Holy Horror: A Quantitative Analysis of the Use of Religion in the Yearly Top Grossing Horror Films From 2000 to 2009

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Abstract

The yearly top-grossing films from 2000 to 2009 were analyzed to see if correlation exists between overt religious content and box office success. Also, the films were analyzed to see if correlation exists between overt religious content and IMDb.com user ratings. Neither box office success nor IMDb.com user ratings were found to be correlated with over religious content.

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Introduction

The popularity of the horror genre has risen significantly over the past few decades, but opinions on what makes these films so popular is widely varied. One could argue that this popularity comes from the fear of the unknown, the vision of something beyond normal, or the pure horror that a horror film can instill in a human's heart and mind. Kinal (2000) notes that as social angst increases so does the popularity of horror films. It is no secret that the world of 2011 is one of the most tumultuous, uncertain, and pivotal times in history. The level of social angst can be seen by opening any newspaper or turning on the T.V. This rise in social angst and the rise in popularity of horror films would seem to be exactly as Kinal discussed, but it still does not explain what exactly makes a horror film popular.

Horror films have evolved significantly in the past few decades as well. The evolution of the horror film could explain the rise in popularity. No longer are horror films solely about vampires, werewolves, mummies and, most recently, zombies. This shift can arguably be traced to the 1960 release of *Psycho*. In an article in the *Toronto Star*, David Thomson, critic and historian, is quoted as saying, "Film was never the same after *Psycho*. In the long term historically the most decisive change in censorship was not so much with sex and language, it was with violence. *Psycho* in 1960 unleashed a kind of casual violence, when you think of the attitudes then, that were unthinkable at the time." Then in 1978, the slasher film *Halloween* was released to huge commercial success. According to IMDb, *Halloween* had a U.S. box office gross of $47 million with an estimated budget of $320,000. Also, according to boxofficemojo, the *Halloween* franchise is the fourth highest grossing horror franchise behind *Friday the 13th*,

Nightmare on Elm Street, and the Hannibal Lecter series. Slasher films are noted for their brutal acts of violence, and three of the top four grossing horror franchise, the Hannibal Lecter series being the exception, are slasher films. *Halloween's* success would spawn numerous franchises such as *Friday the 13th*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Scream*, and *Saw* which would perforate the hearts and minds of moviegoers. The slasher film still exists, but the brutality has gone far beyond anything that pre-*Halloween* horror films could have imagined. At the same time and paradoxically, the content of horror films over the past few decades seems to have moved toward an abundant use of religion, religious imagery, and religious metaphor as the core of their scare factor and storyline. Some examples include, *The Exorcist* (1973), *Pet Sematary* (1989), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *The Fourth Kind* (2009), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and, most recently, *The Rite* (2011).

Rationale for Study

There is an abundance of research on horror films. Some of the main areas that are noted in this study are in the areas of the current state of the genre, the effects of horror films, sex and violence within horror films, gender discrepancies, the way youth are portrayed, and religious elements associated with horror films. While religious elements have been studied in the genre, no research has been done on the quantity of religious symbolism and references in recent, popular horror films. Also, no studies have been done on the correlation between religious content in horror films and box office/user rating data. Mixing religion and horror films may seem forbidden or even blasphemous to some, but perhaps this is the reason it has never been studied in this way. Perhaps it has never been studied because most would think it does not exist in horror films in any meaningful way other than to give a hyperbolic example of certain aspects of religion.

Statement of the Problem

Horror films frequently and liberally use religious symbols, ideology, and metaphor to shape and tell the story. Some clarification is in order as to how religious symbols and reference to the religious will be conceptually defined in this study. For the purpose of this study, a religious symbol will be defined as any artifact or image that the average person would associate with a particular religion. A religious reference will be defined as any dialogue which refers to religious symbols, stories from a particular religion, or passages from a religion's holy texts. By religion, this study refers to any of the major religions, and the definitions just given would include material from Satanism and other "anti-Christian" belief systems. The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H1-There is a positive relationship between overt religious content and box office success.

H2-There is a positive relationship between overt religious content and IMDb.com user ratings.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides a brief introduction about horror films, the rationale for the study, and the statement of the problem. Chapter two presents a comprehensive review of the literature. Chapter three describes the methodology used for this study including how the films were selected, how the data will be analyzed, and validation strategies. Chapter four presents the results of the film analysis with quantitative data. Each film's analysis and the results are described in detail including all information counter to this study. The last chapter discusses the results of the study, future research, and limitations of the study. A conclusion and bibliography are also included in the final chapter.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In her book, *Haunted: Tales of the Grotesque*, Joyce Carol Oates says

> This predilection for art that promises we will be frightened by it, shaken by it, at times repulsed by it seems to be as deeply imprinted in the human psyche as the counter-impulse toward daylight, rationality, scientific skepticism, truth and the 'real.'... And this is the forbidden truth, the unspeakable taboo--that evil is not always repellent but frequently attractive; that it has the power to make of us not simply victims, as nature and accident do, but active accomplices (305).

Horror as a genre has been debated and even ridiculed relentlessly by film purists. However, horror films have gained ground in the realm of scholarly research, as can be seen in this study's literature review, because of what these films say about society, politics, and cultural trends.

Because horror film encompasses a huge part of film itself, this chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section describes the current state of the horror genre. The second section looks at the effects of horror film. The third section is focused on sex and violence within horror films. The fourth section emphasizes gender roles within the genre of horror. The fifth section elaborates on how youth are portrayed as well as the current trend for youth to be the "bad guy" in horror films. The sixth section discusses religious elements in horror films. The seventh section provides examples of previous film content analyses that use the same style as this study.

Current State

The film genre of horror is in a slump and has been for some time now. For the last twenty years, filmmakers have largely relied on remakes of old horror films and sequels. Not much in the way of creativity has emerged, but there are a few exceptions with films such as *Scream* and *The Sixth Sense*. As filmmakers are running out of remakes, they are turning to more violence, gore, and sex to sell films (Hantke 2007). The best examples of this would be the *Saw* series and the *Hostel* series. Hantke says, "Ask any fans, and they will tell you that American horror film is in a slump. Not that no more horror films are being made; on the contrary, as far as popularity and profitability go, the horror film seems near the top of its game as Hollywood lavishes a steady stream primarily of mid-budget films upon its audience. And yet the vast majority of these films just aren't any good" (191).

In an effort to become more creative, horror films have started to use current culture as items of fear. The Internet, T.V., and radio are vilified and shown as items that will break apart normal life and relationships (Tryon 2009). This would seem to be a smart direction for the horror genre to go because technology is evolving at an almost unmanageable pace. Everyday life hinges on various technologies performing their designed function, and people are exposed to various forms of mass media throughout the day. Tryon states

> These horror films that focus on electronic media contribute to this sense of fear and attribute this violence in part to the mass media itself. Rather than working to address actual causes of violence, these films ultimately reinforce a sense of passivity and paranoia, blaming electronic media for apparently putting children at risk. In addition, the films seem to call for a retreat into the private space of the

> middle-class family home without offering any real alternatives or solutions to the dangers they identify. (42)

Some examples of the type of films that Tryon is referring to would be *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Ring*, *The Ring 2*, *FeardotCom*, and *Cloverfield*. Another point that Tryon makes is that many of these films that focus on forms of technology and media imply a blurring between the public and private. In an era where media piracy is extremely prevalent, this blurring is no coincidence (50).

Current reliance on cultural commentary and implications is not limited to American horror films. In fact, one could argue quite effectively that other countries' horror films may have more cultural commentary and implications. Van Heeren (2007) looks at the change in horror film in Indonesia after the end of Suharto's rule. The main changes were that the post-Suharto Indonesian horror genre was not seen as the genre that represented Indonesia anymore and it no longer was solely representative of rural and lower classes (212). It made a move to main stream culture. Indonesian horror films closely mirror Indonesian society, and the people have a larger than normal affection for horror films. This could be due to the fact that horror films were practically the only films produced in Indonesia after the Indonesian film industry collapse in 1993 (Van Heeren 212). Another explanation is that "Indonesian cultural commentators have tried to explain the appeal for horror films by stating that the genre is closely related to Indonesian peoples and Eastern culture, which, they suppose, is synonymous with mystics and supernatural things" (213).

Whether in America or elsewhere in the world, it is clear that the horror genre has turned to content that is both culturally and currently relevant. Perhaps this turn has increased the effects of the horror or fear. Fear is still the point of a horror film. Lavery (1982) explains that the

purpose a horror film is to “surprise, terrify, or alienate an audience by means of a narrative and cinematic techniques which are disorienting and aggressive, violent, or discomforting” (48). However, the subjection of the human mind to the images and content of a horror film has effects. These effects could be difficult for some viewers to deal with.

Effects of Horror Films

Horror films that are culturally relevant present viewers with a potential psychological crisis depending on how significant the viewers find the film. Depending on the viewer’s personality, this psychological crisis will either be dealt with or become traumatic. The trauma can trigger a pre-existing mental health condition in the viewer. This is known as cinematic neurosis (Ballon and Leszcz 2007). On cinematic neurosis, Ballon and Leszcz say that

> Cinematic neurosis, often associated with horror films, can be considered an example of a culturally shaped syndrome, whereby a film shapes the symptom presentation of pre-existing mental health conditions in vulnerable people. Vulnerable individuals include those who have issues with their identity, e.g. possessing varying degrees of borderline personality structures, and those coping with stress, such as a loss of a close relationship about which they feel ambivalent. A film's content can result in the introjection of a powerful cultural symbol for evil to compensate for this loss, resulting paranoid ideation, dissociative states, and anxiety, all of which are highly influenced and shaped by the film narrative. (212)

This study documents seven cases of cinematic neurosis. Five of the cases resulted from the movie *The Exorcist*. Even though *The Exorcist* was released in 1973, it was a very real and intense film based on a true story. As films are becoming more real and intense, studies such as

Ballon and Leszcz's show that horror films like *The Exorcist* can possibly present emotional and psychological problems for the viewer.

The emotional problems that may be associated with viewing such content are possibly cued by information stored in memory. If a person has a prior fear of an object or specific content, a horror movie that uses or depicts this content will elicit a greater emotional response from the viewer (Nueundorf 1998). The study researched viewer's response to *Night of the Living Dead* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and found that "prior fear of specific objects depicted in these films was significantly related to levels of fright experienced during the movie" (24). Neuendorf concludes that "it helps us formulate a picture of what mechanisms the human mind uses to assign a fright response to a given experience. Based on the evidence presented here, it seems that, given some prior negative experience with some object (e.g., a chainsaw), the negative affect will indeed carry over into the general affective response toward the entire media presentation" (25).

Not only can horror films have a psychological effect on viewers, but they also can inform and even persuade viewers about political issues. Studies show that Americans get much of their political information and information in general from audiovisual media. Even though horror films are in a slump content wise, they still are rabidly popular and, as also noted by Tryon (2009), many of the films' "evils" deal with the "politics of communication" (Nelson 381). Nelson argues that the political messages of horror films are achieved through subtext or symbolism. He says, "Thus classic characters of horror signal subtextual politics. By convention, zombie films examine mass societies. Ghost films face injustices. Vampire movies explicate the charismatic and totalitarian politics of perfectionism. Werewolves involve the politics of

development and transformation. Mummies implicate disorders of tradition and authority" (383). Society is thoroughly entrenched in technology, and freedoms are being threatened due to the reliance on technology. It seems natural that horror films would play on society's political concerns over technology.

Psychological effects are apparent whether they are detrimental or just informative. The content most associated with psychological effects within horror films is extreme violence. More recently, sexually explicit material has become a staple in horror films. Much scholarly attention has been given to both of these topics within the genre.

Sex and Violence

A new form of horror film labeled "torture porn" has emerged in the last few years, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the 2004 release of *Saw*. Torture porn is a film style where people try to evade or withstand torturous acts from the people who have captured them (Lockwood 2009). These types of films have been ridiculed by the media and politicians as "moral pollution" (Lockwood 40). The intense violence and shock value is unquestionable, but Lockwood makes the argument that these films may have a "transformative and liberating potential" (40). The idea is that these films are positive in the sense that they "affect" viewers and "make them feel" (Lockwood 41). By "make them feel," Lockwood simply means that these films are so provocative that the viewer has no choice but to deal with the feelings and emotions that come from this kind of film. From this, Lockwood's argument extends to torture porn seen as an allegory of control and becoming. With terrorism and potential government invasion of privacy, control is a very heated topic right now. The victims in torture porn often do not appreciate life, but "become" appreciative after surviving their ordeal (Lockwood 47).

Extreme violence is not a new phenomenon in horror, but it is definitely increasing in frequency from decade to decade. Sapolsky, Molitor, and Luque (2003) performed a content analysis of slasher films from the 1990's and found that there were significantly more acts of violence in these films than in the slasher films of the 1980's. A 44% increase in violence was noted (Sapolsky, Molitor, and Luque 34). Also of great interest, the researchers found that sex and violence were not normally seen together. Many scholars had previously stated that sex and violence were often seen together in slasher films which desensitized males to both violence and aggressive sexual acts. According to the researchers:

> While the amount of sexuality portrayed in slasher films remained unchanged from the 1980s to the 1990s, the occurrence of sex immediately prior to or during scenes of violence declined to fewer than one incident per film. Moreover, two films accounted for nearly all of the instances of sex commingled with violence in 1990s slasher films. Thus, the examination of eighty-three of the most popular slasher films of the 1980s and a content analysis of the ten most-watched slasher films of the 1990s consistently shows that the genre rarely links sex and violence and calls into question the frequent claim that slasher films mix sex and violence. (35)

The previous observation may be the most important finding of that study because horror films have been demonized for mixing sex and violence; which they do, but not to the extent or degree that was previously thought. A similar study by Weaver (1991) analyzed ten slasher films for sexual violence. The scenes in question were categorized as aggressive, sexual, sexually aggressive, and other. Specifically with slasher films, some scenes may exhibit more than one or all of these categories. In total, 406 scenes were analyzed. The results of this study showed no

significant difference between acts of violence committed on men or women. The only inequality found was that scenes of death were much longer when involving a woman than scenes involving a man. However, the worry of some scholars about the effects of horror film on men and women is not unfounded and deserves further attention. Also of concern is how men and women's gender as a whole is portrayed in the horror genre.

Gender

In 2005, Briefel wrote an article that talks about monsters in horror films and how they are typically males. The male monsters often enjoy acts of masochism before they perform their monstrous actions. It is supposedly done for shock value to the victim and to the audience. Male monsters then move on to sadistic acts. On the contrary, the audience tends to feel sorry for female monsters because they are a product of their environment and because their violent acts are seen as a means to terminate their suffering (Briefel 21). Briefel determines that male monsters hurt themselves before violent acts as an act of empowerment, and female monsters show their biological identity when they perform acts of violence mainly due to actual menstruation or signs of menstruation (Briefel 25). Briefel concludes of the gender of monsters that "these essentializing constructions of monstrosity mitigate the films' more revolutionary play with gender and identity categories. They work to reassure audiences that the terrors they are witnessing on screen are containable, that they will not uproot deep-seated beliefs about gender and violence. Whatever else the horror film may stir within us, its gendering of the pain felt by monsters and the sadistic acts they subsequently commit provides an unfortunately reassuring stability" (25). It is interesting that this study sees monsters in horror films as being in line with conventional gender identities.

Trencansky (2001) found the opposite to be true. Trencansky discusses the facts that many slasher films have females as the final combatant (The Final Girl) against the villain, and that the characters are mainly youth that are in revolt against current society. The girl at the end of the film, according to the study, is sometimes desexualized which reduces her femininity but is sexually exploited visually. However, sometimes the girl is seen as a survivor who adapts to her situation, and this is seen as a sign of feminine empowerment. Keisner (2008) comes to the same conclusion about what The Final Girl is implying about female empowerment. Keisner says,

> The Final Girl leaves behind the untrustworthy dominant social order (most typically represented by abusive and irresponsible parents); simultaneously, the audience of movie goers is taught (shown) that the Final Girl can only survive if she embodies certain attributes, most notably: she is virginal, masculine, and often an outsider. Thus, the mostly teen audience is given an outlet to rebel against existing social structures while they are also being taught what behaviors elevate one to hero/heroine status. (422)

The portrayal of gender in horror films is one of many categorizations of people that are starting to gain some attention, but it is definitely significant. Whether it is a positive or negative portrayal or both is still in question. Another of these categorizations that is gaining attention in the genre is youth. Just as important as gender portrayal in horror films is consideration of how youth are affected by and portrayed in horror films.

Youth

Incidences of schoolyard shootings by children have been on the rise starting in the 1990's. It is no coincidence that many horror films during that time frame have had children as

the source of evil. A majority of the time, the evil that is associated with the child has a supernatural source. However, there are instances of films where the evil is an inherent part of the child. Either way, the use of children in horror films typically includes evil of some form. It is also important to note that all of the evil children in these films are white and male just as all of the children who were responsible for the schoolyard killings during this time period were white and male. This is another instance where horror films are using symbolism and subtext to comment on current events of the time period (Jackson 2000).

In a more recent study, but continuing with this same line of thinking, Hoppenstand (2007) discusses how he has started to notice that many characters in horror shows and films, especially the protagonists, are young. Hoppenstand's explanation as to why the genre has shifted to the use of youth is that "Hollywood keeps producing their ageist fare, despite the obvious fact that the largest and most affluent potential film and TV audiences in America are baby-boomers. A limp explanation escapes the lips of the collective Hollywood entertainment industry, arguing that movies and TV shows (and TV advertising) are geared to the young because that is the group that goes to movies and watches TV" (762). Keisner (2008) would argue that it is very dangerous to gear horror film consumption towards youth due to the potential of horror films, specifically slasher films, to change youth's value systems because these films are so socially relevant. Blurring the boundaries of a society's value system is a slippery slope to go down.

If youth are the primary target of the horror genre, then new issues arise. One concern would be the use of the satanic and the occult in the genre and what effect that choice has on the viewers. From previous research documented in this study, it is clear that horror films do have

messages that they are trying to either comment on or reinforce. Whether these messages are intentional or accidental is open for debate, but messages are being interpreted by viewers.

Religious Elements

Elements of Satanism and the occult have long been associated with horror films. A study from Jones (2009) looks at the influence of spiritualism and occultist ideology on early Welsh and Irish horror fictions. The study also looks at "occult Celticism" on two Universal horror films from the early 20th century: *The Old Dark House* and *The Wolfman*. Jones explains that these occult elements show how early horror writers saw themselves as between two worlds: spirit and matter. Brintnall (2004) goes so far as to imply that the monsters in horror films represent homosexuality and are a direct attack against Christian views that are engrained and explicit in society. The monsters in horror movies can blur the distinction between what is normal and abnormal. In particular, *Frankenstein*, *The Haunting*, and *Scream* are examined to show how the monster represents queer desire as "monstrous, disruptive, and violent" (145).

Dyrendal (2008) examines the idea put forth by Christian organizations that horror films and horror film inspired music are media for the advancement of Satanism. Satanism is simply defined by Dyrendal as Christianity in reverse. The argument is made by some Christian organizations that horror films create images that become associated with Satanism, and that they bring youth into direct contact with satanic ideology. Dyrendal says

> However, popular 'dark occulture' seems to be a common source of inspiration for all types of Satanists, so common that it inspires many comments on which *other* kinds of products are satanically relevant. From all kinds of sources, it becomes clear that what is deemed satanic or relevant for Satanists is not limited to products commonly described as religious. Any kind of fiction, science,

> philosophy, music or art may be appropriated in whole or in part if it can be given a relevant interpretation, or otherwise inspire to insight or enjoyment (95).

This is an interesting and provocative point made by Dyrendal. Any kind of popular culture can be a reference point for Satanism, not just horror films or horror film inspired music. It would seem that the horror genre is just an easy place to let the blame fall for exposure to satanic ideology.

In fact, according to an experimental study done by King and Hourani (2007), consumers of horror films desire to see good defeat evil. Early horror films almost always had the bad guy being defeated; good destroying evil. However, a change occurred in the 1970's where teaser endings started to be used; evil overcoming good (King and Hourani 474). The participants of the study commented on traditional and teaser endings to horror films. Traditional endings are where the antagonist dies or is destroyed, and teaser endings are where the antagonist comes back. The study showed that the participants preferred horror films with traditional endings. Interestingly, participants in the study who labeled themselves as gore watchers (those who enjoy horror films with a lot of gore) preferred the films with traditional endings (King and Hourani 488). Arnault (2003) had the same sentiments. While this article is not necessarily about horror films, it contains a section that is applied to some horror films as well as other non-horror films that depict horrific acts. Arnault states that Americans, for the most part, value the fact that good overcomes evil (155).

Film Content Analyses

Monk-Turner, Ciba, Cunningham, McIntire, Pollard, and Turner (2004) performed a content analysis on violence in top-grossing American war films from 1970 to 2002. Four main categories were defined and each had several sub-categories. Implements of violence was coded

for: by hand, blades, primary weapons, small arms, artillery, and explosives/bombs. The next category coded was the ratio of battle scenes to the duration of the movie. The third category that was coded was gore. Gore included instances of gore and a scale of gore that was created by the researchers. The final category was violence other than soldier to soldier. This was coded as: children, women, animals, and civilian structures. Each instance of the four coded categories was "counted and tallied" (6).

Cassidy, Townsend, Bell, and Watnik (2006) examined portrayals of soft drinks in the yearly ten top grossing films in America each year from 1991 to 2000. Every instance of a beverage "being ordered, bought, or in any way acquired by a human character; or was being held, prepared, or in immediate proximity to a human character" was noted (3). The company that the beverage represented was also noted.

Bell, Berger, Cassady, and Townsend (2005) examined the depictions of food, alcohol, exercise, and sport in the yearly ten top grossing films in America from 1991 to 2000. Every instance of food, alcohol, exercise, and sport was noted with a description of what was shown or the activity that took place. Food was further broken down into fats/oils/sweets, meat/poultry/fish/dry beans/eggs/nuts, fruits, bread/cereal/rice/pasta, vegetables, and milk/yogurt/cheese. Also noted was whether the food items were consumed or not.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Selection of Films

The entire genre of horror film is vast with many subgenres. For this reason, the yearly top-grossing horror films from 2000 to 2009 have been selected for examination. These films are the films that Hollywood has designated as existing within the horror genre and which were deemed the most popular for a particular year by the public due to those films receiving the highest yearly gross. By examining a decade's worth of top-grossing horror films, this research will be able to show correlation or no correlation between religious content and box office success/user ratings. The data on box office gross by year and user rating was obtained from The Internet Movie Database or IMDb.com. The user rating is based on a 10-star scale. When contacted concerning clarification about accuracy and consistency of the information provided, IMDb responded by saying

> The information in the Internet Movie Database comes from various sources. While we actively gather information from and verify items with studios and filmmakers, the bulk of our information is submitted by people in the industry and visitors like you. About 70% of our staff is dedicated to processing the massive amounts of information we receive and add to the database every week. In addition to using as many sources as we can, our data goes through consistency checks to ensure it is as accurate and reliable as possible. However, there's absolutely no substitute for an international team of movie buffs with an encyclopedic knowledge of trivia and a large assortment of reference works (and we include in this group many of our loyal contributors). Our sources of

> information include, but are not limited to, on-screen credits, press kits, official bios, autobiographies, and interviews. Given the sheer volume and the nature of the information we list, occasional mistakes are inevitable and, when spotted/reported, they are promptly verified and fixed. That's why we welcome corrections and submissions.

This information can also be found in the FAQ section of the website. A further inquiry was sent to IMDb for more information about the consistency checks, and IMDb responded, “Please note that we receive our data from several different sources; such as registered users or fans, people who are involved on the titles themselves (ie. Directors/Producers/Actors/Production Companies/Agents/etc.), and by our own data managers who do diligent research. As outlined within the FAQ, we also derive our information from other verifying sources, such as on-screen credits, press kits, official bios, autobiographies, and interviews.”

The films for this study are as follows:

Film and Year	**Box Office Gross/User Rating**
What Lies Beneath (2000)	$155 million/6.5
Thir13en Ghosts (2001)	$41.9 million/5.1
The Ring (2002)	$129 million/7.2
Freddy vs. Jason (2003)	$82.2 million/5.8
The Grudge (2004)	$110 million/5.7
Saw II (2005)	$87 million/6.7
Saw III (2006)	$80.2 million/6.2
Paranormal Activity (2007)	$108 million/6.6
Saw V (2008)	$56.7 million/5.7

Zombieland (2009)	$75.6 million/7.8

Quantitative Analysis

The films were watched from earliest to most recent. A brief but detailed description is given of each film, including the director, plot, notable achievements, and major actors. Each film was watched in its entirety several times to look for the use of overt religious content. Conceptually, a religious symbol is defined as any artifact or image that the average person would associate with a particular religion, and a religious reference is defined as any dialogue which refers to religious symbols, stories from a particular religion, or passages from a religion's holy texts. By religion, this study refers to any of the major religions, and the definitions just given would include material from Satanism and other "anti-Christian" belief systems.

The operational definitions of religious content are divided into ten categories:

1. Christianity-crucifix, cross, the Bible, Heaven, Hell, church.
2. Satanism-inverted pentagram, Baphomet (which is an inverted pentagram with a demonic entity within), upside-down cross, goat head, Satanic S or lightning bolt, the serpent, 666, Hell.
3. Witchcraft-pentagram, hexagram, the crescent moon, crystal ball, Tarot cards, Ouija boards.
4. Catholicism-crucifix, cross, priest, confessional booth, Rosary, Mother Mary, clerical clothing, Holy water, church.
5. Exorcism-any image or reference to the Catholic rite of exorcism including demon possession itself.

6. Good and Evil-some of the films may have characters which are the representations of either good or evil in a religious setting but are not made to be affiliated with a specific religion.
7. Religious reference-dialogue that is blatantly pertaining to a religious symbol, text, or image.
8. Angels or Demons.
9. God/Jesus or Satan/the Devil.
10. Apocalyptic-end of the world imagery and rhetoric, references to the book of The Revelation in the Bible.

Some characteristics of the described categories may overlap such as the cross which is part of both Christianity and Catholicism. The category that the symbol falls into will be determined by the context in which it is used in the film.

Every occurrence of the operational definitions is noted with the exact time it occurs as well as a brief description of the image, artifact, text, or dialogue being used. The times were retrieved by simply pressing pause on the DVD which provides a timeline for the movie. The information has been entered into a table to make it clean, ordered, and understandable to any viewer. Once all the films were examined and all instances of the operational definitions were entered into a table, the data was analyzed using a Pearson's correlation and Independent Samples T Test.

Validation Strategies

Credibility for this study is achieved through rich, thick description, negative or discrepant information, and clarification of bias. Rich, thick description is achieved through detailed notes on each film and the occurrences of a religious symbol, religious

reference, or both. All negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the hypotheses that this study sought to prove is presented in detail.

Researcher Bias

This researcher has a great appreciation for horror films. However, this researcher has endeavored to maintain an unbiased and professional study.

Towards the Study

The number of research studies on the genre of horror is increasing. These films are often more than just blood and guts, hack and slash, and fear. Many of these films act as commentaries on current social problems, political miscues, and religious ideology. Also, many of these films play on the fear of what may or may not happen in the future of the world. With these prominent themes in mind, this study hopes to examine the chosen films for the use of religious symbolism and religious reference.

Chapter 4

Study

1. What Lies Beneath (2000)

"In this supernatural thriller, a woman believes that a visitor from another dimension is trying to guide her into a sinister mystery. Feeling lonely after her daughter leaves home for college, Claire (Michelle Pfeiffer) begins to sense that something is wrong in her house, and feels a spirit is trying to contact her. At first her husband Norman (Harrison Ford), a scientist doing research in genetics, attributes her paranormal beliefs to stress or possibly a nervous breakdown, and sends her to a psychiatrist (Joe Morton) who puts no more stock in Claire's stories than does Norman. While Claire's contention that someone or something sinister is afoot leads her down a number of blind alleys, in time she becomes convinced that the mysterious happenings at her home are somehow connected to the disappearance of a woman who was a student at the nearby college -- and bore a striking resemblance to Claire.What Lies Beneath marked the debut of screenwriter Clark Gregg, whose script is based on a story by himself and Sarah Kernochan; the supporting cast includes Diana Scarwid as Claire's best friend Jody, and James Remar andMiranda Otto as a contentious couple living next door" (Mark Deming, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	**Symbol/Reference**	**Oper. Definition**
43:50	Ouija board-wife is trying to contact ghosts in her house	3. Witchcraft
44:10	Jody references protective circles for using Ouija board to Claire	7. Religious reference
44:45-46:40	Ouija board session	3. Witchcraft
47:12	Claire calls what they	7. Religious reference

	did a séance	
48:32-49:01	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
51:24-51:35	Claire tells Norman she had a séance	7. Religious reference
55:30	Book titled "Witchcraft, Ghosts, and Alchemy shown	3. Witchcraft
1:07:08	Chapter in book called "Conjuring the Dead" shown	3. Witchcraft
1:08:14	Claire says to Norman "forbidden fruit" as he is holding an apple	7. Religious reference
1:19:12	Claire puts lock of Madison Elizabeth Frank's hair into Witchcraft, Ghosts, and Alchemy book-title is shown	3. Witchcraft
1:23:26	Norman opens and reads Witchcraft book	3. Witchcraft
1:23:37	Picture with caption "A Spirit is Exorcised by Means of the Burning Hand" is shown from the Witchcraft book	5. Exorcism
1:23:42	Norman writes on notepad "Proposed Suggestion Exorcism-By Fire"	5. Exorcism

2. Thir13en Ghosts (2001)

"This haunted house chiller is the second feature from Dark Castle Entertainment, the mid-budget outfit put together in 1999 to remake the cheesy horror genre pictures of William Castle by his daughter, Terry Castle, and producers Gilbert Adler, Robert Zemeckis, and Joel Silver. Financially ravaged and widowed by a fire that is consuming him with guilt, Arthur Kriticos (Tony Shalhoub) is left to raise two kids on his own: beautiful teenager Kathy (Shannon Elizabeth) and grade school student Bobby (Alec

Roberts). Good news suddenly drops into their lives when a lawyer visits and reveals that they have inherited a lavish home from a late uncle, Cyrus (F. Murray Abraham), an eccentric ghost hunter. The Kriticos family moves into the remote house only to discover its odd secret: the dwelling contains a state-of-the-art, elaborate system of moving glass walls that trap spirits inside. Soon the ghosts, which can only be seen through the use of special high-tech spectacles, are loose in the elaborate contraption and are none too thrilled about their predicament. With the exits sealed, the family members try to learn the secret of Uncle Cyrus' bizarre mansion and survive supernatural assaults with the help of sassy housekeeper Maggie (Rah Digga), neurotic psychic Rafkin (Matthew Lillard), and Kalina (Embeth Davidtz), an activist championing the civil rights of ghosts. The eyeglasses through which the spirits can be viewed in Thirteen Ghosts (2001) were part of a ballyhoo gimmick involving pairs of spectacles handed out to audiences for screenings of the 1960 original, which was presented in 'Illusion-O.'" (Karl Williams, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	**Symbol/Reference**	**Oper. Definition**
5:09	Cyrus is told that he will never pull it off without the right spells	7. Religious reference
41:16-41:30	Dennis says "spells" 3 times	7. Religious reference
42:36	Dennis says "barrier spells"	7. Religious reference
46:46	Dennis says "thank you oh Lord Jesus"	7. Religious reference- this was labeled as such because Dennis seems to be using the term "Jesus" as a figure of speech and not a direct reference to Jesus Christ
51:38	Kalina says "barrier spells"	7. Religious reference

52:16	Kalina describes author of Arcanum book “wrote it while he was under demonic possession”	5. Exorcism
52:27	Kalina describes the house “we are in the middle of a machine designed by the Devil and powered by the dead”	9. Satan/the Devil
54:59	Kalina says “we gotta get to the library, its got spell protection all around it”	7. Religious reference
1:03:25	Reference to Occularis Infernum-Eye of Hell	7. Religious reference
1:03:34	Kalina says “in Hell there is an eye that sees everything”	7. Religious reference

3. The Ring (2002)

“A disturbing videotape appears to hold the power of life and death over those who view it in this offbeat thriller. A strange videotape begins making the rounds in a town in the Pacific Northwest; it is full of bizarre and haunting images, and after watching it, many viewers receive a telephone call in which they are warned they will die in seven days. A handful of teenagers who watched the tape while spending a weekend at a cabin in the mountains scoff at the threat, but as predicted, they all die suddenly on the same night. Rachel Keller (Naomi Watts), the aunt of one of the ill-fated teens, is a journalist who has decided to investigate the matter and travels West with her young son, Aidan (David Dorfman), a troubled child who has been drawing pictures of strange and ominous visions. Rachel managed to find the cabin in the woods and watches the video herself; afterward, she receives the same phone call, and realizes she must solve the puzzle of the

video and the person or persons behind it within a week. Rachel turns to her ex, Noah (Martin Henderson), an expert in video technology, who at first is convinced the story is a hoax until he digs deeper into the mystery. The Ring was adapted from a 1996 Japanese film by Hideo Nakata, which became a massive box-office success in Asia and spawned two sequels" (Mark Deming, Rovi).

No religious symbols or references were found within this film.

4. Freddy vs. Jason (2003)

"Rumored and anticipated for years, the two biggest icons of the slasher genre finally meet in Freddy Vs. Jason, the eighth entry in the Nightmare on Elm Street saga and the 11th film in the Friday the 13th series, though with Jason X taking place in the future, it should be noted that the events of this film take place after the ninth film Jason Goes to Hell. And it is hell where Freddy Kreuger (Robert Englund) and Jason Voorhees (Ken Kirzinger, donning the hockey mask for the first time in a controversial snub against series veteran Kane Hodder) finally become acquainted. Banished there for eternity, Freddy devises a plan to manipulate Jason into continuing his work, hacking up the teenagers of Elm Street. All goes well at first until Jason realizes he's been duped by "the dream master" and is none too pleased. Coaxed by surviving teenagers Will (Jason Ritter), Lori (Monica Keena), and Kia (Destiny's Child's Kelly Rowland), Jason and Freddy descend upon Crystal Lake for a mano a mano battle royal. Helmed by Hong Kong director Ronny Yu (Bride of Chucky, The Bride With the White Hair), Freddy Vs. Jason features the director of the firstFriday film, Sean S. Cunningham serving as producer" (Matthew Tobey, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	Symbol/Reference	Oper. Definition
2:36	Freddy says “I had to search the bowels of Hell”	7. Religious reference
17:57	“Grab a crucifix” is part of a song being sung in the background	7. Religious reference
19:37	Live goat with horns shown directly before Freddy appears	2. Satanism

5. The Grudge (2004)

This American remake of director Takashi Shimizu's popular Japanese movie franchise The Grudge puts Buffy the Vampire Slayer alumna Sarah Michelle Gellar back into the line of supernatural fire. When Karen (Gellar), an American student working with a Japanese health center for college credit, comes across a mysterious curse, she quickly finds herself embroiled in a fight for her own sanity, and, ultimately, her very survival. Known as a "grudge," the curse was born inside of a house after its inhabitants died while consumed by rage -- according to legend, the curse touches all who come into contact with it, and will torment those unlucky individuals until they, too, become part of the grudge. Each time the curse finds a new victim, it is, in a sense, reborn, and will continue on its path unless Karen can free herself from its control over her. This version of The Grudge is also directed by Shimizu, and features Jason Behr, Clea DuVall, Kadee Strickland, William Mapother, and Bill Pullman in supporting roles” (Tracie Cooper, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	Symbol/Reference	Oper. Definition
10:09	Karen says “it’s a Buddhist ritual, the smoke carries their prayers to the spirits of their ancestors”	7. Religious reference

6. Saw II (2005)

“Jigsaw, the diabolical criminal who captured the imagination of horror fans in the 2004 hit Saw, returns in this equally bloody sequel. Eric Matthews (Donnie Wahlberg) is a police detective who, after discovering the aftermath of a particularly gruesome murder, is convinced that Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) is up to his ugly tricks again. Matthews' hunch turns out to be correct, but the master criminal proves to be disconcertingly easy to capture. As it happens, Jigsaw is eager to be put behind bars in order to throw the authorities off his trail as he once again punishes people who in his eyes have transgressed the boundaries of acceptable moral behavior. But instead of trapping two people in a filthy dungeon where they must engage in a terrible contest in order to win their freedom, eight people have been locked away by Jigsaw, and they must torture their bodies and minds to achieve the terrible justice Jigsaw seeks. Saw II was written by Leigh Whannell, who also scripted the first film” (Mark Deming, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	**Symbol/Reference**	**Oper. Definition**
35:20	Jigsaw says, “Once you’re in Hell, only the Devil can help you out”	7. Religious reference

7. Saw III (2006)

“Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) is back, and this time he's concocted his deadliest set of traps yet in this gore-soaked sequel written by James Wan and Leigh Whannell, and directed by Saw II's Darren Lynn Bousman. Picking up directly where its predecessor left off, Saw III finds Jigsaw near death and fighting to stay alive for one final game. Determined to show his protégé, Amanda (Shawnee Smith), what it truly means to carry out his deadly game, the ailing Jigsaw instructs his apprentice to kidnap unsuspecting doctor Lynn Denlon (Bahar Soomekh) in order to ensure that

he survives long enough to see how his latest victim Jeff (Angus MacFadyen) fares when faced with the prospect of imminent death. As Lynn and Jeff both struggle to beat the clock and carry out their tasks before Jigsaw draws his final breath, a much larger plan begins to emerge that shows just how cunning the legendary killer can truly be" (Jason Buchanan, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	Symbol/Reference	Oper. Definition
57:43	Jigsaw says, "Now you have the power to sentence his soul straight to Hell"	7. Religious reference

8. Paranormal Activity (2007)

"After a young, middle class couple moves into a suburban 'starter' tract house, they become increasingly disturbed by a presence that may or may not be somehow demonic but is certainly most active in the middle of the night. Especially when they sleep. Or try to" (Paramount Pictures, IMDb).

Time of Occurrence	Symbol/Reference	Oper. Definintion
18:07	Psychic tells Katie, "Religious movements have good and bad entities"	7. Religious reference
18:08	Psychic says to Katie, "In the Christian faith there's angels and there's demons"	7. Religious reference
18:52	Psychic says, "Demon"	7. Religious reference
19:04	Psychic says, "Dealing with demons is not my area"	7. Religious reference
19:40	Psychic gives Katie the number of a colleague, calls him a "demonologist"	7. Religious reference
19:47	Micah asks if they can "pick up a Ouija board to try and communicate with the entity"	7. Religious reference
19:57	Psychic says "Ouija board" and tells them not to because the entity will sense they are	7. Religious reference

	trying to communicate with it	
22:06	Micah says, “Demonologist”	7. Religious reference
27:13	Micah says, “It could be a ghost or it could be a demon”	7. Religious reference
27:25	Micah shown reading a book called, “Devils, Demons, and Witchcraft”	3. Witchcraft
27:37	Micah says, “Demon”	7. Religious reference
27:47	Micah says, “Demons suck, basically they are these malevolent, evil spirits that only exist to cause pain and commit evil”	7. Religious reference
29:03	Katie says, “Demon”	7. Religious reference
33:53	Micah says, “I’m gonna go out and get a Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
34:17	Katie says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
34:24	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
35:37	Micah says, “Your demon is worthless”	7. Religious reference
41:31	Micah says, “Would you be happier to talk with the Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
50:04	Micah says, “Exorcist”	7. Religious reference
50:20	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
50:20	Inverted pentagram shown on Ouija board	2. Satanism
50:56-51:19	Ouija board said 5 times within a piece of dialogue by Katie and Micah	7. Religious reference
53:41	Katie says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
53:52	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
53:52	Inverted pentagram on Ouija board shown	2. Satanism
54:15	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
54:23	Katie says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
57:00	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
57:23	Micah shown playing with Ouija board	3. Witchcraft
57:54	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
58:30	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
58:30	Inverted pentagram on Ouija board shown	2. Satanism
58:46	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
58:46	Inverted pentagram on Ouija	2. Satanism

	board shown	
58:56	Ouija board shown	3. Witchcraft
58:56	Inverted pentagram on Ouija board shown	2. Satanism
59:45	Katie says, “Demonologist”	7. Religious reference
1:00:52	Micah, “What do you wanna do call the demon guy”	7. Religious reference
1:08:27	Katie says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
1:20:06	Katie says, “You have to find somebody, a psychic or a exorcist”	7. Religious reference
1:20:52	The word “Exorcism” shown on computer screen	5. Exorcism
1:20:54	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
1:21:13	Micah says, “She called an exorcist”	7. Religious reference
1:21:35	Micah says, “Ouija board”	7. Religious reference
1:21:54	Micah says, “This was smuggled out by one of the priests involved in the exorcism”	7. Religious reference
1:22:05	Micah says, “Exorcisms”	7. Religious reference
1:22:10	Micah says, “Exorcist”	7. Religious reference
1:27:39-1:27:47	Katie shown squeezing a cross in her left hand	1. Christianity
1:28:55	Micah burns the cross by putting it in the fireplace	1. Christianity

9. Saw V (2008)

“Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) might be dead, but his traps live on in this fifth Saw entry, which finds the series' production designer David Hackl at the helm for his debut directing gig. Costas Mandylor reprises his role as Hoffman, the detective whose involvement in the string of grisly murders turns out to be more than meets the eye. Picking up where the fourth entry left off, Hoffman is revealed to be a hidden accomplice in Jigsaw's grisly games of death, which look to be continued by the lawman. The plot bounces back and forth from the beginning of their relationship to the present, as Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson) delves farther into the case. Also in the cast are Dexter's Julie Benz and One Missed Call's Meagan Good as victims of another one

of Jigsaw's lessons in morality. Saw IV scribes Patrick Meltonand Marcus Dunstan return to pen the screenplay for the Twisted Pictures/Lionsgate co-production" (Jeremy Wheeler, Rovi).

No religious symbols or references were found within this film.

10. Zombieland (2009)

"A cowardly shut-in named Columbus (Jesse Eisenberg) is forced to join up with a seasoned zombie slayer named Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson) in order to survive the zombie apocalypse. As Tallahassee sets out on a mission to find the last Twinkie on Earth, the duo meets up with Wichita (Emma Stone) and Little Rock (Abigail Breslin), two young girls who have resorted to some rather unorthodox methods to survive amidst the chaos. Reluctant partners in the battle against the undead, all four soon begin to wonder if it might be better to simply take their chances alone" (Jason Buchanan, Rovi).

Time of Occurrence	Symbol/Reference	Oper. Definition
41:54	White cross on brick building	4. Catholicism
41:56	Sister Cynthia Knickerbacker is referenced as having the zombie kill of the week	7. Religious reference

Analysis of Film Data

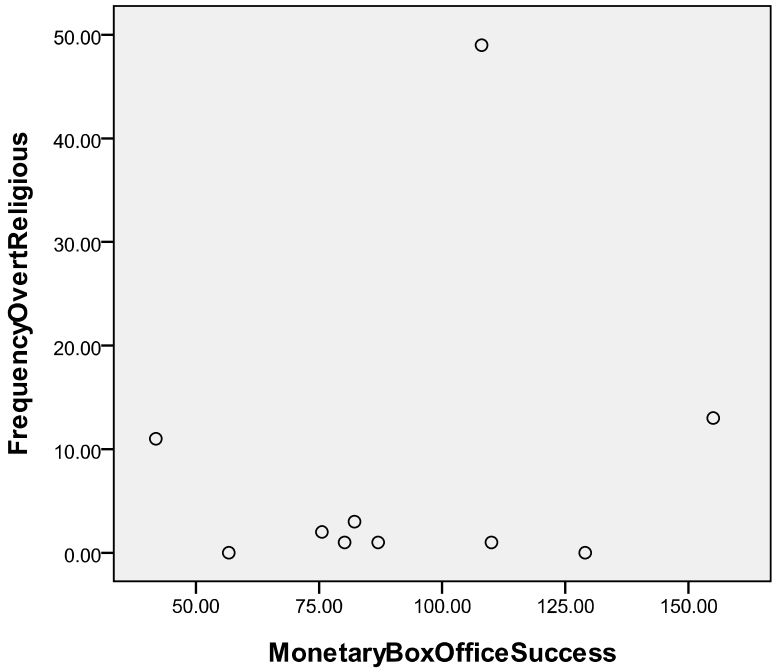
H1 states that there will be a positive relationship between overt religious content and box office success. A Pearson's Correlation test was utilized to see if box office values and the amount of overt religious content are correlated. According to the test, the significance level is .567 which means there is not a significant relationship between the two. To be significant, the significance level would have to be .05 or below.

Correlations

		MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	FrequencyOvertReligious
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Pearson Correlation	1	.207

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.567
	N	10	10
FrequencyOvertReligious	Pearson Correlation	.207	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.567	
	N	10	10

The scatterplot of the Pearson correlation also shows the non-significant relationship. If religious content and box office success were correlated, a straight line from (0,0) should be able to be drawn using the dots on the scatterplot.

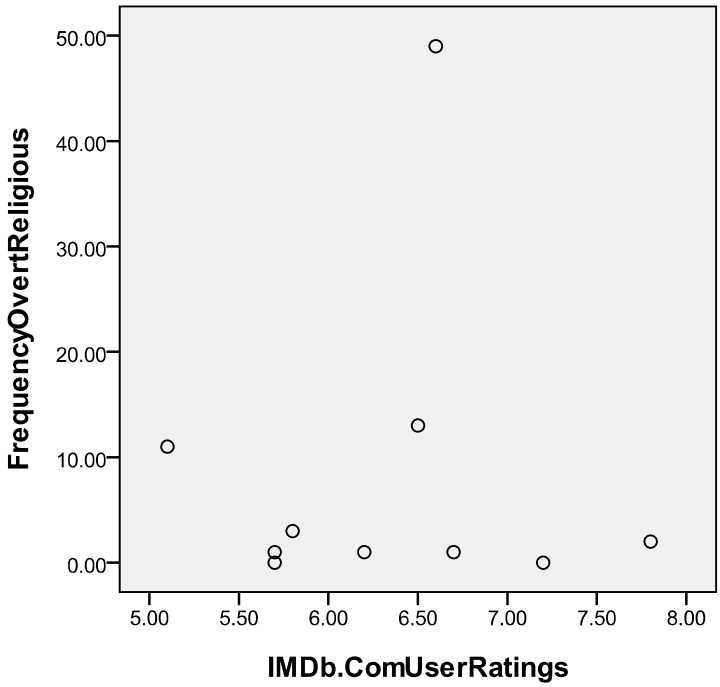


H2 states that there will be a positive relationship between overt religious content and IMDb.com user ratings. A Pearson's Correlation test was utilized to see if IMDb.com user ratings and overt religious content are correlated. According to the test, the significance level is .942 which means there is not a significant relationship between the two.

Correlations

		FrequencyOvert Religious	IMDb.ComUser Ratings
FrequencyOvertReligious	Pearson Correlation	1	.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.942
	N	10	10
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Pearson Correlation	.026	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.942	
	N	10	10

The scatterplot of the Pearson's Correlation also shows the non-significant relationship. If religious content and IMDb.com user ratings were correlated, a straight line from (0,0) should be able to be drawn using the dots on the scatterplot.



To further analyze H1, Independent-Samples T Tests were utilized to examine correlation between the existence of the ten operational definitions of religious content and box office

success. This test will show if the presence of a particular religious content is associated with higher box office numbers. The same procedure is done for H2. For H2, the test shows if the presence of a particular religious content is associated with higher user ratings.

Is there a significant difference between Christianity existing in the films and the amount of money the movies make? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .657.

Group Statistics

	ChristianityType1	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	1	108.0000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	90.8444	35.24082	11.74694

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	.	.	.462	8	.657	17.15556	37.14708	-68.50577	102.81689
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	17.15556	.	.	.

Is there a significant difference between Christianity existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .744.

Group Statistics

	ChristianityType1	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	1	6.6000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	6.3000	.84261	.28087

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.	.	.338	8	.744	.30000	.88819	-1.74818	2.34818
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	.30000	.	.	.

Is there a significant difference between Satanism existing in the films and the amount of money the movies make? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .913.

Group Statistics

	SatanismType2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	2	95.1000	18.24335	12.90000
	Does Not Exist	8	91.9250	37.51429	13.26331

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

									Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	1.240	.298	.113	8	.913	3.17500	28.20693	-61.87030	68.22030
	Equal variances not assumed			.172	3.649	.873	3.17500	18.50203	-50.20243	56.55243

Is there a significant difference between Satanism existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant difference as the significance level is .814.

Group Statistics

	SatanismType2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	2	6.2000	.56569	.40000
	Does Not Exist	8	6.3625	.87821	.31049

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.654	.442	-.243	8	.814	-.16250	.66841	-1.70387	1.37887
	Equal variances not assumed			-.321	2.442	.774	-.16250	.50637	-2.00399	1.67899

Is there a significant difference between Witchcraft existing in the films and the amount of money the movies make? The test shows that there is not a significant difference as the significance level is .061.

Group Statistics

	WitchcraftType3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	2	131.5000	33.23402	23.50000
	Does Not Exist	8	82.8250	27.52893	9.73295

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	.094	.766	2.175	8	.061	48.67500	22.37709	-2.92665	100.27665
	Equal variances not assumed			1.914	1.367	.251	48.67500	25.43581	-127.11081	224.46081

Is there a significant difference between Witchcraft existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .690.

Group Statistics

	WitchcraftType3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	2	6.5500	.07071	.05000
	Does Not Exist	8	6.2750	.89722	.31721

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	3.811	.087	.414	8	.690	.27500	.66380	-1.25572	1.80572
	Equal variances not assumed			.856	7.321	.419	.27500	.32113	-.47767	1.02767

Is there a significant difference between Catholicism existing in the films and the amount of money the movies make? The test shows there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .625.

Group Statistics

	CatholocismType4	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	1	75.6000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	94.4444	35.14364	11.71455

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	.	.	-.509	8	.625	-18.84444	37.04465	-104.26955	66.58066
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	-18.84444	.	.	.

Is there a significant difference between Catholicism existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is a significant relationship as the significance level is .044.

Group Statistics

	CatholocismType4	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	1	7.8000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	6.1667	.64807	.21602

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.	.	2.391	8	.044	1.63333	.68313	.05803	3.20863
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	1.63333	.	.	.

Is there a significant difference between Exorcism existing in the films and the amount of money the movies made? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .607.

Group Statistics

	ExcorcismType5	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	3	101.6333	56.81816	32.80398
	Does Not Exist	7	88.6714	23.77244	8.98514

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	2.839	.130	.535	8	.607	12.96190	24.21061	-42.86786	68.79167
	Equal variances not assumed			.381	2.307	.735	12.96190	34.01226	-116.21448	142.13828

Is there a significant difference between Exorcism existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .528.

Group Statistics

	ExcorcismType5	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	3	6.0667	.83865	.48419
	Does Not Exist	7	6.4429	.82231	.31080

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.018	.896	-.660	8	.528	-.37619	.57029	-1.69127	.93889

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.018	.896	-.660	8	.528	-.37619	.57029	-1.69127	.93889
	Equal variances not assumed			-.654	3.774	.551	-.37619	.57536	-2.01208	1.25970

Is there a significant difference between Religious Reference existing in the films and the amount of money the movies made? The test shows there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .990.

Group Statistics

	ReligiousDialogueType7	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	8	92.4875	32.92057	11.63918
	Does Not Exist	2	92.8500	51.12382	36.15000

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	.637	.448	-.013	8	.990	-.36250	28.22897	-65.45861	64.73361
	Equal variances not assumed			-.010	1.216	.994	-.36250	37.97753	-320.74065	320.01565

Is there a significant difference between Religious Reference in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .828.

Group Statistics

	ReligiousDialogueType7	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	8	6.3000	.81064	.28661
	Does Not Exist	2	6.4500	1.06066	.75000

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.167	.693	-.224	8	.828	-.15000	.66878	-1.69221	1.39221
	Equal variances not assumed			-.187	1.309	.877	-.15000	.80290	-6.09966	5.79966

Is there a significant difference between God/Jesus/Satan/the Devil existing in the films and the amount of money the movies made? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .116.

Group Statistics

	SpecificSpiritualBeingsType9	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Exists	1	41.9000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	98.1889	30.30802	10.10267

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MonetaryBoxOfficeSuccess	Equal variances assumed	.	.	-1.762	8	.116	-56.28889	31.94746	-129.95986	17.38208
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	-56.28889	.	.	.

Is there a significant difference between God/Jesus/Satan/the Devil existing in the films and IMDb.com user ratings? The test shows that there is not a significant relationship as the significance level is .107.

Group Statistics

	SpecificSpiritualBeingsType9	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Exists	1	5.1000	.	.
	Does Not Exist	9	6.4667	.71414	.23805

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
IMDb.ComUserRatings	Equal variances assumed	.	.	-1.816	8	.107	-1.36667	.75277	-3.10256	.36923
	Equal variances not assumed			.	.	.	-1.36667	.	.	.

The Independent Samples T Tests were not performed on operational definition 6. Good and Evil, 8. Angels and Demons, and 10. Apocalyptic because there were no occurrences of them found in the films.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Both user ratings and box office gross showed no correlation with religious content in the Pearson correlation test. However, several factors should be taken into consideration. First, as a professor once said during a class lecture that this researcher was a part of, “No one knows exactly what sells in Hollywood.” The films in this study that were the highest grossing for their respective years are a very eclectic and varied group of films. *What Lies Beneath* is a suspense, thriller horror film. *Thir13en Ghosts* was a remake of a 1960’s film by the same name. *The Ring* and *The Grudge* were remakes of very popular Japanese films, and both had unique storylines. *Freddy vs. Jason* was a twist on two highly successful American franchises featuring the main characters from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th*. *Saw II*, *Saw III*, and *Saw V* were part of a unique and original series of films that pushed the limits of gore and torture in film. *Paranormal Activity* was a film that was set up as if it were real footage of an actual event. *Zombieland* was a unique spin on the typical zombie movie as the main characters were giving a guide to survival of a zombie apocalypse in a humorous, almost tongue-in-cheek, fashion. These films taken together do not seem to have any consistency between them. Of the four top grossing films in this study, *What Lies Beneath*, *The Ring*, *The Grudge*, and *Paranormal Activity*, *The Ring* and *The Grudge* had only one piece of religious content between them while *Paranormal Activity* had the most religious content of any of the ten films. This would seem to give credence to the statement that no one can pinpoint what will sell in Hollywood.

Second, the IMDb.com user ratings also seem to give credence to the point that no one knows what sells, or what will be liked, in Hollywood. The highest rated film was *Zombieland* ($75.6 million) with a 7.8 rating. The second highest was *The Ring* ($129 million) with a 7.2

rating. The two films are very different and could not be further apart. The point is that user rating is not necessarily indicative of box office gross. The average rating of these ten films is 6.33 which is not a particularly good average based on a 10-point scale. Even though horror films are quite popular, one could argue that the genre is still enjoyed by a significant minority of filmgoers.

Third, the Independent Samples T Tests showed that some of the operational definitions would be correlated with either box office gross or IMDb.com user ratings if the tests were viewed as a single-tailed test. For example, Witchcraft showed a .061 significance with box office gross. If the question were rearranged to ask "Does the presence of witchcraft make significantly more money in horror films than the non-existence of withcraft," the test would then become one-tailed because only a positive relationship would be looked for. This would cut the significance level in half to .0305, which would make witchcraft and monetary success significantly related. This would also be the case for God/Jesus/Satan/the Devil and IMDb.com user ratings. The significance level of .107 would be cut in half to .0535. Also, God/Jesus/Satan/the Devil would be close to being significant with monetary success. The significance level of .116 would be cut in half to .058. However, God/Jesus/Satan/the Devil only appeared in one film, *Thir13en Ghosts*, so the sample size simply is not large enough for a definitive statement to be made about this significance.

Only one operational definition showed a two-tailed correlation. Catholicism had a significance level of .044 with IMDb.com user ratings. Again, only one film, *Zombieland*, showed Catholicism as existing within the film. The small sample size makes this correlation questionable at best.

Another interesting observation about these films is that eight of the ten films had evil conquering or equal to good. Only *Thir13en Ghosts* (2001) and *Zombieland* (2009) had the protagonist overcoming evil. This seems to be a popular theme in Hollywood recently, but whether this trend has any kind of nefarious religious purpose is unknown. Perhaps it simply is a way to give the audience something different. In *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003) and the *Saw* series, the audience is actually rooting for the protagonists who are evil. In *Freddy vs. Jason*, the point is to see which evil character from the 90's slasher franchises will defeat the other. In the *Saw* series, it seems that the point is to see if Jigsaw can continue to evade and outsmart the authorities. The *Saw* films even make a point to say that Jigsaw is performing a noble act by torturing his victims because he is providing the victims with an opportunity to defeat their demons and see that life is precious and should not be wasted. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in Hollywood or if audiences will react more favorably to a traditional film where good overcomes evil.

Critics of the genre have said over the years that horror films promote Satanism and witchcraft. However, according to this study, this is simply not true for these ten films. No correlation was found between aspects of any religion and box office gross/IMDb user ratings. These ten films were seen the most by the paying public, and none had a very good user rating. The highest rated film, *Zombieland* (2009), had only two instances of religious content, and the highest grossing, *What Lies Beneath* (2000), had only thirteen. The vast majority of religious content found in these ten films was dialogue. While no definitive statement can be made regarding the entire genre and the promotion of Satanism and witchcraft, it is the opinion of this researcher that this assertion by critics is a myth. Perhaps the assertion stems from the extreme violence and gore that is associated with the horror genre. The violence and gore cannot be

dismissed, but to associate it with promoting Satanism and witchcraft seems to be unfounded and presumptuous.

Limitations

This study examined only ten films chosen because they were the top grossing for each year from 2000 to 2009. In retrospect, this sample size is simply too small to come to any definitive or appropriate conclusions. The scope of this study is limited in and of itself. Since no one can pinpoint what sells in Hollywood, using the highest grossing yearly films of only a ten year period provided films that varied wildly in content and story.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, one could examine the top grossing horror films for each year over the past twenty or thirty years to expand the sample size and try to come to a more definitive conclusion about the relationship between box office gross/user ratings and religious content. Also, this researcher firmly believes that if the top ten or twenty grossing horror films were examined within an individual year, correlation would be found between box office gross/user ratings and religious content. Finally, the genre of horror has many subgenres; perhaps using the methods of this study to examine one or more subgenres would show correlation between box office gross/user ratings and religious content.

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