

ZOMBIFICATION OF DISABILITY

From the “Living Dead” to the “Walking Dead”: How Modern Zombie Culture Reflects, Challenges and Perpetuates Implicit Negative Bias towards People with Disabilities

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Abstract

The modern zombie culture has been popular in the West since World War II as an allegory for what ails modern society. Yet, the zombie narrative has not been used in academic scholarship to explore the fears and misunderstandings that society holds towards marginalized communities. To uncover possible connections, this research examined how the reflection of disabilities and other minorities in popular zombie culture influences the audience's perspectives about disability, inclusion, religion, and the zombie apocalypse. Data gathered through an in-depth survey, follow-up interviews with a sub-group of survey participants, and transcripts of the AMC television series *The Walking Dead* and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* were analyzed using statistical and content analysis methods.

Traditionally, the study of bias in the portrayal of the disabled community has focused on how audiences react to disability representations, including the level of disability portrayed. This research adopts a unique approach, situating the zombie itself as a representative of the nameless, faceless horde of those in society that do not conform to the social norms of today. The zombie is established as a representation of our unconscious biases, and it is argued that the zombie apocalypse can bring about positive change. The zombie narratives, with characters adapting to living in a world dominated by the disabled zombies that is not unified by religious practices, are seen as a depiction of hope for a post-apocalyptic societal rebuild into a more cohesive, inclusive, and empathetic community that sees the worth of all bodies, regardless of their abilities, with collective responsibility for making sure that nobody is left out.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The rise of the modern zombie can be traced from the horrors of two world wars, and since its first appearance post World War II, can be firmly placed within the white culture of the west, with no basis in folk or cautionary tales. The traditional zombie came from the slave trading business that brought slaves to Haiti and elsewhere. It is based on the voodoo religion and beliefs, going so far as to have an entry in the Haitian penal code, placed within the non-white cultural origins of slavery. The modern zombie differs in that it has no cultural roots and is used as an allegory for what ails modern society, including disability, capitalism, racism, climate change, ableism and sexual orientation.

The zombie narrative has not been used traditionally in academic scholarship, yet this seems to me to be a huge oversight as these narratives are reflective of the fears, horror and misunderstandings that society holds towards the marginalized in society. The marginalized referred to in this thesis will include the physically disabled, homeless, the poor and those with mental challenges. The zombie has been written about extensively in post-apocalyptic cautionary tales and it can be used as a blank slate or allegory for any perceived ills in society.

My thesis takes a different approach using a disability lens, as it traces the historical evolution of the zombie from its original voodoo roots to the current times of the worldwide COVID pandemic, and views zombies as a representation and reflection of society's views towards people with disabilities. This thesis also explores how disability has been viewed since pre-

biblical days, long before Lazarus and Jesus are believed to have risen from the dead, to cannibalism and religious communion, through to current reflections of society as portrayed in the digital media of today; specifically, both the modern television series *The Walking Dead* and the quintessential modern zombie story in the film *Night of The Living Dead*. When talking about digital media I am referring specifically to film and television. Digital media is a way of communicating data through a screen or other digital device. As stated by Finnemann, “A basic characteristic of digital media is that they integrate the storage capabilities of print media with the transmission speed of electronic media” (Finnemann, 2011, p83) as in film and television

Using these two representations of the zombie, one film and one a television series, this thesis will critically assess how the rise in modern zombie culture reflects, challenges and perpetuates an unconscious bias toward those considered less fortunate in our society.

The Living Dead

The *Night of The Living Dead* film, by George Romero, was the very first film where the leg-dragging, disfigured cannibal characters were first introduced, yet not named zombies. The word zombie is never used, but it marked the debut of the modern zombie. After the world wars –nerve gas warfare used in WWI, PTSD, shell shock, World War II with the holocaust and the horrors of Hiroshima –with ready access to images of the atrocities on the internet, George Romero introduced the zombie in the quintessential horror subgenre zombie film *Night of The Living Dead*. By comparing this first film with the arguably most watched modern zombie

television series, I will seek to compare their influence with unconscious bias towards people with disabilities of both mental and physical manifestations.

The Walking Dead

The Walking Dead television series started out as a comic book written by Robert Kirkman in 2003 and is now in season 11. With the eruption of the COVID-19 virus in 2019 emerging as a worldwide pandemic in 2020 and the collective societal response, we see how *The Walking Dead* is a close reflection of our fears of infections and how we react to those slower than their able-bodied counterparts. The unrelenting force of the recently dead zombies is terrifying, as they don't need anything from us so there is no negotiation. They have no fear of pain or disfiguration or enclosed spaces, or need for companionship, they just want to feed on us and when we are dead, their numbers swell again to potentially include us.

The Good, the Bad and the Apocalypse

If we take the stance that zombies are a representation of disability, that people feel uncomfortable around disability in its many forms, and the viewpoint that disability is as unwelcome as it has been since the days of the Old Testament, then we can see how disability has been viewed negatively; disability has been seen, for example, as a punishment – the parents were said to have done something to offend God and the child was disabled as a punishment for their sins (Benftsson, 2014). In more recent times, disabled irregular bodies impede the post

industrial revolution's pursuit to make money. The people who watch the horror subgenre of zombies, I will argue, are exhibiting an unconscious bias towards disability.

Many people will not approach people with disabilities, be it physical or mental disabilities, yet cell phone usage is ubiquitous with people avoiding their surroundings with a screen and headphones. Coupled with this withdrawal from their surrounding, many people are taking so many different drugs, prescription and otherwise, it is hard for them to see reality and they are sometimes referring to being in a 'zombie' state (Bennett, Pollock & Ryle, 2005). Zombie narratives give people permission to separate the able-bodied from the disabled, further increasing the "us" and "them" divide of the so-called "normal" in society and those who are othered by them. The colour of your skin is also irrelevant to zombies, yet historically the first zombies were associated with the slave trade in Haiti. The thought of a zombie uprising, with zombies becoming the dominant culture, would be unthinkable to most westerners who could equally not contemplate dark-skinned potential former slaves rising up to enslave the white mainstream society; would be intolerable for many. With our world being currently so unpredictable, many would welcome an apocalypse to reset our world to be a more inclusive and less self-seeking community.

Why we fear zombies and why does it matter.

Zombies tend to arrive in post-apocalyptic scenarios. Americans seem particularly suited to these scenarios due to their lack of universal health care, huge disparities between the rich and

the poor, the American dream where if you just try hard enough you can be anything (and if you don't succeed then maybe you did not try hard enough), the second amendment right to bear arms and generally poorly educated people (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). When we read books and watch apocalyptic and end-of-the-world films, I wonder if what we actually fear is the end of humanity as a dominance force; it is the end of human life on earth that is hard to comprehend, not the end of life on earth in general.

The Washington Post reported on the Ohio protest against COVID-19 social distancing. They reported that despite medical advice, many people “who aren't in favor of social distancing and are pushing to quickly reopen the economy see prey, not predators in the screams of the Ohio protesters. They see heroes” (Judkis, 2020)¹. There is a fear of becoming "the one", whether it is a person infected with COVID, or a zombie or a person with a disability. The

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/that-ohio-protest-photo-looked-like-a-zombie-movie-zombie-movie-directors-think-so-too/2020/04/17/b518fc48-801c-11ea-9040-68981f488eed_story.html

vulnerability of being human is the reality people are afraid to face, and so they go into a state of denial and otherness, blaming all around them, their fear showing as cruelty to anyone less than the expected “normal” of their society. The CBC posted an article on triage, using the word obligation — specifically, an obligation to accommodate — regarding protocols in the COVID pandemic² as if the disabled were a burden. When crises arise, the disabled are seen as not as worthy of saving as their able-bodied counterparts and we alienate them to dehumanize them, to further cover up our selfish desires for survival.

Problem Statement

The objective of my research is to seek an answer to the questions that emerge at the confluence of the three research spaces shown in Figure 1 below of Zombies, Religion and Inclusion. Using these three research spaces will show if the post-apocalyptic world, as shown in the modern zombie narratives, has enough community through inclusion to survive and if

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/opinion-disabled-covid-19-triage-orders-1.5532137>

religion still plays a part in forming cohesive and functioning systems that allow people to survive and thrive, whatever their level of physical and mental ability.

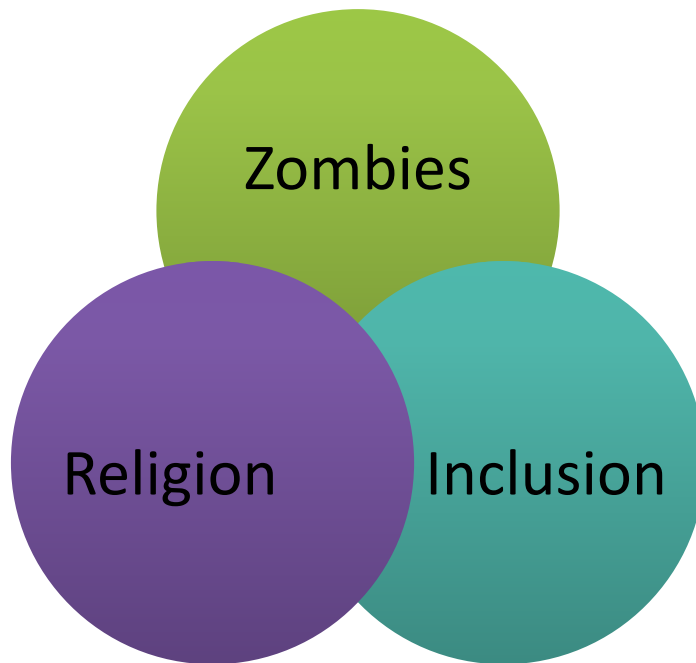


Figure 1 Three Research Spaces

Research Approach

Using the fictional zombie as representative of people's fears and biases towards people with a disability, dividing the research responses into zombies, religion and inclusion, I used

textual analysis on the scripts of the two films, a survey sent out to the general public and in-depth interviews from a subset of participants from the survey.

Further tracing the history of disability, we can see how people have viewed those who are considered misfits to society over time, and finally a history of the zombie itself and how it evolved into the horror subgenre it is today.

Significance of Research

To be human is to be biased. Our categorization of people and events helps us to make quicker decisions and identify threats, yet sometimes these assumptions are wrong and there is no threat (Ross, 2014). To unpack this bias and understand it further will reduce the *us* and *them* mentality of disability, and with more depictions of disability in the genres of film, television and gaming, we further normalize those who are different.

Summary

If we believe that zombies are a representation of disability, that people feel uncomfortable around disability in its many forms, and the religious viewpoint that disability is unwelcome and impedes the post-Industrial Revolution's pursuit of money, then people who watch digital media on zombie stories of horror may be exhibiting an unconscious bias towards disability; further, some people with disabilities self-identify as zombies; Arch Academy Zombies an athletic team

for those with a disability³. Following the history of both disability and zombies, we can look at their origins and see how these biases have arisen, and with that understanding, seek to change perception and reduce the divide between *us* and *them*.

Chapter Two: History of Disability and Zombies

History of Disability

Introduction

Since the days of the Old Testament, disability has been seen as a punishment to parents who had done something to offend God, with the child being disabled to punish them for their sins (Bengtsson, 2014). But disability is a fluid concept; over time, a person could be considered disabled at one point in history, but the same condition at another point in time might not be seen as disabling. Disability is a social construct as dictated by the social expectations of the era (Stiker, 1999) so, disability today is not viewed the same as disability was in ancient biblical, European and Egyptian times. As discussed by Rose (Rose, 2016), disability is different in present times;

³ https://www.openwaterpedia.com/wiki/The_Zombie_Patrol

for example, Rose disputes the stories of Spartans killing deformed babies, and we can better understand the misconceptions of these stories when viewing them through the discourses of the times. We are keen, in present times, to categorize and label things (Foucault, 1994), but it is important to realize that the disability labels were very different in past eras compared to now. Although eugenics may have been practiced by the Spartans, it was not necessarily performed on people who would be categorized as disabled by today's definitions; in fact, there are many references to what would in current times be labeled as physical disabilities being perfectly acceptable by Spartan standards.

The industrial revolution from the 1750's, changed the agrarian nature of work and made disability a problem, as disabled people could not fit into the rigid roles and the uniformity of physical machinery, that, for the sake of efficiency, was all the same shape and size and was built for the average person, not accommodating of any differences. In the industrial revolution, Fordism was mass production and mass consumption when Henry Ford introduced the assembly line for car production in his factories, (Clarke, 1992) in the late 1940s to the mid-1970s. This left little room for diversity so how does disability fit in with our modern world? Is the rise in modern zombie digital media a reflection of how people with disabilities are represented as expendable? Here follows a brief history of disability from biblical times to present day to show how disability has been perceived and how the term disability means many different things as the dominant discourses of the day change and evolve. This section examines who is included and

who is acceptable within the normal range of societal expectations and behaviour, and why this will reflect on historical and modern attitudes towards disability, which has then been reflected in societal fears of the outliers in our society, reflected by the portrayal of the zombie.

Disability in Ancient Biblical, Greece, Sparta, Rome and Egyptian History

Disability in modern times was categorized very differently than it was in ancient times, and different again than it is today (Rose, 2016), and it is important to view this information through the lens of the time. In the bible disability is widely referenced with Jesus Christ in the New Testament, being a disrupter of the Jewish religion and his renunciation of the idea of disability and individual fault (Stiker, 1999). The bible tells us in the Gospel of John (John 11:1–44) that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, four days after he was pronounced dead. Jesus himself rose from the dead, so the link between zombies and religion is found in very early writings and is the basis for Christianity,⁴ with a guarantee we will all rise from the dead at Christ's second coming.

⁴ <https://theconversation.com/the-case-for-christ-whats-the-evidence-for-the-resurrection-75530>

The earliest days of the bible stories have accounts of Jesus raising the dead⁵, stories which are still taught today, and believed as factual historical events by many people (Smith, 1989).

Moreover, the Old Testament viewed the disabled as legally unclean, and the disabled had the status of prostitutes or women who were menstruating — they were not welcomed in the community. Defect is linked to sin in the Jewish social contract and beliefs of the time. In contrast, “Jesus says explicitly that the sick, the disabled, the marginalized, are the first in the Kingdom of God” (Stiker, 1999, p34). The biblical stories from Old Testament times seemed to be in a perfect state and good societal order, but with a line between the rich and poor; including those deemed less worthy with a disability. Disability from war was viewed differently though, so “if the impairment resulted from a glorious war, as opposed to having a criminal origin, disability could indicate that you were highly valued as God’s true servant. Indeed, in order to understand disability and the Bible, one must also regard how a certain disability came to be” (Bengtsson, 2014, p287).

⁵ 4 references in the bible Nain Luke chapter 7, the 12 year old daughter of Jairus a synagogue leader Mark Chapter 4, Lazarus Joh chapter 11

With a link established between bible stories and the raising of the dead, we can see how the links between life and death are important concepts within religion. Also, we can see a link between disability and social rejection over the ages.

In ancient Greek societies there was a social construct of disability categorized as those able to fight and those not able to fight, serve in government or who were otherwise unable to earn a living (Penrose, 2015; Rose, 2016), but there were basic payments for the disabled in ancient Greece as an alternative to charity (Penrose, 2015). Spartans were warriors. The men fought and the women made strong children, and ableism was based on bodily ability; mental health issues, like anxiety, was not a reason to opt out of Spartan social expectations, like fighting (Penrose, 2015).

Healthcare in the Roman army from the late Republic to the early Imperial era was an important part of the war machine. Soldiers disfigured by war, as opposed to birth defects or diseases, were viewed positively (Lommel, 2015). Claudius, Roman emperor AD 41 to 54, had a limp and a stutter. Julius Caesar, who reigned before Claudius, is assumed to have had epilepsy. Disability is hard to define in our present times and even more so to understand in ancient ones (Penrose, 2015).

So, disability has always been acknowledged, but these different ancient civilizations had very different attitudes and categorizations of it and stigma associated with it. Little has been written by people with disabilities themselves, with most accounts being written by the upper

classes and scholars as they were male and taught to read and write. These narratives became more common as reading and writing became more prevalent, and societal attitudes toward disability changed in Medieval Europe and North America although there is a consistent trend of social consternation regarding disabilities.

Disability in Medieval Europe and North America

The playwright William Shakespeare (1564 to 1616) wrote astute narratives of the human condition and repeatedly dealt with issues of disability and social norms of the times. Disability seemed to be more accepted then as there were many disfiguring illnesses (dysentery, malaria, diphtheria, flu, typhoid, smallpox, syphilis, and leprosy) and very low, or no, standards of sanitation were normal. This led to outbreaks like “the Black Death” (bubonic plague), and general poor hygiene made disfiguring skin conditions common. Quarantine, from the Italian ‘quarantina’ (forty days), and social distancing was the only way to stop the Black Death’s spread. Leprosy was also common; although often misdiagnosed, it was nevertheless a common and disfiguring disease. The church and society of the time seemed accepting of those with the diagnosis of leprosy (Brenner, 2010). But to compare disability then to now is difficult. The term disability presumes that this is a collection of people with a common identity, which is hard to do nowadays and in the Middle Ages there was nothing resembling a disability entity (Singer, 2012).

Money makes a difference in lives, and rich people who are or become impaired have resources to help them so their disability is not a barrier. Poverty bias and societal barriers are the cause of impairment and disadvantages (Drew, 2015). In America, where the dollar is like a religion, with people seen as expendable and secondary to the business of making money, disability is viewed as unworthy of financial or social significance. This is further compounded as the history of America is a history of rugged individualism, autonomy and the self-made man of the illusive American dream. There is little empathy for those considered weak or dependent, yet this diversity is what makes the human race so interesting, and it is at the heart of the human experience in both community and democracy (Nielsen, 2012). “When disability is equated with dependency, disability is stigmatized” (Nielsen, 2012, p xiii) and so it is in direct conflict with American ideals of independence and strength through autonomy. In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, these disparities were highlighted as there were/are many popular dialogues asking decisions to be made over which was more important, life or money; the economy or the death of

thousands of people⁶. The value of a statistical life (VSL) can be calculated and used to calculate the trade-off between acceptable death rates, and money (Kniesner & Viscusi, 2019).

Differences can stand out and in America, as it is in the rest of the world, the disparity between rich and poor is large and getting larger. The American economy was built from the slave trade, which although abolished is still in effect today with high rates of incarceration in the BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of colour) communities, unequal opportunities, and prejudice. America does not seem to have moved past slavery and many black people are treated inhumanely and live in dreadful conditions of intolerance and fear. This inequality of race is a social construct made from a fear of difference which is also the same for disability and other differences like gender and sexual orientation.

⁶ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-your-money-or-your-life-coronavirus-era-economics-makes-us-ask-grim/>

Slavery, Race and Disability

The inhumane treatment of slaves is deplorable. Race theory suggests that people of colour have been dehumanized, with Africans compared to apes and therefore denied membership of the human species, to justify inhumane treatment (Haslam, 2006). The slaves of the antebellum period were often treated with great cruelty, with the deformed or weaker slaves, babies and infants killed (Forret, 2016) without thought for the love of their parents or siblings. They were treated like animals, including forced nakedness, and infertile women were sold (Barclay, 2017) and considered less worthy. Many Americans in the early part of the century (and nowadays) saw disability as God's displeasure, with monstrous births symbolizing sin (Barclay, 2017), ignoring the fact that Jesus Christ saw disability differently. During the American civil war (1861 to 1865) slaves were used in the army, and after emancipation disabled former slaves were further discriminated against as emancipation depended upon one's ability to find work, which was especially hard for those with disabilities (Downs, 2008). After emancipation, when many former slaves could not find work, the federal government was concerned that former slaves with disabilities should not become their responsibility. There are records of "deaf, dumb and blind" freedmen filing for support and many were simply placed in asylums (Downs, 2008). So the disabled of the time were seen as expendable as they were not commodifiable. With the slave trade in Haiti the first reports of the living dead were received in North America. They were described as walking yet inanimate, working tirelessly for no pay in

appalling conditions; the perfect worker for a capitalist exploiter in the name of business acumen (Bishop, 2010).

Many civil war veterans found employment post-war difficult, and even more so former slaves with a disability. Participation in society hinges on the ability to work, so being both disabled and black makes acceptance in society, with all the associated prejudices stacking up, even harder to attain. Many disabilities, both mental and physical, are caused by war. After the sacrifice given by all soldiers in war on our behalf, society owes them more than financial and social support, whilst avoiding over-glorification of war as the only resolution to conflict.

Modern War and Disability

The Great War or WWI, lasted from 1914 to 1918. When it ended many soldiers returned home with horrific disfigurements and mental disorders like shell shock. Disabled veterans from WWI in Britain were excluded from the Peace Procession in July 1919. Over 400,000 servicemen joined the parade, but the disabled veterans watched but were not allowed to participate (Cohen, 2001). With more than 750,000 ex-servicemen permanently disabled in Britain, their rehabilitation effort would be significant and promises for pensions were not enough for them to survive on. Programs for rehabilitation were primarily done through philanthropic and voluntary actions (Cohen, 2001). The spouses of disabled veterans were left with having to work, raise children AND look after their disabled loved one. “Throughout the

1920s and 1930s, tens of thousands of disabled veterans waited on live employment registers. The number of men on special registers for disabled ex-servicemen never dropped below 24,000 in the interwar period; in 1923, it rose as high as 65,000, and it climbed again to 41,000 in 1931; how many were placed on the ordinary register cannot be traced. Countless men, having exhausted their unemployment benefit, failed to sign on” (Cohen, 2001, p110). Many found work in sheltered workshops making, for example, poppies for the British Legion. They were expected to be grateful for the charity given to them, but many felt bitter at the sacrifices they gave and the disregard of their plight by the British Government. In contrast the German veterans received secure employment and excellent social services (Cohen, 2001).

For physical disabilities, the medical model of disability was prevalent and the normalization was to rehabilitate and cure rather than accept disabilities as a normal part of the human race (Treviranus, 2020) . Although prosthetics have been used since around 3000 BC, they were seen as a turning point to rehabilitation as a cure for disability (Stiker, 1999). In Canada, although not fought on Canadian soil, WWI veterans returned from war disabled to a country that had to rethink what physical disability meant, along with the growing eugenics discourse. Before WWI, disability had been seen as a punishment given to a parent that had done something wrong; after WWI, disability meant visibly mutilated bodies that had been mutilated through dedication to country by fighting in the war. Being born with a disability is very different to getting a disability later in life.

The medical model of disability is focused on rehabilitation and cure. Rehabilitation is somewhat different than seeking a cure, as to cure “is a removal and relates to health. Rehabilitation is situated in the social sphere and constitutes replacement for a deficit” (Stiker, 1999, p124). Rehabilitation is centred on a return to work and reintegration into society, as if the only contribution to society was work efficiency. Making disability disappear through integration into social conformity relieves society of any need to help, reduces us to commodifiable units and excuses any diversity as deviance, something to be discouraged, when in reality such diversity makes us innovative and stronger (Treviranus, 2020).

Shell shock was little understood and viewed by some as a cover for fraud. Those suffering from shell shock could be said to be in a zombified state: alive yet not alive, in mental anguish, likened to a “male hysteria” (Meyer, 2008). Many soldiers were so traumatized that they exhibited physical manifestations like paralysis or psoriasis, which was seen as hysterical, a psychosomatic response to trauma. The French film-maker Abel Gance directed a film entitled *J'accuse* with dead soldiers returning from the grave to see if their sacrifice had made the village a better place. When the villagers see the terrifying sight, they change their bad ways and look after the soldiers’ families. The dead then returned to the graveyard (Winter, 2013). C. S. Myers, a Cambridge-educated physician, psychologist and anthropologist, was the first to name and study this new horrific category of battlefield injury (Winter, 2013), and the stigmatization of shell shock continues to this day, with mindlessness a state of shell shock, and this zombie state,

portrayed in film. “Part of the reason the cinematic zombie is so varied is because its defining factor, that which makes it a monster, is not that it is dead but that it is mindless” (Vaccaro, 2012, p2). Foucault talks of biopower, centring the body as a machine to be used for work (discipline) and political (regulatory) gain (Foucault, 1995): “We will find the zombie elaborated as the subjectless body that biopower works on and through, the body as productive resource, and perhaps most importantly, we will see that the zombie is immanent in the bourgeois subject, that it is even a goal of modernity – the coordination of automatons” — a characteristic that is a positive one when found in the army (Vacaro, 2012, p3). “Biopower manages and conducts life itself and does this by reducing human subjects to nothing but biological material, automata, zombies” (Vacarro, 2012, p6) and in the trenches of WWI the trench became their new reality and their human faculties shut down, including self-preservation. The human body becomes a zombified weapon, a human machine (Vacarro, 2012). A modern example of this is workers in meat packing plants in the United States who, with an outbreak of the deadly virus COVID-19 were legislated back by former President Donald Trump – the workers’ lives were seen as

expendable, and the workers as inhuman and justifiable losses, in the quest for food and money by politicians and capitalistic owners.⁷

Nazi Germany perfected its methods for mass extermination in WWII on children and adults with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities (Mostert, 2002). Post WWI brought resource scarcity and many private and public institutions closed, giving the public perception that lesser worth was attached to people with disabilities and they could not contribute to the immediate recovery in Germany. With Nazi rule beginning in 1933, by the late 1930s asylum administrators were already discussing killing inmates (Mostert, 2002). In the concentration camps during World War II, there was talk of the Muselmann of Auschwitz, prisoners who were characterised by a loss of all will and consciousness, walking corpses, the living dead (Vacarro, 2012).

Darwin's ideas of biological determinism, along with eugenics and genocidal markers of disability, were explored by the Germans. "The fate of people with disabilities in Germany may

⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/essentials-meatpacking-coronavirus/611437/>

be understood by examining a similar series of genocidal markers, with corresponding sequelae, which determined the real-world fate of ‘useless eaters.’” (Mostert, 2002, p159). Social Darwinism, in humans, states that both biological and social traits are passed between generations as the nature side of the nature/nurture debate. Eugenics, the belief that those deemed inferior should not be allowed to continue in the gene pool, was a growing movement in the 1930s along with euthanasia. Euthanasia, originally a voluntary request regarding a life and death choice to relieve suffering, became a right granted to physicians (Janz, 2019) to alleviate perceived suffering with being “normal” becoming a requirement for life itself.

With 20th century horrors like Hiroshima and the two world wars, man’s inhumanity to man is reflected in popular culture, with the rise in modern zombie culture potentially a foil for the disassociation of people towards disabilities not only naturally occurring but caused by unforgivable, incomprehensible and inhumane treatment in war. The horror of the wars made disability, both mental and physical, prominent in society and further marginalized the different in our society. “Humans are reduced to bare biological life, life that can be operated on, controlled, and exploited. In the age of biopower, all have the potential to become zombies. This is what zombie films have always told us” (Vaccaro, 2012 p1).

History of Zombies

Si vis vitam, para mortem. If you wish for life, prepare for death.

- Sigmund Freud

Introduction

There are two distinct iterations of the zombie with the original zombie being attached to the voodoo religion, and the modern zombie which started as a fictional entity after the horrors of WWII. The modern zombie made its first appearance in 1932, in Victor Halpern's film *White Zombie*, but it was not popularized until after WWII. This modern zombie became the version we now know in popular culture after the release of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968, although Romero did not use the word zombie. The modern zombie is very different from the original zombie as it is not based on religion and superstition; rather it is based on viral infections or biohazards (Luckhurst, 2015).

The origins of zombies and the Vodou religion stems from Haiti, with the black slaves who carried their religious beliefs with them from Africa. Although the official religion of Haiti is Catholicism, the majority of Haitians practice Vodou (Moreman & Rushton, 2011). The word voodoo is popular in the west and its use is associated with sensational, horrific and racist depictions of this religious and cultural practice. The word itself is a corruption/misspelling of the original word Vodou.

Origins

The Vodou religion started when slaves of various backgrounds were brought together at the main hub of slavery, Haiti on the island of Hispanolia, an island which now includes the Dominion Republic as well as Haiti. Although residents of Haiti supposedly converted to the

Catholic Church, Vodou arose from an amalgamation of beliefs and traditions from a group of people forced to accept a colonial regime of oppression whilst trying to retain their original cultures and identities (Moreman & Rushton, 2011). Zombie beliefs are widely held and the Haitian penal code even contains references to zombies in Article 246 (often misquoted as article 249). Translated from the original French, this article reads: “It shall also be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made against any person [using] substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the person had been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows.”⁸

Even older than the zombies of Haiti are other traditions: for example, the raising of the dead from Gilgamesh in Iraq, the hopping corpses of China (reanimated corpses that hop around, killing living creatures to absorb the life force energy from their victims), and Indian Voodoo dolls. More well-known and less “monstrous” zombie examples can be found in the bible, where

⁸ https://web.oas.org/mla/en/Countries_Intro/Haiti_intro_text_fra_2.pdf

<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/files/2014/10/Haitian-Criminal-Code-Article-246.jpg>

<https://memory.loc.gov/service/lawlib/law0001/2010/201000199424237/201000199424237.pdf>

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (Bishop, 2010) and when he himself also arose from the dead. Other African cultural beliefs about reanimated corpses are documented in Benin, Zambia, Tanzania and Ghana, and in many of these African legends, witches reanimated the dead for slaves and servants. In Jamaica, Surinam and Martinique there are parallel beliefs about reanimation, but it is not clear if one influenced the other. Given the long history of zombie legends in Africa, we can conclude that the Haitian zombie is not Indigenous to the island but is a product of the beliefs and legends of transplanted African slaves (Bishop, 2010).

The Catholic religion forced on the slaves was mixed with their old rituals and ceremonies, some of which called for blood rituals not dissimilar to the Catholic Mass ritual of the body and blood of Christ and resurrection of the dead. Zombies were not immortal, argued Seabrook, but just not alive in the manner we perceive life (Bishop, 2010). In transition, as risen from the dead, they represent the step in-between life and death.

The west associates voodoo with revenant corpses known as zombies, cautionary tales for children, fodder for the horror genre and the zombie as an allegory for much social unrest in our modern times.

Zombies and Voodoo

The concept of zombie, as introduced in Haitian folklore, is a dead body reanimated through various methods, but most commonly voodoo magic (Vye Zo Komande LaMenfo,

2011). Zombie stories were brought to America by William Seabrook in his book *The Magic Island* (1929), who wrote of soulless human corpses working in the cane fields, only to return to the cemetery if they are given salt. Seabrook tried to rationalize these zombies as mistaken identity or some kind of doppelganger, but the public in America were “more enamoured by the spectacle, Seabrook’s book became a huge success, forever establishing the idea of the “living Dead” in the imagination of the West” (Bishop, 2010, p49). The modern zombie is fundamentally an American creation and the only supernatural foe to have skipped any sort of literary manifestation, passing directly from folklore to the zombie offering we have today (Bishop, 2010). Vampires owe much of their mythology to Bram Stoker, reanimated dead to Mary Shelley, but the zombie has no germinal fictional or literary source, with its only written origin story being the non-fiction travelogue *The Magic Island* in 1929 which brought the zombie into mainstream America (Bishop, 2010).

Another explorer who contradicted Seabrook, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a book called *Tell My Horse* where she states definitively that there are zombies in Haiti. She claimed to be a zombie initiate rather than just an observer of voodoo practices during her visits in the 1930s to Jamaica and Haiti. Wade Davies, a fellow member of the Explorers Club of Canada grew up in the tall pine forests of British Columbia and entered Harvard in 1971 to study biology. He brought back a sample of the drug he thought was used during zombie rituals to induce the

mindless state, which may well have been a tetrodotoxin known to cause a death-like state leading to live burials, furthering the science of zombification (Guercio, 2017).

The differences between the voodoo zombie and the Hollywood zombie are great. In Haiti the fear is of becoming a zombie; in the west the fear is of being harmed by a zombie (Bishop, 2010). The fear Hollywood audiences would exhibit towards the zombie movies is complex yet understandable as the United States was once itself a colonial entity and slavery an essential part of its economic and social systems, with wounds of the civil war still visible. The thought that the white mainstream society might be enslaved by dark skinned people, potentially former slaves, especially after the US occupation of Haiti, would be unthinkable (Bishop, 2010).

Modern Zombie in Digital Media

Humans are reduced to bare biological life, life that can be operated on, controlled, and exploited. In the age of biopower, all have the potential to become zombies. This is what zombie films have always told us.

- Justin Vaccaro

Introduced to the western culture by Seabrook in his book *The Magic Island* (1929), the zombie concept slowly developed roots in popular culture through films such as *I Walked with a Zombie* (IMDB, 1943) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (IMDB, 1959). George A. Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (IMDB, 1968) spawned a new version of the concept where zombies

are the product of non-magical factors such as radiation, mental diseases, viruses and scientific accidents.

Zombies were seen as a metaphor for everything that bothered Romero about the modern world (Barber, 2014). In his film *Night of the Living Dead* (IMDB, 1968), the original modern zombie movie, the word zombie is not used but it is in his next zombie film, *Dawn of the Dead* (IMDB, 1978). In this second film, Romero places two Philadelphia S.W.A.T. team members, a traffic reporter, and the reporter's television executive girlfriend in a secluded shopping mall to seek refuge, although the film was mainly shot in Toronto. The premise of the movie is that the former people turned zombies were happiest in the consumer world of the mall — in other words, the zombie is associated with mindless capitalism. I will also argue that the zombie is also associated with disability; why else the slow-moving shuffle? The inability to communicate, the incessant desire for more food (flesh), they don't work, and they have no race, sex or gender; many people see disability in these terms. Zombies, when inactive, are roused by noise. They are mob-based and the virus has taken over their minds so completely that they no longer have thoughts past an unstoppable craving for flesh. They are driven like a mob to a common goal. They make perfect soldiers if they can be trained.

Some portrayals of more modern films show zombies as fast-moving and agile, as portrayed in some films like the British films *28 Days Later* and its sequel *28 Weeks Later*. The evolution of the zombie is an alignment to the more modern world and is not linear in nature.

Zombies have an ever-growing and mutating nature as different perceptions of the zombie analogy are portrayed. The slow-moving zombie and the fast-moving zombie both represent disability but in different ways. The supercrip is someone with a physical disability that is seen to be fast, fit and very capable, an inspirational person with a disability that has overcome their limitations, therefore we don't need to be concerned with their survival or care (Schalk, 2016; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Clare, 2017). When comparing the traits of these fast-moving zombies, to the slow moving ones, we see similarities to the mental health challenges faced by people struggling with homelessness drug addiction and depression, where the niceties of our social contract are missing and deviant behaviour is being shown – they are not acting as we would expect them to (Bishop, 2010). Stephen King in 2006 published a book called *Cell* where cell phones became weaponized, turning the users into aggressive people who don't know who or what they are. As soon as this primary source of communication is suspected, the world appears to fall apart (King, 2006). Both Stephen King and Romero's 2007 film *Diary of the Dead* use zombies as an allegory for human evolution and a link between past and future (Keetly, 2012). The difference between the binary normal and not normal in society is seen as those not infected and those infected, with man ready to dominate the planet and killing anything that gets in its way, dehumanizing people to justify bad behaviour.

Zombies get their identity from membership in a group and they are not hard to kill, but their numbers could overwhelm you. If the intersectional and/or marginalized groups of

disability, race, gender et al. joined together they would be a powerful and scary force. As the zombie “calls for revolution without goals” (Rushton & Moreman, 2011, p8), they are a blank slate on which the hope and the fears of the American people could be written (Kordas, 2011). “The crisis the zombie embodies is an apocalyptic one, the end of the bourgeois epoch” (Vacarro, 2012, p10) and this crisis signifies the end of “whiteness”; with the apocalypse, what is at stake is the bourgeois as a way of life. Interestingly, although white males have the most to lose in a disruption of the current social order, the majority of zombie films, shows and comics are predominantly written by white males – George Romero, the originator of zombie films including *The Living Dead*; Victor Halparin, *White Zombie*; Peter Jackson, *28 days later*; *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead* writers are Robert Kirkman, David Erickson, Tony Moore and Charles Aldard, all white males.

With a large disparity in our society between the rich and the poor, black and white, able and disabled, the mainly white rich struggle to keep hold of power; further, to make themselves feel safe, they stockpile money which instead needs to be moving to make the economy viable (Blanc, 1998). When times become seemingly tough for people in society who are rich, the

conservative way is to reduce spending, stop the gravy train⁹, but this response further marginalises the outliers in society, outliers which we need as survival is diversification — monocultures are vulnerable to a single threat and have no ability to adapt (Treviranus, 2010), we need the marginalized for the survival of us all. “If we respect and include others who are fragile, we are compelled to create a more generous and kinder society, a society that will treat us kindly when we are at our weakest, when we are struggling” (Treviranus, 2020, np).

Zombie studies have started to infiltrated academia, where we can use them to evaluate our own humanity. Dr. James Powell at Utah State University staged a “human vs. zombie” game to assess rates of survival and used this knowledge to model epidemic behaviour (Pielak & Cohen, 2014). This zombie horde viewed as a humanitarian struggle exposes differences between community allegiance and the fear of the formerly human horde. Humans must make choices: fighting, fleeing, betrayal, self-sacrifice and giving up, but the nameless, faceless horde of the zombie is single-focused, seemingly immune from pain, has a herd mentality and is

⁹ <https://thebigstorypodcast.ca/2019/10/16/our-new-podcast-the-gravy-train/>

formerly human: “a threat to what we might become and a mirror for what we are” (Pielak & Cohen, 2014, p44).

Summary for History of Disability and Zombies

With a link established between the bible stories and the raising of the dead, we can see how the binaries of life and death are important concepts within religion. The zombie comparison is widely used in our language today, for example it is used in economics to denote an entity that is no longer in existence as it is not viable; a designation used for companies who have larger debts than assets and who will go out of business, as well as the normal definition of the undead or walking dead (Golub & Lane, 2015) .

Also, we can see a link between disability and social rejection over the ages, even in religious communities. To further postulate that people with disability, mental and/or physical, are portrayed as the living dead, feared, shunned, used as cheap labour and segregated from mainstream society, we can extrapolate the theory that this societal discomfort regarding the disabled within normal society is reflected in the post-World War II popular media in zombie horror stories.

How has disability affected laws, policies, economics, literature, daily life and protection in times of crisis? All these things reveal a wealth of societal attitudes to disability (Nielsen, 2012). As I write, we are in solitude due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Triage in

hospitals relies on Darwinism and survival of the fittest to justify the horrible choices – are people over 70 worth trying to save? Are people with disabilities worth trying to save? What life is a worthy life? Are the only people with worth those who fit the societal norm of our time and country's culture?

Darwinism and the “survival of the fittest” is often spoken about especially at this time and place (2020, Ontario) during the COVID-19 pandemic. What makes a life expendable? People with disabilities have been seen as “useless eaters” (Mostert, 2002; Friedlander, 2000) and a drain on the economy for no financial gain. But species survive and thrive on differences and variations; monocultures have a much lower chance of survival as their singular nature makes them vulnerable to extinction (Trevaranus, 2020). People who have experienced vulnerability, including those with a disability, need adaptation skills to survive and so have great ideas on adaptation; they are the stress testers and provide an early warning sign for things that are going wrong.

The modern practice of large scale institutionalization during the 19th and 20th centuries pushes those with a difference out of the view of the mainstream, as they are hidden away in basements, poor houses and institutions. Disability is still misunderstood in our current society –

in 2020, COVID-19 Ontario triage instructions¹⁰ provided guidelines on who to prioritize for intensive care treatment and who to let die, with age (being under 60) as one of the criteria and scores on the frailty scale, which would include most people registered with a disability, another. Questions arise then over which is the more important, money or lives, and it is unjust or inequitable to let someone die because they are disabled.

How we see and categorize disability changes over time, but what has not changed is how people perceived as normal display reluctance to view those with mental and/or physical disabilities as worthy, contributing full members of society. As with disability, the human race adapts, zombies adapt and these adaptations are reflected in the media. In our modern times, we have a more concise set of standards to define disability, including both mental and physical, with the medical model and social models of disability being the most prevalent. We, as a society, still classify some people as worthy of life and financial support but are at a loss as to how to treat the others, so they are put away in institutions, homeless people treated as invisible

¹⁰ <https://caep.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Clinical-Triage-Protocol-for-Major-Surge-in-COVID-Pandemic-March-28-2020.pdf>

and left to die, refugees are dehumanized and deemed unworthy of a life, a nameless, faceless, mass of human suffering.

Disability	Zombie
People don't want to catch the disability	People don't want to catch the virus
Sometimes disfigured	Disfigured
Can be slow-moving	Can be slow-moving
Sometimes homeless or unable to bathe without assistance	Smelly, yet sensitive to the smell of non-zombies
Can be unable to speak clearly	Uncommunicative
Sometimes non-verbal	Non-verbal
Noise sensitivity may play a role in the individual susceptibility to noise-induced hearing loss.	Sensitive to noise
Can be uncoordinated	Clumsy
Low paid labour	Unpaid labourers – legends from Haiti
All people are declared clinically dead when there is no brain activities	Can only be stopped/killed when brain dead
Us vs Them binary	Us vs Them binary
Typical walk of Cerebral Palsy can be likened to the typical zombie shuffle	Move with an awkward shuffle much like that of a typical showing of Cerebral Palsy

Table 1 Comparison between generalized traits of both disability and zombies

Disability and Media Representation

In a morbid, distorted echo of structuralist and poststructuralist thought, the zombie film becomes literally and philosophically antihuman.

- Justin Vaccaro

Representation of disability in film and television is slowly increasing and “mass media images still provide many of the cultural representations of disability to American society. A 1991 Louis Harris poll showed that Americans surveyed were less likely to feel awkward around people with disabilities after having viewed fictional television and movie presentations about people with disabilities” (Haller, 2010, p29). Analyzing this rise using a variety of theoretical frameworks that reference the body allows us to examine and understand how disability is portrayed. Using the theories of feminism (along with feminist film theory), disability, race and gender to explore disability portrayals and the influence of both the medical and social models of disability we can analyse how disability is portrayed in the media. And further, using the analogy of modern zombies as a portrayal of society’s fear of the Others in our society, we can analyse our biases and further understand the us and them divide in society, as reflected in the modern zombie as a cautionary tale of disability.

Why the slow-moving, disfigured zombie? Is the modern zombie being used as an analogy for society's desire to increase the 'us and them' divide between the Normals in society and the Other? Cautionary tales, the earliest written horror stories, have always been used to convey a moral issue or to help avoid danger. Using the zombie as an analogy for disability and the Others in our society, we will explore public consumption of the rise in zombie culture as cautionary tale, evaluating if this ubiquitous view of disability as alterity, further increases or reduces the divide between 'us and them' in representations in film and television.

Introduction

Disability Portrayal in Film and Television

With minorities under-represented in media, it is interesting to see how portraying minorities in film and television makes them more familiar, and so less frightening and more acceptable as the television brings these character portrayals into your living room. If the work done with minorities in film and television representation to increase acceptance has improved (19.8 percent of lead actors in movies in 2017 were people of colour, marking an increase of

almost six percent since the previous year ¹¹), then the same can happen for disability representation. By evaluating media representation, we can start to change these destructive narratives to create a more inclusive society, tolerant of all differences.

Models of Disability

Disability representation is still seated in the medical model rather than the social model in film and television today, disabled people are considered bodies to be fixed. Moreover, ableism becomes more visible as a mental framework, or basis for one's thought and actions, transmitted through rhetoric devices¹² including language and imagery, to induce change and so film and television as the media "provides a space where change can occur" (Schatz & George, 2018, p3). According to Foucault, "where there is power there are resistances; yet these

¹¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/696850/lead-actors-films-ethnicity/>

¹² language tools that employs a particular type of sentence structure, sound or pattern of meaning in order to evoke a particular reaction from an audience

resistances too, contribute to the elaboration of the very objects to which they are directed as resistance” (Tremain, 2017, p49) and resistance brings change (Schatz & George, 2018).

The medical model seeks cures, rehabilitation and doctors’ diagnoses. This model effectively wants to make disability, in all its glorious differences, normal; visually reducing the us and them divide and making able-bodied people feel better about themselves as then they don’t need to be concerned with their, the disabled’s, problems.

The social model of disability states that the environment is the problem, not the impairment (Oliver & Barnes, 2012), and says disability became problematic as “people with functional limitations... became a problem in the industrial age as they were not able to operate the new machinery on which the industrial society was being built nor were their families able to support them, being under severe pressure themselves” (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, p16). The social model is useful as a tool to raise awareness of oppression and to view disability through a different viewpoint as opposed to the medical model, which is an individual approach to disability with suggested outcomes of rehabilitation and cure.

Rosemary Garland-Thomson in her book *Extraordinary Bodies* states that the entrenched assumptions of able-bodiedness and disability are self-evident physical conditions and the “physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p 6). The medical model is also relevant in feminist theory and the medicalization of the puzzling female body as

indicated by the expression “female trouble”, “that historical configuration of a nameless female indisposition, which thinly veiled the notion that being female is a natural indisposition” (Butler, 1990, p xxviii). The intersection of a female with a disability may be difficult for male doctors to understand or empathize with.

Disability in film and television has no easily recognized form (Enns & Smit, 2001), and whilst the medical model of disability seeks to find a cure for all things not aligned with the illusion of the perfect body, movies provide nightmarish images of people with disabilities as a threat to social stability. “As powerful cultural tools, the movies have played a major role in perpetuating mainstream society’s regard for people with disabilities, and more often than not the images borne in those movies have differed sharply from the physically disabled experience” (Norden, 1994, p1). Unfortunately the dominant discourse is still one of isolation with the majority in society doing all they can to keep minorities, including disabled people, dependent (Norden, 1994). The medical model and its desire for a cure or rehabilitation is prevalent in film and television with stereotypes so durable and pervasive that they have become mainstream society’s perception of disabled people. They have created such strong stereotypes that they “obscured if not outright supplanted disabled people’s perception of themselves” (Norden, 1994,p3). In fact, these stereotypes has gone so far as to suggest that disability is a personal choice, and films convey messages that failing to live with a disability is an emotional choice and denotes a lack of courage and character of the individual (Norden 1994). These stereotypes

increase the divide that could be reversed by more honest representations of disability, rather than disabilities being made to be sinister. Giving disabilities to sinister characters reinforces “three common prejudices against handicapped people: disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their ‘fate’; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them” (Longmore, 2001, p4).

Media Representation

The most prevalent imagery of disabled people in the digital media is of the maladjusted disabled person “and there is a growing recognition of the fact that these dominant cultural images not only violate the actual experiences of disability, but are also positively unhelpful in providing role models for disabled people and in breaking down prejudice amongst the rest of the population” (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, p104). Categorization of disability as monstrous, came from such dramatic representations for example *Frankenstein*, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, to distance normal from abnormal and to avoid the viewer feeling responsible for the emotional, moral and financial burden that disability must bring, so death must be preferable for the disabled: “Better dead than disabled” (Longmore, 2001, p7). Interestingly, supporters of animal rights seem OK with putting old, sick and disabled animals in pain to death compassionately, but should the same be said for human beings in pain and suffering with disabilities, there are of

course many different perspectives (Nario-Redmond, 2020). Nazi Germany practiced medical murder and eugenics, with the first victims to the gas chambers being the disabled, a “mercy death” solution (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000), but this systematic organization of murder of the disabled only happened under Hitler. Whilst these practices were being carried out, the United States continued with eugenics and gene manipulation practices, which are still ongoing now.

The American Pioneer Fund, a not-for-profit foundation founded to advance the scientific studies of human differences and heredity; eugenic racism, funded eugenics research in America and “Unlike their German colleagues, American scientists did not participate in the selection of tens of thousands of handicapped people for the Nazi gas chambers...the involvement of American eugenicists with Nazi policies reveals that the ideology of race improvement that was at the root of the massacres was by no means limited to German scientists” (Kühl, 2002, p106). The Pioneer Fund, “a foundation whose early leadership had praised aspects of Nazi Germany’s racial policies and which has, in more recent years, given financial support to controversial research into race and intelligence” (Kühl, 2002, p5), continues to fund projects regarding eugenics, human genetics and immigration. “The Nazi connection with American scientists and its continuity as manifested in the Pioneer Fund can help us understand Nazi race ideology and the results and implications of present-day race research” (Kühl, 2002, p11) and ideas to cure all disabilities and create genetically modified babies.

Media representations “are incorporated into the knowledge base of audience members. If these representations are biased toward a particular common set of social, gender or class stereotypes, it is logical to suggest that these biases play some role in the reinforcement of common stereotypes about race, class and sex roles in our society” (Eschholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002, p301) — this includes disability stereotypes. The media is powerful and can be used as a tool to positively reinforce representations of race, gender and disability. Literature depicts the socially lived experience of disability, not the pathology, so it can be hard for us as viewers to fully understand how the personal and collective true lived experience is unfolding (Mitchell & Snyder 2000).

The disciplines of normality are preconditions of participation in every aspect of social life, yet they are unnoticed by most adults who can conform to them without conscious effort. Children are very aware of the requirements of normality; among children, conformity to standards of normality in body size, carriage, movement, gesture, speech, emotional expression, appearance, scent, ways of eating, and especially control of body functions such as salivation, passing gas, urination and defecation, are enforced by teasing, taunting and the threat of social ostracism, beginning at an early age.

(Wendell, 1996, p88)

Rosemary Garland-Thomson states that interactions between normates and non-normates are “usually strained because the nondisabled person may feel fear, fascination, repulsion or mere surprise, none of which is expressible according to social protocol” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p12), with the non-disabled person unsure how to react. Nick Santonastasso¹³ whose body fits the profile of many zombie monsters as he has one limb instead of four, “is not interested in managing the anxieties of the able-bodied. Rather, this real-life teenager from New Jersey has gathered considerable internet fame by wholeheartedly inhabiting the monster that his body evokes. An avid fan of AMS’s popular series *The Walking Dead*, Santonastasso sets up pranks that transport the relentless, decaying zombies off of the television screen and into the spaces of suburban life” (Duane, 2013, p238) by displaying zombie attacks at everyday venues like the supermarket.

Using critical theory, we can look at these social conditionings that are prevalent in the media and look at disability representation, and analyze how we portray people with disabilities

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdE-FDKZTWk>

and why. Knowing this can help us more fully understand why portrayal of disability in the media is so removed from the lived reality.

The Horror Genre

Storytellers of the horror genre often perpetuate the negative images of disability by showing their perceived physical deformities to shock and repulse viewers without a thought for the negative images that perpetuate derogatory stereotypes of people with disabilities. In *Dawn of the Dead*, George Romero's classic follow-up to the original modern zombie movie *Night of the living Dead*, he states that "When there is no more room in hell, the dead shall walk the earth".

The horror genre is intended to frighten, scare, disgust or startle viewers and it is also used as allegory to communicate or reflect the dominant discourses of the times. The zombie has been used in this way; for example, the film *White Zombie* "presents a dated and ultimately negative view of black culture" (Bishop, 2010, p33). Ideas of mass consumerism and total disregard for the environment are shown in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, set in a shopping mall with the trope of rampant consumerism dominating humanity (Bishop, 2010). *The Walking Dead* deals with many issues of survival where having a disability is rarely discussed, but in the spin off *Fear the Walking Dead*, there are positive portrayals of Indigenous cultures and an actor who is in a wheelchair both in real life and as his portrayal in the show. These horror films

reflect our fear of the future, fear of climate destruction (*Fear the Walking Dead* gives a reason for the apocalypse and shows zombies as nature's way of taking back our world as we are not looking after it well enough) and our fear of the others in our society. These apocalyptic and fearful stories of the future now have their own niche with a genre in film categorization of 'survival horror'. (Luckhurst, 2015).

Influence of Film and TV

Film and TV can be an influence for positive change. Unfortunately, despite it being a powerful cultural tool that could be used to realistically portray disabilities, "the movies have played a major role in perpetuating mainstream society's regard for people with disabilities, and more often than not, the images borne in those movies have differed sharply from the realities of the physically disabled experience" (Norden, 1994, p1). Consumers of film and television are not passive and can be extremely influenced by the content. A powerful example of this influence is seen in the television show *13 Reasons Why*, which is about teen suicide. After watching the show the suicide rate in males aged 10 to 17 went up by 28.9%, although the character who died by suicide is a female and the narrator is male (Bridge, Jeffrey A. et al., 2019). The constructive reality of film and television becomes reality in some people's minds. An example of this is how Fox News, a television station in the United States, suggests that the

former president, Donald Trump, is chosen by god and many people appear to believe this idea¹⁴.

Most mainstream writers do not get their ideas regarding disability from personal experiences as those who are able-bodied, or temporarily able-bodied, tend to avoid those with disabilities. But ideas about disability are largely derived from movies and other popular culture that surround us and furthermore, for many people, these portrayals are reality (Norden, 2001). Norden suggests that portrayals of disability in movies can be divided into three main groups: the first being the 1890s to 1930s, with films depicting women and children as pure and docile resulting in films like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *A Christmas Carol* and the controversial *Freaks*, picking up the story where the freak shows declined in popularity and social acceptance; secondly, the 1930s into the 1970s with images of war heroes with awe-inspiring comebacks; and thirdly, from the 1970s onwards, when rehabilitation and how it can help became the

¹⁴ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fox-news-poll-did-god-favor-donald-trump-in-2016> & <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/14/nearly-half-republicans-think-god-wanted-trump-be-president/>

dominant discourse, as in *Born on the Forth of July* and *Forrest Gump* followed by the ‘Obsessive Avenger’ as in *Wild Wild West*.

Since WWI, a new way of addressing disability – Rehabilitation (Stiker, 1999) — has risen. Rehabilitation is the preferred ableist narrative within mainstream society, and the medical professions gain financially from this, doing all they can to retain its self continuance, which means keeping people with disabilities dependent upon charity and financial gain by selling rehabilitation (Clare, 2017): “if society can’t render them safe through a cure, it rejects them in ways ranging from simply ignoring them to institutionalizing them (and thus moving them out of the public sphere) to outright murdering them” (Norden, 2001, p27). Mainstream society has a need to create and service a charitable class to maintain a sense of superiority and control over the Others and this is reflected in digital content for our consumption. Science fiction also promotes a cure for disability, with science fiction narrative representations of disability being a “powerful site of reimagining the temporal possibilities of embodiment and even transcendence from the body” (Allan, 2013, p6); this includes films like *Iron Man* and *Avatar* and television’s *The Six Million Dollar Man*. These interpretations make disability palatable for the masses.

Another popular representation of disability is the “supercrip” — the inspirational person with a disability who has overcome all odds to personally challenge the stereotype of disability

¹⁵. When we see these supercrip portrayals we are relieved as we now no longer need to feel responsible, as if the person with a disability would only just try harder they could overcome all odds. “Both fictional and nonfictional stories convey the message that success or failure in living with a disability results almost solely from emotional choices, character, and character of the individual” (Longmore, 2001, p9). Freaks and monsters are often depicted as having a disability and in making horror stories; the subtext is often fear and loathing (Longmore, 2001).

Stereotypes

If we are human we are biased. Being biased is a way of protecting ourselves by categorizing people and things, so we can recall them more quickly. We create stereotypes and allocate beliefs and behaviours to these for speedy recall in times of danger or insecurity. We also grow up in a specific culture with a set of standards and rules to live by. Freud has his theory of the Ego, Id and Superego, and he believed our ego would tell us we are “right” and the

¹⁵ The Irish writer Christy Brown, who described his book *My Left Foot* as his 'plucky little cripple story'

other culture is “wrong” and we are largely unaware of this thought process (Ross, 2014). We also have triggers, recall of memories brought back by a smell, a memory, a face. And these triggered memories form a schema of how we react, organize and perceive things we encounter, along with the aforementioned strategies for survival we have assumed.

Disability has been seen as a bodily defect and “defect is linked to sin - directly, for the Jewish religion conscience of the time” (Stiker, 1999, p27), so our stereotypes on disability stem from such early days. A commonly held belief is that Greeks practiced exposure, or leaving a disabled child out in the elements to die. But we need to consider the times and beliefs held and not always bring our modern-day judgements to use as a lens to view historical practices; this story of exposure seems to be false (Rose 2016), or at least not as definitive as some people today think happened. On a personal note, my mother as a practicing midwife in the 1950s, was instructed by doctors to not feed severely deformed children nor show them to the mother, it was considered a kindness to the parents. This mindset has continued into the present day: “A newspaper article from January 2001 outlines the ethics debates around saving the lives of high-risk infants who, if they survive, are at risk later for disability” (Rose, 2016, p1). This further raises the question of the major contributions to society of people with disabilities, like Helen Keller, Stevie Wonder and Stephen Hawking, to name a few (Rose, 2016), who have all made enormous positive contributions to society.

We see messages in film and television that reinforce how we should react and how we should categorize. However, along with the influences of the media, we, as social human beings, have *group think*, in which we are influenced by the current socially dominant group and are deeply influenced by our group associations (Ross, 2014). It is a belief system we put in place to protect ourselves. The dominant and non-dominant groups in society both hear the same messages, but they are internalized differently. “All of us have a tendency to want to fit in.” (Ross, 2014, p57) — how does this affect us when we see people who are physically different or act in a manner not in line with our societal norms? If someone from a non-dominant group, like the physically disabled, sees people in their group being depicted as powerless, they may internalize this, even though they are unaware they are doing so. And most members of the dominant social group may not think of this because they simply don’t have to in order to survive, unless things change for them. The depiction of disability suggests the loss of an essential part of one’s humanity, and so the individual is perceived as somehow less human than the able-bodied. This causes fears that disability is a loss of self-control and so the idea is that disability endangers the rest of society (Longmore, 2001). History has shown us that economic stress creates a greater sense of threat and fear of “the other” in society, so hate crimes go up when the economy goes down (Ross, 2014).

Dominant Discourse

Narrative prosthesis is the portrayal of people with disabilities with preconceived, stereotypical and mainly negative ideas and stories about what disability is. The phrase “narrative prosthesis is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality and analytical insight” ((Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p49). It is prevalent in horror stories and is used as a characterization tool or opportunistically as a metaphorical device or allegory (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000).

Depicting disability as something to be feared is seen in film and television, but it is not a new phenomenon - 19th-century freakshows, where disabled people could make a living by exhibiting their bodies like animals in a zoo, are just one example (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). With disability being a socially constructed concept (Oliver, 2009), the portrayal of disability as being debilitating to social advancement is a large contributing factor to the negative way in which people with disabilities are viewed.

The modern horror discourse, prevalent in zombie tales, is one of an apocalyptic future with no technology, no government or official roles of surveillance. The biggest threat to the survivors is now each other, as very able-bodied people going back to an agrarian existence, and the zombie horde which could be described as the Other, the disabled, the outcast from this new

world order. Is the rise in zombie culture another symptom of ableism? Zombies can be an allegory for much of what is concerning in society today. The word zombie is now in mainstream dictionaries, with the definition of zombie in the Cambridge Dictionary as “someone who moves around as if unconscious and being controlled by someone else” “brought back to life without the ability to speak or move easily”. There are comedic portrayals of disability as in *Shaun of the Dead*, where the true zombie is sitting at home watching television or playing video games; or the masses of people walking around with headphones on staring into their phones, modern zombie-like behaviour. Zombies, unlike individuals with disabilities, are seen mostly in a group, so it becomes easy to dehumanize these individual lives as a nameless, faceless horde. We are trained to compartmentalize impairments as an individual concept, the narrative prosthesis comprised of preconceived ideas of disability. How frightening would it be for all the disability, and other marginalized groups to come together as one whole, to rise up and spread the message that together they are fearsomely unstoppable, and more importantly, you will inevitably become one of them yourself – that is the message for those currently classified as temporarily able-bodied, as at one time or another we will all have a disability, temporary or permanent (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000; Chivers & Markotic 2010), something that becomes more likely as we age. The body acts like a language according to Lacan, the medium is the message according to Marshall McLuhan, and the disabled bodies’ message is portrayed at a distance with the digital medium of a screen dividing us and them.

Horror Subgenre of zombies

The horror subgenre of zombies, depicting the apocalyptic end of the world order as we know it, and the prevalent images of the slow-moving, disfigured former humans, can be likened to the nameless, faceless horde of the Others in our society, to be shunned, dehumanized and feared. The rise in zombie narratives to the hugely popular television show *The Walking Dead* and its close connecting series of *Fear the Walking Dead*, both set in the near future, and their precursor of all these, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, are just a few examples.

There are rare portrayals of disability in contemporary zombie media - for example, *Fear the Walking Dead* has a character called Wendell who is permanently in a post-apocalyptic wheelchair complete with leg guards and defensive spikes. The actor playing Wendell is also disabled and in a wheelchair after a back injury from a motorcycle accident and shows that disability is not always the negative, pitiful state it is often perceived to be. Narratives like this can start to change how we perceive disabilities, to change the narrative prosthesis.

Disabled people are not supposed to have the full range of human emotions and needs. In the movie *The Sessions* (2012), Helen Hunt as a sexual therapist who is helping Mark O'Brien lose his virginity at age 36 is an interesting portrayal of how a disability somehow makes you less than human and how the disabled should not be sexually active. The dominant discourse is that the non-disabled have no trouble accepting imperfections, but disabled people have trouble

accepting that they are lovable so the problem is shifted to the stigmatized person resulting in another version of victim blaming, however untrue this may be in real life (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Part of the allure of the sideshows of previous centuries was the scantily clad performers, the naked displays of exotic, non-white people from foreign countries. Repressed sexuality of the Victorian era would find the sideshows' titillating, intoxicating, yet the removal of the humanity of the 'specimen' would deem the titillation acceptable (Nicholas, 2018). Zombies are also seen as asexual beings (Bishop, 2010).

Monstrous Bodies and Carnival Freaks

“Disability is at the root of the history of freaks shows” (Nicholas, 2018, p7). Freak shows were different from the circuses of the same time period. Carnivals, where freak shows could be found, were connected with street cultures and working class pursuits; circus workers, on the other hand, saw their trade as more of an art form so they had a higher social status attached to them. “Disability rendered freaks so Othered in society that they did not even garner much attention from the social and moral reform movement” (Nicholas, 2018, p49) throughout the late 1800s and into the 1930s. The comparing of bodies from the emerging 'normal' to the freaks in the carnivals started with the naming of those with exaggerated physical abnormalities as 'Monstrosities'.

Monstrosities

The word monster comes from the Latin *monere* meaning to warn or advise; so many cautionary tales use monsters to illustrate their message. Eighteenth century medicinal practitioners use the word “monstrosities” to describe physically deformed entities (Youngquist, 2003) that no longer had a normal productive body. The normal body is viewed as a commodity and as such can use its labour as something to be bought and sold, but the deviant flesh is outside of the social contract, especially when unable to labour, so a body that cannot exchange its labour for other property is not of use to society. “Monstrosities wear the stigmata of social and material relations to the proper body labors to transcend. Hence their threat: the monstrosities of interdependency and obligation trouble the propriety of the free, fungible individual” (Youngquist 2003, p21).

From 1133 to 1855, on the 24th of August, the Bartholomew Fair was held in the UK and was deemed a space of deviance. These fairs differed from the American freak shows (Bogdan, 1999) as Bartholomew Fair was a social event, yet the freak show was deemed to display America’s need for a normalized identity by displaying bodies of how America did NOT see itself represented. One of the attractions at Bartholomew Fair in England was an infant born with no arms or legs, and the handbill that accompanied this spectacle stated that he seemed to be delivered to the kindness of the world and as a helpless thing, must forever remain asexual, forever an infant (Youngquist, 2003).

Joseph Merrick, commonly known as the Elephant Man, was a leading figure in Victorian freak shows and ended up in the London Hospital until his death there in 1890. Merrick was a working class man from the north of England who performed unskilled labouring jobs from age 11 until his stepmother forced him out, as she found him grotesque. John Merrick's story is interesting in that he was both a performer earning a living in the freak shows and a medical curiosity, ending his life in hospital, both an exhibited monstrosity in the shows and the medical world. He suffered from the medical condition known as Proteus syndrome although he died from lying down to sleep – he needed to sleep with his head upright and he suffocated from the weight of his own head after lying down. (Durbach, 2009).

In 1822 a Brazilian lady was exhibited in Bond Street, London UK, as the Venus of South America, with many scars covering her body said to be a lash for each adulterous act. Her name was Tono Maria and her purpose was to confirm how, without social sanctions and male restraint, the female sexual appetite might arise. Freaks and women needed to be contained (Youngquist 2003). Churches targeted freak shows not for the good of humanity, but because they encouraged immorality and “fun”; physicians and scientists targeted them for specimens, making the performers' bodies valuable both in life and in death. In England, Daniel Lambert was born in 1770 and grew so large, over seven hundred pounds, that he went to London and made a living by sitting in his own parlour and charging money to see him. “Having so much property in his own person, Lambert didn't labor to acquire more” (Youngquist, 2003, p39),

although he was physically active and did not, according to his own standards, eat excessively. He supposedly died of natural causes although surprisingly, given the state of the medical profession at this time, there was no autopsy performed to confirm this, and is buried in St Martins church in Stamford, UK where there is a large gravestone with his measurements on it. In death he escaped being a spectacle and unusually, he was not on display post-mortem.

Public interest remained unabated into the 20th century: “Indeed, although the French strictly controlled the exhibition of what they termed *phenomènes*, in the United Kingdom anyone could see armless men, hairy women, giants, dwarfs, conjoined twins, half-animal half-human wonders, and other amazing bodies any day of the year, as there were no laws that specifically regulated the display of human oddities. By the middle of the nineteenth century the freak show had thus become firmly embedded within, and inseparable from, the burgeoning industry of cheap Victorian entertainment” (Durbach, 2009, p4).

With the interest by medicine in monstrosities came categorization and science (Durbach, 2009), and the ongoing interest in determining to this day how other races, subjugated by the slave trade as European exploration penetrated further into other continents, may not actually be human. Charles Darwin, who lived from 1809 to 1882, first proposed the theory of evolution (that species have a common ancestor but changed over time), which raised many questions about life and religion, and what makes us human. “The extraordinary body moved from portent

to pathology” (Thompson, 1997, p58) and ultimately that ‘race’ is a social construct, along with ‘gender’ and ‘disability’.

Freak shows were a popular way for people to see, understand and make sense of bodily differences in the context of shifting understandings of ability, race and gender along with exploration to new lands, discovery of new sciences and advances in medical practices including alienists, the forerunners to psychiatrists.

Freak Shows in North America

Beginning in the 1860s, several American cities (for example, Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; Omaha, Nebraska; Columbus, Ohio; and Chicago, Illinois) passed the Ugly Laws: local ordinances enacted to keep people with unsightly or disfiguring disabilities from appearing in public (Kraut, 2010 & Thomson, 1997). These laws tried to prevent the physically disabled from being seen in public, opening the way for freak shows; and then, when the freak shows were also banned, the physically disabled would rise again in horror stories in film and television, so “the wondrous monsters of antiquity, who became the fascinating freaks of the nineteenth century transformed into the disabled bodies of the later twentieth century” (Thompson, 1997, p 58). In America “the proper body is white...black bodies turn monstrous and live beyond the pale of liberal society, without money, friends, or property” (Youngquist, 2003, p57). Being racialized erases property in a person, only to refigure it in relation to another,

as master to slave. Both fairs and freak shows had other races on display. Barnum, of the Ringling Brothers in America, had his circus show of both animals and freaks and displayed Joice Heth, a black woman who was a slave and purported to be 161 years old and former nanny to George Washington. She was apparently blind, toothless, paralyzed in both legs and one arm, and had long, curling fingernails. Her value to the circus was the opposite of what America wanted to see as their normal, a “trivial reversal of America’s self-image” (Thompson, 1997, p 59).

The disabled or non-normative body is “reduced to pure body through representation” (Thompson, 1997, p 60). Defining what the normal body was took up a great deal of time, and this ideal of the normal body had “serious consequences for everything from medical intervention to economic prosperity to claiming autonomy and adequate care to life itself” (Nicholas, 2018, p9). Reputable scientists were becoming interested in the freak show and this legitimized the public’s curiosity (Bogdan, 1990). Bogdan also talks about Martha Ann Honeywell, who was born limbless yet was exhibited doing needlework; Todd Browning’s film *Freaks* portrays Prince Randian, also born limbless, rolling and smoking a cigarette. The film *Freaks*, where the aforementioned Prince Randian is a performer, is a ground-breaking film using authentic sideshow performers, which disturbed Hollywood sensitivities as the Hollywood culture of beauty, perfection and normality is very different to the disabled body. The film *Freaks* uses camera angles that advantage the characters and makes the audience have some

empathy for them, so “*Freaks* thus inverts society’s exclusion of the horror film monster, instead offering the viewer the chance to be included within the sphere of the monstrous... *Freaks* also asks viewers to consider themselves vulnerable to bodily transformation and to the social and scientific opprobrium directed at usual forms. It was not impossible that *Freaks*’ original audiences might have understood and even embraced such a radical invitation” (Smith, 2011, p101). *Carnivale*¹⁶ is another show made with authentic sideshow performers, which was slated for a six-season run but folded after only two. Similar to *Freaks*, using actual performers with disabilities seems to be too real, a limiting factor regarding film and television.

Disabled lives portrayed as tragic lives have been used many times to raise money for charity, and it made people feel thankful that they themselves were not disabled. The strategy for telethons is based on this principal (Nicholas, 2018 & Longmore, 2016). And whilst “sentimental spectatorship sought to awaken fellow feeling, it induced – indeed, it relied on – the opposite emotion: dramatizing the difference between sympathizers and the objects of their

¹⁶ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319969/>

sympathy”, ensuring viewers of their own safety and security, and further it “authorized them to find pleasure in the spectacle of suffering” (Longmore, 2016, p84). It further illustrated how the American cultural values embedded in the “American Dream” increased the divide between able and disabled as “Success lay within the grasp of individuals who applied themselves diligently; failure – and one might add, many forms of suffering – came about through individual fault” (Longmore, 2016, p8). Charity versus working for a living in a freak show was a choice for many classed as disabled.

The freak shows started to move from America to Canada in the late nineteenth hundreds. In the 1800’s, P. T. Barnham shaped the modern freak show and added structure, order and decorum to the shows. They were educational in nature as well as shocking, bringing people of the world to the Americas. Unfortunately, colonial attitudes were rampant and many of the acts were racialized, depicting the performers as the Other and making the white middle class feel superior and safe (Nicholas, 2018). Many of the performers from Barnum’s show would appear at Canadian fairs and at pleasure gardens like the one on the Toronto Island at Hanlan’s point.

Canadian Freak Shows

Canada has its own history with carnivals and freak shows. In 1973 the CNE (Canadian National Exhibition) ended its long tradition of hosting a freak show on its Midway due to social pressures. The exhibition of Pookey as “The Monkey Girl”, who was only 5 years old and

crying on stage, at the CNE became a rallying point for social change regarding freak shows. Pookey had both physical and mental disabilities and her mother complained, after the social outrage, that this was a way for the family to survive, as they did not get enough monetary support from the government. There are no records available to date about what happened to her after the closure of the show (Nicholas, 2018).

People like to gaze, be it for medical advancement, supporting myths and superstition or wonder at the strangeness of nature. Gazing at other people in Victorian-era Canadian freak shows “was an important part of modern culture as it allowed people to study, attempt to organize, and make sense of the shifting world around them” (Nicholas, 2018, p35). This categorization is the way people learn to survive in the multitude of decisions to be made every day and it is a part of human bias, enabling us to quickly judge and categorise what we feel is safe, so we observe people — we gaze. The gaze, according to Foucault, was a method of empirical observation of the body, so it was an acceptable human behaviour (Foucault, 1995). In Kingston, Ontario there was a practice of asylum tourism, part of modern visual culture, and sometimes freak shows were put on for both staff and inmates (Nicholas, 2018); the gazed-upon become the gazers and back again.

The disabled, freak body did not fit in to the Canadian image of healthy strong bodies and many people wanted to see the ‘abnormals’ put away from sight in institutions. Immigration to Canada was banned for people with disabilities and eugenics was seen as a way forward.

Although seen as something to be pitied by many, cured by medical professionals, or put away in institutions, the parents of disabled individuals did not see their children in such terms, though doctors' reports rarely included patients' voices, opinions or thoughts (Nicholas, 2018).

A Canadian family, the Dionne family, became famous after the birth of quintuplets. Five girls were born with five children already present in the family, which would have been an enormous financial burden to the parents and siblings. The quintuplets were on public display near North Bay in Ontario, but in early 1935 the Ontario government stepped in to shield the Dionne Quintuplets from invasive public exposure, and they became a ward of the crown until age 18. Ironically the government, with Dr. Dafoe as their legal guardian, exploited them by building a 'hospital', Quintland, with observation periods for the little girls. Being publicly displayed and separated from their family must have been a dreadful experience for them all. No longer small and cute as they grew up, they were returned to the custody of their parents (Nicholas, 2018).

The original freak shows were not truly over until the 1970s, but a strange re-emergence is happening now in the UK, with a circus act hoping to reclaim the freak show genre with the Cirque Bijou that currently employs both disabled and non-disabled circus artists, actors, dancers

and musicians¹⁷. Whether freak shows will enjoy a resurgence in popularity remains to be seen; after all, most people now can gaze upon many freakish things in the privacy of their own homes, including horror shows depicting our post-apocalyptic world and the nameless, faceless zombie horde.

Changing Perception

Television and film are powerful media for change, both good and bad. When we understand the way they influence us, we can change the dialogue to more positively and realistically reflect life and move away from the negative narrative prosthesis of disability. In the hugely popular *Game of Thrones* TV show there are many positive portrayals of people with disabilities: Tyrion Lannister as a little person who likes sex and drinking and is compassionate and intelligent; Bran Stark who is paralysed, unable to walk yet eventually becoming a King; Jaime Lannister who loses a hand yet is determined to learn to fight using his remaining hand, an example of a super cripp; and many others, including the Wildlings who are many shapes and

¹⁷ Cirquebijou.co.uk and extraordinarybodies.org.uk

sizes including giants (Harrison, 2018). Portrayals like these bring disability into our lives in a positive way, and are a very powerful instigator of change.

Challenging Bias

These negative stereotypes of disability can be changed. We can reframe our biases, and even simply being aware of the bias, even without any conscious action, can create significant change. The brain has enormous capability for neuroplasticity: “the capacity of the brain to form new neural connections that allow it to reorganize itself throughout our life” (Ross, 2014, p104). If, that is, we are motivated; and motivating people so that they want to change is the hard part. Someone who has a very entrenched negative bias against, for example, certain racial groups “can have the narrative transformed by being exposed to people or stories about people who have lived, worked and loved together across the divide between their own group and the group against which they harboured the bias” (Ross, 2014, p112). If we can show portrayals of people with disabilities more on the very influential media of film and television we can change, or improve, the negative bias.

People used to go to freak shows to stare at monstrous bodies. Although frowned upon now, it certainly allowed people to see these individuals, hopefully as human, and gave many physically disabled people a way of making a good living, something that may have been difficult before due to the biases of many employers and others. Seeing freaks and monsters also

makes us feel normal (Thompson, 1997), yet avoiding those with physical deformities is a survival technique used by animals to reduce the spread of infections, and this avoidance is also true in humans (Park, Faulkner & Schaller 2003) although we know that able-bodied people can spread infections just like anyone else, as seen in the highly infectious Omicron variant of COVID.

With the continued domination of Hollywood and a decline in independent films, challenges to portraying disability in a positive, realistic light are great. Working together, disability studies and film studies would greatly improve the chances for this to happen (Norden, 2001).

Summary

Using the frameworks of feminist, gender, disability and race theories and the allegory of the modern zombie as a disability representation to evaluate how disability is portrayed in the digital media of film and television, we can see how we let our biases contribute to our viewing choices.

From freak shows, where people with disabilities could make a living themselves and not be dependent upon charity, to the horror stories of today, specifically the pervasive modern zombie offerings which I theorize as an unconscious bias towards those with a disability, people have always liked to gaze. People moved from gazing at disability, which included racial

minorities, in the freak shows to gazing at disability in the cinema and in the comfort of their own homes on television (Mulvey 1996). But still we have not moved far enough in representing the Others in our society in a realistic, compassionate or empathetic way. From an individual point of view, it is in our best interest to change the portrayal of disability as, like death after the modern zombie stories, we will all very likely become disabled as we age, so disability is never really far from any of us.

To be human is to be biased. Understand the biases toward disabled people, is the first step to changing the spurious dialogue and changing the message to one of positivity and inclusion. Using the allegory of the zombie as a symbol of disability, the zombie is asexual, slow, deformed, raceless and alive yet dead; we can evaluate how the perceptions of disability do not reflect the reality of the lived existence of disability. Disability is often an issue of commodification feeding the repulsion-attraction dichotomy of the human gaze. The modern zombie analogy is also a useful one in so much as we will all, if we live long enough, have a disability as we age and in the zombie apocalypse, we all become zombies through death, a quick one or a slow one is the only difference.

Chapter Three: Research Approach

Introduction

Theories of disability representation are based in both the physical and mental realms, but the gaze of people on the outliers in society is often viewed more clearly in the physical

manifestations of disability. Critical theories that are based in the body are the most useful theories to implement an analysis of disability in film and television. Using feminist and feminist film theory, along with gender, race and critical disability theories this research seeks to perform an analysis of how disability is perceived and portrayed in modern film and television offerings today.

Zombies are ubiquitous in digital media today, from video games to television series and films. Using the analogy of the zombie as a euphemism for disability we can, using the portrayals of zombies in films, evaluate these media portrayals against the binaries of able and disable and analyse how these binaries in turn are portrayed in the media. The rise of modern zombie culture in both film and television, along with associated electronic games and comics, has been rapid and dramatic. Using the modern zombie gestated from North American popular culture (Bishop, 2006) as opposed to the European horror staples of vampires, werewolves and ghosts, as an example of the portrayal of disabled bodies, this research will show how the portrayal of the undead monster may have influenced negative bias towards the Others in our society.

“White Americans became fascinated with the zombie mythology whilst stationed in Haiti during the marine occupation between 1915 and 1934 usually overlooking its obvious articulations with slavery, capitalism, and political control” (McAlister, 2013 ,p74). And so zombies took their place in the Hollywood monster genre with Old World white figures such as

the vampire, werewolf and ghost. And still today the zombie is synonymous with blackness and voodoo, but after WWII zombies took off in a different direction that of ‘survival horror’ and a new monster genre was born in the New World (McAlister, 2013). These apocalyptic and fearful stories of the future now have their own niche with a genre in film categorization of ‘survival horror’ (Luckhurst, 2015). With this understanding of bias obtained, we can rewrite the dominant discourse on disability portrayal in the media to be a more realistic and positive one.

The allegory of the modern zombie is used today to signify something which is already dead yet is perceived by many as alive. The pervasive rise in modern, post-WWII offerings of the zombie genre is not a sudden phenomenon, and is an allegory for many societal problems. We naturally seek to avoid those with physical deformities; it is bias, a survival technique used by animals to reduce the spread of infections, and this survival technique is also found in humans, which accounts for some of our prejudices (Park, Faulkner & Schaller 2003). The modern digital offerings on games, film and television exploited this technique to the detriment of acceptance by society of bodies that do not follow the norms of society but follow the norms as portrayed by the media. If we use zombies as a euphemism for disability we have an interesting representation of how society may avoid the disabled. Zombies are slow-moving and disfigured, akin to some people with disabilities, with the zombie shuffle much like the walk of some people with cerebral palsy. Other fictional creatures such as vampires and werewolves, on the other hand, are fast-moving mythical creatures of modern fiction, unlike zombies. Moreover,

unlike with vampires and werewolves, it is not how powerful they are that makes zombies frightening; it is how dismal it would be to become one yourself (Barber, 2014). This is how the zombie concept ties in with disability representation.

Critical theory is a method used to apply different lenses or viewpoints, to enable us to understand literature and academic writings. “Critical theory set out to do two things: Firstly, to show internal relationship between knowledge and experience” (Rush, 2004, p.221) so when we experience facts they are likely accompanied with a bias, as they are a product of human activity. Secondly, to “use the interconnectedness of knowledge and experience to break out of the given and projective normative goals and ends.” (Rush, 2004, p.221) and thus see things in a different, alternative way. It allows us to grasp concepts in written work and help relate them to our lived experience. Reading critical theories will allow us to understand concepts and view them through the ideologies of other theorists and recognize another way is possible. Critical theory is important “because the development of theory associated with disablement and equality has an impact on, first, an understanding of the meaning of disablement and, second, the development of consistent laws, policies, and practices.” (Rioux & Valentine, 2006, p47). With much confusion over disability and how it means many different things to many different people, critical theory within Critical Disabilities Studies (CDS) is important to evaluate for consistency within the discipline.

Critical theory from a CDS point of view “has much to offer if our concerns are to remain oriented towards issues of agency that arise from authoritative claims. Rather than limiting our focus to issues of medicine and social services and enhancing access, the moral project of a critical theoretical approach is to contest authoritative claims wherever they arise, especially when these occur within our own movements, thus offering the potential to change the very nature of the supports and services we are trying to obtain. This vigilance is the moral purpose of criticism, and competing views of justice that have emerged within the CDS tradition speak directly to this concern for power dynamics” (Spagnuolo, 2016, p85). Foucault argues that the body is used to control populations using what he termed biopower and further politicians’ use of the power dynamic through authority and policing, with power to control populations, which he has called bio-politics (Foucault, 1995).

Ableism and normalism dominates our society so it is crucial to understand “how ableism reproduces itself through the media since it is there where the normative construction of the body and mind is reinforced within society” (Schatz & George, 2018, p3). More importantly, it is within this media that change can occur. The more people with disabilities are expected to perform their disability in expected and ableist ways, the more this stereotype is reinforced; however, more importantly, this representation once understood, can be unlearned. So we can counter ableist representation and foster new realities by recreating the dominant discourse of disability (Schatz & George, 2018).

“The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p8) and this definition comes with authority; that is, until we strip away what this definition actually is and find that it represents very few people. The links between theories based in the body including “disability and gender otherness need investigating...because the non-normate status accorded disability feminizes all disability figures” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p9) as “disability functions as a multivalent trope, though it remains the mark of otherness” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p9) and disability has the property of a multivalent trope encompassing gender, race and feminist issues.

Erving Goffman states that there is only one portrayal of the perfect male: “young, married, white, urban male, northern, heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (Goffman, 1963, p128). This is obviously not representative of the general population, but it seems to have great significance in society, to obtain this normal, male portrayal. Goffman does not give us a perfect female portrayal but his definition of male perfection allows us to look past the binaries of abled/disabled, male/female and black/white.

Feminist Film Theory and Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is based in the body with gender as a social construct, a role to be played and socialized, and challenges Heteronormativity. This can be useful in critical disability studies

as it is grounded in the human body — and both gender and disability can be viewed as social constructs. Butler states in her book *Gender Trouble* that if we remove the binaries of sex and gender, so when “the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler, 1990, p10). To similarly sever this connection between the body and disability and impairment, the disabled and impaired body must become an unattached label. And as gender is generated by society, so may impairment be; the label of disabled/impaired may be a self-fulfilling prophecy which makes us impaired. If the labels sex/gender, disabled/impaired, black/white, are socially constructed labels, so making them free-floating artefacts, entirely separate from physical bodies, would reduce stigma and bias. If these labels have become roles we see in society and we mimic them, can we not change the roles by changing the stories and would not the most obvious place to do so be in the digital media of film and television, social media and advertising? If “‘the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (Butler, 1990, p12) we can assign and change this meaning. So if the male sex is marked as the only sex, the masculine and the female are contained in the all-encompassing alternate, the Other; so to continue further, disability also becomes the catch-all binary opposite of able bodied.

Feminist film theory is based on psychoanalytic theory and evaluates sex-role stereotyping and concerns itself to “expose as both false and oppressive the limited range of images of women offered by film” (Thornham, 2006). With Goffman’s definition of the perfect body being male and white, (Goffman, 1963), the removal of these ‘Other’ categories will allow the status of a universal person, with no defined race, sex/gender, ability/disability label. Feminist film theory in disability analysis is helpful as film viewing is a spectator experience and so we can examine and unpack the implications of the spectator gaze. But the “the mis-assumed relationship between looking and knowing is particularly salient to film reception” and viewing at home “lies a space for normative and deviant public not just to look but to stare at disabled figures without censure” (Chivers & Markotic, 2010, p4)

Feminist theory and film theory challenges our existing thoughts and understandings regarding power and empowerment. It offers diverse ways of rethinking hegemonic forms of oppression to women, and we can also use it for disability representation, and transforming our ideas of feminism along with its portrayal in film. “Correcting stereotypes will open up a new world of film themes. And new images of women and men in film will provide more constructive models for film viewers” (Thornham, 2006, p19) reflecting a more natural portrayal of the intersection of both women and disability.

Gender Theory

The gender of another person should only be important to someone if they are going to have sex or procreate with that person, why else would the label of sex matter? Gender theory critically analyses the binary way we view male and female from both a societal and a biological viewpoint, and the oppression that these labels bring. The physical body is necessary to enact the norms of gender and to the disabled, they must act as either an already oppressed female gender, or in the case of “men with physical disabilities, masculine gender privilege collides with the stigmatized status of having a disability, thereby causing status inconsistency, as having a disability erodes much, but not all, masculine privilege” (Gerschick, 2000, p1265). Oppression of women is parallel with oppression of racial minorities and people with disabilities. The intersection of race and gender is shown in statistics regarding rape, for example: “the average prison term for a man convicted of raping a black woman was 2 years, as compared to five years for the rape of a Latina, and ten years for the rape of a white woman” (Crenshaw, 1996, p368). Race and gender theories intersect many times and in many ways in our society and are both based in the body.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is a conceptual approach which explores the relationships between race and power dynamics by deconstructing hierarchies of power and control. Using body-based theories can help our understanding of disability. Using both gender and race theory we can look

at disability and more clearly understand how bodily based representation in the media can be a source of negative representation, and also realize that to understand this negativity is to be able to reverse it and represent disability in a more positive way.

Between the years 1927 and 1996 the total awards given by the Academy Awards to people in the film industry with disabilities has increased from 2.6% to 42.8% (Safran, 1998). In a different study regarding race representation, “A total of 3,932 speaking characters were evaluated for race/ethnicity. A full 74.1% were White, 14.1% Black, 4.9% Hispanic, 4.4% Asian, 1.1% Middle Eastern, <1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.2% were from ‘other’ races/ethnicities. Put differently, just over a quarter (25.9%) of speaking characters were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups” (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, 2011, p3). Women are also under-represented: “white males are on the screen more often than are either females or minority males. This screen time represents a departure from reality, where females comprised 51 percent of the population in the United States in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 1999). Yet, women appear in only 35 percent of the leading roles (males = 65%)” (Eschholz, Bufkin, Long, 2002, p314). This has increased over time and now representation is more realistic regarding portrayal of ethnic minorities in film and television. The Hollywood entertainment industry still reflects anxieties concerning black cultures but with more representation of colour in the media, the ‘us and them’ mentality is reduced as bias is reduced through normalization of differences portrayed as entertainment. “Appearing to be someone other than oneself or something other than ‘normal’

lies at the heart of paranoia about fear of the Other. Most people long for acceptance, and any physical or social variations (either real or merely perceived) stand at odds against the status quo – especially variations of race, gender, religion, class, or even physical deformity” (Bishop, 2010, p99).

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory states that the oppression faced by people with disabilities, which was supposed to be helped by liberalism, failed to deliver the promised justices and equalities that should be theirs. Disability is often viewed through a medical lens, where physical and mental deviations from the norm are seen as a medical issue requiring a medical cure or rehabilitation to return back to societal expectations (Clare, 2017). The social model of disability does not frame disability as an individual impairment; rather it puts the onus on the environmental barriers that are causing disability, for example if all stairs had as an alternative an elevator or ramp, wheelchair users would be able to move as freely as able-bodied people (Oliver & Barnes 2012). Disability is therefore another social construct. Using the mediums of film and television we can deconstruct and rebuild this social construct in a more inclusive way.

“If, as disability theorists have long argued, ableist assumptions treat disability as a problem that requires one either to cure or kill it, the zombie narrative distills this binary logic into moral imperatives. Zombies, after all, allow for no middle ground” (Duane, 2013, p239). There are representations, specifically in *The Walking Dead*, where survivors try to keep their

newly dead and zombified loved ones in a safe space, but the zombie narratives repeatedly assure us that trying “to imagine any sort of continuum between physical health and repulsive decay” (Duane, 2013, p239) is not possible as the binaries of zombie and the able-bodied cannot co-exist and “Thus the terror of our own treacherous, unpredictable embodiment becomes transferred to monstrous bodies we must eradicate to be safe” (Duane, 2013, p239).

Conceptual Framework

There has been much research done since the Halperin brothers first made *White Zombie* in 1932, on how the modern zombie culture can be used as a reflection of the most deep, unmentionable fears we have as a society. Three of the main fears our western society has being fear of people with disabilities, uncertainty about our government’s responses to global threats and how would we survive in an apocalyptic situation. A model has emerged indicating that “three important factors in the appeal of horror films are (a) the audience’s desire to experience the satisfying resolutions usually provided in these films, (b) the audience’s desire to see destruction often found in these films and (c) the sensation-seeking personality traits of audience members for these films. In addition, age and gender were important predictors: horror films were enjoyed more by males and by younger viewers (Tamborini & Stiff 1987, p 415). To understand why people watch horror is an aspect of its rise in popular culture, but why zombie movies specifically? Is there a correlation between horror films and disability?

I adopted an exploratory approach in conceptualizing and designing the research study. Roseman (1977) proposes three stages to exploratory research: the early priori stage to discover and explore relationships as in the textual analysis of films; the middle stage to further explore these more specific relationships; and the late stage of exploratory research (direct preparation for priori proposition testing). (Chandrashekar, S, 2011) My research covers all stages. I executed a sequential, multimethod research design that allowed me to identify salient issues in the first phase using textual analysis, a relatively large sample that allowed me to examine these issues more deeply in the second phase with a survey using a smaller subsample and a third phase with very specific interviews to further refine the results.

Chapter Four: Results

When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth

- Dawn of the Dead (1978), Dir. George A. Romero

Introduction

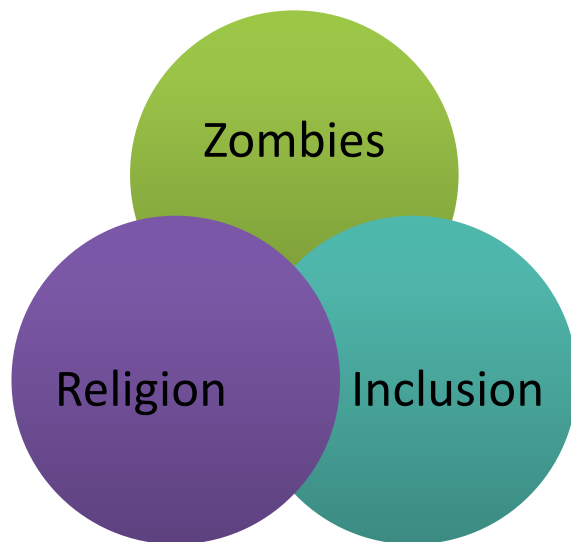
Film and television are an important source of entertainment, documentaries, news and other such transfers of ideas. These modern digital media are also a source for misinformation and a reflection of biases that are prevalent in our current society. How prevalent is the bias towards people with a variety of disabilities, both physical and mental in presentation, and is this bias represented in the modern zombie subgenre of the horror movie? This chapter will explore

and present answers to these questions based on the methodologies of textual analysis, survey and interviews.

Three stages of my research were as follows:

1. The methodology of Textual Analysis was used for the scripts and narratives on both *The Walking Dead* and *The Night of the Living Dead*,
2. Online survey method with 108 participants and
3. Subsequent in-depth interviews method with 10 voluntary participants purposefully selected from the online survey respondents.

The objective of my research is to seek an answer to the questions how prevalent is the bias towards people with a variety of disabilities, both physical and mental in presentation, and is this bias represented in the modern zombie subgenre of the horror movie, that emerge at the confluence of the three research spaces shown below:



If we assume that zombies are a representation of disability, that people feel uncomfortable around disability in its many forms, and the religious viewpoint that disability is unwelcome and impedes the post industrial revolution’s pursuit to make money as shown in 2.1, the chapter on history of disability, then people who watch digital media of zombie horror stories may be exhibiting an unconscious bias towards disability. Further, some people with disabilities self-identify as zombies: the members of the Arch Academy relay swim team in California, who are “individuals with limited potential due to struggles with autism, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, learning disabilities, behavioural problems, ADHD, substance abuse, and other issues,” call themselves the *Arch Academy Zombies*. Through concerted efforts and resulting success, they work towards “defying the

limitations, stereotypes, and misconceptions that hinder the success of student-athletes with particular challenges” (Berkay, 2016, NP). Such efforts alter the perception of the disabled to be more positive, within the constructed realities of film and television, and their self-identification as a fictional creature.

Three methodologies were used to capture the film and television entertainment at its source with textual analysis on both the visual and written sources. Secondly, to gauge the public’s responses to zombies a survey was done, and thirdly a subset of people were individually interviewed for a more detailed analysis of zombies, inclusion and religion and their portrayal in the digital offerings of the horror subgenre of modern zombies.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis, also known as content analysis, was performed to gain an in-depth understanding of the zombie phenomenon as portrayed in both *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Walking Dead* and to analyse the association between the text and visual representations of zombies and people’s reactions to them. I chose to manually analyse the texts whilst making notes watching *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Walking Dead* television series. I further, comparing the analysis to my notes I had made reading the publicly available closed captioned files, produced by the fandom community from the television series *The Walking Dead*. I chose to manually analyse the television series as there were 10 seasons each with multiple episodes. Nvivo was found to be insufficient to the task of tracking and finding linkages to disability, so

this analysis was done manually. The texts were analysed manually with the following aspects of disability in mind:

- Content of the texts
- Language and word choice
- Target audience
- Association with other texts or events
- Social normative behaviour

Survey

An online survey consisting of 25 questions was created in the *QuestionPro* platform as its data is stored in Canada. 108 people answered the survey with a completion rate of 100%, although not all questions were fully answered and some people picked multiple answers to some of the questions. These differences in answering questions explains the number counts not consistently yielding a completed answer count of 108. The survey was rolled out incrementally using personal contacts and listservs that I was a member of for 67 completed surveys and then further expanded to include Facebook and Twitter outreach to complete the total of 108 responses from around the world.

I had made up a companion website, zombie-research.com, where I created an FAQ (frequently asked questions) section containing the following questions I had received from interested potential survey participants:

- Do I need to like zombies to participate?
- I don't want to put in my email address
- I don't live in Canada so how will I get my gift certificate?

Survey Results

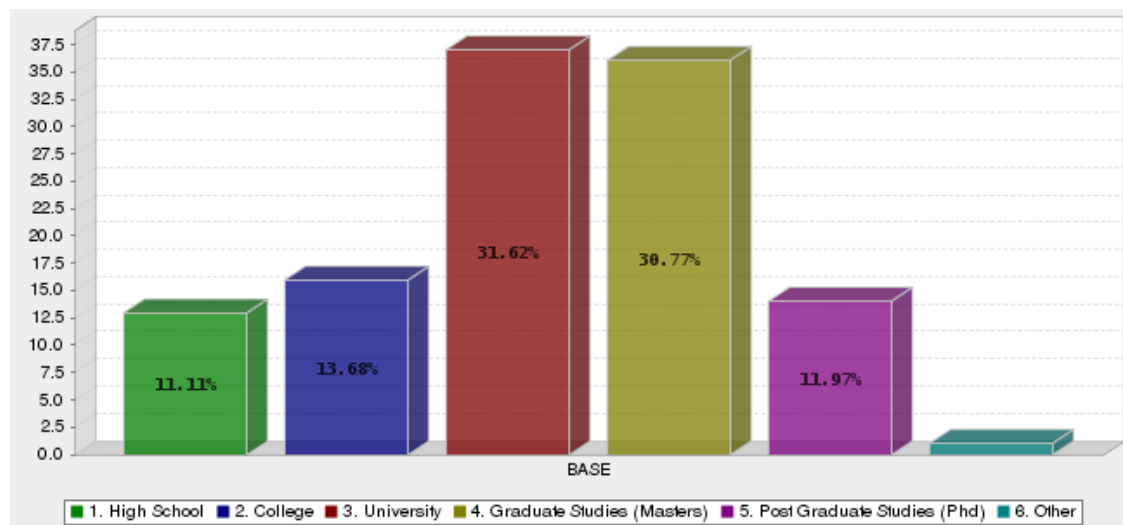
Within the 108 survey respondents, the largest representation is the 41-60 age group. The gender ratio was slightly more represented by female (56), closely followed by male (47) and other (3). All respondents were aware of the term zombie and the existence of zombie culture. Respondents watched a variety of media genres, with comedy being the most watched (52.24% watched often), followed by documentary (44.23% watched often) and romantic (41.35% watched occasionally), followed by both apocalyptic (33.98%) and futuristic (34.95%) shows being watched occasionally. Both violent (32.04%) and zombie (30.10%) shows were watched less often. Interestingly, torture (62.24% never) and horror (31.13%) were not high-scoring and in the never-watched category. Zombie comics (77.14% never) and books (72.28% never) were not widely enjoyed.

The 108 survey participants' responses showed engagement with the zombie in a variety of mass media (television, games, books, films). The age category of the respondents I had contact with denotes an older population with a high intake of documentary consumption, tying in with the findings of the more highly educated typical respondent (see "4.1.3.1 Education" below). The results show the sample population generally does not have a high engagement with zombie movies, violence, torture and horror, but had a correspondingly high tolerance for all disabilities, both mental and physical (see 4.1.3.10, 4.1.3.11, and 4.1.3.16.4). The typical respondent was highly educated (30.77% had a masters degree), white (71.30%), employed (83.96%), married (39.62%), female (52.83%) and straight (78.43%). Other notable statistics were 55.37% were not at all religious, and 83.33% did not want an apocalypse. Regarding disability, 83% identified with a disability or knew someone in their close circle of family or friends with a disability.

Education

What level of education have you obtained?

The largest proportion of respondents, 37, completed their education at the university level, followed closely by respondents with a master's degree.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	High School	13	11.11%
2.	College	16	13.68%
3.	University	37	31.62%
4.	Graduate Studies (Masters)	36	30.77%
5.	Post Graduate Studies (PhD)	14	11.97%
6.	Other	1	0.85%

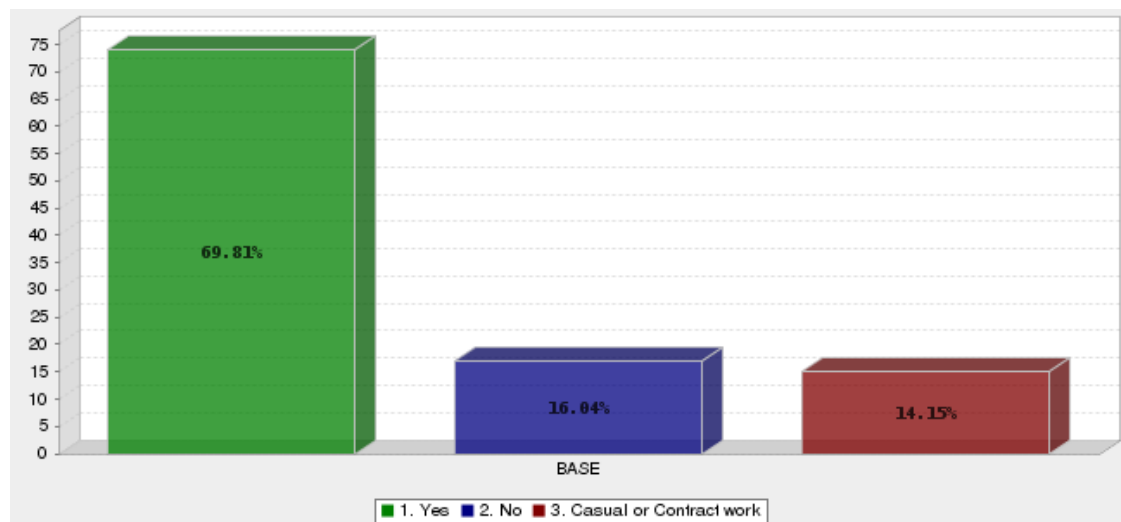
	Total	117	100%
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Table 2 Level of Education

Employed

Are you currently employed?

74 respondents were employed at the time they took the survey.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Yes	74	69.81%

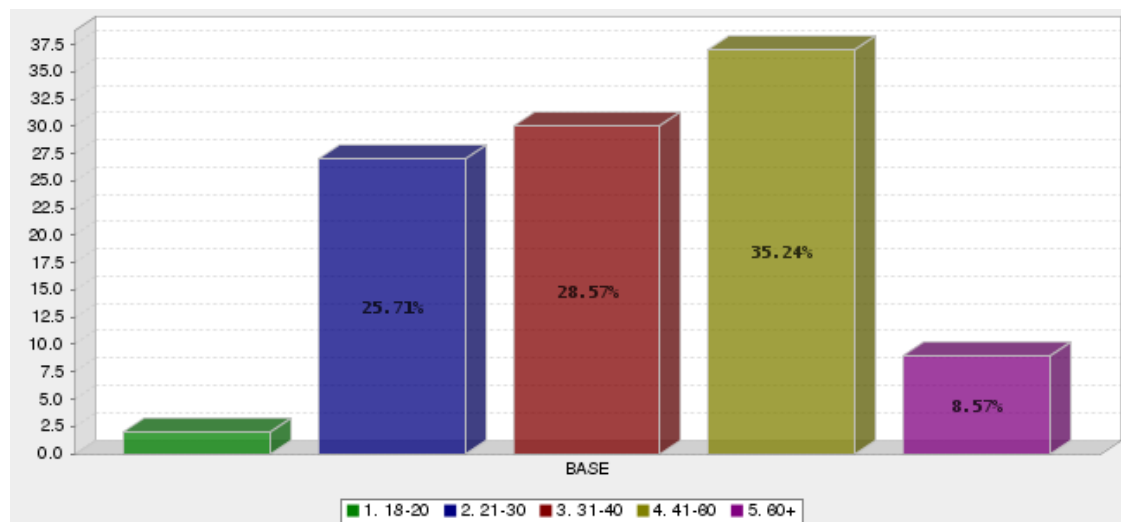
2.	No	17	16.04%
3.	Casual or Contract work	15	14.15%
	Total	106	100%

Table 3 Employment

Age

What is your age bracket?

Largest representation is in the 41-60 age group.



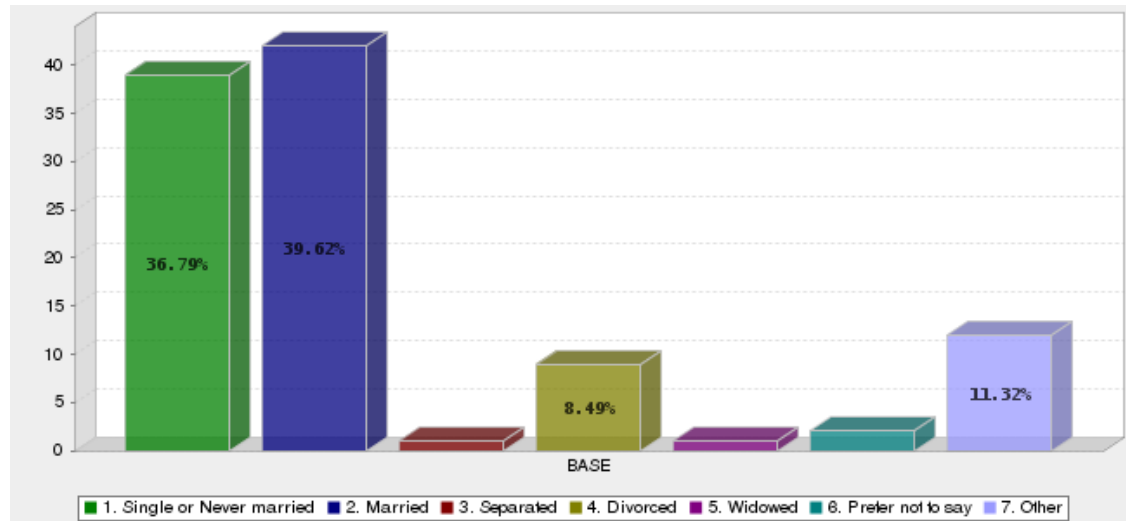
	Answer	Count	Percent
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1.	18-20	2	1.90%
2.	21-30	27	25.71%
3.	31-40	30	28.57%
4.	41-60	37	35.24%
5.	60+	9	8.57%
	Total	105	100%

Table 4 Age

Marital Status

The largest proportion of respondents were married, followed closely by single or never married respondents.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Single or Never married	39	36.79%
2.	Married	42	39.62%
3.	Separated	1	0.94%
4.	Divorced	9	8.49%
5.	Widowed	1	0.94%

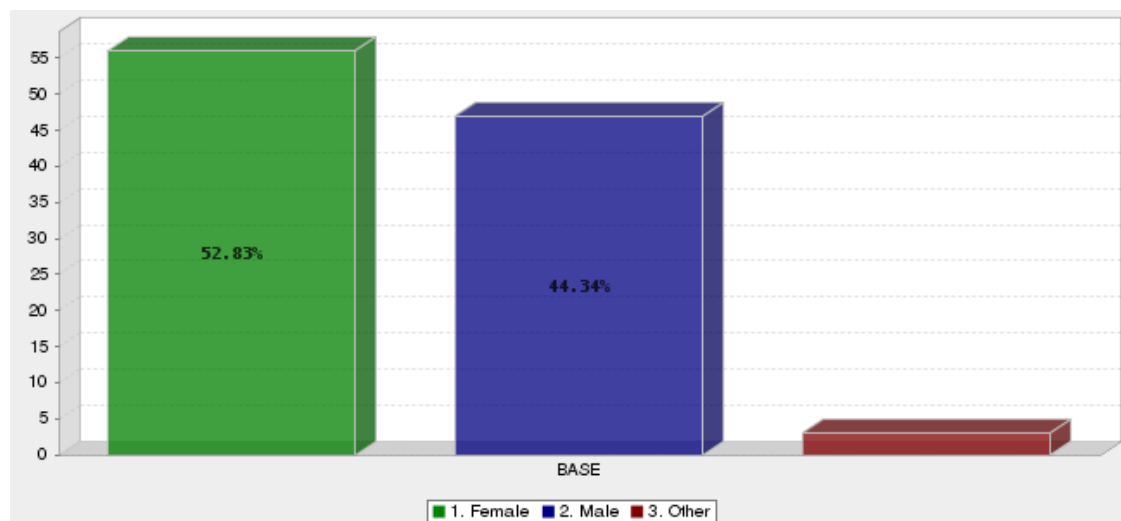
6.	Prefer not to say	2	1.89%
7.	Other	12	11.32%
	Total	106	100%

Table 5 Marital Status

Gender

What gender do you identify as?

Respondents were slightly more likely to be female (56), closely followed by male (47) and other (3).



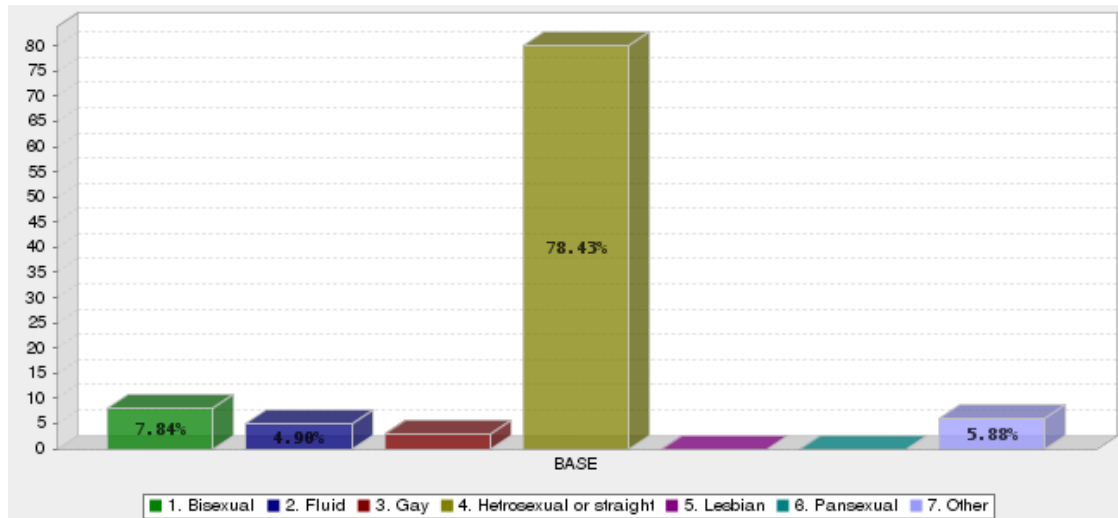
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Female	56	52.83%
2.	Male	47	44.34%
3.	Other	3	2.83%
	Total	106	100%

Table 6 Gender

Sexual orientation

What is your Sexual Orientation?

The majority of respondents identified as heterosexual or straight.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Bisexual	8	7.84%
2.	Fluid	5	4.90%
3.	Gay	3	2.94%
4.	Heterosexual or straight	80	78.43%
5.	Lesbian	0	0.00%
6.	Pansexual	0	0.00%

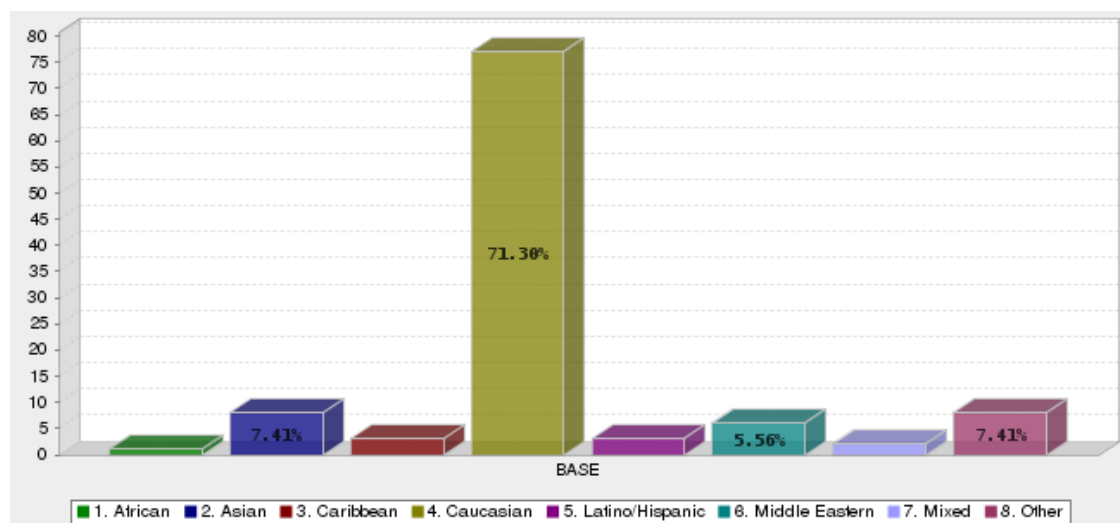
7.	Other	6	5.88%
	Total	102	100%

Table 7 Sexual Orientation

Ethnicity

Please indicate your ethnicity (i.e. people's ethnicity describes their feeling of belonging and attachment to a distinct group of a larger population that shares their ancestry, colour, language or religion)

Caucasian identity was the most prevalent.



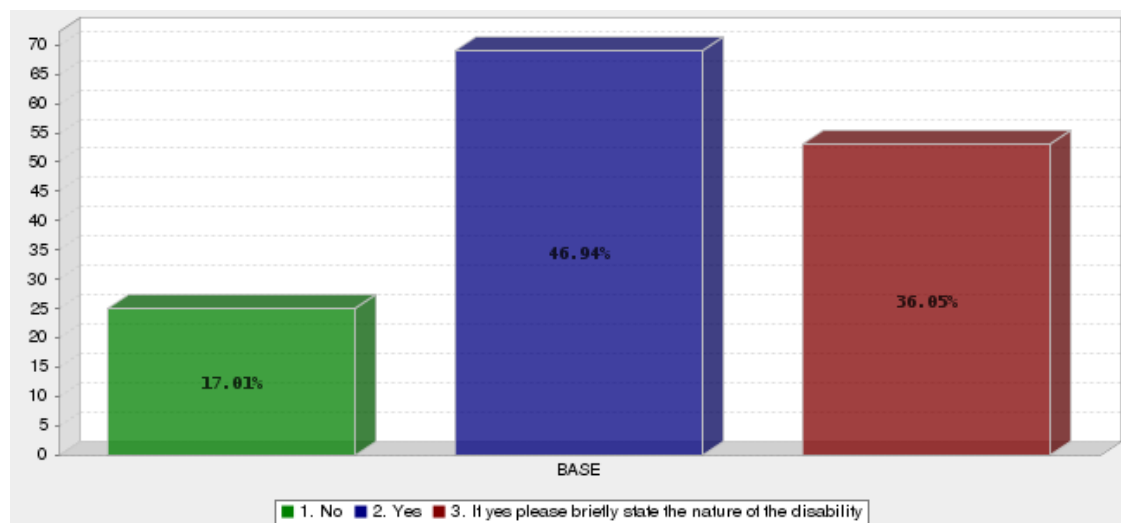
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	African	1	0.93%
2.	Asian	8	7.41%
3.	Caribbean	3	2.78%
4.	Caucasian	77	71.30%
5.	Latino/Hispanic	3	2.78%
6.	Middle Eastern	6	5.56%
7.	Mixed	2	1.85%
8.	Other	8	7.41%
	Total	108	100%

Table 8 Ethnicity

Mental/Physical disability

Do you or anyone in your family or your circle of friends identify as having a mental or physical disability?

The majority of respondents knew someone with a disability, either mental or physical, in their close circle as outlined above in the question. Disabilities stated ranged from a mental health issue for 15 people, mobility issues for 9, hearing for 6 and autism for 6. The rest were alcoholism, anxiety, arthritis, visual impairment and diabetes.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	No	25	17.01%

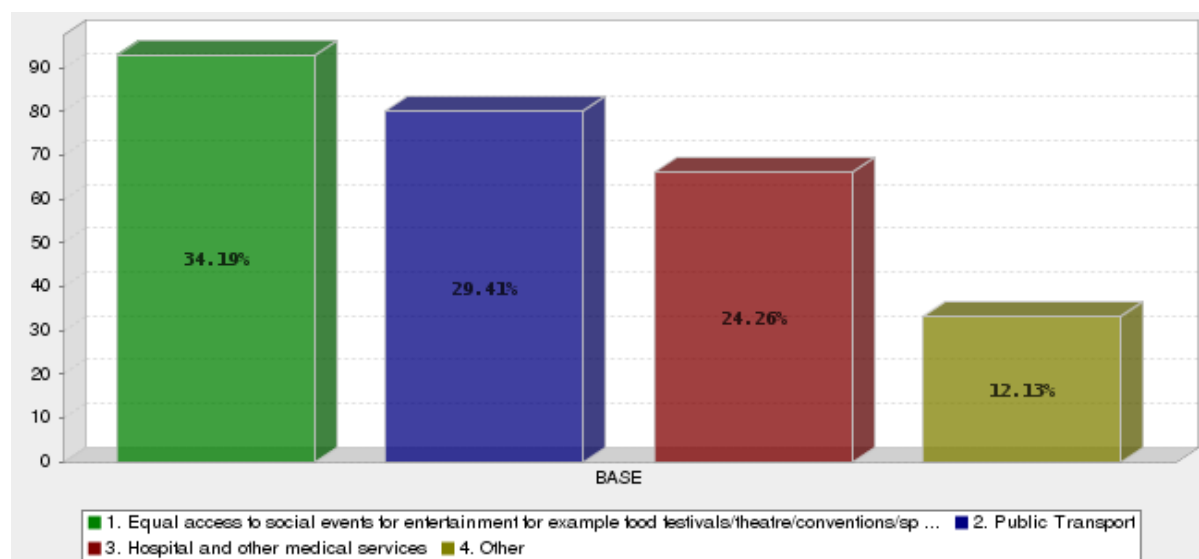
2.	Yes	69	46.94%
3.	If yes please briefly state the nature of the disability	53	36.05%
	Total	147	100%

Table 9 Disability

Discrimination

Do you think disabled people are discriminated against in any of these situations?

The respondents thought that disabled people are most discriminated against in social events.



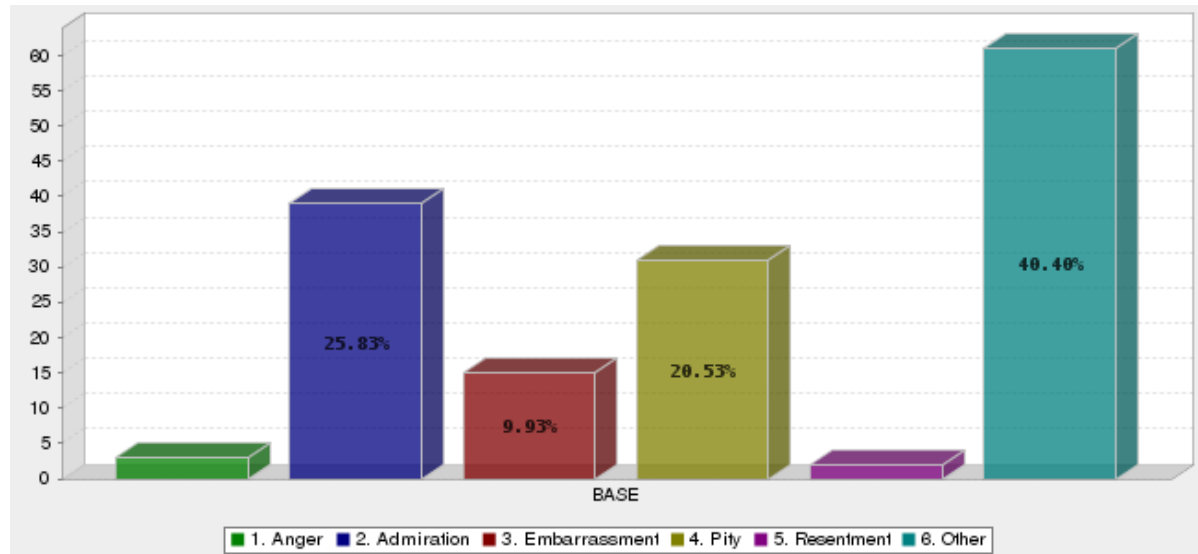
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Equal access to social events for entertainment for example food festivals/theatre/conventions/sporting events.	93	34.19%
2.	Public Transport	80	29.41%
3.	Hospital and other medical services	66	24.26%
4.	Other	33	12.13%
	Total	272	100%

Table 10 Discrimination

Emotion

When you encounter someone with a physical disability, which of these emotions do you feel?

. The most common answer was admiration with 38 people stating they admire people with disabilities; further details were placed into the Other category. Pity was next with 29 people, embarrassment with 11, curious with 4 and the rest were anger, empathy, fear, indifference, kinship, resentment and revulsion.



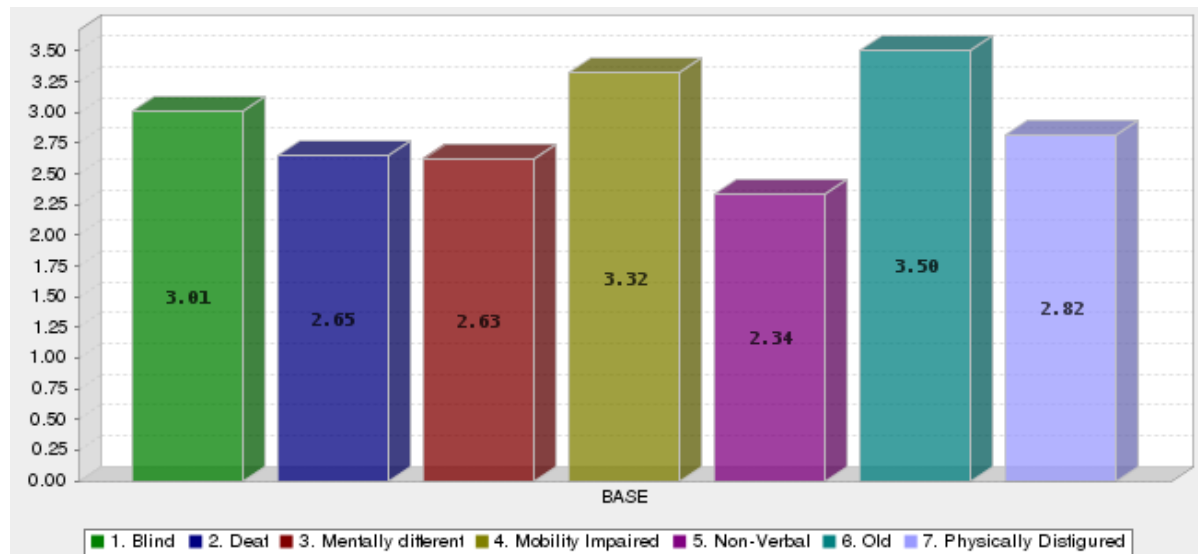
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Anger	3	1.99%
2.	Admiration	39	25.83%
3.	Embarrassment	15	9.93%
4.	Pity	31	20.53%
5.	Resentment	2	1.32%
6.	Other	61	40.40%

	Total	151	100%
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Table 11 Emotion

General comfort with disability

Overall, how comfortable do you feel to interact with someone who is disabled (Not comfortable, very uncomfortable, somewhat comfortable, very comfortable)

**Table 12 Comfort Level with Disability**

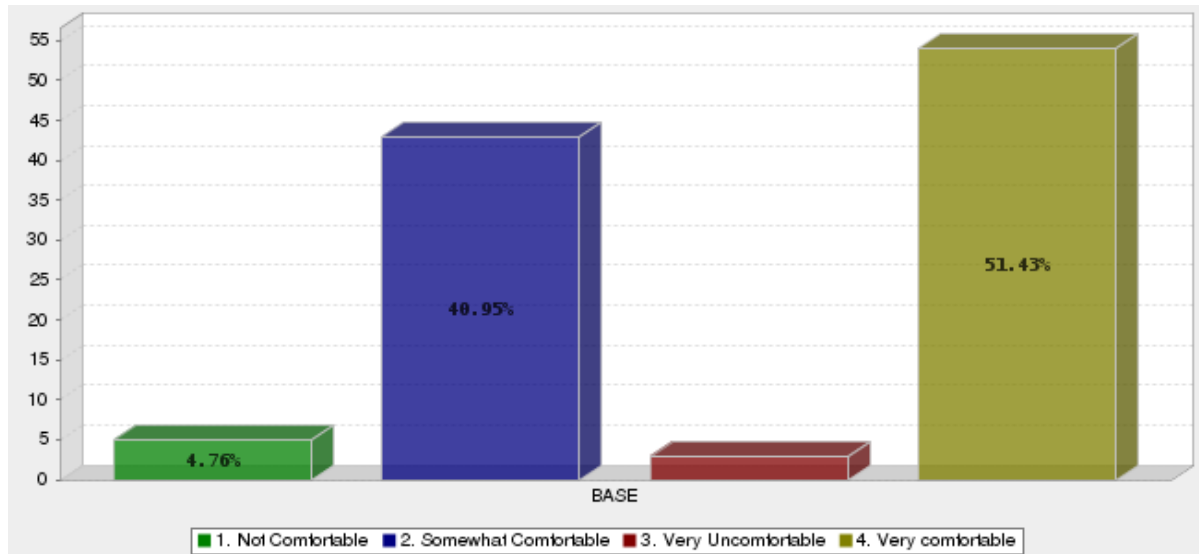
Question	Count
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1.	Blind	105
2.	Deaf	105
3.	Mentally different	105
4.	Mobility Impaired	105
5.	Non-Verbal	104
6.	Old	105
7.	Physically Disfigured	105

Table 13 General Comfort with Disability

Blind

Most respondents were very or somewhat comfortable with people who identify as blind or visually impaired.

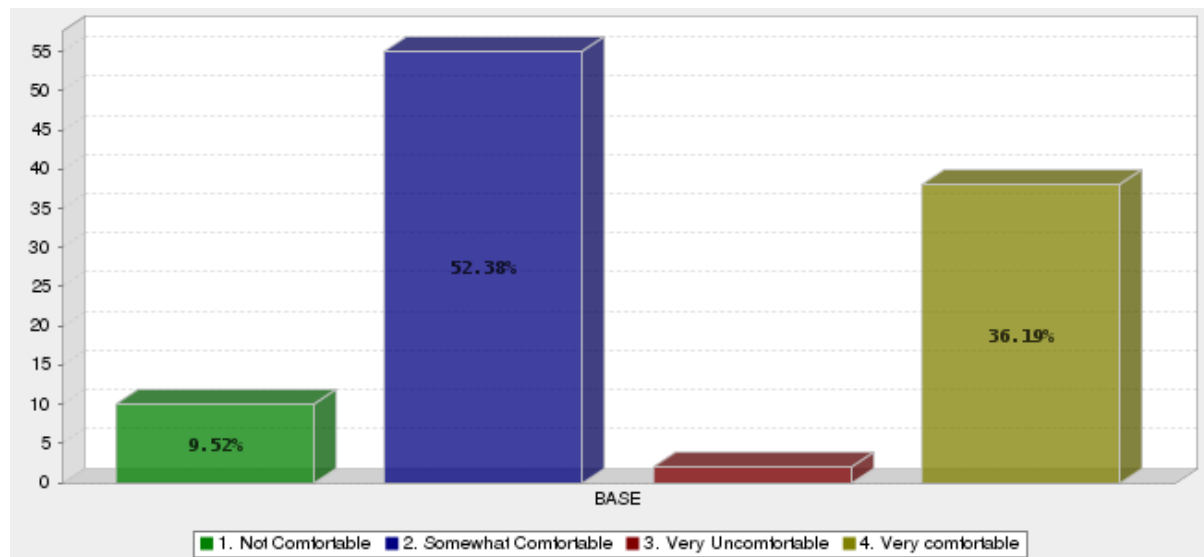


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	5	4.76%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	43	40.95%
3.	Very Uncomfortable	3	2.86%
4.	Very comfortable	54	51.43%
	Total	105	100%

Table 14 Blind

Deaf

The level of comfort indicated by respondents was one of comfort with people who identify as Deaf/deaf.

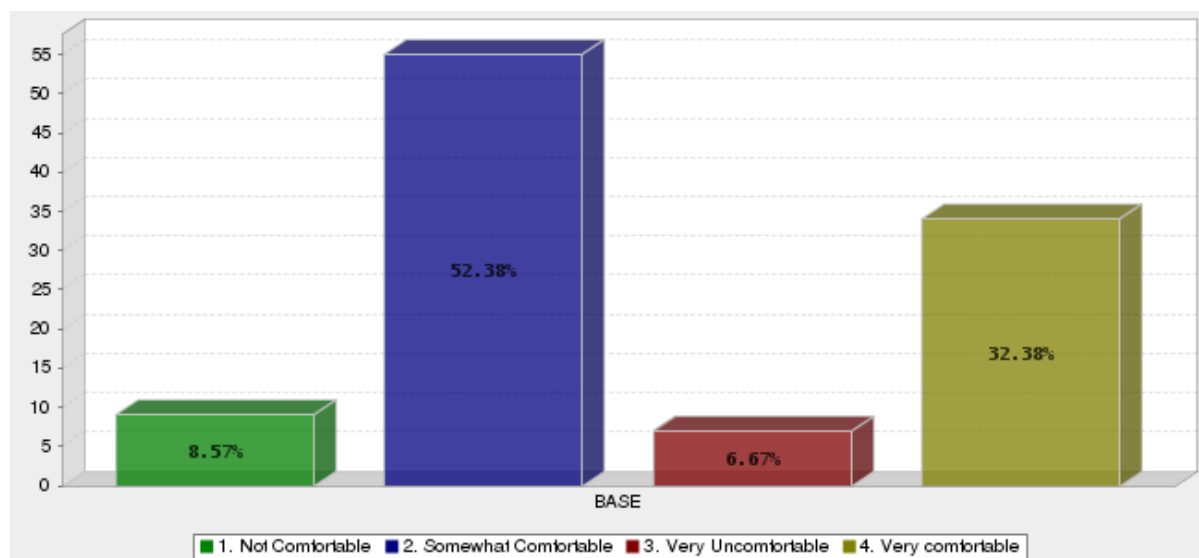


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	10	9.52%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	55	52.38%
3.	Very Uncomfortable	2	1.90%
4.	Very comfortable	38	36.19%

	Total	105	100%
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Table 15 Deaf**Mentally different**

Respondents were somewhat comfortable with this category.



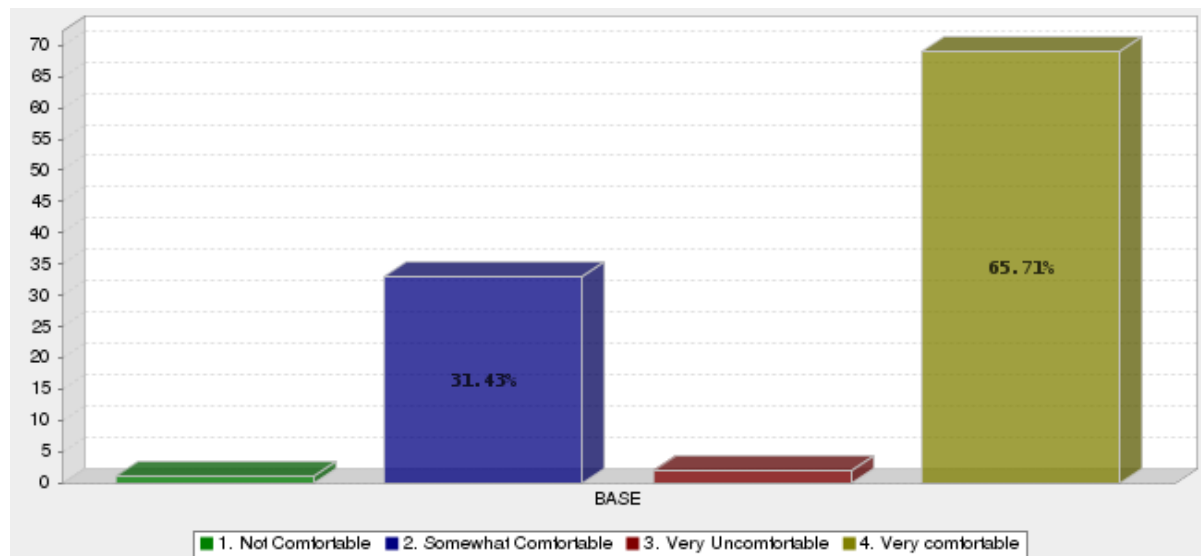
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	9	8.57%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	55	52.38%

3.	Very Uncomfortable	7	6.67%
4.	Very comfortable	34	32.38%
	Total	105	100%

Table 16 Mentally Different

Mobility Impaired

Very comfortable with mobility impaired which are the most like zombies, lurching and stumbling around.

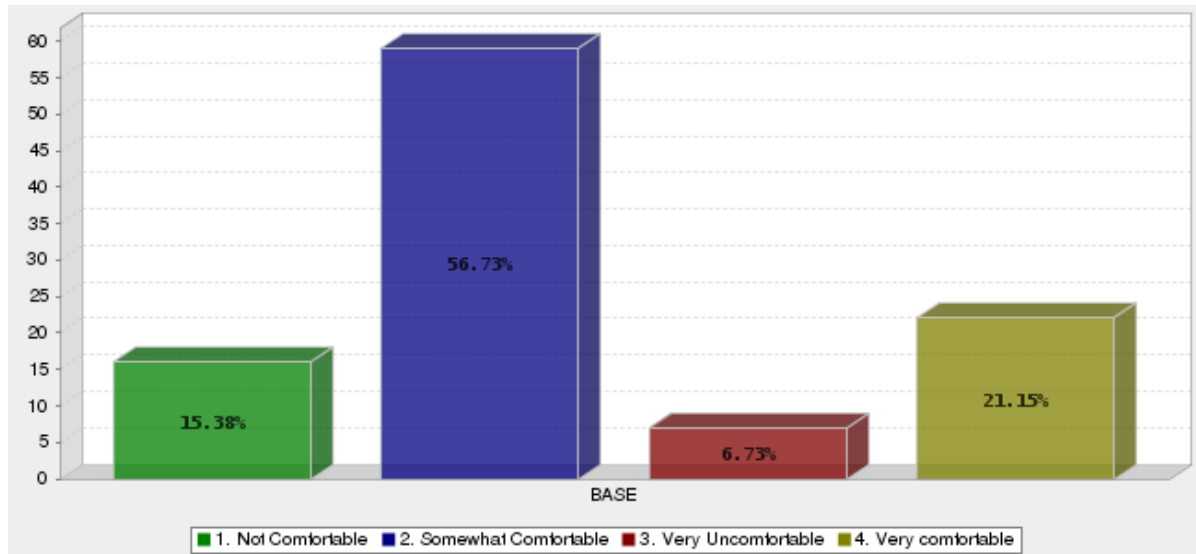


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	1	0.95%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	33	31.43%
3.	Very Uncomfortable	2	1.90%
4.	Very comfortable	69	65.71%
	Total	105	100%

Table 17 Mobility Impaired

Non-Verbal

Again the somewhat comfortable overwhelmingly – again zombies are non verbal.

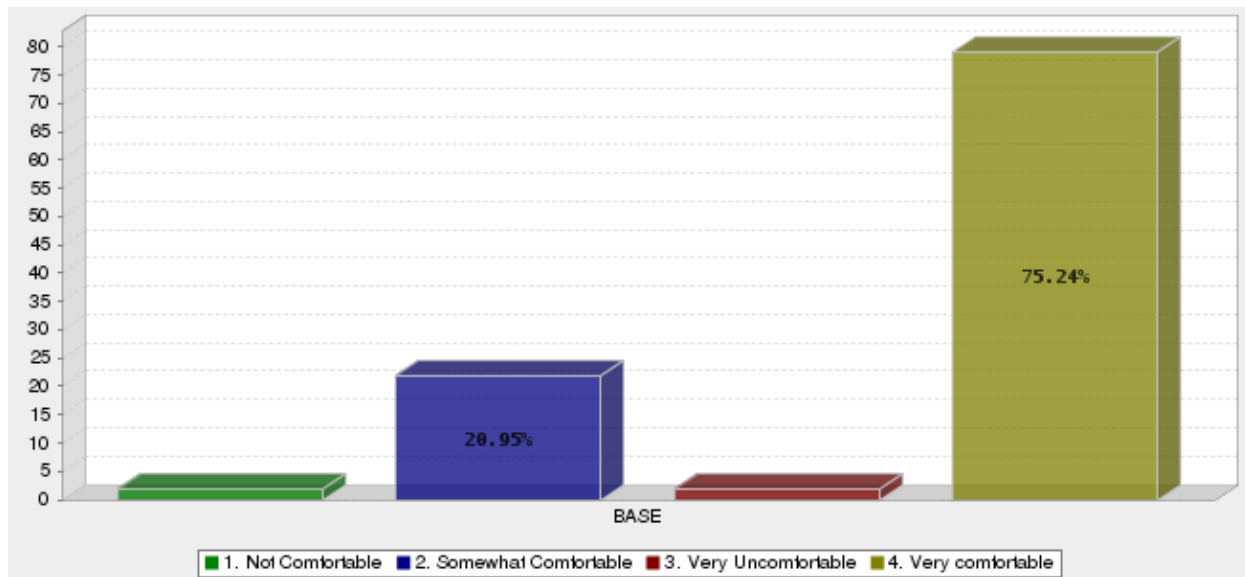


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	16	15.38%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	59	56.73%
3.	Very Uncomfortable	7	6.73%
4.	Very comfortable	22	21.15%
	Total	104	100%

Table 18 Non-Verbal

Old

Very comfortable with aging.

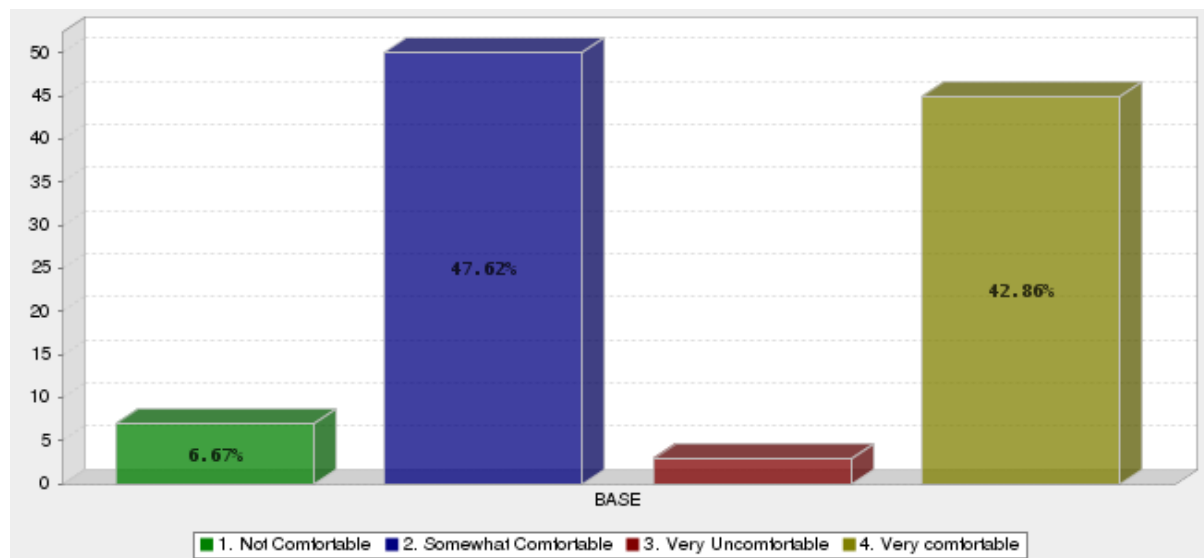


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	2	1.90%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	22	20.95%
3.	Very Uncomfortable	2	1.90%
4.	Very comfortable	79	75.24%

	Total	105	100%
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Table 19 Age**Physically Disfigured**

Comfortable with physically disfigured, again a zombie trait.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Not Comfortable	7	6.67%
2.	Somewhat Comfortable	50	47.62%

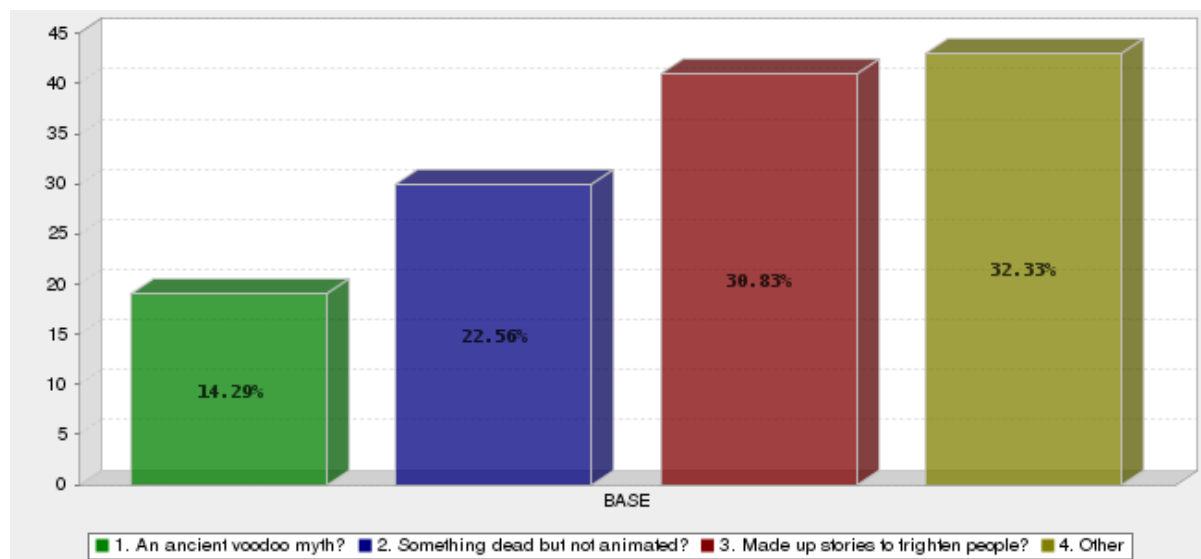
3.	Very Uncomfortable	3	2.86%
4.	Very comfortable	45	42.86%
	Total	105	100%

Table 20 Physical Disfigurement

Zombie word meaning

What does the word zombie mean to you?

Most people, 63, stated that zombies were a fabrication of the film industry, 12 said a myth, and 26 simply said dead.



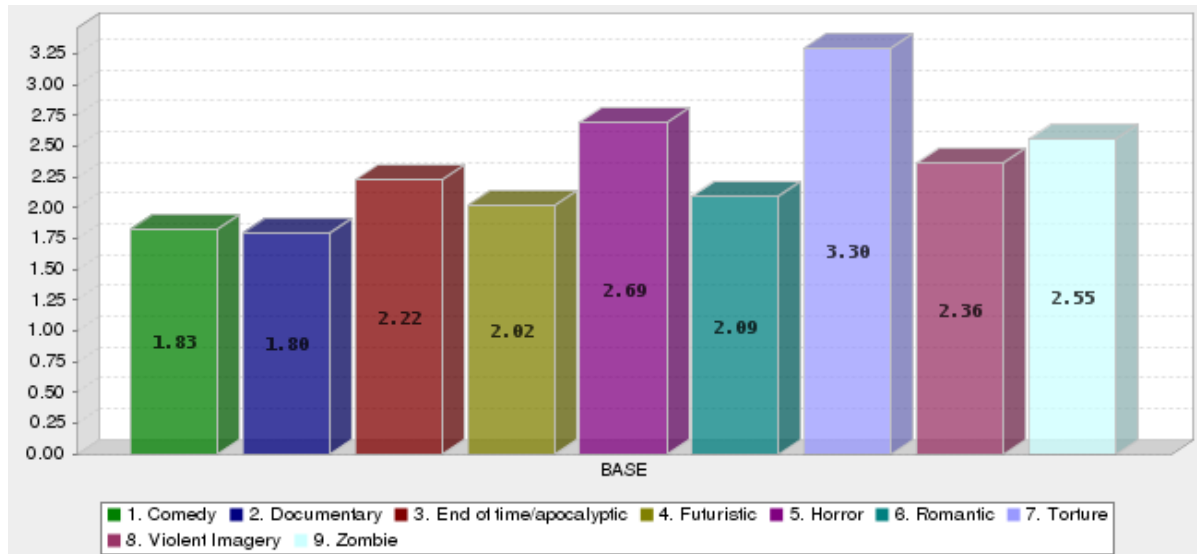
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	An ancient voodoo myth?	19	14.29%
2.	Something dead but not animated?	30	22.56%
3.	Made up stories to frighten people?	41	30.83%
4.	Other	43	32.33%
	Total	133	100%

Table 21 The Meaning of the Word Zombie

Film and television categories general

Do you watch films or television shows in any of the following categories?

Overview:



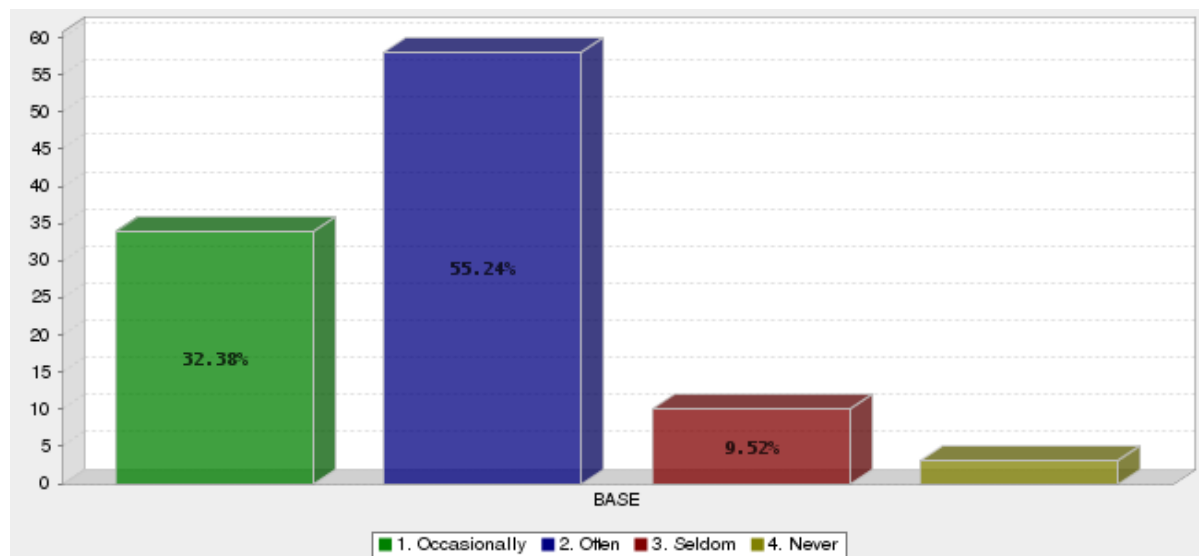
Overall Matrix Scorecard : Do you watch films or television shows in any of the following categories

	Question	Count
1.	Comedy	105
2.	Documentary	104
3.	End of time/apocalyptic	103
4.	Futuristic	103

5.	Horror	106
6.	Romantic	104
7.	Torture	103
8.	Violent Imagery	103
9.	Zombie	103

Table 22 Film Watching

Comedy

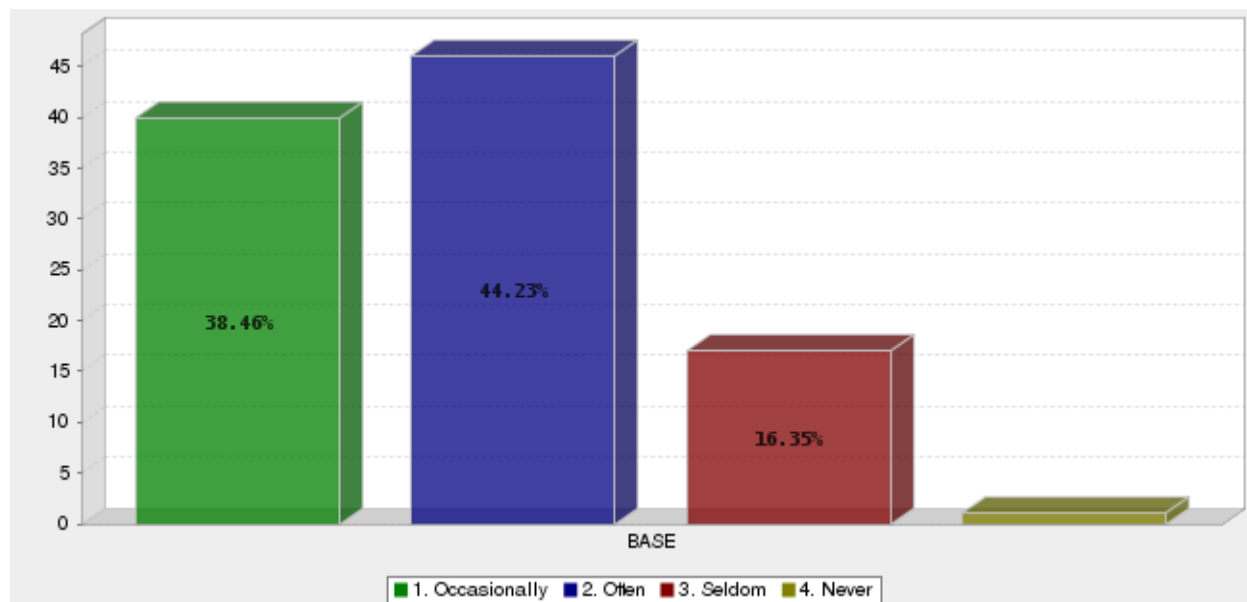


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	34	32.38%
2.	Often	58	55.24%
3.	Seldom	10	9.52%
4.	Never	3	2.86%
	Total	105	100%

Table 23 Comedy

Documentary

Documentaries seem to be a commonality.

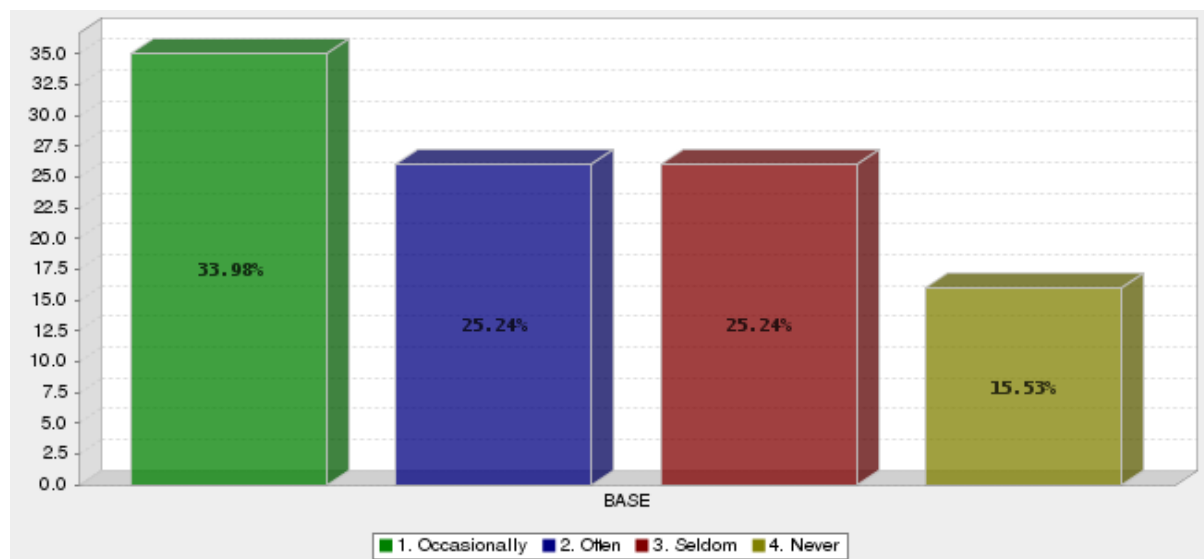


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	40	38.46%
2.	Often	46	44.23%
3.	Seldom	17	16.35%
4.	Never	1	0.96%
	Total	104	100%

Table 24 Documentaries

End of time/apocalyptic

Majority of responses indicate an interest in this genre.

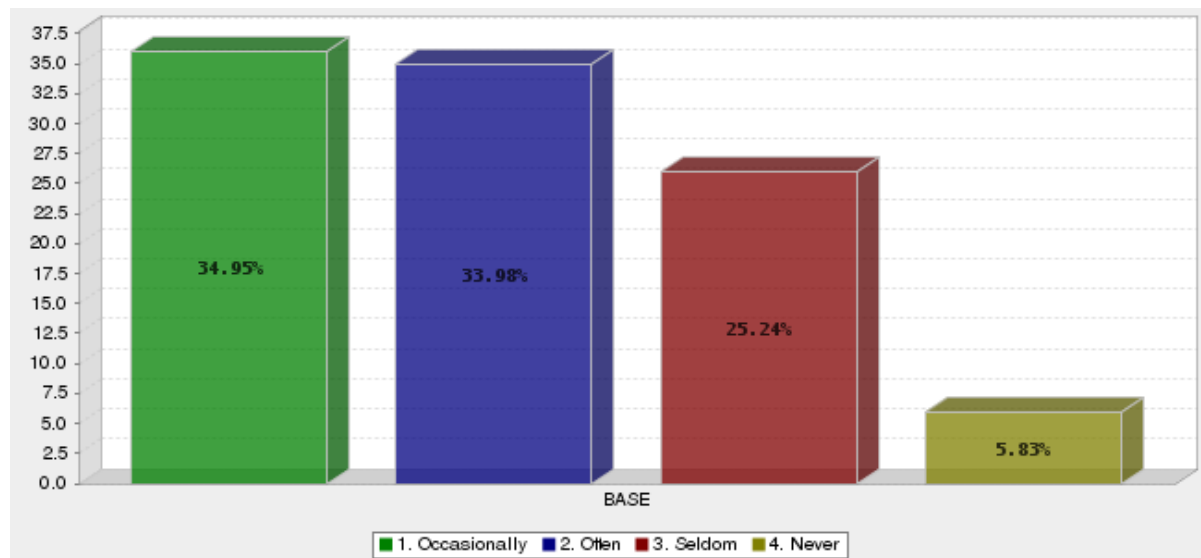


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	35	33.98%
2.	Often	26	25.24%
3.	Seldom	26	25.24%

4.	Never	16	15.53%
	Total	103	100%

Table 25 End of Times

Futuristic



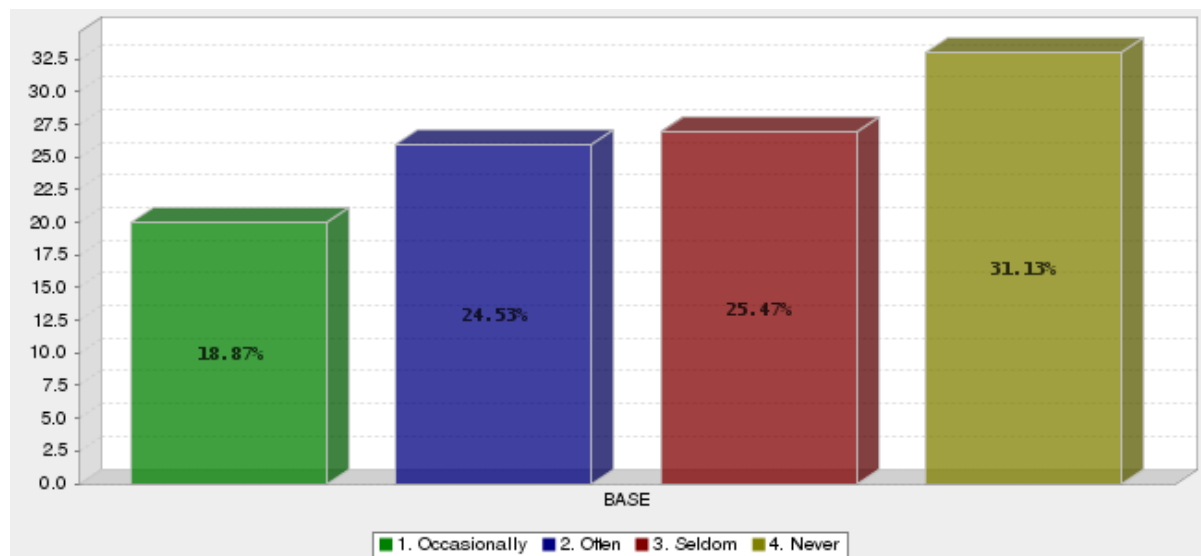
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	36	34.95%

2.	Often	35	33.98%
3.	Seldom	26	25.24%
4.	Never	6	5.83%
	Total	103	100%

Table 26 Futuristic

Horror

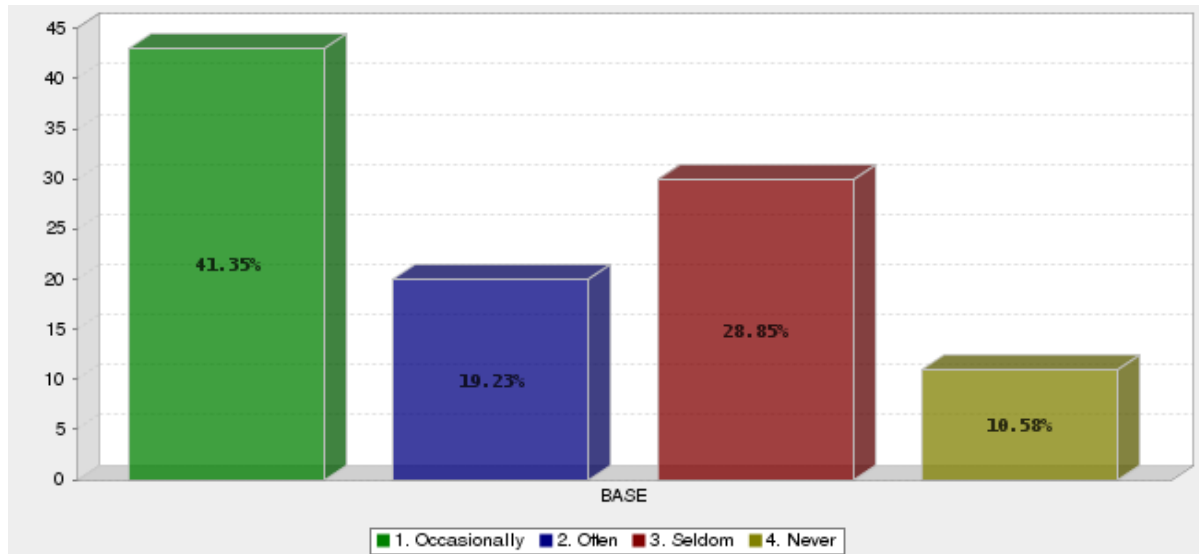
Horror was not a much watched genre, surprisingly.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	20	18.87%
2.	Often	26	24.53%
3.	Seldom	27	25.47%
4.	Never	33	31.13%
	Total	106	100%

Table 27 Horror**Romantic**

Not often viewed.

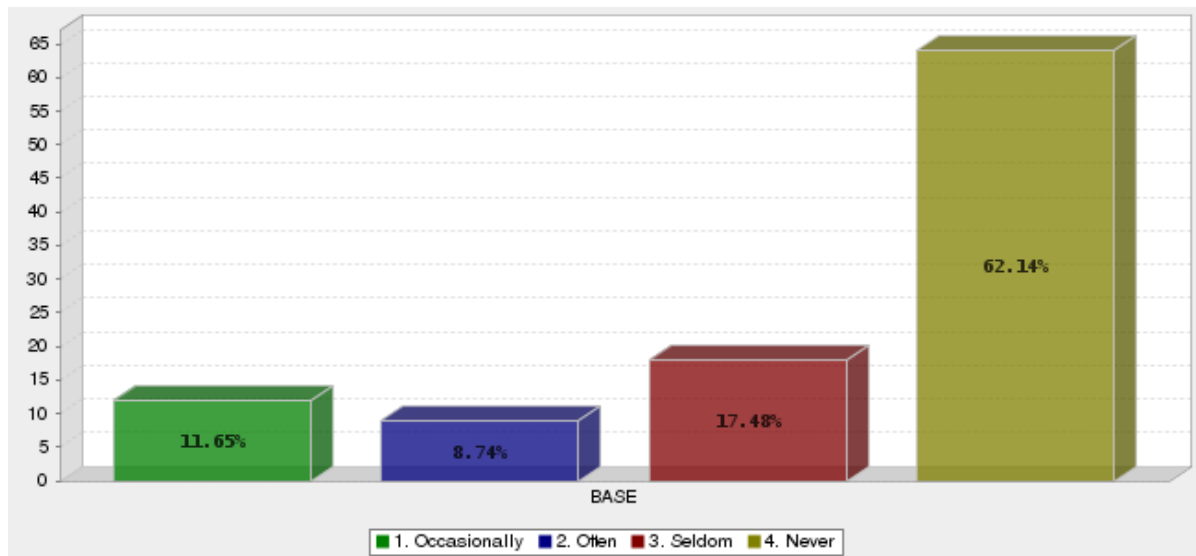


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	43	41.35%
2.	Often	20	19.23%
3.	Seldom	30	28.85%
4.	Never	11	10.58%
	Total	104	100%

Table 28 Romance

Torture

High score for never watched, yet zombie movies tend to be violent and bloody in nature.

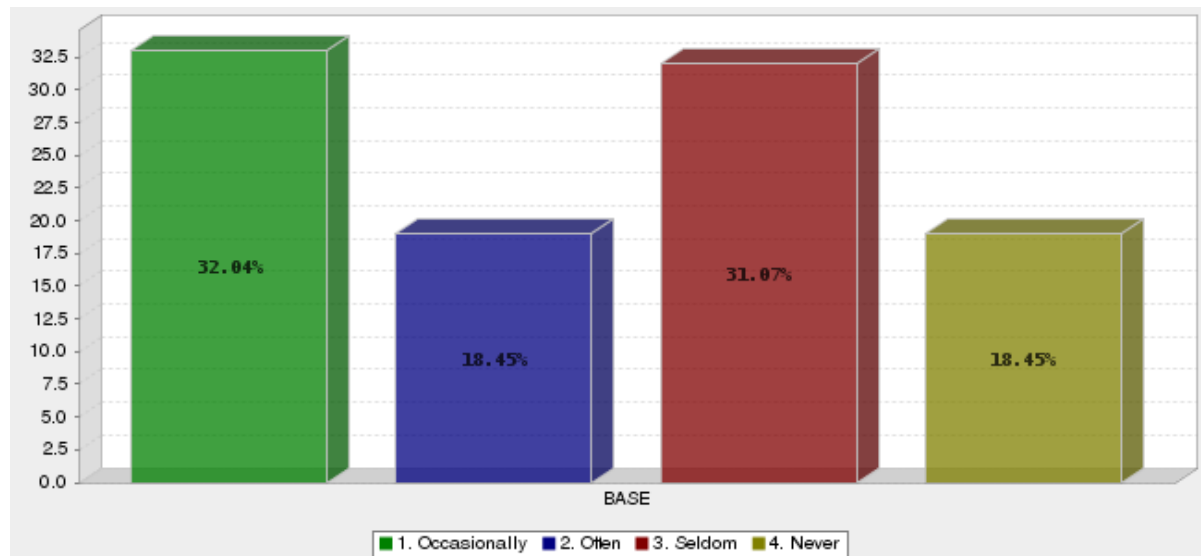


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	12	11.65%
2.	Often	9	8.74%
3.	Seldom	18	17.48%
4.	Never	64	62.14%

	Total	103	100%
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Table 29 Torture**Violent Imagery**

Occasional and seldom scored higher than often and never. Zombie movies tend to depict violence and brutal survival scenarios.



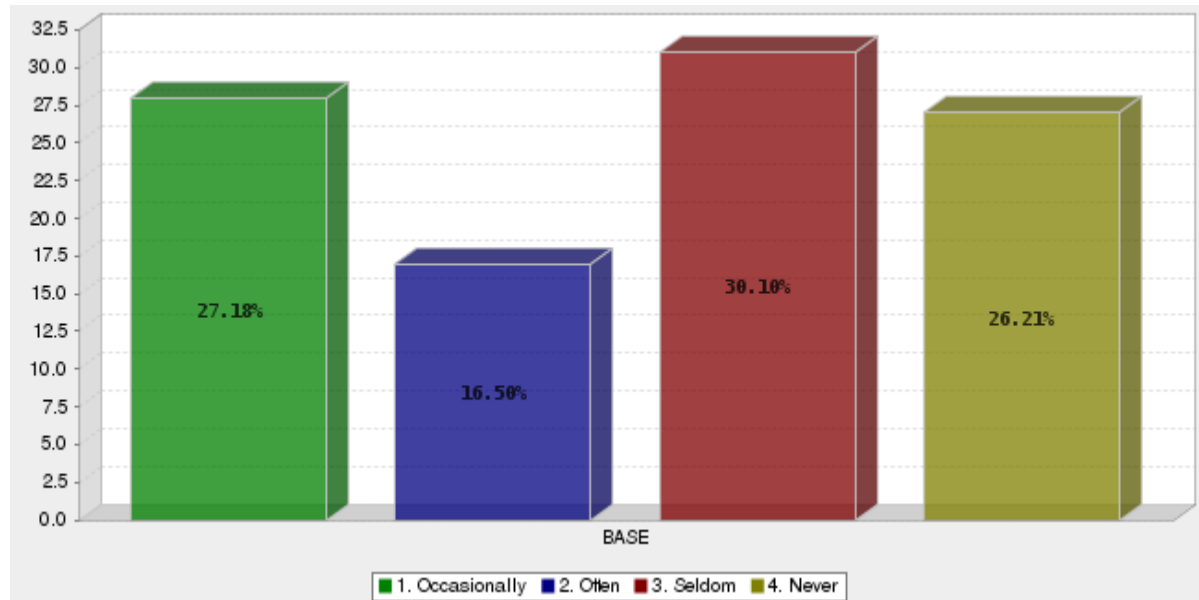
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	33	32.04%

2.	Often	19	18.45%
3.	Seldom	32	31.07%
4.	Never	19	18.45%
	Total	103	100%

Table 30 Violence

Zombie

Seldom and occasional had the highest number of responses for watching zombies, and never was also relatively high, but often was the lowest.

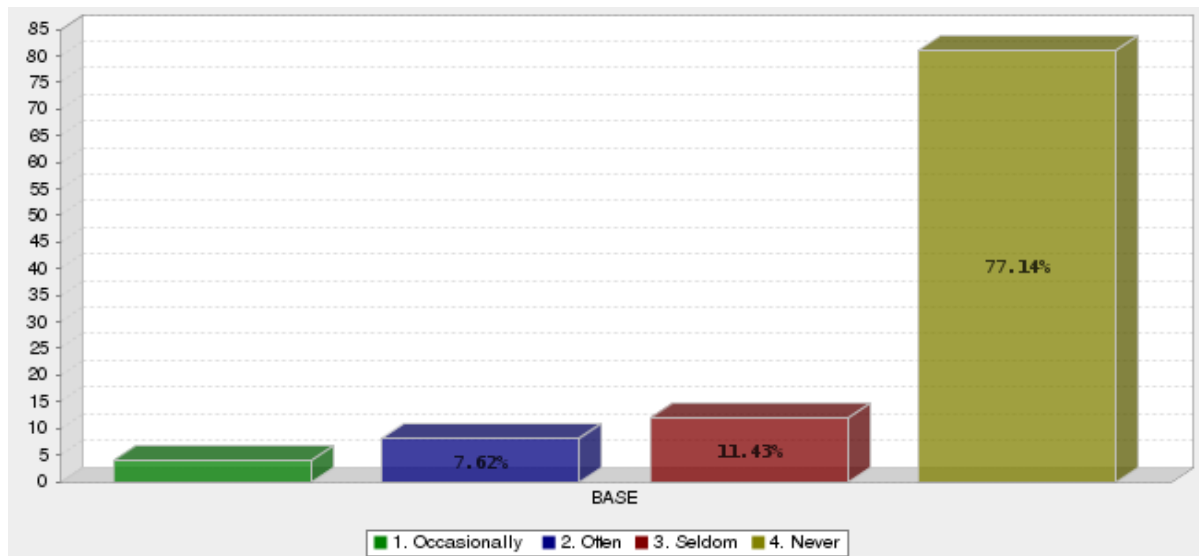


	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	28	27.18%
2.	Often	17	16.50%
3.	Seldom	31	30.10%
4.	Never	27	26.21%
	Total	103	100%

Table 31 Zombie

Do you read zombie comics?

High value for never.



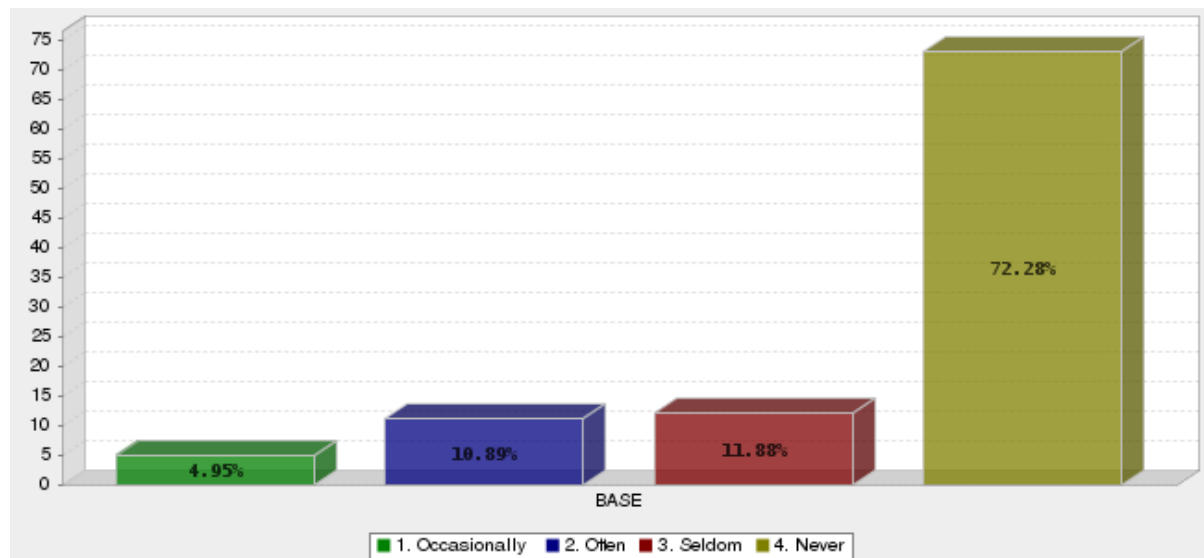
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	4	3.81%
2.	Often	8	7.62%
3.	Seldom	12	11.43%
4.	Never	81	77.14%

	Total	105	100%
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Table 32 Zombie Comics

Do you read books or graphic novels about zombies?

High value for never.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Occasionally	5	4.95%

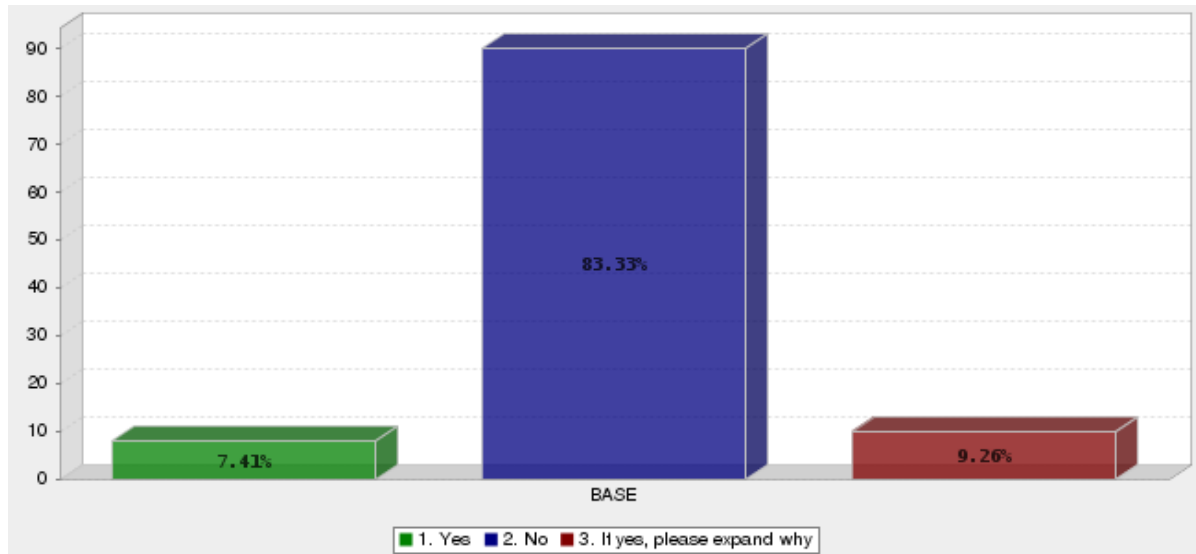
2.	Often	11	10.89%
3.	Seldom	12	11.88%
4.	Never	73	72.28%
	Total	101	100%

Table 33 Zombie Novels

Zombie apocalypse good/bad

Would you think a zombie apocalypse would be a positive occurrence given the current economic and turbulent times we live in?

The desire for law and order seems high as not many people want to have an apocalyptic future, nor be attacked by cannibals.



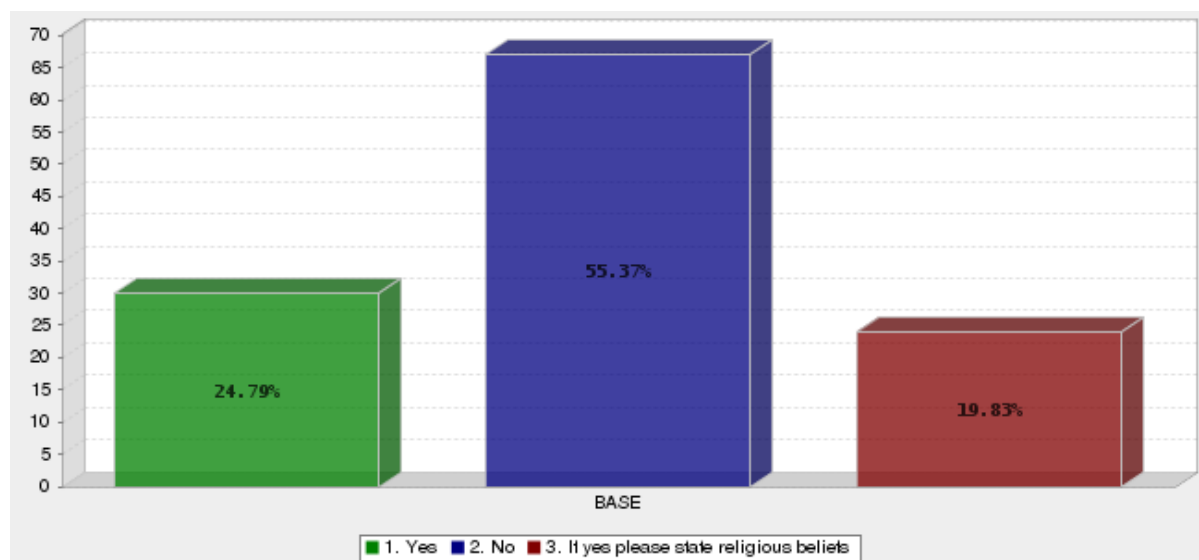
	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Yes	8	7.41%
2.	No	90	83.33%
3.	If yes, please expand why	10	9.26%
	Total	108	100%

Table 34 Welcome the Apocalypse

Religion

Do you identify with a religion? If yes please state which one and if you attend regularly (regularly being more than 12 times a year)

The lack of religious practice vs high tolerance for disability vs low zombie watching would indicate that communities do not need religion for empathy towards the marginalized, nor is it important for inclusion and community. Of the 24.79% who stated they were religious and attended services regularly, five people were Jewish, three were Christian, two were Muslim, one was a Scientologist, one Quaker, one spiritualist, one native American/Pagan, and one belonged to the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. The lack of religion among respondents was interesting, with the majority of recipients in the survey stating they watched zombie films and television shows. Religion does not seem to be a large indicator of success in the post-apocalyptic world of the zombie, which was surprising to me as I had assumed that religion would help communities prosper and collaborate with each other.



	Answer	Count	Percent
1.	Yes	30	24.79%
2.	No	67	55.37%
3.	If yes please state religious beliefs	24	19.83%
	Total	121	100%

Table 35 Religion

Statistical Analysis

Further analysis using statistical methods was done. We ran a Chi-square analysis between education level and watching zombie movies, but we could not draw a conclusion since many of the cells in the table had counts less than 5. Chi square analysis compares expected versus observed values; so when the value is small (less than 5) the observed is close to what is expected.

We also did the Mann-Whitney test to determine if there is an association between employment level and watching zombie movies. The test showed no significant association, with a p-value $P=0.629 > 0.05$. We then transformed the employment level variable into a dichotomous variable (Employed, Not employed) and ran the chi-square test; the test showed no significant association (p-value =0.90) between employment status and watching zombie movies. Unfortunately the results were not conclusive due to the data set being only 108 people, so no significant findings presented.

Interviews

Of the 10 people whom I asked for a follow-up interview seven people responded. The interview was split into the segments of media, disability, humanity, religion and the apocalypse; minorities were overwhelmingly seen as underrepresented in participants and their inclusion would more closely reflect the population generally and in both disability and minority representation.

Analysis

Data from the research were analysed using the framework of zombies, inclusion and religion using textual analysis.

Zombies

Question	Count
Are minorities under-represented in the zombie offerings and if yes,	No=0 Yes=7
Do you find religion a driving force behind a fear of zombies and their representation in modern film and TELEVISION etc.?	No=2 Yes=5

Table 36 Zombie Media

Religion

Religious beliefs did not factor highly in the respondents replies and did not show evidence of increasing compassion towards other people.

Question	Count
If religious , would your faith be important to you as a priority in the post-apocalyptic world?	No=7 Yes=0
Would your religion make you more compassionate towards those less fortunate than yourself?	Yes=2 No=3 Depends on belief=2

Table 37 Religious Beleifs

Inclusion

Disability

Most of the participants identified with disability and thought they could catch a disability; for example leprosy or COVID-related long-term effects. Most participants stated they would be reluctant to approach a zombie, but not a person with a disability. Interview Participant F, who has Downs syndrome, stated he would feel he was being rude if he did not accept the outstretched arms of a zombie, he saw it as a sign of friendship which needed to be

reciprocated. Identifying with a disability, either in yourself or someone close to you, might indicate less reluctance to avoid a zombie until you are sure that they mean you harm.

Question	Count
Do you identify with a disability, or someone close to you?	Yes=6 No=1
Do you think you can catch a disability?	Yes=5 No=2
Would you be reluctant to approach someone with a disability?	No=5 Yes=2
Imagine zombies are real. Would you be reluctant to approach a zombie?	Yes=5 No=2
Would you make, or see, a link between disability and zombies?	No=4

	Yes=3
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Table 38 Disability

Humanity

Overwhelmingly people felt people have a need to care for others, but religion was not a factor to most.

Question	Count
Do you feel that some people have a need to look after and care for others?	Yes=7 No=0
Do you feel compelled to help others that need help?	Yes=7 No=0

Table 39 Humanity

Apocalypse preparation

The interviewees did not generally prepare for an apocalypse, nor did they want one, but preference would be for a more simple time, as our lives are very fast paced.

Question	Count
Have you ever formulated a plan for an apocalypse?	Yes=2 No=5
Would you welcome the apocalypse to cleanse society of its perceived corruption?	Yes=2 No=3 Unclear=2
Would you like a return to simpler times when we grew our own vegetables and lived in villages where everyone knows each other?	Yes=5 No=2

Table 40 Apocalypse

Summary of Results

This chapter discussed answers to the questions raised and explored in this research regarding the prevalence of the bias towards people with a variety of disabilities, both physical and mental in presentation, and is this bias represented in the modern zombie subgenre of the horror movies? It analysed both the written scripts and visual references in two works from the horror subgenre of zombies: the quintessential modern zombie movie *The Living Dead*, and the current television show *The Walking Dead*. It also analysed the interaction between the characters and any references, both direct and indirect, towards the large overreaching umbrella of disability, including both physical and mental health issues.

The intersection of the three areas of study as indicated in the framework of Zombies, Inclusion and Religion is where my academic study is positioned. An important theme emerged during the course of my research of the need for community support (inclusion), how the disabled are perceived (zombies) and that religion does not seem to play a large or positive role in the positive treatment of people with disabilities. Although religion has become distorted in its values over time, I expected it to be more prevalent, and thought that it would have played a greater part in inclusion.

Chapter Five: Discussion

“The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”

Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978), U.S. Vice President from 1965 to 1969

Introduction

In this section I will continue the broader discussion on how the results of my analysis and survey have meaning in my thesis regarding the three areas within my framework of zombies, inclusion and religion. By concentrating on these three areas, I was able to see the correlation between religion and inclusion more clearly and further establish how disability is seen by my interview participants.

Zombies

The Walking Dead television show spans across eleven series, although at this time I only have access to the full seasons 1 to 10. The arc of the stories contained in both *The Walking Dead* and *The Night of the Living Dead* follow along the basic premise of the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 2 below). The most vital physical and safety needs, a trifecta of water, food and safe shelter, are the priorities for immediate survival. These needs have to be met in order to feel safe enough to reproduce, form trusting communities, satisfy psychological needs, evolve

past basic survival existence and to grow a productive community. *The Night of the Living Dead* stories did not evolve to personal self-fulfilment needs as indicated by Maslow (for example personal and creative self growth).

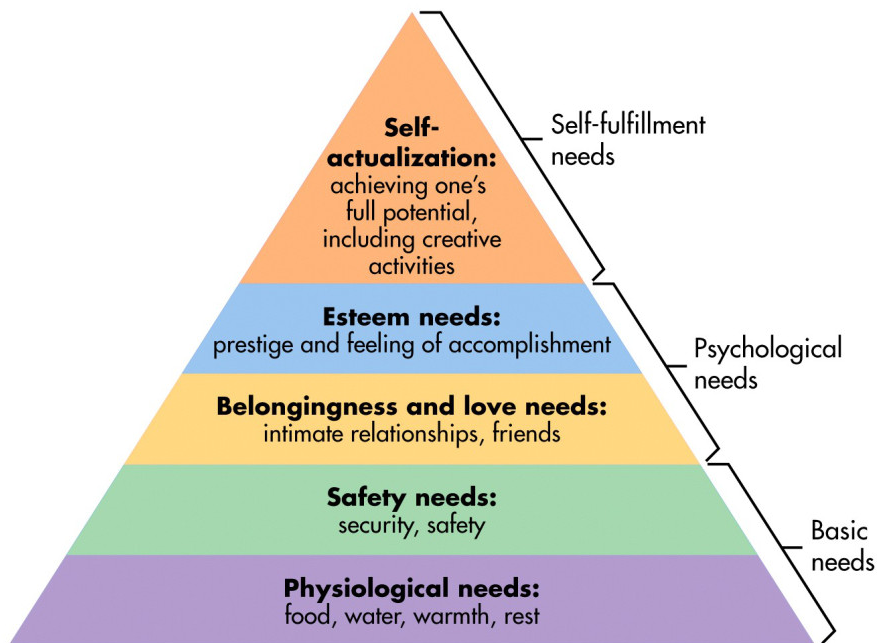
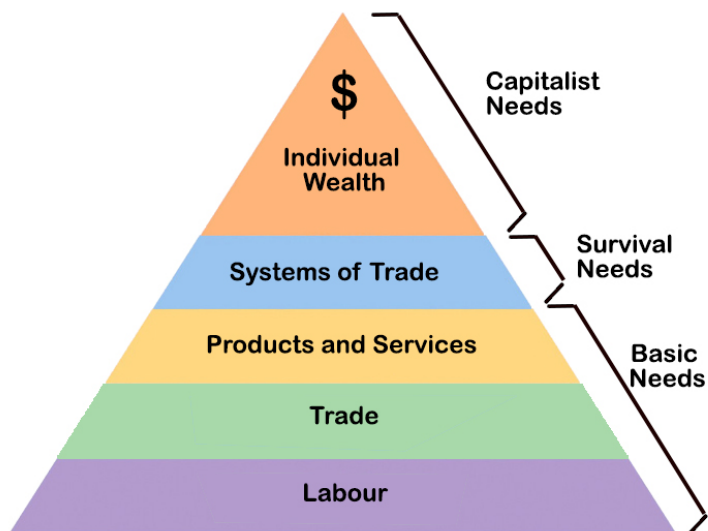


Figure 2 Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>¹⁸

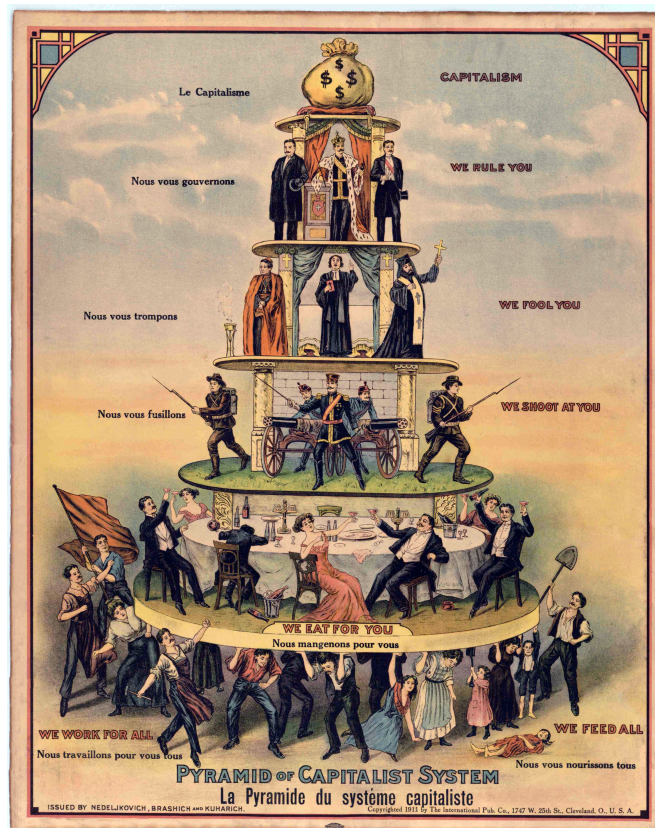
And by way of contrast, the capitalistic scale of needs:



¹⁸ McLeod, S. A. (2020, March 20). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Figure 3 Capitalistic Scale of Needs

Without people to work, the capitalist system would be unable to exist. This is a fact that has been known for a long time as shown in "Pyramid of the Capitalist System" Socialist Poster, produced in 1911, below:



<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/u/ulsmanuscripts/pdf/31735066248802.pdf>

Figure 4 Pyramid of the Capitalistic System

With the world fully engaged in a monetary system of exchanging money for work, the concept of disability becomes one of usefulness to society. The apocalyptic narratives studied for this dissertation, do not deal with disability well, with the inference that there is no need to bother with bodies that need care, and if you are injured or disabled you are a burden. I believe that humans have a need to care. Interview participant A states “I think people who have been affected in their own lives by marginalization in some kind of way whether it's disability, whether it's, you know, race, gender issues, often also feel that impulse to care for others because ... that's what drives me is that I, I don't want other disabled people to face the struggles”. Interview participant P said “some of the values of religion, such as caring for others, I would hope, would eventually get to a point where those were again important”.

The Walking dead in season 8 is a turning point from the depressing, apocalyptic narratives of the former seasons, indicating that despite so many setbacks to a stable community, there is hope for a more inclusive society. In season 8 episode 9 the narrative changes showing Carl, son of Rick Grimes, wanting to find a better way forwards for everyone: “Everybody living... helping everybody else live. If you can still be who you were... that's how it could be. It could.” Although these stories are seen as purely entertainment by many people, they are a reflection of our society's values which views both zombies and the disabled as outcasts to society. In Canada and the west, we live in a society that prioritizes self-fulfilment needs and the needs of the individual over a community that looks after the wellbeing of its most vulnerable

citizens. Zombie apocalypse culture is profoundly and existentially anti-disability, due to its lack of representation, initially, of anyone seen as marginalized. It normalizes the fear, hatred and revulsion that people feel for disability in all its forms.

Zombies can be seen as a cautionary tale of the future should we fail to evolve, post COVID, into a more inclusive society. With the rise in interest in the horror zombie subgenre and post-apocalypse narratives, people generally are questioning their inclusion in the workforce and starting to imagine ways in which civilization can be restructured to be more equitable; especially due to the COVID pandemic, political unrest, threats to democracy and the impending environmental crises.

The textual analysis and survey results were followed up with more pointed questions in my interviews, the answers to which seem to point to a need for humans to care and are backed up by previous academic research: “The link between empathic distress and caring is direct and obvious” (Hoffman, 2000, P225). Most post-apocalyptic shows concentrate on a plague and on the subsequent human conflict surrounding the survivors’ own wants and needs. The people in the shows demonstrate an inability to create collaborative communities, and so the communities they do create ultimately self-destruct. *The Walking Dead* seems to offer a post-apocalyptic change for the better with a rebuild of a more inclusive and tolerant society as started by Carl in his dying conversation with his father Rick in season 8, episode 9, in which Carl asks Rick to consider a more equitable future with community help. When confronted by a single stranger,

Siddiq, who happens to be a doctor, Carl asked his father to accept Siddiq as “He was not going to make it on his own. He needed us” and “I know it can be better” referring to the infighting between groups. In the letters he left for his community, Carl asks them to consider a better way: “sometimes, kids got to show their parents the way”, and to his father: “That's why you changed... why you brought those people from Woodbury in... You brought them in, and we all lived together. We were enemies. You put away your gun. You did it so I could change, so I could be who I am now. What you did then... How you... How you stopped fighting... it was right. It still is. It can be like that again. You can still be like that again” and “You can't kill all of 'em, Dad. There's gotta be something after. For you... and for them. There's gotta be something after”. Carl’s last words were “Everybody living... helping everybody else live”. There has to be hope for a better, collaborative, inclusive future, with a place in society for everyone.

Romero asserts that his zombie films are all about the people and not about the zombies, as is revealed in this piece from a 2005 interview, given on the event of *Land of the Dead*’s release: “To me, the zombies have always just been zombies... My stories are about humans and

how they react, or fail to react, or react stupidly. I'm pointing the finger at us, not the zombies."¹⁹ (accessed May 8, 2014). I believe that Popular zombie culture is a mechanism for othering people with disabilities.

Zombification of disability

Popular zombie culture is the perfect symbol of contempt for disability. The zombification of disability is about pathologizing disability and further, to stigmatize it. We do not see a use for the zombie, nor do we see value in many disabilities and this makes many people unsure of how to react around a disability; we tend to shun those we do not fully understand. When faced with a disability we are reminded of our own frailties and we see the uncomfortable truth that at some time we will all be disabled to some degree, temporarily or permanently as stated by survey participant D "I think that everyone is always two inches away from becoming disabled". If you replaced people with disabilities, symbolically coded as zombies, with any other identifiable group like the BIPOC, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans, two spirited people, those people who perceive themselves as progressive, would be indignant at the

¹⁹ <http://www.vanityfair.com/online/oscars/2010/05/george-romero> (accessed May 8, 2014)

comparison, so why is it that zombie apocalypse culture afforded the opportunity to symbolically vilify people with disabilities? According to participant J “oftentimes being ... turned into a zombie is like acquiring disability” and “Disability means to me that there are norms in place for how humanity is supposed to be, whether it be physical, cognitive, etc. Anyone who deviates from these norms will be rendered 'disabled'. Thus disability is a socially constructed category used to create dichotomies” so “I feel that they are not human and cannot co-exist with humans, for they crave zombies human brains or flesh, which implies the dire situation of 'us or them.'”

When asking participants what disability meant to them they responded “A condition (physical, mental, or psychological) that inhibits a person ... you performing normal/routine activities”, “That a person's skill set does match the built environment or our commonly held ... ideas about what’s normal”, “Disability is caused by the failure of society to meet the needs of PWD’s” and disability is “Limitations to participating in society by able bodied people”. The lack of disability presence in zombies, as indicated by the comments quoted from the survey, indicates that society does not know how to treat disabilities, so they become the faceless and dehumanized horde that the rest of society chooses not to engage with as it is seen as not worth adapting society to enable them to be included as equals in society.

Learning to view the world through other lenses and observing intersectionality issues is vital to understanding and co-existence. Studying zombie films and television shows can help reveal societies attitudes and prejudices towards those who are different, making the academic

study of this horror sub-genre a valid academic pursuit to advance the knowledge of critical disability studies.

Zombies - a trope for othering

Using the zombie trope as a metaphor for disability we see Romero also points a finger at how badly people treat each other with his storylines, which includes those with a disability, so popular zombie apocalypse culture confirms the hostility that people already feel towards people with disabilities; it gives them permission. Popular zombie culture is an extreme othering of disability and whenever a population is othered, negative events happen (Hoffman, 2000) and as Carol indicated in *The Walking Dead* season 10, Episode 8 “Like everything that’s good in the world is not on our side anymore” using the binaries of good and bad, disabled and able bodied, good is able bodied and the bad disabled bodies of zombies are apparently, by season 10, winning the war, by sheer numbers, over the able bodied former majority on earth . Participants reflect this feeling “As a metaphor, it's endlessly adaptable to so many experiences of modern life” and “Dead but animated. Zombies represent the 'other' in modern horror. They are a ... blank slate 'monster' onto which any societal boogeyman can be painted (consumerism/disease/anger etc.)” and as observed by interview participant M” getting into the military industrial complex and ... the misuse of science, so now I think zombies are kind of almost like a tabula rasa blank slate that you can impose any kind of fear or other on to because they're just ... mindless bodies”. The original zombie movies from Romero also mirrors this societal reflection “I am fascinated

by how zombie films in particular are used to [*sic*] zombies comment on society. Night of the Living Dead and Dawn of the Dead are two of my favourite films (original versions)” and the participant also stated there was disability in the family.

In the Canadian film *Blood Quantum*, Indigenous people are immune to the zombie virus, whose blood quantum provides immunity based on the amount of Indigenous blood one has, which shows the Indigenous population as one apart from society and often viewed in a negative light by the North American invaders from Britain and France, who forcefully replaced the Indigenous as the dominant culture and collective identity. As remarked upon by interview participant A “.it's just a similar thing where, ...as with people with disabilities, you and if they are included it's usually like one, one person right who's is there and there's not really... a collective, a collective identity, being represented so other than I would say Blood Quantum does that, you know, it is one of the few representations where we do kind of see that collective identity represented”. In *The Girl with All the Gifts* the breakdown of society is caused by a fungal pestilence, transmitted by bodily fluids, which infects people putting them in a zombie state. Melanie is a second generation “hungry” or zombie, The second-generation hungries were discovered after babies killed their infected mothers by burrowing out of the womb. The only non hungries left are a scientist, who wants Melanie to be dissected so she can find a cure, and a teacher, Justineau, who is a friend to Melanie and eventually is the last human. Melanie suggests that she is one of many so maybe, with only two humans left, it is time for the human race to

end. The film finishes with Justineau, safe but confined to the sealed mobile lab due to the lethal outside environment. Outside, the remaining zombie children, sit together, kept in order by Melanie. Justineau speaks through a microphone, again in her teaching role. In the zombie film *I Am Legend*, it proposes that 'zombies' is just another apocalypse-positive step in society. It's not chaos in theory if everyone transforms. It's just a transition to another state.

These films challenge widely held beliefs of the supremacy of white able bodied peoples over the marginalised in society allowing us to view disability from a different lens, so who are the others in society and how do we evolve as a species? Interview participant A states “if you don't have certain abilities if you don't share certain physical or mental features with other people that does not say anything about your worth as a person ... like disability the dis at the beginning of that is ... originally conceptualized as a negative thing”. And the participant also observed that “*The Walking Dead* it's like a walking representation of death and bodily injury and, ... reminding us of what the sort of the injuries and the composition and just vulnerability that our bodies are subject to, is something that a lot of times we try to keep out of our mind” so effectively moving our vulnerabilities out of conscious thought, so we feel invincible, there is no place for any perceived frailty or dis-ability.

Without certain formal aspects of society being in place, then society will not be able to evolve and grow into a just society, as remarked by a survey participant “Bleak or cynical about humanity, because it's often the humans who are more cruel, careless, or dangerous than the

zombies”. When we do not have these markers in place then the post apocalyptic society will not evolve to become inclusive and welcoming, as a good society should with tolerance and empathy for all of us. The othering of those with a disability, as perceived by the “normal” in society, is not inclusive and the zombie trope can be used to shed light on the inadequacies of our current society by highlighting what zombies stand for, what zombies represent and how zombies stand as a cautionary tale for what may happen to society without inclusivity. Zombies as a representation of disability is quite profound and important if you conceive of popular zombie apocalypse culture as a way to demean and degrade disability in a way that is politically correct and acceptable. Yet *The Walking Dead* offers hope of a more inclusive society in the post apocalyptic world, bringing a more positive vision for a reset of society, which includes the concept of intersectionality as indicated by interview participant M, the “recognition of intersectionality ... being female and disabled as a white woman gives me a very different experience than the experience of a female disabled black person”.

The power of a group cannot be underestimated in our struggles for equality. If all the marginalized groups got together they would be very powerful as seen in the portrayal of the zombie horde. Interview participant M observes “I actually do think of zombies as isolated right, I mean if you look at the typical Romero zombie they're totally devoid of intellect, but they also work best and are most frightening when they are in a group, and so they are actually almost like standing for the hive mind or the mob or what happens when you get so many people in one

place, that they stopped functioning as individual people and start functioning as a kind of mob mentality that can't be reasoned with". Many participants were stating that they would welcome a societal reset as the divide between those who have money and resources, and those who do not, is ever widening.

Why we fear zombies and why does it matter.

Zombies tend to arrive in post-apocalyptic scenarios. American seems particularly suited to these scenarios due to their lack of universal health care, huge disparities between the rich and the poor, the American dream where if you just try hard enough you can be anything (and if you don't succeed then maybe you did not try hard enough), the second amendment right to bear arms, and generally poorly educated people (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). . The Washington Post reported on the Ohio protest against the COVID-19 social distancing but, despite medical advice, many people "who aren't in favor of social distancing and are pushing to quickly reopen the economy see prey, not predators in the screams of the Ohio protesters. They see heroes" (Judkis,

2020)²⁰ There is a Fear of becoming "the one" whether it is a person infected with COVID, or a zombie, or a person with a disability. The vulnerability of being human is the reality people are afraid to face, and so they go into a state of denial and otherness, blaming all around them and their fear showing as cruelty to anyone less than following the expected "normal" of their society. We are in an interesting time with a COVID pandemic forcing inhumane moral and ethical decisions on the value of a life as shown in triage decisions being made on who to save and whose life is deemed less worth of saving²¹.

²⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/that-ohio-protest-photo-looked-like-a-zombie-movie-zombie-movie-directors-think-so-too/2020/04/17/b518fc48-801c-11ea-9040-68981f488eed_story.html

²¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/opinion-disabled-covid-19-triage-orders-1.5532137> and <https://dredf.org/covid-19-advocacy-and-resources/>

Zombies are potentially seen as selfish, not collaborative nor empathetic to those who have suffered the same fate of endless life after death. Zombies are potentially seen as uncontrollable; do not negotiate, do not need anything from us, no-one has control over them so in their ability to group together, by lack of any other compelling glue, they make people nervous. This causes bias as we want to group people together, label them, control them and zombies cannot be controlled – people with disabilities can be controlled by money and poverty, but not the zombies. Equating zombies with disability show us how little we understand the plight of daily living and struggles of those with disabilities, rather we see them as the nameless faceless horde, so we can dehumanize and make ourselves feel okay about the ever widening gap between/poor, able/disable, empathy and ignorance. Dehumanizing people with disabilities moves them into the zombie horde and that would mean we can no longer control them with threats of poverty and medications to normalize their behaviors. When socializing my thesis at Concordia University in Montreal I was made aware that not only do those affected by a physical disability, those with a mental disability, feel equally unseen.

Zombies do not crave food “They eat because they crave, not because they need” (Webb & Byrland, 2008, P87). Further drawing on this observation on what motivates us as human beings are desires, needs and a motivational drive. When interviewing the follow up participants, I was struck by the answer of a gentleman who has downs syndrome. When I asked if he was afraid of zombies he answered very clearly in the negative. “When I see a zombie with

its arms outstretched.... it would be rude not to reach out..... and shake its hand”. I found this profoundly moving as it had not ever occurred to me and realized how his worldview is one that I would not have had and it made me feel that disability, as seen through ableist eyes, is missing a large part of the human social puzzle of the need to connect.

Disconnect through lack of representation

When people are not represented in society, there is a feeling of disconnect. Children with missing limbs, for example, feel more connected when their physical disability is reflected in the culture or the society around them. Colour and disability representation reflected in toys and in film is an example of societal acceptance; yet old age is generally portrayed negatively even though its associated disability challenges will eventually affect everyone.

The original resurrection narratives were often portrayed in a more positive light (*Flatliners*, *Field of Dreams*, *The Crow* and *Robocop* as examples), but not the zombie narratives. Interview participant A suggests, “early precursor to zombies were those resurrection narratives and those were seen in a positive light right like resurrection was a positive.” But not the same is not seen with zombies and the after life, which is seen as a negative; in fact, as observed by participant D, even those who opt out of life by committing suicide are left in a perpetual state of being undead “guys hanging from a tree and it's like a zombie but they're like they strangling like perpetually”. “The Walking Dead it's like a walking representation of death and bodily injury ... reminding us of what the sort of the injuries and the compositions and just

vulnerability that our bodies are subject to something that a lot of times we ... try to keep out of our minds,” suggests interview participant A. To see zombies as a representation of the disability that comes to us all through either age, accident, social unawareness, poverty, prejudice, illness or at birth would indicate that the zombie is a representation of what most people want to avoid turning into, yet it is an end which is very hard to escape. What makes zombies so frightening is their human form with inhuman needs, interview participant M states: “They don't need to sleep, they don't need to stop you do, so it's like this terrifying perspective of no matter what you do, it will always catch up” and “you can't rationalize you can't provide them with a reason why they should not harm you.” Zombies are feared because they have human capabilities and can therefore get anywhere we can; further, they have ceased to care about harming their bodies, they can get into places that a living human would not even try to go; grates, vents, tunnels and small holes, and they have no need to fear death.

Inclusion

Reset of society

Property and ownership of things in our current western society make one feel safe. Groups are powerful and relationships are key to community acceptance. When the group feels safe, then they look to deeper commitments of childbirth, marriage and looking after the lesser-abled and elderly. Nomadic communities do not have ownership of land, and in these societies such ownership can even retard social growth; your possessions will hinder your survival. In

The Walking Dead in season 8 chapter 9 we see Rick Grimes's daughter Judith in Alexandria, but the community has shrunk in scope to an isolationist one, cutting itself off from the bigger, friendly communities of the Hilltop, the Kingdom and the Oceanside, seemingly to protect itself; its possessions and its people. Yet when communities are isolated they may also become vulnerable, as shown in this episode.

When the survey asked about welcoming an apocalyptic reset of society, I got the following responses: "Would you think a zombie apocalypse positive? Yes. I am glad Trump lost. But I'm not super confident in Biden and I'm worried Trump will run again" as a reflection on our current societal inequities and corrupt leaders. There is a fear for the future: "I tend to look at the fiction as a training manual of sorts. I glean ideas from the zombies author about apocalyptic scenarios by seeing how his or her characters handle the situation;" "I don't believe that zombies exist....although I must admit to assessing the last house we bought for its zombie-proof-ability. My friends and family often plan out what we would do in a zombie apocalypse...it makes a good catch-all for risk reduction and emergency planning. Where would we go, how would we get there, who has what skills, sustainability, resources etc. It's more disaster planning with some fun;" "Yes I would like to see a complete and total change to the way humans interact." Further, some respondents felt that the zombie apocalypse may bring about positive change: "Yes I believe we need a hard reboot. We, as humans, have unfortunately made apocalypse positive an alarmingly amount of wrong choices throughout history and I believe it's

time to start over.” Interview participant M states, “Any kind of apocalypse is going to help. The poor and the vulnerable [have] significantly harder [life challenges]... we need a reset, but we need a reset that [is] community driven [from the] bottom up, not burn it down because burn it down it's just going to burn the people who need the help the most.”

In *The Walking Dead* we see portrayals of strong women leading compassionate and inclusive communities; Carol goes from being an abused wife to a strong leader and warrior, Maggie from the farm to a community leader, Michonne a fair and fearsome fighter and Judith, sister of Carl Grimes who wants peace in the new generation of the post apocalyptic world. When we explore the word apocalypse, we find it comes from the Greek and means to uncover, disclose or reveal, but is not an ending. The zombies could be seen as revenants, returning to the days of the enlightenment, an apocalyptic rebirth of a more inclusive and equitable society, with a role for women and others traditionally marginalized.

Women as equals

The western ideas of the pioneering frontiers are well represented in *The Walking Dead*, with women eventually becoming equal to men in tasks, leadership and protection of the group; in fact, the toxic masculinity we found in male leadership becomes reduced as the series progresses. Men enjoy childcare and women are prominent, effective fighters. Before the apocalypse, men's participation in family life was hugely impacted by the societal norm of men going out to work to earn money, a role perpetuated by inequities in pay between men and

women — men earn significantly more money than women could for doing the same job.

Women, in turn, stayed at home looking after the house and any children, dependent upon the generally higher salaries of men for their survival. This typical patriarchal society we have today is not working well. In *The Walking Dead*, our current patriarchal society evolves into a more equitable one, where the success of the community depends upon everyone to contribute how they best can, leading to the destruction of neoliberalism and the dependence upon men as the dominant force for money. This change allows for the emergence of a new societal model based on matriarchal leadership in a post-apocalyptic reset. As commented on by interview participant DJ, “You know there's a lot of things that society has that, I think, without it, people with disability would be better, like the whole capitalist...thing.” The ideology of community over individualism and measuring success by collaboration and community rather than money, makes for a better, more inclusive society than what we currently have – a society reliant on individual success and out of control, destructive, rampant consumerism.

Judith, who is the daughter of Rick Grimes, takes part in the passing of the symbolic hero hat: the uniform that originally belonged to Rick was passed to his son Carl, and after Carl's death it was passed on to Judith, and so she, in turn, also became a leader. Judith's takeover is symbolic of the different world that is possible with diversity: empowerment for all, including those with disabilities. *The Walking Dead* introduces disabilities into its narrative with Connie who is deaf, introducing the first disabled character to the series; as is the actress who plays her.

The show also adds LGBTQ characters and strong women of colour, as in Michonne, and a male character who is partially blind in Father Gabriel, who was blinded by getting zombie entrails in his eyes . *The Walking Dead* is evolving to include disabilities as the groups get stronger and more cohesive and everyone has a role to play in the group's survival in *The Walking Dead*.

Socially acceptable freaks of today

As I am using film and television as a way to academically evaluate how the worldview of normal is reflected in the media using the allegory of the zombie, we can also see historically how this view has changed. At first, we trace how disability was seen in biblical times through to the socially acceptable freak shows with their non-conforming bodies. The freak shows were socially acceptable as people, including the performers themselves, could make money from them. Now on television we have reality shows showing the lives of such freaks, for example *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*; this reality show is about a family who cares deeply about their looks and money, and shows the non-normal behaviours these people indulge in, including plastic surgeries and surrogate motherhood, clinically referred to as gestation . Shows about little people include *The Little Couple*; about a couple who adopt two children, all of whom — parents and children— will remain under four feet tall; and *Little People, Big World*, another reality show about those who suffer from dwarfism or achondroplasia. There are many other examples where the people involved in these shows can make money off of their participation, but the shows' social function seems to be one of making others glad they are not like the people

onscreen. I gave two examples, one considered acceptable (The Kardashians) and the other considered more voyeurism and inspiration porn (*Little People, Big World*), yet still acceptable to the target television audience, as were the original freak shows.

The rise in zombie and apocalyptic narratives reflects a real-world rise of fear for the future. Climate change, terrorism, the rise of extreme right-wing politics, increased division between the rich and poor, an assault on unions, modern slavery methods such as the gig economy, unpaid internships and sweatshops, stakeholder capitalism and poor treatment of immigrants all point to a society that has reached a point when change is imperative, or we face extinction as a species. With the recent COVID pandemic, these realities and the need to create a sustainable and equitable future are being seen as imperative to human survival as a species on this planet. Our pace of life is now so fast and furious, we have no time for humanity as there is no profit to be found in it.

With our lives being so fast-paced and society lacking empathy for others in the personal struggle for survival, if, for example, you lose your job “you're not welcome in society” as your job defines your worth, and if you just smarten up, according to interview participant J things would be better. “If you just get a bit stronger, you can look after yourself ... we won't have to worry about you, it's your fault..... If you just smartened up things would be there ... for you” but it is not always that simple.

Fast pace of life

Interview participant M states that in the book and film *World War Z* we see fast zombies storm the walls in Israel, when people are trying to flee at the airport “once again, it was sheer force of numbers. Yeah, it was they, they're going to pile on top of each other, because there are just so many” so if all the zombies in the world got together, they would be an unstoppable, frightening force. If all the disabled, homeless, racially marginalized and otherwise Othered peoples got together, they too would become an unstoppable, frightening force for inclusion.

The current pace of life can be too fast to sustain for many people. Vivian Sobchack, University of California, Los Angeles, in her lecture *Stop + Motion: On Animation, Inertia and Innervation*²², suggests that the slow-moving zombie is a reflection on the current pace of life which is too fast to sustain. A survey participant noted “Excitement - usually my engagement with zombies in media is movies and these movies are always fast paced and go from 0 to the end of the world in a minute. I am not a good movie watcher when it is a slow movie - so zombie

²² <https://www.kracaueer-lectures.de/en/sommer-2015/vivian-sobchack/>

movies are good ones for me as there is constant action and usually not a lot of explanation or even story - just running away,” and the fear of zombies according to interview participant M is “the everlasting sort of nature of a zombie and the slowness and that it will keep coming and keep coming and keep coming and keep coming and never need to rest.” The thought of fast zombies is equally terrifying, their sheer force of numbers moving fast with the sole object of survival, as portrayed in the film *World War Z*

Mental health issues are on the rise and the pharmaceutical industry’s solution, according to the prevalent medical model of disability, is to medicate and try to navigate the problem, rather than understand, accept or learn from the alternative viewpoint that not all deviations from the norm need to be fixed. It is not out of the realm of possibility that the drugs that people are given, for example to help with depression or for pain treatment which caused the opioid crisis, could be a reflection of this faced-pace life and are another method of zombification of people with disabilities, including mental health challenges. As noted by a survey response regarding zombies “They are real ... It just takes the wrong combination of chemicals”.

Moral development

Moral development is necessary to create a positive and inclusive society which looks after the needs of those outliers that society has defined as disabled, creating caring and binding ties to each other (Hoffman, 2000); in more communal societies, such as a kibbutz, people are

more likely to care and feel responsible for others than in the contemporary western world that most zombie narratives inhabit. Parsons, a functional sociologist, argued that being sick means that the sick person is given a role of acceptable deviation from a normal 'well' state which he calls 'sanctioned deviance' as a sick individual is not a productive member of society. Under the prevalent medical model of disability, the medical profession is required to regulate and police this deviant behaviour as it disturbs the social order of society. As stated by interview participant A, "Bill Hughes is a sociologist who talked about how ableism is really rooted in three responses, effective responses to disability. Fear, pity and disgust; and fear and disgust seem to be, you know, really built into the zombie narrative". In order for society as we know it now to function, we have a hierarchy of needs that need to be met for us to flourish. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs also suggests that to survive in a society, after the basic needs of the survival trifecta of water, food and safe shelter, are belonging and love, self-esteem and then self actualization – traits generally missing in the human societies as portrayed in zombie apocalypse narratives. Survey participant MM stated, in response to how people see others and have a need to care, that "it's a mirror, but so my point of view is self recognition self love, love yourself; if you don't love yourself, you don't recognize yourself, you can't love others." This is shown in the collapse of communities in *The Walking Dead* as groups held together by cruelty do not thrive as well as the ones who collaborate and look after each other, for example The Negan's, a collaborative group who all identify as Negan: "We are all Negan" (season 6 episode 13) and this behaviour is referred to in Appendix C. After winning the war with the Negans and their

collaborators, Michonne, in season 9 episode 9 ,entitled *Adaptation*, stated “It was a new beginning, a chance to build a better future”.

Current societal reflections indicate that others, such as the government, should provide practical help those with a disability, but the process to try to get help is complex and hard to navigate without assistance and, according to interview participant M “ it's often propaganda ... the rhetoric of people who would love to download social responsibility on to the community and family rather than having the government be responsible for providing care and for looking after the best interests of everybody, and that kind of rhetoric makes it sound all nice and good, because all communities are looking after each other, but what it is, is an abdication of responsibility on the part of government.” Compounding these issues are that the government changes with each new election and the system is not designed for any long-term practical solutions, it is instead at the whim of the current political reality. We all need to care about each other to build strong communities; individualism does not work if we want to build a society that thrives in the long-term, as we’ve learned the hard way by seeing how the unvaccinated, unmasked in the COVID pandemic contribute to causing deviant strains to appear and spreading the infection without concern for others.

Empathy

“Empathy and the acquisition of empathy are considered essential components of adequate moral development” (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006, P589) but the post-apocalyptic world

seems devoid of much collaboration essential to survival, and this is the horror of the apocalypse. When the need for empathy is not met, then we become bullies, interested only in our own basic survival; Hoffman also states “that empathy is congruent with caring and most justice principles and it is therefore reasonable to hypothesize that empathy can bond with caring and most justice principles” (Hoffman, 2000, P224). Sympathy and empathy are different, with empathy “contrasted with sympathy: Empathy involves sharing the feelings of another as a means of coming to an appreciation of the other. In contrast, sympathy entails simply sharing the feelings of another” (Weiner & Auster, 2007). People can be sympathetic to the plight of others, but empathy is a deeper understanding of the problems, challenges and needs of others.

Empathy is the ability to understand and, through that understanding, share the feelings of others. We as a society do not have enough empathy for those with a disability. I have been using a visual aid (Figure 5 below) to help me see how films and television shows approach disability and used six main categories:

1. Consultation with PWD (People with Disabilities) s
2. PWDs’ interactions with other characters
3. Empathy
4. Realism
5. Language used
6. Is the disability explained realistically

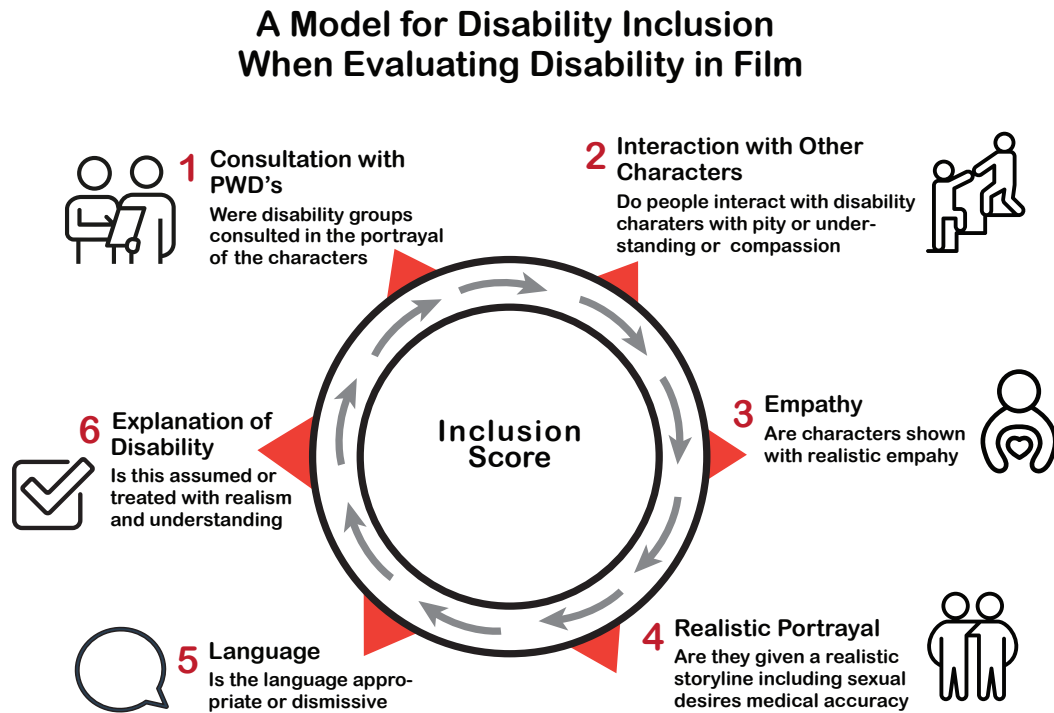


Figure 5 Evaluating Disability in Film illustration by Anne Jackson

Reasoning with people, trying to understand them, feeling empathy for others, are all traits of a successful community. We have rules and regulations in place to protect the Others in society, but what makes zombies so terrifying is that they cannot be reasoned with, as noted by both interview participant J (caregiver in Ireland) and interview participant M (Competitive marathon runner, Ottawa). Further, zombies never need to rest, they keep coming and coming and you are not able to reason with them as they behave with a mob like mentality.

When we don't understand others' views, we are ourselves missing out on the varieties of the human condition. We can remedy this through representation in toys, television, films, representation of our religion, physical attributes and other characteristics of the body like skin colour, disability, age and other defining physical attributes. We can also try to include alternative worldviews that are not part of the mainstream, like the response by Survey and interview participant F when asked if he was afraid of zombies, his answer was so profound; he would not want to offend a zombie by refusing to shake its outstretched hand of welcome.

Religion

Some religions around the world seems to have strayed from basic principals of compassion and tolerance. As suggested by interview participant M "philosophically more than anything, you know do unto others as you would have others do unto you. But yes, if people were actually true to the basic tenets of the religion, they claim to follow ... it should make them more compassionate to others". Unfortunately this is not the case as can be seen in a multitude of religious wars and incidents, like hatred of Muslims shown by defacing of mosques. A survey participant noted that zombies and people could be influenced like "people without their own soul, thoughts, intentions. As if they are zombies being controlled and driven by some greater, possibly evil being, that is trying to get them to do evil tasks for them" and this influence can be seen today with people being influenced by news articles, containing un-collaborated facts, or

untruths. People of all shapes, sizes and abilities need to be represented and seen as valid members of society, which includes representation in film and television.

Need to care

We have a need to care for others and this is one reason why we have children. We are genetically predisposed to have and nurture our children to keep the human race going, but it is deeper than this; there is a need to generate social capital, integrate socially in the community which is different from agrarian times, when children were seen as resources to help the survival of the community (Morgan & Berkowitz King 2001). But why is there such a high rate of abortion for genetically discoverable issues like Downs Syndrome? “If parents of children with disabilities are repeatedly discouraged from finding and acknowledging the positive aspects of caregiving, they may be denied the potentially positive consequences of doing so” (Green, 2007). “One of the keys to a long health span and a long life is social connectedness” (Levitin, 2020, P179). Such sentiments are shared by the Dalai Lama, here quoted on what makes him truly happy: “Ultimately, you get the most benefit from making other people happy” (Levitin, Daniel J. 2020, P177).

So a need for a community and caring is an integral part of the human condition; we need other people so we feel connected, loved and needed. This is reflected by my survey participants responses; “going back in terms of thinking of how human consciousness evolved ... it would be

impossible to have become who we are, if we did not have an inherent wiring to care for others.”

The very nature of how we raise and nurture our children is indicative of this caring. Because of how fragile human babies are and how long children are dependent upon us, we must be caring as a species, but, as indicated by this comment by a survey participant, we are also violent: “because I think we also evolved our connectedness [along with] our ability to communicate and collaborate in order to kill other things. But it also has ...come about as a result of caring for each other”, “When you felt secure I think a natural human response would be also to want to care for something else, whether a human or an animal pet style”. Another observation from the survey, “it's a human need to provide care for other people is that something people really need to be able to do to have a fulfilled life. It's like we talked about when you give somebody a gift or a package wrapped up for Christmas ... that's the perfect ... example ...who gets the most when you give someone a gift and they open that present and you see their joy having received the gift”.

We are embracing a culture of individualism and yet we feel alone (Levitin, 2020). We have fewer unions, civic associations and extended families, with neoliberal social policies turning the workforce into contractors and free agents with no safety net (Levitin, 2020). Social isolation can even change your genetic structure, giving an increased activation of HPA (hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal) feedback mechanisms, causing them to be hypervigilant about perceived social threats. This in turn causes people to believe that the world is out to harm them,

so chronically lonely people start to resemble those with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). This can even have an intergenerational effect – people can pass these stressors on to their children (Levitin, 2020). We need to have community to survive and reproduce, to grow into a successful society. The idea of community is “quintessential to that one and then *Tough Mudder*,²³ you often see teams of people there with somebody with a disability, supporting the person through the race and doing it together and that I saw less of a narrative about less inspire the able people, because the whole race was about you can't do it alone” as stated by interview participant M. We see this in *The Walking Dead* when in season 6, episode 11 Jesus states: ”I think our communities may be in a position to help each other,” and in an interview with participant J: “so there's something really good about us growing our own food and local democracy right, for instance, like things like that, like every neighbourhood being a world unto itself” and “You know self sufficient individual ... that's a passing thing, we know that that's not really what humans start out as or end up as, ... many of us don't go through much of life as that

²³ Tough Mudder is an endurance event series in which participants attempt an obstacle course. The obstacles often play on common human fears, such as fire, water, electricity and heights

sort of self sufficient individual ... so I think that ... it would be perhaps hardest on people with Disability yes to lose community". We need empathy to survive and build positive communities.

Walks with zombies

Disability will come to us all at some time in our lives, be it temporary or permanent, accident or just the aging process; it is dreaded by most, but inevitable. We can build walls to try and keep ourselves safe, but, like the zombie virus within all of us as depicted in *The Walking Dead*, we may get old and be disabled at some time in our lives regardless; it does not mean our lives are invalidated. The word "invalid" seems to indicate a lack of validity - it comes from the Latin *invalidus*; when used as a noun it means weak or feeble, when used as an adjective it is something that is false, unscientific or irrational. Interview participant A, who is blind from birth, remarked that "*The Walking Dead* it's like a walking representation of death and bodily injury and, and like, reminding us of what the ... sort of injuries and the compositions and just vulnerability that our bodies are subject to, something that a lot of times we try to keep out of our minds" yet disability can be seen as a positive addition to the community. The looking after others is something many people feel the need to do and it gives a deep sense of satisfaction to many (Hoffman, 2000). In fact, to take this further, the zombies are a constant reminder of what we may become — disabled or dead — and further, as indicated by interview participant M "it's very much about the fear of loss and the fear of loneliness and the fear of being out of control".

The positive observations of disability are often overlooked according to interview participant M: "Honestly, I think most people with disabilities are much more used to having to deal with inconvenience and not being able to navigate the environment with each not being able to get access to the services that most people take for granted" yet "Often the stories about a disabled person climbs mount Everest they're used as the narrative used as inspiration for able to people it's not about the person with the disability." This 'super crip' behaviour can lead to the perception that those with a disability, women and others, who are usually seen as the weaker portion of humanity, are in fact able to look after themselves if they just try harder. This in turn gives us as a society permission to relinquish the responsibility towards these people that we might otherwise feel, as if they fail to thrive it is because they have not tried hard enough, not because society has failed in its duty to be inclusive and empathetic.

I was once talking with a fellow student who is deaf and whose first language is ASL (American sign language), and she openly says she loves her disability and interestingly, she

would be less disadvantaged using a mask in this current pandemic as she signs²⁴. Yet these positive aspects of disability are rarely shown in film and television as they are not drivers of consumerism nor are they sexy and worthy of visualization on Instagram. In *The Walking Dead* season 10, episode 1 Connie, who is a deaf actress portraying a deaf character, states about her deafness “It’s not a disability. It’s a damn superpower” and we see the rest of the group start learning sign which helps when hunting either food or zombies as they can communicate silently.

Consumerism as the new religion

Zombies and humans both have a drive to consume; humans in capitalist societies desire money, possessions and material goods; and zombies desire flesh and to take human life. Human life is all about the normal in society, how to fit in, be pretty and wear the right clothes, and media like television and film tell us what the human ideal is. Disability is the opposite of

²⁴ Although masks could still be an impediment to some people to whom lip-reading and facial expression can be an important part of communication.

what is normal and pretty according to what is available to view in the media. Capitalism has no place for disability as it sees no value in entities it cannot profit from, and the disabled are not good consumers nor are they useful in marketing. “Once a capitalist bites you...you’ve caught the bug. And we capitalists do in fact infect others, despite our best intentions” (Webb & Byrnan, 2008, P92). Once a zombie bites you, you are no longer alive in the traditional sense, and this is a parallel that can be drawn if you are infected with capitalism. Consumerism could be viewed as a mindless, bottomless hunger to take, no matter what the consequences, and no matter how much we have or take we are left unsatisfied so we want more and more, just like a zombie consuming people mindlessly with no thought to others’ needs and wants. And just like a zombie horde could strip the earth clean, leaving it empty and bereft of all life, so consumerism and capitalism are destroying our planet, stripping it of clean water, air and land. So zombies represent both capitalism and disability as both zombies and capitalism consume with no thought of damage to self or others (as in damaging the environment, running out of a food source) and this consumption lead to poverty, devastation, isolation which is the lot of many people with disabilities. As remarked by a survey respondent regarding why zombies are so popular today, it is because “Money is to be made by it so it keeps going. It is one of various things that are far too common, but where there is cash and poor regulation it will grow endlessly”. Similarly, as we age our susceptibility to disability will grow but as Maggie said in season 8 episode 1 of *The Walking Dead* whilst giving a motivational speech to those in the communities going into battle with Negan, “That we have to keep our faith in each other. If we

can hold on to that with everything we have, the future is ours. The world is ours.” Their community is starting to replace the narratives of death and despair, how we survive together better than alone and the need for hope in a better future and in community not isolation and fear, which is what a lot of people with a disability face. In season 8 episode 1 Carl says to his father Rick “It’s not going to be enough Dad” and Rick replies “enough what?” “Hope”.

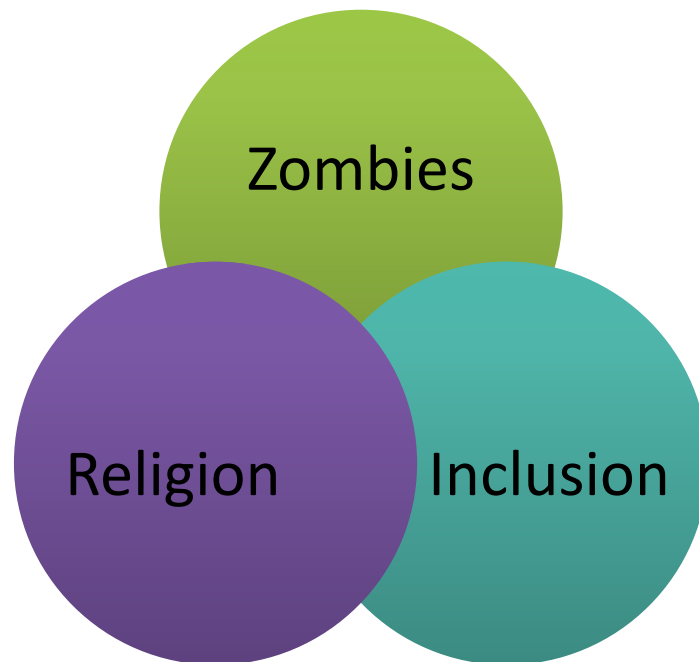
Summary of discussion

*Apocalypse: a prophetic revelation, especially concerning a cataclysm in which the forces of good permanently triumph over the forces of evil.*²⁵

This chapter discussed answers to the questions raised and explored in this research. It analysed both the written scripts and visual references in the quintessential modern zombie movie from the horror subgenre of zombies *The Living Dead*, and the current television show *The Walking Dead*. It also analysed the interaction between the characters and any references, both direct and indirect, towards the large overarching umbrella of disability, including both

²⁵ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/apocalypse>

physical and mental health issues and the intersectionality of studies done on theories based on the physical body. The objective of my research was to seek an answer to the questions that emerge at the confluence of the three research spaces of zombies, inclusion and religion.



If we assume that zombies are a representation of disability as shown in the many portrayals of disability in film and television, and inclusion is a worthy goal for humanity, I was surprised by how little religion is seen as a place of humanity, kindness, fairness and inclusion.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

“Once a capitalist bites you, in other words, you’ve had it – you’ve caught the bug. And we capitalists do in fact infect others, despite our best intentions” Webb and Brynand

Introduction

The most important issue that emerged from my research was the representation of zombies as an array of disability issues: the slow-walking gait as a typical portrayal of cerebral palsy, the single minded pursuit of a goal as in autism, their collective nature but not a supportive cohesive community, the response to noise as in the blind community who rely on sound for navigation and information, and the disfigured and deformed bodies.

The secondary issue was the need for community. This was seen in people who were survivors of the zombie apocalypse, yet real community always seemed to elude them with interpersonal conflicts and the need to dominate others in the community with their ideals. As we look at threats to democratic countries, we can see parallels between our own societies and those depicted in post-apocalyptic fiction.

The issue least talked about was religion, and although the need to dominate with personal ideals is identified in the paragraph above, the premise of religion as a positive and binding force did not emerge as an important factor from my research. Religion, which is generally defined as a set of beliefs, moral values and inclusive practices based on the teachings

of a spiritual leader, seems irrelevant for an inclusive community. Spiritual leadership is missing in the apocalyptic narratives of the zombie genre and I had expected it to be more dominant as a community-related force for good. This result may be a reflection on the modern state of religion, which seems out of alignment with modern needs of inclusion and compassion for all.

Zombies

Zombies - Contribution to society

To contribute to society we need to be seen as producing, which means having a job, consuming and generally conforming to social norms of our times. The representation of the disabled as a positive contributing force to society is not generally highlighted or valued. However, as seen again and again in *The Walking Dead*, societies built on excluding those with disabilities and promoting an “every man for himself” (or woman for herself) philosophy inevitably fail. We need bodily variety and an inclusive society that sees all people as contributors to society in their own unique way. We can and should learn from the outliers in society; they are an important safety net for a successful community. This inclusive model is missing from our current society and if we view the representation of the zombie trope as a destructive representation of disability, we could potentially view it as an ally to the disabled. If the apocalypse brings about the destruction of our society fuelled by zombies, if we see the zombies as disability allies, they are destroying society, as it is wrong, and will allow a rebuild to a proper, just and inclusive one.

The true mission of CDS (Critical Disability Studies) is to normalize disability. CDS “view[s] disability as both a lived reality in which the experiences of people with disabilities are central to interpreting their place in the world, and as a social and political definition based on societal power relations” (Reaume, 2014).

Inclusion - Zombies as catalysts for positive change

This thesis now shows that upon a deeper analysis of *The Walking Dead*, over time, zombies may well be the catalyst for positive change. Using the critical theory studies lens, this thesis makes the unique claim that disability, can be the driving force behind a rebuild of a more inclusive society, through the narrative prosthesis of horror and zombies; a cautionary tale to ensure that the post-apocalyptic society must be a more inclusive one, or we risk a scenario as seen in the post-apocalyptic world of the zombie. Acknowledging and then reducing the influence of capitalism will allow humanity to evolve and allow all people to grow and flourish. Seeing the apocalypse as an end of the world for destructive capitalist and neoliberal practices, we can build back a more just society, with zombies representing anti-capitalism. Being the antithesis of capitalism, they do not need anything we have apart from an indiscriminate food source for mindless consumption. “The colonial mission, the zombie is the worm that turned, capitalism produced and overproduced and is now eating capitalism.” (Webb & Byrmand, 2008, P92). The colonial administrator saw the people of the colonies as dehumanized and exploitable and so the locals also came to see themselves as such (Webb & Byrmand, 2008). With the media

reflective of society, the disabled see representation of themselves as useless eaters and are not voracious consumers of useless products that comprise mainstream society as described by Webb and Byrnan. Dehumanizing people with disabilities allows us to ignore them and, when seen in the context of zombie portrayal in popular zombie apocalypse culture, confirms the hostility that people already feel towards people with disabilities. It gives them permission.

Religion – A Need For Reinstating Values

The modern-day, carnivorous zombie isn't in the bible. But there are many references to bodies being reanimated or resurrected which may have inspired zombie myths throughout history. As the book of Isaiah states, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Moreover, passages abound in the both the Old and New Testaments about the resurrection of saints and sinners in the end times. This may be one reason

so many zombie stories are associated with an apocalypse²⁶. The book of *Ezekiel*, who is also a character in *The Walking Dead*, describes a vision where Ezekiel is dropped in a boneyard and makes prophecies to the bones. The bones start to shake and become covered with muscle and flesh until they're reanimated yet "there was no breath in them."

An Apocalyptic Reset to a More Inclusive Society

A number of questions drove my research and analysis:

Has ablest understanding of disability contributed to the rise in modern zombie culture as reflected in the post World War II popular horror subgenre of zombies and apocalyptic times as reflected in *The Walking Dead* and *The Living Dead*?

How does the constructed reality, reflected in digital media and depicted in these virus-based post-apocalyptic futures, mirror our innermost thoughts and fears about people with disabilities, reflective of our unconscious biases towards disability?

²⁶ <https://www.history.com/topics/folklore/history-of-zombies>

Does this also suggest that society wants and should be reset to become a more inclusive, equitable and compassionate one?

Would the zombie apocalypse, reflecting this worldview, mirror societal angst towards those people who are not mainstream to society, give permission to rewrite society as more inclusive?

Are zombies allies to disability in the fight to rebuild society back into a healthy, more inclusive, equitable and prosperous place for all?

How can the zombie apocalypse inform social inclusion?

Are zombies the saviours of the marginalized in society, reflecting society's reluctance to fully accept the marginalized?

With zombie-hood a survival of death, or a powerful resistance to the mortality of humans and characterized as an almost unstoppable force of nature or a nature out of control, it is therefore inherently dangerous and a threat to the healthy. Symbolically, while they maintain some abilities and perhaps maintain some gender characteristics, is it socially acceptable to murder them; not only this, when faced with this circumstance, is it a duty of all those healthy to rid the planet of these creatures (with occasional attempts to study, dissect, cure them)?

Metaphysicality is resisted by science. There is only the physical world and all forces that would otherwise poison, shoot, dismember and kill, yet this is nearly impossible to impose upon zombies. Their scientific-physiological phenomenon is at the same time also a metaphysical phenomenon. The “not of this world” aspects of being un-dead justify brutal and inhumane responses, because the afterworld represents the unknown, or as Shakespeare said, “the undiscovered country from where no traveller returns” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1). Unlike Shakespeare, other authors envisioned a return, a resurrection, like Christ. Only the eminently holy or the unholy may transition from the afterworlds in most fiction.

Ghosts differ in many respects from the undead, as they are often intangible, non-material and only in exceptional circumstances present themselves or manipulate the physical world, whereas zombies, mummies, vampires and some other undead exist in material form and function. Their presence is a form of resistance to the accepted norms of most of what we consider acceptable to the living world and rails against scientifically accepted norms. In this respect, they must always be referred to in terms of the supernatural and possessing holy powers (good or evil, but mostly evil and haunting or deadly toward the living). But the transition is important, because a metamorphosis must exist in life and death, perpetuating something special about human life. That being alive is special and whether attributed to scientific or religious values, it is celebrated, and the focus of something miraculous, especially when that body or mind conforms to a wholeness of life as in ableism. Whatever parts you miss: the eye, the ear a

limb, like that of the undead, there is a missing attribute of wholeness, and without fully acknowledging it, there is a historical and present sense of being an object of pity, of being wholly innocent and also a burden in many cultures. The refusal to die represents resistance, like presence represents resistance, that to be not put down or hidden or locked away demands understanding and acceptance. The acceptance may come from a societal reset as denoted in the definition of the word apocalypse. Although the respondents answered that they would not (83.33% said no) want an apocalypse, there is sufficient evidence in the mainstream media that a reset in society should be one that is more equitable as seen in worldwide political unrest and the climate crisis and the pandemic of COVID first reported in China December 2019.

Situating my Contributions on the Critical Disability Studies Research Map

My research is situated in the centre of zombies, inclusion and religion. Interesting research has emerged about the need to be forgiving around time commitments, referred to as Crip Time. Ellen Samuels states that Crip Time is about moving at the pace one can, and this ties in with my research on the traditionally slow-moving zombie, who could be described as moving at their own pace. “Crip time means listening to the broken language of our bodies, translating them, honouring their words”. She further states that zombies seem “in vogue these days, and I do often feel like a zombie”. The slow-moving zombie certainly is represented in the current research of Crip Time (Samuels, 2017).

As there was no previous research on zombies and disability, this thesis contributes further to disability studies, bringing in the new facet of zombies as an aid to the disability research field. The disabled and the zombies are each a group of those othered by society and deemed less worthy (Berne, 2020). Even further, in the television series *Fear the Walking Dead*, the suggestion is made that mother nature is taking back her world by creating the zombie virus, as we humans have destroyed the world with our greed-driven, human-made climate disaster.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

When we are not sure how to act, as human survival nature dictates, we categorize to be able to make sense of large pieces of information, to enable us to react quickly and appropriately to protect ourselves and our loved ones. When we see ourselves represented in toys, films and television we feel accepted within society. When we are unable to see ourselves represented, we will cease to participate in the dominant culture and will create our own.

Intersectionality was not addressed in any detail as the groups I was identifying were under a very diverse umbrella and were purposefully not further isolated as I considered all groups of equal importance and all identified in the zombie trope.

Future research would include targeting a group of people who do not identify with a disability, either in themselves or in their close circle of family and friends, to further evaluate how disability is seen and represented in society, whichever society this would be. It would also be interesting to do the same study on those who identify with a disability and do not have higher

educational achievements. My subject group tended to be educated, empathetic and white, so a wider group of participants, including preppers²⁷, would expand the target group and enhance the dataset, including those who identify as a minority. The results were inclusive and accepting regarding disability, which may be because the majority of my participants were educated to at least a college level. I would have preferred a more diverse selection of respondents with more people who identify with a disability. Calling on personal contacts first, and then moving to the more anonymous platforms of Facebook and other social media did not give me the diversity I had hoped for despite there being a large community of zombie and apocalyptic preppers that I had access to via their groups both private and public. The main weakness was in the small sample group that had similar educational achievements.

²⁷ Preppers are people who believe a catastrophic disaster or emergency is going to occur in the near future and they actively prepare for it, typically by stockpiling food, ammunition, and other supplies, and learning basic survival, camping and outdoors skills.

My research and findings are important when we understand the film and television representation of the zombie as a cautionary tale against the societal inclusion of those with a disability, we can change the narrative or use the zombie to create a more inclusive representation or to dispel myths around the useless eaters mentioned by the Nazi Party of Germany in World War II. In the television series *Fear The Walking Dead*, the zombies were used to power an oil drill and in *The Walking Dead* they were used as a weapon to kill the people who were alive, overwhelming them by sheer force of numbers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the modern post-WWII media offerings of zombie narratives initially reflect negative connotations regarding disability, portraying them as the nameless and faceless horde of formerly alive humans. Upon further analysis, a theme of hope emerged, with the zombie portrayal becoming a metaphor for a post-apocalyptic rebuild of society which is more inclusive and empathetic, a community that sees the worth of all bodies and in which all people have a part to play independent of their abilities in the collaborative and co-operative successful societies of the future.

The word apocalypse is defined not only as a cataclysmic event, revelation or prophecy, but specifically as an event where the forces of 'good' are victorious over the forces of 'bad'.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Survey Questionnaire

Demographic Section

Why I am asking this

1. What level of education have you obtained?	Why are the zombie narratives interesting to you? Intellectual comparison? Activism? Allegory? Entertainment?
a. High School	
b. College	
c. University	
d. Post graduate studies	
e. Other	
2. Are you currently employed ?	Bored? Feelings of frustration with work/lack of work/gig economy
a. Yes/No	
b. Casual contract work	

3. What is your age bracket?	What groups want to interact in zombie culture
a. 18-30	
b. 31-40	
c. 41-60	
d. 60+	
4. Marital status?	Lonely, living in parents' basement, not really interacting in reality, avoiding society
a. Married	
b. Divorced	
c. Long Term Relationship	
d. Other	

5. Gender?	With a presumption that men are more prone to violence so is this more relatable to typical male?
a. Male	
b. Female	
c. Other	
6. Sexual Orientation?	With a presumption that men are more prone to violence so is this more relatable to them, horror and violence
a. Male	
b. Female	
c. Fluid	
d. Other	

7. Please indicate your ethnicity (i.e. people's ethnicity describes their feeling of belonging and attachment to a distinct group of a larger population that shares their ancestry, colour, language or religion)	Because of the origins with voodoo, that originated in Haiti and slavery, are zombie narratives more relatable, or different to a specific ethnic group.
a. African	
b. Caucasian	
c. Caribbean	
d. Asian	
e. Latino/Hispanic	
f. Middle eastern	
g. Mixed	
h. Other	

Media Section

Why I am asking this

8. Do you watch films or television shows in any of the following categories [check boxes] (Yes, No, Seldom, Often, Other):	People need to have an interest in zombies for me to want to select them for interview
a. Horror	
b. Torture	
c. Violent imagery	
d. Zombie	
e. Romantic	
f. Documentaries	
g. Comedy	
h. End of times/apocalyptic	

9. What does the word zombie mean to you?	To ensure that there is a consistent set of markers for disability and a commonality of descriptors
a. An ancient voodoo myth?	
b. Something dead but still animated?	
c. Made up stories to frighten people?	
d. Other [freeform text box]	
10. Do you read Zombie comics?	What level of engagement is there with the zombie culture? Zombie enthusiasts would likely read these original source materials as many films/tv shows started as comics
a. Yes. If yes, Why?	
b. No	

11. Do you read books or graphic novels about horror/zombies/?	Are zombies seen as their own genre or is it consumed as a subset of general horror movies - zombie purist or horror fan.
a. Yes	
b. No	
12. What do you feel primarily when you first engaged with media about zombies?	Initial response will change as zombies are assimilated into the persons thought process - does this morph or change over time and exposure to the gore and horror, do we turn off the unpleasant thoughts?

13. Would you think a zombie apocalypse would be a positive occurrence given the current economic and turbulent times we live in?	Wanting to know if there are any preppers ²⁸ engaging with zombies and the apocalypse. Preppers, or survivalists, are interesting as they are often lawless so perfect for the apocalypse narratives
a. Yes. If yes, please expand why.	
b. No	

²⁸ <https://www.canadianpreparedness.com>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/we-should-all-be-preppers/611074/>

<p>14. Do you believe that Zombies exist in some form, or are they a total fabrication?</p>	<p>People believe many things, so does anyone believe zombies to be real or are they seeing zombies as an analogy for bad labour prospects, more like unpaid drudges, under employed etc. which may be why they are interested in zombie culture</p>
<p>15. Do you identify with a religion? If yes, please state which one and if you attend regularly (regularly being more than 12 times a year) [freeform text box]</p>	<p>Interested in if life after death religions like Roman Catholics etc. are afraid of zombies. Life after death is a common theme in religions with differing ideas of heaven/hell. Do they influence or scare exploration of zombies?</p>
<p>16. Would you consider the practice of voodoo? [freeform text box]</p>	<p>Do zombie films and TV make people want to join into the religion of voodoo</p>

Disability

Why I am asking this

17. What does the word disability mean to you? [freeform text box]	To ensure that there is a consistent set of markers for disability and a commonality of descriptors
18. Do you or anyone in your family or your circle of friends identify as having a mental or physical disability? [check boxes]	If someone is in contact with people with disabilities they may be less empathetic to zombies as a reflection of disability
a. Yes. If yes, please state briefly the nature of the disability [freeform text box]	
b. No	

<p>19. Do you think disabled people are discriminated against in any of these situations? [check boxes]</p>	<p>If someone is in contact with people with disabilities, they may be less empathetic to zombies as a reflection of disability.</p>
<p>a. Equal access to social events for entertainment for example food festivals/theatre/conventions/sporting events.</p>	
<p>b. Public transport</p>	
<p>c. Hospital and other medical services</p>	
<p>d. Any other</p>	
<p>20. When you encounter someone with a physical disability, which of these emotions do you feel? [check boxes]</p>	<p>If someone is in contact with people with disabilities. they may be less empathetic to zombies as a reflection of disability.</p>
<p>a. Pity</p>	

b. Anger	
c. Admiration	
d. Embarrassment	
e. Resentment	
f. Other [freeform text box]	
21. When you encounter someone with a mental disability or homeless or begging do you feel any of the following emotions? [check boxes]	The marginalized are shunned by society; so are those with less empathy to disabilities more likely to embrace zombie culture?
a. Pity	
b. Anger	
c. Empathy	
d. Embarrassment	
e. Resentment	

f. Other [freeform text box]	
22. How comfortable do you feel to interact with someone who is (Not comfortable, very uncomfortable, somewhat comfortable, very comfortable) [check boxes]	The marginalized are shunned by society; so are those with less empathy to disabilities more likely to embrace zombie culture?
a. Blind	
b. Deaf	
c. Non-verbal	
d. Mobility-impaired	
e. Physically disfigured	
f. Mentally different	
g. Old	

Appendix B Interview Protocol

Study Announcement



Faculty of Health, Critical Disability Studies
York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto (ON) M3J 1P3

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

Title of the research project:

Modern Zombie Culture and People with Disabilities

I invite English-speaking adults (age 18 and above) to participate in an electronic survey regarding modern zombie culture and people with disabilities as part of my PhD research. Your participation will contribute to a better understanding of how disability is represented in film and television and how our biases are reflected in our choices.

The survey has 22 questions and could take around 40 minutes to complete. Upon submission of the survey response, you will be entered in a raffle with a chance to win one of five gift certificates of \$25.00 each.

Following the survey, I will conduct interviews with 10 of the survey respondents. Please let me know if you would like to be considered for taking part in the interview. Each interview participant will receive a gift certificate of \$25.00.

Further information on my study to help you decide about participating in it is available at [(<https://ca.questionpro.com/t/AB3uoEiZB3urHC>)]. If you know some others who would be interested, please forward this letter and survey to them. I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest.

B. Anne Jackson

Ph.D. Candidate, Critical Disability Studies
York University
toomanyj@yorku.ca

This call for participation is valid till July 31, 2021.

Informed Consent



Faculty of Health, Critical Disability Studies
York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto (ON) M3J 1P3

INFORMED CONSENT FOR ONLINE SURVEY

Title of the research project:

Modern Zombie Culture and People with Disabilities

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study, which is a part of my doctoral research at York University in Toronto. Here is some information about the study to help you make an informed decision about participating in it.

The first part of the study is an electronic survey. If you are an English-speaking adult (age 18 and above), you can participate in the survey, which is about modern zombie culture and people with disabilities. The survey has 22 questions and could take around 40 minutes to complete. Your responses will contribute to a better understanding of how

disability is represented in film and television and how our biases are reflected in our choices. Upon submission of the survey response, you will be entered in a raffle with a chance to win one of five gift certificates of \$25.00 each.

In the second part of the study, I will be digging deeper into some of the themes emerging from the survey results. This would be done through interviews with 10 of the survey respondents. Please let me know if you would like to be considered for taking part in the interview. Each interview participant will receive a gift certificate of \$25.00.

The survey can be accessed online at this link [provide link to online survey.] It will be available till May 31, 2021. My goal is to collect responses from at least 100 people of varying degrees of abilities who engage with zombie media and are willing to share their perspectives.

If you decide to participate in the survey, please fill out the consent form available at the above link and then complete the survey questions. Upon submitting the survey, you will be entered into the raffle to win one of five gift certificates of \$25.00 each.

At the end of the survey, all participants will receive an email thanking them for their participation. If you happen to be one of the winners, you will be informed in that email and details will be sought to enable dispatch of the prize amount.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the survey questions, you may refrain from answering it without negative consequences. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences and will still be entered in the raffle with a chance to win one of five gift certificates of \$25.00 each. Participation in this study does not involve any foreseeable risk.

Your name or contact details will not be used in the study. Your responses will be confidential and your identity will not be known to anyone except me, this will include any recordings done via zoom or other video interview tool. I will assign a number to the response you submit, and only I will know which number was assigned to you. Your data will be stored securely on a password-protected USB drive and only I will have access to the drive. All data from this study will be destroyed on September 1, 2023. The data will be used only for scientific purposes.

The results would likely be published in academic publications and presented at conferences, but your identity will not be disclosed in any of them. At the end of the study, I will write an article about the study, which I will make available to all participants. You can also to contact me if you wish to discuss the general outcomes of the study.

- Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.
- You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.
- The researcher(s) acknowledge that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrix, Survey Monkey, etc.) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

Please contact me at any time if you need further clarifications about the study. My contact details are provided at the end of this information letter. If you have questions about the research, please contact my faculty supervisor Dr. Geoffrey Reaume at greame@yorku.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the York University Ethics Department by email at ore@yorku.ca or phone 416-736-5914 or 476-736-5201.

I also invite you to indicate your willingness, at the end of this document, to be considered for a follow-up more in depth interview session.

Please retain a copy of this information and consent form for your own reference. I look forward to receiving the completed questionnaire and consent form from you at the earliest.

B. Anne Jackson
Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Health, Critical Disability Studies
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario
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toomanyj@yorku.ca

CONSENT FORM

1. I confirm that I am an adult volunteering to participate in this study.
2. I have read and understood the information about this study.
3. I am aware how to contact the investigator and/or supervisor to ask any question any time.
4. I understand that the information I provide will be treated confidentially and my identity will not be revealed in the reporting of the study results.
5. I am aware that I have a chance to win a gift certificate prize in the associated raffle and I will be informed if I win.
6. I am typing my name below to indicate my consent to participate in the study.
7. I am giving my contact email ID below for receiving further communications relating to the study, such as raffle results.

End of Consent Form

Interview Informed Consent and Guide



Faculty of Health, Critical Disability Studies
York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto (ON) M3J 1P3

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Your name or contact details will not be used in the study. Your responses will be confidential and your identity will not be known to anyone except me, this will include any recordings done via zoom or other video interview tool. I will assign a number to the response you submit, and only I will know which number was assigned to you. Your data will be stored securely on a password-protected USB drive and only I will have access to the drive. All data from this study will be destroyed on September 1, 2023. The data will be used only for scientific purposes.

The results would likely be published in academic publications and presented at conferences, but your identity will not be disclosed in any of them. At the end of the study, I will write an article about the study, which I will make available to all participants. You can also to contact me if you wish to discuss the general outcomes of the study.

- Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.
- You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular

questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

- The researcher(s) acknowledge that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrix, Survey Monkey, etc.) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

Please contact me at any time if you need further clarifications about the study. My contact details are provided at the end of this information letter. If you have questions about the research, please contact my faculty supervisor Dr. Geoffrey Reaume at greaume@yorku.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the York University Ethics Department by email at ore@yorku.ca or phone 416-736-5914 or 476-736-5201.

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End of Consent Form

Appendix C Story lines

Plots of The Walking Dead and the Night of the Living Dead

The Walking Dead

Rick Grimes is the main character, a policeman who was shot in the line of duty and awoke to the apocalyptic world of zombies. The story follows his search for his wife and son who have escaped the zombies and are now with a group of survivors. Rick's wife Lori has an affair with Rick's former police partner Shane, who may be the father of Lori's second child (both Shane and Lori believed Rick to be dead). Rick eventually finds this group of survivors and becomes their leader. Rick leads his changing group through many different communities, some of which are very dysfunctional and others that are not. They learn that they can themselves turn into a zombie if bitten, but worse, everyone carries the contagion so when they die, they re-animate into zombies unless they are killed by destroying the brain – there is no cure.

The story evolves into a survival story where the zombies are less frightening than the living. The group's members change as they move from settlement to settlement. First they are sheltered reluctantly by Hershel Green, a veterinary surgeon and farmer. When the zombies overrun the farm the group, interestingly, moves to safety in a prison, where they live in peace for a few years, growing food and co-existing with the remaining inmates and others that join the group. When The Governor finds the group from his safe holding of Woodbury, he kills Hershel

and the prison is overrun with zombies. The group scatters and tries to regroup in Terminus, which ends up being a group of cannibals. They destroy Terminus with the help of Carol.

A scouting party headed by Aaron finds the group next and they move to Alexandria, a gated community run on environmentally-friendly power led by a woman named Deanna. Rick is entrusted to lead the community when it becomes obvious that they are unable to deal with the zombies and they are further attacked by a group of nomads called the Wolves, who attack them with a group of zombies.

After the attack is repelled, the group learns of a community called the Hilltop. Jesus invites them to trade supplies and knowledge with Hilltop if they can help with the threat of the extortionist Savivors, who steal their food, weapons and anything else useful, led by a man named Negan. Negan makes all his followers call themselves Negan and he carries a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire and named after his deceased wife who died of cancer. Rick and his group are eventually caught by Negan and forced to submit to him after he bludgeons two of the group to death and then tries to get Rick to cut off his own son's arm.

Rick, whilst under the cruel rule of the Negans, joins forces with The Kingdom, Scavengers and Hilltop, but the Scavengers double-cross Rick and are in fact allied with the Negans. Rick's son is bitten by a zombie and before he dies, he persuades his father to end the war and restart society as a more equitable and inclusive one. When Negan eventually falls, he is imprisoned, not brutally killed, as a symbol of the new beginning.

Rick is seemingly killed whilst trying to build bridges between the friendly communities and it leaves an opening for The Whisperers who demand no one trespass on their territory. Rick is seen in a helicopter, badly injured, with Anne/Jadis, the leader of the Scavengers who are now all dead. Negan infiltrates The Whisperers and kills their leader. Negan has changed and is now a valued member of the communities. Michonne and Dwight still search for Rick as they are unable to find a body and don't want to believe he is permanently gone.

The Characters:

Rick Grimes

The main protagonist until season 9. Rick is a former sheriff's deputy who wakes up from a coma in an abandoned hospital post-apocalypse, and generally leads the group.

Lori Grimes

Rick's wife and Carl and Judith's mother. She dies in childbirth in season three after an affair with Rick's former partner Shane, who could be the father of Judith.

Judith Grimes

Rick and Lori's daughter, whose birth causes Lori's death. Judith grows up to become a synthesis of the old and new, and to take over the hero image for the narrative after Rick's departure.

Carl Grimes

The son of Rick and Lori Grimes, sister of Judith.

Michonne

A fierce warrior whose weapon of choice is a katana. Michonne eventually becomes Rick's romantic partner and a mother-figure to his children.

Daryl

Daryl becomes a key member of the group and is an excellent hunter who rides a motorcycle and has a deep and close friendship with Carol.

Carol

Carol overcomes domestic abuse and threats to her daughter of incest, to become a skilled, resourceful fighter and leader. She marries the leader of the kingdom Ezekiel.

Hershel

A farmer and veterinary surgeon who is an older stable character and father of Maggie.

Maggie

The daughter of Hershel and the mother of Hershel (named after her father), and the strong leader of Hilltop community

Morgan

After the war with the saviours he leaves the group and goes alone. He is a reflection of the new society as he no longer wants to kill and is a master at Aikido

Jesus

Jesus served as the ambassador for The Hilltop and frequently searches for new recruits on horseback. He is a pacifist but is killed by one of The Whisperers.

Glen

Pizza delivery guy, who is an ally of Rick, husband to Maggie and father to baby Hershel. He was bludgeoned to death by Negan in front of his community and pregnant wife. He is kind, quick-witted and resourceful.

The Governor

The leader of Woodbury, a patriarchal figure with toxic masculinity. Although initially appearing to be a kind, brave, caring man, he was, in fact, a manipulative, brutal killer, who is

mentally unstable and believed his zombified daughter was in fact still living in some recognizable form.

Negan

The aggressive and dictatorial leader of the Saviours. After their defeat by Rick and his group, Negan is jailed in Alexandria and is seen as a reformed person by both Carl and Judith.

Lucille

Negan's barbed-wire-wrapped baseball bat, named after his deceased wife.

The Saviours

Led by Negan, the Saviours terrorise other communities into procuring supplies for them.

Walkers

The zombies.

Scavengers

The garbage recyclers lead by Jadis, also known as Anne. They live surrounded by garbage and are both allies and enemies of Rick and his group, siding with Negan when he offered them a better deal. When Rick is thrown from his horse and impaled on rebar, Jadis finds him and is seen leaving with him in a helicopter.

The Whisperers

Another antagonistic group led by a woman, whose members disguise themselves in zombie skins and walk among the dead, and kill members of Rick's group to infiltrate by wearing their skins as disguise. Initially they are seen as zombies that have evolved to communicate.

The settlements:

Alexandria

A gated, solar powered community near Washington D.C., populated by a community who have no idea how the outside world is existing as they have never left their walled community.

The Farm

A traditional farming homestead owned by Hershel Green, a veterinary surgeon and his family.

HillTop

A community based at a former historical mansion that has a successful agricultural system in place. It is initially run by a dictatorial man who believes in toxic masculinity. He is killed by Maggie Green, who takes over the community running it successfully as a co-operative.

The Kingdom

A community ruled by a king with a tiger. Renaissance in its style, they have hand tool carpenters, blacksmiths and other older skills.

The Prison

A former high-security prison in Georgia with supplies and room to grow crops. The community lived alongside former inmates but was destroyed by The Governor.

Woodbury

A settlement run by The Governor. Woodbury is like a traditional American small town, which is protected by barricades. There are disturbing entertainment spectacles, pitting people against zombies for sport in the same way that Christians were pitted against lions in ancient Roman times.

Terminus

A train depot advertised along many miles of tracks as being a safe haven for survivors. After the prison is abandoned due to fighting by The Governor, many survivors make their way along the railway tracks to this supposedly welcoming community which turns out to be controlled by violent cannibals.

Night of the Living Dead

When visiting their father's grave in Pennsylvania, Barbra and Johnny notice a lurching figure coming towards them. Barbra manages to run away and takes refuge in what appears to be an abandoned farmhouse. Ben, the only person of colour in the film, stops by the farmhouse in search of gas and soon both Barbra and Ben are besieged by zombies. Ben does his best to secure the house and Barbra is suffering from the stress of the zombie horde so is not very helpful; in fact she becomes almost catatonic. They listen to the radio reports of all the people who are being zombified. Barbra and Ben are shocked to find five more people hiding in the basement, all now panicked and unsure how to survive. Harry, Helen and Karen are a family and Karen is not well. Harry tries to take control of the situation but makes it worse and he and his wife end up being eaten by their daughter, who has turned. Tom and Judy, a young couple, are also in the house. With Ben and Harry arguing over how best to lead, the situation deteriorates and their chances of survival diminish rapidly as the reanimated bodies surround the house. The zombies find a way inside and turn the survivors one by one with the exception of Ben. Ben survives but is shot by the Sheriff as Ben tries desperately to let him know he is not infected.

Appendix D Curriculum Vitae

Name:	(Barbara) B. Anne Jackson
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	OCAD University Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2013-2015 Master of Design, Inclusive Design Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2013-2015 M. Design, Inclusive Design York University Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2018-2022 Ph.D Critical Disability Studies.
Related Work Experience	Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant York University 2018-2022