

# Un-Queering Horror: *Hellbent* and the Policing of the “Gay Slasher”

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*Paul Etheredge-Ouzts’s 2004 film Hellbent identifies itself as the first “all gay slasher film” and has, subsequently, been identified as a queer film. While many scholars consider the horror genre to have decidedly queer potential, this essay argues that, despite being a “gay film,” Hellbent refuses the oppositional and political implications of queerness. Reading both the film text itself and a number of promotional “extra-texts,” this essay identifies a strategy of rhetorical ambivalence that simultaneously asserts and disavows queer practices and pleasures.*

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Identifying itself as the “first ever all gay slasher film,” Paul Etheredge-Ouzts’s *Hellbent* (2004) claimed to offer a corrective to the absence of gay characters in horror.<sup>1</sup> Grossing \$183,066 and playing at thirty-nine small or independent theaters, *Hellbent* traveled largely on the GLBT festival circuit, screening at approximately thirty festivals between June 2004 and April 2006, including the Los Angeles Outfest, the Austin Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival, the Honolulu “Rainbow” Film Festival, and the Seattle Lesbran and Gay Film Festival.<sup>2</sup> Soon after *Hellbent* dubbed itself a “gay slasher,” it was designated a “queer” film, demonstrating the tendency in public discourse to conflate the categories of gay and queer. For instance, Etheredge-Ouzts describes *Hellbent* as offering a “queer twist” to horror (Juergens), and the popular online clearinghouse, Wikipedia, cites the film as an example of “queer horror.” Fans interested in buying the *Hellbent* DVD can find it under the “Queer Horror” section in the cult-oriented catalog TLA Video, and even the most

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cursory search on the Internet reveals a host of reviews and fan blogs identifying the film as a “queer corollary” (Koresky) to the horror genre, with postings on Queerhorror.com giving *Hellbent* the highest marks for its “queer horror rating.”

However, despite assignation of the label “queer,” *Hellbent* and its promotional material demonstrate shared ambivalence toward queerness, undercutting the film’s subversive potential. Not unlike *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Hellbent* (a title chosen by a contest that also produced *Queer Eye for the Dead Guy* as a possibility) is branded “queer” while being largely denuded of queer sensibilities and/or politics.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, this essay reads *Hellbent*’s promotional texts—what Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus might call “extra-texts”—and the film’s diegesis as simultaneously asserting and disavowing queer pleasures and practices. Marked by overlapping rhetorics of mimesis and obeisance, *Hellbent* and its extra-texts (including a DVD bonus feature and online interviews) discipline queer reading strategies and advocate a version of homosexuality that complies with heteronormative expectations.

For scholars of communication, this reading of *Hellbent* is significant for several reasons. First, the case of *Hellbent* foregrounds the rhetoricity of promotional texts, which don’t simply advertise films but may also advocate particular audience responses to and uses of them. Rather than just publicizing, *Hellbent*’s extra-texts define parameters of sexual publicity by disciplining queer counterpublics and privatizing homosexuality. Second, in its simultaneous declarations and renunciations of queerness, *Hellbent* impacts how “queer” circulates in public discourse. Given recent investments in queer theory within communication studies, the rhetorical work done with *and to* “queer” deserves examination. Third, although identified as a text made for gay audiences, *Hellbent* contributes to the hegemony of heteronormativity. As such, this essay argues that, in the name of queer, *Hellbent* “un-queers” horror, consequently undermining efforts (both popular and academic) to combat the “symbolic, psychological, and discursive violence that result from heteronormativity” (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia 6).

## Queer Horror

David Halperin describes queer as an oppositional “positionality” that is “at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (62). Cherry Smith posits queer as “a strategy, an attitude” aimed at “a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family” (280). Given these figurations of queer as outside of and in opposition to normative structures, it should perhaps come as no surprise that horror—an often disturbing genre—might be considered a queer genre, or one that facilitates, as Judith Halberstam writes, “feminine, feminist, and queer forms of pleasure” (138).<sup>4</sup>

To wit, Alexander Doty proffers that the “central conventions of horror” may “encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry.” For Doty, horror’s frequent depiction of heterosexual sex as precipitating a character’s demise can be

understood as the genre's contestation of heteronormativity, locating the genre within "the space of the contra-heterosexual and the contra-straight" (15). And, if Hollywood's dominant fictions typically offer happy endings for heterosexual couples, horror's characteristic refusal of such tidy closure (or, in some cases, *any* closure) might be read as critiquing heterosexuality as a master narrative.

Similarly, Harry Benshoff argues that horror spectatorship embodies the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, in which "the conventions of normality are ritualistically overturned . . . in order to celebrate the lure of the deviant" (98). Despite the relative absence of gay characters, Benshoff argues that horror films engender queer reading strategies via their recurrent depiction of queer characters and their tendency to encourage identification with a monster that is queer in relation to such categories as masculine/feminine, animal/human, living/dead. To wit, Richard Dyer, Ken Gelder, and Sue-Ellen Case trace a queer genealogy through the cinematic vampire, and Patricia White reads *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963) as visualizing the marginalization of lesbian identity and offering opportunities for lesbian identifications (215). Hence, such scholarship understands horror's monsters not as loathed or rejected but as key figures of desire and identification that encourage spectators to read queerly.

What's more, Carol Clover notes queer potentialities specific to the slasher subgenre, with which *Hellbent* identifies. Slashers, which include such films as *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974), *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), feature a psycho-killer stalking sexually active young people. Central to the subgenre is the "Final Girl," the primary survivor who is coded as biologically female but non-traditional in her femininity. Clover proffers, "Just as the killer is not fully masculine, [the Final Girl] is not fully feminine—not, in any case, feminine in the way of her friends" (40). Instead of boys and make-up, the Final Girl enjoys books and work, and instead of being a helpless victim, she relies on her wit and physicality to outlive the attacks of the psycho-killer.

Clover, thus, reads the Final Girl as blurring and revealing the instability of traditional gender boundaries (40), a claim echoed by Halberstam's description of the "queer tendency" of the horror genre "to reconfigure gender not simply through inversion but by literally creating new categories" (139). To demonstrate, Halberstam understands Stretch, the Final Girl from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Part 2* (Tobe Hooper, 1986), as performing "an intense blast of interference that messes up once and for all the generic identity codes that read femininity into tits and ass and masculinity into penises," thus producing "a queer body of violence and power" (160).

Additionally, Clover contends that the Final Girl offers the possibility of cross-identification in which male spectators, typically thought to be the slasher's target audience, may find themselves identifying with a biologically female character (8). She explains that the Final Girl represents "the possibility that male viewers are quite prepared to identify not just with screen females, but with . . . screen females in fear and pain" (5). As such, Clover implies the possibility of queer pleasures in horror spectatorship, reading the Final Girl as "a male surrogate" and "a homoerotic stand-in" for male audience members (53).

Rhona Berenstein similarly suggests that horror's queerness lies not simply in its specific characters but in the identificatory structures the genre engenders. In particular, she understands the possibility of multiple, shifting identifications across a horror text as queer. Berenstein writes, "Horror cinema invites spectators to play out, temporarily and differentially, roles and responses that sometimes contrast with those they adopt or are asked to adopt on a day-to-day basis," offering a "simultaneity of multiple identifications and desires" as well as "interplay between difference and similarity" (58).

Identificatory positions are not necessarily fixed, stable, or determined at the outset, or even conclusion, of a horror film; instead, what often characterize horror spectatorship are fluid and adaptive identifications—encouraging spectators to cheer, at one moment, for the victim and, at another, for the killer. Ultimately, Berenstein argues that horror takes on "the masks that Western culture treats as core identities—such as male and female, homosexual and heterosexual," resulting in queer celebrations of "mobile spectatorial positions, the dissolution of conventional gender traits, the fragility of the heterosexual couple, and the precariousness of patriarchal institutions and values" (59).

However, this is not to say that the horror genre is inherently or necessarily queer, or that all horror films deploy queer sensibilities. To assert an absolute and immutable link between "horror" and "queer" would be to undermine the contingency and mutability that define queerness. After all, vital to queer as a theoretical concept and subject position is a refusal of fixed identity or definitional stability. This is also not to say that horror necessarily produces queer readings; certainly, not all spectators use horror films to reclaim queer pleasures, and no text can ever fully control audience reactions. Rather, what Berenstein and the other scholarship cited here do suggest is that many horror texts feature queer characters, give voice to non-normative pleasures, and therefore, encourage queer spectatorship.

Equally, it cannot be taken for granted that a "gay film" is inherently queer, given Halperin's assertion that queerness does not (and need not) necessarily align with GLBT identity (62). However, in the case of *Hellbent*, such an assumption has been made by the myriad sources that identify and/or market the film's gay content as innate evidence of its queerness. In contrast, the argument forwarded here is that *Hellbent* and its extra-texts actively discourage the queer pleasures and reading practices enabled by many horror films, offering spectators promises of queerness that are betrayed by directives to "play it straight." Demonstrating a rhetorical strategy of ambivalence, both the text and extra-texts claim to queer horror at the same time they discipline queer disruptions. Consequently, this (mis)labeling of *Hellbent* risks severing queer from the realm of politics—commodifying, taming, and, above all, "un-queering" queer.

### **The Boys in the DVD Box**

Inter-cutting real and fictional footage from West Hollywood's Halloween carnival, *Hellbent* follows its main characters—Joey, Tobey, Chaz, and Eddie—as they are

stalked and attacked by a masked killer, the Devil Daddy. At first, this film seems to offer multiple queer disruptions. For instance, the combination of real and fictional footage is an unconventional technique within the genre; although such horror films as *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972) and *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999) are infamous for their documentary-like style, *Hellbent* comes much closer to disrupting stylistic norms and occupying a position of generic queerness.

Additionally, the setting of the film during carnival seems to offer a queer context. Given Benschhoff's understanding of the carnivalesque as central to horror's queer potential, this setting may give the initial impression that *Hellbent* subverts the heteronormative conventions governing most mainstream films. As Chaz says, "Halloween is the one night of the year when you get to indulge your most perverse and twisted fantasies and nobody cares." However, both the film text and its promotional packaging discourage carnivalesque indulgences and perversions, thus inhibiting queer subversions. Specifically, in *Hellbent* and its extra-texts the signifier of "queer" is emptied out, disarticulated from its positionality of opposition, and deployed to persuade GLBT subjects and bodies to "straighten up."

Before turning to *Hellbent* itself, I begin by examining extra-textual materials, including a DVD bonus feature called, "Backlot Featurette," and online interviews with Etheredge-Ouzts. Just as Brookey and Westerfelhaus argue that DVD extras are significant rhetorical texts that may contain queer implications suggested within a film text, online and DVD promotional materials for *Hellbent* attempt (whether consciously or not) to regulate the film's queerness and police performances of gay identity. Thus, these extra-texts reiterate Brookey and Westerfelhaus's claim that "digital technology can be used to delegitimize resistant and politically activated readings" (40), enacting a strategy of rhetorical ambiguation in which queer is exploited toward hegemonic ends.

The online interviews discussed here were published on such Web sites as AfterElton.com and Q-Notes.com and were chosen for analysis for a number of reasons. First, these entertainment-news Web sites are aimed at GLBT audiences, explicitly attend to media representations of homosexuality, and often address the topic of queerness.<sup>5</sup> Easy to find and widely available to those with Internet access, these sites were also chosen because of the immediacy and accessibility they share with DVD bonus features, especially given the important role the Internet plays in the circulation of gay-oriented information.

As global marketing research has shown, the Internet is an "especially important" communication tool for LGBT consumers ("American Living"), who report more than twice the usage of news, entertainment, and/or pop culture sites than heterosexuals ("Gay and Lesbian Adults"). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that such sites as AfterElton.com and Q-Notes.com reach audiences actively seeking out information about *Hellbent* and may also introduce unfamiliar audiences to the film. I also address *Hellbent's* Web site because the official movie Web site is a common marketing tool that, not unlike DVD extras, has become a familiar source of information for curious fans.

In addition, these Web sites share the “interactivity” that Brookey and Westerfelhaus cite in DVD bonus materials, making them a popular resource for spectators interested in “greater control over the viewing experience” (22).<sup>6</sup> Like the DVD extras, these Web sites promise viewers a “behind the scenes” look at the film, offering fantasies of insider privilege. And, given *Hellbent*’s limited release, such Web sites likely provided many would-be viewers their only access to the film after its initial release in 2004 until its DVD release in 2006. Thus, I posit these online discussions of *Hellbent* as significant objects for rhetorical critique.

Although these interactive extra-texts may engender a pronounced sense of reader agency for the “invested viewer” (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 40), their rhetoric, like that of the film itself, works to discipline and constrain spectator pleasure. And, even for readers that never see *Hellbent*, these online extra-texts make arguments about what spectators should want and expect from onscreen representations of GLBT identity. Hence, these promotional materials demonstrate rhetorical implications in their own right and operate alongside *Hellbent* to create an intertextual matrix that not only shapes readings of the film but also regulates queerness according to heteronormative directives.

To be clear, I am not claiming that extra-texts *wholly* control how audiences react to *Hellbent* or *necessarily* produce any specific responses. I intend neither to make claims about the effects of extra-texts on actual audience members nor to deny the possibility of varying and/or oppositional readings of them (or *Hellbent* itself). Rather, I am concerned with the degree to which these extra-texts participate in a discourse formation that encourages the erasure of queer practices—an erasure that is especially troubling when animated under the pretense of queerness and within texts claiming to speak directly to GLBT audiences. Circulated in GLBT-oriented spaces, these extra-texts may carry strong rhetorical force, especially given findings that GLBT consumers are significantly more receptive to texts marketed directly to them (Johnston). Accordingly, I examine how these extra-texts (both online and on the DVD) go beyond promoting *Hellbent* as a product to advocating certain reading strategies and subject positions (and discouraging others) in ways that reproduce heteronormativity and disavow queer politics.

At the heart of *Hellbent*’s GLBT-oriented promotional discourse exists a tension: although hell bent on identifying the film as “gay,” it does so while policing “how gay” it can be and regulating the pleasures the film can offer. For instance, press for *Hellbent* tempers its politics by rejecting camp as an interpretive frame. On the official *Hellbent* Web site, [www.hellbent-movie.com/index.php](http://www.hellbent-movie.com/index.php), director Etheredge-Ouzts overtly rejects the camp aesthetic. Answering the question, “What is gay horror?,” Etheredge-Ouzts explains, “I predict most audiences will expect a camp version of a slasher—characters growling arch double entendres as they off each other. This image doesn’t describe the film at all.” Instead, he insists, the film relies on “the traditional elements of horror,” which Etheredge-Ouzts defines as “universally potent.” This particular refusal of camp is significant for a number of reasons.

First, camp (defined as a reception strategy that playfully reinterprets an otherwise serious text and/or a deliberate strategy used by a text) has been associated with gay

and lesbian reception practices and understood as queer. According to Benshoff and Griffin, camp is neither “frivolous” nor “apolitical” but is “always a critique of heterosexual privilege and presumption” (120). Positing camp as a form of “queer critique or parody,” they argue that, even when rendered “pop” by mainstream appropriation, camp “contains a powerful queer charge” (120). Consequently, refusing camp removes *Hellbent* from a queer-political framework and attempts to discipline spectators’ readings and appropriations of the text. This is not to say that a film must be camp to be queer (as suggested earlier, reifying links between “queer” and any specific genre or film stylistic would undermine its strategic instability) but to argue that Etheredge-Outzs’s dismissal of camp encourages spectators to be pious and tractable, rather than disruptive or critical—to offer “straight” readings of the text, rather than queer ones.

Second, the rhetoric with which Etheredge-Outzs rejects camp in favor of “traditional elements of horror” positions *Hellbent* not as oppositional or groundbreaking but as conventional and obedient—a positioning underscored by promotional emphasis on links between *Hellbent*, *Halloween*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* based on shared executive producer, Joseph Wolf. Similarly, in his AfterElton.com interview, Etheredge-Outzs explains, “Instead of reinventing the slasher movie, I was interested in doing a familiar slasher pic populated with different characters. It follows a very familiar model” (Weiss). This rendering of *Hellbent* as “familiar” and “not camp” promotes adherence to and reproduction of cinematic (and cultural) norms, rather than disruptions of them, which is presumably why the film has been censured for having “exactly as much social relevance as a lesbian carwash, and considerably less purpose” (Burr D1).

As I demonstrate below, *Hellbent* does borrow from familiar slasher films but does *not* reproduce those narrative elements cited as most queer. Moreover, even if horror does operate within a largely queer genre, emphasizing *Hellbent*’s reliance on tradition produces a normative rhetoric of mimicry that undermines the resistant positionality crucial to queerness; that is, Etheredge-Outzs’s appeal to tradition lays claim to an acceptability, or legitimacy, at odds with queer’s aims “to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up” (Sullivan vi).

What’s at stake in Etheredge-Outzs’s comments is not whether *Hellbent* *really* is a traditional slasher but, rather, the logics of imitation and conventionality instructing his comments; even if we granted that *Hellbent* reproduces the queer sensibilities of its slasher predecessors (a claim I would find too generous), using tradition and mimesis as rhetorical frames risks un-queering *Hellbent*’s place within its generic context. Moreover, the language with which Etheredge-Outzs privileges the “traditional” over camp is noteworthy: calling traditional horror “universally potent” reifies the presumed naturalness, or universality, of (hetero)normativity and its alleged dominance over a passive, even impotent, construction of queer. Significantly, this assertion of traditional horror’s potency reinforces what I describe below as the masculinist logic of the film, which privileges virility, mastery, and physical violence.

In addition to rejecting camp, Etheredge-Outzs prevaricates when asked about the differences between “straight horror” and “gay horror.” Again referencing the

universal potency of traditional horror, he maintains there are no “specifically gay themes” at work in the film. To defend this approach, Etheredge-Ouzts remarks, “You wouldn’t expect a slasher movie with an all black cast to be fundamentally different from other films in the genre” (Juergens). Thus, in his implicit reliance on the rhetoric of color-blindness, asserting that race doesn’t “matter,” Etheredge-Ouzts also participates in a white-washing discourse of sexual normalization that positions gay identities and cultures as existing politely within and not in opposition to dominant cultural norms. Interestingly, this approach mirrors what Brenda Cooper and Edward C. Pease describe as a tendency within the popular press to tame *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) by using the frame of “universal love” to “‘un-queer’” the male leads and efface the particularities of queer sexuality (258).

As such, Etheredge-Ouzts’s denial of any specificity to gay culture constitutes an erasure, promoting gay culture’s (alleged) mimetic obedience to heteronorms and regulating audience expectations and readings accordingly. Just as he advises audiences not to expect camp, Etheredge-Ouzts instructs spectators not to seek out anything “specifically gay” in his film, suggesting attempts (conscious or not) to discipline queer audiences—directing them to “behave” and to relinquish queer reading strategies. And, given his assumption that there is nothing specifically gay operating beyond *mise-en-scène*, Etheredge-Ouzts makes the pessimistic prediction that he “doubt[s] ‘all-gay horror’ will thrive as its own sub-genre” (Juergens). Interestingly, then, Etheredge-Ouzts offers this new film culture the same dismal fate that *Hellbent* offers to its characters, which, as I discuss later, aren’t given much of an opportunity to thrive (or even survive, for that matter). Consequently, Etheredge-Ouzts’s comments reaffirm homophobic assumptions that queer pleasures are ill-fated and not meant to last.

Despite his disavowal of anything “too gay” at work in *Hellbent*, Etheredge-Ouzts’s interview on AfterElton.com does briefly allude to the queer potential of horror. He explains, “Horror has for a long time been known for having a subtext that is gay. Now the subtext is becoming the main text.” But, again, he equivocates, immediately discounting the claim, “Well, I don’t entirely agree with that. It’s an interesting point of view” (Weiss). Rather than making bold or direct claims about the genre, Etheredge-Ouzts refuses to acknowledge or lay claim to sexual politics that might be perceived as too “disturbing.” As a result, Etheredge-Ouzts insinuates that this “all gay” slasher can and should be expected to behave itself and not cause too much trouble. And, while Etheredge-Ouzts’s backtracking might seem like a peculiar slip of the tongue, I argue that this vacillation embodies *Hellbent*’s larger strategy of rhetorical ambivalence in which queer is promised only to be denied.

Etheredge-Ouzts’s comments about casting the film suggest further reifications of and obeisance to non-queer norms. On the film’s official Web site, he explains, “When we began to cast the movie, I stressed that I didn’t want actors who played ‘gay’ . . . I envisioned the leads to be regular guys.” Likewise, in his AfterElton.com interview, Etheredge-Ouzts insinuates that there can be such a thing as “too gay,” explaining that he advised his actors to “be a human, not a gay” (Weiss). Or, as actor Matt Phillips (“Tobey”) explains in the DVD extra, the filmmakers didn’t want characters (or



actors) that “act gay.” This rhetorical framing of the characters as “regular guys” reproduces the assumption that anything outside of the heterosexual is irregular, reifying heterosexuality’s position as the norm. And, by calling for actors whose sexual identity remains somewhat invisible, or at least unremarkable, Etheredge-Ouzts’s remarks perpetuate what Michael Warner describes as the GLBT movement’s “retreat from its history of radicalism into a new form of post-liberationist privatization” (168) where sexuality is meant not to call attention to itself but to fit in.

Likewise, the DVD “Featurette” emphasizes the “fact” that the actors playing the primary characters are “actually” straight. For example, actor Hank Harris (“Joey”) reveals, “I thought I was going to be the only straight person . . . and then I got on set and found out everybody was straight.” The result? “A lot of straight guys making out with straight guys.” Similarly, actor Dylan Fergus (“Eddie”) discusses doing gay love scenes and remarks that, other than dealing with co-star Bryan Kirkwood’s five-o’clock shadow, kissing another man “wasn’t really a big deal at all.” And, when asked in his Q-Notes interview, “Did any of the straight actors have trepidations about playing gay?” Etheredge-Ouzts responds, “One of my actors dreaded wearing heels for the entire shoot—and he did take some nasty spills. But other than that, the cast was game” (Juergens).

Not surprisingly, the choice to cast self-identified straight actors in the role of gay characters has generated discussion in most promotional interviews for the film. However, this essay is not addressing the politics of casting or whether or not *Hellbent* “should” feature gay actors. Instead, I am concerned with how attention to the actors’ sexuality participates in the larger discourses of heteronormativity and queer ambivalence. Accordingly, extra-textual emphasis on the presence of “straight guys” in a “gay film” is significant for two reasons.

First, emphasizing the actors’ off-screen heterosexuality participates in confessional culture, which Bonnie Dow reads as central to coming-out narratives (124). Although these actors are coming out as straight, attention to their sexuality nonetheless reproduces disciplinary assumptions about the “authenticity” of the individual’s “true” self and denies the fluidity and instability that queer theory cites as crucial to the construction and performance of identity. Unlike Berenstein’s description of horror as destabilizing what are often taken to be “core identities,” these extra-texts reaffirm assumptions about identity as stable and immutable.

Second, celebrating the actors’ willingness to play gay characters also reproduces long-standing and normative assumptions about homosexuality as a problem (Dow 129)—in this case, one faced by male actors that must “deal with” kissing other men and wearing high heels.<sup>7</sup> And, while Etheredge-Ouzts claims homosexuality within the narrative is “wholly incidental,” this focus on *Hellbent*’s straight actors that are “game” for playing gay seems to congratulate them on their “bravery” and “valor”—a pat on the back also famously offered to such self-identified heterosexual actors as Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) and Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal in *Brokeback Mountain*. Thus, the extra-textual materials for a film claiming to redress heterosexuality’s stronghold on horror reveal *Hellbent* to be mired in a heteronormative matrix where the primary cause for concern

remains the experiences of straight people, while “gay” is both marked as abnormal *and* removed from any queer-political framework.

Furthermore, Etheredge-Ouzts’s interview on the official *Hellbent* Web site describes the characters as paying “homage to the slasher stereotypes,” including “the bad boy, the sex addict, and the virgin.” Rather than celebrating characters that blur, defy, or invent conceptual categories, his comments, once again, stress mimesis and reliance upon static, fixed, and conventional(ized) identity markers. And, significantly, when *Hellbent* does borrow characters from the slasher repertoire, especially the Final Girl and the psycho-killer, it excises those features that have been understood to mark them as queer. As such, I will now turn to the film-text itself, which mirrors and reinforces extra-textual efforts to legitimate homosexuality by reconciling it with and subjecting it to heteronormative mandates. For those characters that don’t conform to such standards, *Hellbent* offers dangerous, even deadly, consequences.

### **Dangerous Liaisons**

*Hellbent* narrows the limits of what (and where) “gay” can be by punishing performances of homosexuality that are visible and public. Just as Etheredge-Ouzts ambivalently advises viewers not to look for anything “specifically gay,” *Hellbent*’s narrative warns viewers of the dangers of being “too gay” in the public sphere. Despite producer Stephen Wolfe’s comments in the DVD bonus feature that there is “nothing to indicate that people are being killed because they’re gay,” *Hellbent* does imply links between homosexuality and violence. For example, when discussing the psycho-killer with Tobey, Joey asks, “What makes people kill like that?” In response, Tobey quips, “Probably some 40-year old gay guy that just came out of the closet . . . probably jealous of all the nice hot guys like us walking around. Wouldn’t you want to kill us? We’re fucking fabulous.”

By locating both the cause of the killer’s violence and the choice of his victims within his homosexuality, this dialogue reproduces associations of homosexuality with pathology, not unlike a film like *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980), which positions homosexuality itself as monstrous. Significantly, Tobey’s framing of the killer’s motivations echoes the DVD extra’s construction of homosexuality as a “problem” to be solved. Furthermore, to his figuration of a closeted homosexual monster, Tobey adds regional insults, suggesting that the psycho-killer most likely hails from Louisiana or Oklahoma, or some other “backwater” place. To which Chaz replies, “It’s probably about his mother; it always is.” Hence, this heteronormative construction of monstrosity also implicates anxieties about class and gender, and the scapegoating of both rural identity and women demonstrates the film’s recourse to hegemonic constructions of white, middle-class masculinity, a tendency Benshoff identifies as common to horror films.

As products of patriarchal culture, these artifacts also tend to narrow the scope of the word queer by reflecting the dominant culture’s masculinist bias, wherein all of queer’s multifarious plurality is most frequently signified in terms of (white) men and male homosexuality. (Benshoff 94)

*Hellbent* seems to be no exception. Given its almost exclusive focus on white, homosexual men, *Hellbent* participates in the narrowing of queer and the hegemony of masculinist logic.<sup>8</sup> What's more, in referencing "mother issues," Chaz contributes to the tradition, ranging from Freud to Philip Wylie, of asserting etiological links between homosexuality, psycho-pathology, and excessive or inappropriate mothering.<sup>9</sup> In addition to being misogynist, this claim reaffirms the construction of homosexuality as a problem, or a form of "acting out."

*Hellbent* reiterates such a masculinist bias in its depiction of Tobey, a model whose choice to dress in drag as female for Halloween leads to his demise. Accustomed to favorable responses to his appearance, Tobey attributes the lack of attention he receives on Halloween to his drag performance, which he describes as "uncomfortable" and "scary as shit." In fact, the Tobey story-arc centers on his discomfort at having been displaced from his privileged position as sex symbol to what the film constructs as the marginalized position of drag queen. For example, when Tobey unwittingly flirts with the psycho-killer, he anxiously promises, "I don't always look like this." And, upon feeling rejected, Tobey responds, "Superficial faggot! I'm never doing drag again." *Hellbent*, thus, privileges Tobey's masculine identity as an underwear model with a "huge cock" over his attempt to blur gender boundaries. Instead of being the source of Tobey's strength or allure, being gender-queer is framed as a regrettable (and dangerous) mistake. Consequently, *Hellbent* rejects the gender-bending central to many slashers' potential queerness and reaffirms assumptions about fixed subject positions, valorizing masculinist identity formations and punishing those that fall outside this narrow framework.

Further implying that homosexuality lies at the root of its violence, *Hellbent*, like many slashers, positions the pursuit of sexual pleasure as hastening certain death. However, while Doty reads the violent treatment of heterosexual romance within mainstream horror as critiquing heterosexist norms and institutions, *Hellbent's* choice to attack its characters during a sexual encounter endangers the very subject positions and desires it seeks to make visible. For instance, the film opens with two incidental characters having sex in a car at a cruising park, an extreme high angle shot (a cinematic convention that often enacts a position of divine judgment) revealing one character getting a blowjob. In the next shot, the psycho-killer decapitates him—literally, the victim loses his head while getting it.

The film then follows its four main characters as they become targets of the psycho-killer after walking through the cruising park. The Devil Daddy pursues each character one by one; and as each character seeks the little death of sexual ecstasy, he meets his literal death. Joey is decapitated in the men's room of a club following a brief, first kiss with his love interest. Chaz is killed in the middle of the dance floor after taking ecstasy and having a sexual encounter with a woman.<sup>10</sup> And, Tobey dies in an alley following unsuccessful sexual advances toward the killer. Hence, *Hellbent* adopts an uneasy and punitive attitude toward sex, implicitly blaming victims for their suffering. It is not simply that victims are reproached for being in the proverbial "wrong place at the wrong time"; they are rebuked for having desires that the film implies are dangerous.

Thus, it bears noting that each character represents an embattled icon of gay culture: Joey is dressed in S&M gear, Chaz is bisexual (and dressed as a cowboy), and Tobey is in drag. As critic Michael Wilmington explains, *Hellbent* is “something of a gay fable, with certain stereotypes (S&M, drag queen, bisexual) violently killed and discarded along the way to the violent, romantic climax” (5). It is also significant that the violent disposal of these stereotypes occurs in spaces that are public and historically associated with homosexual identity and/or sexual practices: parks, bathrooms, and clubs. Thus, *Hellbent*’s violence echoes the rhetoric of its promotional material, reinforcing the heterosexist demand that homosexuality should be kept secret and mirroring what Warner has described as the movement in GLBT politics from radicalization to privatization.

These murder sequences also preempt the diegetic fulfillment of sexual pleasure, always offing *Hellbent*’s characters before they have a chance to get off. As Etheredge-Ouzts explains, “I know T and A is very typical of the slasher genre but I didn’t want to make a soft-core, typical gay film. No one even gets laid in this film” (Weiss). Significantly, *Hellbent*’s proclivity for killing its characters before sexual fulfillment contrasts with the tendency within most slashers to kill characters in the post-coital afterglow. Thus, although *Hellbent* does offer spectators more images of same-sex desire and pleasure than most mainstream media texts (where intimacy and sex between men remain largely invisible), these images of sex are often, quite literally, cut short.

Likewise, although it does present images of shirtless men, *Hellbent* does little to challenge the conventional codes governing male nudity in commercial cinema: as a film that identifies itself as “all gay,” there remains a notable absence of “all nude” male bodies, which should be understood in contradistinction from the centrality of female nudity within most slashers. This refusal to give spectators access to the nude male body, and the penis in particular, should be understood as part of the film’s reluctance to counter normative expectations about masculine corporeality, sexuality, and cinematic representation. Put another way, *Hellbent*’s insistence on keeping the penis invisible, like its refusal to offer visual proof of queer pleasure, enacts the obeisance to convention and mimesis of heteronormativity that its extra-texts advocate. As one Amazon.com review put it, the sexuality in this film is not “barrier-pushing” and, therefore, positions *Hellbent* as the kind of “gay movie straight people will watch easily.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, the spectator turning to *Hellbent* to find evidence of gay male bodies, sexualities, and pleasures may find him/herself needing to search further. Or, as the logic of the film implies, such a spectator may want to stop looking altogether because, in *Hellbent*, those who go looking for sex usually find trouble.

The exception to *Hellbent*’s violent rule of thumb is Eddie, the one main character to survive. But, notably, the killer’s attacks on Eddie climax only after he brings Jake, his new love interest, back to his apartment, furthering the film’s suggestion that (homo)sexuality warrants violent punishment. It is also noteworthy that *Hellbent*’s primary survivor is the character most reticent to engage in casual sex and least comfortable with the “perversions” of carnival. For instance, the film codes Eddie as reserved, as demonstrated by one character’s assertion that “if you ever get this

guy into bed, he'll fucking explode." And, at the outset of the group's Halloween night, Eddie reminds young, innocent Joey that he "better not get into any trouble" and rebukes Chaz for his sexual fluidity, asserting, "I'm not like you." Hence, Eddie's insistence that his friends behave and not go looking for "any trouble" echoes the extra-textual directives that *Hellbent's* actors should not be "too gay" and that its spectators should not look for anything queer in the film itself.

To wit, although *Hellbent* approaches its violent climax with Eddie in bed with Jake, the film tempers the implications of this sexual encounter by framing Eddie's desire for Jake squarely within the traditional parameters of romance and monogamy (in contrast to the leather daddy, bisexual, and drag queen that get killed earlier). Eddie's choice to take Jake to his apartment signals his desire for a serious commitment, which is bolstered by discussions of their romance in the DVD "Featurette" as a "relationship" based on "love." In other words, *Hellbent* only allows its hero's pleasure when this pleasure has been sanitized and legitimated within relational and heteronormative frames; but, even then, Eddie is still punished for his desires, for, as mentioned earlier, moments after getting Jake in bed (and getting handcuffed to it), Eddie must fight for his life. And, it bears repeating: he never does get to have sex.

Mirroring Etheredge-Ouzts's rejection of camp for a serious (or, straight) take on traditional horror, Eddie must trade his playful use of handcuffs for a serious use of violence, which the film sanctions by coding him as the physical embodiment of masculinist law and order (or, at least, a faithful copy): he is the son of a policeman; he attended the police academy and is a would-be cop; and on this fateful Halloween, he is dressed as a police officer in his late father's uniform. As such, implicit attempts to police sexuality, within both the extra-texts and the film's narrative, become literalized in this figure whose concern for the maintenance of the social order suggests anxiety about, rather than indulgence in, cultural upending. That is, Eddie adopts a positionality, or attitude, in defense of "the normal, the legitimate, the dominant." Rather than being disruptive or oppositional, he becomes a prop with which the status quo is held in place. In the end, the only main character to survive is the one who is least queer, suggesting that *Hellbent* has quite literally (and violently) un-queered its ensemble of characters—one by one.

As the leading character and primary survivor, Eddie represents *Hellbent's* Final Girl; but unlike the typical Final Girl, who is also known for her lack of onscreen sexuality, Eddie does not achieve his heroic status by blurring gender or sexual boundaries but by reaffirming them.<sup>12</sup> While the traditional Final Girl's "sexual reluctance" and "tomboyish" style (Clover 40) may open up space for queer readings in which she might be imagined as lesbian and/or gender-queer, Eddie's lack of sexual fulfillment and performance of masculinity enforce heteronormative gender expectations. Thus, *Hellbent* lacks what might be considered one of the queerest dimensions of slasher narratives. Moreover, while Eddie begins the film as "half a man," he overcomes his weakness through an assertion of phallic mastery that ultimately proves to be his saving grace.

Having lost one of his eyes in an accident, Eddie wears a glass prosthetic and cannot follow in his father's footsteps. Eddie is unable to pass the police physical

or perform as an officer, a limitation *Hellbent* sums up in its admission that Eddie “doesn’t shoot much” either in impromptu games of basketball with other men or with a gun. Of course, this narrative scenario only thinly veils the insinuation that Eddie (not unlike Etheredge-Ouzts’s figuration of camp) is impotent, and his injury seems to be an even greater assault on his phallic masculinity considering the cinematic positioning of the gaze as a chief signifier of masculine authority.<sup>13</sup>

What’s more, Eddie only survives his assault by the psycho-killer when he triumphs, if only temporarily, over his injury and articulates the masculinist links between violence and heroism. Literally removing his father’s gun from the closet, Eddie obeys the patriarchal injunction to “be a man” and is, for the first time, able to shoot a gun successfully. So, if it is her masculinity that makes the Final Girl queer, Eddie’s performance of hegemonic masculinity does little to disrupt traditional gendered norms. Thus, the price of gay visibility within horror seems to have come at the expense of any queer challenge to traditional gender and sexual norms, and the implication of such a representational strategy is that gay men, once again, “become patriarchal allies—rather than adversaries—in efforts to naturalize and reproduce heteronormative politics” (Shugart 89).

As much as Eddie abides by masculinist logic and upholds the mandates of hegemonic masculinity (apart from his homosexuality), so too does *Hellbent*’s psycho-killer. Unlike most gender-bending killers within slashers, whose queer transgressions mirror those of the Final Girl, the Devil Daddy also adheres to the masculinist norms that govern Eddie’s heroism. He is big, strong, and wields weapons with no apparent effort. So, even as an additional figure for identification, *Hellbent*’s monster does little to disrupt traditional identity categories and asserts that the only tenable subject position is one that conforms to the laws of hegemonic masculinity. Hence, *Hellbent*’s characters represent a rather limited range of subject positions, restricting the productive fluidity and instability that multiple, shifting identifications have the potential to offer and presenting audiences with a clear argument about who and what represent the identificatory norm.

Nevertheless, in the end, if *Hellbent* demands that its protagonist perform heteronormative masculinity (Eddie’s life quite literally depends upon his ability to “shoot straight”) it also suggests that such a performance is impossible. Moments before Eddie shoots him, the killer removes Eddie’s prosthetic eye with his tongue, leaving Eddie with a gaping hole in his face. Later and in typical slasher fashion, the final shot of the film reveals the killer is alive, with Eddie’s glass eye resting on his tongue. On a literal level, this shot establishes the possibility of a sequel; but, more implicitly, this shot also suggests the ultimate failure, or at least, incompleteness of Eddie’s performance of traditional masculinity.

Just as Eddie cannot become a “real” cop and can only play one on Halloween, his performance of hegemonic masculinity, like his eye, appears to be artificial, and at the end of the film Eddie remains (at least figuratively) castrated. Moreover, Eddie only gains the ability to shoot straight when he is stripped of his prosthetic—that is, when he stops pretending (to have two eyes, to be “regular”) and confesses his true, and defective, identity. So, while the “Backlot Featurette” claims it is “no big deal” for

straight actors to “play gay,” *Hellbent* contends that this gay man doesn’t have it so easy. Rather than using Eddie’s Halloween drag to signify that all identity is performed, in flux, and contingent, *Hellbent* resorts to essentialist and homophobic figurations of identity, implying that no matter how well Eddie plays a “real” man, he is unable to live up to the role. Thus, heteronormativity prevails and the queering of identity is violently pushed to the margins because, ultimately, Eddie’s willingness to obey heteronormative rules cannot overcome his defect, and at the end of the film, it seems unclear what this defect is: his half-blindness or his sexuality.

## Conclusions

I have argued that for *Hellbent*, the label of queer, like Tobey’s drag, is a poor fit. I will conclude by addressing how this reading of *Hellbent* contributes to understandings of communication. After all, couldn’t we dismiss this film as an exception in an otherwise queer generic landscape? Possibly. But, even as an “un-queer” exception in an otherwise (largely) queer genre, *Hellbent* is one of the first horror films to wear the title of queer. And, as a film that has been identified as a landmark of queer horror and promoted on Web sites with a queer readership, *Hellbent*’s rejection of queer politics and practices should be of concern to communication scholars and demands redressing for a number of reasons.

First, this film has helped usher in a host of imitations also bearing the label “queer horror.” Since its release, many GLBT-focused horror films have entered the cinematic marketplace, but rather than bearing the title of “gay horror,” these films are frequently categorized as “queer.” For example, the TLA Video catalog, which specializes in offering hard-to-find and “special interest” films, now has an entire category of films titled “queer horror.” Examples of films in this category include *October Moon* (Jason Paul Collum, 2005), *A Slice of Terror* (Michael Haboush, 2005), *In the Blood* (Lou Peterson, 2006), *Model Kill* (Alex Dove, 2006), and *Dead Boyz Don’t Scream* (Marc Saltarelli, 2007). Additionally, cult director David DeCoteau recently signed a deal with Regent Studios to produce ten new queer horror films, including remakes of older texts “refashioned to include gay themes” (Goldstein). In response to this burgeoning film culture, queer awards dedicated to horror texts featuring GLBT characters—including the Queer Horror Awards and the Gaylactic Spectrum Awards—have added films to their considerations. Hence, it seems *Hellbent* is less an exception than a watershed.

Second, the online circulation of “queer” as a marketing tool has significant implications for public discourse about identity and sexuality. Texts are never insular or closed but are enmeshed in larger discursive fields, and attention to this “logosphere” should also include the “blogosphere.” Based on recent reports that there are over 12 million self-identified GLBT Internet users, the Gay and Lesbian Internet Users report claims that the “GLBT community has embraced the Internet with vigor,” with much of its \$660 billion annual purchasing power being spent online (“New Report”). Accordingly, it is crucial that communication scholars attend to the kinds of rhetoric espoused in these cyber-marketing and consumer spaces,

especially given that many GLBT activists celebrate the Internet as a kind of queer space crucial to the development of GLBT and queer identities and communities.<sup>14</sup> While these technologies can be hailed for offering new communicative possibilities, we cannot overlook the ways in which the Internet, like other digital technologies, may discipline queer readings and restrict queer world-making, even while making claims to the contrary.

Third, while much attention has been given to such straightening out of gay identity within mainstream media, the promotion of heteronormativity in spaces actively addressing GLBT audiences should be more fully considered. Typically, the limited (and limiting) parameters of gay visibility have been addressed with regard to texts that clearly have heterosexual consumers in mind, including television shows like *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. But, *Hellbent* illustrates that such sanitizing treatment of homosexuality doesn't simply occur within texts aimed at heterosexual audiences but also exists within texts that are produced and exhibited outside of mainstream media contexts and that openly lay claim to gay audiences. So, while Cooper and Pease have shown how press for *Brokeback Mountain* attempts to appease heterosexual audiences by persuading them "to overlook queer subjectivity" (252), this essay has argued that *Hellbent* and its extra-texts address GLBT audiences in similar ways.

Offering a warning against the publicity of gay identity, *Hellbent* and its extra-texts promote a restrictive model of what gay identity "should" look like—namely, heterosexuality—and discourage the creation of queer counterpublics. Just as Etheredge-Ouzts admits, in his AfterElton.com interview, to sacrificing the display of skin and sex to appease the film's straight producers (Weiss), the texts addressed here encourage GLBT audience members to tame, and even hide, public performances of same-sex desire and queer spectatorship. And, just as Etheredge-Ouzts stresses his film's conventionality, the model of homosexuality promoted by this intertextual matrix emphasizes concession, compromise, and conformity. However, rather than mere textual anomaly, the case of *Hellbent* represents a larger discursive formation that claims to affirm GLBT identity at the same time it advises GLBT audiences not to "act out."

For example, on the Web site for leading GLBT newsmagazine *The Advocate*, which also promoted *Hellbent* as a "queer horror flick" (Giltz), Dave White offers a guide for "How to get along with your right-wing relatives." Confessing that he is "ready to make nice," White encourages readers not to confront homophobic relatives and to "keep the peace," for, in his estimation, home-cooked meals and family holidays are not worth "jeopardizing" for the sake of "gay rights." Although written in a humorous and hyperbolic voice, White's message of assimilation and compromise is clear. The model of homosexuality that he advocates is one that is well-behaved and not disruptive, and his emphasis on what GLBT readers can do for their straight relatives continues to put heterocentrist norms and expectations first. Likewise, the gay-focused here! Networks (whose name is synecdoche for the political slogan "We're here, and we're queer!") offers a host of original series and films attempting to legitimize homosexuality by appealing to dominant, masculinist



norms. For instance, in the film *Eleven Men Out* (Róbert I. Douglas, 2005) an outed athlete leaves his team to avoid controversy and then attempts to prove his masculinity by finding success on a gay soccer team; and in the film *Fat Girls* (Ash Christian, 2006), an adolescent gay male must overcome the “fat girl within” to win social mastery and popularity.

These texts, thus, perform rhetorics of obeisance and mimesis, contending that homosexuality should be tempered by the larger goal of fitting in and playing by hegemonic rules. Ultimately, then, this reading of *Hellbent* exemplifies a larger rhetorical strategy that garners force by appealing to and then diluting the radicalizing discourse of queerness. Texts that are (mis)labeled as queer but largely divested of, or even contrary to, queer politics risk emptying out the political use-value of queerness as a theoretical concept and a subject position. If queer theory and activism have emerged in response to identity politics and liberationist movements focused on “social assimilation” (Yep, Lovaas, and Elia 130), the simultaneity of appropriating queer as a genre category and erasing queer difference threatens to eradicate queer as a distinct conceptual and political category.

This hazard should be of particular importance to the field of communication studies given recent work to “queer the discipline,” as exemplified, for instance, by the 2008 decision of the National Communication Association’s Caucus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns to add “Queer” to its name and the approximately thirty papers and/or panels programmed for the 2009 NCA convention featuring “queer” in their title.<sup>15</sup> If communication studies is invested in queer studies and queer theory, the discipline should take note of how and to what ends “queer” is being used in public and popular discourse.

This discussion of *Hellbent* is not meant to demonstrate that horror is a genre in which gay bodies would necessarily be better off remaining unseen or that gay horror cannot be queer. But, neither does this discussion imply that *Hellbent* is a peculiar or singular text. Despite labeling itself as a “first,” *Hellbent* is neither a generic novelty nor the unique text its billing suggests; rather, *Hellbent* exemplifies the thoroughgoing tendency within American popular culture to encourage homosexuality to straighten up and demonstrates that heteronormativity is so pervasive and naturalized that it has been absorbed by texts that claim to speak from (and to) the margins and to challenge heterosexual privilege. In response, this essay has argued that for gay horror to challenge heteronormative violence, this subgenre needs to operate more queerly.

## Notes

- [1] *Hellbent*’s self-designation as the “first” gay slasher film can be contested because there are other slashers that prominently feature GLBT characters, including *Make a Wish* (Sharon Ferranti, 2002), *Dead Guys* (Alex Dove, 2003), and *Haute Tension/High Tension* (Alexandre, Aja, 2003).
- [2] *Hellbent* was distributed by Regent Studios and its sister company here! Films, both of which are owned by Regent Media. Regent Media also owns here! Television and recently merged with LPI Media, which owns *The Advocate* and [TheAdvocate.com](http://TheAdvocate.com).

- [3] See Westerfelhaus and Lacroix.
- [4] It should also be noted that horror has been cited as demonizing queerness and/or same-sex desire. See Brintall.
- [5] A division of LOGO, a GLBT-focused subsidiary of the MTV Networks, AfterElton.com is a popular and high profile GLBT Web site. Q-Notes began as a monthly, regional LGBT news source in North and South Carolina but has expanded and increased its profile through Facebook, MySpace, e-mail subscriptions, and its Web site, which reports over 10,000 hits per month.
- [6] This similarity seems especially significant given recent efforts to link DVDs directly to interactive online materials. For more on technological convergence, see Brookey.
- [7] It is significant that Etheredge-Ouzts responds to a question about playing gay by referencing the experience of an actor in high heels, which reproduces an assumed link between homosexuality and femininity for which *Hellbent* seems to atone through reliance on masculinist logic.
- [8] Etheredge-Ouzts addresses the problem of the “Lily-white” cast for which he apologizes by explaining that the character of Eddie was initially intended to be Latino and by citing casting problems. Coming dangerously close to scapegoating he explains, “To my great disappointment, we convinced only a handful of non-white actors to audition. One day during casting, we had auditions scheduled for more than thirty non-white actors. Not one showed up.” See his interview on <http://campblood.org/Features/Paul%20Etheredge.htm>.
- [9] Freud suggests that male homosexuality might be the neurotic results of a son’s attachment to his mother. See Freud, *Three Essays*. Wylie coined the term “momism” to define his belief that everything from homosexuality to wartime passivism can be “blamed” on over-zealous “mom” culture. See Wylie.
- [10] Throughout the film, Chaz has sexual encounters with both men and women. Promotional materials for the film alternately identify him as “bisexual” or even “pansexual.” In this case, Chaz’s murder seems to be punishment not simply for being “gay” but for being “queer” inasmuch as his sexual desires and pleasures seem to trouble the categories of “hetero” and “homo” when they are understood as binaries. To this end, Chaz’s death mirrors the extent to which bisexuals have been scapegoated, even by the gay community, as too disruptive.
- [11] Etheredge-Ouzts explains on AfterElton.com that the lack of sex was a concession made for non-gay audiences. He explains, “I had two sets of producers, one with a horror background, one with a gay film background. The gay film guys were saying “More skin” and the horror was saying “OH MY GOD, they’re kissing.” I struck with the medium . . . the skin is not exploited” (Weiss).
- [12] Etheredge-Ouzts admits the importance of the “final girl” as a slasher trope that informed his script. See <http://campblood.org/Features/Paul%20Etheredge.htm>.
- [13] On the patriarchal significance of the male gaze, see Mulvey and Berger among many others.
- [14] On the importance of the Internet for GLBT communication, see *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 7.2–3 (July 2002), a special double issue devoted to the topic of “queer webs.”
- [15] For instance, see Yep, Lovaas, and Elia and Morris.

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