Colonial Academic Alliance Undergraduate Research Journal

Volume 2 Article 6

11-11-2011

What Are Little Girls Made Of?: Abjection and the Queer Child in Hard Candy

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Recommended Citation
Wade, Hadass S. (2011) "What Are Little Girls Made Of?: Abjection and the Queer Child in Hard Candy," *Colonial Academic Alliance Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 2, Article 6.
Available at: http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/caaurj/vol2/iss1/6

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Introduction

Hard Candy (dir. David Slade, 2005) is a film that challenges the conceptual categories of good and evil, monster and victim, villain and hero. Hayley (Ellen Page), the protagonist, is a 14-year-old girl who takes her relationship with thirty-two-year-old Jeff Kohlver (Patrick Wilson) from the safety of the Internet into real life. The narrative initially establishes her as ripe for victimization, but, about 24 minutes in, we realize that Jeff is *her* victim. The rest of the film's 140-minute running time is devoted to her slow, methodical exploration of Jeff's home, body and mind as she tries to get him to admit to abducting and murdering a girl named Donna Mauer. The film is, in effect, an exploration of the monstrousness that is present in both of the main characters. It is this dynamic between victim and monster that is the foundation of my study. Though *Hard Candy* is not a horror film, it borrows elements from different cycles of the horror genre, including the Final Girl of the slasher film, the avenger of the rape-revenge film, and the torturer of torture porn films. This engagement with the horror tradition has informed my analysis of the film's portrayal of gender and its connection to the theory of abjection. I will argue that *Hard Candy* is an intersection of queerness and abjection, as evidenced by the film's deviation from the female victim/male monster standard of horror film.

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982) provides a portion of the theoretical framework of this analysis; she establishes a structure for understanding abjection, a concept that is ambiguous by nature. Kristeva defines it in numerous ways, the primary quality being that the abject is not of the self; it threatens the self, the subject. The abject, like the object, is opposed to the subject. Whereas the object is included in the conception of self because it defines *I*, the abject, however, is "radically excluded;" it threatens or destroys the boundary between self and other, it is the "place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). It must be excluded from the place of the subject, yet tolerated, because in threatening life, it helps to define life. A key example of the abject is the corpse: a body without a soul, human, but not human. The abject is "what disturbs identity, system, and order…[it] does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4).

The abject is dealt with quite directly in horror cinema. Horror films are visually explicit in their engagement with abjection: blood, gore, pus, dead bodies and bodies that cross the boundary between human and nonhuman are common features. *Hard Candy* steers away from such visual and graphic entanglement. The film's initial and enduring relationship with the abject is in terms of crime. According to Kristeva, "any crime [is abject], because it draws attention to the fragility of the law… but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more [abject] because they heighten the display of such fragility" (4).

Hard Candy begins with the suggestion of a crime in a close-up of a computer screen that shows an IM chat session between "Thonggrrrl14" and "Lensman319." The viewer witnesses the exchange from "Thonggrrrl14's" computer screen, yet not from her perspective. The camera slowly roves down the screen to include the text-entry field; oscillating as the framing grows ever tighter on the IM window. There is one cut as "Thonggrrrl14" replies, "then you wouldn't have to fantasize." The cut and the camera's change in position function as a blink, a signal that a boundary has been crossed in this sexual banter between man and "grrrl." There is a cut to black after she confirms their meeting, "see you soon. xxxxoooo."

Like the rest of the film, this opening scene concerns itself with boundaries. According to Barbara Creed, "the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject" (*The Monstrous Feminine* 10-11). In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), Creed extends Kristeva's theory of abjection to horror film. She outlines three ways in which horror films depict abjection: images of bodily wastes and the corpse, the construction of the monstrous in terms of a border, and the construction of the maternal figure, and, thus, the feminine, as abject. The IM conversation establishes two figures that violate boundaries: a pedophile and a sexual child. Both of these figures promise to transgress those boundaries by the end of the narrative.

Hard Candy's engagement with abjection is sustained though the violation of boundaries and the presence of the monstrous-feminine. Creed's monstrous-feminine is a form of transgressive femininity that is based on an understanding of the female's special relationship to the abject. The female is the object of desire, yet her body is also seen as disgusting because of its maternal functions and her relationship to excrement (in menstruation, child birth and child rearing). Monstrous femininity has numerous embodiments in horror film, but it is Creed's *femme castratrice*, the castrating female figure, that is the key to my analysis in the link between abjection and queerness within the film. This figure is a confrontation of castration anxiety and includes both the slasher film's Final Girl and the avenger of rape-revenge narratives. The avenger is usually quite literally a castrating figure, while the Final Girl is more symbolically castrating.

The Final Girl of the slasher film is a figure defined by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) as "the one who did not die" (35). She is the one who either defeats the monster or delays him until she is rescued by the (male) hero. Identified early in the narrative as the main character, this "not fully feminine" female is intelligent, resourceful, and, most importantly, "sexually reluctant," unlike her friends (Clover 40). Through the Final Girl, the viewer's understanding of the situation is matched and the hero function is performed or enabled. "The moment at which the Final Girl is effectively phallicized is the moment that the plot halts and terror ceases" (Clover 50).

To Creed, however, Clover's Final Girl is problematic because it ignores the *castrating* role of the figure, instead, characterizing her as a "pseudo man," or "phallic woman" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 127). Creed challenges Clover's definition and re-reads the Final Girl as a *femme castratrice*, a category that includes the heroines of the rape-revenge film. Clover's own analyses of rape-revenge films provide a parallel between the Final Girl and the rape avenger. Similar to the Final Girl in function, the rape avenger goes after the male(s) responsible for her (or another woman's) rape. Like a rape avenger, Hayley traps Jeff with the sole purpose of punishing him for his role in Donna's murder.

Hard Candy combines the figures of the Final Girl and the rape avenger into one character with agency. Hayley Stark is not just the Final Girl: she is the *only* girl and the last girl Jeff Kohlver ever sees. As Hayley says: "There's that word again. *Girl*." Hayley's youth has an unsettling effect on the film's treatment of gender. It is an aspect of the film that cannot be linked to other models of horror film, not even those centered on a horrific child. Those narratives feature children who are either demonically possessed or who are spawns of Satan. In *The Exorcist* (dir. William Friedkin, 1973), Regan's transformation is the result of demonic possession; she is never in control of the vile things she says or does. In contrast, Hayley is completely in control of her actions and her identity. Her transgression of the boundary of youth lies in the transitory nature of her identity: from her masquerade of adult femininity, to her masquerade of girlish naïveté, to her embodiment of the *femme castratrice*.

In *The Queer Child, Or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), Katherine Stockton provides an additional lens through which to view this character. I must note that my casting of Hayley as a *queer child* is removed from any assumption of the character's sexual preference; it is more a way of engaging with her transitory identity. Whereas Jeff is ultimately revealed for what he is, a killer (or at least a participant in a murder) and a pedophile, Hayley's "true" identity is never anything more than an idea. Stockton's description of the *queer child* and her sideways growth lends itself to this reading of Hayley. The child exists in a liminal state, neither here nor there, and is only recognized as queer in hindsight. Sideways growth is a result of feeling queer, a "feeling of fearful self-disclosure [that] may concern any child who feels out of sync with the children around her or feels repelled by the future being mapped for her" (Stockton 52).

Hayley's identity is a monstrous queerness (or queer monstrousness), which can be further explained by Stockton. Stockton introduces "the child queered by Freud," "the not-yet-straight child who is, nonetheless, a sexual child with aggressive wishes" (27). This incarnation of the queer child is defined as having hostile motives in her interactions with adults: "adult perversions are clearly threatened by aggressive children" (29). Hayley's aggression toward Jeff has everything to do with *his* perversions and the threat he poses. In her liminal state as child, Hayley is vulnerable to pedophiles, but her future is not much brighter as she will still have to deal with her vulnerability to sexual assault.

Donna Mauer is a stand-in for the assaulted or victimized female. Likewise, Jeff's monstrosity has larger implications in the narrative. He is not a single monster: he represents the cultural conditions that make that victimization a reality. Thus, we come full circle to Hayley as Final Girl and rape avenger.

Hard Candy explores this victim/monster relationship, which has evolved past the female victim/male monster standard of horror film. My analysis of this relationship entails a discussion of abjection, age and gender and how these elements collaborate within the film. *Hard Candy* deals heavily in the abject, specifically concerning crime, boundaries and the monstrous-feminine on the narrative level. Images of abjection abound in horror films: blood and gore, bodily fluids and dead bodies are common features. However, *Hard Candy* obscures images of abjection through framing, editing and camera movement: abjection is more of an idea than an image, one that is visually and thematically related to queerness. In the film, there are no copious amounts of blood, nor are there any dead bodies; Donna's murder and Jeff's suicide both occur off screen. The film concerns itself with boundaries, both narratively and cinematically, through character, cinematography and editing. Character is intertwined with the abject, but it is also intimately linked with queerness in that the film's queerness is mobilized by and around Hayley's character. Her fulfillment of the role of Final Girl, avenger and torturer illustrates a mutation of gender beyond a strict binary and opens a queer space within the film.

"Then You Wouldn't Have to Fantasize": Crossing Boundaries

Following the IM scene, the viewer is brought into the real space of Nighthawks, where Hayley and Jeff will rendezvous. The introductory image that takes us from the virtual into the real is an extreme close-up of Hayley's tiramisu as she cuts into it with a fork. Hayley's profile is caught in a medium shot as she slowly pulls the fork from her mouth, moaning in delight. This image and those that follow can be read as belonging to "the pleasure realm children excel in…the economy of candy" (Stockton 127). Hayley's first appearance on camera further characterizes her as a seductive innocent, her childlike glee over the dessert contrasting with her moans, which infuse the moment with sexuality. The preceding cut to black functions as a cinematic boundary, which Hayley and Jeff cross as they simultaneously transgress narrative boundaries. Jeff's approach is captured in a medium shot, the camera zooming out as he moves toward Hayley, who still has her back turned. The time between his approach and his first words is relatively lengthy, collaborating with the camera's actions to suggest a voyeurism that is aligned with his screen name and profession. If, previously, we are caught in a sweetly rapturous moment, now we are in a darker space as we, too, are implicated in this voyeurism. Jeff is an interloper in this moment, a voyeur who is given his own moment to watch her.

The reverse shot is a shallow focus medium shot of Hayley as she turns to face him, chocolate smeared on her lips. Jeff's arm is disembodied in the

following shots as he wipes the chocolate from her bottom lip with his thumb. The initial contact is shown in a medium close-up of Hayley's face, his arm taking up almost half the frame before a cut to another medium profile shot of her as he withdraws his hand. The series culminates in a medium close-up of Jeff as he licks the chocolate from his thumb. These shots are another example of the film's visual engagement with the abject. Here, chocolate is like blood or gore, in that they each provoke reactions of disgust. In this case, disgust results from the chocolate's function as a sexual exchange between a man and a child. A dynamic is established that mimics their IM conversation, simultaneously sexual and ominous.

At the start of the next sequence, the camera continues its constant motion, functioning as a pointed finger. The camera dollies toward Hayley while tilting up, catching Jeff in close-up before centering on a "Missing Persons" poster on the bulletin board above their table. Donna Mauer is immortalized in this image for a brief moment before a quick cut to Hayley. The camera's motion is graceful and slow prior to this cut, gently suggesting a link between the three individuals before forcing attention back to Hayley and Jeff. Perhaps, the shots can also be a visual analogy for the events that are to come: Hayley is to Jeff as Jeff is to Donna Mauer. The shot/reverse shot continues, but the camera has already revealed its positioning from a place that does not originate from either character. The specter of Donna Mauer, the idea of the corpse, is introduced and her presence reigns over the rest of the film.

Together, these opening scenes provide narrative exposition, but, more importantly, establish the visual terms of engagement with abjection. Hayley and Jeff's rendezvous at Nighthawks functions as a reiteration, a re-enactment of their IM session. Hayley and Jeff are embodiments of abjection; in this way, abjection is always going to be onscreen. The narrative has established a conflict between a seductive innocent and a pedophile. These figures propel the narrative toward its inevitable conclusion, a criminal act, which is always a site of abjection. Donna Mauer's missing persons poster is a finger pointing to this site.

"Carpe Omnious": The Terrible Place

The IM scene and the two scenes that follow work together to create tension between these two characters, which generic rules tell us will pan out in one of two ways: either Hayley will survive this as the Final Girl, or she will end up like Donna Mauer. Her initial characterization, however, fails to construct her as a convincing Final Girl. Through her conversation with Jeff, Hayley is clearly seen as more intelligent than others of her age, more mature. Yet she retains signs of her youth, and her foolishness in meeting with him is obvious. A parallel can be drawn between Hayley, in her red, hooded sweatshirt, and Little Red Riding Hood (a common reference in horror): both of them have strayed from the path and into the wolf's territory. In Hayley's case, it is uncertain if a woodsman will be happening by in time to save her.

Another function of the red sweatshirt is as a symbol of menstruation (and, thus, the abject monstrous-feminine), which indicates her biological sexual maturity while contrasting with the body it covers. She lacks womanly curves and has boyishly short hair, but she shields that lack with her apparent maturity and mastery of flirtation. The scene is peppered with these contrasting details: during their conversation, she mentions that she's getting a head start on the *ninth grade* reading list and then explains that she is also auditing a college level medical course taught by her father. The interplay of her youth and maturity/intelligence is an uncomfortable reminder of the ambiguity of that period of female adolescence where no adult male belongs.

However, shortly after arriving at his house, Hayley's Final Girl status is more certain. Jeff carries two glasses of water over to where she is sitting, stops and extends his hand, offering her a glass. There is a cut to Hayley in close-up and a slight pan over to include the offered glass as she looks at it. Hayley's gaze is a challenge as she reminds him: "They teach us young things not to drink anything we haven't mixed ourselves." The cut and camera movement force the viewer *and* Jeff to acknowledge that not only is she in a vulnerable position, but she is very aware of it.

According to Clover, the Final Girl's "unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the 'active investigating gaze' normally reserved for males" (48). Jeff's home emphasizes the idea of the masculine gaze: the walls of his living room operate as his "portfolio." There are many pictures of girls: one whose torso is amputated by the framing of the photo while another is seemingly headless because of the photograph's angle. The subjects are framed (photographs) within frames (walls) within the frame (the camera) and decapitated at the head by this framing. The framing and the interplay of colors give the interior of Jeff's house an ominous, maze-like appearance. The photographs point to a violence with no blood evidence: the decapitated girls in the photos are reminders of Donna Mauer, robbed of their gaze by the photographer.

In the kitchen, Hayley and Jeff are shown again in shot/reverse shot: Jeff against the kitchen's red wall as he watches her, half his face in shadows. Cutting to Hayley, the framing is widened to include the red wall and his shadow's retreat as he goes to put on some music, which draws attention to the absence of his gaze. Meanwhile, Hayley discovers vodka in the freezer and prepares cocktails. His return to the kitchen is a focus on Hayley in a medium long shot, his shoulder the only part of his body in frame, the camera following as he approaches. Like his approach in Nighthawks, the camera signals his voyeurism and consciously implicates the viewer. The cuts in between his exit and return to the kitchen draw attention to this slow advance and his active gaze.

As they drink, both Hayley and Jeff seem to succumb to the effects of the alcohol. Hayley asks increasingly more personal questions and Jeff obliges her by answering each of them. It is a subtle reversal of her initial vulnerability and goes further to establish her acquisition of the investigating gaze. He shows her his

studio, in which color and lighting depart from naturalism. They stand in front of a sunshine yellow backdrop and he proposes that they make a toast. "*Carpe omnious*," Hayley says, a shadow coming over her face. "Take it all," Jeff translates in an inquisitive tone. "Take it all," she confirms. The setting reinforces the theme of voyeurism and its centrality to his life (his home studio) while manipulation of lighting and color place the focus on Hayley.

Hayley soon darts off, searching the photos on the walls for the only model he has admitted to sleeping with. She finds it in his bedroom, where they stand in front of a wall of photos of a woman named Janelle, Jeff's first love turned supermodel. He is uncomfortable with her questions about Janelle, another hint at his increasing vulnerability. Impressed that Jeff gave a supermodel her start, Hayley convinces Jeff to photograph her. He jumps at the chance to release the role of the looked at and resume that of the looker. Jeff, now stumbling and slurring his words, moves toward her with his camera as she dances seductively on the sofa. The camera's focus goes in and out, mimicking his state of mind, but not taking on his point of view. She takes off her shirt, but he is still having trouble focusing, and so is the camera. He grows frustrated with her "phony, music video" dancing and his disorientation, failing to snap a shot of her before he passes out. The camera cuts to Hayley in close-up, zooms into extreme close-up and loses focus before cutting to black. Here, and in the beginning of the next scene, the camera aligns the viewer with Jeff even though there are no point-of-view shots.

His failure to capture her with his camera is the final clue that Hayley has appropriated this active gaze for her own purposes. This second cut to black is a turning point: if before Hayley was the victim and Jeff was the monster, the following scenes dictate a drastic role reversal. Jeff's home is now what Carol Clover termed the "Terrible Place," the place the victim believes to be a safe haven, but ultimately becomes "the walls that hold the victim in" (31)."

"Torture? […] This…is nothing": The Queer Child

The next image is a medium close-up of Jeff, a jacket covering his face, tied to a chair in front of the window. The camera retreats as he groans incoherently and we hear Hayley rushing toward him, the sound of her footsteps carrying through the cut to a medium close shot as she pulls the jacket from his head. Hayley is amputated at the neck by the camera's frame; her voice is amplified as she talks to him. Hayley's framing here is reminiscent of the girls in the photographs, which is ironic because she has robbed the photographer of his gaze.

This is the beginning of another exposition scene: their roles are now reversed. This inversion of the horror film formula of male tormentor/female victim drives the latter part of the film: she is not like the other girls. She begins a slow, methodical explanation of how Jeff came to find himself in such a position, her transformation from potential victim to punisher complemented by the cool,

blue light from the window and her face focused in steady close-up. Her mask of femininity has faded and reappears only to mock his foolishness to have believed it in the first place. The camera and the film's editing slow here. Initially, Jeff is calm, trying to convince her that she has misunderstood his motives: "I'm not the first guy to do something stupid to impress a girl. Does that deserve being tied up and tortured?" To which she replies, "torture? […] This…is nothing."

She spins his chair and moves away from him, crossing the frame in a way that blacks it out. There is a cut to a shallow focus shot of his suit jacket dangling from her hands before she slips it on, the role reversal in full effect. Lighting and color are naturalized again as she sits on the couch. She continues her accusations, searching through the jacket pockets. She puts on his glasses and looks at him, a literal depiction of her adopting (his) active male gaze. Our Final Girl is here, "making a spectacle of the killer and a spectator of herself" (Clover 60). She stands, removes the jacket, and stalks closer to him as he protests her charges. There is a close-up of her face as she stands in front of him again, the color suddenly changing back to the chilly blue tone from the beginning of the scene. She is getting angrier, spitting the word "pedophiles" at him. Jeff, too, is now cast in cold blue tones. This sequence establishes the unreliability of Hayley's identity through color and her literally playing dress up in Jeff's jacket and glasses. Her appropriation of the gaze is, in effect, a form of castration. Jeff is reduced to a passive, reactive role and rendered impotent for the time being.

Judith Halberstam's analysis of gender in the slasher film (in terms of the Final Girl) establishes a context for a queering of identity in line with Hayley's transformation. "Female bodies that do not splatter, then, are often sutured bodies, bodies that are in some way distanced from the gender constructions that would otherwise sentence them to a messy and certain death" (Halberstam 141). She goes on to argue that this kind of failure in constructions of gender appears at the limit of proper gender, which is also at the boundary of human/inhuman. It is this transgression that dominates the remainder of the film: while the film is confronting those limits through Hayley, it is also exploring them through Jeff, who is doing double time as victim-monster. This brings us back to the film's engagement with abjection in terms of boundaries. At one boundary, Jeff is constructed as monstrous because of his improper sexual desires. At this turning point, the film begins to connect to Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine, the line where Hayley transgresses proper gender roles. Hayley's gender queerness is quite visual, particularly in her playing dress-up with Jeff's jacket and glasses. Moreover, it is apparent in the ensuing physical and psychological struggles. Jeff gives up trying to reason with Hayley once she finds the shameful evidence of his true monstrosity. Hidden away in his safe she finds two items of interest: a disc containing child pornography and a photo of Donna Mauer.

Again, her photo is shown briefly, but the power of it, the condemning nature of this picture, is proved by Jeff's panic. He works his feet free of the ropes that bind them while Hayley is transfixed by the photo and takes the opportunity

to attack. The camera resumes frantic motion as he rolls himself into the bedroom and grabs the gun that Hayley had discovered earlier and had thrown carelessly onto the bed. Jeff is behaving like the panicked victims in slasher films; the shaky camera mirrors/mocks his panic and records his appropriation of this phallic object. Already, then, Hayley has figuratively castrated Jeff and his demasculinization nears completion. When he rolls back into the living room, Hayley has disappeared. The camera seems to vibrate as he looks around wildly; it begins to quake as she appears behind him, suffocating him with a length of saran wrap pulled tightly across his face. She releases him once he passes out, angry that she almost lost control of the situation. The camera is steady as she throws herself against the wall and cuts to black at the masochistic act.

Hayley's occupation of the monster role is thus characterized by a masochistic act. According to Aviva Briefel, "masochism is central to the construction of male monsters, who initiate their sadistic rampages with acts of self-mutilation" (1). This is yet another signifier of transgressed gender boundaries. Meanwhile, this third cut to black is an escalation: Jeff the victim is now confirmed as pedophile and murderer (or accomplice to murder), while Hayley is on the converged paths of the Final Girl, rape avenger, and torturer.

Hayley's entrance into avenger territory, which was hinted at in her earlier diatribe about pedophiles, is solidified by the sequence following the cut. When Jeff regains consciousness, he is bound to a table: the camera slowly pans down his body, coming to rest on the bag of ice placed over his genitals. Again, white light pulsates through the frame. Hayley's face looms over him and the flashes of light continue. The light of the image makes her appear angelic, but this is not heaven. As Carol Clover explains, "It lies in the nature of revenge and self-defense stories that the avenger or self-defender will become as directly or indirectly violent as her assailant" (123).

"Please Don't Cut Me": The *Femme Castratrice*

The torture aspect of the scene is obvious in the threat of castration, but, given that she does not actually commit the act, it is relegated to the realm of psychological torture. He is bound to the table for roughly 30 minutes of screen time, during which she mercilessly toys with him. The process reduces him to a hysterical, terrified, blubbering mess, which furthers the film's queering of gender. In Clover's discussion of slasher films, she argues that the acts of "cowering, screaming, fainting, trembling, [and] begging for mercy belong to the female" (117). In this film, particularly in this sequence, Jeff performs all of these functions except fainting. It is Hayley's specialized torture that so feminizes him. By the end of this sequence, Jeff will have experienced a 50-minute torture session. The length of the torture and the cold, sterile atmosphere evoked by the film's use of color and lighting call to mind the so-called "torture porn" film cycle that began with *Saw* (dir. James Wan) in 2004. In "Torture Porn and Surveillance Culture," Evangelos Tziallas examines the role of setting in his discussion of

torture porn films, noting that "torture porn's investment in containment and claustrophobia transforms the entire setting into a 'vaginal space' and weapon." This allows for a reading of Jeff's house, with its numerous red walls, as a vaginal space, perhaps explaining why Hayley was able to entrap him within his own home. Red is the color of violence, the color of menstrual blood, which "threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (Creed, "Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection" 71). As the camera resumes its motion throughout the castration sequence, snatches of red are brought into frame. Jeff's house turned operating room and the camera that records this transformation "[produce] some interesting queer energies as traditional dichotomies of gender roles and genderedness become diffused" (Tziallas).

Hayley's feminizing of Jeff through the threat of castration is a purification of sorts. Through her violation of his home as sanctuary, turning it into "the Terrible Place," Hayley is able to discover Jeff's secrets, confirm his guilt, and use them to manipulate him. Like Jigsaw of the *Saw* films, Hayley "forces [her] victim to confront [himself]" (Tziallas). It is her role as avenger/torturer that brings about his confessions: that he had abnormal sexual tendencies at an early age (which resulted in his Aunt Denise threatening to castrate him when he was nine years old) and that he had met Donna for coffee at Nighthawks. Throughout this sequence, Jeff is the embodiment of abject terror and the camera keeps him in close-up for most of it. By the time she finishes, both of them are sweating profusely, which is the only directly abject visual besides a cut on her forehead. Hayley uses the garbage disposal to dispose of his "testicles," tidies up, and excuses herself to take a shower.

Jeff frees himself and discovers that he has not been castrated. What he thought was his real-time castration streaming to the television was actually a pre-recorded medical procedure. In his second phallic appropriation, he grabs the scalpel and attempts to attack her in the shower. Hayley appears behind him, this time with her own phallus: a taser. When he pulls back the shower curtain, there is a shock cut to her approach from the red abyss of the hallway, which functions here as "[a screen] of color for the child's play of anger" (Stockton, p. 127). Again, he is overpowered; Jeff's aggression is no match for Hayley's. There is another cut to black: the images that follow depict Hayley dragging Jeff's limp body. At this cut, the criminal child becomes even more dominating.

Jeff wakes to find himself in the kitchen, strung up in a noose. Hayley is angry and bathed in blue tones again, but she is interrupted by a neighbor's visit. She plays the innocent child as she deals with Mrs. Tokuda (Sandra Oh), which makes her transition back to criminal child all the more chilling and draws attention to the ease with which she masquerades. She returns to Jeff, laying out his options: he can hang himself and she'll destroy all evidence of his crimes or she'll leave him there for someone to find him along with all of the evidence. Naturalistic tone and lighting return, and Jeff has another chance to free himself.

He catches her in a leg lock, knocks her to the floor and swings himself over to stand on the counter. Hayley flees and the camera follows, the images now slightly overexposed. Jeff obtains another phallus, this time a knife, and shakes the victim role and *his* masquerade. He violently stabs a picture on the wall, "You're all the same […] You wanna drive a man fucking crazy then go on your way." He calms himself, "You're right, Hayley…This is me, this is who I am, thank you for making me see it."

"It's the Only Way": Conclusion

The final confrontation occurs on the roof, Jeff's knife versus Hayley's gun. She gives him the same option she has given him before: he can either hang himself or have Janelle and everyone else find out what he really is. She explains that she has called Janelle, who is on her way to his house at that very moment and pleads with him to hang himself, to accept that "it's the only way." He composes himself and confesses that he merely watched while Donna Mauer was murdered, that he just wanted to take pictures. Then he offers to help her track down the other guy. But she already knows, and she has already "helped" that man to kill himself. This scene is overexposed by sunlight, intensifying the effect of these revelations. Hayley successfully robbed him of his gaze in the beginning of the film, but we now know that he never saw clearly at all. Her identity is even more of a masquerade than his. Everything Jeff (and the viewer) knows about her is a lie: all we know is that she is "every little girl [he] ever watched, touched, hurt, screwed, killed."

While the scene is overexposed by the sunlight, their faces become shadowed as she places the noose over his neck. The camera cuts to a long shot in silhouette and Jeff steps off the roof in slow motion. Jeff's transition from human being to human body occurs off screen; he essentially leaps out of the frame. Hayley, however, is able to look down at this corpse, her active gaze still intact. It is a partial ejection of the abject; one monstrous figure is eliminated. And what of the other? The film's final cut to black perhaps suggests a separation of Hayley from the roles she has taken up during the course of the narrative, divorcing her from her masquerades. She simply walks away.

Hard Candy's engagement with gender, abjection and the queer child culminates in this final scene. Both of these characters are abject for different reasons: Jeff for his sexual perversions and Hayley for her transgression of age and gender roles. The conflict between them is the catalyst for the gender mutation that occurs and the queer space that opens within the film. As the narrative progresses, the victim/monster relationship moves further away from that standard of horror: Hayley's aggression forces Jeff further into the feminization of the victim role. The function of constructions of the monstrous in horror films is to "bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens stability" (Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine* 11). However, most horror films allows for a clear distinction between victim and monster and the

complete ejection of the abject by the narrative's end. In *Hard Candy*, the line between victim and monster is never distinct and the queer monstrous-feminine escapes ejection.

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