Modern Monsters: Young American Selfhood

Mackenzie Gill
mgill@rollins.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors
Part of the American Popular Culture Commons, and the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This is brought to you for free and open access by Rollins Scholarship Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of Rollins Scholarship Online. For more information, please contact wzhang@rollins.edu.
Modern Monsters: Young American Selfhood

Mackenzie Gill
# Table of Contents

I. **Introduction** ................................................................. 3
   A. Shelley’s Monster .......................................................... 4
   B. Stoker’s Dracula ............................................................ 5
   C. Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde ............................................. 7
   D. The Rise of Popular Horror ............................................. 9

II. **Monsters in Children’s Television** .................................... 10
    A. Sesame Street and “Monster in the Mirror” ....................... 10

III. **Monsters in Children’s Literature** .................................. 16

IV. **Monsters in Children’s Movies** ...................................... 23
    A. Food Inspired by Monsters, Inc ........................................ 39
    B. Sexual Interpretations of Monsters, Inc ............................. 41

V. **Monsters in Young Adult Halloween Culture** ...................... 47
   A. Halloween Horror Nights ............................................... 48
   B. Dracula: Legacy in Blood .............................................. 54
   C. Halloween Costumes .................................................... 57

VI. **Conclusion** ................................................................ 61
Modern Monsters: Young American Selfhood

I. Introduction

The bloody, murderous reputation of Frankenstein and Dracula haunted society for almost a century. “Monster” seemed to be indelibly synonymous with horror, sex, and crime, and these associations survived perpetual narrative revision since the conception of these terrifying nineteenth-century classics. But somewhere along the way, a paradigm shift occurred: contemporary monsters are no longer relegated to the gloomy corners of adult novels or horror films. Kids eat Franken Berry cereal for breakfast, watch Sesame Street and Monsters, Inc., and dress like sexified monsters at Universal’s Halloween Horror Nights. After documenting the dark origin of Gothic monsters and the rise of a new monstrosity into America’s cultural consciousness, this paper will thematically examine the contemporary function of monsters, focusing on the cultural assimilation of fear and identity through monster spin-offs in the realm of young people. While at first it seems this shift is arbitrary, this paper argues that monsters have been rehabilitated from nightmares about the horrifying “other” and appropriated as not-so-scary companions for a deliberate reason: to revise young selfhood in American society by selling self-confidence in a convenient externalized form. A cultural close reading suggests people should accept the monster in the mirror because it is your friend; it is you.

A historical survey of the gothic British monster literature that inspired American horror movies sets the stage for the perversity of popular monstrosity today. According to cultural critic Judith Halberstam, gothic literature is a reaction to or a “disruption of realism and purity,” a narrative style designed to produce fear with ornamental excess and mayhem (2). This fear is unique in that monster literature revolves around an “aesthetic of pleasurable fear” that attracts mass appeal (Halberstam 12). The gothic novel accompanied the rise of capitalism as bourgeois
for consumers in its excess and extravagance, but there was widespread adult anxiety about consuming this popular literature or low art. Using the scholarly work of Halberstam and other monster academics as a guide, the next section with provide a thematic overview of Frankenstein’s monster, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—nineteenth-century horror icons—to investigate identity anxiety, establish what “monster” used to be, and generate a healthy skepticism regarding recent pop-culture monster trends.

**Shelley’s Monster**

James Heffernan, a scholar of monster representation asks an important question: how has a nameless monster inspired “nearly 200 films” (Heffernan 136)? Readers cannot even decide if Frankenstein’s monster is a “who” or a “what” but they, according to Halbertam, “deemonstrate” or express their attraction to the classic monster and his horrible tale by rabidly consuming and re-imagining the story since its conception in 1818 (2). The reanimation of cadaverous parts, brutalization of female flesh, and murder of an innocent woman make this story grotesque and repulsive. While Frankenstein’s monster was never electrocuted or described with stitching across his face in the novel, film adaptations take advantage of the tendency to categorize deformity as depravity (Heffernan 147), running wild with the creature’s words: “my form is a filthy type of yours” (Shelley 154). Audiences are so captivated by hideous monsters and the havoc that accompanies them that they easily accept what Aviva Briefel, a film representation specialist, calls their “proper place” as the “monster’s victim[s]” (18). This proper place survived unchallenged for decades.

Yet audiences cannot help but sympathize with the monster’s tortured longing to be seen as an “object of desire,” and his want to overcome his lonely monstrosity (Heffernan 144). Frankenstein’s monster admits: “I am malicious because I am miserable” (Shelley 173). This
odd trace of humanity in Shelley’s monster and the decay of Victor’s sanity questions whether Victor Frankenstein builds his monster or his monster builds him—a blatant commentary on the constructed nature of identity. Halberstam argues that Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein is about the making of a human who represents a constructed yet decomposing humanity (36), but others including fiction critic Marshall Brown have less faith in Shelley’s vision, insisting her book “is itself a monster” and a daydreamy “child’s tale” (155). Regardless, the transgressions of Frankenstein’s murderous supernatural monster are surprisingly pleasurable and entertaining because of the gothic “aesthetic of pleasurable fear”—a muddled mixture of horror and desire that inspires the senses beyond the conclusion of the book.

At the end of the novel, Victor Frankenstein watches his monster disappear:

He sprung from the cabin window as he said this upon an ice raft that lay close to the vessel and pushing himself off he was carried away by the waves and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness and distance (Shelley 119)

This ambiguous end becomes a haunting trope in monster literature; monsters are eternal—they cannot die. Perhaps Frankenstein’s monster is still alive today because people cannot kill a character or figment of their imagination. For the capitalist entrepreneur, this phenomenon reeks of huge commercial potential. Judith Halberstam self-consciously admits: “monsters sell books and books sell monsters” (12). Noting the immortality of monstrosity is critical to understanding the contemporary function of monsters. Shelley’s monster precedes many immortal monsters to come.

**Stoker’s Dracula**

While Bram Stoker’s Dracula spawned an entire vampirism craze that has largely overshadowed its Gothic roots, it is necessary to revive Dracula’s historical conception with a memorable scene from the original novel to understand why eating Count Chocula cereal and
learning 1-2-3’s with the Count on *Sesame Street* is so disturbing. Stoker’s *Dracula* was born in 1897 from a rich history of vampire myth as a symbol of the dark, perverse, foreign other and a “threat to domestic purity” in the midst of waxing English nationalism (Halberstam 14).

However, as gender representation scholar Christoph Craft points out, the most alarming dimension of Gothic Dracula is his parasitic, erotic deviance. The sexual connotations with vampirism are undeniable when Dr. Seward watches Dracula force Mina to consume his blood (Craft 125):

> With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension: his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (Stoker 336)

Mina recounts this symbolic “forced fellation [or] nursing” later in the novel (Craft 125):

> With that he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some of the—Oh, my God, my God! What have I done? (Stoker 343)

Craft captures this moment well: “Mina’s verbal ejaculation supplants the Count’s liquid one” (125). This scene commands a visceral reaction. The deviant pornographic nature of this act easily sears itself into the minds of readers, inspiring a never-ending chain of highly sexualized vampire spin-offs. If monsters embody what women’s studies scholar Stephanie Demetrakopoulos describes as deeply repressed “societal desires surface in fantasy form”(111), it is fascinating how America responds to the Count on Sesame Street: mothers purchase plush
versions of the vampire by the droves and nestle them next to their babies as snuggly sleeping friends. The contemporary coexistence of shirtless, body-penetrating Dracula and the 1-2-3 Count on *Sesame Street* needs to be reconciled.

**Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde**

Like Frankenstein and his monster or Dracula and Mina, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are intimately related, but perhaps even more closely considering the critical perspective of Halberstam who views this story as a “gruesome pregnancy parody” of one man within another (76). While this summary seems extreme, it is reasonable to agree with parts of this argument, namely there is nothing touching or sentimental about this “poisonous” novel that was “designed to shock not soothe” in 1886 (54). In fact, this intimacy mirrors a very real paranoid terror: the horror of losing self-control of “the monster in the master,” or the self within the self (57). This self-conscious anxiety is manifested in Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekll and Mr. Hyde* with explicit drug references (Stevenson 38), “crush[ing] children” (8) and beating an old man to a pulp augmented with the nauseating sound of audible bone-crushing (15). These horrors warn readers of the dangerous “other” within. Disrupting the myth of the unified self sickens people who cling to their pure notion of identity. While it is not surprising that a combination of good plus evil equals human, most recoil at the thought of a disjointed self and the impulsive animal inside. That is why it is so creepy when Dr. Jekyll delivers this sick, playful pun with regards to his other half: “If he be Mr. Hyde,”…I shall be Mr. Seek” (Stevenson 8). The confident tone is incongruous because identity formation is not a game. In fact, anxiety about identity degeneration and the “fragility of the whole” cripples humanity with paranoia (Halberstam 81). If, like Stevenson says, “man is not only one, but truly two” (43), what is happening in there? Halberstam captures this stomach-turning feeling through an apt metaphor: the “body is a
haunted house” (75); identity floats in and out. Monsters embody and thus externalize the anxiety of the masses, but they do so in a most mercurial, mystified way.

After revisiting Frankenstein’s monster, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the nineteenth-century monster seems to be anything dark or unknown: “crime embodied in a specific deviant form,” “horror,” “warning,” “paranoia,” “money,” “science,” “perversion,” “Satan,” “female,” “fugitive from identity” and most generally, “other” (Halberstam 1-137). Since monsters are a challenge to categorize in the cosmic order and “disrupt categories and destruct boundaries,” they are a feared symbol but one all people recognize (Halberstam 51). Furthermore, monster scholar Marie-Helene Huet notes that Darwin biologically defines monstrosities as “deviations, generally injurious, but not useful to the species” like extra limbs (75). When these natural anomalies are divided and categorized as “monstrosities,” they are naturalized, but the possibilities of nineteenth-century monster meanings are infinite.

Monsters are unique and inescapable because they “emerge from within all of us” (Heffernan 164), and they are comprised of the collective human imagination as a way to cope with the unknown and they are popularized through “collective dreaming about objects people covet” (Demetrakopoulos 106). Ultimately, the original British monsters are unknowable symbols of desire and fear, but new American monster breeds somehow overshadow this shady past. Somehow, consumers who eat Franken Berry cereal and purchase plush Sesame Street dolls forget this precedent of sexuality and death. However, they are less likely latent necrophiliacs or sexual deviants and more likely people who superficially enjoy purchasing products that entertain them or make them happy. A mass cultural shift permits the modern commercialization of the monster. It is important to note that the consumer needs to be produced before the commodity, so a structural change is responsible for contemporary pop-culture monster. While
the focus of this analysis is the contemporary function of monstrosity, divergent new monster breeds will garner more attention despite many 20th and 21st century monsters following the dark path of their nineteenth-century forefathers. Briefly establishing this sinister continuation helps distinguish contrary monster types and the unique human relationship with each type.

**The Rise of Popular Horror**

For nearly four decades, the partnership between monstrosity and horror flourished as a major source of “mass aesthetic stimulation” and became a staple across popular art forms (“Nature of Horror” 51), particularly film. America imported the famous British monsters and featured them in classic Universal Studios Hollywood productions starting in 1923. The monster cinema trend boomed, and after the success of *The Exorcist* in 1973, it became extremely rare to visit the movies without meeting at least one scary monster. Horror expert Noel Carroll captures the rise of popular monstrosity:

[Horror] spawn[s] vampires, trolls, gremlins, zombies, werewolves, demonically possessed children, space monsters of all sizes, ghosts and other unnamable concoctions at a pace that has made the last forty years seems like one long Halloween night. (51)

Carroll insists that a monster must be repulsive, filthy, and characterized by the fearful attitude of other characters toward the monster (“Horror and Humor” 53). If the monster nauseates the surrounding characters and they flee the filthy disgusting beast, then the audience will inevitably sync their emotions with those of the terrified victims. With this in mind, how do audiences categorize a monster that does not fit in this mold like the Cookie Monster in *Sesame Street*? The word “monster” is in his name, but his fuzzy blue coat, googly eyes, and ungrammatical jabber fall short of a monster’s historically dark reputation. Is he a monster? If not, then what is he? The
postmodern deconstruction of this symbolic framework is important to establish the recent instability of monster categories in popular culture.

II. Monsters in Children’s Television

Some parts of the monster have been recycled, and some parts have been sanitized. The following close readings of current monster adaptations in the realm of young children will help detangle the contemporary function of monsters, despite their fantastic ability to blur the distance between real and imagined, good and bad. This drive to categorize reflects widespread adult paranoia about developmental boundaries: “Am I a monster or a monster maker?” (Halberstam 35). Is the monster a threat? Is it internal or external? The anxiety ironically contributes to the rise of the monster as the star of educational morality tales. A closer look at a popular children’s television program will reveal a deeper cause for this instructive trend.

Sesame Street and the “Monster in the Mirror”

*Sesame Street*, the classic preschool educational television program, first aired in 1969. The show was specifically designed to educate young children and get them “ready” for kindergarten and beyond. Considering the explicit youthful content of the program and horrifying reputation of monsters, it is interesting that producers chose monster puppets to deliver educational messages. Perhaps contributors to the program figured that spearheading the most powerful symbol of the unknown—monsters—and using it to educate children would be an effective way to brace children before they enter a big scary world of unknowns. To accomplish this goal, this show dawns a new breed of monstrosity: the friendly monster. These monsters belong in another category than their nasty forefathers; *Sesame Street* monsters generally act with good, clean intentions and play with and learn from humans. This novel behavior is important to dissect. An analysis of one of the most memorable music videos in show history,
Grover’s song, “Monster in the Mirror,” suggests monsters help teach very young children how to develop a sense of self and how to cope with fear and frustration.

Grover sings the following lyrics in a catchy song:

Saw a monster in the mirror when I woke up today
A monster in my mirror but I did not run away
I did not shed a tear or hide beneath my bed
Though the monster looked at me and this is what he said:
He said "Wubba wubba wubba wubba woo woo woo"
Wubba wubba wubba and a doodly do
He sang "Wubba wubba wubba" so I sang it too
Do not wubba me or I will wubba you
Told the monster in the mirror, "No, I am not scared"
Then I smiled at him and thanked him for the song that we had shared
Well, the monster thanked me too, he smiled right back and then
The monster in the mirror sang his song again
Yes, wubba wubba wubba is a monster song
Wubba wubba wubba is a monster song
If your mirror has a monster in it, do not shout
This kind of situation does not call for freaking out
And do nothing that you would not like to see him do
'Cause that monster in the mirror he just might be you

(“Monster in the Mirror”)

First of all, the juvenile language and repetition of this song clearly depart from the formal language of historical monster narratives. This song is designed to facilitate a connection between very young children and monsters. While this song, like all Sesame Street material, has a strong morality message woven into it, it is unique because it self-consciously addresses the original function of monsters: to horrify. It urges young people to cope with this purpose by creating a new role for monsters: to befriend.

Starting the song with “w[aking] up” represents Grover’s fresh perspective of sudden self-consciousness. Young viewers relate to the monster because he has a morning routine just like they do, so they immediately share his increased awareness. After the connection is made, young audiences are distracted by the catchy yet alien “wubba” chorus that begs to be sung:
“Wubba wubba wubba wubba woo woo woo” is delightful. The chorus seems to have a composite meaning of a ghost’s stimulating “boo” and a child’s triumphant “nanna nanna boo boo.” The chorus repeats this liberating and triumphant phrase that distances children from the English language and the development of culturally constructed selves. Singing aloud encourages kids to subconsciously emulate Grover’s strength in the face his own startling reflection.

What is so scary about one’s reflection? The reflection is at first a source of alarm. It is an explicit reference to the child development mirror stage in psychoanalytic theory—the root of identity anxiety. By beginning the song with “saw” and rendering the “I” elliptical, Grover insinuates the sudden presence startles him so much that he initially forgets himself. As the song continues, the music video encourages children to “not run away” from themselves; in fact, they should politely thank themselves to maintain maximum control of their emotional state. This seems nice and reasonable; kids should confront their fears. Alternatively, the juvenile ”wubba’s” and Grover’s silly singing voice caricature the serious, crippling implications of unregulated inner fear, and the image of horror inevitably created within. For example, one abrupt moment during this skit, the Grover’s inner monster flashes its true colors (see fig. 1):

(Fig. 1. “Monster in the Mirror”)
This frame displays indisputable nightmare fuel. For one second, the large animated monster looms over Grover and the viewer, but then immediately shrinks to more accurately mirror Grover’s reflection. While Sesame Street playfully designs colorful monsters, the brooding eyebrows render the reflection’s smile devilish, the intimidating size and enlarged face overwhelm Grover’s body, and the raised arms suggest a physical threat. Moreover, the deformed heavy-lidded eye on the right suggests depravity. Monsters used to be primarily represented as grimy and humanoid, but the clean colorful aesthetic of Grover’s fluffy bright blue coat still does not mask the malicious behavior of his reflection. What is the function of this one-second-long frame in a children’s television program? First, it acknowledges fear as an appropriate reaction despite the elementary monster present. Viewers of all ages still have a physiological response to this frame. Second, according to this image, fear does not spawn from an external foreign source; it is created within viewers, especially imaginative young children. This is an example of what young people might see in themselves, and the song urges them to overcome the initial fear of the “other” and embrace an innate two-sided self. Fear is constructed, just as identity is constructed. Similarly, familiarity and comfort can be constructed too.

Sesame Street is heavily merchandized, facilitating the connection between real and imagined, child and monster, and fear and familiarity. The doll below encourages children to calm their worries with a fuzzy plush pal (see fig. 2):

(Fig. 2. ebay.com)
Starting at $50 on eBay.com, a parent can bet against other parents to purchase this “life-sized” Grover doll for their lucky child. Despite the disturbing image from the music video and this doll’s relatively large size, most children would find this toy an agreeable friend. Eventually, if a child watches the “Monster in the Mirror” video over and over again, sings along religiously, and sleeps with this large monster doll every night, a shift will take place: that child will grow up loving monsters; that child will see this doll as more human than monster. Children imagine a real connection with this monster puppet simulation and develop immunity to the uncertainties of the unknown, because they are snuggling with a tangible manifestation of the unknown.

Most American children live in a relatively stable environment that lacks immanent threats to survival. Sesame Street strives to override the evolutionary impulse to flee fear because it is a waste of scarce cognitive resources; fear is largely imagined and culturally conditioned despite its developmental roots. The television show communicates that the monster no longer poses a threat unless young people allow it to, because the external “other” in American society is a less fearful opponent than the internal “other.” The “Monster in the Mirror” music video trains the next generation to not fear the monster, because monsters are just fears designed and puppeteered by others, even the other within. However, an unintended implication of this moral message is that those who grew up on Sesame Street possess the ultimate power: they feel that they know the formerly unknown “other;” in fact, the song suggests they are others: “that monster in the mirror he just might be you.” This empowers the following generations of children with the knowledge that they are monsters, and they are proud of it. Many believe this generation of children is entitled and overconfident. This seems largely true, but they are just behaving how they were taught: embody the monster, and know confidence and inner harmony.
Monsters empower and embolden children. Other media follow suit by catering to those who cannot get enough of the friendly monster breed *Sesame Street* designed.
III. Monsters in Children’s Literature

Horrible monsters continue to surface in horror novels, but a consumer shift has relocated most monsters; they are not as easily found in contemporary thrillers. Conservative parents would not read *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* to their young, impressionable children at night; sexualized blood-sucking and vengeful murder will not bode well with imaginative children. On the other hand, the children’s literature section of bookstores across the country teems with monsters and caters to parents looking for fun monster activities like coloring books, joke books, counting flash cards, and bedtime books for their youngsters. This is where many monsters live.

One such example, *I Need My Monster* published in 2009 (Noll), represents this new wave of children’s literature. The book stands out because it caters to parents who want monsters not for themselves, but for their children. Also, the simple narrative and illustrations suggest another unique monster function and a message that wholly contradicts the historical separation of victim and monster.

The book begins at bedtime with a young boy named Ethan who finds a note under his bed: “Gone fishing. Back in a week—Gabe” (2). The boy calls Gabe “my monster” and insists he “needed” his monster to sleep (2). This first person narration endears the reader to Ethan’s struggle to sleep without his scary friend. But he woefully misses some strange things: the monster’s “ragged breathing,” “nose-whistling,” and the “scabbling of his uncut claws” (3). It was too quiet. Ethan foregoes asking his parents for some sort of comfort because “(grown-ups have some strange ideas about monsters under beds)” and takes matters into his own hands: he “knocks on the floorboards” hoping to attract another monster to take Gabe’s place for a week (4). Several monsters answer Ethan’s call in succession. The first monster quickly fails to meet the boy’s expectations.
Ethan immediately rejects “Herbert,” the first monster, merely because of his docile name. The bold boy shouts: “What kind of a name is that for a monster?!” (5). While Ethan dismisses the monster and says, “It’s nothing personal” (6), it is nothing but personal. A name represents the façade of the constructed nature of identity, and he refuses a monster on the basis of a name. After Herbert leaves, another monster appears under his bed, and Ethan is initially impressed with a jagged set of sharp claws that appear beside him. That is, until he sees a bow tied on the monsters tail and asks, with two emphatic question marks, “Are you a girl monster??” (16). The corresponding illustration depicts a skeptical young boy pointing incredulously at a pink bow on the end of an otherwise repulsive monster, Cynthia. The giant girl monster asks Ethan: “Do you have a problem with that?” and he fearlessly answers: “Um, yeah, I do[…]Boy monsters are for boys and girl monsters are for girls” (16). He refuses to accept a girl monster as if she were not even in the same monster category, even though he appreciates all of her other scary attributes.

On the following page, a lonely boy looks up at the universe and wonders in a hilariously short inner monologue: “Was I being too picky? NO” (17). Ethan, with his authoritative tone and general lack of insecurity demonstrates a steadfast youth who audaciously interviews horrible creatures and will not budge until he gets what he wants—the brave product of Sesame Street. This does not seem to be an ideal bedtime story because of the protagonist’s over-the-top audacity, but it certainly has entertainment value, especially because the danger is categorized as imaginary. However, imagined danger can be equally injurious to the host of these supposed delusions. According to a popular online book review forum, the book appeals to “children’s love of creatures both alarming and absurd” (Goodreads.com 1), but there is something more serious and real going on here. Why does this little boy care so much about the identity of his
monster? Why is he so picky in the face of peril? Ethan has a very specific idea of what he wants in a monster, but not because he is comparing the substitutes to Gabe. He is fearlessly fussy because he is attempting to designate a suitable likeness or replica of himself in the monster world. This young boy imagines his monster is an extension of himself.

Then why exactly is a perfectly matched monster necessary to induce sleep? It seems his monster-pet would entertain him or keep him up out of fear. Both of these options seem to be exciting rather than sedating. Ethan answers this question by insisting he absolutely needs fear to force himself to sleep at night: “the whole point of having a monster, after all, was to keep me in bed, imagining all the scary stuff that could happen if I got out” (17). Ethan clearly wants a sort of imagined fettering. Gabe is so familiar to Ethan that the little boy’s fear evolves into desire. At the end of the 30-page illustrated bedtime story, Gabe suddenly returns from fishing because “fish scare too easily” (23), and declares to Ethan: “Ha! I knew it! We’re made for each other” after threatening him with his spiked tail (27). This odd reunion is cute on the surface because both characters are happy to restore their normal relationship that revolves around the familiar fear that Ethan intensely desires. The threat is perfectly welcome. Thus, yet another composite monster function is born: to comfort with familiar fear. Gabe represents a fully fetishized and irresistibly personalized pet monster. It is a monster’s job to accompany its assigned child when the child is vulnerable and alone—a function attractive to developing children. However, this is not the only party that benefits from this late-night relationship. In fact, another party benefits even more.

Monsters like Gabe help parents keep kids from waking up and seeking parental comfort when they fear the lonesome darkness. No parent wants to religiously soothe his or her child in the middle of the night. This repeated behavior would develop into a habit and both the parent
and child would suffer in the long run. Parents read monster bedtime stories like *I Need My Monster* over and over to develop a better habit: they hope to indoctrinate their children with a fear so they are more comfortable at night. This complex function reflects the fragmented and incoherent nature of the modern family. Parents are essentially teaching their children to fear and not fear at the same time. While at first this conflict seems irreconcilable, it merely mirrors the multi-function ability of monsters that evolves as culture evolves to best serve consumers.

In another book for children, *Frankenstein Makes a Sandwich: And Other Stories You’re Sure to Like, Because They’re All about Monsters, and Some of Them Are Also about Food* is designed to help children ages 5-10 learn to read (Rex). This illustrated pastiche of short monster poems confirms the popular notion that monstrosity sells, yet this narrative enforces this in a less glamorous way. For example, the book begins with a confrontational yet comforting bang: “You think you’ve got problems? Dracula, Wolfman, Frankenstein—now they have problems. Monster-sized” (1). There is a marked dichotomy of the italicized terms: you vs. they. At first, this conveys the idea that, unlike the previous children’s book, humans are entirely separate from monsters; humans and monsters do not mix, and they are definitely not best friends. A close look at a rhyming poem about Frankenstein’s monster and his nineteenth-century friend Dr. Jekyll reveals the reverse of this expected moral. The extreme situation of monsters is supposed to soothe and refresh youngsters who are learning to read.

The beginner poetry book starts with an endearing story about Frankenstein’s monster. While third person narration separates the audience from the giant green monster, his dismal face and apparent lack of food still encourage readers to relate to the monster; he is just hungry. Frankenstein’s monster begins looking for food, but the townspeople shoo him away by thrusting pitchforks at him and chucking food: “tomatoes, pigs, potatoes, loaves of moldy bread” (6).
Suddenly, Frankenstein’s monster has an epiphany: “he found on the ground they’d made a mound of food” (6). Soon after, the monster happily gathers the food, waves goodbye, and shouts: “Thanks a bunch!” even though the townspeople did not throw food out of kindness (6); they probably threw food out of fear. Regardless, this promotes the benefits of altering one’s perspective and seeing the bright side in hostile situations, both internal and external. The monster is immune to the hostility because he ultimately gets what he wants. In other words, one man’s trash becomes another man’s treasure, or one community’s rejection becomes an outsider’s support. Though the book insists monsters have bigger problems, these problems resemble human problems, and the monsters quickly figure out solutions. This children’s book suggests solving a problem can be as easy as changing perspective.

On the next page, a tall “big, disgusting” sandwich takes center stage complete with feathered chicken leg, whole fish, and moldy bread (7). The meal is gargantuan and repulsive, but the blissful expression on the green monster’s face suggests this is just what he wanted and needed—substantial nourishment from his community. This need mirrors the nineteenth-century needs of Frankenstein’s monster. Frankenstein has only ever wanted camaraderie and support since the original novel. An explicit reference—“monster seeks bride”—sneaks its way into the tiniest corner of a newspaper in this illustrated children’s book attests to this. It might seem the creative author believes that the monster stupidly misunderstood the food-throwing situation. However, it is also likely that the author suggests people generally misunderstand monsters, so an equal and opposite misunderstanding from the monster’s perspective is an appropriate equalizing response.

After twenty more pages of beautifully illustrated monster stories for children, readers come across a poem titled, “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Henderson” (24). A hilarious twist on
Stevenson’s original tale makes this rendition memorable. The poem begins with the doctor not wanting to go to a hoity-toity party, so he decides to drug himself and become Mr. Hyde. At first, Dr. Jekyll simply wants to enjoy himself for the night, but the doctor accidentally switches some “potion” ingredients and becomes another character altogether (24): Mr. Henderson. The doctor only realizes this mistake after he arrives at a party and beholds himself in a mirror, noting his face looks “pooped and wan” and his hair looks “plastered on” (26). Nevertheless, Mr. Henderson proceeds to join the party guests and tell “an endless tale that test their endurance, topped that with pictures of his cat, then sold them all insurance” (26). He cannot help but “bore the pants off of every guest” because he has “one-tenth the zest Jekyll had” and lacks “the personality of plaid” (26). This characterization is amusing because it ironically opposes the thrilling pursuits associated with Mr. Hyde, and it probably reminds many readers of an excruciatingly dreary person they know. The author strives to make readers laugh with his embodiment of boring. In Stevenson’s book, Dr. Jekyll’s questionably scientific goal to extract evil from humans is characterized as a mad pursuit, but the idea still holds moral weight. On the other hand, this youth monster book parodies the dark seriousness of Dr. Jekyll’s intentions; the guy just wants to have a good time as Mr. Hyde, lying and stealing. Instead he accidentally concocts a magical depressant drug that makes him monstrously boring. While it seems the ability to transform into Mr. Henderson is a supernatural accomplishment, this story pokes fun at the blatant humanity of this monster.

What links these two children’s books after looking more closely at fresh episodes of Frankenstein’s monster and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in *Frankenstein Makes a Sandwich: And Other Stories You’re Sure to Like, Because They’re All about Monsters, and Some of Them Are Also about Food* is a narrative of belonging. Frankenstein’s monster simply seeks the support of
his community, and Dr. Jekyll feels he does not fit in and enjoy himself unless he is drugged and in a different monstrous form. Either way, no monster belongs at the end of the story, but this rejection narrative has historically accompanied monsters; they are often defined as “others.” Thus, they navigate society the best they can. People relate to this struggle of the individual vs. society, particularly children, because there are countless unspoken social rules that are so tempting to break. Perhaps this is why monsters move into the functional realm of empowerment. Humans resent obsequiousness, yet people tend to behave in predictably boring ways. Recognizing, celebrating, and selling the quirky monstrous side of humanity has become outrageously popular and thus profitable.
IV. Monsters in Children’s Movies

The serial success of animated monster movies for children like *Hotel Transylvania* (2012), *Paranorman* (2012), and *Frankenweenie* (2012), all rated PG, demonstrates the commercial popularity of animated young monsters with human problems. These child film stars are more relatable than ever before, blurring the lines between human and non-human and keeping audiences on the edge of their seats. In these charming movies, complex lovable monsters could behave in a number of surprising ways—scaring or crying one moment, then caring or joking the next moment. Expensive family movie outings or movie nights at home are two common ways people incorporate monstrosity into their lives. While some animated monster movies retain a trace of the scary reputation monsters have established over the centuries, most monster stars in these blockbusters endear audiences young and old with humor or vulnerability. One movie in particular paved the way for the remarkable commercial potential of animated monsters.

*Monsters, Inc.*, a Disney Pixar film released in 2001, stole the hearts of audiences around the world and still refuses to let go. The blockbuster tops most critic and fan ratings as the #1 monster movie appropriate for kids around the world (Harris). It has risen to the top of monster consciousness as the most popular family-friendly monster film; accordingly, the movie is heavily merchandized with interactive games, cookware, party supplies, and cuddly plush monsters that fans giddily purchase and take home. While this animated movie appears to function as hilarious entertainment for the young and young at heart, a closer look at strategic parallels between Monstropolis and reality and the connection between monster and child reveals a more complicated cultural relationship between young people and monsters in the new millennium.
A brief introduction to the world of *Monsters, Inc.* is necessary to begin understanding this relationship. The storyline revolves around the adventures of two monsters, Sulley and his sidekick Mike Wazowski, in a city of monsters dubbed Monstropolis. A quick look at Mike, the green ball, and Sulley, the hairy beast, sets the foundation for the monster aesthetic of *Monsters, Inc.* (see fig. 3):

![Monsters, Inc. logo](image)

(Fig. 3. *Monsters, Inc.*)

Viewers are immediately struck by the shockingly bright hues of Mike and Sulley. They have inherited their vibrant skins and coats from their *Sesame Street* predecessors. Mike is clearly smaller and less threatening than Sully. He dorkily smiles and gives the thumbs up to viewers, something Frankenstein’s monster, for example, would never do. Mike’s lime green skin is a bit reptilian, though his spherical form and spindly appendages buck any continuity with any animal category. Mike’s unique monster form represents the aesthetic variety of *Monsters, Inc.*—monsters come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Halberstam notes that the color of skin is the “most visible of fetishes” (840), so Mike’s eye-catching lime hue may have more import than meets the eye. The lively colors of *Monsters, Inc.* monsters like Mike make the monsters more
aesthetically distinctive and dazzling than humans. Thus, the bright monsters become oddly attractive and desirable.

To the right, Sulley’s imposing size and aqua fur coat are arguably more snuggly and striking than Mike’s bare skin. Sulley’s tubby belly makes him normal and approachable, and the lavender polka dots and short horns give Sulley a more composite look than Mike. Sulley’s gorilla nose and crooked smile lend more character to his face, while Mike’s emotions are solely communicated by the skin movements around his eye and mouth. Both monsters boast sharp toenails, a threatening but familiar animal characteristic. To summarize Disney and Pixar’s strategic design, Mike and Sulley are illustrated as friendly sentient animal-like aliens. Their adventures generate complex material to analyze.

The plot of *Monsters, Inc.* is an excellent medium to explore the contemporary function of monstrosity. Mike and Sulley are the top scare team for a company called Monsters, Inc. that processes children’s screams into energy for the city. When they are at work, the high-tech factory assembles a detached door on the “scare floor” in front of them. Each of the other ten monster scare teams is also assigned one door at a time. The doors are portals into the human dimension and represent a unique child’s bedroom closet door. The “ scarer” monsters like Sulley quickly sneak into children’s bedrooms to scare the kids and make them scream. While the child screams, each monster sidekick, like Mike, ensures the scream fills up a storage canister. Then, the scarer monsters exit the human world through their respective doors back into the monster world. The exhausted door is quickly replaced with another via machine. Each door represents a different child’s bedroom somewhere in the world and each scarer horrifies dozens of children each day. Children, in the movie and reality, have active imaginations that run wild while they are alone at night in the most intimate locus of their home. The monsters in *Monsters, Inc.*
commercially exploit this exposure and vulnerability. In this light, strategic scaring is particularly disturbing, and the net human horriﬁcation is tremendous.

At one point in the movie, several children’s screams build and crescendo over several haunting seconds, striking high sharp and flat notes that necessitate a physiological stress response from viewers. While scaring children seems appalling, the monsters in Monsters, Inc. are generally not devilish like their nineteenth-century predecessors; they are performing a rote job function when they terrify kids. The conﬂicted motto of the company is: “We scare because we care.” They care about their monster race at the expense of the human race. Other than this stereotypical scaring behavior they are trained to execute, they generally do nothing else horrifying or otherwise damaging. Yet they are not squeaky-clean monsters like those in Sesame Street either. Monsters, Inc. monsters are the most human-like in character—a hybrid between their dark forefathers and their sanitized parents.

Monsters, Inc. monsters demonstrate monstrosity by eating trash, breathing ﬁre, and wearing “odorant,” yet these repulsive behaviors seem mock repulsive when compared to their otherwise tedious daily activities. This breed of animated monster demonstrates humanity by living in civilized apartments, working for companies, eating in fancy restaurants, and otherwise carrying out normal human routines. Additionally, most scarers augment their monstrosity on the job by wearing extra teeth or eyes, according to Darwin’s deﬁnition of monstrosity as biological excess. It is the conﬂict between exotic monster and dull human within the characters that generates humor. For example, when Mike and Sulley monotonously discuss their favorite “odorant” type like “wet dog” and “smelly garbage.” The humorous dialogue in Monsters, Inc. represents another proﬁtable function for monsters: to make people laugh.
While the charming humor in *Monsters, Inc.* entertains a broad audience, the comedy masks a deeper message that guides the plot and reveals the actual focus of the movie. An understated but poignant example of this occurs early in the film: Mike and Sully change the channel on their television while relaxing in their apartment when a new *Monsters, Inc.* commercial airs. They both become excited because they know they will be featured in the commercial. The ad hilariously resembles rosy Monsanto commercials about energy and technology, and becomes especially funny when the *Monsters, Inc.* logo is immediately superimposed over Mike so he cannot actually be seen while Sulley is heavily featured. The audience expects Mike to be outraged, but he exclaims, “I…loved it!” afterwards. As audiences laugh about this unfortunate placement and Mike’s unexpectedly positive reaction, a deeper message is delivered at the very end of the commercial. The announcer’s voice is literally deep, betraying the gravity of this final statement: “We are MI,” a phrase that is almost phonetically indistinguishable from “Where am I?” This evidences a focal theme of the movie: the universal anxiety about feeling lost in a complex world, both within and without. A subtle clue betrays Disney and Pixar’s attempt to redefine and relocate the monster symbol in popular culture. *Monsters, Inc.* makes a seemingly impossible identity transformation—from murderous monster to funny monster—possible, giving hope to people who desperately search for their most “true” selves. According to this commercial, monsters are not obscure others; they are just like us. *Monsters, Inc.* suggests everyone and everything belongs in the cosmic universe, even if people deem an “other” outside the bounds of their cultural reality.

Life proceeds as usual in Monstropolis until a “scream shortage,” a simulacrum of the current energy crisis, begins to put pressure on the CEO of *Monsters, Inc.*, Mr. Waternoose, to experiment with alternative methods in order to garner more children’s screams. It is fascinating
that kids power this fictional monster world, because this seems to be a parody of the reverse in reality. Recall that Halberstam admits the flexible meaning of a monster sells (12), and consumers eat it up, literally in some cases yet to be discussed. Monstropolis and its citizens value children as a scare resource, not as individuals. However, the scream shortage is the least of Sulley’s worries when a human child follows him back through her closet door into the Monsters, Inc. factory.

Why is a human child a dire problem in the monster world? According to the CDA or the “Child Detection Agency” in Monstropolis, children are deathly toxic. The CDA runs around wearing HAZMAT suits and treats humans like bombs. The CDA purifies potentially contaminated areas with ridiculously extensive procedures. The elaborate care taken to deal with humans reveals the fragility of a disintegrating relationship that many in Monstropolis believe to be the cause of the scream shortage. The CEO laments to Sulley: “kids don’t get scared like they used to” and “the window of innocence is shrinking.” Maintaining the ignorance and fear of children is considered critically important to their continued way of life. Monsters are desperate for human energy, so they need to keep their world as isolated as possible to preserve their constructed scary reputation. At the factory, when a child no longer screams after a monster attempts to frighten them, Monster Inc. deems the door a “dead door” and discontinues its use in the factory, rendering the connection between monster and child broken forever.

A close look at the opening scene in Monsters, Inc. communicates a subtle message about the dying connection between children and their inanimate playthings (see fig. 4):
The first scene of *Monsters, Inc.* functions as an elegy for old toys. The lights start on, and then quickly turn off (see above) on a shelf displaying a model plane, toy horse, teddy bear, and humpty dumpty doll—notably dated playthings. In the dark, the shelf of toys function as decoration, or a representation of the past on display, because it is far out of reach of the child in the bed below. After this frame, several shots of old toys around the room occur in succession. Each toy is inanimate, and especially obsolete when a breeze of air tickles a curtain through a window. After this flash of movement, a monster enters the room from the closet door. This fresh presence, accompanied by dramatic horror movie strings, ignites a wave of curiosity and fear within the viewer. While monsters stereotypically incite fear, a generally undesirable feeling, the movie suggests feeling something is better than not feeling at all. A living, breathing entity is more exciting than a motionless model. Children have become increasingly desensitized to boring toys because it is up to them to imagine a real connection—an increasingly unfavorable activity considering the cognitive ease of watching movies or playing interactive video games. Thus, the youth market demands a more animated source of entertainment. Disney answers the call by forging a connection between children and a more exciting friend. Monsters are
extremely animated and vibrant, just like children. While *Sesame Street* suggests children are monsters, Disney also recognizes the relationship potential here, and children find the possibility exciting.

The exciting first meeting between human child and monster in *Monsters, Inc.* is unexpected. The following two images illustrate Sulley and a little girl’s surprising reaction to each other after the girl has entered the monster world (see fig. 5):

![Fig. 5. Monsters, Inc.](image)

Sulley leans dramatically away from the small child and hopes to escape her purportedly deadly touch. Notably, the child is a girl with adorable pigtails and a pink dress. Even so, her body language—her smile and outstretched arms—communicates her dauntlessness. Unlike most children who respond to disorientation or confusion with the expected tears and tantrums, the girl smiles and reaches for the large hairy beast without missing a beat. A significant role-reversal takes place: the large male monster fears the giggling female toddler because the monster has been conditioned to fear human children. This parodies children’s conditioned fear of monsters as a way to encourage people to question this conditioning. The little girl is delighted by Sulley
and finds his fear silly. She greets the monster by squealing, “Kitty,” an endearing term that demonstrates her immediate acceptance of him. This also mocks his formal job function; she simply wants him as a pet friend. The little girl immediately insists on calling the large monster “Kitty” and continues to call him “Kitty” for the entire movie. On the other hand, Sulley and Mike call the young girl “it” and “thing” for a period of time because she is an “other” or an unknown entity to be feared. Accordingly, they handle her with kitchen gloves and other safety gear, a laughable but very real parody of the irrational human fear of monsters and countless unnamable others that haunt the human imagination.

The little girl flaunts around the monster world and encourages Sulley to play peek-a-boo with her. He nervously proceeds to play this hide and seek game, a playful reference to the identity struggle in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and the girl seems to be in charge. Hide and seek is her game; she is the initiator. At least, this is the case until she exhibits her vulnerability as a young child through some strategic realism; the girl soon needs to relieve herself, eat, and sleep. These universal needs disclose the little one’s dependence, because she clearly requires assistance. Notably following these demonstrations, the girl earns her charming but important name from Sulley: “Boo.” A critical shift occurs when Sulley decides to name her. The name signifies the recognition of Boo as an individual and Sulley’s shocked attachment to the amusing toddler. Additionally, “Boo” mirrors the surprising identity swap between the monster and child. Despite their obvious differences, their nicknames for each other suggest they are interchangeable; Boo is named as if she were a scary ghost by a hulking monster, and the child names Sulley as if he were a cute little kitten.
The following matrix illustrates the unexpected parallels between monster and child:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fear (F)</th>
<th>Anger (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monster (1)</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child (2)</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fig. 6. Monsters, Inc.)

Row 1 presents a monster’s fear (F) and anger (A) and row 2 captures a child’s fear (F) and anger (A) (see fig. 6). The visual mirroring between monster and child becomes conspicuous when organized into a matrix. First of all, the girl as seen here, appears in her costumed monster form for most of the movie. She is transformed by Sulley to hide her true human identity. The next most noticeable similarity between the frames is the blue-purple coloration that uniformly paints the characters and their environments during each of these highly emotive moments. The identical tint unites the images. Additionally, a white light washes out both F frames because the characters are leaning back, and Sulley and Boo both pull their appendages closer to their bodies in order to shield themselves. On the other hand, both A frames show the monster and child with furrowed brows and hands turned outwards at their aggressors to communicate a pending offensive attack. In all frames, both monster and child have their mouths dramatically agape; the
frames capture exaggerated versions of fear and anger. A brief comparison suggests there are clear parallels between both the characters and their emotions.

Figure 1A and figure 2F respectively represent the stereotypical emotions when a monster confronts a child: the monster growls while the child cowers. However, this is not the case in *Monsters, Inc*. The other two figures, 1F and 2A, show the opposite emotions of what is expected of a monster and a child: the child growls while the monster cowers. This unexpected reaction combination is ironic, and audiences accordingly love this twist because it generates comic relief. Beyond this superficial purpose, the switch emboldens children viewers to fight their fears. Children find imitation to be an effective coping strategy with the unknown. Even though most consider fear, anger, monsters, and children more different than similar, a close reading of these frames evidences more similarities than differences in this Disney-Pixar narrative. Universal emotions unite Boo and Sulley, suggesting that the two belong to same universe. This suggestion mitigates the largest obstacle threatening the success of a relationship between children and monsters.

Despite “Boo’s” adorable pigtails and diminutive stature, it takes Sulley and Mike a while to trust her because they have been conditioned to fear for their lives if they make physical contact with a human child. Once Monstropolis catches word that a human child is on the loose, Mike and Sulley turn on the television and witness news teams call the human threat a “kid-tastrophe.” However, after witnessing the girl’s innocent youth, Sulley remarkably admits to Mike: “I don’t think that kid’s dangerous.” Mike and Sulley eventually see she needs adult support in this foreign world. Once the monster team realizes the innocence of the child, they sympathize with her and become her guardian in their dimension—a world only dangerous to humans because of a strategic misunderstanding.
In order to generate scream-energy, monsters must protect their identities. In this light, it is fascinating that they choose to protect a stranger from a popular deleterious stereotype instead of doing their jobs and maintaining the standard of living in their city. They shield Boo from a doom they do not believe she deserves. This choice transforms Mike and Sully into ironic parental figures, but Sulley in particular changes his disposition. He becomes extremely partial to the human, just like a child might become inseparable from his or her Grover doll. For the rest of the movie, he guards Boo’s wellbeing like a fiercely loyal father figure. Even after the top scare team and the child bond, Mike and Sulley dress Boo up like a monster (see fig. 6) and plan to deposit the child into any door they can locate once they cautiously sneak into the Monsters, Inc. factory because of the risk involved with keeping her. However, this plan crumbles when Sulley has a moral dilemma after Mike suggests they simply chuck the child back into a random door. Sulley takes Boo’s fate into his own hands and refuses to send Boo back through a door that is not hers. He insists that she be returned to her rightful home because he sees her not as an unnamable other, but as a child.

This guardianship intensifies when Sulley realizes his scummy coworker, Randall, is Boo’s assigned scare monster. A quick look at Randall’s monster form and Boo’s reaction towards him typifies the typical monster-victim relationship (see fig. 7):

(Fig. 7. Monsters, Inc.)
A monster’s form communicates its function. Randall’s chameleon lizard body conveys his snaky personality; he is cold-blooded and rough. The addition of a shark-worthy row of teeth and some spunky hair complete his menacing monster form. Unlike Mike and Sulley, he is purely designed to scare. Disney creates a bad monster character to increase the legitimacy of the connection between Boo and Sulley, because the enemy of an enemy is a friend. As demonstrated in the left picture, he often squints and leans uncomfortably close to others in order to mock and intimidate them. He terrorizes people by slithering superhumanly quick, camouflaging with his surroundings, and startling people when they are alone. Essentially, Randall is a rascal incarnate who sneaks around the factory bullying everyone.

In Randall’s defense, his job is to upset children all day as a scare monster. Randall just brings work home with him, frightening everyone he meets. Regardless, he is considered an outlier in Monstropolis, an “other” among monsters, and most audiences do not sympathize with him despite his compliance with a rich precedent of evil monstrosity. While some fringe groups yet to be discussed are attracted to Randall’s personality, a quick look at Boo’s pitiful pout in the right-hand image is hard not to empathize with, especially when compared to Boo’s conspicuous delight upon meeting Sulley. Her drawing further captures viewers’ hearts because it is an alarming version of Randall with outstretched stick arms and bulging red eyes, a reference to the modern popularity of dreadful children’s drawings in horror films. Notably, no children sleep with Randall dolls at night; kids would be petrified in their beds. Yet, children have no problem sleeping with Mike and Sulley, the good monsters. Interestingly, children are conditioned to differentiate between good monsters and bad monsters, and, if they are lucky, they hope the good ones will protect them from the bad ones.
One particular reason most viewers find it near impossible to forgive Randall for his bad boy ways is his appalling invention: “the scream extractor.” This contraption is Randall’s solution to the energy crisis—strap kids into chairs and forcibly suck the scream out of them. The comparative visuals below illustrate the undeniable sexual perversity of this machine (see fig. 8):

(Fig. 8. Monsters, Inc.)

The top two frames demonstrate the effects of the scream extractor on Fungus, Randall’s tech-savvy minion. He turns red as the “scream” is sucked out of him and reels in pain with swollen blood-red lips. The machine functions as a mechanized Dracula, sucking the life out of innocent victims. Yet the robotic machine trumps Dracula’s horrible deeds because the scream extractor does not distinguish between male or female, child or adult. Dracula targeted adult females, while the machine violates literally anyone in its path. Most scandalously, the telescopic metal
extension of the scream extractor resembles an oversized erect penis. Fungus’s corresponding vagina lips buttress this notion after coming in contact with the machine’s reverse penetration. The sexual symbol is clearly not benign to anyone, but it is especially extreme and threatening when shoved in the face of a little girl. Moreover, forcing children to have oral contact with a harmful metal apparatus oozes blind corruption. This overt perversity in a children’s animation film suggests an emphatic message: the original function of monsters—to scare—does not sell any more. People are not buying it, and producers who cling to the old, untransformed monster are relegated to forcefully attempting to suck in more money from consumers. According to Monsters, Inc., the historical relationship between humans and monsters is constructed and strained. As evidenced by a closer reading of this repulsive apparatus, the old monster function is obsolete. Disney aims to have their new funny monster kick Dracula’s immortal butt in the box office.

Before moving on from these frames, it is interesting to make a connection evident in bottom-left picture. It shows that Boo in her monster form and Randall share the exact same purple coloration. While this might seem to suggest that they were made for each other, the evolution of contemporary fashion has ousted traditional matching because it is too matchy-matchy, another reference to the forced, obsolete nature of nineteenth-century monstrosity. This idea is strengthened by noticing that Sulley shares this exact purple coloration but in moderated, more natural spots on his back. The colors in this monster triad communicate that the relationship between Boo and Randall is assigned and artificial, while Boo and Sulley share a more organic connection.

Disney repeatedly uses Monsters, Inc. as a vehicle to promote a new, superior function for monsters. At the end of the movie, a scene features Mike telling a dumb joke to a child in the
child’s bedroom: “You’re in kindergarten right? Oh, I loved kindergarten. Best three years of my life [silence]…of my life.” This dorky joke reveals Monsters, Inc.’s target audience of 5-6 year olds. This joke also introduces a whole new focus for the once fear-obsessed company: comedy. As a result of this, Mike, the former supporting sidekick, can now be directly involved in the human-monster connection because the connection is based on personality and wit, not superficial appearance; he is no longer the oddball out. Once Mike returns into the monster world after a successful comedy session, Sully congratulates Mike on his ability to make the child laugh and says, “laughter is 10 times more powerful than scream.” After making this discovery, the factory, the monsters, and the kids win; the factory makes more money off of energy, the monsters enjoy reduced pressure to perform, and the children have bedtime entertainment and companionship. The traditional aesthetic of pleasurable fear has evolved to recognize that desire is more powerful than fear. Monsters, Inc. projects a corresponding message: the mean monster was profitable, but the nice funny monster now has 10 times more commercial potential than the nineteenth-century classics. Youngsters and their parents prefer that kids bond with popular funny monsters who comfort them, not dark Dracula dolls that might haunt their minds at night and drive the distraught children into their parents beds.

The final exchange of the movie captures the rekindling of the central relationship in the film after Sulley and Boo are separated for a period of time:

Sulley: “Boo?”
Boo: “Kitty!” (Monsters, Inc.)

Only audio plays here while the screen freezes, forcing viewers to imagine the deep emotion connection between Boo and her chosen guardian-monster. Boo’s voice relays excitement and interest when Sulley discovers her again, just like her voice during the pair’s first meeting. This final moment frames the movie and reminds the audience of an unanswered puzzle: why and
how was Boo able to love and trust Sully from the very beginning while the monster’s affection was so delayed? Viewers meet Boo when she fearlessly grabs Sulley’s hulking hairy tail and giggles with delight when Sully’s recoils in horror. Somehow she possesses enough good intuition to tease and explore a foreign beast in her closet. But what exactly makes Sulley different than Randall? How does Boo know to fear Randall and mock Sulley? Perhaps this mystery is necessary to maintain the seductive shroud around the monster reputation. A monster can be good or bad now; it is exhilarating to not know what kind of monster might emerge. Regardless, Boo is rewarded for her boldness with a more appropriate monster-friend. This extremely personal connection between monsters and humans characterizes contemporary monster spin-offs in merchandizing and children’s literature, because every child dreams their ideal, and of course super cool, monster match is out there waiting to keep them company at night.

**Food Inspired by *Monsters, Inc.***

Audiences love Mike and Sulley. In 2002 alone, when Disney and Pixar released *Monsters, Inc.* on home video, consumers purchased 30.4 million copies, generating $201.7 million in revenue (Evangelista). It is remarkable that *Monsters, Inc.* sales have kept up for more than ten years. But do thousands of people love them enough to literally consume Mike and Sulley and spend 24 hours celebrating them across the country? Disney predicted this demand by offering edible monster treats for sale at theme parks for a recent promotional kick-off event, “Monstrous Summer,” to advertise the popular 2013 prequel to *Monsters, Inc.* called *Monsters University* (see fig. 9):
This image captures a sugary marketing technique designed to feed avid monster fans at one of many select Disney theme parks for a full 24-hours. The Disney display is not vulgar or unprecedented, and it most likely does not strike most observers as inappropriately weird or disgusting. Yet, imagining a child charging up to the glass breathlessly begging for a taste of Mike! Edible monsters are not new when considering the bizarre lineage of monster cereals. In 1971, General Mills released Count Chocula and Franken-Berry breakfast cereals, the first two of five monster-themed breakfast cereals commonly referred to as the “Monster Cereals.” The specialty food is now only manufactured and distributed during the Halloween season.

According to NPR’s online food blog, The Salt, people are still obsessed with monster-themed foods. Author Dan Pashman interviewed one fan who admits the longing connection she has with her favorite monster cereal:

There really is something about these particular artificial flavors that tap into a very specific sense memory[…]It still reminds me of that Saturday morning special treat that you could only eat every once in a while, and it's something now that I get to share with my own daughter…It's really kind of nostalgic and exciting to me

(Pashman)
This enthusiast maintains a very fond connection with monster food, and the quoted language like “nostalgic and exciting” suggests people can get sensually addicted to these monster foods. It is reasonable to wonder what part, if any part, of the historical monster is spared in these processed concoctions. In the case of the pictured Disney’s display, imagine watching a child bite into the Sulley apple, exposing his sweet pale flesh, or imagine chomping into Mike’s chewy, crunchy, oozing eyeball and smiling with sensual delight. This is gross, but people are somehow attracted to the perverse delight of literally consuming monsters; masticating monsters into a pulp is a form of mastery over evil or a way to defeat scary monsters and ingest their mercurial power. Alternatively, internalizing a monster perceived to be friendly is a popular step to symbolically become one with colorful monster friends. This explains the popularity of a variety of monster products. Either way, waking up to a bowl full of monster breakfast cereal is an apt metaphor for how monsters fuel human consumers. Over time, however, the power gleaned from static monster products will wane, and consumers will desire some increased level of distortion or deviance after experiencing a childhood full of familiar monster toys and representations. The next wave of monstrosity has to be edgy and different because deviance sells.

Sexual Interpretations of *Monsters, Inc.*

The excitement of deviating from Disney’s monster prescription inspires the masses to create unexpected interpretations of *Monsters, Inc.* For example, a Randall-obsessed cult is actually floating out there on the Internet. This is a bit odd because most viewers dwell on Sulley, Mike, and Boo, the popular characters. Unfazed, numerous fanatics profess their love on a particular blog site—Tumblr.com—designed to harbor deviants and facilitate the anonymous expression of atypical obsessions. According to a pop-culture authority, “Pinterest is a blog site
for white girls about cupcakes and weddings; Tumblr is a blog site for [deviants] about weed and sex” (Penaranda). Many view tumblr as an outlet because it is more anonymous than other blog sites; people can be whoever they wish to be and publish whatever they would like. Therefore, the amateur blog producer, “the-winds-of-change,” felt safe and untraceable publishing the illustrated interpretation on his human Randall profile (see fig. 10):

(Fig. 10. the-winds-of-change)

This illustration is a human interpretation of Randall, the scummy purple villain in *Monsters, Inc.* that marks the identity of the profile user. The spiked hair, skeptically squinted eyes, and purple coloration reflect Randall’s monster form, but the creator took artistic license when designing a stylish human version. Not only did “the-winds-of-change” fixate on a nasty villain in a children’s animation film and take the time to visually recreate one human version of this character, but also the author dedicated an entire frequently maintained tumblr blog to him and his new story:

Randall Bogs at your Service. I was once a monster, but now I've taken up the dangerous job of being a human, in order to get on the inside. My corporation will be ten times
better than Monster's Incorporated, even if it means sucking the screams from every child in the world (the-winds-of-change)

This narrative fabrication on the margins of the Internet allows monsterphiles to feel even closer to the objects of their desire when public obsession seems inappropriate. The story perpetuates the imaginative fantasy that Disney initiated, and the flexibility and creation of fresh content is exciting. This fan frequently updates this blog with similar content, but, of course, people love turning it up a notch. This is not the only unusual tumblr blog dedicated to Randall.

According to a separate tumblr account, Randall has accrued an arguably more dedicated fan who updates her profile almost daily. This person with the profile name “pitbulllady” admits being “disgustedly attracted to Randall Boggs” in the following image featured on her highly active page (see fig. 11):

(Fig. 11. pitbulllady)

The presence of Randall’s last name is hilarious here because it is an attempt to humanize a purple lizard, and most readers recognize the effort is in vain. But the effort is not in vain for the admirer. Perhaps Randall’s sadistic invention, the scream extractor, turns this fan on beyond the
point of recognizing the separate imagined reality in which this character lives, and this adult imagines a real connection between herself and Randall. However, Disney and Pixar do preach a lesson of inclusion, even for “others” like Randall. Randall’s cult following attests to the captivating blend between nineteenth-century and twenty-first century monster that arouses people enough to openly declare their lust for a children’s animated character.

A popular website, deviantART.com, further characterizes the locus of adult monster obsession in a world where children’s monsters reign supreme. It is an online community showcasing various forms of user-made artwork modified from original designs to suit their own often-bizarre tastes. Artists start with a recognizable character and alter it in a way to make the image more visually provocative. This process most often dislocates innocent characters from their tame environments and relocates them into a more mature forum. Since the site’s conception in 2000, members in general have become known as “deviants” and submissions as “deviations” (deviantART.com). The following two images created by inspired illustrators exemplify the complex relationship between adults and animated monsters (see fig. 12):

(Fig. 12. deviantART.com)
Boo becomes a young adult, Sulley dies in the name of fashion, and Mike exploits the ‘roids in these edgy interpretations. Reinventing recognizable characters in surprising ways often vies for the attention of a different audience than the original film’s intended audience of youngsters and families. In *Monsters, Inc.*, toddler Boo cannot speak in full sentences, yet multiple *deviantART* artists choose to depict her here as ten to twenty years older. This deliberate modification seems to suggest that these illustrations are future projections of what happens when a child grows up after having such a close relationship with monsters. The art’s playful energy masks a more serious message: the artwork interprets the rowdy future of children who grow up monster.

The pigtails, pink dress, and pop-art speech bubble identify the young adult as Boo, and her goofy socks further maintain the innocence of her identity. However, these tags of innocence serve a specific purpose: they contrast with a too-short pink dress that she tugs down to cover herself. Also, despite a sense of liberation from constriction that leg exposure conveys, the concealment of the rest of her body suggests Boo is an exhibition for public enjoyment. This conflict is sexy, and so is her inappropriately mischievous behavior among dangerous monsters. In both images, she poses self-consciously with either an unemotional doll face or a mischievous grin with dead and dangerous friends. While her highly recognizable *Monsters, Inc.* companions further mark her as “Boo,” their exaggerated forms are designed to augment her feminine form; this discord is captivating. To highlight the contrived nature of the costume, it is important to establish that it is not realistic, accurate, or functional. This is a costume of design. The dramatic presence of Boo’s monster friends renders these illustrations edgy with sexual tension.

One of the most fascinating characteristics of this sketch is Sulley’s body that Boo, at first, seems to wear as a symbol of her authority over the monster. A shrunken Sulley hangs over Boo’s shoulders, seemingly dead and skinned for his stylish and exotic turquoise-lavender fur.
Despite the hunk of dead friend on her back, Boo seems shockingly composed. What happened here? Did a human vs. monster showdown ensue as Boo reached the raging teenage stage, resulting in her wearing a monster trophy? A closer look reveals the exposed teeth of the monster and Boo leaning to the left under Sulley’s weight or figurative importance. This enforces the dead monster’s authority over her as if he possesses her, just like a parasite latching on to and animating an innocent host. These factors challenge the notion that Boo has truly adopted the power of a monster. Boo’s monster accessory also incites commentary about her identity. It may seem at first that, she has killed Sulley and she has somehow conquered masculine monster aggression. However, she is more accurately defined by it. It seems that the Sulley’s miniature dead body communicates her identity just as powerfully as her pigtails and pink dress. More likely, Boo and Sulley’s altered forms suggest the girl has figuratively outlived and outgrown her childhood guardian. He is still with her, concealing her and marking her as special as he repeatedly did in his monster world. Thus, Boo’s identity is directly linked with the monster: she might have outgrown the monster, but the monster still wears her.

In both interpretations, “Boo” seems to be a more fitting name for a stripper than a toddler. Her posed sexual body language suggests she has grown up as a human self-conscious of female beauty. On the right with a hulking Mike, Boo and her warm body language confirms this conformity as she drapes over a bulging and provocatively sharp beast. Sprouted horns, veiny hunched back, enlarged snaky tongue, and gaping toothy mouth depart from Mike’s simple aesthetic in *Monsters, Inc.* Mike reaches aggressively for an older audience that would appreciate his evolved form, an audience that would marvel at his assertive behavior. This kind of audience values the rough, unruly monster and wants to see the darkness of nineteenth-century rise again as they grow up into more mature adults.
V. Monsters in Contemporary Halloween Culture

Theme parks like Universal Studios capitalize on the mass intrigue of deviantART fantasies by designing large-scale immersive monster experiences for young adults who will happily pay big bucks to step into Boo’s adult shoes for a few hours. While Universal Studios spawns countless ideal monster case studies to dissect like the classic Universal Monster films, a close look at the twisted theatrics of Halloween Horror Nights®, the theme park’s most popular marquee event, suggests Universal Studios attracts a surprisingly young audience as the contemporary stronghold of nineteenth-century monstrosity.

While the popular conception of monsters is elementary or classic in contemporary culture, each new monster rendition is a composite story, rich with meaning and symbols of times past. Each monster engages with the previous dark lives of its predecessors. The survival of any story, whether oral or literary, depends on a fan base to revive it over and over again, and monsters are constantly reincarnated to captivate audiences young and old. Originally, monsters were dark supernatural symbols of the unknown laden with cruel sexual overtones. The Sesame Street and Walt Disney sanitation of the story bury this sexual meaning in order to sell friendship and confidence to children.

Recent monster interpretations like Halloween Horror Nights® reject Disney’s asexual Monsters Inc. mode and strive to be exceptional breaks from the unthreatening monster narrative; they hearken back to the past lives of monsters. After first establishing nineteenth-century monster origins, departures become a part of a cycle because narrative revision is a reproductive process. A close look at Universal Studios’ Halloween event and a specific monster-themed haunted house reveals that these variations echo devious sexual themes of the infamous nineteenth-century monster, Dracula. These supposedly wild and fresh renditions
borrow heavily from the past, so it is reasonable to wonder: if change is cyclical, is it really change? Are any of these dark new monster functions really new? The remarkable mercurial properties of monsters imply that monster icons and their stories are adaptable, but still of the same intangible element. Defining these varied functions paves the way to better understand how consumers entertain conflicting monster functions simultaneously.

**Halloween Horror Nights®**

Some contemporary monsters functions are dramatic and sexually charged, like the enormous theme-park scale Halloween experience, Halloween Horror Nights®. Halloween Horror Nights® is an annual Halloween event produced by Universal Studios in Orlando that draws hundreds of thousands of horror fans from around the globe each year. Tony Timpone, Editor of *Fangoria Magazine*, says, "After visiting scream parks all across the U.S. for the last 20 years, I can say that Universal's is the best in the business...Halloween Horror Nights® is the ultimate Halloween experience" (*Halloween Horror Nights® 2013 at Universal Orlando*). The popularity of this spectacular event draws a loyal horror fanatic following. The following amateur fan photos capture the young crowds eagerly waiting for the “scream park” to open before night falls (see fig. 13):

(Fig. 13. yelp.com)
For 25 select nights around Halloween, crowds gather at the gates of Universal Studios when the park terminates its ordinary operations at 4:00pm and transitions the kid-friendly park to a hellish movie-set quality battleground ready for brave demographic of mostly 15-30 year olds. The gates open at 6:00pm and stay open as late as 2:00am in the morning. The gruesome content and ungodly hours practically prohibit older people from enjoying the theatrical spectacle. Some might believe this event is for “fringe” or marginal adult groups who are obsessed with horror, but the impressive representation of middle and high school age groups challenge this notion.

Production assistants rush around before the park reopens, constructing “scare zones,” or horror-themed outdoor areas throughout the walkways of the park. These themed zones feature elaborate props and monsters designed to disturb people. Universal plans the distribution of these limited, concentrated scare zones so it is necessary to travel through them to access other scary live shows and events in around the park. After hours of complicated make-up application and costuming during the day, hundreds of bloodied “scareactors” are released to prowl around in the six separate scare zones for which they were designed. For example, grotesque monster characters are instructed to crisscross a cloudy path and frighten guests like the pictured scare zone below while deafening chainsaws rev and people shriek in the background (see fig. 14):

(Fig. 14. Halloween Horror Nights 19 2009 Opening Night Scare Zone)
Crowds of young people funnel through this dirty playground of frightening monsters, simultaneously hoping and dreading that a talented actor might make them scream. This conflict is almost as exhilarating as the evolutionary fight-or-flight instinct that kicks in within even the most macho paying guests as soon as they enter the park. The degree of gore and horror is surprising for most young first-timers, but it is in line with the general rising demand for an increasingly shocking entertainment experience; guests quickly become desensitized. Universal’s quick transformation from bubbly during the day to terrifying at night implies that the dark side of monstrosity, the entertainment industry, and consumers is just below the surface, longing to feast on fear. The monster concoctions at Halloween Horror Nights® are stimulating and diverse, but this multi-acre outdoor obstacle course is just the superficial layer of theatrical terror.

Not only are the outdoor paths of the park transformed into horror movie material, but also the real gems of the Universal Studios production are hidden within eight full-blown indoor haunted houses pre-constructed within gigantic soundstages and tents located along the periphery of the park. The outdoor scare zones are just child’s play when compared to the houses; walking through five minutes of near pitch-black Dracula movie sets as strobe lights reveal a crawling Renfield at your feet and a hovering bride of Dracula clawing for your head is enough to make most people reevaluate why they put themselves in this nightmarish situation. The ratio of scareactors to square footage increases tremendously on the cramped indoor house pathways, and talented monsters hide in crafty hidden alleys and doorways difficult to distinguish in the dark.

Within each haunted house, the walkway is claustrophobically narrow because, though scareactors are technically not permitted to touch visitors, Universal Studios utilizes water guns, air blasts, designer smells, mechanized floor drops, crawl spaces, lighting effects, and obstructive
Theatrical props to create an overwhelming, fully immersive environment. They want guests to believe “even for a second” that they are actually in Dracula’s castle (Halloween Horror Nights 2009 Ripped from the Silver Screen). Since a single night admission costs $70 (Halloween Horror Nights® 2013 at Universal Orlando), Halloween Horror Nights® is a separately ticketed event, and the above entrance crowds demonstrate an overwhelming turnout year after year, revenue seems astronomical, especially when considering the amount of overpriced merchandise, food, and alcohol consumed. However, it is clear Universal Studios puts substantial capital into altering a visitor’s sense of reality.

The event has been described as a theme park Halloween party “for those looking for something a little edgier than Disney” (Halloween Horror Nights® 2013 at Universal Orlando). In fact, the official Halloween Horror Nights® website issues a warning that it “may be too intense for young children and is not recommended for children under age 13” (Halloween Horror Nights® 2013 at Universal Orlando). Despite, and probably because of, this limitation, Halloween Horror Nights® pushes the envelope and is consistently recognized as the “Best Halloween Event” by Amusement Today and the premier Halloween experience in the world (Halloween Horror Nights® 2013 at Universal Orlando). Since its debut in 1991, the theatrical event breaks attendance and satisfaction records each year (“Halloween Horror Nights: Guests Surveys Indicate Increased Popularity”). It is a gruesome, highly sexualized environment that merits an official warning and stimulates the imaginations of a new generation of young thrill seekers—the generation that grew to love monsters on Sesame Street. The warning functions as a deliberate design of Universal Studios to intrigue the public and imply the exclusivity of the event, as if it were a rite of passage for the newest monster recruits.
Each year, Universal Studios designates a unifying theme for the Halloween experience, and amongst the spread of past frightening themes, this paper is situated in the domain of “Halloween Horror Nights XIX: Ripped from the Silver Screen.” In 2009, Orlando chose a self-referential movie-production theme to unify the event (Halloween Horror Nights 2009 Ripped from the Silver Screen). The goal was to simulate an environment where guests can “live the biggest, baddest horror movie experiences of all time” like Frankenstein and Dracula (Halloween Horror Nights 2009 Ripped from the Silver Screen). The theme plays on the familiarity of classic monsters to scare visitors with shocking departures from the supposedly retro originals. This foreshadows the interaction between past and present, the competitive, territorial nature of the entertainment industry, and the public fascination with increasingly twisted monster functions, even as sanitized monsters continue to be churned out. Universal’s best advertising efforts to draw crowds with familiar monster names and threats to survival prove particularly effective. Universal’s “we promise to scare you” guarantee resonates with the meaning of the Monsters, Inc. motto: “we scare because we care.” However, despite the unforgottably personal experiences and actors trained to target individual people, this event has reportedly become an overstuffed tourist fear feast. Halloween Horror Nights® is mass gore gluttony, not a private small-scale production. Accordingly, some unglamorous prerequisites are required to experience Universal’s finest monster house creations.

After weaving through a few scare zones, most patrons of Halloween Horror Nights® rush to station themselves in the pictured situation below (see fig. 15):
Eight haunted house signs like the image at the top left are spread out through the park. These posts designate the eight most extreme horror experiences available, but only to those who walk into the dreadfully long metallic queues. More often than not, guests are faced with the decision to wait in an impressively long line or continue weaving through the limited scare zones outside. If guests accept the house challenge, they funnel into a queue for up to 120 minutes per house. The opportunity cost is fascinating to take into account in this unique situation; people choose to pay a sizable sum to forego sleep and other pleasures to wait in incredibly long lines and be scared by aggressive monsters. Remarkably, diehard fans see this as a small price to pay: when else are people stimulated to the point that they are genuinely scared for their lives? What better way to forget petty problems at work or school than to trigger a 4-8 hour adrenaline rush? Visitors are thrilled to leave the humdrum of reality and voyage deeper and deeper into a seemingly indefinite mythical past. Universal Studios satisfies this need by shuttling visitors
back in time to revisit a dark narrative history that has been bleached by cuddly kid monsters. People are entertained, but they still express unhappiness with a growing crowding issue. In fact, many have insisted the event should have a “ticket sales cap” so guests receive more individual monster attention (*yelp.com*). Still, personalized scare tactics keep monsterphiles coming back for more. This individualized attention is an impressive spectacle (see fig. 16).

**Dracula: Legacy in Blood**

In the absence of literal text, Universal Studios relies on theatrical expertise to reclaim classic monster stories. For example, the 2009 haunted house, “Dracula: Legacy in Blood” features an enormous castle wrought with Dracula, his prey, and his feisty brides. Guests enter a dark spacious soundstage and see an imposing entrance: a dated edifice surrounded by impaled skeletons and a vampire admiring his murderous work, a reference to Dracula’s historical predecessor, Vlad the Impaler. While this is intimidating, the fear truly begins upon entering the constructed house on the narrow pathway. The image below captures the visual dimension of personal attention offered in the threatening castle halls (see fig. 16):

(Fig. 16. *HHN 19 Dracula Walkthrough News 13*)
A quick look at this blood-washed foggy scene reveals a “feral” bride of Dracula boldly lunging into a guest’s face while a surprisingly illuminated vampire monster lurks in the pathway ahead (*Halloween Horror Nights 2009 Ripped from the Silver Screen*). Fighting the urge to turn and run with these two visible scareactors is demanding enough, but registering the obscured presence of a third vampire in the top right corner renders the path ahead plagued with aggressors—a seemingly insurmountable path. The actors are technically not allowed to touch guests, but this is little consolation when the bride starts breathing down your neck, the first vampire quickly disappears to surely scare you later, and the second maintains paralyzing eye contact as you slide by him. If this were not sufficiently overwhelming, Universal Studios layers this visual dimension with the blasting soundtrack of the last deafening shrieks of homicide victims loud enough to vibrate through the floor. Finally, according to this top-notch movie production studio, this classically derived *Dracula* house would not be complete without the metallic smell of blood and “burnt rubble” pumped into the air (*HHN 19 Dracula Walkthrough News 13*), the final sensual touch to convince guests they have entered another dimension that does not sympathize with their nervous laughter or “I’ve-clearly-had-enough” facial expressions. This is something in which Universal takes great pride: there is no mercy at Halloween Horror Nights®. But people worship this experience; “pitbulllady” seems increasingly less strange.

This demonstration of evil monstrosity can be viewed as Universal’s effort to dismantle Disney’s near-successful overthrow of historical monstrosity. Universal Studios depicts sexualized violence and sickening scenes as a part of an artistic, performative experience. The violation of social norms at Halloween Horror Nights® is performed with theatrical, not moral, interests in mind. In this light, it seems that Disney molested the original identities of classic characters and bleached out the rich anarchy of the past to inject moral lessons. Though it is a
popular notion that contemporary monsters are simple and designed as cuddly kid companions, Universal fights back with evil monster favorites, symbolizing the triumphant public return to nineteenth-century origins and the partial death of the Disney monster myth. In this light, Disney’s Mike and Sulley “monsters” are more twisted than Universal’s gory creations because Disney and other commercial purifiers manipulate timeworn narratives in an attempt to redefine what the living public considers “classic.” Self-defined “classic” innocent stories attempt to reclaim dominance in a sexually driven entertainment industry.

The monster clash continues in a highly surprising arena: love and marriage. Halloween Horror Nights® uses monstrosity to counter Disney’s thriving wedding enterprise by catering to a population that demands a different breed of themed wedding. While many have heard of themed weddings, most have not heard of a new dark monster function that fits into this category. The most odd, telling fact that betrays the wild success of Halloween Horror Nights® is the recent addition of customizable wedding packages on their extensive monster menu. According to an article on the Theme Park Adventure online site, “New Halloween Horror Nights Wedding Packages Feature Chainsaw Drill Team Wedding Guests, Hearse Ride For Bride and Groom Through the Event and More.” The following description captures the strange allure of saying “I do” to bloody horror chic:

A cold fog creeps around you in the darkness as you exchange your vows on the creaky steps of a haunted house. The sound of growling chainsaws and screeches erupt from your “scareactor” wedding guests, as you promise “till un-death do us part.” This wedding of your nightmares is now a reality with new customizable and highly-anticipated Halloween Horror Nights wedding packages. These new Halloween Horror Nights themed wedding packages offer customizable options including “his” and “hers” coffins for the bride and groom. Reception menu items include “Deadly Romance” spring rolls, “Bride of Frankenstein Lady Fingers” stuffed jalapenos and “Creepy Wellingtons.

(Theme Park Adventure)
For the last four years, guests plan their wedding during Halloween Horror Nights®, so they can enjoy the event before or after the wedding with their guests. Couples can even choose to get married in front of Dracula’s castle among impaled skeletons and hooting vampire scareactors with special ghoulish guests of their choosing. Surprisingly, most couples that choose this venue dress and act unsettlingly normal as they exchange vows and chainsaws rev as they kiss before entering the fully functioning haunted house together. This hybrid purpose of monsters at Halloween Horror Nights® combines the most commercially powerful elements of monstrosity—exoticism and adrenaline—to attract daring couples who want a non-traditional wedding to remember.

This 200-year battle between the good or evil monstrosity presiding at the forefront of American culture champions writers, designers, and artists who dig into the flesh of the monster narrative body again and again to glean new life for each story and attract an audience that may or may not be familiar with the dark past of nineteenth-century monsters. These creative figures are inspired by the energy of the visiting, consuming public at monster-themed events to fuel revision, a process central to the love of monsters at Disney parks, the fear of monsters at Universal Parks, and modern monster mythology as a whole. Monsters are a hot medium to explore contemporary sexuality, and the sexualized monster scareactor scenarios above have wider implications than the Universal Studios soundstages.

**Halloween Costumes**

The popularity of Universal’s wild horror party is an emblem of the current bizarre and hyper-sexualized Halloween costume market. Slutty sequels to supposedly “classic” monster costumes are ubiquitous at Halloween gatherings and mass-marketed to the demanding public, both male and female. It is almost impossible to imagine an alternative to the high hemlines and
heels that have become synonymous with women’s Halloween costumes. The costume website “Costume Craze” is just one of many entities that satisfy the public demand for sexy Halloween outfits. The company boasts “Thousands of Costumes. Millions of Smiles” which suggests both that there is great demand for these sassy costumes and that they satisfy a greater audience (Costumecraze.com). If one were to search for monster costumes, a dizzying array of short skirts and bulging breasts would appear sandwiched between “Terror in a Tutu Monster Toddler” and “Teeny Meanie Monster Baby” costumes (Costumecraze.com). Even with the presence of baby and toddler options, the merchandise overwhelmingly appears to be that of an adult superstore.

Halloween is a competition. Once a year, it is socially acceptable and nearly required that women wear stripper attire to make a statement. Women sexify themselves with false glittery eyelashes, garish makeup, and porno accessories in an effort to stand out. But first, the following costume images illustrate the troubling progression from simple to sexy monster (see fig. 17):

1a) Toddler Cuddle Monster 2a) Monster Miss Toddler 3a) Toddler Wild Child Monster
The parallel design for child and adult monster costumes is conspicuous and not unlike the young and old versions of Boo from *Monsters, Inc.* and deviantART. While the costumes follow the short-skirt and campy accessory template for popular Halloween costumes, these “sassy” and “sexy” animated monster costumes are not as common as Frankenstein or Dracula spin-offs—the traditional Halloween staples. Then there must be something in particular that drives people to buy these infantilized adult costumes. Why choose to look like a child and forgo lustier styles like “Sexy Rebel Monster,” “Deluxe Gothic Mistress,” or “Frankenbride” (*costumecraze.com*)?

First of all, “sexified” kid cartoon icons quickly catch the crowd’s attention; they ensure a sexy shock factor because they depart from an established children’s tale. The above adult costumes defy Disney’s family-friendly rewrites as hybrids between good and evil monsters.

Also, the bright fabric is eye-catching at dark parties, and being the unique youthful monster challenges the norm of darkness on Halloween. Just like the exotic coloration of
Monsters, Inc. monsters, hot pinks and purples normally reserved for young girl costumes quickly capture the public attention on a tall busty woman. When worn by children, the youthful monster costumes seem fitting because, like Sesame Street insists, they are little monsters. On adults, the childish monster costume is surprisingly bold, bubbly, and untamed—a combination that says: I’m fun! The outfit injects life and youthfulness in a way that encourages viewers to reevaluate the sexuality of the asexual monster. It seems that the more innocent the original concept is, the sexier the reinterpretation of that concept can be. Regardless, entertainment companies profit from the perversion of innocent monster icons because of a public obsessed with sexual control and individuality.

Did sanitizers like the producers of Sesame Street and Monsters, Inc. have such foresight to create a perfect storm of demand for his re-sexified hybrid monster products because they knew revision was cyclical? Did he remove overt sexuality from monsters just to reap in the dough when the public predictably demanded that a form of nineteenth-century monstrosity come back out to play? The entertainment industry betrays their eagerness to consult the past in making recycled themes appear outrageous or unique again. This possibility exposes the darker side of innocent Disney, the side that knows “sex sells” and keeps ratings high. Clean monster producers of all kinds seem to have a thorough awareness and command of the numerous past lives of murderous monsters. Producers capitalize on deviations of “classic” innocent monster tale because they realized the potent attraction of scary monsters is as much a fantasy as the asexual friendship offered by Mike and Sulley.
VI. Conclusion

While this paper swings like a pendulum from one monster function to another, back and forth between darkness and light, the constant rebirth of the monster identity is defined by sexuality and mirrors the sexualized nature of rewriting a tale. Revision is a reproductive process. Many of the newest renditions are not unlike the nineteenth-century tales of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, or *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* because they all depend on shocking or relatable human elements to either civilize children or liberate young adults. The resurfacing of the old in modern versions of monstrosity is a sort of inevitable scarring that results from the cyclical revision process.

While the clean monster seems to challenge the scaring efficacy of the dark monster, the frequent reminder of monstrosity’s nice characters makes the existence of evil supernatural demons much more exciting. In fact, this also applies vice versa; evil makes clean look squeaky clean and more approachable. Thus, there is an exciting conversation between two camps of monstrosity that universally encourages the coexistence of conflicting monster types and the continued commercial success of the human-monster relationship. Additionally, it is important to note that while the binary tendencies of the human brain limit the popular conception of monsters as either of the old dark scary nineteenth-century variety or the *Monsters, Inc.* children’s variety, this analysis has revealed the vast range of complex monster hybrids between the two extremes. Monster types and functions fall on a spectrum between pleasure and fear. New monster interpretations increasingly straddle the continuum between monster meanings (from murderous beast to fragile youngster) and speak of the notoriously complex character of monstrosity. Entertaining multiple definitions of “monster” simultaneously and facilitating the incredible reproducibility and portability of monstrosity over space and time requires substantial
cognitive effort for both producers and consumers. Thus, it is reasonable to wonder why people invest time and energy into monstrosity and how this relates to the similarities of monsters and humans.

Monsters have increasingly become objects of desire, and because people desire them, people imitate them. This in turn encourages monster-makers to create monsters in their image. The distinction between the self and other has collapsed to the extent that it is becoming impossible to differentiate between monstrosity and humanity; the line between monster and human grows thin. For example, in MTV’s hit series Teen Wolf, the identity of Scott is conflated so it is not clear if he is human or monster. Scott is a sexified wolf boy and the main character of the series who sometimes flirts in his normal high school classes and sometimes transforms into a wolf and murders nogitsune, a dark fox spirit and one of his many supernatural foes. Is he only a monster when he is a wolf? His identity could change as his form changes, but it is not clear—it is up to viewers to decide how they view Scott in their fantasies. Monsters are now endowed with human forms and behaviors, acquiring all the positive attributes of humanity including sexuality, compassion, and conscience. The fact that the masses would endorse or even allow this kind of conflation suggests this sharing is important. People covet monster features like supernaturalism that make monster vibrant and unique. In addition, people augment their monster idols with the pleasures of humanity to create a super-human. The line between humanity and monstrosity has grown thinner because monsters are designed for humans by humans; monsters are reflections of their adult makers. The ultimate fantasy is to surpass the rules of this world while enjoying the human pleasures associated with living in it.

The limits of humanity inspire the creation of a symbol to embody this discomfort. This act simulates the sensation of being alive and autonomous. There is something inherently
hopeless about living with and inventing monsters because no matter what people accomplish, humans will never be able achieve the majestic status of “monster.” People generate creatures to do what they cannot: enter another dimension, demonstrate superhuman behaviors, and live forever. It is the widespread fantasy of Americans to defy the impossible—the necessary constraints of humanity. These constraints become increasingly acute to adults as they grow older. They cannot go back to their childhood, reinvent themselves, and delay the slow death of life that creeps closer to them every day. However, parents can simulate all of these things through others: their children.

Adults generate monsters and a prosperous demand for monster products, so monsters—even the fuzzy cuddly breed—are never made to satisfy the demand of children. Colorful monsters inject feral energy back into the obsequious lives of most adult humans. Then monster producers make and sell products to children who get hooked on products they did not necessarily desire or introduce into the market in the first place. The impressionable nature of children creates the potential to fashion a more interesting, bold, confident child by exposing them to a friendly breed while they are young, because it pays to be bold in life.

America has introduced monstrosity to children hoping they will be inspired by the unbounded alien lives of monsters. In this way, parents are the transmitters of cultural currency and identity. Monstrosity is a key component of contemporary identity construction because modern monsters of all breeds introduce boldness into the early stages of development. In fact, the monster-child relationship may fuel the notorious impression that Americans, particularly the most recent generation of children, are irrationally overconfident. The monster children generation grows up differently than the now-adults of the scary monster generations. Humans first enjoyed monsters exclusively via text, but now cinematic, digital, and experiential mediums
are available. People can even experience monstrosity by living as a monster. For example, “furry lifestyle” is a growing sexual genre that has become more popular recently in mainstream culture. People who are into furries are sometimes called furry lifestylers and essentially are people who gravitate toward animated, fictional characters with human qualities and personalities. While diverse behaviors accompany this human fixation, people have identified sexual components to their furrightness. In this light, adults imposing monsters on children is a trend to watch because of monstrosity’s tendency toward the dark side.

Monsters are complicated creations. People direct monsters to make humans scream, laugh, or love, but these are superficial responsibilities. Deeper-level monster functions exist despite the common belief that monsters merely entertain audiences. The fundamental function of monsters is inspired by human incredulity towards the role of humanity: what are people supposed to be doing anyways? Making monsters is an outlet for the frustrated limits of life on earth, inspiration to children to be bold and strong, and is a way increase the sense of control in life by manipulating fictional constructs. People do not just laugh or scream when monsters confront them. Their true function is to watch, analyze, and mimic monstrosity. In some ways monstrosity emboldens people, yet in other ways the unbounded reality of the monster fantasy is toxic to the true home of humanity. The reality on planet earth pales in comparison to exotic and thrilling environment of Monstropolis or Halloween Horror Nights®.

However, the alternative is not desirable. If people stopped giving monsters life, form, or function, the “other” or the measure of community would be lost. If nineteenth century monstrosity never grew into a booming commercial market for children, monsters would only be horrific outsiders. Consumers and producers of television, toys, and costumes would be less concerned with civilizing young people and more concerned with avoiding the mystery of
monstrosity. While the influence of monsters on people can be viewed as dangerous, this proximity allows people to hold the reigns over the supposed “unknown.” Making sense of this world through fictional monster narratives is critical not only to cognitive comfort but also to survival. Yet the “unknown” is too vague to capture the heart of modern monstrosity. Essentially, modern monsters are humans that transcend the limits of humanity. Monsters are not automatically despised as evil outcasts anymore; they are revered for their ability to transcend human confines. People are ready to embrace each new monster because it represents a new possibility that can ultimately never be realized, only fantasized. Shape-shifting monstrosity mirrors cultural shifts in America, not just different representations of monstrosity over time. Monsters have not changed; people, their environment, and their perception of monsters have changed. Regardless of monstrosity’s chaotic symbolism and evolving social purpose, the increasingly monstrous reality of humanity is an ironic development because monsters are thriving in America’s most secure crevices. Now monsters leave no person—adult or child—untouched.
Works Cited


Costume Craze. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.


DeviantART. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.


Penaranda, Steven. Personal interview. 2 Mar. 2014.


*Theme Park Adventure.* “Couples can enter to win the wedding of their nightmares at Universal Orlando Resort’s Halloween Horror Nights.” TPA Quick Take. *Theme Park Adventure,* 15 Sept. 2010. Web. 5 Apr. 2014.