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1. Introduction

Similar to pornography, horror has often been considered a deviant subject; nevertheless, it has always been a matter of discussion among scholars from various disciplines. Mostly, scholars' interest concerning the horror genre and its origins in the Gothic focuses on horror in literature or cinema and therefore, horror's importance in television, especially in serialized form, has been rarely acknowledged until lately.

Recently, however, the close investigation of television series has been receiving increasing attention, also regarding the horror genre. This development may correlate with the release of a broad variety of horror related shows in the last decade, including *Bates Motel* (2013-2017), *Black Mirror* (2011-present), *Hemlock Grove* (2013-2015), *Stranger Things* (2016-present), or *The Walking Dead* (2010-present). Among the researched horror series, *American Horror Story* (*AHS*) has been subject to various analyses (Geller & Banker 2017; Keetley 2013; King 2017; Sevenich 2015; Subramanian 2013; Trapero Llobera 2015; Yaeri 2014). So far, numerous aspects concerning *AHS* have been examined, including temporality and repetition (Geller & Banker; Yaeri), gender and race (King), queer theory (Sevenich), sexuality and madness (Earle), monstrosity concerning the female body (Subramanian) and postmodernity (Trapero Llobera). Additionally, Keetley has disclosed that the twin characters in season one may convey two meanings: on the one hand, the twins can be understood as representing metaphorical symbols concerning the repetition of the same; on the other, they may be interpreted to represent a link to women's fear concerning fertility prolonging methods, as these procedures commonly have a high probability of twin-pregnancy.

Despite the broad variety of topics in these studies, sexuality seems to be a somewhat ignored issue except for Earle (2017), who investigates the correlation between sexuality and madness. However, her research focuses almost exclusively on the second season *AHS: Asylum* (2012). Considering the fact that horror "[...] often deal[s] with fantasies of brutality, sexuality, victimization, [and] repression [...]" (Kawin 241) and that all *AHS* seasons contain a lot of graphic sexuality, it appears surprising that this aspect has been mostly neglected so far. As the first season of *AHS: Murder House* (2011) displays sexuality in ways which can be linked to horror as well as to power, I intend to add to the existing literature and fill this research gap.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which sexuality is instrumentalized in *AHS: Murder House* to negotiate power relations between the characters as well as to produce fear on-screen and off-screen. As I will show, sexuality can be used to revert the power between two or more characters and thereby create fear in the characters as well as in the audience. Additionally, I will base my argument on Freud and Kristeva to show that certain aspects of sexuality itself can be terrifying.

In the following analysis of *AHS: Murder House*, I will draw on a psychoanalytical approach to analyze the ways in which sexuality is instrumentalized in the series to exert power and to produce a feeling of fear, which may be divided into the two aspects of terror and horror. The reason why I chose psychoanalysis as an approach to analyze sexuality in horror is that this field of study seeks to explain the ways in which humans behave and form (sexual) desire (Benshoff, *Film and TV* 106). To support my argument, I will also draw on film semiotics in my analysis to elaborate on the series' aesthetics such as auditory and visual features. As far as the technical terms are concerned, I will rely on Wolf Liebelt's *The Language of Film*, in which he illustrates the field sizes, point of view, camera angles, montage, punctuation, as well as miscellaneous analysis tools regarding film. Since television analysis usually consists of a written product only, which lacks sound and images in contrast to the program analyzed, it should always be understood as an interpretation of the primary text, the program itself. Despite this limitation of television analysis, it has the potential to offer what the primary text cannot do: it can reveal structures (i.e. ambiguities, emotions) which may be invisible or unconscious to the viewer while watching (Hickethier 27-28). Thus, including an analysis of sound and camera work will help to strengthen my argument concerning the exertion of power and production of horror through sexuality in *AHS: Murder House*.

As far as the distinction between the terms terror and horror are concerned, many scholars list the terms individually to point out their difference in meaning (Gaut 1; Lloyd-Smith 8; Russell 235; Schmidt 161): while terror denotes the thrill which precedes a frightening situation, horror is the experienced repulsion after a terrifying event (Lloyd-Smith 8). Others, however, use the terms synonymously (Grant 4). Muir, for example, (1) sees terror as "an adrenaline rush, heightened emotions, suspense and heart-pounding horror" and thereby renders terror as a component of horror. Since the instances of terror and horror in *Murder House* appear to be closely intertwined, I will not distinguish between the two aspects of fear unless necessary. Additionally, I would

like to remark that in case of making a distinction between terror and horror, I will rely on Muir's definition and treat terror as an aspect of horror. To clarify, I am excluding any connotations associated with the Nazi-regime, due to the fact that terror has been associated right-wing extremism and not only fear since then. Therefore, I will also use the words fear or anxiety as synonyms for horror.

In the first section, I will discuss how horror evolved as a proper genre by providing a brief historical overview. In the following, I will argue that, despite horror's historical origins in books and its only recent adaption for television, television series have the biggest potential to fulfil the purpose of the horror genre (scaring its audience, arousing emotions) in contrast to any other medium, as the individual episodes are typically closed with a cliff hanger, which attracts the viewers' interest to continue the series (Schmidt 166). Additionally, seriality facilitates an emotional connection between the characters and the audience, also because it is consumed in a private space in which the haunting of an episode may continue (especially through online-streaming services such as *Netflix*). Therefore, (serialized) horror television may have a greater impact on the viewers' emotions than consuming a movie at the cinema only. In 3., I will present a psychoanalytical approach to sexuality in connection with power and fear, on which I will base my analysis in 4. In this context, I would like to remark that despite the suggested separation of the terms sexuality and reproduction, which may not entail each other (Bristow 7; Dumas 24; Williamson 217), I will regard procreation as one of the dimensions of sexuality and consider unproductive sexuality as a matter of pleasure. In 3.1., I will first examine movie ratings, comparing sexuality and violence in terms of censorship, so as to show that sexuality and the horror genre are closely connected. Second, I will explain the formation of one's sexual identity by comparing Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva's theories regarding a child's psychosexual development and how this relates to desire and power. As I will show by drawing on Foucault, sexuality forms part of a continuous power discourse, which can also be reversed as it is the case in *Murder House*. Through this reversal, the power is shifted between the characters, and therefore, this incidence evokes feelings of fear on-screen (characters) and off-screen (audience).

Subsequently in 3.2., I will draw attention to the emotion of fear and investigate the "paradox of horror" (Carroll), which attracts viewers to consume horror shows even though "[...] being horrified is so unpleasant" (Carroll 8). This will provide a basis for

the understanding of how *AHS* does not only represent terror in the series' characters, but also for the audience. Closely connected, I will discuss Kristeva's idea of the "abject", which denotes disgust with materials which "[...] [disturb] identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior [...]" (4). In the horror genre, this repulsion is essential for the evocation of horror. Additionally, abjection in terms of a woman's reproductive function can be read as a power discourse. Thus, I will use abjection as a further concept for my analysis in addition to Foucault's "reverse discourse". As I will show, there are various representations of abjection, which, on the one hand symbolize personal horrors embodied by the characters, and on the other hand, evoke fear in the audience. Apart from regarding abjection as a horrifying and power transmitting element in *Murder House*, I will demonstrate that there is also a variety of reverse discourses in the series, which establish a negotiation of power and thereby also create horror.

For readers unfamiliar with the *AHS* series, I will provide a brief outline of the content in the following. *AHS* is an American anthology television series created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk and has been airing on FX since 2011. So far, eight seasons (*Murder House*, *Asylum*, *Coven*, *Freak Show*, *Hotel*, *Roanoke*, *Cult*, *Apocalypse*) have been released, which have been among the most popular television shows for adults, which is also supported by the numbers of viewers peaking at 5.8 million for season 5 (*Tv by the Numbers*).

The season I will be analyzing, *Murder House*, follows the Harmon family, consisting of Ben, Vivien and their daughter Violet, who moves from Boston to Los Angeles into the Murder House, "a classic L.A. Victorian built around 1920 by the doctor to the stars at the time" (*AHS*, S01E01), to start a new life after Vivien's miscarriage and Ben's affair with his student Haydon. They are hoping for a bright future together, but are soon haunted by the house's previous inhabitants. As a psychiatrist, Ben decides to see his patients at home so he "[...] can spend more time with the family" (*AHS*, S01E01) and treats a seemingly psychopathic teenager called Tate, who grows fond of Violet. At that time, Ben is not aware that Tate is a ghost of the Harmons' neighbor's, Constance Langdon's, child. Soon, the Harmons learn about the past of their house,

in which several couples have been suffering violent deaths and continue living as revengeful ghosts in the house, until the Harmons themselves experience death.

Even though the importance of sexuality in *Murder House* may not yet be apparent, I will show that everyone and everything within the series is connected to sexuality. In order to understand my argument better, the following illustration will provide an overview of the general connections between the characters, but also indicate their sexual relations. As the relationships are almost exclusively based on sexuality, I will refer to the illustration as a 'sexogram'. Regarding the completeness of the sexogram, I have decided to only include those *Murder House* characters most vital to my analysis and illustrated their relationships in the following way. The ring symbolizes married couples and the overlapping sex symbols indicate sexual intercourse. While the majority of characters engages in sexual activities with other *Murder House* inhabitants, Patrick's extramarital relationships are represented with several signs, to imply that he repetitiously commits adultery with characters, who do not form part of the series' cast.

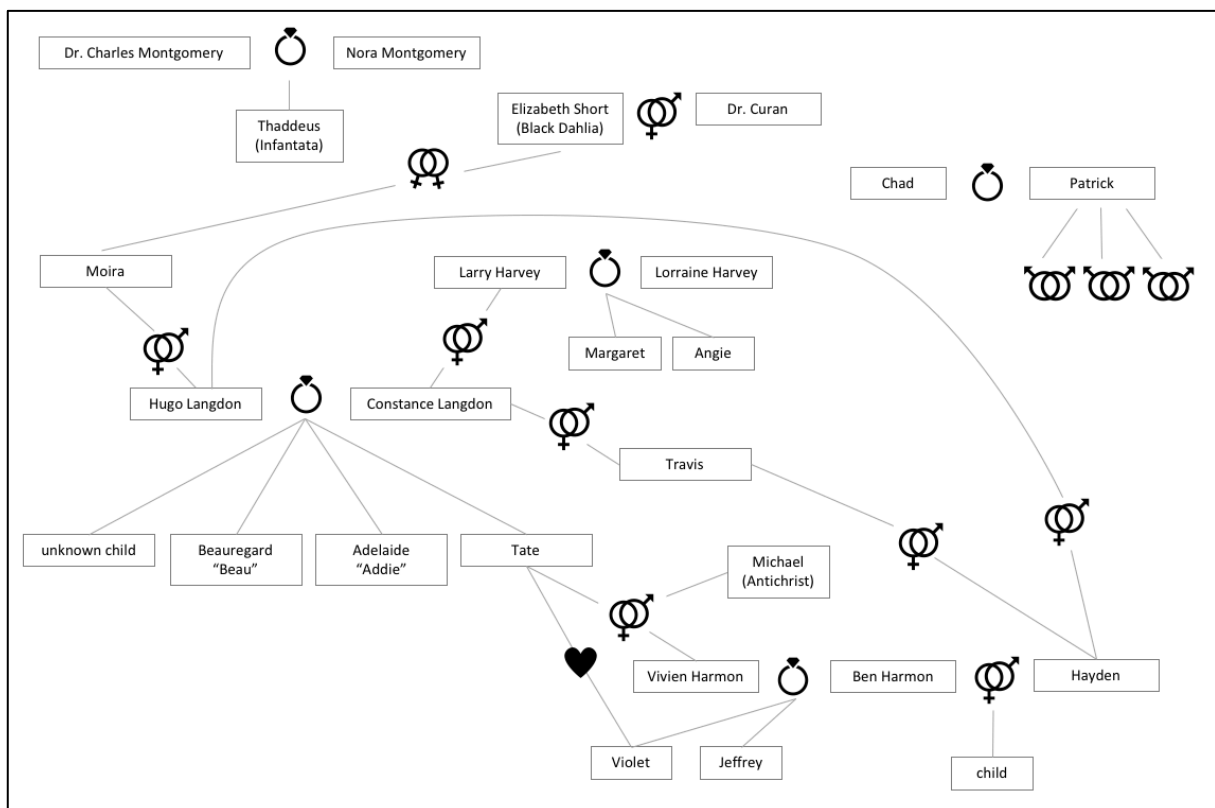


Figure 1 Sexogram

As far as the spelling convention of the word "Murder House" is concerned, I would like to remark that I refer to the *AHS* series when writing the name in italics (*Murder House*), while I will use Murder House when regarding the house in the series itself.

2. A history of horrors

2.1 From paper to screen

One of the first forms of horror, long preceding cinema and television, is 18th century Gothic literature, “[...] with roots in folklore, mythodology, classical tragedy, [...] the gothic novel, and the work of Romantics from Colerdige and Mary Shelley to Poe” (Kawin 242). When considering that Greek mythology contains a lot of what one would nowadays call ‘monstrous creatures’ like the Minotaur, which is a hybrid of human (man) and animal (bull) (Benshoff, *Companion* 208), it may be suggested that certain elements of horror have been present for much longer than the last few centuries. In the Age of Enlightenment, science and logic dominated the way of thinking, banishing superstition (Benshoff, *Companion* 209). However, the following period of Romanticism and particularly Gothicism are considered a counter-movement reaction to the Enlightenment, where Gothic literature was inspired by the Gothic architectural style, which included elements of the supernatural and uncanny (Benshoff, *Companion* 210).

According to Spooner and McEvoy, Gothic novels typically display “[...] dominant tropes such as imperiled heroines, dastardly villains, ineffectual heroes, supernatural events, dilapidated buildings and atmospheric weather” (1). Nevertheless, the Gothic genre is much more complex and can be subdivided into various categories. In his work *The Gothic Quest* (1938), Montague Summers (qtd. in Carroll 4) suggests a four-fold categorical scheme which should be adhered to classify Gothic writings under the following: “the historical gothic, the natural or explained gothic, the supernatural gothic and the equivocal gothic”. As Carroll (4) explains, the historical gothic does not feature supernatural events in contrast to the natural or explained gothic, which in fact contains supernatural elements, but those are demystified such as in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe). In the equivocal gothic, supernatural phenomena are represented ambiguously through mentally disturbed personae. Nowadays, the explained gothic and the equivocal gothic are often classified as fantastic or uncanny by literary theorists. Despite the existing supernatural elements in the categories mentioned, the supernatural gothic seems to have been the most significant for the evolution of the horror genre (Carroll 4).

Given that there was a great variety in Gothic publications in the 18th century, the identification of 'the original' book which marked the beginning of the Gothic novel is complicated. Still, the *The Castle of Otranto*, written by the English Horace Walpole, is commonly considered "the first 'Gothic' novel" (Miles 11) and therefore, it has been identified as the most influential source of Gothic writing for horror's evolvement (Carroll 4), which started to receive increasing attention as a proper genre in the early 19th century (Fisher 177). Further important works of the period in which the horror genre emerged are *The Monk* (Lewis), *Frankenstein* (Shelley), and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe). During the mid 19th century, the fascination for horror in the English-speaking world was substituted for the realist novel, while publishers like *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* sought to keep the Gothic alive by encouraging writers to publish short fictions (Carroll 5). In the United States, Edgar Allen Poe followed this short story style promoted by *Blackwood*. Nowadays, he is still considered a key author for horror as he influenced the most significant horror writers such as H. P. Lovecraft (Carroll 215).

As Jancovich (7) points out, it is problematic to identify 'original' horror films, as many movies were only respectively classified as horror films, while others were already originally produced as such. Still, the beginnings of the adaptations of horror literature to the screen can be historically allocated to Post-World War I, in which the "horror genre also found a new home in the nascent art of the cinema" (Carroll 6). Frequently, Gothic novel classics such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson) and *Dracula* (Stoker) were adapted for theater and cinema (Carroll 6), which is why the horror film has always maintained a close relationship with horror literature (2). Until the horror genre's prosperity starting in the mid 1970s, especially due to the upcoming of home television, horror cinema was gaining increasing attention.

From the 1940s onwards, there was a notable shift in the location in which the horror took place: "[T]he horror no longer takes place in some exotic never-never land but erupts within the normal and everyday" (Jancovich 3). Especially Val Lewton films at RKO were criticized for approaching and threatening the home through this newly established connection with horror (Jancovich 3). In the 1950s, aliens emerged as a new form of monsters from outer space in the American cinema in films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) or *The Thing from Another World* (1951) (Jancovich 4). Apart from "'replacing' humans with alien copies" (Jancovich 4), it was also common to include scientific alterations of animals as results of experiments or nuclear

radiation. As far as the classification of the films from this period is concerned, there has been disagreement among scholars whether to assign them to science-fiction or horror (Jancovich 4). Indeed, as Kawin (242) notes, “in literary terms it is fairly easy to conceptualize the difference between horror and science fiction [...]. In film, however, the lines have proved much harder to draw, and this may have something to do with the role of the BEM, or bug-eyed monster, in the pulp science fiction magazines of the thirties and forties”. However, soon the producers’ attention was drawn to teenage audiences and Gothic elements were gradually reinforced in the genre again. Generally, the films of this period were low-budget color film productions set in a melodramatic fantasy world, moving away from the home (Jancovich 4). Often, the film plots included alien invasions in which a teenager would be abducted or transformed into a monster by a mad scientist such as in *I was a Teenage Werewolf* so as to address the teenage audience directly. Yet, by the end of the decade, there was a shift from supernatural elements to an increased reinforcement of Gothic elements. The director Roger Corman, for example, based his first movie cycle on Edgar Allen Poe’s literary works including *The Fall of the House of Usher* (film: *House of Usher*), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (film of the same name) and *The Raven* (film of the same name).

In the following decade of the 1960s, horror also gained increasing attention in Europe, where directors such as Mario Bava (Italy) and Jess Franco (Spain) launched their own series of horror productions (Jancovich 4). In the US, the originally British Alfred Hitchcock, who had moved to America in 1939 and had attained American citizenship in 1955, released his low-budget film *Psycho* (1960). This film should transform the horror genre considerably according to Wood (qtd. in Jancovich 4), locating the horror film in American society, which is also the case for *AHS* as I will show. More importantly, *Psycho* marked the beginning of family horror films, and soon, Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* followed this new trend, which concerned the whole family instead of teenagers only.

Despite the successes mentioned, horror had its period of prosperity in the 1970s and especially 1980s, with slasher films dominating the scene. Even though slasher films did not count towards top ticket sales in the box offices, they clearly left a mark on following parodies or remakes, introducing “[...] graphic violence and explicit gore, which was made possible by new developments in prosthetic make-up and mechanical special effects” (Kendrick 310). This new element of explicit mutilation on screen such

as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *Halloween*, which are often considered as marking the kick-off for slasher films (Gelder 274; Kendrick 323), appeared particularly attractive to younger audiences, who were thought to be “looking for a rebellious cinematic thrill” and were lured into the cinemas (Kendrick 310). Other notable films of that genre are *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and, several years later, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) as well as *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997).

In an article in *The Washington Post*, C. Williams (qtd. in Kendrick 311) depicted 1980 as having released “the biggest glut of nightmare movies in film history”, but only one year later, the releases (93 films) surpassed the 1980’s productions by 23 films (Prince 298). In the following five years, the production rate of horror films decreased again until their recovery in 1968-87, when the releases rocketed from 52 in 1985 to 89 in 1986, and reaching a peak of 105 films a year later (Prince 298). Despite the horror genre’s success, big film companies belonging to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) (“Paramount, Universal, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros, MGM/UA, Columbia/Tri-Star, Orion, and Disney” (Prince qtd. in Kendrick 311)) stayed out of the business and invested neither in the production of horror films nor their distribution. Acknowledging that the 5th season *Hotel* of *AHS* achieved 5.8 million viewers (*Tv by the Numbers*), horror’s still continuing popularity needs to be recognized.

Despite firing horror fans’ enthusiasm for this genre (Gelder 274), slasher films received heavy criticism for the humiliating depiction of female characters, who were more commonly the victims of mindless slaughter and dissection in contrast to their male counterparts (Gelder 274; Jancovich 5; Newman 135). Mostly, the 1980s slasher films were marked by mutilations of predominantly attractive teenage girls (Dika qtd. in Kendrick 320), which is why the slasher subgenre is closely connected to body horror in which, in contrast to the slasher film, “[...] the monstrous threat is not simply external but erupts from within the human body, and so challenges the distinction between self and other, inside and outside” (Jancovich 6). Indeed, “[u]nlike classical horror films, which tell and imply but show very little of destruction wrought upon the human body, the postmodern horror film is obsessed with the wet death, intent on imaging the mutilation and destruction of the body” (Pinedo 51). In *AHS: Murder House*, however, death induced through sexuality is significantly more common than murder through maiming, as I will show.

2.2 Horror's homecoming

Apart from the horror genre's boom hitting the ticket offices, horror was also consumed at home. In fact, by the early 1990s, the "domestic filmed entertainment revenues" from basic cable television (\$11,080 million) far surpassed those from movie box offices (\$4,803 million) (Wasko 3). Despite starting with black and white horror shows such as *Alcoa Presents: One Step Beyond* or *The Twilight Zone* in the late 1950s until mid 1960s, the 'real' starting point of modern horror television is commonly ascribed to the 1970s (Muir 1). More specifically, Rod Serling's *Night Gallery*, which was the first color production and put more emphasis on horror than on science fiction in contrast to the previous series, is considered as the beginning of horror television (Muir 1). In addition to the shift to more gruesome and violent contents, which was facilitated through the upcoming of special effects and make-up in Hollywood at that time, horror television received an even darker nuance, as many shows aired at night. Thus, horror's philosophical darkness was replenished with its literal sense, scaring its audiences in their most private space (Muir 1-2).

In the 1980s, the sudden intrusion of the home became even more prominent with "[...] the emergence of two key delivery systems: basic and premium cable television and the videocassette recorder (VCR)" (Beard 212), which enabled watching on demand. Thereby, films gained 'afterlives' and lingered on, haunting people at home instead of 'leaving the horror behind' at cinema theaters. Soon, these haunting afterlives caused a moral panic in the United States, which is also known as the "Satanic Panic" (Beard 212), in which the crime rate of murders, abductions and abuse had increased tremendously (Stevens 21). These phenomena were often ascribed to a mysterious group of members believing in Satan, who would commit these crimes as part of their cult (Beard 212). This way of accusation may be explained with Michael Shermer's feedback loop model in which "[...] outputs are connected to inputs, producing change in response to both" (101), and therefore, the loop organizes itself. It consists of internal and external components, while latter can be increased by the media (Shermer 101-02). By raising the external components, phenomena such as the Satanic Panic can be caused, as social events were linked back to horror movies (Beard 219-20), which were easily available at home due to cable television and VCRs.

In addition to horror's on-demand availability at home, the historical context in which it was consumed may also have been a trigger for the development of the Satanic Panic. Even though films like *The Exorcist* [...] were consumed within that specific post-Watergate and post-Vietnam context, [...] [they] were, in truth, responding to earlier panic surrounding societal disintegration and endangered youth, originating in the intergenerational turmoil and social change of the late 1960s [...]" (Beard 214). Owing to this context, the external components may have been increased additionally, and thereby, the socio-historical situation of those days may have also contributed to the feedback loop, which very likely caused the Satanic Panic.

In the following period of the 1990s, the horror genre underwent a remarkable development in television series like *The X Files* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Jancovich 7), celebrating an ever-growing audience, as "[t]his 'next generation' of terror television not only terrifies, it enlightens, amuses, and entertains" (Muir 3). Therefore, horror has not only evolved as a genre, but also its format has transformed considerably in two ways. Firstly, the traditional horror movie was not merely consumed in the cinema, but at home, due to the upcoming of cable television and VCRs, followed by the revolution of the significantly cheaper DVD as well as online streaming services like *Netflix*. Secondly, horror was not 'reduced' to films anymore, but spread in the form of television series.

As Robson (243) has found, the Gothic genre is very flexible and thus, it has been integrated in various televisual texts and genres. One example would be the series *The X Files*, which contains many supernatural elements, but is still considered as "more Gothic than science fiction or crime" (Robson 242) due to its "tendency to leave its threats wholly or partly unknown". Even though these elements were due to censorship and the low budget on which it was produced, the ambiguities in *The X Files* became the signature feature for the show (Robson 242-43). Another example for the genre's flexibility is the television show *Twin Peaks*, which has been classified as a Gothic soap opera (Robson 243; L. Williams, *Serial-Thriller Soap* 38). A soap opera is "a continuing drama serial involving a large number of characters in a specific location, focusing on relationships, emotions and reversals of fortune" (Bignell 124). Many characteristics of the soap opera also occur in other genres, such as in hospital drama series, for example, but they differ in the way of closing the individual episodes. While hospital drama series always have completed storylines, soap operas are open-ended

(Bignell 130), which is why "the open-ended soap-style narrative lends itself very well to the Gothic, as a genre of uncertainty" (Wheatley 148). This means, that horror series like *Twin Peaks* did not transform the soap opera into a Gothic genre, but rather "continued a tradition of Gothic elements in American soap" (Robson 243).

Apart from a horror shows' possible classification as a soap opera (like *Twin Peaks*, *American Gothic*, *Kindred: The Embraced*), Muir (3) points out two further basic formats, in which horror is frequently produced: The adventure format (series as *The X Files*, *Millennium*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and the anthology format (*Night Gallery*, *The Next Step Beyond*, and *Freddy's Nightmares*). While "a regular character (or group of characters) investigates and combats the supernatural or terrifying" (Muir 3) in the adventure format, the anthology format usually focuses on a different character every week and consists of "a series of separate, unconnected programmes broadcast under a shared title" (Bignell 317). As already mentioned, the series *American Horror Story*, which will be closely examined in this study, also counts towards the latter category of anthology series. Each season may contain several parallels to the other seasons, but the storylines are not connected (despite sharing the broadcast title), as is characteristic of anthology series.

When considering the high number of viewers for the 5th season of the horror series *AHS: Hotel* (5.8 million (*Tv by the Numbers*)), which aired in 2015-16, it is interesting to note that many critics still consider television an unsuitable medium for horror, emphasizing cinema's superiority to achieve the purposes of the genre (Baddeley 106; Hills 111-14; Waller 159). Hills (112) even goes further by claiming that horror television does not exist as a separate category, as it is not included as individual genre in various books on television studies such as *The Television Genre Book* (Creeber) and *Television Studies* (Miller). Nevertheless, one cannot expect a television studies reader to include all genres, and as horror is academically sometimes considered as somewhat insignificant, this could be a reason why the books mentioned may not dedicate a separate section to horror. Additionally, there are indeed scholars who dedicate articles and chapters (*Gothic Television* (Robson); *Television: Horror's 'Original' Home* (Schmidt)) up to entire books (*Terror Television American Series, 1970-1999* (Muir); *Gothic Television* (Wheatley)) to the investigation of horror tv, manifesting it as an individual television genre.

As already mentioned, a further point of debate among scholars has been whether television is a suitable medium for the consumption of horror, because “[u]nlike its cinematic counterparts, the audiovisual output of the small screen was considered too transitory, too light, too small for the type of critical attention which the cinematic movie had finally been accorded” (Hammond & Mazdon 6). When considering that television horror provoked the Satanic Panic, however, television may appear to be a significantly more impactful medium than cinema, which, in contrast to tv, did not cause any similar social phenomenon. Additionally, the Gothic genre has always been bound to the home, which is why “the most domestic of genres on the most domestic of media” (Wheatley 25) may be consumed most effectively at home on a small screen. In this way, horror can ‘linger on’ within the homes of the audience through its consumption via television. Thereby, horror haunts the spectators for a longer time, as they do not simply leave their home like they do after a cinema visit, but remain in the place in which the horror has been enjoyed, rendering “television soap opera [...] the twentieth-century equivalent of Gothic novels” (Davenport-Hines 144).

Apart from seeking to scare the audience, horror also deals with melodrama. As Schmidt (160) finds, melodrama contains various elements of horror, but still, many scholars seem to treat the two genres individually. Melodrama is “a form of drama characterized by exaggerated performance, a focus on reversals of fortune and extreme emotional reactions to events” (Bignell 307), and therefore, one may recognize melodrama’s similarity to horror. Indeed, arousing the audience’s emotions is one of the most essential characteristics of horror, which typically includes emotions such as “fear, anxiety, terror, horror, disgust and suspense” (Schmidt 161), which is why horror may connect so well with melodrama. Moreover, the purpose of melodramatic quality in horror can be achieved significantly better through seriality (Schmidt 160). Often, the seriality of television narratives is regarded as a rather new phenomenon, but actually, it has a long history in the 19th century with the serialized publication of sensation novels (Mitchell 29). Even though publishing stories in a serialized form was done for financial reasons, so people would be able to afford buying the magazines (Mitchell 29), this may have triggered a new way of consuming literature, which provokes a certain curiosity in the readers, making them want to find out how the story continues. This phenomenon did not remain centered only on books, but is nowadays also very popular in contemporary television series such as *AHS* or *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*), which always close an episode with a cliffhanger, creating excitement: “Seriality means that

the story is built upon connections between episodes, that characters have a memory and a history, and that single episodes, while providing limited resolution in some instances, most often invite and demand viewing of the next, and the next” (Schmidt 166). For this reason, it may be much easier for the audience to sympathize and suffer with the characters, as they do spend a considerable amount of time with them, similar to a weekly meeting with friends or colleagues. Hence, I agree with Schmidt (166) that television horror can be much more intense and devastating for the fans than the best horror movie seen at the cinema.

Moreover, horror may be preferably consumed at home as the Gothic allows for a ‘safe’ confrontation with one’s fears (Robson 242). Due to the “excesses and ambivalence associated with Gothic figures” (Botting 4), they were often considered transgressive, challenging norms and beliefs, as “transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits” (Botting 5). Since the narratives surpass the boundaries of reality, horror, as an often exaggerated form of societal fears, may help to deal with one’s anxieties. In order to confront these fears in a safe environment, Robson (242) suggests that home television may provide the most suitable basis to do so, since confronting oneself with fears through television horror may evoke further or more subconscious fears. Still, many seem unable to resist the temptation to continue the consumption of horror. This, however, is not necessarily limited to one’s desire to explore their fears, but might as well include other motivations, which I will examine in more detail in the following section.

3. Concepts in horror

3.1 Sexuality

3.1.1 Screening sex

As explained in 2.2., the homecoming of horror via VCR and cable television caused a “Satanic Panic”, which raised concern about children’s psychological well-being that was suddenly put at risk (Beard 213). This development was additionally fostered due to an increase in working parents, which meant that children, also called “latchkey kids”, would come home to empty houses and were easily able to access television or VCR without supervision (West qtd. in Beard 213). In the following period of the 1990s, a survey has shown that children at that time spent considerably more time watching television (15 hours) in contrast to reading for pleasure or studying (5-6 hours) within one week (Hofferth qtd. in Cappella & Lerner 27). This great amount of time spent in front of television was considered a negative influence on the offsprings’ emotional well-being, especially when consuming images inappropriate for their age (Bar-On et al. 423).

In order to protect those children, there have been various codes which served as a basis for movie ratings and censorship in film and television (Pollard 1). In the 1930s, the MPAA film industry company introduced the Production Code Administration, which should help set regularities concerning the morality and ideology of contents of American films (Prince 365). At that time, America’s attitude towards sexuality and violence was relatively conservative and therefore, the amount of inappropriate contents in films had to be reduced, which often resulted in a great financial loss for production companies (Prince 365-66). To overcome this problem, MPAA and NATO (National Association of Theatre Owners) founded a subsidiary named CARA (Classification and Rating Administration) to provide ratings for MPAA’s movies. The following classifications set by CARA impose restrictions according to age groups to help parents identify potentially inappropriate motion pictures for their children (MPAA & NATO 1):

- G – General Audiences. All Ages Admitted. [...]
- PG – Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children. [...]

- PG-13 – Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13. [...]
- R – Restricted. Children Under 17 Require Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian. [...]
- NC-17 – No One 17 and Under Admitted.
(MPAA & NATO 6-8)

The restrictions of the respective rating refer to scenes of pornography, nudity, violence, drug abuse, or a vulgar choice of words. If rated G, the viewer need not expect any of the mentioned components, but their appearance increases up to NC-17, which includes contents inappropriate for anyone under 17 (MPAA & NATO 8). Interestingly, the restrictions have not always been that strict. Indeed, the pre-code films (1930-34) depicted relatively realistic scenes of sexuality (Pollard 6). The following Hays Code, however, banned these depictions, which is why instances like the mentioned had to be integrated through symbolism or ambiguity. Since the period of the 1960s, there has been more explicit sexuality in films again. This is also indicated in *Murder House* by Constance Langdon who tells Vivien Harmon about the reason why she moved to LA: “I came out here to be a movie star. Did the screen tests and everything. But nudity was the big deal then. The morals were just beginning to collapse and I wasn't about to have my green pasture flashed 70 feet high for every man, woman and child to see. So I took that little butterfly of a dream and put it in a jar on the shelf” (AHS, S01E01). Due to the strict censorship regarding on-screen sex and nudity, the producers were required to retake delicate scenes in some cases and in order to avoid this financial threat, many film companies relied on violence instead of “[...] realistic depictions of sexual relations [...]” (Pollard 7).

Considering that people are more likely to have sex than to be chased by a psycho-killer, the production code has always been more concerned about the depiction of sexual content rather than of violent scenes (Pollard 131-32). Although the negative effects of media violence on children’s emotional well-being have been demonstrated, Federman has found an increasing amount of violence portrayed on television in a study on television violence in America, which may be due to the following:

- Almost two thirds of television shows contain violence (29)
- Offenders hardly get punished (27)
- Violence is frequently glamorized (26)

- Violent behavior is repetitively depicted (usually 6+ violent instances per hour in average violent program) (30)
- Children's shows, especially cartoons, contain a high degree of violence (30)
- Instead of depicting painful sensations of the victims, violent situations are often humorized (26).

In addition to the points mentioned, it is also very common that the perpetrators are represented as attractive characters, which exacerbates the negative effect of violence on the viewers even further (Federman 27). Due to this glorified and simplified depiction of violence, the audience is easily desensitized and violent behavior is learned (Federman 26). This may cause especially children to consider violence as the 'ultimate' solution to problems, which leads to more aggressive behavior in real-life (Federman 31).

In contrast to violence on television, which seems to be a somewhat ignored issue, the regulations concerning explicit sexuality have always been strict. The reasons why sexuality may be regarded more obscene than violence are the following: Firstly, it may be due to the Puritan conviction that "all sensual pleasures rooted in the body [...] [are] an evil distraction from the spiritual life located in the rational mind and the soul" (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22). Secondly, sexual intercourse was reserved for reproductive purposes only and any other forms of sexuality such as homosexuality, adultery and infidelity are unnatural and sinful behavior (Pollard 182-83). For this reason, the mentioned regulation system was introduced in the USA to protect children "[...] from 'unsuitable influences' and their parents from embarrassment in the context of a private, but family, context [...]" (Arthurs 24). Additionally, the airing times of shows which feature inappropriate content for children are regulated in order to avoid their accidental display to offsprings. Regarding *AHS*, all seasons have been marked as containing children-inappropriate content despite the different levels of graphic sexuality and violence. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ninth season of *AHS: Apocalypse* is currently airing in the USA on Wednesdays at 10 p.m. on FX (American Horror Story), at a time when children are rather unlikely to be watching television. According to Surette, the previous *AHS* seasons also aired between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. and therefore, it could be said that the airing time of *AHS* conforms to the regulations set concerning the protection of particularly younger audiences, for which the contents of after 9 p.m. shows may appear disturbing. Nevertheless, these regulations may be futile when

considering that the USA has several different time zones. Due to this time difference of up to five hours, it may be said that there is a risk in at least one time zone that children may access uncensored content, which renders the regulation system useless. Apart from this time-zone issue in the USA, it has also become significantly easier for children all around the world to access inappropriate content at any time, due to online streaming platforms such as *Netflix* or the world wide web. On *Netflix*, the *AHS* series is not automatically blocked for children unless the parental controls, which hinder offsprings from access, are activated on the account. Interestingly, there is a little pop-up sign in the left upper corner when starting an episode, which indicates 18 years as age rating and suggests drug-related and violent content, but not sexuality. In order to show that *AHS* also displays a lot of sexuality, I will examine sex in relation to horror as well as power more closely in the following section.

3.1.2 The power of sex

The definition of the terms sexuality and sex have been a highly debated issue. While sex is used to refer to the anatomical difference between man and woman regarding their genitals, gender denotes the culturally constructed distinctions between man and woman (Brooker 229-30). In short, the latter refers to the ways in which society constructs or sees someone as man or woman by comparing them to their established stereotypes. This has already been postulated by Simone DeBeauvoir, who suggests that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (qtd. in Butler 35), emphasizing the cultural construction of gender. As far as the term sexuality is concerned, it is considered to refer to “erotic desires, practices and identities” or “aspects of personal and social life which have erotic significance” (Jackson & Scott 2). Hence, it appears that the definition of sexuality seems considerably more indistinct than sex and does not only relate to sexual intercourse.

Bristow (2) suggests that the term sexuality is relatively new and has only been in use for about two centuries. Since the late 19th century, the term sexuality, “[...] when marked by a prefix – such as ‘bi’, ‘hetero’ or ‘homo’ [...]” (Bristow 2), has been used to put people into different categories regarding their respective sexual preference. This notion, however, has already been challenged especially by queer and feminist theorists, who argue against a classification regarding people’s gender as much as their sexuality. In the constructionist view, one’s sexuality is formed through societal discourses. This means that a certain cultural stereotypical perspective may be

maintained or renegotiated and always depends on cultural ideologies and their respective representations (Brooker 230). In psychoanalysis, however, sexuality is a multidimensional concept, which includes procreative as well as non-procreative sexuality and is far more complex than a 'mere' biological instinct or cultural inscription, which is the case in *Murder House* as my analysis will show:

First: sexuality pervades every aspect of human life and behavior. Second: sexuality is not just sex (i.e., heterosexual coitus, committed in marriage with an aim toward procreation, is not the definition of sexuality, but merely an instance of it). Third: sexuality arises within, and can only be understood in reference to, the experiences of childhood and the family. Fourth: where sexuality is concerned, there is no "normality"—only varying degrees of social acceptability. (Dumas 24)

Most significantly, psychoanalysis considers sexuality to be determined in childhood when the child tries to form its own (sexual) identity. For the French psychoanalyst Lacan, sexuality stands in a close relationship with desire, which he, just like Freud, considers to originate from the Unconscious, "which develops simultaneously with the formation of the subject at the point of entry into the [symbolic] order" (Brooker 68).

In contrast to Freud, who considers sexuality as a biological impulse (Freud, *Pleasure* 208-38), Lacan compares a child's psychosexual development to the ideological structures of language. He divides this process into the three phases of "the Real", "the Imaginary", and "the Symbolic" (Brooker 138). The Real, Lacan ascribes to the first six months of a child "[...] when you were the closest to the pure materiality of existence [...]" (Felluga 245), which denotes a state of completeness to which one strives to return. In the following, between 6 and 18 months, Lacan believes that children undergo a "mirror stage", which forms the most crucial part in their process of identification. At that stage, children experience a "libidinal dynamism" (Lacan, *Écrits* 1) of their "Ideal-I" (Lacan, *Écrits* 2) when they recognize their own image as themselves for the first time. The mirror stage presents a precondition for the Imaginary, in which the individual becomes more aware of their separation from the maternal. Through this process of misrecognition, the child is able to create its own identity, but simultaneously experiences fear and lack of the Other. To express this lack, one develops language and enters the Symbolic, which means that one becomes even more distant from the Real (Felluga 246-47).

Nevertheless, the formation of the I is not fully accomplished in the mirror phase, but seems to be stuck in a continuous renegotiation. In fact, as Lacan observes: "It is not

a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak" (Lacan, *Écrits* 125). As "[a] *man's desire is the desire of the Other*" (Lacan, *Concepts* 38), the I is constructed in relation to others and can therefore never be entirely fixed. To explain this process of identification and thus, signification, Lacan draws on Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of signifier and signified. Saussure (xxx) postulated that the linguistic sign consists of two components: signifier (the material sign itself, e.g. a gesture) and signified (meaning of the sign, e.g. a name). As the relation between the two is arbitrary, a signifier can have different signifieds and therefore, their only connection remains through the sign itself. As I will explain later in this section, the construction of desire and giving meaning are central to one's psychosexual development.

In Kristeva's attempt to describe the development of psychosexuality, she terms Lacan's stage of the Real as "chora", suggesting that one is entirely influenced by "life drives and death drives" (Kristeva 14). Between the chora and the mirror stage, however, she believes that there is "[...] a crucial pre-linguistic stage that she associates with the abject [...] that must be in place before the entrance into language" (Felluga 246). Following the phenomenon of narcissism in Lacan's mirror stage, Kristeva considers abjection "*a precondition of narcissism*" (Kristeva 13), so that the "libidinal dynamism" (Lacan, *Écrits* 1) which a child perceives at its identification with its mirror image can be facilitated. As the process of abjection, in which one feels desire for something while wanting to separate it from oneself to set the boundaries between self and other can be considered horrifying, I will investigate the concept of the abject more thoroughly in section 3.2.3. and show that abjection in horror is an essential element to produce fear, but also forms part of a power discourse as I will demonstrate in my analysis of *Murder House*.

Moreover, when experiencing the Oedipus complex, Freud believes in the merely two-fold possibility of the child's identification with either mother or father, in which it determines its sexual orientation (Felluga 248). The concept of the Oedipal complex refers to a child's unconscious wish to become intimate with its mother and therefore, the father is seen as an enemy that needs elimination. This desire, however, is repressed by the father by "threatening castration and the child comes thus to accept the authority of the PHALLUS invested in the father" (Brooker 181). For Freud, this development of

the unconscious marks the point of transition into the symbolic order in which the child becomes an individual subject.

To understand the relationship between Lacan's three-part scheme and sexuality, it is necessary to take a closer look at his theory of desire. As already mentioned earlier, the subject's formation of desire arises from a certain lack it tries to compensate:

Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the appeal to receive the complement from the Other, if the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this want, or lack. That which is thus given to the Other to fill, and which is strictly that which it does not have, since it, too, lacks being, is what is called love, but it is also hate and ignorance. (Lacan, *Écrits* 200)

Even though one can observe a clear link between need and demand, it needs to be mentioned that Lacan views them mostly as separate constituents which result in a lack through their interplay, as "[...] desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)" (*Écrits*, 219). To become a sexed subject, Lacan applies the device of the phallus, which goes back to the Freudian Oedipal complex. In contrast to Freud, Lacan explains the entrance into the Symbolic as occurring through socio-linguistic discourses rather than biological drives (Bristow 84). In his theory, Lacan also views the Oedipal complex as a vital element in the psychosexual development, but he links the complex with the process of language acquisition instead of designating it a libidinal relationship with the mother. In Lacan's Oedipal phase, the child recognizes its dependency on the mother and thus, learns about the social regulations to which it has to obey. During this process, the child starts to understand that the differentiation between Self and Other occurs through language. Even though Lacan does not refer to the phallus in its literal sense of penis, he uses the term to refer to a symbolic father, which represents the power of social structures (Felluga 248). As soon as one has overcome the Oedipal complex, "the position of the phallus (a position within that differential system) can be assumed by [a]most anyone (teachers, leaders, even the mother) [...]" (Felluga 248-49). Considering Saussure's theory of signification, however, Lacan's concept of the 'non-sexual' phallus may indeed represent an allusion to the male genitals, as "[...] the phallus remains forever veiled with signification. Since the phallus is always masked, it serves as a constant lure for desire. [...] Through this ongoing search for the all-important but elusive

signifier, sexuality emerges” (Bristow 94). Thus, despite claiming a different signified for the phallus, namely an authoritative figure, Lacan can clearly not deny a certain connection to its literal meaning of an erect penis, as Freud suggested. Thus, even though Lacan claims a different signified for the phallus, namely the phallus as a symbol for an authoritative figure, the word’s connection to its literal meaning of an erect penis (a seemingly ‘stronger’ signified) in the way as Freud used it, cannot be denied.

Due to this dual interpretation of the term phallus to signify power and penis, Lacan’s signification of the phallus may also be understood as a hint towards the link between sexuality and power. As phallus and power seem to be linked for Lacan, his theory can be interpreted to ascribe dominance to male power. Since the *AHS* series offers far more than a limited patriarchal reading of men-as-active-dominants and women-as-passive-submissives, I would like to expand Lacan’s understanding of power and sexuality by drawing on Foucault. In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault closely analyzed the connection between sexuality and power. As he explains, the repression or freeing of sexual desire is a result of the power organization in Western societies (Bristow 9):

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies. There is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all the manifestations of sex. For example, the idea that there have been repeated attempts, by various means, to reduce all of sex to its reproductive function, its heterosexual and adult form, and its matrimonial legitimacy fails to take into account the manifold objectives aimed for, the manifold means employed in the different sexual politics concerned with the two sexes, the different age groups and social classes. (Foucault 101)

As appears clear from Foucault’s definition of sexuality, the following aspects are particularly vital to my analysis in 4.: first, sexuality is more than reproduction, and second, it must not be reduced to heterosexuality, as one’s power does not depend on their gender or sexual preference, but on other factors as well, as I will demonstrate with *Murder House*. The reason why sexuality is still often reduced to heterosexuality is, as Foucault notes, a culturally constructed discourse, which established sexuality as a

“dense transfer point for relations of power” (101). Nevertheless, it is possible to change a word’s connotation by reclaiming its meaning due to the fact that “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 101), and therefore, the discourse can be reversed.

One example of a “reverse discourse” which Foucault mentions, is homosexuality. Since about the 18th century, sexuality has been used to exert power, including the “hysterization of women’s bodies”, “pedagogization of children’s sex”, “socialization of procreative behavior”, and “psychization of perverse pleasure” (Foucault 104-05), which were all regulated laws by the state. Since homosexuality was a practice that could not serve the purpose of procreation, it was considered sexually deviant. Thus, it was connected to mental illness (Foucault 36), similar to non-reproductive female sexuality, which was seen as an unnatural and sinful practice (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22, Pollard 182-83), as I have argued previously. Moreover, people could be punished like criminals for practicing homosexuality, as it was deemed a perversion and sin “contrary to nature” (Foucault 38). Nevertheless, publications dealing with ‘perverse’ species such as homosexuality facilitated “[...] the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (Foucault 101). Hence, by reversing the discourse, the meaning of the homosexuality was reclaimed and received a new meaning which did not denote a medical condition anymore, but described a person’s sexual desire for a same-sexed person.

As I will show in my analysis, one can recognize several reverse discourses in *Murder House*, which are established in order to renegotiate the power by instrumentalising sexuality. Additionally, I will base my argument in 4. on Kristeva’s concept of abjection to highlight the connection between sexuality, fear and power by taking a closer look at the representations of female characters in the series. In order to understand how these depictions may arouse emotions of horror in the viewers, I will examine the ways in which horror is consumed and thus affects the audience in the following.

3.2 Fear

3.2.1 Loving the thrill

If the primary purposes of horror are to scare its audience and arouse their emotions, it seems interesting to consider why people still feel so attracted to such horrifying spectacles on screen. There are two primary emotions which are typically associated with horror: fear and disgust (Bantinaki 383; Smuts 41), and these emotions “[...] on which the horror genre trades are identified in the emotion literature as negative emotions [...] [while] fear and disgust are generally regarded as intrinsically unpleasant and, being such, as emotions that we avoid experiencing in real life, along with the situations that elicit them” (Bantinaki 383). Therefore, one would assume that no-one would be keen of exposing themselves to a terrifying or arousing situation they would avoid in real life. Yet, the horror genre attracts a broad audience, which seems to be keen on this contradictory experience. Many theorists have already dedicated their studies to this phenomenon, referring to it as the “paradox of horror” (Carroll) or “paradox of tragedy” (Smuts), which I will analyze from the following theoretical perspectives: conversion theory (pain is converted into pleasure), compensation theory (experienced pain is compensated by greater pleasures), control theory (taking pleasure as long as one can control the situation), something I would call projection or diversion theory (other people’s pain is enjoyed if it distracts one from their own suffering), and finally, feminist theory, which frequently argues that it is only possible for male viewers to take pleasure from horror viewing due to the phenomenon of the male gaze (Mulvey 9), as I will explain later in this section.

In his article “Art and Negative Affect”, Smuts examines various philosophical approaches in order to find an explanation for the paradoxical phenomenon of exposing oneself to painful art. So in order to explain why fear can be a positive emotion, as Bantinaki claims in *The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion*, I will take a closer look at some of the theories addressed by Smuts, including control, compensation, and conversion theory. In contrast to Smuts, who dedicates his arguments to artworks, I will try to apply his findings on horror on screen.

To mention one of the conversion theorists, in his section “Of Tragedy” in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, David Hume seeks to resolve the mentioned paradox, postulating that “[...] the same object of distress, which pleases in a tragedy, were it

really set before us, would give the most unfeigned uneasiness [...]" (Hume 218). Following his line of argument, the unpleasant experience needs to be faced so it can be "[...] effaced by something stronger of an opposite kind [...]" (Hume 220). This means that the audience first needs to feel pain in order to convert it into a feeling of pleasure. By drawing on Jones, Carroll describes the origin of this phenomenon that "[...] the ambivalence felt toward the objects of horror derives from a deeper ambivalence about our most enduring psychosexual desires" (170). Without the precondition of a certain amount of discomfort, pleasure can thus not be ensured for the viewing audience. Similarly to conversion, compensation theory also maintains that it is necessary to feel pain to experience the following pleasure (Smuts 42). For compensation theorists, however, pain is not converted into a pleasant feeling, but compensated by greater pleasures which make one forget the pain. "As society becomes more complex and contradictory, so do the fears that the genre must engage with" (Newman 137), and when considering conversion and compensation theory, this would imply that everyone needs to feel pain during the same scenes. Still, "[w]hat might be genuinely frightening to one audience, or what might have seemed frightening at the time of a film's initial release, may appear for someone else, elsewhere or later on, as trite, stale, confusing, or even unintentionally funny" (Russell 235). Therefore, I would like to investigate two more theories including control theory by Morreall and another approach which I would term projection or diversion theory in order to approach a solution for the paradox.

According to the control theorist John Morreall, people can indeed enjoy negative emotions as long as they are in control and therefore, people confront themselves with seemingly unpleasant feelings (Morreall 97). As far as the emotion fear is concerned, the psychological sensation of watching horror may be linked to bodily reactions which include increased heartbeat and alertness, muscle tension, adrenaline rushes, and excitement (Morreall 96). The latter is the feeling which actually makes fear enjoyable, "[e]specially for someone who leads a relatively dull life, the stimulation provided by fear can be pleasurable by contrast with the ordinary lack of stimulation" (Morreall 96). Thus, horror viewing may be seen as something pleasurable as it may be considered sufficiently 'extreme' to appeal to one's emotions and arouse bodily reactions in contrast to every day monotony. Concerning the bodily symptoms evoked by horror, I agree with Bantinaki that they may be deviations from the "[...] normal physical state of equilibrium, but they are not, literally, pains" (386). More significantly, she links the bodily symptoms to the clearly positive sensation of sexual arousal, and thereby,

renders the physical experience of horror and sex alike (Bantinaki 386-87). As I will demonstrate on the basis of *Murder House*, sex plays an important role in horror, which may also highlight the close connection between horror and sex regarding the bodily reactions they evoke in the audience.

A similar intense feeling is also elicited in other real-life situations such as in extreme sports (Morreall 98), in which people expose themselves to extreme situations because they enjoy the adrenaline rush it produces in them. Also, it is possible to take pleasure from a certain degree of feeling anger, fear, or other negative emotions, as long as being in control of the emotions (Morreall 99). As soon as they get too intense, however, one quickly loses control and can no longer enjoy the perceived emotion. Nevertheless, control can be maintained most easily if the situation one exposes oneself to does not have any practical consequences, such as it is the case with television horror (Morreall 101). For example, if one of the characters dies on screen, this does not affect the audience in their real life and hence, they can retain control over the situation and therefore, horror can be enjoyed. Additionally, one can decide to close their eyes or simply turn off the television if one gets too emotionally involved in the horror and thereby keep control of the intensity of the emotions perceived and thus, feel pleasure in watching horror.

Apart from the paradoxical entertainment one gets from the consumption of screened horror, there is a similar paradox one encounters in everyday life, when watching the news on television:

Our fascination with media representations of death and death work is another example of how we project our fears and problems onto people and events outside ourselves. This fascination thus operates as a defense: if I think about the child abuser on the other side of town (or from a different social class or ethnic background from mine) I divert my attention from the ways in which I've been abused or from my abuse of others. (Tyson 24)

In the case of this theory, which I would name projection or diversion theory, the motivation to expose oneself to gruesome images on purpose originates from the wish to avoid the confrontation with one's own abuse and therefore, one's attention is drawn to that of others. When considering this theory in the context of horror, this may be explained through projecting one's fear onto the characters of the horror episode, who experience more suffering than the viewers themselves, which is why the horror is enjoyed.

Closely connected, feminist studies have found another power-related correlation between the desire to consume horror and its audience. Following Linda Williams' line of argument, the horror genre is actually very unlikely to be enjoyed by a female audience, but by males only, referring to Laura Mulvey's explanation of the cinematic gaze, which should evoke pleasure in the viewers:

There are excellent reasons for this refusal of the woman to look, not the least of which is that she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation and murder. Another excellent reason for the refusal to look is the fact that women are given so little to identify with on the screen. Laura Mulvey's extremely influential article on visual pleasure in narrative cinema has best defined this problem in terms of a dominant male look at the woman that leaves no place for the woman's own pleasure in seeing: she exists only to be looked at. (L. Williams, *Woman Looks* 61)

Even though it is possible for women to hold an active gaze, "[t]he woman's gaze is punished [...] by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire into masochistic fantasy" (L. Williams, *Woman Looks* 61). Williams (*Woman Looks* 61) describes this punishment of the woman's look as a process of recognition, which the woman undergoes when looking at the monster, recognizing their parallels as monstrous outcasts in patriarchal ways of looking. According to Mulvey (8), this recognition of the self may be connected to what Jacques Lacan described as the mirror stage, which is a part of a person's identification process. Initially, Lacan ascribed this stage to a period of time during a child's development (6-18 months), but later, he adapted his concept:

[The mirror stage is] a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image. [...] The observation consists simply in the jubilant interest shown by the infant over eight months at the sight of his own image in a mirror [...] [and] in games in which the child seems to be in endless ecstasy when it sees that movements in the mirror correspond to its own movements. (Lacan, *Reflections on Ego* 14)

This means that one seems trapped in this process of identification, which needs to be negotiated throughout one's entire life. Thus, when a woman identifies with her ascribed role as a passive and deficient version of the man, she becomes entrapped in these patriarchal structures when viewing a horror film (L. Williams, *Woman Looks* 64). As the monster represents a double of the woman, this may explain the often close relationship between the female character and the monster, such as in *King Kong*, which again induces the identification with the abnormal creature and renders the

woman a monster herself. However, at the same time the monstrous embodiment of the woman may pose a threat to the masculinity of the normal male, as the monster has significantly more power than the man, which typically results in castration anxiety (L. Williams, *Woman Looks* 63). Therefore, the woman's look has to be punished and in horror, this takes place through the destruction of the monster which functions as the double of the woman. Through this mutilation, the danger of possible castration represented by the female body (in the form of the monster) is averted (L. Williams, *Woman Looks* 64). In this way, the man's power of looking is restored: "As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (Mulvey 10).

As I will demonstrate in the following, the female characters in *Murder House* can be interpreted to be monsters themselves due to their reproductive organs, since a woman's ability to give birth renders her an abject. Regarding the 'punishment' of the woman's look, women in the series may not be mutilated, but they are still killed and death in *Murder House* is mostly linked to sexuality as will become clear from my analysis.

3.2.2 Sexuality and Fear

As I have already indicated earlier, there is an interesting link between horror and female sexuality in particular, which goes back to Puritan beliefs in the 17th century and still plays an important role in American society nowadays. Following the Puritan conviction, women do not feel any pleasure in sexuality and only endure it as a means for reproduction. Showing deviations from this belief, such as screening female sexuality in which the woman takes pleasure, is therefore considered improper and sinful (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22). Thus, the still prevailing religious attitudes of Puritanism may be one of the reasons why sexuality is often associated with fear, such as the fear of violating the Puritan laws, and therefore used in horror.

In the 19th century, female sexuality was considered as the cause for insanity due to "[...] the biological crises of the female life-cycle – puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause – during which the mind would be weakened and the symptoms of insanity might emerge" (Showalter 55). Any deviations from the expected norm regarding the

female body were linked to their reproductive system. Thus, when a woman perceived an increased desire for sex, it was considered as signs of madness and “[...] symptomatic of female abhumanness” (Hurley 120); the latter, Hurley refers to Kristeva’s abject body, rendering the “[...] abhuman subject [...] a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming no-itself, becoming other” (3-4). As becomes clear, the Victorian beliefs only allowed for a dual attitude, facing two extremes regarding the woman: they are “saintly or demonic, spiritual or bodily, asexual or ravenously sexed, guardians of domestic happiness or unnatural monsters” (Hurley 121). Apart from the polar classification of the woman herself, she was also contrasted to the man, who was believed to complement female passivity. Nevertheless, the upcoming of new sexualized identities such as homosexuality or the ‘New Woman’, with her sudden sexualized identity, soon posed a threat to virility, as these new forms violated the ‘nature’ of sexuality (Hurley 121). Therefore, women and especially their bodies were “of abjection and danger” (Hurley 118).

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva explains the phenomenon of the “abject” as being neither subject nor object, a feeling of repulsion towards bodily wastes and decay, while simultaneously being attracted to them. However, “[i]t is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4), which interests Kristeva. As Brooker (1) describes in his *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*:

[t]he abject is what the subject seeks to expel in order to achieve an independent identity but this is impossible since the body cannot cease both to take in and expel objects. [...] The abject is a troubled marker between the unclean and clean, and between the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, the sign of an undecidable boundary line between the inside and the outside of the body, and therefore a divided subject [...].

This split in-between, non-border respecting status of the abject, has been compared to mostly bodily functions, such as food loathing, by Kristeva (2). While food itself may be tasteful for the subject, the body excrements it, “[b]ut since the food is not an ‘other’ for me’, [...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (Kristeva 3). This means that through this orality, food becomes part of the subject, but through excrement or vomit, it becomes the abject as it is separated from the body, despite forming part of it. The most significant form of abjection, however, is the corpse, as it signifies death:

My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who I expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. (Kristeva 3-4)

Therefore, when facing “signified death” (Kristeva 3) as in a theater or on screen, for example, one is made aware of “the fragility of boundaries which regulate social life and our sense of meaning or identity” (Goodnow 32). While being alive, the I Kristeva talks about decides which part it decides to expel from itself in order to form its own identity of the I; thereby, it becomes the abject. Death, however, transcends this border, separating the body from the soul, which makes the corpse an abject (Creed 10).

In her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed links Kristeva’s concept of abjection to the horror film, trying to explain why the abject arouses feelings of horror. More specifically, she examines on-screen representations of abjects, focusing on female characters as “monstrous feminines”. Additionally, she connects abjection to the audience of horror films. While the corpse has been described as “the utmost of abjection” (Kristeva 4), Creed explains that there is a variety of other significant monstrous figures in horror, which threaten to transcend the border and become the abject. Usually, these monstrous figures are represented through hybrids, which are a mixture of human and inhuman, or addressing the borders between good and evil, normal and supernatural, or also the extremes concerning sexual desire. Frequently, many of these representations refer to concepts which are considered as abjects in religion, such as cannibals and religious abominations (e.g. impure women who get killed off in slasher movies) (Creed 11).

Another way in which the abject is represented in horror is the maternal figure, which will be most vital for my analysis later. As Kristeva (102) remarks, the woman’s body is considerably more prone to becoming an abject than the man’s. Due to menstruation and child-birth, the maternal body becomes an object to decay (Kristeva 102). When the child tries to separate itself from the mother to form its own identity, the mother turns into an abject (Creed 12), as “[t]he abject is that which must be expelled or excluded in the construction of that self” (Creed 37). In order to construct itself, the child has to ‘expel’ the mother, making her the abject, and therefore, abjection can be considered a “precondition of narcissism” (Kristeva 13).

Apart from its separation from the mother, the child also learns "[t]hat all signs of bodily excretions - bile, urine, shit, mucus, spittle, blood - must be treated as abject, cleaned up and removed from sight" (Creed 38). This process of separation can be compared to language learning in which one also marks their difference to others (Kristeva 72). To separate itself from the mother, the child has to repress and reject the maternal authority gradually, as she marks the border between the child and herself (Creed 38). Due to her association with the excremental and menstrual, the maternal figure therefore represents the abject to the paternal law (Creed 14).

Regarding monstrosity, it has often been brought into connection with the abject female uterus because of the associations between birth and death (Creed 47). "Evocation of the maternal body and childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides" (Kristeva 101). To enter the symbolic order, "[t]he body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper" (Kristeva 102). Due to the woman's reproductive functions, she cannot form part of the Symbolic and remains linked to nature, which makes her an abject (Creed 47-48). For this reason, the mother's womb is readily depicted in horror as being the origin of monstrous, which transgresses from the inside (abject uterus) to the outside (accompanied by blood, excrements, and other abjects) (Creed 49).

Moreover, sexuality may also play an important role in horror due to the fact that horror has been frequently compared to pornography. Firstly, both genres are usually heavily criticized and therefore, they share a somewhat marginal status (Jancovich 1; Kavin 241-42). Secondly, they have been considered as triggers for moral panics and have caused various discussions regarding the censorship of their content, as I have argued earlier. Additionally, horror and pornography have both been identified as forming part of the sensation or "body genres" (Clover 189) due to the "[...] strong physical response elicited by each: [...] sexual arousal in pornography, and fear in horror" (Williams qtd. in Grant, *Screams on Screens* 3). In her essay *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess*, Linda Williams investigates the excessive sensationalism on which horror, pornography and melodrama are built. As she notes, all three genres share the same elements, namely sex, violence, and emotions, to achieve the respective purpose of the genre (L. Williams, *Film Bodies* 3). Therefore, it seems unsurprising that the boundaries between the three genres are sometimes only minimal, as "pornography is today

more often deemed excessive for its violence than for its sex, while horror films are excessive in their displacement of sex onto violence” (L. Williams, *Film Bodies* 2).

As I have argued in the previous section, the feelings horror evokes can be compared to a notion of ecstasy. Even though horror is commonly associated with a feeling of pain, one does not, in fact, suffer literal pains when consuming horror. More precisely, the bodily symptoms one experiences as a reaction to horror can be linked to the sensation when having an orgasm (Bantinaki 387). To provoke this state of ecstasy, which may evoke terror equally to sexual pleasure, Linda Williams (*Film Bodies* 4) notes that these sensations are mostly embodied by figures of women. The reason for this may be due to women’s bodies, which are “thoroughly saturated with sexuality” (104) according to Foucault, and can therefore evoke the sensations mentioned most effectively.

As one can see from the discussion above, the feeling of horror and sexuality are connected in several ways. Interestingly, the notion that sexuality is horrifying originates in the 18th century, when sexual activity for other than reproductive purposes was considered sinful. Additionally, especially women’s increased desire for sex was considered a sign of madness and thus, terrifying. One of the probably most significant theories explaining the link between horror and sexuality may be the concept of abjection. First, it describes that the crossing of borders produces a feeling of horror because it points out the fragility of the system “where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 2). Second, the concept of the abject explains why female sexuality and women’s bodies in particular create horror. Finally, one can observe a link between horror and pornography regarding the strong sensationalism they try to evoke as well as bodily reactions they cause in the audience. Thus, despite arousing different emotions, one perceives the same bodily symptoms when consuming either of the two genres, which again highlights the close relationship of horror and sexuality.

For the reasons mentioned, sexuality is indeed an important element in the horror genre in order to create feelings of terror in the audience. In the following analysis in 5., I will analyze in what ways this is done in the popular series *AHS*, focusing on the first season *Murder House*. As I will show, the representations which are used on-screen to scare the audience, are not only used for the purpose of evoking fear in the viewers, but they should also reflect negative aspects and anxieties of American society as suggested by Grant (xiii).

4. *American Horror Story: Murder House*

4.1 Reverse abjects

4.1.1 'Monster' moms

"Every pregnant woman worries they've got a little devil in them" (*AHS*, S01E07)

As discussed earlier, the woman's reproductive function is considered a frightening abject due to her "[...] ability to give birth [which] links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death" (Creed 47). Therefore, it is a frequently used element in horror to arouse the audience's emotions. In the following, I will show that one can encounter a similar link between the mother characters and their monstrous kids in *Murder House*.

One of the probably most significant connections between the woman and the monstrous represented in *Murder House* is pregnancy. As already mentioned, "[the] woman's womb is viewed as horrifying [...] because of its essential functions – it houses an alien life form, it causes alterations in the body, it leads to the act of birth. The womb is horrifying *per se* and within patriarchal discourses it has been used to represent woman's body as marked, impure and a part of the natural/animal world" (Creed 49). When Vivien gets pregnant in *Murder House*, she has to undergo various tests to make sure the baby is healthy as she is over 40 and has had a miscarriage before. The first time she goes to hospital for an ultrasound, the nurse Angie faints at the sight of the ultrasound picture, causing the Harmons disquiet over the well-being of their prospective child. At her next visit, Vivien finds out that Angie quit her job after her last medical check and she becomes increasingly worried. Vivien insists on meeting with Angie to find out what she has seen on the ultrasound picture:

VIVIEN. They said that the machine malfunctioned, but it seemed to me that you saw something that scared you.

ANGIE. Yes, and I've been praying about it ever since. I saw the unclean thing, what you carry in your womb. The plague of nations, the Beast.

VIVIEN. Okay, so you didn't see anything. So, the machine malfunctioned.

ANGIE. It did not. I saw the little hooves.

VIVIEN. You need some help.

ANGIE. And the woman was full of the filthiness of her fornication. The mother of harlots and abominations of the Earth! (*AHS*, S01E06)

Considering the place in which this conversation between the two women takes place, the church highlights the significance of religion, or Christianity in particular, in *Murder House*, which is important for the creation of horror in connection with sexuality. As already mentioned earlier, religion has always played an important part in the conceptualization of the abject and monstrous female body and in this scene, the monstrosity of the women's womb, which already represents an abject itself, is additionally highlighted through Vivien's baby's abject characteristic. This becomes clear when the nurse Angie reveals to Vivien that "what you carry in your womb [is] the plague of nations, the Beast" (*AHS*, S01E06). Regarding "the little hooves" (*AHS*, S01E06) Angie mentions to have seen in the ultrasound, it can be deduced that she is referring to the devil, as cloven hooves are the devil's frequently ascribed physical characteristics in addition to "his characteristic horns [and] tail [...] [which] were borrowed directly from deities such as the Gaulish hunting god Cernunnos and the Greek nature god Pan" (Martin 28). As I will explain in the following, however, the hooves Angie has seen are not displayed in their literal sense in *Murder House* (the baby has normal feet), but represent a metaphorical symbol for the child's malice and the abject quality of the maternal womb.

In a subsequent medical check in episode 7, Vivien finds out that she is pregnant with twins. The children, however, do not have the same father. As it turns out later in the series, one of the children is Ben's (Jeffrey), and the other one (Michael) is the result of sexual intercourse with Tate, who, in the first episode, dresses up in a bondage suit to pretend he is Ben and rapes Vivien (who assumes her husband to be in the suit). As Tate's mother Constance fears "a rather earth-shattering situation" (*AHS*, S01E09) when discovering that Vivien is possibly pregnant from Tate, she talks to the medium Billie Dean to find out about the consequences of a mongrel between a human (Vivien) and a ghost (Tate):

CONSTANCE. What happens when a human copulates with someone from the spirit world?

BILLIE. Spirits aren't known for their potency.

CONSTANCE. Yes, but what if there is, in fact, a conception?

BILLIE. You do know about the box. The pope's box?

CONSTANCE. What the hell are you talking about?

BILLIE. [...] It has been said that this box contains the ultimate secret. It holds the secret of the end of the world. [...] This piece of paper reveals the precise nature of the Antichrist. "A child born of human and spirit will usher in the end of times." It is the essence of evil. A perversion of the Immaculate Conception.

CONSTANCE. What are you talking about? –

BILLIE. Oh, come on, honey. The Holy Ghost merely whispered in the Virgin Mary's ear and she begat the Son of God. If the devil's going to use a human womb for his spawn he's going to want a little more bang for his buck. (AHS, S01E09)

When Vivien gives birth to the twins in the penultimate episode, Ben's child, Jeffrey, is stillborn, while the other twin, the Antichrist Michael, survives. Regarding Jeffrey's stillbirth, it is indicated that Michael indirectly killed his brother in Vivien's womb: "[T]he other one seems to be getting weaker. Sometimes referred to as intrauterine omophagia. All the necessary nutrients are being devoured by the larger fetus. The alpha, if you will" (AHS, S01E11). As far as Vivien is concerned, Michael causes her internal bleedings during birth, which lead to her death. Additionally, Billy Dean's predicted monstrosity and maliciousness of the Antichrist becomes even more obvious in the last episode of *Murder House*, *Afterbirth*, when Constance comes home to find the surviving Harmon twin, of whom she has been taking care since the Harmons' deaths, covered in his babysitter's blood, while sitting in a rocking chair with a diabolical smile. For this reason, it can be said that Michael may not appear as the devil from the outside (he does not have cloven hooves), but shares two characteristics with the devil. First, Michael is also a hybrid of human and non-human/ghost; second, he is clearly evil considering the fact that he caused his mother's and brother's death, as well as willfully murdering his babysitter.

Following Kristeva's theory concerning the way in which a child makes the mother an abject by rejecting her to form its own identity (Creed 12), there seem to be various forms of abjection in *Murder House*. In the case of the Antichrist, he not only separates himself from Vivien, but rather turns her into the ultimate form of an abject: a corpse. Even though Kristeva suggests that only the mother can become an abject through birth (qtd. in Creed 12), her concept would need revision and expansion in order to explain the phenomenon of the Antichrist. Through his birth, the Antichrist himself also becomes an abject as he is a hybrid, "born of human and spirit" (AHS, S01E09) and therefore, he "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). Similar to the fascination and simultaneous repulsion of the maternal body, which the baby experiences in the process of its own identification, the audience encounters a comparable contradictory feeling towards the Antichrist. On the one hand, the viewers are fascinated by the newborn life, but on the other, they want to repress the Antichrist as he is the embodiment of the devil who "[...] will usher the end of times" (AHS, S01E09).

Another abject baby is Charles and Nora's Thaddeus, also known as Infantata. Dr. Charles Montgomery used to perform illegal abortions on young women and one day, one of the betrayed fathers breaks into the Montgomery's house and dismembers their son. In contrast to the Antichrist, who is able to make his mother an abject due to already having formed its own identity as abject ghost-baby in the womb, the Infantata becomes an abject himself before he can turn his mother into the abject, as the Infantata is killed whilst being in the process of forming his own identity. Additionally, the Infantata is transformed into an abject when Charles tries to bring it back to life by sewing his dismembered body parts together with "the beating heart from one of our girls" (AHS, S01E07). However, when Nora tries to nurse him, she finds out that Charles has created an abject: "That thing upstairs – it's not human. [...] I stabbed it with a letter opener - but it clung to life, Charles" (AHS, S01E07). In the cited utterance, Nora's repulsion from her abject-son becomes clear in the following two ways: when she walks upstairs to the nursery to see Thaddeus, the camera focuses on Nora's face in a close up from a low angle when she hears his hissing and gurgling, showing her horrified facial expression. This dramatic build-up of tension is further supported by the music in the off *The Beginning* (American Horror Story Brasil, 2014) composed by Wojciech Kilar, which was also featured in the film based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It is the tune of a slowly ascending cello, which gets louder as Nora opens the door to Thaddeus' nursery with drums provided as a background and fading as she comes closer to his cradle in minute 20:15 (AHS, S01E07), leaving Nora in eerie silence when detecting the abject Thaddeus. Moreover, when Nora talks to Charles afterwards, her horror can be inferred from the change in her choice of words, using "that thing" and the pronoun "it" instead of "him" (AHS, S01E07) to refer to Thaddeus, indicating that she wants to distance herself from the abject-son. For the reasons mentioned, the Infantata becomes an abject after his birth in a twofold way: first, through his death and reaching the ultimate abject state of the corpse; second, by being brought back to life as a sewn-together creature.

One seemingly special process of abjection is the way in which Addie separates herself from her mother. In contrast to the previously analyzed abject-children, Addie turns her mother into an abject in a considerably different way. When Addie dies in episode 4, Constance tries to move her to the property of Murder House, so Addie will live on as a ghost and continue forming part of Constance as her yet 'unseparated' child. As it seems, Addie is stuck in the process of forming her own identity, separating from her

mother; as Constance observes, “In truth, I think my little monster was more like me than any of my other children” (*AHS*, S01E05). Even though Kristeva allocates this phase before Lacan’s mirror stage, which refers to a child’s identification process usually taking place between 6-18 months, Addie appears to be still connected to Constance as in what Kristeva termed “chora” in which “[...] that ‘not yet’ ego [correlates] with an ‘object’ in order to establish both of them” (14). The incompleteness of Addie’s separation becomes even more obvious in one utterance Constance makes as Addie lies dead in front of her in the mortuary: “One of the many comforts of having children is knowing one’s youth has not fled but merely been passed down to a new generation. They say when a parent dies a child feels his own mortality. But when a child dies it’s immortality that a parent loses” (*AHS*, S01E05). Hence, with Addie’s death, the mother and the child both become abjects. Constance, because Addie finally manages to separate herself from her mother, and Addie, as she has become the ultimate abject, a corpse.

Apart from regarding the woman’s womb as horrifying due to its functions and ability to house “an alien life form” (Creed 49) and give birth to it, it also “[...] signifies sexual difference and as such has the power to horrify woman’s sexual other” (Creed 57). For the man, the woman’s ability to give birth to a child without him makes him recognize the woman as more powerful, which is why he feels horror and envy. According to Creed (57) men imitate women’s birth-giving superiority in sports by squatting in a birthing position, for example. Therefore, the man seems caught in a power struggle as he is terrified by the woman as the castrated sexual other while simultaneously envying her for her power, namely, to give birth to a child without the man (Creed 57). In *Murder House*, the mother characters are also represented as independent regarding birth as well as the upbringing of the children. Not only are the women the ones who give birth to the children in *Murder House*, but they also take care of their offsprings’ upbringing. Although the mother characters are not single moms in the literal sense, they seem to be left alone caring for the children. Despite their ‘power’ to raise their offspring, it can be said that they still may not be very successful in their upbringing as Nora immediately calls the nursemaid when Thaddeus starts crying, Vivien’s daughter Violet contemplates suicide, and Constance’s son Tate performs various violent acts, including setting his mother’s lover Larry on fire and going on a rampage at school. For this reason, the mother characters’ power of independent upbringing terrifies in two ways. On the one hand, the fact that they raise their children independently

without the fathers evokes terror; on the other hand, the mothers in *Murder House* also trigger a feeling of horror due to their powerful negative influence on their children.

In brief, *Murder House* features various ways of abjection, especially regarding the relationship between the mother characters Vivien, Nora, and Constance and their children, to cause fear in the characters as well as the *AHS* audience. As becomes clear from my analysis, the concept of abjection in connection with the female reproductive system, the womb, is not only used metaphorically, but also realized literally in *Murder House* to achieve the purpose of arousing the audience's emotions in the following manners: while Jeffrey becomes the ultimate form of an abject due to his still-birth, his human-ghost hybrid 'twin' brother seems to be the diabolic result from his mother's sin of adultery with a ghost. As he is the Antichrist/devil, he already turns his mother Vivien into an abject before birth, considering that he is already in abject himself in her womb due to his hybrid character. Nora's son Thaddeus already separates himself from his mother at birth, but is later turned into an abject himself by his father through 'resuscitation'. This revival, however, is only successful because Charles hybridizes Thaddeus with the remnants and "beating heart" (*AHS*, S01E07) from one of their customers. Due to his hybridization, Thaddeus is a similar abject to the Antichrist, but does not embody the devil like Michael for the following two reasons. First, Thaddeus only becomes a hybrid post-mortem as opposed to the Antichrist, who is born as a hybrid. Second, as analyzed earlier, the Antichrist is an abject hybrid of human and non-human/ghost while Thaddeus only receives parts of another human body. Finally, also the character Addie and her mother Constance embody an interesting form of abjection, as the separation process between the two seems to not have taken place in contrast to the other *Murder House* mothers. More significantly, Constance only experiences abjection at her daughter's death, when Addie herself becomes an abject. Finally, considering the way in which the *Murder House* mothers raise their children, they can be indeed referred to as 'monster' moms, due to their independence from the father characters as well as their negative attitude towards their own offsprings. As I will show in the following section, not only the woman's womb and its ability to house and give birth to the monstrous (in its very literal sense in the case of *Murder House*) can evoke feelings of fear, but also reproduction can represent personal horrors as well as an imbalance of power.

4.1.2 Failing reproduction

Over 5,000 amnios and not a single miscarriage, but who's counting? (*AHS*, S01E06)

Closely connected to the horrifying abject quality of the maternal womb in *Murder House*, also the characters' inability to procreate represents a wide-spread personal horror in Western societies. Creed (56) observes that "[...] recent debates about scientific experiments in cloning and reproductive technology" may correlate with the monstrous representation of the woman in horror. This monstrosity is mostly constructed through a reference to the woman's ability to reproduce, as becomes clear from the previous chapter on 'monster' moms. Nevertheless, the fear of being unable to procreate is not only limited to the female characters in *Murder House*, but also affects the men in the series.

As I have explained earlier, it is important to differentiate between certain aspects of sexuality. While sex is not necessarily reproductive, it is neither a precondition for reproduction (Bristow 7; Williamson 217), as procreation can also be undertaken through in vitro fertilization, for example. Nevertheless, sexuality is also essential for the preservation of species, which is why Freud describes sexuality as an innate impulse (Freud, *Pleasure* 208-38). Thus, it may be suggested that sexuality has two dimensions: on the one hand, it fulfills reproductive purposes, on the other, it serves to bring pleasure. As far as the aim of procreation through sexual intercourse in *Murder House* is concerned, I would like to examine the characters' biological ability to reproduce first, before investigating pleasure and sexual desire more closely in the following chapters.

When considering the amount of sexual relationships among the *Murder House* characters, as can be seen in the sexogram, it appears interesting that these affairs are mostly non-reproductive. Most intriguing, all "[...] potentially procreative couples are markedly not having sex [...], [while] [t]he dead seem to be having more sex than anyone" (Keetley 99). In an argument in episode 1, Ben reproaches Vivien for not having "[...] had sex in almost a year" (*AHS*, S01E01), after she had had a miscarriage. Additionally, despite being interested in sexual activities, Vivien and Ben both seem to prefer masturbating instead of having sex with each other, or in Ben's case, having an affair with his student Hayden. Vivien fantasizes about Ben while satisfying herself, but she also dreams of the Rubber Man and the security guard Luke, who has been taking care of her security since the home invasion in episode 2. Similarly, Ben also

masturbates, but his thoughts do not involve sex fantasies with his wife at all. Instead, his thoughts only revolve around the Harmons' maid Moira, as she appears young and seductive to Ben, in contrast to the other *Murder House* characters, to whom she seems to be an elderly half-blind woman. Mostly he masturbates after having rejected one of Moira's various attempts to seduce him, except for once in episode 1, when Ben loses control and kisses Moira until Violet enters the room and disturbs them. The way in which Moira appears to Ben in particular, however, will be investigated more closely in chapter 4.2.1. to explain her seductive power.

Another couple which seems to have more sex with other partners rather than each other is Chad and Patrick. While Chad blames their non-existing sex life on his "[...] low testosterone from stress" (*AHS*, S01E04) and complains about their relationship, Patrick does not make any efforts to hide his disapproval of his partner in an argument:

PATRICK. You know what? I am.

CHAD. You are what?

PATRICK. Screwing my trainer. You know what else? He's a power bottom. He loves it.

CHAD. First of all, please remember our agreement. Don't ask don't tell. Secondly, is this crass admission supposed to hurt me? [...] I want love! I want passion! I want a relationship with a man, not Martha Stewart! (*AHS*, S01E04)

Even though the gay couple had previously been planning to adopt a child and thereby 'reproduce', their discontent with the relationship appears to have affected their intention as none of the two seems interested in neither revitalizing nor continuing their relationship. As it turns out later, Patrick's trainer has not been the only one with whom he has been cheating on Chad; in fact, it is revealed that Patrick has been engaging in sadomasochistic cybersex with someone called "JungleJim4322" (*AHS*, S01E08). When Chad buys a latex suit in episode 8 to show sympathy for his partner's fetish, Patrick rejects him again and they start another argument. Later, Tate appears as the Rubber Man in the latex suit and kills the homosexual couple. Thereby, he eliminates any further hope of the two to procreate.

Considering those facts, it appears that both couples' mentioned unproductive relationships are due to the infidelities committed by one of the partners. While hardly engaging in any sexual activities with their partners, Ben and Patrick are both sexually active, committing adultery by sleeping with others as well as masturbating while thinking of someone else than their spouse. Since masturbation and homosexuality "[...]

may well fail to satisfy the natural reproductive function of sex [...]” (Williamson 217), both men fail to fulfil reproductive purposes.

Closely connected to markedly unreproductive sexual practices, women’s (in)ability to reproduce also plays a significant role in *Murder House*. As already mentioned, there is a wide-spread fear among aging women in modern society to lose fecundity and therefore, they prolong their fertility with reproductive technologies, such as hormone treatment, fertility medication or in vitro fertilization. Despite enhancing the possibility to get pregnant at an age when fertility usually starts decreasing, these methods commonly entail a risk of getting children with birth defects (Sifferlin). In *Murder House*, Violets reminds her mother of these tricky circumstances when she gets to know about Vivien’s pregnancy: “You know the statistics when you have a baby over 40” (AHS, S01E02). One side effect of reproductive technologies is the increased probability for a twin pregnancy (Ombelet et al. 3), and in *Murder House*, there are even two twin couples. Since the vandalizing twins Troy and Bryan from episode 1 hardly appear in *Murder House*, they can only be taken as hints towards being the result of a possibly artificially enhanced pregnancy. The other twin couple, Michael and Jeffrey, even convey another risk of fertility enhancing methods, as they both indeed suffer from deficits. Jeffrey is stillborn, while Michael (Antichrist) can be considered as mentally disturbed considering his high levels of aggression and bloodlust towards his innocent babysitter in episode 12. Nevertheless, it can also be interpreted that the Harmons’ twins’ deficits mentioned do not represent symbols for Vivien’s late pregnancy, but rather stand in relation with Michael’s hybridity of a human and a ghost, which makes him an abject, as I have argued in the previous chapter.

As far as birth deficits, which are typically associated with fertility enhancing methods (Sifferlin), are concerned, Constance’s offsprings may represent the best example, as all four of them have a deficit, although the fourth child’s identity is never revealed in the series. Even though Constance continuously insists on being a caring mother who does not want Child Protection Services “[...] to take him away, place him in an institution. My boy. My Beauregard” (AHS, S01E07), she seems to regret all of her children’s births, which becomes clear in a conversation between her and Vivien:

VIVIEN. Can I ask you a personal question? If you had known about Addie before she was born would you have done something? When I first met you, you said that if they'd had the tests back then that you might have...

CONSTANCE. Oh, don't think I didn't think about it, even after she was born leaving that little bug-eye out in the cold. That's what they do in China. But a mother never turns her back on her child. Every one of mine was pure love.

VIVIEN. You have other kids?

CONSTANCE. I have four. I should've stopped after the first. My womb is cursed. My husband was the spitting image of Van Johnson. You'd think we'd make little cherub children, fat and lively but it wasn't meant to be. I think our beauty was an affront to the gods.

VIVIEN. All four of them had Down's?

CONSTANCE. Or some such malady. Except for one. He was a model of physical perfection. He was my gift, but I lost him to other things. (AHS, S01E02)

While Addie suffers from Down's syndrome, Beau has a mental disability. Similarly, Tate is severely mentally disturbed, considering the fact that he was the assassin in a school shooting at Westfield High, where he killed 15 students, and later justifies his criminal act claiming "I kill people I like. [...] I don't feel sad. I don't feel anything. It's a filthy world we live in. It's a filthy, goddamn, helpless world. And, honestly, I feel like I'm helping to take them away from the shit and the piss and the vomit that run in the streets. I'm helping to take them somewhere clean and kind" (AHS, S01E01). Acknowledging the facts mentioned, it can be said that Constance's reproduction was in so far unsuccessful as all her offsprings were born with deficits, which is probably one of aging mothers' biggest concern about a late pregnancy.

Moreover, the children represented with either mental or physical deficits can also be understood as an allusion towards the abject quality of the woman's womb. As I have illustrated previously, the woman and especially her womb are often considered as monstrous due to their reproductive function (Creed 49). In *Murder House*, disability seems to be represented as an allusion towards a woman's abject ability to (re)produce further abjects (monstrous children), as Constance continuously refers to Addie as her "little monster" (AHS, S01E05), eventually suggesting that she would have had an abortion if "they'd invented some of those tests a few years ago" (AHS, S01E01). Considering that Constance does not use any similar nicknames for Tate, who indeed commits monstrous acts, it can be interpreted that Constance views Addie's disability as abjective, ignoring that Tate may be the 'real' monster, as his former school mates suggest (AHS, S01E11). Thus, disability in *Murder House* may symbolize that not only the woman's womb itself is a monstrous abject, but that it can also create "little monster[s]" (AHS, S01E05).

In contrast to older female *Murder House* characters, who seem to be capable of “monstrous procreation[s]” (Keetley 95) only, the younger characters have difficulty of being physically able to have sex at all. In a therapy session, Tate informs Ben about his worries: “I was afraid my dick wouldn’t work. Because I met someone” (*AHS*, S01E01). This fear becomes true when Tate and Violet try to have sex for the first time at the beach in episode 5 and Tate seems incapable of getting an erection. However, as soon as Violet becomes a ghost as well after having committed suicide, they manage to have sex without difficulty (*AHS*, S01E08). As one might assume, Tate’s erectile dysfunction may be due to the fact that Violet is still human at their first try. Nevertheless, the ‘human quality’ of Tate’s sex partner may be regarded as irrelevant, considering that he did not face any difficulties raping Vivien in the first episode, which eventually even lead to a pregnancy. Since the only ‘difference’ between Vivien and Violet is their age, it may be interpreted that Tate’s fear of being unable to perform sex continues until Violet becomes alike to him as a ghost; the reason why ghosts may be considerably more successful in performing sexual acts, however, will be more closely analyzed in 4.2.2.

Furthermore, Hayden exploits her newly gained ghost-quality after she has been murdered and uses “[...] death [as] an infallible method of birth control” (Keetley 95). In contrast to modern society, in which young women are often afraid to get pregnant, the characters in *AHS* seem to consider teen pregnancy as rather unlikely or even impossible. This becomes clear when Hayden has an affair with Constance’s toy boy Travis, who is concerned of having impregnated her, but relaxes as soon as Hayden tells him “It’s cool. I can’t get pregnant” (*AHS*, S01E09). Considering the seemingly infertile young characters, it may be said that the modern societal fear of getting pregnant is reversed in *Murder House*. Instead of fearing pregnancy, the younger characters seem to question their physical ability to perform sex (Tate), as well as their fecundity (Hayden). Thus, despite their prolific age, the youngsters seem to be unable to procreate at all.

As becomes clear from the above discussion, the reproductive function of sexuality fails in several ways in *Murder House*. First, many characters have sex for the purpose of pleasure and not for procreation, which is why they engage in non-reproductive sexual practices, such as masturbation or homosexuality. Second, female characters who actually manage to get pregnant only give birth to children with a deficit. This can be

understood as a symbol for fertility prolonging methods which commonly involve the risk of giving birth to twins (Ombelet et al. 3) or children with a deficit (Sifferlin) and can both be found in *Murder House*. At the same time, the deficits represented in the series may also be interpreted as an allusion towards a woman's abject quality of her womb, which enables her to give birth to abject children. This may be supported by the fact that Addie, for example, has Down's syndrome, but is referred to as monster by her own mother, despite any wrongdoing. Finally, in contrast to the aging women's successful 'monstrous' reproduction, especially the younger characters face difficulties of being physically able to perform any sexual activity, not to mention getting pregnant.

4.1.3 Lustful devils

"Sex is the only weapon you have [...]" (*AHS*, S01E09)

Apart from representing women in relation to their abject ability to reproduce, which confers power on the woman, *Murder House* also depicts women's sexuality as terribly powerful. As I have argued previously, non-procreative female sexuality was sinful and therefore linked to insanity in the 19th century, as a symptom of women's "[...] instability of their reproductive systems [interfering] with their sexual, emotional, and rational control" (Showalter 55). Even though it is impossible to eradicate a term's strong connotation entirely, as I have explained with the phallus, its meaning can still be reclaimed by reversing the discourse (Foucault 101). Following Foucault's theory of the "reverse discourse", it may be suggested that reversing the stereotypes about sexuality can exert power, similar to Kristeva's concept of abjection. As I will demonstrate, one can recognize such a reverse discourse regarding female sexuality in *Murder House*.

In Victorian times, "women were theorized as incomplete human subjects" (Hurley 119) due to their vulnerability to insanity (Showalter 55). Soon, however, the upcoming of "ambiguously sexed and gendered subjects as the homosexual and the 'New Woman' emerged increasingly into public controversy" (Hurley 121), as women's new sexual identity contradicted the stereotypical view of the "domestic angel" and endangered men's virility. This disruption of the ideal of domesticity is most notably represented in the *Murder House* character Vivien and can be referred to her duty as a housewife. Since Vivien is a married housewife with a child and a dog, she may be classified as a somewhat stereotypical representation of a "domestic angel", but considering her household skills, she is rather unsuccessful. Despite being at home, she employs

Moira to undertake her job, who emphasizes women's stereotypical role in a conversation with Vivien: "Do you ever get tired of cleaning up other people's messes? - We're women. It's what we do. I just get paid for it" (*AHS*, S01E01). Regarding the relationship between Moira and Vivien, it can be said that Vivien adapts the role of the Lacanian phallus, which refers to the "social structures that control our lives" (Felluga 248). Due to the connotation of the word phallus with an erect penis, as I have argued earlier, it can be inferred that the power related with what Lacan termed "'Name-of-the-Father' (laws, control, knowledge)" (Felluga 248) denotes male dominance, which, in this case, is taken over by a female. Through this claiming of power, Vivien manages to gain autonomy and independence, similar to the process of abjection between a mother and a child.

Moreover, one may interpret that the classification of a "domestic angel" does not only refer to the successful management of household chores, but also denotes the role of a (good) mother. As already analyzed previously, the mother characters in *Murder House* can be indeed described as monstrous, not only because their bodies can be horrifying due to their abject quality, but also due to their offsprings' atrocious upbringing, of which they take care independently from the respective fathers. Constance, for example, does not only give birth to 'monsters', but also treats them badly, as "her flashbacks are characterized by pain and violence associated with domesticity and motherhood" (Subramanian 116). Through the flashbacks, the audience gets to know that she used to keep her son Beau chained in the attic and forced her lover Larry to choke him with a pillow in episode 7. Also in the present she seems to have maintained her negative feelings towards her own children, informing Vivien that she would have contemplated abortion, if she had known that Addie would be born with Down's syndrome (*AHS*, S01E02). Additionally, Constance seems to care more about her lover(s) than her own children as becomes clear in the scene in which she threatens Addie to quit spending time with Travis: "I would kill or die for you. But I will not share the affections of the men I bring into this house with any woman. You understand? [...] And when Travis comes back, send him upstairs" (*AHS*, S01E04). The numerous affairs also have a negative influence on Constance's relationship with Tate. He disapproves of her due to her relationship with Larry as well as the fact that she murdered Beau and continuously denies her crime, insisting he "[...] died in his slumber of natural causes" (*AHS*, S01E10). Tate's resentment towards Constance becomes even more obvious in a flashback when Tate was seven years old and Nora's ghost saved him

from Thaddeus, after which he told her “I wish you were my mommy” (*AHS*, S01E11), underlining Constance’s incompetence of being a good mother.

Apart from reversing the image of the woman as “domestic angel” to obtain power, the instrumentalization of sexuality seems to be an even more significant discourse in *Murder House*. As far as the three characters Constance, Vivien and Hayden are concerned, they follow sexual activities against the Puritan practice of limiting women’s sex life to reproduction only (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22; Pollard 182-83) and therefore, they may be interpreted to represent a reverse discourse of female sexuality. In the 19th century, the Victorians were convinced that women develop an increased sex drive during the “female life-cycle” (Showalter 55), as I have explained earlier. Since this behavior deviated from the norm, non-reproductive female sexuality was considered horrifying (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22; Hurley 121; Pollard 182-83). In *Murder House*, Constance has numerous affairs, as can be seen in the sexogram, in which she acts highly manipulative to exploit her respective partner. Nevertheless, she has not always been controlling the relationships, but only manages to reverse the power, when killing her husband Hugo. In order to understand Constance’s transformation from the young domestic angel to the old abusive Jezebel, it may be important to take a closer look at the scene when she catches Hugo raping the maid Moira in their matrimonial bed.

In a flashback at the beginning of episode 3, it is revealed that Hugo has been unfaithful to Constance for a longer time. When Moira refuses to have sex with him, Hugo insists “You liked it the last time” (*AHS*, S01E03). As Moira tries to escape the argument, which is filmed in a close-up shot reverse shot on a straight-on angle, Hugo violently grabs her, throws her on the bed and pulls down his trousers, indicating that he rapes the maid. With a cut at the atonal sound of a violin, the image switches to Constance, filmed in a tilt up from her feet to her hip, while Moira’s whimpering can be heard in voice off. Eventually, a gun in Constance’s right hand is revealed, on which the camera remains mostly focused until she pulls the trigger in an extreme close-up of the gun, when she targets the window to get their attention. Considering that Constance walks up to their bedroom with a gun, she appears to be prepared to kill her unfaithful husband. When Constance whispers “I’ve loved you since I was 16. [...] You’ve broken my heart for the last time” (*AHS*, S01E03), it can be interpreted that she has been enduring Hugo’s repetitious deceit for many years and is now ready to take revenge and reverse the power.

After this incidence, the Langdons move in next door and Constance seduces Larry to regain Murder House, in which Larry is living with his family. She abuses Larry's seemingly eternal affection and manipulates him, so he even continues being madly in love with her after they have long broken up. Also, when Constance confronts him with the murder of her new boyfriend Travis, Larry tries to convince her to come back to him "Please, baby, he's dead, and I'm here. And I'm alive, and I still love you" (*AHS*, S01E10), although she informs him that "I never loved you. I endured you for the sake of my family. That is all" (*AHS*, S01E10). Regarding Constance's relationship with her last boyfriend Travis, she also claims to love him and even suggests getting married and raising the Harmon twin Michael (her grandson) together. Nevertheless, every time Constance talks about Travis she only emphasizes that he is "So young. So beautiful" (*AHS*, S01E10), which makes clear that she is only interested in exploiting his youthfulness and innocence of believing that she wants to start a family with him out of mutual affection. Again, Constance abuses a man's desire for her in order to reverse stereotypical power relations to her advantage.

Akin to Constance, Hayden also represents a reverse discourse as she demands sex for the purpose of pleasure. In comparison to the other female *Murder House* characters, she only seduces taken men, as can be seen in the sexogram. The strongest of her relations with male characters is the one with Ben, whom she not only desires sexually, but also as her partner. Despite claiming to prefer Vivien over Hayden, however, Ben seems caught by Hayden's irresistibility and assures her of his full support, which ultimately ends in lying to Vivien again (*AHS*, S01E04). Therefore, Hayden does not only exert power over Ben, but also over his marriage with Vivien, who gets furious when she finds out that her husband returned to Boston to stand by Hayden for her abortion (*AHS*, S01E02). Regarding her other two 'victims', Hayden also seduces Constance's ex-husband Hugo and her current lover Travis, whose attention Hayden gains by giving him a wolf whistle as he walks by after an argument with Constance (*AHS*, S01E09). When Hayden questions Travis' relationship with the "royal bitch" (*AHS*, S01E09), Travis claims to be in love with Constance. Nevertheless, he returns to Hayden, similar to Ben, to continue their merely sexual affair. Hence, Hayden's seductive behavior towards men seems to be more powerful than their attraction to their respective partner. For the reasons mentioned, Hayden manages to reverse the stereotypically male power of desiring sex. Additionally, since female sexual desire deviates from the norm, as I have argued, Hayden also becomes an abject by craving sex, as

“abjection is constructed as a rebellion of filthy, lustful, carnal, female flesh” (Creed 38). This process of abjection through increased sexual desire is also indicated in one of Hayden’s conversations with Ben: “Kiss me. I miss your mouth. I miss the way it tastes. I’m aching for you. My tongue is swollen. My lips are raw. I’m rotting from the inside out” (*AHS*, S01E05). Thus, Hayden turns into an abject by reversing the discourse of stereotypical gender roles to obtain power.

In addition to the two characters analyzed, Vivien is also a significant personality in the context of power and sex. As opposed to Constance and Hayden, who enjoy being desired by a man and abuse their devotion to manipulate them, Vivien exerts power over her husband by refusing to have sex with him:

BEN. How long, Viv? How long are you gonna punish me for?

VIVIEN. I’m not punishing you, you narcissistic asshole. I’m trying to figure out how to forgive you for having sex with one of your students. You want me to have sex with you? I can’t even look at your face, Ben without seeing the expression on it while you were pile-driving her in our bed!

BEN. I screwed up! How many times do I have to say I’m sorry? I was hurting too!

VIVIEN. Oh. Oh, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Did- Did the life that was growing inside you die and did you have to carry that around in your belly? [...]

BEN. My son died too! My baby died too! [...] I needed you, and you got a dog. It was me you should’ve been curling up with at night. Not a dog! [...]

VIVIEN. You needed me? So she was revenge because you needed me? Because I wasn’t there for you in your time of need? Now I get it.

BEN. We haven’t had sex in almost a year.

VIVIEN. Yeah. You think I don’t know that? (*AHS*, S01E01)

According to Foucault, the relation between power and sex is always negative: “rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, or mask. [...] To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex” (83). Since Vivien rejects sex for “almost a year” (*AHS*, S01E01), she exerts power through sex deprivation, which seems to be successful considering that Ben is still attracted to her, attempting to make advances to his wife several times despite her repulsions: “I appreciate that you’re trying. I’m trying too. [...] It’s just gonna take some time” (*AHS*, S01E01). Thus, by deciding when to (not) have sex, it can be said that Vivien establishes a similarly powerful reverse discourse to Constance and Hayden, as “the suppression of sex” (Foucault 83) seems to be most effective in the context of power and sex.

For the reasons mentioned, female sexuality is used in *Murder House* to reverse the power ascribed to stereotypical gender roles. Instead of enduring sex for procreation (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22), the women do not only practice non-reproductive sexual activities, but also seem to enjoy them and thereby, they reverse the discourse. Due to the *Murder House* women's deviant desire, they also become objects, which makes the power they attain through the instrumentalization of sexuality even more horrifying.

4.2 Desires and drives

4.2.1 Father's sins

"You know, I could show you statistics on how many men cheat after a miscarriage."
(*AHS*, S01E01)

Regarding the criminal acts conducted by male characters, they represent another essential element to evoke the emotion fear (Botting 84). According to Botting (84), the sins of the father are projected onto the following generations, which can be recognized in their repetitiously committed offenses. In *Murder House*, this central gothic trope is impersonated by adulterous father characters, as can be deduced from the sexogram. Nevertheless, the *Murder House* fathers also commit other sins, which can be connected to the previously analyzed reversal of power relations.

As far as the male *Murder House* characters' unfaithfulness towards their spouses is concerned, it is interesting to note that "[...] the husband's infidelity [always] results in death" (Yaeri 65). For example, Travis affair with Hayden results in his death, as Hayden kills him when he intends to return to Constance to profess love (*AHS*, S01E09). Hugo's infidelity even causes a multiple murder, as he and Moira are shot by Constance when she catches her husband raping their maid in their bedroom (*AHS*, S01E03). Moreover, the homosexual couple Chad and Patrick are both murdered by Tate, as soon as Patrick's infidelity endangers the couple's plan to adopt a child, which Tate wanted to give to Nora to ease her suffering to get a child. Nevertheless, the commission of adultery does not necessarily result in the decease of the offender himself, but may also affect characters closely related to the adulterer, as it is the case with Larry. When his wife Lorraine discovers his affair with Constance, she sets their house ablaze, burning herself and their two daughters Margaret and Angie (*AHS*, S01E07). Similarly, Ben's extramarital relationship leads to Hayden's decease, when

Larry beats her to death with a shovel (*AHS*, S01E03). Only later in the series, the rest of Ben's family including himself comes to die in Murder House, while Larry remains one of the few characters who 'survive' as a human at the end of the series.

Moreover, the close relation between infidelity and death is also indicated by Moira, who tells Vivien that "[c]heating on one's wife qualifies as an unspeakable criminal act. It's on par with murder. And I'll tell you one thing I know, if I know anything at all. Dr. Harmon will cheat again if given half the chance" (*AHS*, S01E06). With regards to Moira, her character seems to mirror the male characters' attraction to unfaithfulness as she embodies their assumingly sinful mind. While she is seen as an elderly hunch-backed woman with a creepy blind eye by the majority of Murder House inhabitants, to Ben Harmon as well as to most other male characters, she appears young and seductive. According to Moira, the reason why men perceive her as highly attractive and eroticizing is "[...] the ways of men – their need to objectify, conquer. They see what they want to see. Women, however, see into the soul of a person" (*AHS*, S01E03). Thereby, the series blurs the boundaries between film and audience, which can be referred back to the concept of the male gaze (Mulvey 9).

Furthermore, it may be interpreted that Moira only appears as a provoking embodiment of men's secret desires as long as they are driven by their longing for sex. For this reason, Ben is tempted to become a repeat offender as Moira continuously provokes him suggesting "Why don't you touch me a little" (*AHS*, S01E01), which he almost gives in to in episode 1, but gets interrupted by Violet, who sees the 'old' Moira sitting on his lap. Only later in the series, when Ben realizes his true passion for Vivien, he also starts seeing Moira's older appearance:

MOIRA. Kinky. You want me to try that on? Looks like you went to a lot of trouble to find it.

BEN. What do you know about this?

MOIRA. I know I get wet just thinking about sliding that rubber on my body.

BEN. Stop it. Stop your bullshit and listen to me. You're in this house all the time. You see everything. What happened with Vivien?

MOIRA. Why do you care? You're a man. Isn't this what all men want? The freedom to satiate their needs guilt-free?

BEN. Just tell me the truth. I think I made a horrible mistake by putting Vivien in the hospital. She was attacked by someone.

MOIRA. Congratulations, Dr. Harmon. You're finally beginning to see things as they are. (*AHS*, S01E09)

At the beginning of this scene, Moira is again represented as young and tempting. First, the perspective in which she is filmed is a full shot from a slightly low angle, which after four cuts, changes to a tilt up from her knees to her hip, focusing on the garter straps she is wearing. When Ben tells Moira to stop her seductive behavior, he approaches her and the camera switches to a shot reverse shot from a straight-on angle. Then, Moira's thighs are filmed in a tilt up once more and subsequently, the camera changes back to a shot reverse shot between the two. The moment Ben realizes that he "[...] made a horrible mistake by putting Vivien in the hospital" (*AHS*, S01E09), Moira first lowers and then raises her look before turning away from Ben and walking towards the door. Again, her garter straps are filmed in an extreme close up from the back until the camera tilts up from her thighs to her head to reveal the 'old' Moira, who congratulates Ben that he is "finally beginning to see things as they are" (*AHS*, S01E09).

Considering that Moira is seen as either old and spooky, or young and arousing, depending on a characters' desire, it may be interpreted that Moira's character represents an extension to the examples of reverse discourses analyzed. As Vivien reverses the power by neglecting sex to Ben, Moira embodies Ben's sexual craving and thus displays that he seems to be driven by his desires, not love. By continuously tempting Ben to engage in sexual activities with her, it may be inferred that she intensifies Vivien's power. Ben continues to see young Moira until episode 9, because until then, his wife's rejection to have sex with him (except for episode 1) has the effect that Ben seems to crave sex even more. Nevertheless, as Ben is indeed able to see the 'old' Moira, his sexualized perception of her seems to be a trick of his mind, which verifies his claimed dedication for Vivien and thus makes Vivien's reverse power discourse even stronger.

Apart from being unfaithful, however, Ben commits another sin which may also be interpreted as an attempt to suppress Vivien's reversal of power relations. Due to the fact that she obtains control over Ben, he feels endangered in his virility and therefore, he sends her to an asylum as it was common practice in Victorian times, when female sexuality was associated with symptoms of insanity, which emerged during "[...] the biological crises of the female life-cycle – puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause [...]" (Showalter 55). Due to the increased sex drive that women develop while passing through these phases, "the disorders of the female body were inextricably

linked to the female reproductive system, so that female sexuality emerged as both causal and symptomatic of female abhumanness” (Hurley 120). Additionally, women’s bodies were hystericized in sociomedical discourses as “a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed – qualified and disqualified – as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality [...]” (Foucault 104). Due to this seemingly immediate connection between brain and uterus when reaching maturity (Blandford qtd. in Showalter 56), any deviations regarding a woman’s body were seen as “of abjection and danger” (Hurley 118). Thus, in an attempt to cure women from their deviant behavior, adolescent women were occasionally sent to asylums (Showalter 56).

In *Murder House*, Vivien is associated with this emerging insanity originating from her female reproductive organs. She has had a miscarriage and thus reacts hysterically to any deviations concerning her new pregnancy. Also, she is continuously troubled after having become the victim of several acts of cruelty, involving various intrusions of strangers, Violet’s rebellion, as well as her husband’s repetitious infidelity. Eventually, Ben admits Vivien to an asylum and she herself starts believing that she has gone insane:

VIVIEN. My mind is playing tricks on me, Moira. I'm literally seeing things.

[...] And everybody thinks I'm crazy. I know Ben does. I know it. [...]

MOIRA. That's what men do. They make you think you're crazy, so they can have their fun. [...] Since the beginning of time men find excuses to lock women away. They make up diseases, like hysteria. Do you know where that word comes from?

VIVIEN. No.

MOIRA. The Greek word for uterus. In the second century, they thought it was caused by sexual deprivation and the only possible cure was hysterical paroxysm. Orgasms. Doctors would masturbate women in their office and call it medicine.

VIVIEN. I had no idea.

MOIRA. It was a hundred years ago, but we're no better off today. Men are still inventing ways to drive women over the edge. Look at you and Mr. Harmon. Cheating on you and leaving you here pregnant with twins, alone to care for your truant teenage daughter. Any woman would lose her mind. (AHS, S01E08)

As becomes clear from this conversation, Ben seems to link Vivien’s emotional instability with her pregnancy, sending her to the asylum to ‘cure’ her, while Moira reveals that it had only been a manipulative move from Ben to tame Vivien’s rebellion against him. Even though Vivien has become a victim of rape, Ben accuses her of having cheated on him and that she is “seeing things” (AHS, S01E08). In order to support his argument, he goes one step further by drawing on his ‘expertise knowledge’: “I know

a psychotic break when I see one. My wife is a danger to herself and to others” (*AHS*, S01E8). Only Luke, a police acquaintance of Vivien, indicates that he suspects the evil plans behind Ben’s pretext to help his wife by having her institutionalized: “So you want to ship her off to the loony bin so you get the house, the kids, the mistress and the dog, huh?” (*AHS*, S01E08). As Ben seems to feel powerless and offended in his virility due to the fact that Vivien has been impregnated by someone else than her husband, the reason why he admits his wife to a clinic may be that he wants to gain Vivien back and suppress her power. Additionally, Vivien’s contemplations of getting divorced and becoming independent appear to reinforce Ben’s attempts to become a happy family again, as his wife’s autonomy and toughness endanger his male power.

Altogether, the sins which the *Murder House* father characters commit can be perceived as horrifying for various reasons. Firstly, the infidelity practiced in *Murder House* is passed onto the successive generations. This may be inferred from the fact that the male characters analyzed represent different contemporaries of Murder House owners. Secondly, the men’s adulteries always result in decease, mostly including the offender himself. Regarding the fathers’ unfaithfulness, the way in which Moira is perceived by other characters depends on “[...] what they want to see” (*AHS*, S01E03). Thus, men with a sinful mind see her in a sexualized version, while the others “see into [her] soul” (*AHS*, S01E03) and thus, they recognize the old Moira. Furthermore, Ben commits another sin when he tries to hide his own guilt and admits Vivien to an asylum. As I have explained, this action can be interpreted as an attempt to overturn his wife’s power, which she attains by reversing the power discourse.

4.2.2 Necrophilia, or sex with the ghosts?

“Hi. I’m Tate. I’m dead. Wanna hook up?” (*AHS*, S01E10).

Similar to the male characters’ unfaithfulness to cause death, sex and pregnancy in *Murder House* are also closely connected to demise. According to Freud, the human psyche is regulated by the pleasure principle, which is an innate “[...] propensity to avoid unpleasure or to generate pleasure” (Freud *Pleasure* 139). As children, the achievement of pleasure needs to be immediate and during maturity, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle, which enables postponed gratification (Freud *Pleasure* 144). Due to the fact that “[...] the pleasure principle [occasionally] overwhelms the reality principle, to the detriment of the entire organism” (Freud *Pleasure*

145), Freud came to distinguish further between the “life drive” (sexual drive) and the “death drive” (ego drive) (*Pleasure* 210). While the life drive refers to one’s intention to reproduce and to prolong the existence of a species, “[t]he death instincts are to begin with directed inwards and tend towards self-destruction [...]” (Laplanche & Pontalis 97). Following Freud’s (*Pleasure* 210) argument, this means that the death drive represents the opposite working force to the life drive as an intrinsic and universal impulse aimed at destruction, fear and hate. Considering the abundance of sexual relationships as well as the high mortality rate in *Murder House*, however, I will demonstrate that the death drive forms part of the sex drive (Evans 34), by examining another way in which power is established through sex.

Regarding the studies on *American Horror Story* by Keetley, Geller and Banker, it appears that the theory of the death drive may indeed play an important role in the series, due to the considerable number of deaths as well as sexual intercourses in the series. As suggested by Bataille, there is a correlation between sex and destruction, which may explain its further relation to death:

Our status in the social order is based on this sort of behaviour. But when the fever of sex seizes us we behave in the opposite way. We recklessly draw on our strength and sometimes in the violence of passion we squander considerable resources to no real purpose. Pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as a ‘little death’. Consequently anything that suggests erotic excess always implies disorder. (170)

If sex is so closely linked to a destructive energy, it may be inferred that Lacan is correct in postulating that “[...] the death drive is not a separate drive, but is in fact an aspect of every DRIVE” (*Écrits* qtd. Evans 34), in contrast to Freud’s conviction that death drive and life drive are opposing forces (*Pleasure* 210). Considering that the biological function of sex is to procreate, the connection to a destructive and possibly intrinsic drive would render reproduction as markedly unsuccessful and eliminate “the biopolitics that secures reproductive futurity” (Geller & Banker 46). Indeed, the *Murder House* characters’ futile efforts of procreation appear to be “[...] a seemingly boundless source of impulsive energy caught within a dynamic of creation and destruction” (Bristow 9). If the death drive is indeed contained within all drives, thus also the sex drive, it may be interpreted that in *Murder House*, the death drive takes over the sex drive’s aspiration to procreate, merely leaving unproductive sexual desire behind, which may explain the issue of failing reproduction. Even though the two characters Vivien and

Hayden manage to get pregnant, both pregnancies end lethally for themselves as well as their babies; hence, also the 'successful' gestations are closely related to death.

Moreover, sexual activities in *Murder House* are also directly linked with death due to the fact that the majority of sex partners are ghosts and thus dead. As I have argued in the previous chapters, many of the characters only have sex with ghosts or when they are ghosts themselves. In the case of the young couple Violet and Tate, their attempt to have sex only succeeds after Violet has committed suicide in the house and has also become a ghost. While the two seem to be leading a romantic relationship, other characters develop an increased sex drive as soon as they become ghosts:

HAYDEN. You're like a girl, sulking down here in the basement instead of doing something about what's really bothering you.

TATE. I'm tired of hurting people.

HAYDEN. Do you want her to go away? 'Cause Vivien booked their tickets. I heard her. You know what you have to do.

TATE. Yeah, I do. I just have to prepare myself. It's not fun.

HAYDEN. You want to fool around while you work your way up to it? Come on.

TATE. I'm not into it.

HAYDEN. What is it about being dead that makes me so horny?

TATE. Quit it. I'm in love. (AHS, S01E08)

Apart from trying to "fool around" (AHS, S01E08) with Tate, who rejects Hayden's attempts, as he is in love with Violet and does not feel attracted to anyone else than his girlfriend, Hayden appears to be a particularly lascivious ghost. She not only imposes herself on Ben to get him back, but also manipulates his marriage by telling Vivien suggestive details about their affair: "He found something in me he'll never find in you again. He said my face was soft like a baby and between my thighs, I tasted like raspberries and cream" (AHS, S01E05). In addition to her attempts to seduce Ben, Hayden has sex with several other men, including Hugo and Travis, after having been killed by Larry (AHS, S01E03). While Hugo is already a ghost as well, Travis still remains among the living when they sleep with each other. In fact, Hayden informs Travis that the reason she engages in intercourse with him despite being in love with Ben is "[t]o see if I could do it with a guy who's still alive" (AHS, S01E09).

Similar to Hayden, Patrick also has various one-night stands with characters who do not form part of the series' cast, especially on Halloween night, when he can walk around freely and leave the property of Murder House. This is also indicated by his partner Chad in the second part of the episode Halloween: "He's probably on his fourth

unprotected blow job" (*AHS*, S01E05). Apart from his Halloween affairs who he encounters at bars (*AHS*, S01E04), Patrick is also tempted to engage in sexual intercourse with characters in Murder House. When he and Ben are alone in the bathroom to treat Ben's cut from pumpkin carving, Patrick touches his lower parts, suggesting "Come on, Ben. We're the same. I can tell. You play the role of the dutiful househusband but you like having that cock sucked often and well. I can do that. Four minutes. No one will know" (*AHS*, S01E04). Ben, however, rejects this offer explaining "I'm not gay" (*AHS*, S01E04) and falling back from Patrick, emphasizing his statement with hand gestures. Patrick immediately apologizes justifying "It's just been a long time for me" (*AHS*, S01E04) and accepts the defeat. A further character who leads Patrick into temptation is Tate: "Well, there's got to be something I could offer you. I mean, just because we're dead doesn't mean we don't have wants. Desires. [...] It must suck to have to wait till Halloween every year to get a little strange" (*AHS*, S01E11). Even though Patrick rejects Tate, the camera setting yet indicates his sexual desire, as it focuses on Patrick's facial expression in a close-up as he looks at Tate's penis covered in his pants. Also, the camera switches between the two characters in a shot reverse shot, showing Tate from a slight below shot and Patrick from overhead. Due to the differences in height represented, it may be interpreted that the camera angles in which the scenes are shot establish a notion of unequal power between them. As Patrick is filmed from an overhead perspective, it can be inferred that this camera angle should emphasize his struggle to control himself and not succumb to his sexual desire, which has increased since he has been a ghost. By contrast, Tate seems to be aware that Patrick is stuck in a conflict between desire and disgust towards him and takes full advantage of this knowledge. Thus, the reason for which the camera shoots Tate from a low angle may be to place him in a more powerful position, as "[...] the importance of what is shown tends to be enlarged thereby" (Liebelt 5). Since the ghosts have a clearly increased desire for sex, but are already dead, the link between the death drive and sex drive may be illustrated.

Another element in *Murder House* which links sexuality and death is necrophilia (sex with corpses). In 1947, the dentist Dr. Curan treats a young woman called Elizabeth Short. As she is short of money, she suggests they "[...] could come to some kind of mutually beneficial arrangement" (*AHS*, S01E09), indicating she would pay for her dental treatment with sex, just as he had accepted from other girls previously: "Nabby also said you sometimes made special arrangements with girls who were a little short"

(*AHS*, S01E09). While Elizabeth is anesthetized with nitrous oxide, Curan rapes her and when he takes the gas mask off her and she does not awake, he recognizes that she has died from an overdose of the heavy sedation during his abuse. As Elizabeth is already dead, Curan's willful abuse should not be classified as 'mere' rape, but rather designate his atrocity as necrophilia. Nevertheless, Curan is clearly not the only one performing necrophiliac actions, even though his criminal act may be the only clearly recognizable one. In fact, almost all *Murder House* characters engage in necrophilia, considering that the majority has sex with a ghost at least once, but is hardly aware of the ghostly quality of their sex partner(s). Only Hayden implies that she is dead after having slept with Travis, as examined previously, when she declares that she wanted "[t]o see if [she] could do it with a guy who's still alive" (*AHS*, S01E09). Since "[t]he dead seem to be having more sex than anyone [else]" (Keetley 99), it may be interpreted that the death drive contained in the sex drive causes the characters' attraction to sex with the dead. As the *Murder House* inhabitants are mostly unaware of the fact that they are technically performing necrophilia, this element can be seen as another symbol for the connection between the life drive and death drive. Moreover, it seems interesting that only Curan appears to be horrified when he realizes that he has accidentally killed Elizabeth and hence has had necrophiliac sex (*AHS*, S01E09). This may be inferred from the fact that his voice slightly squeaks as he calls "Beth" to wake her up and sobs "Oh God" in voice off (*AHS*, S01E09), while the camera shoots Elizabeth's face in a close-up from a low angle, showing her eyes closed and her mouth slightly open. As already mentioned, not only Curan's intercourse needs to be regarded as necrophiliac, but also most of the other relations occurring in *Murder House*. Nevertheless, the other necrophiliac relations are presented as 'normal' ghost-sex instead of perverse actions and thus, the inclusion of necrophilia as a separate element may appear highly distressing to the audience. Therefore, it can be said that *Murder House* aims to create a feeling of fear and disgust by including the element of necrophilia on two levels. The reason for this might be that this aspect supports the creation of a perverse and repulsive atmosphere, which is similar to the emotion evoked through abjection.

Concerning the death drive and its destructive energy, there is another intriguing component in *Murder House* which may represent the link between sexuality and death. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (97) "[t]he death instincts are to begin with directed inwards and tend towards self-destruction but they are subsequently turned

towards the outside world in the form of the aggressive or destructive instinct” and in *Murder House*, one can recognize a similar phenomenon. Apart from the dead sex partners, death in the series is also commonly induced through sexual activities. As I have already analyzed in 4.2.2., the reason for this connection between sex and death may result from the sins committed by the father characters, which is a frequently portrayed gothic trope to arouse emotions of horror (Botting 84). Nevertheless, other instances in *Murder House* suggest that this relation may also be due to a power struggle between the living and the dead: “It’s this place. It has a hold on us. But that’s not all. There’s a power in it. A power we can use. We can make ourselves unknown and when we really need it, we can make ourselves known” (*AHS*, S01E8). At the end of episode 7, Moira seduces a potential buyer for Murder House to kill him and prevent the sale. When engaging in oral sex, it is implied that Moira bites off the man’s penis, as he asks her to use “little less teeth” (*AHS*, S01E08), but soon starts shrieking. The scene is filmed a shot reverse shot, switching between the screaming victim and Moira with blood running down her lips. A similarly violent event takes place when Travis continues his affair with Hayden, but tells her that he wants to return to Constance: “I really gotta go. I can’t leave it like this with Constance. [...] I guess I love her” (*AHS*, S01E09). Hayden tricks Travis, pretending that she wants to get a hug and stabs a knife into his back to kill him. In contrast to Moira, who kills the potential buyer to save Murder House from being turned into “affordable housing” (*AHS*, S01E07), the reason for Hayden’s move may result from her increased sexual desire as a ghost. As Hayden has not come to the climax during the intercourse with Travis, she decides to kill him to finish what they have started (*AHS*, S01E09). Thus, it may be interpreted that the ghosts in *Murder House* embody the death drive; instead of aiming towards self-destruction as they are dead already, they turn their aggressions “towards the outside world” (Laplanche & Pontalis 97) by appealing to other characters’ sex drive in order to seduce and subsequently kill them.

For the reasons mentioned, the power struggles between the living and the dead in *Murder House* can be inferred to originate from the death drive, which forms part of all drives (Evans 34), including the sex drive. As I have demonstrated, this link between the drives is represented on various levels in the *AHS* series. First, the close connection between sex and destruction may explain the reason for which pregnancy and attempts to achieve it are represented as futile in *Murder House*. Second, the inclusion of apparent necrophilia committed by Dr. Curan as well as the unconsciously

performed necrophiliac actions among other characters with ghosts provides another distressing element, which supports the argument that sex is closely intertwined with death. Finally, the death instincts may eradicate the desire of reproduction and instead make the characters strive towards “[...] the moment of climax as a ‘little death’” (Bataille 170), which becomes apparent in *Murder House* due to the link between seduction and murder.

4.2.3 Fetishes – the kinky stuff

“And for the record, I like leather, not latex” (*AHS*, S01E08)

Apart from engaging in necrophiliac activities, there are various other predilections represented in *Murder House*, which contribute to the ways in which power can be exerted through sexuality. As I will demonstrate, the *AHS* series portrays fetishism, which refers to “[...] a sexual PERVERSION in which sexual excitement is absolutely dependent on the presence of a specific object (the fetish)” (Evans 64). While Freud links the development of a fetishist preference to “the child’s horror of female castration” (*Fetishism* qtd. in Evans 64) due to the mother’s lack of a penis, Lacan considers fetishism as a substitute for the phallus, which denotes social power structures and not its literal association with the word penis (*Écrits* qtd. in Evans 64). Nevertheless, both psychoanalysts describe fetishism as a predominantly male perversion (Evans 64), which is also portrayed in *Murder House*. Additionally, I will show that the context of application of two fetish elements is altered in a reverse discourse in the series.

One of the fetish elements in the series is the rubber suit, which Chad originally buys to revitalize his sex life with Patrick, when he discovers that his partner has been “[...] carrying on a truly vile online relationship with some S & M freak who calls himself JungleJim4322” (*AHS*, S01E08). Considering the nicknames with which Patrick and his lover address each other, it becomes obvious that there is an indisputable power inequality concerning their roles in the relationship:

HARDLOVEJUNKY656. Yes [sic] master whatever you say. I’ve done what you told me and got the ass beads.

JUNGLEJIM4322. Good work slave. Did you get the other special toys?

HARDLOVEJUNKY656. Yes master I have them clamped on now.

JUNGLEJIM4322. Excellent slave. Are your nipples raw yet?

HARDLOVEJUNKY656. Yes master. I am ready for your punishment.

JUNGLEJIM4322. Slave, I am going to plug you up with my new toys.

HARDLOVEJUNKY656. You can torture me as you wish master.
(AHS, S01E08)

The way of addressing one's partner as either "slave" or "master" may show the characters' affinity for BDSM, which "[...] refers to erotic behaviors involving bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism, and/or slave and master relationships" (Connolly 80). Chad becomes jealous when he discovers Patrick's affair, but is also shocked when he reads the chat, as he had not anticipated his boyfriend to be attracted to fetish. Since Chad does not want to lose Patrick, he decides to fight for him and "gear up" (AHS, S01E08). In the scene when Chad goes to a BDSM sex store to get himself informed about fetish sex toys, the lighting is dimmed and one can hear the suggestive song XXX by Natalie Nylon (Parrottlm, 2012) in voice off:

CHAD. I'm sorry. Um- My boyfriend has been in these chat rooms.

ASSISTANT. That's always how it starts. Is he dominant or submissive?

CHAD. I don't know. I'm usually the one who calls the shots.

ASSISTANT. Then maybe he wants to be the dom for a change.

CHAD. Huh. Well, that's interesting. I never thought of that.

ASSISTANT. Every relationship's a power play, with or without the props. What about a muzzle? [...] But if you're feeling brave I got just the thing. The hood's fully detachable and the harness has anchor points for bondage.

CHAD. Forgive me. Um, I don't get any of this. At all.

ASSISTANT. The point of the suit is to dehumanize the submissive turn him into a rubber sex toy. (AHS, S01E08)

As becomes clear from this conversation, Chad seems to feel guilty for having been "the one who calls the shots" (AHS, S01E08) and buys the suit, so as to get Patrick interested in sleeping with him again by handing over power and becoming the submissive in the suit. When Chad tries to seduce Patrick dressed in the rubber suit, however, it turns out that Patrick has not only been unfaithful due to a difference in sexual preference, but also because he is unhappy to continue his relationship with Chad, who has been driving him insane with his obsession of decorating: "The house, decorating – I hate it! It's no wonder I don't want to stick my dick in you anymore" (AHS, S01E08). Even though "the point of the suit is to dehumanize the submissive" (AHS, S01E08), which would render Patrick the dominant in the relationship, he refuses to have sex with Chad and thereby draws on the more powerful discourse of suppressing sex (Foucault 83), similar to Vivien as analyzed in 4.1.3. Thus, Chad's attempt to excite Patrick with the rubber suit can be seen as a symbol to regain power in their relationship just like Ben's pursuit to tame Vivien by admitting her to an asylum.

Another character who considers using the latex suit to reignite his sex life is Ben. Just like Chad, Ben has been under sex deprivation and jokingly comments “I guess these guys were into the kinky stuff, huh? - Should I try it on? [...] I think I'd look good in that” (AHS, S01E01), when he and Vivien find the rubber suit on the attic. For this couple, the rubber suit does not become an object of stimulation or eroticism either, but is in fact used as a dangerous disguise. When the Rubber Man enters the Harmons' bedroom, Vivien is convinced that it is her husband Ben who is wearing the latex suit: “Hot. I thought I told you to throw that thing away. Oh, you're not talking? Well, I'll give you points for creativity. We were pretty hot this afternoon. [...] I can be kinky” (AHS, S01E01). While Vivien seems unconcerned about the fetish costume, the high-pitched and atonal violin sound in voice off evokes a feeling of horror in the audience, as the sound creates the sensation that there must be something evil about the Rubber Man. In contrast to the viewers, Vivien only experiences a delayed horror when she gets to know that her twins have different fathers and realizes that she has been raped.

As the spectators as well as the Harmons find out later in the series, the Rubber Man's identity is unveiled and he emerges to be Tate, who has been using the suit for gruesome acts. According to Harrington and Williams, who describe BDSM community conventions in their manual book *Playing Well with Others*, any sadomasochistic actions, whether or not they involve fetish sex toys or props, need to be clarified and agreed before performing them in a BDSM relation in order to respect others' preferences as well as boundaries (34-37). Instead of using the suit for sadomasochistic practices, however, Tate alias the Rubber Man wears it to hide his identity. As explained earlier, the latex suit is usually worn by the submissive for dehumanization to become “a rubber sex toy” (AHS, S01E08) for the dominant, who gives orders and controls a slave and master relationship. Tate, however, reverses the suits' purpose and turns it into a weapon rather than a fetish element. He invalidates the role of the wearer of the suit, which is usually submissive, as he is the one who assumes power while wearing the suit.

Nevertheless, Vivien is not the Rubber Man's only Harmon victim of assault. Dressed in the latex suit, Tate appears to Ben and anaesthetizes him, but before he manages to overpower him, Ben grasps the head part of the suit and manages to unveil Tate's identity (AHS, S01E10). In contrast to her parents, Violet's encounter with the Rubber Man is considerably less violent. When Violet awaits Tate to meet him in the basement

at midnight, she is frightened at the sight of the Rubber Man when she turns around. As he grabs her violently and covers her lips with his hands (*AHS*, S01E04), dramatic music in voice off underscores the scene. At the crescendo of drums, the music in off stops and one can hear her laughter coming from the Rubber Man, who reveals his identity to Violet taking off the mask. She is the only person in *Murder House* who has a peaceful encounter with the Rubber Man and also, Tate only discloses his second appearance voluntarily to Violet. Another couple on who the Rubber Man practices malicious deceit are Patrick and Chad. When the homosexual couple abandons their plan to adopt a child, Tate's arrangement with Nora to steal the couple's baby and give it to her is endangered. Thus, Tate puts on the rubber suit to trick Chad into believing it is Patrick in the suit and drowns him in a bowl, which Chad had prepared for a Halloween party game (*AHS*, S01E04); subsequently, he also kills Patrick with a fireplace poker.

Another fetish element of which its context of application is reversed in *Murder House* is the nurse costume. Similar to the rubber suit, it is also used in the BDSM scene; nevertheless, the nurse costume is typically associated with role play and is not necessarily an 'accessory' in a master slave relationship (Harrington & Williams 9). In a flashback to 1968 in episode 2, *Murder House* was a Sorority house inhabited by nurses, who receive a very unpleasant visitor one night. While three of the girls go out, Gladys and Maria stay at home, when suddenly a man rings the doorbell and asks for help. Maria admits him to *Murder House* without hesitation to sew his head wound, but he knocks her unconscious with an ashtray when she notices that there is no "source of the bleeding" (*AHS*, S01E02). Shortly afterwards, the young nurse wakes up on the couch to her tantalizer, who throws a nurse dress to Maria and tells her to take her clothes off and "put it on" (*AHS*, S01E02). As the girl anticipates that the tormentor, who is later in the series revealed to be called R. Franklin, wants to rape her due to forcing her into the nurse dress, she begs for mercy whispering "Please. I'm a virgin" (*AHS*, S01E02). As Maria lies on the couch dressed in the uniform and with her hands tied to her back, she says a prayer and Franklin leaves her field of view. The girl seems relieved as she believes that Franklin has left, but suddenly, he appears on the screen again and stabs her in the back multiple times with a knife until the young nurse is dead. Since Franklin does not apply the nurse costume in a sexually arousing, but rather exceptionally violent context, the allocation of a new perverse notion to the costume may be considered a reverse discourse. In fact, the success of the represented reclamation of meaning is further reinforced by the copycat killers Bianca, Fiona and

Dallas, who invade the Harmons' house and try to imitate the R. Franklin murder from 1968 (*AHS*, S01E02). Just as Franklin, the Murder House intruders force Vivien and Violet to dress in nurse costumes. As Vivien and Violet do not indicate any signs of expecting anything else than murder associated with the nurse costumes, which they are obliged to wear, it may be interpreted that Franklin successfully reclaimed the nurse dress' function.

For the reasons mentioned, the fetish costumes in *Murder House* have a dual function. One of the purposes of the rubber suit, which may be defined as the 'original' context of use, is "[...] to dehumanize the submissive [and] turn him into a rubber sex toy" (*AHS*, S01E08). Nevertheless, despite the desperate attempts of the suit's application for sexual arousal and subordination to another character, such as Chad and Patrick, for example, these efforts remain futile. The other function of the fetish disguises may represent a reverse discourse, as both rubber suit and nurse costume are displayed in differently connoted contexts from their 'original' application in the BDSM scene. As Tate wears the rubber suit in order to guarantee his anonymity while executing violent acts, he reverses the discourse from a sexually connoted to a murderous context similar to R. Franklin, who does not use the nurse costumes for sexual excitement, but in connection with bloodlust. Additionally, not only the fetish dresses' meaning is reclaimed, but also the person who holds power is reversed, since Tate, for instance, assumes power over other characters while wearing the suit instead of submitting himself. Thus, the ways in which both rubber suit and nurse dress are administered may be interpreted to represent reverse discourses regarding the items themselves as well as the exertion of power.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several ways in which sexuality is instrumentalized to arouse emotions of fear as well as to exert power in the *American Horror Story* series *Murder House*. As I have shown with a psychoanalytical approach, *Murder House* depicts various aspects of sexuality which are horrifying per se according to Freud and Kristeva. Additionally, sexuality is used to negotiate the power between the characters while simultaneously creating fear on-screen and off-screen.

One aspect through which sexuality and horror are linked in *Murder House* is Kristeva's concept of the abject, which "[...] the subject seeks to expel in order to achieve an independent identity [...] the sign of an undecidable boundary line between the inside and the outside of the body, and therefore a divided subject" (Brooker 1). This phenomenon of abjection can be linked the female reproductive system due to "[...] its essential functions – it houses an alien life form, it causes alterations in the body, it leads to the act of birth" (Creed 49); hence, female characters are commonly represented as "monstrous feminines" in horror, as examined by Creed in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. In *Murder House*, the abject quality of the maternal womb is represented through pregnancy. This is further highlighted through the abject baby which the character Vivien carries, due to the fact that one of her unborn children is a hybrid of human and ghost and therefore, it "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). Moreover, the link between abjection and the formation of a child's identity is also represented in *Murder House*. Even though Kristeva postulates that the transformation into an abject through birth is only possible for the mother (qtd. in Creed 12), I have shown that also children may experience abjection through birth (Michael, who is born "born of human and spirit" (*AHS*, S01E09) and Thaddeus, who is murdered and subsequently resuscitated as hybrid), or may even delay abjecting their mother (Addie, when she dies). Apart from a woman's womb abject ability to bear monstrous children, the female body can also be viewed as horrifying, since giving birth to a child without the help of a man confers power to the woman. In *Murder House*, this power is represented through mothers who raise their children without the father's support. Thus, the mother characters evoke horror not only because of the female body's association with abjection, but also due to the power obtained through child-birth and independent upbringing.

Another way in which the link between sexuality and horror is represented in *Murder House* is the characters' inability to procreate. Even though this fear may be more commonly spread among women in Western societies, the *AHS* series also depicts male procreation as markedly unsuccessful. First, reproduction in *Murder House* is a futile effort in that the characters mostly perform unproductive sex, such as masturbation or homosexuality. Second, many children in the series are born with either mental or physical deficits, which are effects typically correlating with fertility prolonging methods and represent aging mothers' concern about ineffective procreation. Nevertheless, the birth deficits depicted may also be interpreted as allusions towards the woman's abject body to indicate her ability to reproduce abjects. Third, also the younger *AHS* characters' fertility is represented as problematic, as they seem unable of physically performing sex or are already dead and thus infertile when succeeding to perform a sexual act.

Moreover, female sexuality in *Murder House* is not only linked to the personal horror of failing to reproduce, but also it can also be identified as a representation of a "reverse discourse", which means that the nuance of a word can be altered by reclaiming its original meaning as "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault 101). Concerning the stereotypical role of the "domestic angel" (Hurley 121), which may refer to a woman's quality of a good housewife as well as mother, the female characters in *Murder House* clearly contradict this Victorian ideal as they assume the role of what Lacan termed phallus, which he refers to a concept of social structures and not an erect penis in contrast to Freud (Brooker 181; Felluga 248). In this way, the *AHS* women attain power and become independent from the men similar to the way in which a child abjects its mother. Furthermore, the characters Constance and Hayden also perform a reverse discourse by demanding sex, as this contradicts the Victorian belief that women cannot take pleasure from sexual intercourse (Bocock qtd. in Arthurs 22). Nevertheless, it is not only possible to exert power by requesting sex, but also by rejecting it such as in the case of Vivien, who refuses to engage in intercourse with her husband for "almost a year" (*AHS*, S01E01). Thus, it may be concluded that female sexuality is instrumentalized to reverse the discourse of culturally ascribed gender roles.

Closely connected, one can recognize a horrifying correlation between the gothic trope

of the sins of the father (Botting 84) and the reverse discourses performed by the female *Murder House* characters. As far as the sins of the *AHS* fathers is concerned, they are repeatedly unfaithful, which always leads at least one character to death. Regarding the male characters' sinful desire, Moira can be interpreted to embody them, as she has two different appearances to the other *Murder House* inhabitants, depending on whether "they see what they want to see [...] [or] see into the soul of a person" (*AHS*, S01E03). Since Ben continues to see the sexualized Moira until episode 9, Moira's appearance may support the argument that Vivien exerts power over Ben by refusing sex. Additionally, the fact that Ben admits Vivien to an asylum may be considered as another hint towards Vivien's ability to attain power, which her husband tries to suppress by locking her away.

Furthermore, I have shown that the power is also exerted in *Murder House* through sex due to its close connection to death. Even though Freud suggests that the intrinsic life drive and death drive oppose each other (*Pleasure* 210), *Murder House* clearly represents the death drive as an aspect of the sex drive and thereby follows Lacan's argument (*Écrits* qtd. Evans 34). Considering that reproduction in the series is markedly unsuccessful, I suggest that the death drive may influence the sex drive to the extent that it eradicates its procreational function and only allows for unreproductive sexual desire. This may be further supported by the fact that 'successful' procreation in *Murder House* always results in death for mothers as well as their offsprings. Another element which links sexuality and death is the fact that almost all characters engage in sexual activities with a ghost and hence dead at least once. Interestingly, the dead seem to have a significantly increased sex drive in comparison to their human housemates, considering the ghosts' fair amount of sexual relationships as illustrated in the sexogram. Moreover, even though Dr. Curan's incident with one of his dental patients is the only 'obvious' necrophiliac activity, I argue that all *Murder House* inhabitants perform necrophilia, as their sex partners are commonly ghosts. Thus, these elements may highlight the close link between the death drive and the sex drive, explaining why one is contained in the other instead of opposing each other. Additionally, the two levels of necrophilia represented in the series may create a feeling of repulsion in the audience and hence, necrophilia can be interpreted as another embodiment of abjection.

In conjunction with necrophilia, there is a further perverse pleasure represented in the series, which can also be associated with the exertion of power through sexuality. As I have demonstrated, the stereotypical use of the rubber suit as well as the nurse costume is reversed in *Murder House*. Despite indicating the costumes' original function in various instances, such as Chad's purchase of the latex suit in a BDSM sex store in episode 8, the suit's application in violent contexts appears more frequent in the rest of the series likewise to the nurse costume, which is not used for sexual arousal but in connection with murder only in the series (*AHS*, S01E02). Apart from reversing the context in which the suit and nurse dress are used, there is a further reverse discourse regarding the disguises, as the power of the character wearing it is newly negotiated. This may be most obvious regarding the suit, which is used in the BDSM scene "to dehumanize the submissive" (*AHS*, S01E08), but in its newly ascribed violent context, the wearer (Tate) attains power instead of submitting himself to another character.

For the reasons mentioned, there are various instances in which sexuality is instrumentalized in *Murder House* in order to exert power over other characters. While this negotiation of power is commonly due to a reversal of the discourse, it also contributes substantially to the evocation of the feeling fear. Additionally, horror is also created through the inclusion of Kristeva's concept of abjection, which can further be related to power in various ways, as I have demonstrated.

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7. Appendix

7.1 English Abstract

Horror and sexuality have always been closely intertwined, especially concerning the moralization of female sexuality and its stereotypical representation. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which sexuality is instrumentalized in the popular American anthology series *American Horror Story: Murder House* to produce power and fear. While focusing on the negotiation of power through sexuality among the characters, fear will be examined on-screen and off-screen. Regarding the analysis, this thesis draws on a psychoanalytical approach focusing on the theories regarding sexuality by Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Foucault. Additionally, a film semiotic analysis following the technical terms used by Wolf Liebelt in *The Language of Film* to reinforce the psychoanalytical interpretation. By studying *Murder House* in more detail, it was demonstrated that the series displays various instances of “abjection”, which refers to the in-between state of being “neither subject nor object” (Kristeva 1), which is often linked to the female reproductive organs (Creed 47). In this way, fear but also power is induced through sexuality in the series. Moreover, it was determined that the “reverse discourses”, which denote the reclamation of a word’s meaning to alter its nuance (Foucault 101), regarding aspects of sexuality are represented as another means to attain power in the series. For the reasons mentioned, *Murder House* employs various manners to create fear as well as power through the instrumentalization of sexuality.

7.2 German Abstract

Die enge Verbundenheit zwischen Horror und Sexualität ist keine Gegebenheit der Neuzeit, sondern besteht besonders durch die Moralisierung weiblicher Sexualität und dessen stereotypischer Repräsentation bereits seit geraumer Zeit. Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, die Instrumentalisierung von Sexualität in der bekannten amerikanischen Antologieserie *American Horror Story: Murder House* zu erforschen und darzulegen, wie durch Sexualität Angst und Macht ausgeübt werden können. Während sich die Arbeit einerseits auf Machtkonflikte durch Sexualität zwischen den Charakteren konzentriert, wird andererseits der Aspekt der Angst nicht nur in Bezug auf Filmfiguren sondern auch das Publikum betrachtet. Die Analyse dieser Diplomarbeit stützt sich hierbei auf einen psychoanalytischen Ansatz mit besonderem Augenmerk auf die TheoretikerInnen Freud, Lacan, Kristeva und Foucault, um die Aspekte von Sexualität zu erläutern. Zusätzlich soll eine filmsemiotische Analyse mithilfe des technischen Vokabulars von Wolf Liebelts *The Language of Film* die psychoanalytische Interpretation unterstützen. Bei der genauen Betrachtung von *Murder House* zeigte sich, dass „abjection“, welches den Zwischenstatus von „neither subject nor object“ (Kristeva 1) bezeichnet und oft mit den weiblichen Reproduktionsorganen in Verbindung gebracht wird (Creed 47), als wiederkehrendes Element in der Serie fungiert. Auf diese Weise wird sowohl Angst als auch Macht durch Sexualität erzielt. Darüber hinaus stellte sich heraus, dass „reverse discourses“, welche die Änderung der Bedeutung eines Wortes definieren (Foucault 101), hinsichtlich der Aspekte von Sexualität ein weiteres Mittel zur Machtgewinnung in der Serie repräsentieren. Aus den genannten Gründen lässt sich daher schließen, dass *Murder House* verschiedene Methoden der Instrumentalisierung von Sexualität zur Angsterzeugung und Ausübung von Macht aufweist.