

This research focuses on the representation of the female and male characters from *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018). The concept of gender stereotypes will answer whether there is a shift in the traditional gender roles on the characters. Each film consists of one female heroine and one male hero, in which their interactions, utterance, and characteristics will be analysed according to the elements of stereotypes. Furthermore, by analysing the female heroines, Hannah Stine from *Goosebumps* (2015) and Sarah Quinn from *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018), the study will reveal whether these female characters challenge the normalised stereotypes in the horror movie industry. This research also delves further to analyse the representation of agentic and independent female heroines despite being accompanied by male characters who hold important roles to the female characters in both movies. The stereotypes of the characters will be identified using Welter's True Cult of Womanhood and Pleck's Male Gender Role Identity (Welter, 1966; Pleck, 1981 as cited in Brannon, 2004). Stuart Hall's theory of representation is also used to support the analysis of the narrative on how the female heroines are depicted in *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018).

This research uses a textual approach centred on the narrative of the two films. The representation of female heroines in the story is then identified by highlighting the meanings or messages on gender roles in both movies using Hall's representation theory. Welter's True Cult of Womanhood and Pleck's Male Gender Role Identity (Welter, 1966; Pleck, 1981 as cited in Brannon, 2004) are applied to identify the stereotypes of the female heroines and male heroes,

respectively. According to the True Cult of Womanhood, a true woman is supposed to be religious (pious) and sexually uninterested (pure). They also tend to be submissive and domestic. It aids to reveal how the female characters defy traditional gender values and show their evolvement from those stereotypes. Whereas, according to the stereotype, men are expected to be unfeminine (“No Sissy Stuff”) and successful (“The Big Wheel”). In addition, men should also be tough and confident (“the Sturdy Oak”) while also be aggressive and daring (“Give ‘Em Hell”). Like True Cult of Womanhood, the Male Gender Role Identity employs to identify and classify whether the male heroes are still portrayed as overly masculine and heroic men in a horror movie.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Gender Stereotypes in *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018)

1. Gender Stereotypes in the Female Heroines

According to Brannon (2003), gender stereotypes are based on gender roles, where society creates a set of behaviours for men and women. These gender roles categorise men and women into two distinct traits typically linked with their gender, which create differences in treatment and behaviours. (Brannon, 2003; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Eagly et.al., 2016). The horror industry also cannot escape from gender stereotypes; as a matter of fact, the subgenre slasher is usually based on the said concept. Compared to other subgenres of horror, famous slasher films like *Scream*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Psycho* are well-known for having female characters heavily based on traditional gender stereotypes. These visually attractive women are expected to be graceful and pure to create the perfect “final girls”. Some slasher movies even depict them as sexual and helpless being, which are incapable of defending themselves from the killer or perpetrator. In addition, they are seen as sexual objects for the male audience by dressing provocatively or being killed in an oddly sexual situation (Brewer, 2009). In *the Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), the female character Sally is given stereotypical feminine attribute. Bond (2009) finds Sally to be submissive and actively participates in stereotypical behaviour, such as cleaning, cooking, and sewing. At the same time, *Coraline* (2009) places the heroine as the “passive recipient” who relies on the male character’s help to overcome difficult situations.

Hannah Stine in *Goosebumps* (2015) is depicted as an agentic character, yet she relies heavily on the male hero as the story progresses. After meeting Zach, the male hero and potential love interest, Hannah demonstrates passiveness and dependency. However, the movie attempted to defy these stereotypes by portraying Hannah Stine as a rebellious teenager at the beginning of the movie. Her curious and adventurous side follows her antics as a rebel throughout the movie’s first half. There is a scene where she shows Zach an abandoned amusement park located deep into the woods. She is not afraid of venturing to unknown areas independently and is brave enough to spend her free time climbing a Ferris wheel to see the city view.

Hannah: Come on, this is my favourite part.

Zach: Wait, wait, wait. What are you doing?

Hannah: What are you afraid of? I do this all the time

Zach: I’m... I’m not afraid. I’m just not current with my tetanus shot.

This scene shows Hannah’s fearless side, which can easily be compared to the male hero, Zach (Letterman, 2015, 14:46-15.00). From the conversation, Hannah expresses her boldness and

fearlessness. The line “I do this all the time” conveys that she is daring enough to climb such high places in her free time. She defies one of the aspects of a true woman: staying at home and doing household activities. Hannah is depicted as someone who enjoys activities that gets her adrenaline going, and this is what makes her unique as a female character.

There is an ambiguity in her portrayal as she becomes the stereotypical female character, who gets easily scared. The contrast in the scene where they walked through the cemetery is relatively apparent compared to the Ferris wheel scene. In this scene, Hannah and Zach walked side-by-side when something suddenly grabs Hannah’s hoodie. As a result, it made her scream and gained Zach’s attention. (Letterman, 2015, 1:04:45-1:05:00)

Hannah: (screams)

Zach: Wait, wait. Hold on. It’s okay. It’s just a statue. It’s caught on your jacket.

Hannah: (softly smiles at Zach) My hero.

The contrast happens as Hannah is not the slightest bit fazed with climbing a Ferris wheel or facing an abominable snowman ten times her size, but she is afraid of something or someone grabbing the back of her hoodie. In the Cult of True Womanhood, virtuous women are weak, obedient, and helpless (Welter, 1976, as cited in Brannon, 2004). Nevertheless, this scene shows Hannah’s dependant and vulnerable side as she needs the male hero’s reassurance and support to get over her shock. The line “my hero” also implies that she is acting as the damsel in distress, and she needs a “hero”, specifically a male hero, to save and protect her from harm. The ambivalence also appears as her strength and boldness that existed initially seem to decrease because she became more dependent on the male hero as the story progresses.

Hannah becomes a character who lived for the male character around her. At first, Hannah’s existence is partly problematic because she existed solely for and due to her father, R.L. Stine. A conversation between Zach and R.L. Stine reveals Hannah Stine’s background, where she is born from R.L. Stine’s writing to cope with his loneliness and isolation from the outside world. Hannah’s isolated background due to her father’s overprotectiveness made her rebel to the extent where she would go on late night walks and visit various places and shortcuts within the town. However, this also implies that she does not belong in the “normal” society. Thus, one way for her to be accepted into the society is by latching onto the male hero. Other than that, Zach is also the first man she interacted with that is not her father.

Following the four virtues from the Cult of True Womanhood, Hannah conforms to the stereotype of a pure woman. Purity in the Cult of True Womanhood embodies the idea that women should be sexually and romantically uninterested. Purity is essential as piety is supposed to be to a young woman; its absence is considered unnatural and unfeminine. Without it, she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower-order” (Welter, 1978, p. 315 as cited in Brannon, 2004). It was never explicitly mentioned that Hannah is sexually uninterested, but her interaction with Zach expresses romantic interest in each other. As a result, Hannah is no longer pure and deserves to be punished like other girls who defy these gender roles. In horror movies, specifically slashers, immoral or sexually active female characters are often killed in a terrible way to repent their sins (Rieser, 2001, Brewer, 2009). However, *Goosebumps* (2015) has young adults and children under the age of 17 as its audience; thus, the punishment given to Hannah is different to those girls in slasher movies. Her “punishment” can also be seen as a sacrifice, where she will be sucked into the book just like all the other monsters written by R.L. Stine. (Letterman, 2015, 1:27:26)

Zach: Hannah, there is something you need to know and you're not gonna...

Hannah: Open the book, Zach.

Zach: No, no. You don't understand. If we open the book that means...

Hannah: It means I will be stuck on a shelf someplace forever.

In this conversation, the implication is that Hannah is fully aware of her identity as R.L Stine's creation, yet she remained quiet for so many years to accompany R.L Stine. She accepted her identity as part of R.L Stine's creation and lived all these years with him without questioning why she existed. The line "It means I will be stuck on a shelf someplace forever" suggests that Hannah willingly accepts her fate and plans not to fight back the situation. Hannah's disappearance from the world would mean that the city will be safe from all the monsters and Zach will be safe too, so in a way, she is sacrificing herself for Zach's sake. After all, her world started to revolve around Zach to the point that she is disempowered and started to become a weak and submissive female heroine. Although the narration seems to shift to Hannah's sacrifice, this is a turning point for Zach. His father died last year, and for that reason, Zach and his mother moved to Madison, Delaware. Zach had a hard time accepting his father's death; thus, he refused to open the book because he did not want Hannah to leave him. So, in the movie's climax, Hannah's action and sacrifice are still attached to the male hero's emotional development as he had to let go of another person he dearly loved.

Fortunately, the movie offered a happy ending for the young couple as R.L Stine brought Hannah back to life by writing another book for her at the end of the movie. This time he burned the book so that Hannah can remain in the real world forever. The difference is that Hannah now lives for Zach, who became her romantic partner. The movie ending shows Hannah and Zach's romantic reunion at school (Letterman, 2015, 1:34:15).

Zach: Hannah, you are real. You came back.

Hannah: I had to. You owe me a dance.

Hannah's reasoning to come back to the real world is not for herself, nor is it for her to chase her ambitions. It is all for Zach's sake and for her to continue being in a loving relationship with Zach. This ending type is typical in classic horror movies, where the hero and heroine start a relationship together once they defeat the killer or perpetrator (Dubois, 2001). Dubois (2001) also explains it as the moment where the heroine discards her ambitions and dreams to be the wife and mother in the relationship.

Compared to Hannah Stine, Sarah Quinn is a character that defies traditional gender stereotypes. In the beginning, Sarah is told to stay at home and watch over her brother, Sonny and his best friend, Sam. However, she decides to go to a club and meet her crush for a while. She also seems to refuse in doing any domestic-related activities that are tasked to her. For example, her mother left a laundry basket with a message that tells her to fold them. However, Sarah decided to focus on writing her admission essay for Columbia University and told his brother to do the task. This implies that Sarah chooses to chase career ambition instead of domestic-related activities.



Figure 3: Sarah giving the house chore to her brother, Sonny



Figure 4: Sonny telling Sarah that she is the one who is supposed to do it

From the previous scene, Sarah, the eldest daughter in the family, is expected to do activities considered part of her identity as a woman. This reflects how the movie inserted stereotypical gender roles, where women are usually submissive and domestic (Brannon, 2004). Women are expected to have traits like nurturing, caring, submissive and dependent. Prentice and Carranza (2002) mention how the traits commonly given to men and women are expected to be part of their gender. In simple terms, “gender stereotypes are highly prescriptive.” (Prentice & Carranza, p. 1). Sarah’s actions prove otherwise as she exhibits the rebellious characteristic of not wanting to stay at home and do her house chores. These actions show that she defies the stereotypes that are usually plastered to her as a woman.

Sarah formulates plans and shows the capability to use her strength to defeat the monsters. Various scenes exhibit Sarah showcasing her toughness in the movie. For example, Sarah grabs a shovel to standby outside Tommy’s house while the boys break into Tommy’s house to get the book back. Movies that follow traditional gender stereotypes usually would make the male characters stand on guards while the others are doing the mission. By letting Sarah be the one to do so, it leaves the message that girls can show their strength and toughness. Moreover, after the boys got the book, Sarah fights the skeleton bride and groom, who attack them by surprise. She hits the skeleton bride with a shovel and kicks the skeleton groom’s groin. Through her action, Sarah defies the stereotype by not depending on anybody’s help and using her strength to defeat the monster. This also demonstrates how a female heroine can successfully execute self-defence that requires physical abilities.

Unlike Hannah who sacrificed herself and got revived to life for the male hero’s sake, Sarah manages to defeat Slappy for herself and her family’s sake. As the movie reaches the climax, Sarah faces Slappy for the first time. She establishes her dominance over Slappy by saying, “*It’s just you and me now, Slappy.*” (Letterman, 2015, 1:11:12). By using a threatening tone to Slappy, Sarah shows that she is the one in charge and will defeat him. The banter between Sarah and Slappy after they reach the tower also expresses Sarah’s boldness and courageous characteristic, thus resisting the stereotype, where women are expected to be timid and passive when placed in a dangerous situation.

The only flaw with Sarah’s characteristic is that she still partly relies on male characters’ help to save the town successfully. The male characters are her brother Sonny and Sam. Even though Sarah is the one that faces Slappy and even threatens him, Sonny and Sam are the ones who hijacked the machine which controls the tower. Thus, Sarah’s capability to overcome a problem still requires the support of male characters for it to be ultimately successful. The movie leaves the notion that even when female characters are depicted as agentic, there are limitations to how strong they are supposed to be. Like Sarah, these limitations can be in how different the area of expertise is between the two genders. In the story, Sarah is interested in writing, while Sonny is interested in science. Even though Sarah is shown to be very ambitious in pursuing a future career in writing, the skill is rendered useless if compared to Sonny’s interest in science which manages

to be helpful at the movie's climax.

2. Gender Stereotypes in the Male Heroes

Zach, the male hero in *Goosebumps* (2015), also attempted to oppose the stereotype. At first, he is easily scared and not much of a risk-taker if we compare him to Hannah Stine. Hannah even calls him "scaredy-cat" multiple times from how amusing his reaction is to every little thing. However, the label "scaredy-cat" conveys that men are not allowed to be scared and are supposed to act tough even at the scariest moment of their lives. It also creates the sense that being scared is associated with a negative trait. Similar to Hannah, his character becomes more stereotypical as the story progresses.

Zach refused to be associated with non-masculine traits. Since meeting Hannah, Zach tries to act rugged and manly as he is worried that Hannah will make fun of him for lacking masculinity. One way for him to act tough in front of a member of the opposite sex is by lying or denying the statement that is said about him. For example, on their second meeting, Hannah surprised Zach, who is throwing garbage behind his house. His expression and body language show that Zach is surprised and scared, yet he refused to admit that. When Hannah asked him whether she scared him, Zach lies by saying no. In addition, Zach further denies the fact that he is scared by saying, "You know, I jump a lot. It is how I stay in such a great shape." In a way, he expresses that men should only be doing "manly" activities, such as exercising.

Zach embodies the stereotypical male characteristics, including aggressive and daring behaviour during crucial moments. These traits are included in the Male Gender Role Identity sphere, which Brannon (1986) labelled "Give 'Em Hell". For example, Zach boldly invades Stine's house because he believes that Hannah is in danger. Not only did he make his assumptions and daringly acts on them, but this also displays his heroic and masculine tendencies as he finds it necessary to save Hannah, the damsel in distress. In the scene where evil gnomes block their exit, Zach aggressively smashes many gnomes by hands or with the help of tools. By using violence, he showcased his strength and protected the people who are with him. Zach also conforms to the stereotype called "the Sturdy Oak". According to Brannon (2004), "the Sturdy Oak" refers to the necessity for a man facing challenging circumstances to be tough, confident, and reliable (Brannon, p. 163). In the movie, Zach, acting as the leader for the team, is very reliable as he commands and leads other people. Moreover, he also protects and saves other people in a crisis and puts other people's needs above his own. Zach acts as a dependable man, particularly in the scene where they are trying to evacuate the students at high school. As the heroic and reliable male character, he instructs other people to help barricade the school and create a defence to keep the monsters away.

At the beginning of the movie, Zach refused to be associated with feminine traits, yet Zach expresses his emotional side towards the movie's climax. He is introduced as someone who refused to be seen as weak and vulnerable. His refusal to admit his feelings can be seen in how he responds to his mother whenever she shows or talks about something related to his deceased father. Similar to his refusal to be labelled as a "scaredy-cat", Zach always puts up a façade and lies about his emotions to not be seen weak by people around him. The action shows that Zach finds emotional vulnerability to be unmanly. However, after meeting Hannah, Zach slowly opens up and accepts the vulnerability by admitting that he feels lonely and sad about his father's death. After confronting R.L Stine about Hannah's identity, Zach discovers that Stine is just a lonely man who wanted to be accompanied by someone. He shares that he can relate to R.L Stine's loneliness as his father's death made him become a closed-off person. Society viewed feminine traits (e.g., emotionally expressive, nurturing, dependent, etc.) to threaten masculine identities (Kilmartin,

1994). By allowing the emotional moment between Zach and R.L Stine, the movie subtly leaves the notion that men are allowed to display their emotions. Moreover, they both accepted these emotions as something normal instead of mocking each other for being vulnerable.

Compared to Zach, who is portrayed as a partly stereotypical male hero, Sonny Quinn, Sarah's younger brother and the male hero, defy the stereotypical male characteristic. If Sarah acted daring and courageous as a female heroine, Sonny offered the complete opposite as he served mainly as a timid and weak male hero. Moreover, due to his physical appearance and hobby in pursuing science and lack of friends, Sonny is strapped to the stereotypical "fat boy" character. According to Hanna (2019), in the research on *Harry Potter and the Fat Stereotype*, there are two types of fat characters: the one who bullies and the one who is bullied. These characters are usually ridiculed for their physical appearance or lack of intelligence (Hanna, 2019). Sonny falls to the latter category as Tommy bullies him. He also lacks the confidence to defend himself, which are very apparent when Sonny and Sam react to a particular problem. The movie establishes Sonny as the timid one while his best friend, Sam, is the opposite. In the story, Sonny and Sam are bullied by Tommy, where they are mocked for picking up junk in their spare time and for being together most of the time. (Sandel, 2018, 08:52)

Tommy: Hey, Junk Bros.

Sam: Spit wads? What are you, 9?

Tommy: What'd you say?

Sonny: [whispering] Sam, what are you doing?

Sam: I got this.

Sam responds by talking back to Tommy and showing that he refuses to be treated horribly by Tommy and his friends. Meanwhile, Sonny reacts by timidly giving in to whatever Tommy asked him to do, and most of the time, he allows Tommy to trample over him as he felt that he is too weak to defend himself. There is also a scene where Tommy and his friends forced Sonny and Sam to give up the items they got from their junk hunting. Sonny tends to be passive because he wanted to stay out of trouble. Unlike the typical male hero who fights for his rights with all his power, Sonny prefers to admit defeat and submit to Tommy's coercion. Fat characters often lack agency compared to slim characters; thus, they become "comic relief or the punch-lines of jokes" (Hanna, 2019, p. 5). Unlike other fat characters whose weight plays comic relief in the movie, Sonny's naivety makes him the punch-line instead. When Sarah, Sonny and Sam tried to retrieve the book from Tommy, they asked whether Tommy has the book with him right now, in which he replied he does. Tommy's answer is sarcastic, but Sonny is the only one gullible enough to think that Tommy has the book with him. The punch-line is in Sonny's expression as he smiles widely for a moment, thinking that Tommy is helping them. Knowing that Tommy is a mean person who bullies him daily, it is unlikely for Tommy to cooperate in returning the book immediately. The stereotype of an unintelligent fat character is prevalent in movie tropes. The comedy happens as the fat character does not have enough common sense to read the room or situation (Hanna, 2019).

Sonny is a male hero who refuses to use violence to solve a problem. One of the traits from Male Gender Identity is named "Give 'Em Hell", where there is a normalization of men to be violent, aggressive and daring. If Sonny is compared to Sarah, the female heroine uses more violence and aggression to defend herself, while Sonny tends to be anxious with the thought of using violence. An example is in the scene where Sarah, Sonny and Sam went to throw Slappy into the river. While Sarah and Sam seem to be fine hitting Slappy with a baseball bat and throwing the ventriloquist dummy to the river, Sonny panicked because he felt like they just did a crime by killing a dummy (Sandel, 2018, 38:06).

Sonny: Am I the only one that feels like we are committing a crime right now?

Sarah: It's a dummy, the only crime we are committing is littering.

Not only does Sonny express his fear about murdering a ventriloquist dummy, but he also seems somewhat nervous and anxious after they threw Slappy into the river. This shows that Sonny is afraid of the outcome of their actions and the possibility that someone might discover what they did. When they left the location, Sonny still looked nervous and said they killed a puppet (Sandel, 2018, 38:53). Sarah assures that it is something they had to do and tells them to forget it ever happened because nobody will believe their story. Despite Sarah's explanation, Sonny still looks visibly worried about the outcome. This shows that Sonny defies the tough and confident stereotype that are commonly found in male heroes. Another scene also exhibits Sonny's tendency to worry about his action, particularly when Sonny and Sam break into Tommy's house to get the book back. He is appalled with the idea of breaking into someone's house and even expresses his disbelief by saying, "I can't believe we are breaking into someone else's house right now." (Sandel, 2018, 49:35).

Sonny displays a lack of confidence as he finds himself unable to execute the "masculine" standard. The term gender role discrepancy strain arguably fits Sonny's perception of himself as the movie reaches its climax. According to Pleck (1981, 1995) as cited in Rummell and Levant (2014), gender role discrepancy is the failure to perform the ideal gender norms. As a result, there is an inconsistency in how a man thinks he should be and how a man sees himself. Since he fails to fulfil the "masculine" standard, Sonny finds himself to be lacking self-confidence and questioning his capability to hijack the machine that controls the tower (Sandel, 2018, 1:12:01).

Sam: Oh no, Sonny. Hurry up! Slappy's at the top. Do something.

Sonny: I can't do it, Sam.

Sam: C'mon Sonny, you are the smartest kid I know.

Sonny: Sam, I couldn't even do my little science project. Slappy did that and even that one shorted out.

In the four spheres of Male Gender Role Identity, Brannon (1976) define "the Big Wheel" as the need for men to reach success and gain respect and authority in society. For Sonny, his quest for success lies in his science project. So, the failure made Sonny find himself to be unqualified and incapable to settle problems. Sonny's failure could have been the movie's attempt to defy the stereotype as it shows men do not have to be successful all the time and they should accept the failures as part of the learning process. However, the movie quickly makes him overcome the phase by allowing Sonny to formulate a new plan by hijacking the tower to its total capacity. As a result, the narration makes Sonny conform to one of the stereotypes. To be a heroic and manly character, Sonny displays the intelligence and applies his knowledge about the Tesla Tower. Furthermore, the movie transforms Sonny's lack of masculinity by giving him an ending that displays his accomplishment. This time he completes a new version of his Tesla tower project and wins an award for his success. In the end, after being a male hero that defies all the masculine stereotype, the film still ultimately wants Sonny to fulfil one of the masculinity spheres, which is through the display of his intelligence.

All in all, the male hero and female heroine from *Goosebumps* (2015) conform to the stereotypes. Despite being depicted as characters that defy stereotypes at the beginning of the movie, these characters still behave according to the traditional gender stereotypes. On the other hand, the male hero and female heroine from *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) are shown

to defy these stereotypes. Unfortunately, the movie's ending shows that they still conform to the stereotype through the display of the female heroine needing the male hero's assistance to defeat the enemy and the male hero using his scientific knowledge to save the day.

B. *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018): The Inconsistent Depictions of the Female Heroines

Gender stereotypes in films are linked to how characters and their agencies are represented or depicted). In a horror setting, the female heroine's agency determines their chance of survival against the perpetrator or the killer. This example is very apparent in the depictions of 'final girls' in slasher movies, in which their capabilities and abilities increase the chance of defeating the killer themselves. It can be said that individuals play an integral role in adjusting how actions bring changes and impacts to the surrounding (Barker, 2003). In *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018), independence is the key factor of how Hannah Stine and Sarah Quinn are represented. Their independence allows the two female heroines to make their own decisions, showcases their leadership ability, and formulates plans without other characters' interference.

However, Hannah Stine from *Goosebumps* (2015) has ambivalence depictions in which she becomes disempowered as the story progresses. The ambivalence happens as the movie contravenes her characteristics in the beginning of the movie and the ending. At the earlier part of the movie, Hannah Stine is portrayed to be capable and courageous. She leads Zach to an abandoned amusement park, which she claims to be her favourite place. Compared to Zach, Hannah is not scared of heights or unknown places, which makes her visit all these places by herself before meeting Zach. She even encourages Zach to climb the Ferris wheel, so they can see the city view. In another scene, specifically, after Zach and another male character named Champ unleash the Abominable Snowman from Pasadena, Hannah immediately takes action to try and get the monster back into the book. However, Zach and Champ hinder the attempt by telling her to run away from the monster without listening to her explanation. It is revealed later that to get the monster back into the book; someone must be holding the book open at a close distance, which is what Hannah is trying to do. This conversation shows Hannah's frustration at Zach and Champ as she tries to capture the monster (Letterman, 2015, 35:10-35:18).

Zach: Come on, it's distracted. Hannah, come on! Let's go!

Hannah: No, what are you doing? Get off. No. Stop it! No, you don't understand. The only way to stop them is to put them back into the book.

Champ: Drop the book and let it suck itself back in.

The conversation exhibits how the male characters around Hannah insisted on running away from the monster instead of defeating it. Not only did they insist on running away, but they also drag Hannah by the arms to stop her from capturing the monster. As a result, these male characters took Hannah's independence from her, affecting her agency as a female heroine. They also completely disregard Hannah's action and decision by choosing to stop her action by force. In the end, Hannah is unable to capture the monster, and her father is the one who did it. By denying Hannah's capability to capture the monster, the movie robs Hannah of her possibility of becoming an independent female character.

The ambivalence in her representation resulted in Hannah reverting to a passive and dependent trait, which contradicts her earlier portrayals in the movie. For example, Hannah does not contribute to formulating the plans with the other male characters and instead asks, "What

are we going to do now?” or agrees to whatever Zach offers. There is the scene when Hannah, Zach, Champ, and R.L Stine are in the city centre and see the chaos Slappy causes. (Letterman, 2015, 52:50-53:07).

Hannah: What are we going to do?

R.L Stine: Without the manuscripts, there's nothing I can do.

Zach: if you write the monsters off the page, then maybe there's a way you could write them back on.

[R.L Stine disagrees with the idea thinking it's not possible.]

Hannah: Dad, just listen to him, it's a great idea.

In this scene, Zach suggests R.L Stine write a new story, which will later suck all the monsters back into the book. The previous scene affirms Zach's domination when he tells them to get R.L Stine a computer by breaking into an IT store. In contrast, Hannah stands on the side and follows all his directions without initiating ideas or solutions. Despite R.L Stine's disagreement, Hannah fully supports Zach's idea without sharing her opinions about it, even though she seems to know more about the problem compared to Zach. Hannah's passiveness is seen in how she does not offer a solution and instead agrees with the male hero's idea. As a result, Hannah's agency in the film weakens because the male hero makes most decisions for her. The ambivalence in Hannah's agency can be seen from how she is completely passive in the previous scene, yet actively engages in proactive behaviour afterwards. For example, Hannah suggested a shortcut which the male hero did not think of. (Letterman, 2015, 57:48-58:00)

Zach: How far are we from the high school?

Hannah: Not too far. We can cut through the cemetery.

Zach: I'm sorry, a cemetery?

Hannah: God, relax. The high school's just past the woods.

R.L Stine: Excuse me? How do you know that?

Hannah: Uh, sometimes I get a little stir-crazy and go exploring.

R.L Stine: When?

Hannah: At night after you go to bed.

However, the movie tried to redeem Hannah's lack of agency by letting her lead the group to the shortcut. Similar to how Hannah discovers an abandoned amusement park, she also knows her way around the town by venturing to various shortcuts on her own. This creates the impression that Hannah was independent before the male lead came into her life. Not only is she courageous and adventurous, but her hobby to visit hidden places and shortcuts in town became one of her strongest points compared to Zach. Yet, this agentic trait of hers is not showcased enough in the movie, leaving the impression that she can offer something for the team only on certain occasions.



Figure 1: Hannah tells Zach to distract the monster



Figure 2: Hannah hides behind Zach

Hannah is allowed to be agentic, but there are limitations on how agentic she can be. She is agentic and bold, but not enough to take the spotlight from the male hero, Zach. After she showed her assertive side, she reverts to the passive and dependant version of herself, and by doing so, she allows the male lead to be “heroic” as he becomes the one who protects and saves other people. For example, when they encountered the Werewolf from the Fever Swamp, Hannah expects Zach to save her father, who is hiding from the werewolf by saying, “Do something.” (Letterman, 2015, 1:00:54). Hannah becomes dependant as she chose to rely on the male lead and not on her strength even though she might have been capable of saving her father too. The movie subtly leaves the message that a woman can only be independent when she is on her own. However, she should limit her independence and rely on a man’s help if a man is there to save her. According to Zuvela (2012), movies often undervalue women’s capabilities by rarely offering a powerful character who can overcome difficult circumstances alone. Movies repeatedly depict women as “objects or reasons for the main twist” (p.7).

In another case, Sarah Quinn in *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) sets a good depiction of a female heroine’s agency in a horror movie. Sarah is seen to be very agentic as she displays leadership qualities rarely seen in a female heroine. Her agency got stronger as she decided on behalf of the team to save the town and protect her family from harm. Compared to her timid younger brother, Sarah tends to take the matter into her own hands by using tools to protect herself or thinking smartly in solving various problems. Like *Goosebumps* (2015), Slappy, one of R.L Stine’s most evil characters and the movie’s main antagonist, comes back to life once again. In the second movie, Slappy plans to bring Halloween to life and create his own family. After Sarah, her younger brother Sonny, and his best friend Sam realised Slappy’s evil intention, Sarah is the first to confront Slappy by swinging a baseball bat to shut him up. Unlike Hannah who mostly relies on Zach’s help, Sarah uses her strength to eliminate obstacles and takes the role of capable leader to protect her family.

Sarah Quinn is a capable older sister and an empowered female heroine who stood on her ground. After discovering how bad the situation has escalated, Sonny suggested getting help from someone who knows R.L Stine. After getting the number, Sarah, without hesitation, calls the number. As nobody answers their call, Sarah said, “Well, looks like we are on our own.” (Sandel, 2018, 46:08). Despite being unsure of the situation and having no one to rely on except themselves, Sarah is depicted as discerning and quick-witted. Without making a prolonged discussion, Sarah quickly planned the next move and said that she would find Tommy and get the book back. This book plays a significant role and will later help Sarah to capture all the monsters. At first, Sonny and Sam ask Tommy about the book, but Tommy did not take them seriously. Tommy ends up underestimating Sarah for being the older woman between the two boys by assuming her position as their babysitter (Sandel, 2018, 46:38-45:56).

Tommy: Now go back home with your babysitter. I'll be there in a bit to egg your house.

Sarah: Listen you little punk, I'm not the babysitter. I am Sonny's sister. You're gonna give us that book back or I'll make your life a living hell. The only thing that you'll use that toilet paper for is to wipe...

Tommy: Okay, okay. You don't have to be so mean about it.

From this conversation, Sarah confidently stands up for herself by not allowing anyone, including Tommy, to underestimate her. She did so by establishing her position and saying that she is Sonny's sister. Not only did she refute Tommy's degrading remark about her, but she is also not afraid to threaten Tommy to get the book back. As a female heroine, Sarah delivers the message that girls should not be afraid to stand up for themselves and play a significant role outside the domestic role.

When comparing the two female heroines, Sarah is shown to be more consistently empowered. Unfortunately, the movie's ending shows that Sarah needs her brother's help to control the Tesla tower. This ambivalence in character portrayal contradicts the empowered version of herself that is presented throughout the movie. Sarah did her share of saving the city by holding the book open to absorb all the monsters into it. Moreover, she is the one who confronts and distracts Slappy while the male hero focuses on finding a solution to turn off the machines. However, the male hero's interference is deemed necessary for the book to reach its full capability in trapping all the monsters. Sarah's dependence on the male hero is shown by saying, "Come on, Sonny. Turn this thing off." (Sandel, 2015, 1:11:58). Consequently, she ends up relying on the male hero's support and assistance to turn off the Tesla tower's machine despite showing her capabilities and strength many times in the movie.

To sum up, the two movies attempted to offer empowered female heroines. Nevertheless, Hannah Stine's depiction is inconsistent as her agency seems to be connected to the male hero's character development. On the other hand, Sarah Quinn remains more agentic as she consistently demonstrates her boldness and courageous trait, which Hannah fails to do. However, the movie subverts Sarah Quinn's empowering portrayals by relying on the male character's knowledge and ability in science.

CONCLUSION

One of the characteristics of horror movies is their sexist depiction of female characters, *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) attempted on creating female heroines that are independent and powerful. Nevertheless, these attempts do not go very far, as *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) shows ambivalent depictions of the female heroines. At the start, the movie depicted Hannah as an agentic female heroine, but she becomes passive and dependent as she develops friendship with the male hero. Even when she is agentic, her agency is limited, so she will not overpower the male hero. On the other hand, Sarah Quinn in *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) is relatively agentic and empowered, but she needs a male character's help to finish the conflict.

The ambivalence is shown in the contradicting portrayal of the characters in the earlier part of the film and the ending. Both *Goosebumps* (2015) characters exhibit and revert to stereotypical traits, despite showing the possibility of defying these gender stereotypes. For example, the movie displays Hannah as bold, curious, and independent, but these characteristics diminish, and she started to rely on the male hero to protect her. At the same time, Zach's earlier depiction as an easily scared boy has steadily changed to the stereotypical male hero with aggressive and bold behaviour over the course of the movie. These conflicting representations

also happen in *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018), where the female heroine and male hero defy gender stereotypes at first. Unfortunately, the movie's ending shows that the female heroine still needs the male hero's knowledge to save the day, making the movie display her as a conventional female heroine. Moreover, Sonny, the male hero who does not fulfil the masculine standard, ultimately becomes a typical male hero and saves the day by using his scientific knowledge.

Overall, *Goosebumps* (2015) and *Goosebumps: Haunted Halloween* (2018) show that gender stereotypes are still prevalent within the horror movie industry. Like the characters in the subgenre slasher, movies like these still demonstrate stereotypical female heroines and male heroes who somehow try to defy stereotypes but did not make it far enough for the characters to be wholly impactful and empowered. Moreover, the apparent inconsistency in female heroines' agency in horror movies for young adults as seen in Bond (2009) and Curtis (2016) is still reoccurring in these two movies, which further unveils that filmmakers still need to work on the representations of the female heroines. Future research should analyse the female heroines of horror movies beyond the subgenre of slasher or young adult thriller (e.g., supernatural horror movies like *the Conjuring* and *Insidious*) to see whether they also offer ambiguous depiction of female heroines' agency.

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