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“It’s so confusing sometimes to be a girl”
(Charli XCX)

An exploration of the link between Girlhood,
Queerness, and Survival as shown in *The
Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*.

Alicia Bailey

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research

York St John University

School of Humanities

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I owe myself a thank you too, I persevered through this degree when I changed jobs, moved house, and my health took a dip. I even persisted when *Yellowjackets* released an awful Season 3 that everyone hated. A big well done to me.

Abstract

Using primary texts of *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, this thesis aims to evaluate the connection between concepts of girlhood and queerness, within the context of survival. Both concepts of physical survival and political survival are considered within the contexts of survival narratives, alongside the Gothic and coming of age narratives.

The Wilds and *Yellowjackets* were released at a similar time in the 2020s, and the politics of that period are reflected in the dominance of patriarchal structures within each narrative. Both texts isolate groups of girls from cisheteropatriarchal society through plane crashes into the wilderness, and this isolation allows for the evaluation of the effect of patriarchal expectations on the girls in both shows. I consider the use of flashbacks and different timelines to show the continued patriarchal surveillance and the consequential trauma that this causes.

I analyse aspects of the texts themselves to examine the effect that patriarchal control has over concepts of girlhood and queerness. I also consider the inherent connection between girlhood and queerness and examine representation of both at length, discussing how the queer representation found in both texts affects audience in terms of authenticity.

Using direct critical responses to the texts, and critical work about broader concepts, I discuss how *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* allow for audiences of queer girls to see authentic representation of themselves, which is still rare to see in media. Fundamentally, my research discusses how these texts make space to explore spaces outside of patriarchal control, using the wilderness as a key concept and facilitator for this exploration and representation of minority groups.

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Introduction

This thesis will demonstrate the meaningful connection between concepts of girlhood and queerness in the television series *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. This connection fundamentally stems from the trauma of living under cisheteropatriarchal society. Both these texts are survival narratives, and I will explore how they illustrate that a separation from cisheteropatriarchal society allows girls to survive and unlearn harmful societal pressures and create their own communities, despite having to experience significant trauma to do so. The key research question of the work is: how do the concepts of girlhood and queerness link with concepts of survival in relation to *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*? The answer to this lies with queer representation, which I explore throughout all three chapters of the work. This queer representation is significant as audiences are left with fewer television shows that show queer representation in a genuinely inclusive way.

This work is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss the relationship between queerness and girlhood, with a focus on queer representation in television. This chapter centres on form, television specifically, and highlights the importance of representation on television and how both texts achieve this.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the Gothic as a genre and how both texts fulfil genre conventions. Wheatley states that the “relationship between the imagined and the real, or the strange and the familiar” (7) is a key narrative feature of Gothic television. This is indeed key for both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* as the relationship between the strange and the familiar is warped. The ‘familiar’ would be the lives the girls had before the crash and the ‘strange’ would be the life they have in the wilderness. There is a sense that the girls gain a familiarity with the wilderness, or the Wilderness as a personified character, and therefore feel a sense of estrangement towards the lives they left behind. This is evidenced by the lives the girls are forced to live as older characters in *Yellowjackets*; they do not know how to fit into the patriarchal world they left behind so, in a way, they become the strangeness in a familiar space.

In Chapter 3, I explore girlhood’s relationship to patriarchy as a concept and the societal implications of subverting, deviating from, and abandoning patriarchal

expectations and norms in terms of my texts. I discuss patriarchal structures and the effect on mass media and how both texts portray safe spaces for their characters and for queer audiences in opposition to these structures. The key to this work is queer representation on television. Rebecca Beirne states that “the relative absence of queer characters on television has made the queer representations, when they do occur, all the more significant” (2). This statement emphasises the importance of queer representation that does in fact represent a wide range of queer people. The characters found in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are messy and morally grey, and it is important that they are. Taking influence from Beirne’s statement, I would further highlight that queer representation which places queer people on an unattainable pedestal is not productive, and damages perceptions of the queer community.

My work is situated firmly within Queer Television Studies. Concerning queer representation, I elaborate on previous work from critics such as Monique Franklin and Emma Nordin when considering the importance of queer characters in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* and the impact queerbaiting has on this representation. Regarding the genres of the Gothic and Queer Gothic, my work aims to expand on the works of Paulina Palmer, Laura Westengard, Jack Halberstam, and others, to evaluate the genre with regard to *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. In terms of work relating to *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, I situate my arguments alongside H. A. Beare and A Brierley-Beare, and A Miller, E Gardner, and J Gleeson. I also acknowledge arguments about my texts that oppose my own such as that of Meredith Neville-Shepherd to firmly situate myself as research amongst the current work carried out by critics.

The Wilds is an Amazon Prime original show, in which “a group of teen girls from diverse backgrounds must fight for survival after a plane crash strands them on a deserted island. The castaways both clash and bond as they learn more about each other, the secrets they keep, and the traumas they’ve all endured” (Prime, n.p).

Yellowjackets was produced by Showtime, distributed by Paramount Plus in the UK, and features “a team of wildly talented high school girls’ soccer players who become the (un)lucky survivors of a plane crash deep in the Ontario wilderness” (Paramount Plus, n.p). Both descriptions include the plane crashes as key trigger points for plot, but the description of *The Wilds* as a coming-of-age drama suggests the focus is actually on the connection between the characters and the trauma that they share.

While the description of *Yellowjackets* also focuses on the girls' connection as a sports team, they are called "survivors" (Paramount Plus) rather than "castaways" (Amazon Prime). There is more of a focus on the survivalist nature of the show, linking the plot to those of *Lord of the Flies* or *Lost*.

The structure of both shows follows two distinct timelines. *The Wilds* uses flashbacks to the girls' lives before the crash and jumps forward to interviews with the girls after they are rescued, punctuated by the main story of the girls on the island.

Yellowjackets has two clear timelines, the teenage storyline of the girls in the wilderness directly after the plane crash, and the adult storyline of the girls 25 years after the crash trying to live normal lives. The parts of both texts that focus on the girls' experiences in the wilderness clearly highlight shared experiences that come from being removed from their home lives. While *The Wilds* shows flashbacks to before the plane crash to emphasise the trauma that comes from patriarchal control, *Yellowjackets* shows that this trauma is intensified by the girls having to return to patriarchal society after surviving the plane crash. The key link between the two shows is the exploration of creating a different version of society while in the wilderness. The girls create a place where they can safely come of age and explore living as their true selves, without the risk of being attacked or ostracised, as is the case in patriarchal society. This further demonstrates the patriarchal undertones of typical coming of age narratives by disrupting and relocating the narrative to the wilderness. This is where the link between girlhood and queerness becomes so clear in both texts. The wilderness becomes a queer safe space for the girls, both in exploring queer relationships and in living in opposition to cis-heteropatriarchal society.

Miller, Gardner, and Gleeson state that *Yellowjackets*, and similarly *The Wilds*, is interested in "scrutinising the social realities produced by patriarchy" and that survivalist thrillers in general give opportunity to "reflect on contemporary political anxieties via a microcosm" (1). Laura Bates states that "in a post-#MeToo society, the opportunity to strand characters away from civilisation offers fascinating opportunities to explore current anxieties around misogyny and sexual violence" (n.p). In both shows, the separation from mainstream patriarchal society provides a clear commentary on contemporary politics: the wilderness provides a space for both

the characters and the audience to reflect on their own experiences and find solidarity and community with others who are oppressed by patriarchal ideals.

To explore these texts within the context of my chosen topic, I will define the following terms: queer, cisheteropatriarchy, and girlhood.

The definition of queer that I will be using is Eve Sedgwick's definition as an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). This definition is useful as Sedgwick allows for fluidity and differences within queerness itself, and this is more broadly representative of the lived experiences of the queer community. Regarding the topic of this work, queer describes a sexuality or gender expression that is not cis-gender or heterosexual and is therefore in opposition with the expectations and requirements of cisheteropatriarchy.

Bob Pierik defines patriarchal power as "men's appropriated power over the flesh, over biological processes but also the knowledge and appearances of these processes, which results in it presenting itself as the 'natural' default state, and women's challenge to it as unnatural and against biology" (73). The contemporary society we live in is considered a patriarchy because of this power that men have over women, or anyone deemed to challenge that power. A cisheteropatriarchy organises this power into specifically cisgender and heterosexual structures, with cis-heterosexual men taking the most power. For ease and fluidity, I will be using the terms patriarchy and cisheteropatriarchy to mean the same, in reference to the Anglo-American society within which the shows are set.

To define girlhood, the intersectionality of girlhood and queerness in relation to patriarchy needs to be explored. Whitney Monaghan discusses the 'girl' as a figure that is "consistently bound up with heteronormative ideas of adolescent development" (np) and that the construction of the 'girl' in teen television "overwhelmingly deals with issues of girlhood through a narrow frame of reference [and this girlhood] spans the high school years; girls are white, middle class, slender and able-bodied, feminine in appearance and dress. They typically aspire to beauty, popularity, and successful heterosexual romance" (n.p). Susan Driver discusses the

relationship between adolescent girls and mass media such as television shows and states that “mass media representations increasingly pervade their cultural environments and imaginations [and] girls are challenged to use popular culture images and stories to make sense of their lives and communicate their differences” (1). Mass media is used to communicate ideas and to influence audiences into behaving a certain way; the presence of anti-feminist stereotypes of women and girls and negative stereotypes of the queer community still shown on screen thereby influence or inform sanctioned ways of being. Representation for queer girls is particularly important, as Driver discusses, girls are surrounded by media meant to influence them to behave in a way that society deems acceptable; television is filled with portrayals of diet culture, beauty standards, and patriarchal expectations about family life aimed at teenage girls. *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* subvert these expectations and stereotypes in their depictions of girls, queer girls, and girlhood.

The co-creator of *Yellowjackets*, Ashley Lyle, has commented on how the “nightmarish experience of female adolescence correlates to the extremities of the survival thriller” (quoted by Miller, Gardener, Gleeson, 5), and by using teenage girls as characters within this genre, especially characters that thrive like in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, there is a “satisfying subversion of the classic precious, helpless, image-obsessed cheerleader trope” (Bates, n.p). The girls in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* allow for explorations of the complexities of girlhood because they are diverse casts of characters and many of the girls do not play into patriarchal stereotypes. Miller, Gardener, and Gleeson state that *Yellowjackets*, and also *The Wilds*, emphasise how “girlhood has always been imbricated with acts of resistance and violence” and this is shown through the girls’ refusal to “participate in the gendered expectations of an appropriate femininity” (5). Through their explorations of sexuality in terms of both queerness and desire, the girls repeatedly undermine “heteropatriarchal configurations of girlhood based on archaic ideas of purity and chastity” (Miller, Gardener and Gleeson, 7). Both texts subvert the concept of survival, in that to survive in patriarchal society the girls must play into stereotypes to not be othered by this society. In the wilderness they must dispense with the same learned behaviour to survive in the new ‘society’ the girls are building for themselves. In this way, girlhood is linked to patriarchal society and the survival of such.

The Wilds and *Yellowjackets* can be considered to exhibit a more cult or marginal status than other prestige TV, but the effect these queer girls in the wilderness can have on the dismantling of patriarchal structures is crucial to understanding the way queer girls are represented more broadly in mass media. Both shows first aired within a year of each other (*The Wilds* being released in December 2020 and *Yellowjackets*' pilot airing in November 2021) at a time when diverse anti-patriarchal discourses were developing with increasing urgency. The wilderness as represented in both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* allows for an allegorising or reimagining of real-world survival through narrative storytelling. The connection both texts have to the wilderness being a driving force in the characters' physical survival of a plane crash and the emotional survival of living under patriarchal norms is significant. *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* offer representations of survival which allow people to feel less alone and my exploration of this dual notion of survival is crucial to understanding contemporary queer representation in media.

Chapter 1

“I’m just a girl, what’s my destiny?”

(Stefani and Dumont)

Girlhood and queerness as represented in television

The intersection between the concepts of girlhood and queerness is seen in the way that *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* portray the girls’ relationships to the patriarchal society and expectations that they live in. There is a clear link between the way that girls are treated by society, and the way that queerness is treated. Both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* focus on the idea of finding safety and being able to enjoy girlhood away from patriarchal society; they ‘survive’ living under patriarchy. Despite the traumatic events that put them in the wilderness, the girls manage to survive in several ways; they survive the wilderness itself, and they survive the trauma that they were subjected to by patriarchal society. There is also an intersectional focus on queerness and girlhood in both texts – the queer girls can survive because they can explore their queerness in a safe space physically separate from patriarchal norms. The intersection of girlhood and queerness exists because of the relationship between patriarchy and femininity.

Sexuality

Representations of queerness in media are fundamental to the discussion of *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. The way characters of different sexualities are treated both within the texts themselves and by the real people (writers, audiences, and wider society) surrounding the texts is key to observing how patriarchal society treats queerness. In terms of sexuality, heterosexual relationships under a patriarchal society centre men and marginalise women. Adrienne Rich states that “women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable” (1521) and this is certainly true when considering the representation of girlhood and queerness in my texts, one example being the relationship between Shelby’s hidden queerness and her strict religious upbringing as explored in *The Wilds*.

All facets of queerness share a relationship to girlhood, and girlhood has a distinct relationship to patriarchal society. Judith Butler states that “no one arrives in the world separate from the set of norms lying in wait for them” (31), and this is especially true when considering the link between girlhood, patriarchy, and queerness. It is the patriarchal society that has predetermined what norms are acceptable, and anyone displaying behaviour outside of those norms is deemed as negative. Butler discusses anti-gender ideology and states that the fear that the far right has about queerness is that anything other than cisgender heterosexuality “challenges patriarchal power and social structures within the state, civil society, and the heteronormative family unit” (5). As Butler states here, queerness challenges the power patriarchal society holds over minorities, which is why observing the link between girlhood and queerness is so important, especially considering representations in media. Queerness is attacked by patriarchal society systemically and societally; there are systemic difficulties for queer people such as access to healthcare and discriminatory laws, and there are social rules built on patriarchal stereotypes that are inherently homophobic and transphobic. Negative stereotypes about femininity being equal to weakness are used by society, and in particular by cisgender, heterosexual, white men, to reinforce homophobic beliefs about gay men. Identities with attraction to multiple genders face discrimination for not ‘picking a side’ and feel pressure to be in relationships with men because it is easier and more socially acceptable. It is the link between femininity and a version of masculinity that does not align with patriarchal values that is seen as the problem here.

In terms of gender and queerness, transgender and nonbinary individuals face societal pressures rooted in patriarchal ideals to conform to gender expectations of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ in terms of physical presentation, experience in domestic and professional spaces, and role within a family group. Transgender women are attacked readily by the far right for seeking femininity and a girlhood from which they were excluded. Transgender men are pushing away femininity but understand the ways women are treated up by society, and they are not accepted into masculine spaces because they are still connected to femininity by their upbringing. People who are nonbinary or gender non-conforming in some way are seen as the gender they were assigned at birth, or their biological sex, and if they desire to present androgynously or as a different gender to what society prescribed for them, they face

invasive questions about their physical body. Lesbians are one of the only letters of the LGBTQ+ acronym that do not centre men in their identity or sexuality, and patriarchal society attempts to apply heterosexual standards to lesbian relationships. Adrienne Rich famously discusses lesbian identity in relation to compulsory heterosexuality and states that the way male power manifests itself is recognisable as “enforcing heterosexuality on women” (1521); for example, being asked which person is the ‘man’ in the relationship and completely disregarding historical lesbian identities like butch and femme lesbians. Monique Wittig’s key research about the relationship between womanhood and lesbianism is important to consider here. Wittig states that “if womanhood depends upon a heterosexual framework, then lesbians are not ‘women’ and if lesbians are not ‘women’ then they fall outside of patriarchal norms” (4). This is to say that patriarchy dictates that men are centred in all aspects of society, including womanhood, but because lesbians do not centre men in this way, they cannot be considered women by society’s standards. Both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* have queer characters, specifically characters identifying as lesbians, which adds depth to the exploration of girlhood within the texts as the experience of growing up as a young lesbian is stunted by patriarchal expectations, adding to the trauma that these characters experience.

Failure within patriarchal society due to queerness is a key part of the representation of queerness and girlhood in both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. Jack Halberstam states that success within a patriarchal society requires “so much effort” (3) and “failure is easier” (3) for queer people. They discuss the fact that success requires playing along with patriarchal norms, such as ‘passing’ as straight or cisgender, and with this comes physical effort. There is a sense of adhering to both patriarchal and capitalist societal norms when discussing ‘passing’ successfully as there is a materialistic element to it: clothes and make-up are often used to ‘pass’ therefore keeping up with what society deems as correct requires effort. In *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, the girls are failing in the society they live in, so they literally, crash and burn. If the plane crashes represent a failure to adhere to patriarchal societal expectations, then the girls thriving in the wilderness away from ‘normal’ society is a representation of how “failure” is indeed easier and “offers different rewards” (3), as Halberstam states. Further, there is a link between failure and childhood/teenagehood according to Halberstam, that is poignant here. They state

that failure allows an escape from “punishing norms that discipline behaviour” and preserves the “wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children” (3) and this is relevant to both texts.

Halberstam states that childhood is a place to enjoy failure, or where failure is more accepted, before being forced to conform to the “punishing norms” of adulthood.

Teenagehood is a place of uncertainty, a limbo where it is unclear whether they are children or adults, and they are held to differing standards. Many teenagers do not know where they fit into society, and my texts explore this. In *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, the girls fail at following societal norms but find some kind of success in the wilderness where they are separated from patriarchal societal norms. In *Yellowjackets* in particular, the adult timeline shows a regression back into the girls’ teenage selves as they cannot succeed in society, so they revert to a time they did succeed in some way, which was during their time in the wilderness. The exploration of queerness in both texts is also poignant in terms of failure.

In *The Wilds*, Shelby is a clear example of the intersection between girlhood, queerness, and failure. Shelby is brought up as a Christian ‘southern belle’ in Texas, attending pageants as the pinnacle of femininity that is acceptable in a patriarchal society. In the pilot, she says, about herself, “I do real. I do family. I do Jesus. I do pageants.” (“Day One”). She is forced to hide her queerness behind a mask of patriarchal Christian values to survive. She says that she is “real,” but it becomes clear that she has never been supported to live her life as her authentic self. One example of this is her opinion of boys in the pilot episode: when discussing boys with Martha, she says that “all you need is one good one” (“Day One”). This implies that to find a “good one”, there needs to be a trial and error or settling process. This statement becomes more poignant when we learn that Shelby is queer, as she is hiding behind her ‘straight’ identity to survive her Christian patriarchal society. To revisit the previous quotation from Adrienne Rich, “women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable—even if unsatisfying or oppressive—components of their lives” (1521), Shelby seems to believe that she can suppress her queerness and find her “good one” so she can continue the facade she has built for herself. Shelby is failing at the life her culture has prescribed for her as she cannot fulfil the expectations that patriarchal society, represented by her father, has for her. She must hide her dentures in order to be a beauty queen and also try to

turn herself straight or overcompensate for being queer with statements like “all you need is one good one”. The turning point for Shelby is her relationship with Toni, succumbing to the failure she has been fighting so hard against when they realise their feelings for each other and Shelby initiates their first kiss in Season 1 Episode 7 “Day Fifteen”. Shelby knows that this action is a ‘failure’ on her part because she attempts to run away, but Toni chases after her. This signifies the bond that the girls develop on the island, as even though Shelby has been somewhat of an antagonist for Toni, she recognises that the action that Shelby took could be a turning point for her discovering herself while away from a damaging culture. Toni’s action of chasing after Shelby highlights that this ‘failure’ Shelby has succumbed to is not actually negative but is something to be celebrated. To revisit Halberstam, this failure allows Shelby to “escape the punishing norms” (3) of patriarchal society and find community on the island while experiencing a safer version of girlhood.

Relationship to Patriarchy

Both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* explore the relationship between the concepts of patriarchy and girlhood. In the pilot episode of *The Wilds*, protagonist Leah gives a monologue within the first five minutes which establishes the tone of the show – effectively stating that the group of girl protagonists have suffered because of patriarchal influence before the plane crash, rather than because of the plane crash itself. The viewer hears Leah’s voice against a montage of visual clips which show the other female protagonists as they endure painful experiences before the plane crash. These instances serve to emphasise how this is a universal experience of girlhood under patriarchy. When interviewed at the beginning of the episode, Leah states that the adults that are looking after them post-crash “don’t know what I’ve [they’ve] been through” and are “just assuming trauma” and that “it was a living hell” (“Day One”). The girls feel a separation from the adults; the adults interviewing them are men and have not experienced growing up as a girl under patriarchy. Leah describes the experience in the wilderness “completely cut off from the lives we [they] left behind” as “obviously traumatic,” but she then goes on to ask, “what was so fucking great about the lives we left behind?” This comparison of traumatic experiences is key in establishing the importance of the effect growing up under patriarchy has on young girls, particularly queer girls. Leah is equating a plane crash

with the everyday occurrence of growing up, stating that the two are equal in the amount of trauma the girls experienced.

The speech then carries on as follows, listing the ways in which girlhood under patriarchy is traumatic:

“What was so fucking great about the lives we left behind? Because here's what I remember of all that. I remember not being enough. I remember wanting to be more. I remember the dark moods, the violent moods, moods that nobody had any patience for. And then there was the brutal social scene, which some girls could just glide through like they belonged everywhere. And there you were, just trying to belong somewhere. I remember the ridiculous expectations they had for us. Like... We were supposed to be these golden gods 24-7. I remember the responsibilities, heavy burdens meant for adults forced on us before our time. Responsibilities that made you think... "Yeah, this is definitely fucking with my healthy development right now." (“Day One”)

These “ridiculous expectations” come from living in a patriarchal society as a young girl, particularly as a teenager. The protagonists of *The Wilds* are girls that “nobody had any patience for,” which is ultimately why Gretchen chooses them for her experiment: they are the girls on the outside of what society deems as acceptable, so they are more likely to succeed in the wilderness. At the end of her monologue, Leah says that “being a teenage girl in normal-ass America, that was the real living hell” (“Day One”). She looked directly into the camera, breaking the fourth wall, addressing the audience. She is both waiting for the audience to disagree with her statement and seeking to establish a connection with people who relate. The writers use Leah here to emphasise the theme of heteronormative girlhood versus patriarchal values.

In the second season of *Yellowjackets* one of the featured songs is ‘Just a Girl’ by Florence and the Machine, a cover of the 1995 song by No Doubt. According to Tina Benitez-Eves for American Songwriter, ‘Just a Girl’ is a “powerful anthem for disenchanting young women of the '90s and one that yelled back at the imbalances of the sexes [and it is] about becoming a woman and no longer being ‘just a girl’” (n.p). This song is a poignant choice for a television show exploring girlhood in the

nineties and aids the discussion about the effects of growing up under patriarchal societal expectations. The fact that the song featured in the show is a cover is also interesting, showing that there is a sense of nostalgia for the nineties, as the modern timeline in the show also shows as the now grown-up characters start regressing back to the selves they created in the wilderness. The cover also suggests that there is an unchanging presence, an influence that carries through from one timeline to another—this is the patriarchal expectations the girls were forced to grow up under and are still influenced by as adults. The anger that the girls feel consistently throughout their lives is reflected in the song.

The lyrics of the song are forceful in meaning. The use of rhetorical questions like “Don’t you think I know exactly where I stand?” leave nothing to the imagination in terms of how the singer feels about the fairness of their position in the world. In the context of the song being included in *Yellowjackets*, the singer, Florence Welch, is acting as the spokesperson for the girls as this is how they are all feeling. One verse is important to consider in terms of the relationship between patriarchy, girlhood, and queerness:

The moment that I step outside
 So many reasons for me to run and hide
 I can't do the little things I hold so dear
 'Cause it's all those little things that I fear

The word “outside” in this verse can mean two things: the literal physical outside world, or a world outside of ideological norms such as patriarchal expectations. The girl in the song feels a need to “run and hide” from the physical, emotional and ideological threats of living under patriarchy. I argue that this is applicable to queerness as well as femininity in this context. The ideological differences that a young lesbian has, for example, compared to someone with a sexuality that centres men, means that there are different threats to being “outside” physically and ideologically. The final line of the verse is important as putting the “little things” into a queer context makes the line even more angry—little things such as being able to express a queer gender or sexuality through spoken language, clothing choices, and

the choice of a romantic partner, is intimidating within a patriarchal society so there is a sense of repression and fear that queer people have to overcome in order to be themselves, but this comes with a cost.

The lyrics are focused on the idea of suppression and “captivity,” the singer says that because she is a girl and “pretty and petite,” society doesn’t “let me [her] have any rights”. The “world,” patriarchal ideologies, does not see women as anything other than girls, so it attempts to suppress them and make them succumb to oppression. In the song, the lyric “what I’ve succumbed to is making me numb” is important here, as the girls are angry that they have been forced into acting out an ideology that they do not believe in but cannot escape. The line that encompasses how trapped girls feel in a patriarchal world is “I’m just a girl, what’s my destiny?” The singer is asking what her place is in a world that sees her as a singular thing and patriarchal ideologies intend to keep it that way. The singer, and the girls in *Yellowjackets*, feel that the only way to exist is to be “just a girl,” without any other intersections. They are not considered women, they are “just” girls, and society intends to keep them like that. There is a stifling of any ideology that does not fit with the ‘norm,’ and deviating from social norms can lead to serious threats to safety- particularly for women and queer people. These threats to safety in America, where *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are set, include gender-based violence against girls, violent homophobia against queer people, increasing levels of abuse towards young people, and systemic issues against women and queer people. This includes systemic transphobic decisions such as reducing access to official documentation that shows the correct gender marker. Karen Dolan for *The Guardian* writes about the issues American women and girls are facing, and states that “22 million women and girls of reproductive age live in states where their reproductive rights have been either eliminated or significantly eroded” (n.p) since the overturning of Roe Vs Wade, and “nearly 43% of women – and almost half of all children – are poor or low-income” (n.p). These issues are widespread and dangerous, and it is crucial that visual media particularly, is a place where these problems can be represented and discussed to raise awareness. *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* may not explicitly present the struggles that the girls face as coming from patriarchal norms, but there is a clear line of investigation to be had by the audience. Audiences can see this representation of the girls struggling to find their place in a world that is not meant to

belong to them, and then see themselves in these characters, leading to wider questions and discussions on social media.

The Wilds and *Yellowjackets* not only explore safety for cisgender and heterosexual girls, but they also discuss literal and political queer survival. The queer characters are not only allowed to be openly queer, but they suffer none of the usual consequences of being queer that queer characters in other media do such as being the victims of the harmful ‘bury your gays’ trope where queer characters are “subjected to countless onscreen deaths” (n.p), as Maya Salam writes in *The New York Times*, in order to keep the attention of a cishetero audience. The girls are allowed to be girls, they are allowed to be queer and messy and morally grey, and this is what makes these texts revolutionary in the current climate of declining queer representation.

Queer Survival

It is important to note that *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* focus on queer characters, and these characters are allowed to survive a dystopian event. The survival is both physical and political as they do not suffer from stereotypes or harmful tropes that other queer characters in media do. This means that queer audiences are more likely to watch and enjoy them. Elisabeth Schneider states that instead of being “fully fleshed-out, complex human beings, queer characters are [usually] portrayed as troubled or villainous, their identities dismissed as transitory “phases” or passed off as jokes—if queer characters are to be found at all” (54) which emphasises how important the complex queer representation in my texts is. I argue that the political implications of complex queer representation lean into ideas about queer survival. The physical survival of the girls in the Wilderness, located away from the patriarchal norms is linked to the political survival of queer people. By allowing the queer characters to use the wilderness as a space to develop and feel safe away from patriarchal structures, the creators are emphasising the importance of queer representation in literature and film, whether consciously or otherwise.

There is no definitive definition for a concept like queer survival but to define it for the purpose of this work, I would draw from Eve Sedgwick’s discussions. In *Tendencies*, she describes queer survival as having “irreducible multilayeredness and

multi-phasedness” (3) and goes on to describe horrific acts that queer people do indeed have to physically survive, like the AIDS epidemic and homophobic violence, as well as the “omnipresence of somatic fear and wrenching loss” (3) that is involved in queer survival. I would argue that because the concept is very present in real queer lives, has life or death stakes, and involves multiple layers like Sedgwick describes, the fact that we can extrapolate ideas about political survival from the physical survival of characters is significant. Queer people in real life must survive physically, battling continuous challenges such as AIDS and homophobic violence, and politically, dealing with stigma taught by homophobic laws and right-wing presses, so any survival of fictional queer characters sends a political message. The concept of queer survival in literature and media is also relevant in terms of harmful stereotypes and tropes stemming from the inherent homophobia and transphobia of censorship laws such as the Hays Code in mid twentieth century Hollywood. Emma Nordin states that arguments surrounding the lack of queer representation the legal and social censorship rules “made it hard for producers to create overtly queer content, [and] instead, they used subtext and thus managed to avoid being censored or cancelled” (26).

The way that the queer characters are written in these texts is revolutionary in terms of the accuracy of the representation. The girls in *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* are allowed to be messy, imperfect, and most importantly, morally grey. They are all allowed to do questionable things, including the queer characters. There is a danger in viewing the representation of marginalised groups as only acceptable if the characters are the most perfect and morally upstanding members of the community as this is inaccurate and offensive. By only allowing ‘perfect’ queer characters in media, the message is that every queer person who is not like that is wrong, which is poor representation. Queer survival relies on authenticity, and it is this messiness and imperfect characterisation of the girls in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* that makes this representation more meaningful for queer audiences. To emphasise the effect of the good representation in my chosen texts, I will briefly explore the concept of queer baiting and how this and other harmful media tropes link to the concept of queer survival.

The term queerbaiting has only just started to come into regular use in media and academic circles within the last decade, as queer people have become more accepted and able to speak up about representation in media. I would combine two definitions to emphasise this: Joseph Brennan's definition of queerbaiting as a "fan-conceived term that describes a tactic whereby media producers suggest homoerotic subtext between characters in popular television that is never intended to be actualised on screen" (189) and Judith Fathallah's definition that a key part of queerbaiting as a strategy of writers and television networks is that "denial and mockery reinstate a heteronormative narrative that poses no danger of offending mainstream viewers at the expense of queer eyes" (491). The key part of the definition of queerbaiting to note is that it is an intentional action by the writer, producer, or someone in charge of a television show or film. Often there is some kind of promotional material that includes even a vague nod to queerness, such as the trailer, behind the scenes clips, or even cast interviews, which leads the audience to believe that there will be queer representation within the media itself. The queer audience then goes through a feeling of betrayal when they realise that there is not actually the queer representation they were promised. Importantly, this mockery of queer fans can come from other fans as well as a vague television network, writer, or actor statement about a character's sexuality. Emma Nordin states that writers and producers use "recognisable cues" (34) to trick audiences into interpreting a romantic story arc between characters of the same gender which puts emphasis on the writers being at fault and deliberately manipulating a queer audience. Janet Borgerson et al discuss subtextual queerness and say that "a straight person might perceive two guys in [a text] as friends, whereas a gay person might pick up on indirect codes and infer that [the text] also is directed toward him" (960), indicating two important points. Firstly, that a subtle and subtextual queer relationship may not be a manipulation tactic and may just be a way of highlighting queerness in a safe way that a heterosexual audience may not spot. Secondly, queerbaiting can be 'defended' by a writer claiming that the relationship is meant to be subtext and not easy to spot. There are issues with both, but I argue that subtle representation can cause the mockery of the fans I mentioned above.

Nordin argues that "the hints that had worked earlier as subtext to convey what could not be said out loud now work as signifiers for what producers refuse to say out loud,

suggesting social constrictions rather than legal ones" (27) and I agree with this statement and would take it further by linking Nordin's argument to that of Monique Franklin. Monique Franklin raises a key point in her chapter in *Queerbaiting and Fandom*, in that discussions about queerbaiting have gained an "absolutist perspective of representation that sacrifices nuance" (42). Fans want to see clear queer representation, leaving no room for subtext or subtlety and there has been an increase in policing fan responses to this representation rather than aiming all anger at the people responsible for the creation of the representation or lack thereof. According to Franklin, fans are "discouraged from 'falling for' or indulging in these subtextual forms of expression in any way [and] fans who celebrate elements of queerness without confirmation — who make fan fiction, fan art, and meta-analysis — are presented as being 'satisfied with the bare minimum' and thus complicit with producers' attempts to exploit them" (42). I agree with Franklin's observation of recent fan culture in that queer subtext from media produced in a more difficult time for closeted queer writers is likely to be accused of "manipulative homoeroticism" (Franklin, 47) when in fact, this media *had* to use subtext as a subtle message to avoid social and legal complications. Indeed, contemporary queer representation does not need to be as subtle as it has been historically, but subtlety and subtext can be and are used as tools, rather than a way to manipulate a queer audience. While ambiguity is a "way to avoid being clear, a method of downplaying, diluting, and discrediting queerness in media" (43) as Franklin states, there is an ambiguity and fluidity that comes with identifying as queer. If audiences only allow "obvious and irrefutable" (Franklin, 44) representation, then the nuance and fluidity associated with some queer identities will never be represented, which is an issue. While I agree that there are problems that come with fans being strict about the queer representation in media, I argue that the clear queer representation in my chosen texts allows for the subtext to shine through and fans are making fan content. Clear and authentic representation is a base for audiences to draw subtextual and homoerotic meanings from characters and I would argue that the subtext can actually be enjoyed by fans rather than it being a necessity: the only form of queer representation available.

Rebecca Beirne makes a crucial point about queer representation. They state that "lesbian and bisexual women have a unique position in popular cultural representation [they are] simultaneously fetishized and ignored, desired and

disparaged" (4) which means that well rounded representation of these identities in media is crucial. Beirne goes on to say that there was a problematic representation of lesbian characters "as the move into "positive" representations increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s" (4) in that they were "desexualised" to put them on a pedestal. As I have discussed, this form of queer representation where the characters are unrealistic in their 'moral' standing according to patriarchal norms causes detrimental harm to queer communities. *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* allow lesbian characters to be messy and morally grey at times, they can have dysfunctional relationships with friends and girlfriends, and they are allowed intimate relationships with peers. This further emphasises the importance of this representation for the genre of teenage television, as teenagers are restricted in what they can see represented on screen for their age group.

Whitney Monaghan discusses issues with queer girls being represented in media and states that queer girls function within "limiting narratives premised upon the same patterns of affirmation and renunciation" and that "same-sex attraction of girl characters is typically represented as "just a phase" of unruly adolescent development" (n.p). Queer relationships between teenage girls are seen as a phase on the way to fulfilling traditional gender roles as dictated by patriarchy, the "patterns of affirmation and renunciation" (n.p) can be seen through this transitional phase of exploring queerness then affirming heterosexuality and ignoring past exploration on screen. This is a harmful narrative to show queer teenage girls on television as there is no sense that they are 'allowed' to reach adulthood holding onto queer identity. In *Yellowjackets*, the explicitly queer characters are queer in both teenage and adulthood, showing that the relationships in the wilderness are not transitory. One example of this is the relationship between Taissa and Van, they have to hide their relationship while in high school until they reach the wilderness, then Taissa goes on to have a wife. While not with Van for the duration of the show, she is shown as queer so her teenage relationship was not a phase.

In both texts, the groups of girls become closer whilst in the Wilderness, as Leah says in *The Wilds* "at some point we just sort of clicked. It wasn't like we were friends or anything, but for the first time we were an 'us'" ("Day Twelve"). They are participating in acts of literal survival, like shelter building, and emotional survival in

the development of a community group. The community that the girls create for themselves in both texts is particularly important in terms of girlhood and queer survival. I argue that it is significant that the community building seen in both texts takes place away from the patriarchal society that the characters and the audience grow up in. The ideals that are forced upon them and us affect the way they, and we as an audience, interact with the world and with other people. This is shown in both texts when there is a discovery that someone is not “normal”: Toni is openly a lesbian and Shelby is closeted in *The Wilds*, and Taissa and Van reveal their relationship in *Yellowjackets*. What is interesting and important about these interactions between the girls is that most of the group side with the “different” (queer) girl and the perpetrator of patriarchal ideals is left to change her opinion or face being alone in the wilderness without the support of the others. I argue that this is because the girls are, subconsciously or otherwise, aware that they have been given this place of safety and they do not want to lose it and be forced to go back to the oppressive society that they knew before. This is particularly the case in *The Wilds*, where Shelby openly rejects Toni for being gay because of her religious beliefs, but the audience become aware of the fact that she is holding onto these beliefs because she is a closeted lesbian herself.

The wilderness, as further explored in Chapter 2, represents the only safe place to express your true self, so being reminded of harmful patriarchal views disrupts the safety that the girls have been able to build and reminds them of what they have to go back to once they are rescued. This is particularly the case with Shelby in *The Wilds* as she discovers that she is in fact allowed to be gay in the wilderness when she has not been previously. Shelby’s dentures are representative of her struggle with her sexuality. In her flashbacks in “Day Sixteen,” she begs her parents to get permanent implants, so she does not have to wear dentures and her parents resist, until her father sees her kissing a girl, her friend Becca. While he does not explicitly punish her for this, he bribes her with dental surgery, saying that “like any flaw, if you have the means to take care of it you should. [...] if it can be fixed, the pain’s worth it. Right Shelbs? [...] get it taken care of once and for all.” The implication here is that the flaw that needs fixing is Shelby’s sexuality. While in the wilderness, Shelby says that she has “been cleaning this thing [her denture] as privately as possible like I have since I was 11 years old” meaning this has been a longstanding secret that she

cannot reveal for fear of repercussions from her conservative family. It is revealed to the audience in her flashback that Shelby's denial of the act of kissing Becca and subsequent consequences were the cause of Becca's suicide. Shelby feels responsible, so her fear around society finding out that she is queer combined with the guilt adds to the internalised homophobia, which comes out when faced with openly gay Toni.

In "Day Twelve," Shelby becomes uncomfortable with the queerness she is surrounded with, but the others do not support her. Toni is open about her queerness, and the others are supportive, encouraging her to talk and laugh about it. Shelby says later in the episode, "I do believe that way of life is a sin [...] everything I've ever known has taught me that," which emphasises how repressed her feelings are. No one else in the group agrees with her, highlighting how those beliefs do not belong in the safe space they created. She says, "am I not allowed to have my own beliefs?" and Dot replies, "not those ones," isolating Shelby from the queer community that she should be a part of. I argue that there is a sense of 'protecting their own' in Dot's defence of queerness: although Dot herself may not be canonically queer, she does not fit into patriarchal ideals of womanhood so is able to find safety amongst other 'outsiders' like the rest of the girls. She says "you can't have a problem with someone over who they are, over something that they can't even change" which emphasises this. None of the girls in the texts typically fit into what society deems as acceptable for them, so the safety they eventually find is fiercely protected. While in the wilderness, Shelby considers smashing her dentures with a vodka bottle, symbolising breaking free from the strict patriarchy she lived in before the crash. In "Day Fifteen," Toni confronts Shelby about her homophobia, and they talk about their home lives, in that Shelby has a lot of expectations placed on her by the society she lives in:

Toni: Nobody expects shit from me. Doesn't feel great either.

Shelby: But you're free. Don't you see that? You don't have to answer to anybody.

Toni: And neither do you! Not right now, anyway. I mean, you're on a deserted island a million miles away from whatever bullshit expectations that

you left behind. You know you're free here, Shelby, and if you're not taking advantage of that then I don't know what to tell you.

This is a turning point for Shelby; she realises that she is in the right place to be herself for the first time. After this speech, Shelby kisses Toni, solidifying her queer identity. From here, it becomes clear that Shelby does not want to go back to the society where she is not free to be herself. In "Day Fifteen," when the girls spot a plane flying over, they think they're going to be rescued so start celebrating. The camera zooms in on Shelby's face, physically isolating her from the group and pulling the audience's focus onto the fact that she is the only one not excited to be taken off the island: away from the safety that she is just starting to find for herself away from patriarchal influence. She subtly talks about this in "Day Sixteen," when the psychologist interviews her: "one thing I will say about that place, it was kind of like hitting the pause button. You could step back and get a really good look at your life from all those miles away. Could really help a girl get some perspective, especially if she was feeling a little unsettled in her own skin." While she does not directly reference her sexuality, it is implied that this is what she was referring to. Shelby's internalised homophobia was what was making her feel "unsettled in her own skin" and she only realised this when she was taken away from the societal pressures she was facing at home. The "perspective" she gained while in the wilderness is a clear reference, to the removal of rose-tinted glasses, in a way. Once she was far away from the life she knew, she discovered that things could be different and she could feel free. This freedom comes from the wilderness itself and separation from patriarchy, and from the building of a queer community group.

In *Yellowjackets*, Van and Taissa have been hiding their relationship from their teammates for fear of homophobia, but in the episode "Doomcoming", they reveal that they are together at the Homecoming, or 'Doomcoming' dance the girls throw. As they enter the clearing holding hands, Mari asks, "Are they?" and Akilah replies simply, "Duh." The reaction to the two kissing is cheering and applause, the most positive reaction to queerness in my chosen texts. Once again, the girls have created a safe space to be themselves, away from patriarchal influence.

These instances in the texts are examples of how girlhood is linked to queerness. The queer characters can find their place within a group of cis het girls because they

share the same relationship to patriarchy. They are all outsiders in a patriarchal world, and their isolation from the society that they grew up in allows them to see just how damaging it was to them. The girls have found a place where they can develop their own sense of community and learn how to separate themselves from deep set patriarchal values, and in this they have created a queer familial structure. They have created their own version of girlhood that does not centre men despite the pressures they grew up with. As the characters themselves realise this, the audience are encouraged to consider the same thing. The representation of diverse kinds of girls, and different kinds of queer people, prove that survival is possible despite challenges set by patriarchy. Additionally, by representing queerness and allowing for messy, human characters in the way that *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* do, there is a disruption in the patriarchal society that we are indeed still living in. By presenting the audience with relatable and openly queer characters that survive, the writers of these texts are rebelling from decades of poor representation and queer baiting. While not every lesbian today will be able to relate Shelby's religious trauma and consequent internalised homophobia, or Taissa and Van's reluctance to come out in nineties New Jersey, *someone* might be able to see themselves in any of the queer representations in these texts.

In conclusion, it is important to consider the connection between concepts of girlhood and queerness in relation to patriarchal ideals as this informs the representation of characters in media. Both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* use the inherent link between girlhood and queerness to explore life when forcibly separated from patriarchal society. The queer representation in both texts is interesting because there is no queerbaiting or other harmful tropes and the characters are allowed to be messy and morally grey; this allows audiences to enjoy the representation itself and any queer subtext. The link between girlhood and queerness has been well established by critics and theorists and in applying these theories to contemporary texts like *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* I am reiterating the relevance and importance these theories still have in society.

Chapter 2

“I’m just a girl, guess I’m some kind of freak” (Stefani and Dumont)

Girlhood, queerness, and the use of the Gothic genre

The link between girlhood and queerness in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* is exhibited through genre. While *Yellowjackets* sits more within the horror genre because of the violent content and *The Wilds* sits more within thriller, both television shows share Gothic elements. To discuss *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* in terms of the Gothic, I will be combining definitions of Gothic and Queer Gothic by various critics to emphasise and explore the connection between the texts and genre.

The Gothic

There is a key link between the Gothic as a genre, explorations of the ‘other’, and trauma. The Gothic is defined by many literary critics as an aesthetic or group of tropes originating from British Gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the key takeaway from this definition is how the narrative treats the ‘other’ or monster as a representation of a villain of polite society. The Gothic represents a fear of the unknown, which is why the ‘other’ can be read as a member of a minority group in most cases. Laura Westengard states that the Gothic was a response to “British anxieties and fears about race, class, gender, and sexuality in the face of an emerging modern cultural identity” (8) and Jack Halberstam states that the narrative structure of the Gothic in particular is designed to “produce fear and desire within the reader” (2), both critics emphasising the role of fear and juxtapositions within the genre. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states that the Gothic is a “return of the repressed” (qtd by Halberstam, 18) which leads into discussions of the ‘other’ within the genre and what the ‘monster’ represents to the audience, regardless of whether the media is an eighteenth century Gothic novel or a television show about a plane crash from the 2020s. Robyn Ollett states that the Gothic is a narrative based on “anxiety over selfhood, identity and belonging, be that is a gendered, sexual or colonial context” (25) which further emphasises the importance

of fear within a Gothic narrative. There is the fear felt by the ‘monster’ characters as they are othered, opposed by the fear felt by the other characters towards the monster that does not fit into strict societal rules. As Ollett states, “belonging” (25) is the key here, the othered character does not feel as though they can fit into society and they are not allowed to; audiences that relate to this monster can see their struggles with belonging in media and feel seen and understood even if the monster is portrayed in a negative light. The monster in the Gothic must be the opposite of what a ‘normal’—white, male, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied—person is, to produce fear. Westengard also states that the Gothic is queer because “its monsters, ghosts, and transgressive desires expose a world outside of normative structures” (179) which further highlights this point.

Yellowjackets and *The Wilds* are both examples of Gothic media because of the characters’ relationship to the society they live in. The girls can be considered ‘other’ as they are positioned in opposition to patriarchal power and society. Miller, Gardener and Gleeson state that *Yellowjackets* challenges “colonial and masculine frameworks” and focuses on “complex representations of girlhood and femininity” (3) within the narrative, and this also applies to *The Wilds*.

The ‘other’ is a key feature of the Gothic, particularly the relationship between this ‘other’ and society. Harry Benshoff summarises Robin Wood’s work on the horror film and suggests that the thematic core of the horror genre – and I argue the Gothic – as the relationship between “normality, as defined chiefly by a heterosexual patriarchal capitalism, and the Other, embodied in the figure of the monster” (Benshoff, 226). This relationship between juxtapositions is also explored by Halberstam who discusses the Victorian Gothic novel and states that the genre is about dissolving boundaries between “good and evil, health and perversity, crime and punishment, truth and deception, inside and outside” (149). Palmer also discusses Gothic monstrosity in terms of “establishing the boundaries of the human” (153) and determining what is and is not acceptable within society.

The link between the Gothic and queerness has been explored at length by critics. Ollett states that critics see the Gothic as having “always been queer” (7). E. McCallum argues that there is a well-established link between the Gothic and queerness, as “uncertainties about sexual differences” (71) are key aspects of the

genre. They go on to argue that it is also the relationship between trauma, the “liminal and in between” (77) that makes the genre queer; the definition of queer that McCallum uses is “to destabilise the settled and normative meaning” (71) and these arguments can be applied to my texts in terms of dismantling the preexisting patriarchal views on society that the girls are able to escape during their experience in the wilderness. Laura Westengard argues similarly and states that the Gothic reflects “antinormative queerness” and is a media response to the “systematized exclusion and violence that has plagued U.S. queer communities” (3). She specifically states that this marginalisation is intersected by the trauma related to this oppression and the development of “rich queer culture infused by gothicism” (4) and the use of the Gothic as a genre is a way to “disrupt the social order and threaten conventions” (4).

Halberstam discusses the monster in the Gothic as being representative of “various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body” (150). Fundamentally, the monster, or the ‘other’, is a threat to society, which is why queerness and the Gothic go hand in hand. The Gothic is a genre built by and for the social ‘other’ and, as Westengard states, marginalised people have “always been good at finding representation in cultural productions meant to punish and erase them [and] reappropriating and redeploying that which was meant to silence them” (180).

Queerness is a key interpretation of the Gothic other because of the oppression queer people have historically faced in patriarchal society – Palmer states that queerness “challenges the binary [...] disturbs order and identity [...] and fails to respect borders, positions, and rules” (153). Queer relationships are stigmatized and unnatural and are described as “posing a threat to family stability” (Palmer, 153) as dictated by hetero-patriarchal society. In terms of *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* as pieces of Gothic media, the girls are positioned as the ‘other’ versus patriarchal society, and this is emphasised by the experiences they have once they are separated from this society.

James Rendell discusses the “dreamlike or nightmarish” (726) quality of the *Yellowjackets* title sequence which further connects to the Gothic genre. These “nightmarish” (Rendell, 726) audiovisuals play into Gothic genre conventions by

utilising a sense of unease, foreshadowing the horrors that the girls will experience in each episode, both before and during their time in the wilderness. The girls are othered from patriarchy through this title sequence and are shown to be exhibiting “unruly rebel girl behaviour that undermines gender roles” (Rendell, 726) through the clips in the title sequence of the girls together smoking, drinking alcohol, partying, and “team captain Jackie using her finger to mimic cutting a throat before winking at the camera” (Rendell, 726). The title sequence therefore uses the Gothic convention of othering the girls to set them apart from the patriarchal norms that they are supposed to be upholding.

Miller, Gardener and Gleeson state that the characters in *Yellowjackets*, and this also applies to *The Wilds*, gain power by “rejecting norms used to relegate women to the margins” and “the survivor-protagonists profoundly unsettle, even corrupt, traditional conceptions of femininity and idealised visions of girlhood” (2). Further to this, Miller, Gardener and Gleeson explore representations of survivor protagonists in recent media and state that these characters are nuanced and are progressively invested in explicitly, and self-consciously, exposing the violations of patriarchy” (4) and go on to discuss that the behaviours that these characters exhibit are “aligned with brutality and monstrosity” (4) but are celebrated in popular culture rather than “maligned as deviant or monstrous” (4) as they may have been previously. This point emphasises the importance of morally grey female and queer characters as they expose patriarchy in a way that is well received by the audience because the characters are realistic and more interesting in their actions. The ‘other’ in this case is more powerful than the society that it is entrapped in because there is a “rejection of and resistance to the dominance of male power” (Miller, Gardener, Gleeson, 4).

Ollett makes an interesting point when she states that “it is perhaps little wonder that Gothic media continues to be one of the few places where queer and trans narratives are told” (227). I discuss in Chapters 1 and 3 that representation of queer girls in media is extremely important, and horror and the Gothic are key genres in terms of finding accurate representation. The first pieces of Gothic literature focused heavily on the negative aspects of being ‘different’ or ‘monstrous’ but contemporary Gothic media leans into socio-political commentary and twists these narratives to explore queerness in opposition to capitalism and heteronormativity. The morally grey characters in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are an example of realistic

representation for queer girls. Miller, Gardener and Gleeson discuss this and state that the characters offer a “slippery notion of self, shifting and moving between what might be grasped and therefore controlled” (8) meaning that a key part of both texts is that the girls do not adhere to patriarchal societal expectations. In the wilderness, the girls cannot be controlled in the same way as they can within patriarchal society as the expectations have shifted and they are in charge of their own community, whilst unconsciously undoing internalised misogyny and homophobia.

Yellowjackets positions the girls as monstrous because the violence and cannibalism they partake in is much more opposed to actions of ‘polite’ society than the actions of the girls in *The Wilds*. Miller, Gardener, and Gleeson discuss this and directly call the *Yellowjackets* “disruptive ‘others’ with the potential to unravel regulatory systems of control” (4). This emphasises the Gothic elements of *Yellowjackets* and can be applied to *The Wilds*. In *The Wilds*, while the girls do not partake in the same extreme violence as the girls in *Yellowjackets*, they are still ‘othered’ by the patriarchal society they grew up in. For example: Shelby is suffering as a closeted lesbian under strict Christian rules; Fatin faces unrealistic expectations from her parents and is hated for revealing her father’s infidelity; Dot faces poverty and uncertainty as a young carer who must sell drugs to survive, and Leah is groomed by an older man. In *The Wilds*, the group of girls have been deliberately isolated by Gretchen to prove her misandrist hypothesis and have therefore been ‘othered’ for their behaviour against patriarchal society. Gretchen chooses them because they already defy patriarchal expectations and therefore will create a different kind of society. The girls in *Yellowjackets* are also defy patriarchal expectations pre-crash: they are on a successful soccer team which is not considered a ‘feminine sport; Taissa and Van are in a closeted lesbian relationship; Taissa behaves in a monstrous way in terms of breaking Allie’s leg to ensure a win; Shauna betrays Jackie by sleeping with her boyfriend; Nat is alternative and engages in dangerous behaviours. Both groups of girls are monstrous in terms of defying patriarchal rules even before the plane crash gives them the opportunity to explore the world outside of society. This behaviour ‘others’ them from the beginning and emphasises the Gothic elements of both television shows, highlighting the girls as morally grey as they are not put on a pedestal to be seen as ‘good’ representation.

Yellowjackets specifically “frames the coming-of-age journey as a psychological horror” and captures how “growing out of girlhood is an inherently brutal and absurd process” (Li, n.p). The concepts of patriarchy, girlhood, and the ‘other’ are linked through the Gothic here. Growing up under patriarchy places girls, particularly queer girls, in the position of the ‘other’ as represented in traditional Gothic literature – “consistently and aggressively disrupting gender expectations in complex and ambiguous ways” (Miller, Gardener, Gleeson, 13). Glennis Byron and Sharon Deans discuss the ‘Teen Gothic’, Gothic literature written about and for teenagers. They state that this subgenre gives adolescents an “alternative viewpoint” which allows them to escape the normative and “instructive nature” of realist texts (101). The teenage characters, and readers, are allowed to explore the “ambiguity of their status in the world” (Byron, Deans, 94) and their fear of abandonment through the classic Gothic liminality of life and death. Byron and Deans’ arguments are incredibly useful in my discussion of my texts, particularly a point that is made about dystopian fiction: “post disaster fiction is unlimited in its possibilities and can transgress all boundaries, supplying, therefore, a very broad canvas” (98). This fluidity of various boundaries further emphasises the Gothic features of *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* in terms of being a coming-of-age narrative exploring girlhood under patriarchy. The girls’ acts of survival in a dystopian situation brings forth a narrative surrounding life and death, which in turn is key to a Gothic narrative. While the threat of death is very real for the characters, and they are aware of this, the wilderness gives them a permission to *live* in a way that they have not been allowed to before in the patriarchal society they left behind. *Yellowjackets* in general, is described by Grady as “as emotionally true as TV about teenage girls ever gets” (n.p) which emphasises how important this show is in terms of representation of girlhood under patriarchy.

Miller, Gardner and Gleeson discuss survivalist narratives in terms of resilience in children’s literature (3) and that childhood is a “contested space” (4); *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* explore this and portray “dangers which threaten the adolescent body” and pay particular attention to the “abuses young women must negotiate in order to survive” in a patriarchal society (Miller, Gardner, Gleeson, 4). This is seen in the pre-plane crash scenes which explore the girls’ lives and show that they do not have an ‘idyllic’ childhood as they all face significant emotional and physical distress. In *The Wilds*: Dot has to turn to selling drugs in order to afford her father’s medical

care and becomes a young carer; Rachel's love of sport leads to her then developing an eating disorder and her sister then lives in her shadow, traumatising both of them; Shelby is brought up in a strict religious household and faces consequences for not being the perfect Christian daughter that her father wishes she was; Leah is groomed by an older man and struggles to see how this relationship is dangerous. In *Yellowjackets*: Taissa and Van have to hide their relationship and cannot explore it fully because of the risk of homophobia; Nat turns to drinking as a teenager in order to deal with her abusive father; Misty is bullied relentlessly for being different; Shauna grow up under Jackie's shadow and falls pregnant; Jackie is seemingly unaware of the problems Shauna is facing and tries to dictate their life plan together, which has been drilled into her by society. These issues are all a result of growing up under patriarchal societal rules and stereotypes and have forced the girls to skip through their child and teenage hoods and behave like women. The wilderness gives the girls a chance to experience a different way of living, where they have been separated from the issues they faced in society and are given a chance to try and heal from these experiences.

Space and place are key features of Gothic literature and media, and landscape is heavily explored in *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds*. The wilderness is both a setting and a character, a ready-made space for the girls to explore sides of themselves that were prohibited by patriarchy and a figure that is trying to protect them.

Haunted houses are key points of setting in both horror and the Gothic. The link to queerness specifically lies in the exploration of the home and household. In both *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds*, the lives the girls had with their families before the plane crashes function in the same way as a haunted house. Paulina Palmer states that haunted house narratives have been utilised to "explore the disturbing effect that same-sex desire can have on the hetero-patriarchal household" (108) and society in the 1980s and 90s found an additional reason to "stigmatize the gay man as a polluting presence in the home" (108). She goes on to discuss how the concept of the home has "hetero-patriarchal cultural practices and connotations as oppressive" (109) for other marginalised groups, including heterosexual and queer women as they are usually confined to the "patriarchal ideology of domesticity" (109). In my texts, the wilderness the girls become stranded in after the plane crash represents a sense of freedom from patriarchal society. In this way, the home or domestic sphere

the girls were entrapped in with their families keeps the girls confined within patriarchal expectations, like a haunted house. The wilderness and nature that they live in for a brief time away from the society they grew up in gives them freedom to act in ways that they have not been allowed to before.

The natural world is represented in a Gothic way in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. A number of critics have described the Gothic portrayal of nature in a way that I argue represents the nature found in my texts: Carolyn Merchant states that ancient concepts of nature were represented as organic and female but these views were replaced during the Renaissance by a version of nature that was disorderly, sick, and decaying; Roderick Nash states that folk traditions of many different cultures associate wilderness with the supernatural and monstrous because it is difficult to understand; but nature and wilderness were romanticised and the aesthetic was more focused on, such as by the romantic poets for example. Tom Hillard has a slightly different view on nature and the Gothic: he states that humanity has viewed nature as a “source of fear and danger” (692) rather than a nurturing ‘motherly’ figure, linking this “darker side of nature writing” (688) to themes in Gothic literature. As the Gothic is a way of confronting concepts that are “threatening, frightful, and culturally or socially reprehensible” (Hillard, 691) in a safe way, the Gothic is a logical genre to use when creating a dangerous version of nature, as is the case in *The Wilds*, and particularly *Yellowjackets*. Another interesting point Hillard makes is about natural disaster films, about disasters such as floods and tornadoes, as he states that they indicate a “nearly ubiquitous cultural fascination with the hostile and deadly aspects of the otherwise nurturing image of ‘Mother Nature’ (688).

The personification of the wilderness links to this image that Hillard discusses. There is arguably a maternal factor to the protection the girls find in the wilderness. I argue that there is a sense of the Wilderness protecting its own, that as a personified being it recognises the threats the girls face and separates them from these. The plane crashes themselves may or may not be deliberate, depending on which text is focused on, but within the way that the girls are able to find resources and see dangers is an implication that they are not alone and something is looking out for them. Hillard’s description of natural disaster films applies to the events in my texts, particularly with the juxtaposition of the ‘maternal’ Wilderness and the destructive natural environment. The girls can find a sense of safety within the dystopian and

dangerous situation they are left in. The safety that the girls are allowed to feel within this dangerous natural environment is also linked to the absence of social structures rooted in patriarchal ideology, particularly for the queer characters. Despite the natural environment around them being physically dangerous, the separation from the world they grew up in and are used to is what gives the girls permission to develop and thrive in the way they do within the texts. The Wilderness, as a conscious concept or a supernatural, religious, or other kind of being, is being personified in the texts, and it is this 'creature' that physically allows the girls to survive. They are protected by the Wilderness. Being taken away from home creates an absence of patriarchal views and societal pressures, and they are now able to experience the world in a new way. They are no longer subject to stereotypes and pressures, so they are *allowed* to be truly themselves. This is especially pertinent to the queer characters in the texts: Shelby in *The Wilds*, and Van and Taissa in *Yellowjackets*. These characters have to hide their queerness in their lives before the events: Shelby has to stay closeted for fear of religious consequences, and Van and Taissa hide their relationship because of widespread homophobia. The dangerous natural environment protects their queerness, giving them a safe space away from the dangers of their other lives and giving the rest of their groups something other than homophobia and transphobia to think about - it is the least of their worries. This protection of queerness is another way that my chosen texts fit into the Gothic.

Being in the wilderness gives the girls permission to live in a way that they have not before but, interestingly, the texts personify the Wilderness beyond the 'Mother Nature' stereotype. The two entities, the girls experiencing girlhood and the Wilderness, are both misunderstood by the cisheteropatriarchy that they are now separate from. This is why they seem to be able to relate to each other and work together, although in a more intense and dangerous way in *Yellowjackets* than in *The Wilds*. This is a Gothic representation of nature and indeed queerness as the genre explores a fear of things that cannot be easily understood: Simon Estok states that there is a "contempt and fear" (207) surrounding the perceived agency of the natural environment and I argue that there are similar feelings about other concepts that a cisheteropatriarchy struggles to understand such as queerness. A key feature of the Gothic is the fear of the unknown and one of the links between the wilderness and girlhood and queerness is that they are misunderstood by the cisheteropatriarchy

that they are initially surrounded by. The girls and the wilderness, as a personified entity, are able to find solace and understanding in each other. I propose that the Wilderness, although varying in intensity and power in each, is a character in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*.

In *Yellowjackets*, there is subtext that implies that there is magic or the supernatural involved in the girls' experience in the wilderness, giving the Wilderness an intense role in the story. H. A. Beare and A. Brierley-Beare state that the magic is only alluded to as an "entity that has an invisible presence" (n.p) and the audience, as well as the characters themselves, have to decide whether the 'magic' is indeed an entity from the wilderness, a representation of the wilderness itself, or a manifestation of the girls' trauma and existing mental illness, particularly Lottie's schizophrenia. I argue that these 'magic' or 'supernatural' elements to the story are a personification of the Wilderness. The Wilderness creates the safe space for the girls away from patriarchy or allows the girls to create the space themselves.

Fundamentally, there is a constructive relationship between the Wilderness and the girls in both texts, even if that is nature facilitating development outside of patriarchy as is perhaps the case in *Yellowjackets*. The 'magic' or Wilderness in *Yellowjackets* allows, as Beare and Brierley-Beare state, the characters to "confront their violent actions and absolve themselves of responsibility for horrible decisions" (n.p). This is particularly evident in the 'red queen ritual' that Lottie designs for when the girls must resort to cannibalism to survive the harsh winter. The group can go through with this action because it is the Wilderness that is deciding who is to be sacrificed. If we take the Wilderness as a personified character, then the Wilderness is performing another act to keep the girls safe by making this decision for them; allowing the girls "a chance to escape the trauma and grief and give meaning to their violent actions in the wilderness" (Beare, Brierley-Beare) by not being responsible for a morally terrible action. The Wilderness chose who to sacrifice, therefore the girls feel that they were only doing what they needed to survive.

The personification of the Wilderness as a character stays ambiguous throughout both texts, with the writing itself neither confirming nor denying the presence of a 'higher being'. This ambiguity links back to the Gothic's exploration of the fear of the unknown. If there is indeed another being with the girls, then the audience feels the fear of not knowing whether it is 'good' or 'bad', whether it will attack the girls if they

do something wrong, especially in the case of *Yellowjackets* which is more violent than *The Wilds*. There is a sense in *Yellowjackets* that the Wilderness is unpredictable and is hunting the girls even after they've grown up and gone back to their lives. I argue that this unpredictability emphasises the personification of the Wilderness as 'Mother Nature' is behaving like a human. There is a maternal instinct at play here, the Wilderness recognising that the girls' lives are still ruled by patriarchal ideologies, so they are therefore still in as much danger as before the plane crash. The Wilderness is making an active effort to bring them back to a place of perceived safety, the natural world.

Considering the Wilderness as a personified character, animals found there are an extension of or a tool used by the Wilderness to help the girls. The girls in *Yellowjackets* have an innate connection to animals as their team's name is a species of wasp and that is how they connect together as a team, calling out "buzz buzz buzz" ("Pilot") while on the soccer pitch. I argue that by representing the girls as wasps, the show is implying that there is a sense of a 'hive mind' between the girls on the team, and the idea of a queen is a key part of the story. The 'antler queen' makes an appearance early in the flashback sequences in the pilot episode and there is a fan theory that there are multiple antler queens, and some yellowjacket wasp colonies have multiple queens. Yellowjacket wasp queens also "overwinter" and are the only members of the colony that do not die off in the winter months; the girls in *Yellowjackets* suffer through a harsh winter but ultimately survive because of the actions of their 'queen', who at that moment is Lottie. Yellowjacket wasp queens survive the winter and create a new colony in the spring (Dhir, Marlos, n.p) which is arguably what the girls are doing; the queen is creating a new colony away from the negative influence of the patriarchy they escaped. Miller, Gardener, and Gleeson state that Yellowjacket wasps are "social hunters where all females have the capacity to sting and the colony preys upon pests" (6) and this is representative of what the girls do in the wilderness as they become more 'monstrous'. The intense and ritualistic activities that the girls partake in in Season 2 Episode 2 when they consume Jackie is meant to be viewed as representative of a hive-mind; they are doing something horrific for the good of the 'colony'. Jackie did the most useful thing she could by dying, and the rest of the group took on the sacrifice and mentally moved past any morality issues in order to survive.

In *The Wilds*, a prime example of the relationship between animals, the Wilderness, and the girls, is the use of snakes in the narrative. In this text, snakes attack the girls and threaten their safety, and this serves as a representation of the patriarchy and a way for Dot to take out her frustration and to bond with Shelby. The snake is a rattlesnake, making a warning noise as it prepares to bite Shelby. She calls for Dot, who strikes the snake with a stick. The snake fights back after the first hit but Dot ultimately wins the fight and spears the snake on the stick and beats it against a rock, even after it is dead. Dot says, “I was supposed to be in fucking Hawaii [...] not in this fucking hellscape trying not to die!” (“Day Three”). She is taking out her frustration about the crash and her general living situation out on the snake, but I would argue that this represents more. Dot can beat a stereotypical representation of patriarchy in a physical altercation, something girls are not meant to do. She also can protect the rest of the group, represented by Shelby in this scene, from something actively trying to harm them. Dot can destroy this trace of patriarchy and return the wilderness to a safe space for the girls to live and survive.

Biblically, snakes are seen as “crafty” (Genesis 3:1), “shrewd” (Matthew 10:16), and related to “the devil and Satan” (Revelation 12:9) so there is an interesting discussion to be had depending on how literal the Bible is taken. If snakes are taken as a representation of patriarchal ideologies, as they can be in *The Wilds*, then it would be negative that they are clever and the link between snakes and the devil would be more prominent. There is also the symbolism of the snake in the garden of Eden to consider here: if the snakes represent patriarchal views, then are the snakes *The Wilds* aiming to corrupt the safe space the girls have built? I would argue yes. The complex representations of snakes in literature and folklore are relevant here as the girls themselves are purposefully written as complex beings, which is what makes the characters excellent representation for the audience. Snakes shed their skin and a key theme in my chosen texts is that the girls shed their past selves to create or develop identities that are better suited for their new environment; this is why the girls struggle to reintegrate into the world they left behind. They feel safe enough in the Wilderness to explore new identities and ways of being so can shed their old lives that were influenced by patriarchal views and live in safety in the wilderness. The ouroboros, an ancient symbol of a snake eating itself, is relevant in this discussion. Encyclopedia Britannica states that this symbol represents the “unity of

all things” and the perpetually changing form in the “eternal cycle of destruction and re-creation” and this cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth is important to note in my chosen texts. In both texts, in finding a way to live in the wilderness away from patriarchal influence, the girls can ‘die’ in their old lives and find rebirth in a safe environment. I also argue that the cyclical nature of patriarchal structures is represented here, as in my chosen texts there are moments in the aftermath of the incidents where the girls fall back into patriarchal stereotypes after being isolated from them, indicating the cyclical nature of growing up and living in an oppressive patriarchal society.

Freedom and Trauma

The isolation from patriarchal norms is what allows the girls in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* to experience freedom in their new environments. Miller et al state that in *Yellowjackets* there is a sense of freedom that comes from being outside of the male gaze and “no longer disguising attractions deemed taboo or undesirable” (7). Furthering this, being able to explore attractions in this way, particularly queer relationships or different versions of femininity, means that the girls are no longer under the surveillance of patriarchy; they do not have to conform to versions of femininity that do not suit them. In both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, the freedom that comes from this physical isolation from patriarchal society leads to the girls being able to live authentically. This adds to my discussion in Chapter 1 considering physical and political survival. The girls can live authentically in the wilderness, adding to the representation of characters who are pushing boundaries. The authenticity of the characters being messy and morally grey allows for more authentic representation. In both texts, the physical survival in the wilderness is met with this freedom to be authentic while away from patriarchal expectations, which is political survival. Most of the girls embrace this and live authentically; the predominant example is exploring queerness openly and therefore providing audiences with queer representation. In *Yellowjackets*, Jackie is the exception in the group, she struggles to let go of her life before the crash and is “unable to relinquish the tropes of the popular girl and performance of acceptable femininity” (Miller et al, 7). This is Jackie’s downfall. While the others are committing to learning the skills needed to survive which do not include performing femininity for a male audience, Jackie is uninterested in joining in. The survival skills she learnt from being a girl

favoured by patriarchy are now irrelevant when physical survival is more important. The group's priorities shift from surviving and conforming to patriarchal societal norms, to being able to survive in the wilderness in isolation. Miller, Gardener, and Gleeson summarise Jackie's link to patriarchy and performance for the male gaze as "both limiting and destructive, a redundant mode of identification in which the self is repeatedly defined, and thus annihilated, by a gaze that is no longer looking" (7) which emphasises how surplus Jackie's skills are outside of patriarchy and that she has a significant amount of internalised misogyny and homophobia to work through. The isolation that gives the rest of the group freedom, is simply just isolation for Jackie and she cannot understand why the group have no issues with getting on with it. Her leadership skills that made her team captain "vanish without a trace" (Grady, n.p) and the team turn on her. Shauna is the one to hit the final nail in Jackie's coffin, almost literally, because their argument is the trigger for Jackie sleeping outside and therefore passing away. Shauna and Jackie's relationship is one of the most interesting on the show and has caused a significant amount of discussion in online spaces.

Shauna is the first of the girls to resort to cannibalism, but not because she was starving. She eats Jackie's ear and keeps it secret from the others. She consumes Jackie because she does not know what to do with the love and guilt that she feels. Whether this love is platonic or romantic does not matter, but the intensity of the love they have for each other cannot be disputed. Shauna allowed Jackie to change her because she loves her and wants to be her simultaneously. Jackie is the goal for the whole team; she is the girl who has it easier so therefore she is the girl everyone wants to be. Grady states that Shauna's love for Jackie is "laced with sadistic resentment" (n.p) and this true in the sense that their love for each other is twisted: Jackie's is "laced with" (Grady, n.p) a sense of control and Shauna is intensely jealous. As Grady says, "Shauna eats Jackie because she hates her and she eats her because she loves her and she eats her because she wants to be her" (n.p). This sentiment is also shared by the team, they follow her until her kind of leadership is invalid, due to the escape from patriarchal surveillance, then the only way she can still serve them is by being eaten to save them from starvation. Grady states that they eat Jackie because she was "what they were told to aspire to be, so much so that they loved her almost as much as they hated her" (n.p). Jackie's connection to

patriarchal femininity makes her incredibly complex and a contradiction to the other characters. She is silently suffering through patriarchal norms because that is what she was taught. Miller, Gardner, and Gleeson state that because the girls reject traditional forms of femininity, they “occupy liminal and abject spaces bordering on the monstrous” (8) which emphasises the freedom felt by the girls as ‘othered’ beings within a Gothic text. Both groups of girls in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are seen as monstrous before the plane crash and their actions in the wilderness further emphasise this. They feel a sense of freedom because their actions are no longer being controlled by patriarchal expectations.

The relationship between trauma and the Gothic is highlighted in both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. Westengard explores this in terms of trauma related to queerness in Gothic media and states that “queer cultural production is both queer and Gothic because it responds to trauma” (30). This is the case with both *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* as they explore the trauma caused by living under patriarchy that then comes to the surface when isolated from patriarchal society. Westengard describes “insidious” trauma as “disruptive and fracturing” (180) because it is elusive. The trauma that stems from living in patriarchal society can indeed be described as “insidious” (180) as it is subtle, but the effects are gradual and have harmful effects. This can be seen in both the pre-crash scenes in both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, and in the contrast between the teenage and adult storylines in *Yellowjackets* in particular.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Leah’s monologue in the pilot episode of *The Wilds* is key to understanding the trauma that the girls experience while living under patriarchy. The fact that this monologue comes so early in the series establishes the tone for the show, showing the audience the juxtaposition of two kinds of trauma: the trauma caused by the plane crash, and the “insidious” (180) trauma that Westengard discusses as being caused by patriarchal society. As Westengard states, this kind of trauma is “disruptive” (180) to the girls in *The Wilds* because it does not allow to live authentically. Leah describes “ridiculous expectations” (“Day One”) that forced the girls into prescribed boxes, a key example being Shelby, who I have discussed at length, struggling as a closeted queer girl in a strict religious household. *The Wilds* focuses on the trauma that the girls are already suffering from, that they perhaps do not realise they are experiencing until they are alone in the wilderness away from

patriarchy and supported by other girls who have been traumatised in the same way by patriarchal expectations.

Westengard discusses trauma narratives and the connection to the Gothic and explores the notion that for a recovery from trauma, there must be a “pre-trauma coherent self to which the recovered subject can return” (5). There must be a past version of the self that the subject can regress back to after experiencing trauma as a place of emotional safety. As an example from the texts, the girls in *Yellowjackets* regress back to their teenage selves while experiencing patriarchal trauma in adulthood. The relationship between the two timelines in *Yellowjackets* allows the audience to see the girls regress back to their wilderness selves after being forced to revisit the trauma of living under patriarchy. The Gothic narrative of restoration of “normative social order” (Westengard, 5) after the monster disrupts societal expectations is linked here. The monster disrupts society and there is a return to societal expectations. In *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, the ‘disruption’ of societal expectations is represented by the experiences in the wilderness, and there is an attempt to restore the “social order” (Westengard, 5) of patriarchy by bringing the girls back to society and forcing them to conform to patriarchal expectations.

In *Yellowjackets*, the trauma the girls experience as adults stems from a combination of the plane crash and the experience of living under patriarchal surveillance. This is shown in the adult timeline through the characters regressing back to their teenage selves and roles within the group. Examples of this include Misty having a photo of the Yellowjackets team on her wall as an adult, despite not actually being a player herself, and Van being ‘stuck in the nineties’ and owning a VHS rental store in the adult timeline. Misty’s transition from teenage to adulthood is a clear reflection on her time in the wilderness as she becomes a nurse for the elderly, people who cannot refuse her help like the teenage Yellowjackets during the days after the crash. This was a time when she felt the most useful and needed after, presumably, a childhood of bullying by the popular girls. The VHS rental store represents the time before the crash for Van, but a romanticised version. She spends her adulthood being lost in films and forms of media that are becoming extinct: the shop is called “While You Were Streaming” which is a clear mocking of modern-day streaming culture, and Van remasters VHS’ and sells DVDs. Van’s love of physical media keeps her in the past, but her shop also creates a queer space. Erin Brady writes for SlashFilm that “While

You Were Streaming is filled with Easter eggs to mainstream queer cinema, even if most of them are more subtextual than textual” (n.p) and some of the films spotlighted have been reclaimed by queer fans as “starring closeted queer characters attempting to navigate a strictly heterosexual world” (Brady, n.p). These films include *Sunset Boulevard*, having “its own unique mark on queer cinema” (Brady, n.p) and *The Watermelon Woman*, about a “filmmaker exploring what it means to be a Black lesbian in the predominantly white worlds of art and queerness” (Brady, n.p). Brady discusses that there are other metatextual films mentioned that have “become reclaimed by queer film fans over the years” (n.p) and these spotlight “the realities of queer pain” (n.p), as well as Van’s video store offering the “joys of subtextual queer camp” (n.p). The films that are mentioned are niche and cult classics rather than well-known blockbusters, which adds to the discussion of queer representation in media. The writers of *Yellowjackets* clearly position Van as creating a safe space as a queer elder, through the films that she discusses and shows in her store. The inclusion of queer film here creates a safe queer space, and the fact that the shop is purely for physical media can be read as queer given the relationship between queerness and capitalism – physical media is falling out of favour for consumers because it is easier to stream, and streaming is easier for big companies to manage as the consumer does not own the media and it can therefore be deleted at will and no longer exist. The consumer has more control over physical media and the relationship to queerness lies in this keeping control over narratives, as queer media is more likely to be cancelled and therefore deleted from streaming platforms without warning. Van’s relationship to physical media in the adult timeline, shows that she is romanticising her life before the crash and focusing on the films rather than focusing on the trauma she experienced from her home situation and from being forcefully closeted by society’s negative view of queerness in the nineties. This narrative can be read as Van regressing back to her wilderness self, as there she was able to be openly queer with no consequences while separated from patriarchal society.

Taissa is an interesting character to consider when discussing trauma in relation to the Gothic. The presence of ‘Other Tai’, Taissa’s sleepwalking persona that appears in the wilderness, highlights the importance of trauma responses within the narrative. The personality fragmentation that Taissa experiences as a teenager in the

wilderness, is a way for her brain to protect her from the trauma she is experiencing, for example she does not remember the girls partaking in cannibalism and eating Jackie until Van reminds her. The return of 'Other Tai' in the adult timeline highlights the return of trauma for Taissa and emphasises the regression to the teenage self that all the surviving characters experience. She is referred to by her son as "the bad one" (Sammy, S1EP2) and exhibits strange nighttime behaviours like eating soil in a tree and sacrificing the family dog, behaviour that is also seen in the wilderness. This is also the version of Taissa that seeks out Van, the person she was in a relationship with as a teenager before the crash and during the time spent in the wilderness. This queer relationship was closeted before the crash, as there was a risk of homophobia due to the political climate of the nineties and was able to be revealed in the wilderness as that risk was reduced. Taissa's regression back to teenage behaviour is influenced by the effect being away from patriarchy had on her ability to be open about her queer relationship. This further emphasises the trauma that living as a queer young woman under patriarchy had on her as a character. The trauma that all the girls suffer from is arguably a mixture of trauma from the plane crash and experiences in the wilderness, and the trauma from growing up under patriarchy, being separated from patriarchal ideals, and being forced to live back under them. According to Miller, Gardener, and Gleeson, Taissa represents the "traditional Gothic double" (9) as her fragmented personality is similar to Jekyll and Hyde, and Westengard states that post-traumatic fragmentation of personality appears in descriptions of "hysteria, shell shock, and post-traumatic stress disorder" (5), all of which appear in Gothic media under one name or another.

Jackie is a clear example of a Gothic character haunting the narrative. Channelling Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*, Jackie's presence haunts Shauna, both in the teenage timeline when Shauna lives in Jackie's shadow, and then in the adult timeline when Shauna keeps seeing Jackie, or reminders of her. Jackie's role in the narrative here is to show the death of society, in that she represents social roles and expectations laid out by patriarchal society. Her death marks the start of the other girls' descent into cannibalism and creation of their own societal rules such as the 'queen of hearts hunts', and therefore Jackie's repeated return is a kind of reckoning and a reminder of the kind of 'acceptable' society they left behind. Jackie is the 'perfect' girl in patriarchal society: she comes from a wealthy family; she is clever but not too clever

to challenge men (she is not going to an Ivy League College); she is pretty and popular, and she has a boyfriend that she has not slept with. Jackie does everything right and fits patriarchal stereotypes, which is why the fact that she haunts Shauna is so important. Jackie's haunting and omnipresence in both the teenage and adult timelines has multiple readings. Firstly, that patriarchal expectations haunt the girls in the wilderness as they move away from following these expectations, and then again when they are adults living back under patriarchal control to keep them from straying again. This is represented by Shauna's life as a housewife in particular, as she is constantly surrounded by reminders of Jackie. Secondly, Shauna's hallucinations can represent Shauna's unrequited romantic feelings for Jackie haunting her attempt to be a stereotypical housewife, emphasising her negative feelings for her life with her husband and daughter. Finally, Jackie represents multiple facets of trauma, life before the crash, the plane crash itself, and the events in the wilderness. For Shauna, it is also a reminder of her own guilt about what she did to Jackie in terms of her relationship with Jeff, and the events that led to her death. The haunting is a reminder of Shauna's violent behaviour and how she treated her teammates, causing trauma for herself and the other girls in the wilderness. Patriarchal surveillance is an important reading here as this is a key factor in Shauna's regression back to her teenage role during the adult timeline.

Shauna the Butcher: A Case Study

The trauma caused by living under patriarchal norms is clearly shown through the character of Shauna in *Yellowjackets* and the way she regresses back to her teenage self as an adult. As a teenager before the crash, she was living in Jackie's shadow and unable to express her true feelings which resulted in anger and jealousy, but in the wilderness, she discovers her true self – the 'butcher'. This role that she takes on is key to the survival of the team, preparing the meat for consumption, and it is this role she regresses back into as an adult. Her life becomes stagnant and is not as promising as the life she had planned before the crash: her relationships with her husband and daughter are strained due to her trauma and she did not go to the Ivy League college she had planned to, instead becoming a housewife. Shauna had the opportunity to do what she wanted with her life, not what Jackie and patriarchal norms suggested. It becomes clear that she resents the choice not to follow through with this path and does not enjoy her life as a housewife.

As the show progresses and Shauna regresses back to her teenage self, there is a sense that she is punishing herself for Jackie's death. She is living the life that Jackie would have lived, marrying her high school sweetheart and being a housewife, rather than the life she wanted for herself. This links to Jackie's haunting of Shauna in that Shauna cannot escape the events of the wilderness as well as the patriarchal expectations that Jackie represents. A key scene to illustrate this regression is the butchering of the rabbit in Episode 2 of the first season. The audience is introduced to this violent version of Shauna early in the show in the adult timeline, but in the teenage timeline, she does not take on the role of 'the butcher' until the girls have realised that they will need to hunt. The first human she butchers is Javi, and the process of preparing him to be eaten is visually similar to the butchering of the rabbit.

The butchering of the rabbit in Shauna's adult life becomes more sinister when the audience notices the considerable number of rabbit ornaments and trinkets that Shauna possesses. It is revealed that in the adult timeline, Jackie's parents gift Shauna a rabbit themed item every year on Jackie's birthday and thus tie Jackie to rabbits, making the butchering of the rabbit even more ominous. Jackie is represented by rabbits and is haunting Shauna through this association. Shauna's treatment of Jackie prior to her death is arguably the first time Shauna is openly violent towards the other girls and Jackie was the first to perceive the self that Shauna develops while in the wilderness. Jackie haunting Shauna's adult life through rabbits and hallucinations is reminding Shauna of this change in their friendship that ultimately led to Jackie's death. In the adult timeline, Shauna butchering the rabbit shows that she cannot contain her true self anymore and allows herself to regress. This is when cracks start appearing in her relationships with her family and she becomes more violent and erratic in her behaviours, for example her relationship with and subsequent murder of Adam.

There is a sense of calm that adult Shauna has while butchering the rabbit in Season 1, Episode 2 that is not often seen in Shauna. She is an erratic character throughout the show, showcasing unpredictable behaviours in both the teenage and adult timelines. The degradation of her behaviour from being in Jackie's shadow at the beginning of Season 1 to the power-hungry hunter at the end of Season 3 shows the continuous effect that patriarchal trauma has on a young girl. As a teenager, Shauna was suffering under patriarchy as she was in Jackie's shadow, so when Jackie dies

in the wilderness, Shauna takes on a new persona. This is arguably her 'real' self that has not been allowed to be exhibited while living in patriarchal society as she is too violent and wants too much. This persona was not allowed to be brought back from the wilderness as violent women are not allowed under patriarchy. Carol Gentry and Laura Sjoberg state that violent women are "often thought of as not only bad but as bad women – in the sense that they are bad and they're women, and in the sense that their violence makes them bad at being women" (3) which emphasises that Shauna being a violent person and being a woman cannot coexist under patriarchy. Shauna exhibits violence towards her fellow teammates as a teenager, and other people in her adult life, but her violent behaviour was accepted when she fulfilled her role as the butcher in the wilderness. Shauna takes pleasure in using her experience as the butcher to intimidate men: in Season 2, Episode 3, she "draws on her memories of human butchery to intimidate a man threatening her" (Miller, Gardner, Gleeson, 11) and asks "have you ever peeled the skin off a human corpse?. . . You have to roll back just the edges of it, so you can get a good enough grip to really pull" ("Digestif"). She relishes in this taboo, further showing her disconnect to patriarchal stereotypes once she regresses to her teenage self and stops trying to conform to patriarchal roles. She has a somewhat twisted view of motherhood and caregiving. Her role as the butcher was key in the physical survival in the wilderness as she was providing food, but the way she had to go about this was inherently violent. This is discussed by Miller, Gardner and Gleeson in that she "frequently blurs the lines between violence and caregiving" (9) through her actions caring for Jackie's corpse, violence towards animals and the other girls, and butchering the rabbit to feed her family. This emphasises that she has a connection to the wilderness rather than a place in patriarchal society as her violence is part of teenage regression. Her place in the wilderness as the butcher was key to physical survival, and she is regressing into that form of violence to survive the mundane life in adulthood that she does not enjoy. She discovered her true self away from patriarchal surveillance so regresses back to her teenage self when triggered by patriarchal expectations. This is shown through the butchering of the rabbit, as this act shows a kind of last straw for Shauna. She does not feel at home in the society that she was brought back to and forced to conform to, so she reverts to a time when she did feel at home.

As Miller, Gardner, and Gleeson observe, Shauna creates her butcher role in the wilderness and her ability in this area remains “into adulthood” (6), utilised early on in Season 1 in a “darkly humorous moment of domestic frustration: ‘Callie forgot to take the meat out of the freezer, so I killed the rabbit in the garden, skinned it, chin to anus’ (S1E2)” (6). Shauna takes on a crucial role in the wilderness, without her the team would not have survived, particularly during the winter. In her adult life, her role as a housewife and mother is not one created out of need: Callie is a typical teenager and does not have a positive relationship with Shauna in the first season of the show especially, and Shauna believes that Jeff is having an affair. Adult Shauna feels replaceable and is suffering living under patriarchal society where she cannot be the more violent self that she discovered in the wilderness. It is due to these feelings of entrapment that Shauna regresses into her more violent teenage self, settling back into the role where she felt essential. In butchering the rabbit as an adult, Shauna is regressing back to the state where she felt most at home and therefore reintroducing herself to her family as they do not know this version of her.

In conclusion of this chapter, both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are part of the Gothic genre and showcase the connection between the Gothic, trauma, and queerness. Miller, Gardner, and Gleeson state that the blurring of the lines between “maternal, sexual, and violent tendencies” of survivor protagonists “situate them in states of ever-shifting liminal and subversive existences” (8) which is a key part of the Gothic genre and raises a stronger connection to queerness and separation from patriarchal structures.

Chapter 3

“I’m just a girl, living in captivity”

(Stefani and Dumont)

Girlhood, queerness, and living under surveillance

Girlhood and queerness are inherently linked by their relationship to patriarchy, and this is clear when considering that living in a patriarchal society means living under constant surveillance and ideological control. The social norms are dictated by the ruling class, patriarchy, everyone is observed, and the groups not following these norms are punished. Media strategist Gillian Branstetter states on X (formally Twitter), “if enforcing gender norms requires a constant state of surveillance and censorship then they probably aren’t as biological or innate as you think they are” and this idea is explored in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*.

Judith Butler famously theorised that gender is inherently performative, and states that gender is “culturally constructed” (8) and that “gender reality is created through sustained social performances” (192). This idea relates to the above quote by Gillian Branstetter in that the cultural construction of gender norms by patriarchy requires constant surveillance and enforcement and this affects the way that women and queer people, and therefore girlhood, is portrayed through media. To enforce patriarchal gender norms, there must be some form of ideological influence as these norms are a medium of control.

Patriarchal structures are threatened by anyone who is not a white, cisgender, able-bodied, middle to upper-class man and patriarchal society subtly gives everyone a prescribed way to behave, and this is particularly true for women and queer people. Being the ‘perfect’ woman or queer person or being traumatised enough to ‘behave’ means that there is a limited threat to patriarchal structures. Joshua Falek and JJ Wright discuss the impact of this, stating that the performance of gender and sexual scripts dictated by patriarchal ideals “reestablishes the hegemony and ubiquity of both cisheteropatriarchy and whiteness by naturalising a hierarchy within which those with the least privilege are deemed sexually amoral and subject to harm without consequence” (n.p). This emphasises that patriarchal society lends itself to

violence against marginalised people and this influences media representations of these groups. Queer trauma and violence against women have become stereotypes of representation in media, and this has happened through surveillance by patriarchal society and the implementation of ideological control. By having a very small number of queer relationships compared to heterosexual in media, killing off queer characters or cancelling queer led television shows, and portraying women as sexist stereotypes and one note characters, society is pushing a certain ideology perpetrated by patriarchal ideals: that “cisheterosexual femininity and masculinity are articulated to be the most valuable” (Falek and Wright, n.p). Raley and Lucas state that media such as television is a powerful tool that society can use to “proliferate the values, assumptions, and stereotypes of their society to the populace” (20).

Furthermore, they discuss that television is incredibly influential as it is the “dominant source of information for the majority of Americans” (21). This is important when considering *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* as the American societal context that they were written under and portray influences the kind of representation in these shows.

The concepts of surveillance and ideological control occur both around the texts for the audiences, and within the texts for the characters. This duality creates representation that is more effective and important for the audience as they can see themselves in the characters more easily.

Ideological control

The surveillance and ideological control of media leads to over-representing certain versions of identities instead of providing audiences with a spectrum of identities that authentically represent society. Edward Schiappa et al. state that “television has an opportunity to influence beliefs about groups with which individuals typically may have little direct social contact” (15) and in their study about how heterosexual people view a television show with gay characters, *Will & Grace*, found that “increased viewing frequency and parasocial interaction were found to correlate with lower levels of sexual prejudice” (15). This research into “intergroup contact” (Schiappa et al. 18) found that prejudicial attitudes “may be based on a negative initial experience, a mass-mediated stereotype, or socialisation from family, friends, or other sources” (Schiappa et a. 18) which is important to note in terms of the relationship between patriarchal surveillance and ideological control and queer

representation. The “mass-mediated stereotypes” (Schiappa et al. 18) that affect views of minority groups are an example of ideological control as these stereotypes directly inform behaviour. The ideological control that leads to inauthentic or harmful queer representation is being directly challenged by *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*.

In terms of queer representation in media, in Chapter 1 I discussed the idea that queer characters are written to be perfect and placed on a pedestal. This leads to the damaging idea that queer people must be model citizens at all times instead of being allowed to be morally grey or messy, like human beings are. The other version of queerness that is explored by media, television in particular, is to do with the trauma experienced by queer people. Teresa Caprioglio discusses this and states that “experiences and articulations of queerness and of trauma appear linked on television” (462) then goes on to discuss that queer identity is “predicated on experiencing trauma” (462) and this is what is represented in television. Falek and Wright also discuss this and state that focusing on oppression alone can “easily produce homogenous representations of queer and trans populations as constantly suffering rather than reckon with their entirety” (n.p) which can be applied to this discussion of *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. Indeed, queer people are more likely to experience traumatic events due to patriarchal oppression, but if this is the only represented version of queer people in media then this oppression becomes normalised and accepted by society.

The queer narratives presented on television affect all facets of the audience, queer or not, and Caprioglio states that television is a “mass medium” (462) and the constant repetition of this traumatised version of queerness has impacts for the “continued naturalisation of institutional, systemic, and interpersonal, especially familial, queerphobic violence” (462). The fact that queerphobic violence is normalised through traumatised queer narratives on television is concerning as it also puts a demand onto queer individuals, particularly young queer people, to stand up to situations when it may not be safe to do so. On the surface, this kind of representation of queer trauma does not seem sinister; in fact, it is important to discuss these kinds of narratives so cis-hetero audiences are made aware of issues that queer people face. However, the issue is when this is the only kind of representation of queerness on television, particularly if the television show is not

written for or by queer people and the queer trauma is a stereotype such as the 'bury your gays' trope.

An interesting example of representation of queer trauma is with the television show *It's a Sin*, which I will discuss in more detail further in this chapter. *It's a Sin* has an incredibly traumatic storyline about AIDS and, as Emily Garside states, if you have lived experience of something like that then the show is an "emotional reckoning like no other" (139). If you use television to feel safe and represented, then this storyline is perhaps more harmful and begs the question whether it is worth damaging the mental health of a queer audience for the sole purpose of educating a cis-hetero one. The AIDS crisis is a huge part of queer history and still affects the community, but this is not the only part of queer history worth representing on TV. The release of more media catered for queer young adults such as *Love, Victor* and *Heartstopper* has raised more questions about which 'version' of queerness is readily represented in media. Liam Casey writes for *The Conversation* that *Heartstopper* creates a duality and juxtaposition for queer audiences, seeing the queer joy depicted in the show but feeling "anger, grief, and sadness as they compared the show to their own relatively painful adolescence" (Casey, n.p). The higher number of television shows and other media that depict only queer trauma means that it is a surprise when the representation is that of queer joy instead. Casey states that television shows like *Heartstopper* "plant a seed" (n.p) and makes queer audiences wonder "how life might have played out if their high school experience was supportive rather than frightening" (n.p). *Heartstopper* does indeed have traumatic aspects, protagonist Charlie being bullied for being gay being just one example, but the show is discussed as if nothing negative happens to the protagonists. The focus on queer joy is not a negative reaction; in fact, blame is being put on this show for being unrepresentative of real-life queerness because it depicts joy alongside trauma. It is the overrepresentation of queer trauma in media because patriarchal society has 'rules' for queer representation that has caused this audience response. Kit Connor, the actor who plays Nick in *Heartstopper*, stated in an interview with Charlotte Edwards that the show "subverted what's out there in other ways [because] queer media is pretty dark and depressing and involves a lot of trauma" and the goal of *Heartstopper* is to push the "other message: that being queer can be beautiful" (quoted by Edwards, n.p). Audiences are used to seeing queer trauma and

stereotypes like the 'bury-your-gays' trope, a "systematic pattern in which queer characters, typically lesbians and bisexual women, die in violent ways and often in service of another character's development" (Birchmore and Hensman Kettrey, 1312), so seeing queer joy on screen is confusing. The ideology that comes from queer trauma as the primary representation in media is that to be queer, your life has to be entirely traumatic. Queer trauma in real life does exist and is unfortunately common but it is usually in conjunction with queer joy, so it is important that there is a mix of both in shows with queer representation.

Queer trauma does have a place in media and storytelling, but in producing media that focuses on queer joy, the norm of queer trauma as influenced by patriarchal society is actively challenged. Queer joy offers "crucial redirection to sociologies of sex, gender, and sexuality" (Falek and Wright, n.p) by exploring queer lives beyond violence. One participant in a study by Wright et al. said that the "pervasiveness of internalised heteronormativity is something that is just really hard to shake. No matter how much of an enlightened, feminist, queer woman I want to be, I feel like there's still elements that I'm constantly having to work through" (51). This emphasises how much cisheteronormativity and patriarchal control influence society and highlights the importance of realistic queer representation.

As mentioned, an interesting opposite to *Heartstopper* is the Channel 4 show *It's a Sin*; a standalone miniseries written by Russell T Davies about British queer people during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s, that builds on decades of other, primarily American, AIDS stories. Both *Heartstopper* and *It's a Sin* contain both queer joy and queer trauma - *It's a Sin* is heavier in subject matter because known for this in online spaces. *It's a Sin* is seen by some as the pinnacle of queer visual media, showcasing real and traumatic events. Queer trauma is seen as more valid than queer joy, because it is a less heteronormative and sanitised view of the queer community and, unfortunately, "LGBTQ people are at higher risk of PTSD compared with their cisgender/heterosexual peers" (Marchi, 7) so a queer audience may relate more closely to a traumatic storyline. Queer trauma may be seen as more highly regarded because there is a shock factor that makes heteronormative society listen. In *Heartstopper*, the queerness of the characters does not add to any shock factor of the plot but in *It's a Sin*, the preconceptions about who you think will die from AIDS in the story add to the shock when the 'well behaved' character is the first to die.

Garside states that *It's a Sin* was released at a time when there was a generation of people who were hearing the story of AIDS for the first time or “at least in a way that made them listen” (139) which has a huge impact on audience perceptions as this generation are more likely to post online about what they have watched and be interested in having a discussion about the content.

It's a Sin did not win any of the BAFTAs it was nominated for but did win the Outstanding TV Movie or Limited Series award at the GLAAD Media Awards, and the 'Media Moment' award at the British LGBT Awards. Emily Garside discusses this and suggests that this was not entirely because there are still issues with censoring queer media, but *It's a Sin* is “difficult queer TV” (139). Garside discusses this at length and states that *It's a Sin* presents “messy, flawed gay men doing things that made each other uncomfortable, doing morally questionable things, making poor life choices, and making life choices wider society frowned upon” (140) as opposed to *Heartstopper* that is arguably more sanitised. Garside states that straight audiences have “embraced ‘queer shows’ but only on their terms, only the ‘safe’ ones” like *Heartstopper* that are “heteronormative, sweet and romantic” (140). She then goes on to say that the “safe spaces” (140) are needed by queer people too so shows that focus more on queer joy are still important, but audiences need difficult TV like *It's a Sin* that do not “replicate versions of the world they feel safe in, one in which gay men follow heteronormative patterns, focusing on love and romance” (140). Garside describes these shows as a “stepping stone into the queer experience” (140) as opposed to *It's a Sin* which is better described as a “baptism of fire” (140) into queer history. While *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* do not share many of the same key qualities as *Heartstopper* and *It's a Sin* in that they are about American lesbians/queer women, they are more similar to *It's a Sin* because the queer characters are not sanitised. My focus texts are not a ‘safe space’ if you are afraid of overt queerness: it would be unlikely anyone other than a queer person on the internet could be found calling Misty “adorable” for her actions in *Yellowjackets*, but it would be more likely to find a straight person discussing how “cute” they think Charlie from *Heartstopper* is. As Garside says, the ‘safe’ shows are the “sweet and romantic” (140) ones, not the ones like *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* that are both queer in character and queer in their response to society.

To cater to a wider range of queer audiences and act against patriarchal ideological control of audience perspectives on queerness, there needs to be a middle ground between representations of queer trauma and queer joy. This is where shows like *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* come in. These two shows each have traumatic incidents at their heart, but the plane crashes are not the focus. The characters are exploring the traumatic aspects of girlhood and queerness that come from living under a patriarchal society. This also leans into the theory of minority stress, which is defined by Ilan Meyer as the “excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position” (4). Minority stress stems from “social processes, institutions, and structures beyond the individual” (5) and this is highlighted in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. Both bring together an intersectional group that all suffer while living under patriarchal control and, interestingly, the disaster and survival situations the girls find themselves in can be read as healing experiences as they are now separate from patriarchal control. It is revealed at the end of the pilot episode that the survival narrative of *The Wilds* is the result of a social experiment, and a disgraced scientist handpicked the girls and engineered the situation to get favourable results. There is a juxtaposition of Gretchen, the scientist, watching and studying the girls to prove that women are superior leaders and the girls openly discussing how they feel watched by patriarchy, is striking for the audience. The trauma that the girls experience primarily comes from the experience of living as a minority group under patriarchy rather than the plane crash itself and this raises a key point about how audiences relate to queer representation.

Surveillance

Monitoring identity closely through surveillance is another way of controlling and policing the identity and behaviour of the members of society deemed abnormal. This is a key point of exploration for both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* as it is the act of taking the girls away from patriarchal society that allows them to become aware of how this surveillance has caused trauma. Examples of surveillance can be found throughout history and in media, McCarthyism in the mid-twentieth century being key. Westengard discusses “paranoid surveillance in the form of McCarthyism” (71) and states that under this form of control, the “idyllic, white, suburban, Christian, middle-class, heteronormative nuclear family became the picture of health and

happiness, and anything that deviated from this structure — or functioned within the structure but failed to achieve happiness as a result — became the face of the enemy” (71). Arguably, the results of this kind of surveillance and control are ongoing, considering the social and media censorship of queer people as explored through current queer representation in Chapter 1. There are other discussions of surveillance that can be applied to the kind of surveillance exhibited in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, I will be using Foucault’s work on the Panopticon and Althusser’s work on ideological state apparatus to analyse this further. This application of more dated theory to modern day patriarchal society highlights the ongoing effect of living under patriarchy has on minority groups and how this is shown through visual media, including *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*.

Louis Althusser’s theory concerning ideological state apparatus can be applied to this discussion as the trauma that comes from living under surveillance and ideological control is key to both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. Althusser’s theory states that ideology is “not voluntary but the result of structural factors in society” (Althusser, 1284) and these structures can be categorised as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) which are civil institutions like churches and schools, and repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) which operate through repression like government and the police. Althusser goes on to state that the ruling class “cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the RSAs [...] because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself” (Althusser, 1293). This is to say that even though the ruling class attempts to control the ideology of society through civil institutions, they are run by the people and can be dismantled and changed. This applies to queer representation because the ruling class, patriarchy, has attempted to control the ideology surrounding queerness presented in media and through audience perspectives. However, queer and ally writers have been able to uproot patriarchal ideas surrounding queerness in media. This is why messy and morally grey queer representation like the kind found in *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* is so important and strikes a chord with queer audiences: the representation is authentic and going against harmful, patriarchal, ideologies.

A theory that complements Althusser’s is Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s discussion of heteronormativity. They state that heteronormativity is “more than

ideology [and is] produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life” (555). To combine Althusser’s theory with that of Berlant and Warner: heteronormativity, the normalisation of straight relationships and culture, is ingrained in society and is a key part of both civic institutions (schools, churches, etc) and repressive state apparatuses (governments, policing, etc). The social preference of heterosexuality is the “result of structural factors in society” (Althusser, 1284) and the “material conditions [of heterosexuality] feel hard-wired into personhood” (Berlant and Warner, 555). Therefore, the ideology that is shown the most in media like television shows is heteronormative and shows like *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* challenge this ‘inherent’ part of society through the characters’ experiences under patriarchy and how the queer characters are portrayed.

Foucault’s discussion of the Panopticon, a circular prison where the cells face towards a central watchtower, is crucial when considering surveillance as a concept and its relationship to patriarchy and girlhood. The theory of the Panopticon, while starting out as a physical prison, can be applied when discussing surveillance, particularly when discussing how the girls in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* behave when separated from patriarchy. Foucault states that the Panopticon induces a state of “conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (84). It is the consistent fear of observation that acts as a mechanism of control over the prisoner’s behaviour. Surveillance in a patriarchal society exists on both a systemic and sociological level. For example, ‘undesirable’ behaviours that reject patriarchal social rules like being queer, are under threat in terms of a systemic ruling over definitions of gender or not being able to hold hands in public due to fears of homophobic violence.

In *The Wilds*, they are living in a more physical Panopticon while on the island as they are indeed being monitored and watched. While many of the girls do not think they are being watched, two do: Nora as the experiment’s confederate and Leah who becomes suspicious and paranoid. Nora’s behaviour, like the prisoners in the Panopticon, depends on her knowledge of being physically monitored by Gretchen, and the same applies to Leah as she becomes more paranoid and her behaviour becomes more erratic. For the other girls, they are unaware that they are being watched but are still subject to the residual surveillance of patriarchy, which is more of a metaphorical or theoretical Panopticon. In *Yellowjackets*, the concept of

surveillance has several facets. The presence of the Wilderness as an entity, along with the overarching presence of patriarchy make the girls feel like they're being watched and therefore, applying Foucault, affect their behaviour. Foucault's theory states that the major effect of the Panopticon is to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (84). That is to say that the inmate does not need to be watched constantly to *feel* like they are, and therefore they behave according to the rules set out by the inspector, or by the overarching society.

Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon also links with Althusser's work on ideological state apparatus. Repressive state apparatuses are the same as Foucault's "mechanisms of power" (37) as they represent the same parts of society: the government, perceived leaders of society and therefore perpetrators of patriarchal norms. Berlant and Warner's discussion of heteronormativity being ingrained into society links to this exploration of how surveillance is used as a mechanism of control within patriarchal society. Surveillance leads to control, and in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* this is the case with both concepts of girlhood and queerness. Both these parts of the characters' identities are closely monitored and controlled within patriarchal society but are celebrated within the wilderness, when taken away from patriarchy.

It is revealed early on in *The Wilds* that the girls are under surveillance, not from men but from Gretchen and the Dawn of Eve project. Gretchen is a disgraced psychologist who is trying to validate her academic integrity by 'proving' that "it is women and not men who have a natural gift for creating harmonious and capable communities and that the reins of power should finally be shifted into their hands" ("Day Fifteen"). Gretchen is calling for matriarchal control after centuries of patriarchal rule, but the way she is 'proving' this is by monitoring a group of girls in the same way as patriarchal society does. The island, as discussed in Chapter 2, is representative of a safe space where the girls can explore girlhood and queerness away from patriarchal surveillance, but Gretchen has artificially created this environment. Inserting 'confederates' into the group, Jeanette being directly employed by Gretchen, and Nora being coerced through promises of help for her sister, adds to this. The space that the girls come to discover is a sanctuary is manufactured and they are still being watched and manipulated. This is emphasised

when Leah starts to believe that there is something more sinister going on. In Episode 1.9, “Day Twenty-Two”, Nora says “she [Leah] was drowning, sinking under the terrible weight of it all. Maybe because she was losing her mind or maybe because she was starting to see things more clearly” (“Day Twenty-Two”). The language of “drowning” and “sinking under the terrible weight of it” implies that the girls, particularly Leah, feel suffocated by the weight of the traumatic event combined with the issues they already face by living under patriarchy. The wilderness, as explored in Chapter 2, is a safe space away from patriarchal influence, but the “terrible weight” that Leah is feeling is reflective of patriarchal influence infiltrating the safe space. Leah does not know the extent of what is truly happening and is unaware of who is behind it, but trying to uncover the truth adds to the betrayal that the audience feels upon learning that the girls have been used in a way that is reminiscent of the patriarchal surveillance that they were lucky to escape.

Patriarchal surveillance is also a key feature of *Yellowjackets*. The makeup of the group of survivors is different to that of *The Wilds* in that there are men within the group of girls. Coach Ben has a different relationship to patriarchy in that he is a closeted gay man in the 1990s so is perhaps not perpetrating patriarchal ideals as strictly or consciously as a straight man, but his presence is important to note. R. W Connell and James Messerschmidt discuss Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity and state that it was understood as “the pattern of practice [...] that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (822) and that “men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (822). Coach Ben is not a heterosexual man, so does not enforce patriarchal stereotypes onto the girls in the same way that the society they lived in before the crash did, but he does still benefit from patriarchy. The difference between *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* is the presence of men in the group, Ben, Travis, and Javi, in *Yellowjackets*. These men have a different relationship to the wilderness than the girls. Ben is injured upon entering the wilderness and is ultimately saved by Misty, Travis has an on and off again relationship with Nat, and Javi is eaten to survive. The moment in Season 1 episode 2 (“F Sharp”) when Misty brutally chops Ben’s leg off with an axe to save his life, is arguably the moment when the girls are cut off from the society they grew up in. Misty’s actions are extreme, she is doing it to save him, but the audience is

shown a darker side to the girls right from the beginning. The axe represents the severing from cisheteropatriarchy, as the action weakens Ben even though it saves his life. His version of patriarchal surveillance is arguably weaker as his authority slowly disappears as the story goes on, but it fundamentally does still exist.

In the adult plotline, Shauna and the other survivors receive postcards that depict mountains and the words “Wish You Were Here”, and a drawing of the sigil that they found in the wilderness on the back. They presume that these postcards are a threat, but it is unclear from whom until the latter part of Season 1 when it is revealed that it is in fact Jeff. This emphasises the surveillance of the girls, as Jeff is representative of patriarchal society through his blackmail and need to enter a situation where he was not involved. When the girls receive postcards, Nat thinks that it is the Wilderness itself that is coming back for them. The emotional response to the postcards is poignant here as it becomes clear that the characters have all regressed back to their teenage (or wilderness) selves. Taissa wants to take control, Nat spirals, Misty wants to solve the mystery, and Shauna turns to violence. They are regressing back to themselves before the crash, before they found a kind of solace in the wilderness away from society, because they are once again suffering under patriarchal control and surveillance. If, as explored in Chapter 2, the Wilderness is understood as an entity that is a protector of the girls, the postcards are even more poignant. Even though it is Jeff that sent the postcards, the Wilderness, or at least its influence, is still returning in the regression back to the girls’ teenage selves. The adult lives that they are leading are not fulfilling them because they are still suffering under patriarchal surveillance, so the Wilderness is trying to take the survivors back to the safe space they created for themselves.

Hearth and Home

To challenge the trauma of living under and being observed by patriarchal society, *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* provide the characters with a space away from patriarchal expectations to thrive in some way. Drawing on my analysis of the concept of Wilderness in Chapter 2, the theme of hearth and home is prominent in both texts and is relevant here. The physical survival of the girls is a primary focus of both texts and the examples presented are similar across all of them: finding resources like water, shelter building, and hunting. The sense of safety amongst their

physical environment and emotionally as a new community group is felt primarily when around the campfire. The fire itself is a survival tool, giving the girls an ability to purify water, cook food, but most importantly stay warm and provide an SOS signal with the smoke. When considering the symbolism of the fire in this instance, is almost more important to discuss the representation of the hearth, rather than the physical aspect of fire. While the fire is a literal and physical representation of safety the girls' find after disaster, the emotional safety that they find together while gathered around the campfire is integral to the groups in both texts coming together outside of patriarchal structures. This coming together is key for political survival of queer characters and allows audiences to see community building away from patriarchal society. In both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, the campfires allow for the groups to process the disaster they have experienced in a way that also builds community. I argue that the physical coming together around the campfire allows for emotional intimacy amongst the groups of girls that have very different life experiences but ultimately share the trauma of growing up under patriarchal structures and expectations. In *The Wilds*, the girls play a typical sleepover game of 'Never Have I Ever', revealing secrets and laughing. In *Yellowjackets*, Laura Lee is convinced that she caused the crash by swearing at her piano teacher, so the other girls confess their own 'sins' in order to make her feel better and the group end up laughing together. The girls can find connection in a way they may not have been able to in their normal lives, and this is the first instance of them coming together as a group in their new environment, building a foundation of their new lives.

The concept of the hearth has been linked to femininity and womanhood for centuries, notably in Ancient Greek worship of the goddess Hestia. Mika Kajava discusses Hestia and describes how Homer's retelling of Hestia's origin myth stated that she was given the best part of the offerings to keep the fires burning; this assimilated her to the hearth and the hearth was "personified" (2). Hearth and home relate to womanhood due to the concept of public and private spheres, in which women were meant to stay in the domestic space at home. The symbol of hearth in literature can also be used to dismantle patriarchal ideas about women's role in society, as is the case in my chosen texts. Mohammed Hamdan discusses the relationship between the hearth and women in nineteenth century literature, but the ideas can be comfortably applied to my chosen texts.

Hamdan states that in nineteenth century texts, the hearth is associated with “familial warmth, domestic unity and collective consciousness” (707) and while that is related to patriarchal ideas of the family, I argue that this can be representative of a different, possibly queer, community structure that appears in my chosen texts. By the end of each of my texts, the groups of girls have become like a family group but have subverted the traditional patriarchal version of what this should look like. The beginning of this coming together outside of patriarchal society begins with the gathering around the hearth, firstly for physical safety, but developing into a way to get to know each other in different ways. As Hamdan goes on to discuss, the hearth is a space where “different bodies are collectively tied to the centre of fire and light” (708), this can clearly be seen in my texts in that the groups of girls are made up of people from different races, sexualities, and socioeconomic backgrounds but are ultimately brought together into one almost “familial” group in order to survive. A particularly interesting point that Hamdan makes is about fire itself, in that it is a “consuming entity” that “resists historical categorisations or traditional binarisms” (708). By personifying fire in this way and connecting it back to the campfires in my texts, there is a link between the fire that brings the girls together for the first time, and the Wilderness as a personified and supernatural entity. I argue that if the Wilderness is indeed considered personified and is an almost motherly figure, trying to keep the girls safe from patriarchy, then the hearth and fire in general is a tool to keep the girls physically warm and safe and also emotionally develop together away from the societal views they have been suffocated with. In contrast to Hamden, Tony Williams states that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominant ideology (patriarchal) “allowed female domestic power as long as she confined her reign to the hearth” (74) and that this is represented in horror media in particular; this emphasises the importance of the hearth in domestic spaces. While the hearth of the campfire is a positive aspect of the characters’ time in the wilderness, it has also been used as a tool to trap women. I argue that the subversion of the hearth and domestic spaces from a tool of imprisonment for female characters to a space for connection and community for the ‘other’ is important and can only happen in a space isolated from patriarchal ideologies like the wilderness in my texts. Hamdan states that “hearth fires offer a passageway into psychological spaces of personal freedom” (714). The campfires are the first spaces where the girls can come together away from patriarchal ideas and are arguably the catalysts for the creation of new

community groups so therefore, they are indeed a way of finding “personal freedom” (Hamden, 714). The freedom that the girls experience around the hearth is a direct contradiction to how women have been confined in the past and makes the representation of girlhood even more important; the girls are using the space that was once used to imprison them to thrive.

In *Yellowjackets*, there is a particular moment where fire is important: the final moments in the Season 2 finale where the cabin burns down and the girls narrowly escape. In these moments, the girls are bathed in warm orange light, usually indicating safety, and the outline of the building they called home, is striking. There is audience speculation as to how the fire started but, as an article for *Collider* by Samantha Graves states, “all arrows seem to point toward Coach Ben”. He is seen picking up a box of matches after discovering the girls preparing to eat Javi and while it seems like an extreme reaction to the girls simply trying to survive in the wilderness, it is significant that it was likely Coach Ben that started it. Coach Ben is the only adult and the only man in the group; he represents a version of patriarchy carrying through to the wilderness. He does not partake in the ritualistic cannibalism as the girls do to survive and he is generally ignored and not given a leadership role despite having power over the girls before the crash as a coach. It is interesting that this patriarchal role is given to Coach Ben because he also does not fit into traditional patriarchal roles set out for him in the real world, because he is gay. He is cast in this role in the wilderness because, although he *should* be able to understand what the girls are going through as outsiders to patriarchy, he cannot and is therefore an obstacle to them becoming a close group in the wilderness. There is subtext here of internalised homophobia and misogyny and this transfers to a kind of puritanical attitude towards the brutal and necessary sacrifices the girls must make to survive in the wilderness. There is also a sense that the fire is cleansing in a pseudo-religious way and Coach Ben’s deterioration in mental and physical health requires a religious saviour, in a similar way that Lottie’s mental illness is cleansed by the wilderness. Javi and Travis are the other boys in the group; Javi being sacrificed and consumed, and Travis becoming somewhat of an antagonist, particularly in his on and off again relationship with Natalie. The male characters do not participate in the rituals the girls do, because they cannot fathom the importance of them. The girls are creating their own world, away from patriarchy, and the men are no longer needed. The

hearth that allowed the girls to bond after the plane crash and start the development of a community was used against them, arguably by a patriarchal figure.

There is a contrast between the concepts of the hearth and the home in my texts. As explained, the hearth is a positive way the girls are brought together and allows them to create a safe space, but the concept of home is more negative. In *The Wilds*, the girls must build their own shelters and take part in shelter building competitions, adding to the sleepover fun they created for themselves around the campfire. The girls in *The Wilds* spend time physically building their own shelter using natural resources from the island but in *Yellowjackets*, they find a cabin they can keep safe in. The shelter is being provided by the wilderness, with the girls using natural resources like tree branches or by finding the cabin. In *Yellowjackets*, Lottie is the character with the closest relationship to the wilderness, right from the beginning of the story. In Season 1 Episode 3, she is the one to spot the cabin, the place of safety and protection for the girls against the elements, even though she does not initially trust it and thinks “bad things happened” (“The Dollhouse”) inside. She does not want to initially stay inside the cabin but is convinced by the other girls that it is safer to stay together and that there is nothing wrong. However, it turns out that it is not the cabin itself that Lottie has a “bad feeling” (“The Dollhouse”) about, but the skeleton in the attic that she finds. If the character of the Wilderness is a sentient entity that wants to isolate the girls from mainstream patriarchal ideologies, then it is possible to read into the finding of the cabin as an act of protection, giving the girls a place to keep physically safe. At this early point in the narrative, Lottie does not understand if she is suffering from her unmedicated schizophrenia or if there is really something supernatural or magical trying to contact her so even though she is the first one to be ‘chosen’ by the Wilderness, the presence of the presumably male skeleton in the only place of safety for the girls is confusing. The skeleton of the hunter can be representative of a number of things, such as the patriarchal ideology and male energy that the girls are able to escape in the wilderness, but I also argue that it could represent the concepts of death and patriarchal ideologies that the girls are trying to escape but will be with them forever. The cabin is initially seen as a haven, but I argue that while the Wilderness as a sentient being could have given the girls the cabin as a place of safety, the link between the Gothic and horror genres need to be considered in terms of domestic spaces and femininity.

As well as the *Yellowjackets* girls' survival being less realistic due to the harsher weather conditions in the mountainous setting, the crossover genres of Gothic and horror are poignant here. Haunted houses and 'cabins in the woods' are common tropes in horror, and domestic spaces are also an important place to analyse female characters in Gothic media. The combination of the Gothic and horror in *Yellowjackets* is important when considering the representation of girlhood and queerness. The episode where the cabin is discovered is called "Welcome to the Dollhouse", a reference to the cabin itself and, I would argue, the girls' situation, in that they must play at being adults in this situation because the only adult in the group is unable to take responsibility. The "Dollhouse" could also be a reference to how a patriarchal society sees teenage girls, as dolls to dress up and play with then discard when they are no longer wanted. The title of this episode could also be a canonical reference to Joss Whedon's 2009 television show *Dollhouse*, in which "a top-secret organisation erases the identities of attractive young people, turning them into blank "dolls" ready for imprints of temporary identities they need to fulfil assignments for clients" (IMDb, n.p). From this description, and the plot point that these assignments can be romantic, the link to *Yellowjackets* is that the "Dollhouse" is not a reference to the cabin, but to the society the girls left behind. It is patriarchal society that aims to turn people into "blank dolls" and enforce prescribed personalities and identities through surveillance.

The role of the family and the familial home is a key aspect of the horror genre, and this is applicable to *Yellowjackets*. In his text *Hearths of Darkness*, Tony Williams discusses a wide range of twentieth century horror films and how familial structures are used as a metaphor for entrapment by patriarchal and capitalist societal structures. *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) is a particular example used at length to discuss the domestic sphere as a negative space, especially for women. The physical entrapment of Marion and Mrs Bates within the motel epitomises the treatment of women with regards to domesticity in the horror genre, and this can be seen in my chosen texts – particularly *Yellowjackets*. Williams makes some important points about familial structures in his work: that "patriarchy depends on a particular 'order of things' [...] an institutional psychic structure needing the family to process subjects into accepting rigid rules concerning gender and social reproduction. These psychic operations necessitate a patriarchal family structure, but

they are not always totally successful [as] the repressed always returns in one form or another” (22). This link between family and patriarchal social structures is important when considering the isolation of the characters in my texts from their homes before the plane crashes. The freedom the characters find in the wilderness is due to being separated from patriarchal structures that were enforced by their families at home. Williams states, “the family plays a significant role in any society determining everyone's psychic and social formation” (14) and there is a Freudian idea that civilisation relies on repression and “moulding individuals in ways detrimental to their individual potentials” (Williams, 15); these ideas are combined when talking about domestic spaces in horror. Horror and the Gothic share the exploration of the frightening and unknown, so, like Williams, I argue that the patriarchal structures in place within domestic spaces in this media, including my texts, are ways of suppressing the unknown. Harry Benshoff discusses queerness in horror films and says that being queer is a threat to community (1) so closets, physical and metaphorical, are “proscribed places” (2) for the threat to be contained. Combining the arguments of both Williams and Benshoff, I argue that the treatment of the ‘other’ in Gothic and horror media is relevant to my discussion as the ‘other’ in this case are teenage girls and young queer girls who have been suppressed by the patriarchal ideals of society and families so badly that they find community in isolated wilderness after a traumatic event.

Williams discusses Marion and Norman in *Psycho* trying to escape their own “private traps” caused by the “deadweight of family ties” (84) and I want to apply this idea to the characters in my texts. Imprisonment in the home or domestic space is a theme that is shared by multiple characters in both texts when focusing on their lives before the plane crashes. In *The Wilds*, Shelby was trapped in her family by religious expectations and a strictly patriarchal family structure, not allowing her to be anything other than the ‘perfect’ Christian daughter and suppressing her sexuality. Shelby can escape the “private traps” (Williams, 84) of her home life and find safety and the ability to express herself when on the island. There is a sense that Shelby in particular feels safe within the wilderness because it is actively protecting her from the shame she felt at home. While *The Wilds* is more settled in the drama genre rather than horror, the treatment of the girls in their domestic spaces before the plane crashes does in fact lean into tropes from the genre.

In conclusion to this chapter, the wilderness allows for a separation from patriarchal society in both texts and this emphasises the surveillance that the girls are under while living in patriarchal society. This surveillance and ideological control by patriarchal expectations causes trauma and this is shown in both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. The authentic queer representation in both texts allows for the survival of queerness under patriarchal society, also explored in Chapters 1 and 2. The difference between queer trauma and queer joy in visual media is important to note and shows that there needs to be a middle ground, like *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*, in order to showcase messy representation, which is more authentic.

Conclusion

This work has focused on how the intersection of girlhood and queerness in *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* raises questions about survival under cisheteropatriarchal society. The key underpinning of my research has been queer representation through the characters of both texts and their connection to girlhood and versions of survival.

In summary, Chapter 1 focused on the key connection between queerness and girlhood, linking both to the experiences of girls growing up under patriarchy. I used *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* as key turning points for authentic queer representation in contemporary television and discussed the importance of the messy and morally grey queer representation exhibited by both television shows. Chapter 2 was primarily concentrated on the Gothic genre, how queerness relates to the Gothic, and how these texts adhere to genre conventions. I also examined the relationship the Gothic has to trauma narratives, focusing on ‘Shauna the Butcher’ as a case study from *Yellowjackets* to further explore this. Chapter 3 discussed surveillance and pulled from key theoretical discussions of Foucault and Althusser to analyse both texts’ relationship to patriarchal structures and how authentic queer representation underpins rebellion against these norms and structures.

While I argue that both *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are overtly feminist and queer, there are questions being raised by other critics as to whether this is completely true. An example of these texts being problematised is Meredith Neville-Shepherd’s discussion of the concept of gore empowerment in relation to *Yellowjackets*. Neville-Shepherd raises questions about representations that support a “twisted white feminist understanding of radical egalitarianism that appropriates hegemonic violence and necropolitical power as symbols of women’s liberation” (348). Gore empowerment, according to Neville-Shepherd, describes white feminists’ utilisation of hegemonic masculine and necropolitical tools, such as violence and the political management of death and human populations, and claiming them as symbols of feminism. The question that Neville-Shepherd ultimately raises is: if the girls are as violent as the boys, does this make society equal? For Neville-Shepherd the violence in *Yellowjackets* as reflective of “media markets [which] perpetually trivialise and

glamorize violence for mass consumption, aggression and violence are further legitimated as tools for amassing wealth, influence, and happiness within late capitalism” (348). This is true, the increase in gratuitous violence in television does indeed trivialise violence due to constant exposure, and there is a patriarchal stereotype stemming from colonialism and capitalism that considers aggression and violence as a way to gain wealth and power; as long as you are committing violence from a place of existing privilege within patriarchal structures. *Yellowjackets* does use violence to gain power and influence, through the narrative of red queen ritual and Shauna’s descent into violence, and Neville-Shepherd states that *Yellowjackets* “proposes a brand of girl power that is primarily—and primally—rooted in the affective thrills of gore” (348). This is a worthy criticism of contemporary mass media, but I raise that the use of violence is indicative of the characters’ relationship to the violence they have experienced through living under patriarchy. This is more of a trauma response and unconscious reaction to patriarchal gender roles than an active choice by the characters to become violent, and I would read this as an intentional exploration of the effect of living under patriarchy on queer girls by the writers.

The annual ‘Where We Are on TV’ report from GLAAD tracks how the number of LGBTQ+ characters in television shows varies year by year and, most interestingly, how many of these television shows get cancelled or their queer characters removed. While the study is not peer reviewed or conducted by a scientific body, the work GLAAD does for the queer community is important and the study is crucial to consider when investigating queer representation in media. There is not a specific figure for queer trauma shown on television, but this data can be easily extrapolated from other key points of analysis.

From the 2023-2024 Where We Are on TV report (which is the most recently released at the time of writing), GLAAD found that there were 468 LGBTQ+ characters across primetime scripted, cable, and scripted originals across the eight streaming services. This is a huge decrease of 128 characters from the 596 LGBTQ+ characters of the 2022-2023 study. 25% (118) of the total number of queer characters were lesbians in 2023-2024 which is a significant decrease from the 2022-2023 results which were 30% or 180 characters. The “continuing and escalating trend of LGBTQ-inclusive series being cancelled or abruptly ending after

one or two seasons” (stated in the study itself), meant that GLAAD started formally tracking which inclusive shows were cancelled in the 2022-2023 report. In 2023-2024, 36 series that include LGBTQ+ characters were cancelled, and in 2022-2023 there were 54 series cancellations which removed 140 LGBTQ+ characters from screens—which is 24% of the total number of LGBTQ+ characters on television that year.

The president and CEO of GLAAD, Sarah Kate Ellis, says in her introduction to the 2023-2024 report that networks are at risk of “alienating a huge audience and tarnishing future brand recognition” by not telling “nuanced and meaningful inclusive” (n.p) queer stories because younger audiences are seeking out characters and stories that reflect the world around them. She goes on to say that if these stories are not told, audiences will turn to “competing providers, gaming and other forms of entertainment, and to social media to find those authentic characters” (n.p). The crucial takeaway from this is that if the community is not given a space on screen, then they will create their own space and stop consuming content.

The data from the GLAAD study and this statement from Sarah Kate Ellis emphasises the importance of relevant and varied queer representation in media. In the 2020-2021 GLAAD report, for streaming services, lesbian representation decreased by two percentage points and six characters from the previous year, which was “the fourth year in a row with a decreasing percentage”. This small part of the report shows the consistent reduction in representation for lesbians, further emphasising the importance of the clear lesbian representation of characters in my texts. *The Wilds* was cancelled after two seasons and a physical copy of the show does not exist in the form of DVDs, which further connects the issue of survival and queer representation. The trend for killing off lesbian characters or cancelling inclusive series that gained attention on social media, is exemplified by the death of Lexa from *The 100*, or Tara from *Buffy*, each of whom were killed in a very similar way: soon after scenes of these characters being in bed with another female character. Fans have stated that this implies that lesbian sex is punishable by death, which is why the ‘bury-your-gays’ trope is so dangerous in terms of spreading toxic patriarchal ideology. *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* are examples of texts that have messy and morally grey lesbian characters who survive and are loved by fans, which

raises the issue of the distinct lack of lesbian representation in media. *Yellowjackets* released the third season during the writing process for this project and has been renewed for a fourth. This is an example of a continuing text which means that the ideas and messages explored by the show and that I have discussed remain relevant going forward.

This thesis has aimed to answer the question: how do the concepts of girlhood and queerness link with concepts of survival in relation to *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*? Through my exploration and analysis of both texts, genre, and relation to patriarchy, I have discussed that the primary link between the concepts of girlhood and queerness is learning to survive under cisheteropatriarchy. Survival is both physically and politically represented in these texts, through the juxtaposition of the trauma sustained during the plane crashes and the trauma that the characters experience as part of growing up as girls under patriarchy. I have explored the importance of queer representation at length, concluding that media representation is the key connection between concepts of girlhood and queerness. Authentic representation of girls, particularly queer girls, is still limited in mass media. By making these connections through extensive exploration, I am bringing the discussion of queer representation to the forefront of work analysing *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets*. For the girls in my texts, physical survival of the wilderness was not enough, but the separation from harmful patriarchal ideals and stereotypes allowed them to explore their own versions of girlhood and queerness and live authentically. The key takeaway from my work is that cisheteropatriarchy connects girlhood and queerness through the enforcing of harmful norms and stereotypes. The control that cisheteropatriarchy has over mass media has led directly to the lack of authentic queer representation shown on screen. This power that patriarchy has over the way that queer girls see themselves on television has been directly challenged by shows like *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* and I want to emphasise the importance of my texts one final time here. The influence of television and media on the way girls see themselves is huge, so the representation found in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* is critical in aiding the development of girls outside of harmful patriarchal influence. The experience of the characters in *The Wilds* and *Yellowjackets* and the experiences of girls everywhere who grow up under patriarchy can be summarised by the immortal words of Charli XCX: "it's so confusing sometimes to be a girl".

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