

Your Friendly Neighbourhood Zombie:
Normalizing Monstrous Bodies Through Zombie Media

by

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Abstract

Our deepest social fears and anxieties are often communicated through the zombie, but these readings aren't reflected in contemporary zombie media. Increasingly, we are producing a less scary, less threatening zombie — one that is simply struggling to navigate a society in which it doesn't fit. I begin to rectify the gap between zombie scholarship and contemporary zombie media by mapping the zombie's shift from "outbreak narratives" to normalized monsters. If the zombie no longer articulates social fears and anxieties, what purpose does it serve? Through the close examination of these "normalized" zombie media, I read the zombie as possessing a non-normative body whose lived experiences reveal and reflect tensions of identity construction — a process that is muddy, in motion, and never easy. We may be done with the uncontrollable horde, but we're far from done with the zombie and its connection to us and society.

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Chapter 1: How'd We End Up With All These Zombies?

“Zombies are people too,” is the tagline for the 2007 straight-to-DVD zombie comedy *Wasting Away* (a.k.a *Aaah! Zombies!!*). Though critically the film received mixed reviews and sits at a little over 50 per cent rating on two of the most popular internet movie websites, IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes, its tagline speaks to a shift in zombies’ relationship to the mediated society in which they lurch. Numbered are the days of the metaphorical fear-mongering, humanity devouring, zombie horde — if zombies are people, as the promotion for *Wasting Away* suggests, then they are subject to the same processes of socialization as other individuals in society.

Many examples exist in contradiction to this example, where zombies lack humanity. As consumers of zombie texts we have been taught by films, video games, books, and various other media that zombies are monsters devoid of consciousness, only capable of devouring flesh and brains. Human survivors unable to recognize the lack of humanity in the shambling zombie are usually the first to perish, often at the hands and teeth of those most familiar to them. Video games like *Left 4 Dead* (2008), *Dead Island* (2011) and the *Resident Evil* (1996) series allow us to annihilate seemingly unending hordes of undead. However, there is a recent surge of texts where zombies seem less interested in devouring the human race and more interested in being part of it. Narratives are increasingly framed from the zombie’s point of view, asking consumers of the text to relate to the monsters they once feared. Zombies can think, speak, love, prepare their own meals, and procure employment. They are taking steps to exist alongside still-living humans, or to successfully pass as human. What was once a clearly defined dichotomy between us and them, the living and the undead, has become a blurry and often transgressed border where

“our” relationship to “them” is less focused on eradicating the zombie threat, and more about bringing the undead back into the fold of “normal”, “civilized” society.

The shift from a dominant narrative that features terrifying living-corpse and de-individualized hordes to one of a monstrous individual navigating society is not specific to any one media form in popular culture. In general, explorations into zombies’ role in popular culture have focused on their film presence with some work on their popularity in video games and, more recently, television. However, there are numerous examples that suggest the zombie’s reincorporation into civilized and cultured society is happening across multiple types of media. In this project I read the proliferation of zombies in mainstream, popular culture as the development of “zombie media,” which contributes to a broader normalization of the zombie. I explore zombies through a lens of monstrous bodies, suggesting processes of domestication and normalization seen in zombie media are akin to the ways in which mainstream society manages difference, specifically in those cases where the difference is so threatening to the social norm it is, itself, considered monstrous.

Jeffery Jerome Cohen (1996) argues we seek control over monsters, through naming and domestication. Michel Foucault (1974) argues that once something is common or familiar it is no longer classified as a monster. The zombie appears to have sustained popularity as an undead monster despite becoming ubiquitous in mainstream society. Does this mean the zombie is no longer a monster? Or is it still a monster, but our definition of monster is changing? What changing role then is this new zombie playing in the contemporary social imagination? What does it suggest about difference, what passes for normal, and monstrous bodies in society? We are past the point of nihilism that so often drives the narrative in traditional zombie texts. We

aren't done with the zombie, so much as we want to believe he/she/it can cross boundaries and become a functioning, assimilated member of society once again.

1.1: Zombies in Academic Literature

Zombies have wholly infected our popular and scholarly cultures. They've been liberated from the confines of their literary and cinematic origins to appear in some of the most unusual and unexpected places including children's books, public health campaigns, and as performances on the streets in many major cities¹. What was once read as a representation of colonialism and then a cultural critique of racism in North America, has shifted to critiques of consumerism, capitalism and other socio-political environments. Now, those same critical zombies have helped society grapple with post-9/11 threats of terrorism, anxieties around globalization, and the risk of widespread pandemic with the power to end life as we know it on this planet. Zombies have been through quite a bit in their short time as cultural monsters.

Most scholars agree the zombie's first media appearance was in William Seabrook's travel novel *The Magic Island* (1929). Shortly thereafter, the zombie made its cinematic debut in *White Zombie* (1932) and has been held up as a monster of horror cinema ever since. The zombies of this time are most often defined as reanimated corpses through Haitian voodoo ritual. They lack autonomy, created for the sole purpose of carrying out their master's orders. Readings of these early zombies generally focus the zombie as a metaphor for racial tensions in North America, owing to the distinct master-slave relationship depicted in the narratives (Wood, 2003;

¹ For example Joe McGee and Charles Santoso wrote and illustrated *Peanut Butter & Brains: A Zombie Culinary Tale* in 2015; Washington D.C. runs a public health campaign on the dangers of synthetic marijuana, saying its effects turns users into "zombies" (K2ZombieDC, 2013); Toronto hosted an annual zombie walk and Halloween parade until 2014.

Christie & Lauro, 2011; Bishop, 2010). As a result, many of the scholars engaged with zombies from this era appeal to this understanding before developing their analysis to incorporate contemporary examples.

George Romero reimaged the zombie in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and it is widely accepted that with this film he provided the turning point for the zombie narrative. Romero's zombies were liberated from their voodoo masters, acting of their own accord in their perpetual quest for human flesh. Instead of an individual undead corpse, Romero presented the public with what would become the zombie horde, and shifted the site of fear. Where once the public had feared becoming a zombie-slave, now they feared becoming lunch. With his sequel, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), Romero's zombies and the film's shopping mall setting are frequently read as communicating a critique of capitalist consumerism (Newitz, 2006; McNally, 2011). This is rarely questioned in academic explorations of zombie media, with most scholars citing work from broader studies in monster theory, like that of Robin Wood (2003) who developed an organization of monster and horror films in the 20th century. Following Romero's contributions to the genre, the figure of the zombie undergoes more developments with respect to speed, mode of reproduction, and method of dispatch. While the Haitian origin story and reinvention by Romero are rarely questioned in the academic literature or by enthusiastic fans of the genre, the zombie's evolving mythos (ex: its origin, consumption habits, or method of dispatch) gives way to a number of explorations into what makes a zombie and why we are so afraid of them. The result is multi-disciplinary collection of literature in which scholars agree the zombie is an object worth studying and applying as a metaphor for larger social anxieties.

With the following sections I map the landscape of contemporary academic zombie literature so as to show the zombie as an adaptable object for study, where scholars are concerned with its ability to articulate fears in society. I start by bringing together conversations about the zombie as an open metaphor in which scholars ask whether or not it holds semantic value on its own. Zombies in this section are classified as a useful tool, the application of which allows for broader explorations of social issues. In the second section I explore the academic landscape of the zombie as Other, specifically where race, gender, and sexuality are concerned. Because of its Haitian roots and connections to 20th century colonialism, the zombie is often read as a racialized Other, even if only in passing, before a more fulsome analysis is presented. Similarly, the zombie is read as a gendered or sexed Other, classified as monstrous by the dominant society because of its resistance to normality. In the third section I bring together scholars engaging with the threat of the zombie horde. They do this through a capitalist consumer lens, reading the zombie as a metaphor for forced labour, or more recently through a language of infection and disease, connecting to social anxieties of pandemic outbreak. Scholars engaging with these examples understand the zombie horde as a threat that must be controlled, or eradicated. I bring these scholars together in the same section because of their similar approach to the site of fear for zombie narratives — it is not the individual zombie that terrifies, but the power of the uncontrollable horde.

1.1a: Zombies as _____ : Navigating the metaphorical zombie

In this section I consider the work in which scholars grapple with the role of the zombie as a metaphorical tool to be mobilized and read in a variety of ways, the limits of which appear

endless. In some cases, the zombie is applied in a focused and specific way, whereas other studies attempt to reconcile the zombie as a widely interpretable metaphor. Some scholars read the zombie as a metaphor for Vietnam stories (Randell, 2011), some read it as a metaphor for postwar Britain (LaRose, 2011), and still others interpret it as a metaphor for the present post-secondary educational system (Greenspan, 2011). Some scholars argue studies such as these, across disciplines, contribute to a larger conversation about the zombie as a general metaphorical tool. At the same time they grapple with the proliferation of zombies in popular culture, especially in a post-9/11 landscape.

Tyson E. Lewis (2011) and Randy Laist (2011) argue the figure of the zombie is semantically empty and lacking a specific politic, but rather serves as a useful tool in social critique. Laist describes the zombie as “a semantic device of an extremely plastic nature” (2011, p. 101), suggesting the zombie as it is presented in film and other media has no socio-political power of its own — it is a blank canvas waiting for interpretation and manipulation by creators. This auteurist approach removes the value of meaningful critical analysis, suggesting the creator’s intention is the optimal reading for a zombie text. Lewis (2011) responds to Henry Giroux’s claims about the zombie as having political power to advance a catastrophe narrative and visions of the apocalypse (p. 98). He argues the zombie holds no specific political agenda and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. While these arguments seemingly limit the research, other scholars argue the zombie is a malleable allegorical tool within the socially conscious horror genre (Moreland, 2011; Brieffel & Miller, 2011). Considering the zombie to be an open metaphor allows for interpretation that embraces the multi-media nature of contemporary zombies.

Peter Dendle (2007) examines the zombie's popularity over the course of its existence in popular culture. From its first cinematic appearance in *White Zombie* (1932), the zombie emerged as a "cinematic monster uniquely suited to address social anxieties" (p. 46). This, he establishes, changes depending on the social moment in which the zombie exists. Once again, the zombie is read as a shifting metaphor for the anxieties of the society that produces it. Kyle William Bishop (2010) reinforces this idea when he traces the evolution of the zombie over its moments of popularity, concluding that it will continue to adapt to its cultural environment. Kim Paffenroth (2011) is hesitant to contribute to the dominant scholarship engaged with zombie narratives that read the zombie as a threat of the unfamiliar Other, and instead prefers to view them as a familiar threat — zombies are our neighbours, zombies are us. He engages with previous research in an attempt to understand what gives zombies their threatening power, ultimately concluding that the general assumptions are not substantive enough. According to Paffenroth, the popularity and threat of zombies deserve a broader analysis as their timelessness as metaphorical monster is more widely applicable than the threat of foreign invader literature suggests (p. 19). Like Dendle (2007) and Bishop (2010), Paffenroth concludes there is more happening within the zombie narrative than the scholarship suggests and the shifting myths presented in contemporary zombie narratives suggest a broadening interpretation of these narratives (p. 24).

Some scholars in this section contribute to conversations that read the zombie as an interpretive metaphorical tool. Instead of engaging with the zombie directly and theorizing its role in the social imaginary, they apply the zombie as an object for analysis through which to understand other phenomena in a wide variety of disciplines. Recognizing this, scholars argue

the zombie is a visual signifier, standing in for any number of social phenomena. Dendle (2007) and Bishop (2010) reinforce this work by mapping the historical context of zombies in popular culture. However, Paffenroth (2011) is hesitant about this trend in the academic literature and calls for a more in-depth consideration of the zombie and its cultural popularity.

1.1b: Race, gender, and the Othered zombie

Early depictions of zombies are nearly always read as metaphors for the racialized Other, with little critical reflection of the trend in this literature. Conversations concerned with representations of gender and sexuality in zombie texts are generally part of the larger discussion of horror and monsters as a gendered genre (Creed, 1993; Clover, 1992), with little exploration into the specific work of gender and sexuality in zombie texts. In this section I map the literature engaged with zombies as Other, whether they be raced, gendered, or sexed Others. Though the approach to how the zombie is read is similar in all these contexts, I note there is far more scholarship on the zombie as a racialized Other. This is in part because of the zombie's Haitian origin story, but also because of a resurgence of studies reading the zombie as representative of the foreign invader in a post-9/11 context. I bring together the limited scholarship engaged with zombies from a gender and or sexuality perspective, as well as criticisms in which the zombie is read as lacking those social identity markers (MacCormack, 2008; Ahmad, 2011).

Owing to their voodoo-slave origin story, zombies are often read as metaphors for racial anxieties, especially in early Depression-era depictions. In *The Magic Island* (1929) and *White Zombie* (1932) a corpse is reanimated through voodoo rituals and made to do the bidding of the master. Studies of these early depictions of zombies, and the collection of films that followed,

read the master-slave relationship as an articulation of racial tensions in America in the first half of the twentieth century.

Christopher Moreman and Cory James Rushton (2011) draw a divide between Haitian zombies and viral zombies, crediting the shift to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) where the cannibalistic ghouls depicted were no longer controlled by a voodoo master. However, prior to this shift, Moreman and Rushton comment on an earlier period, where the zombie was relegated to "the service of various Caucasian fears and racisms," (p. 2). This echoes Dendle's (2007) argument for the zombie as an adaptable social metaphor, the adaptation here being one for the zombie's representation of Western anxieties about the Other (Moreman and Rushton, 2011, p. 4). Reading zombies as a metaphor for all racial anxieties in North America is so common Moreman and Rushton list it as the second of five truisms in the academic literature (p. 1). Chera Kee (2011) reinforces this in her explanation of the evolution of the zombie in popular fiction before exploring the nuances of the zombie's cannibalistic origins.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century cannibalistic discourse surrounding Haitian Voodoo was transformed into a racialized discourse in early zombie films, but it becomes evident that over time, as the zombie matured, the overt link to Haiti and to Voodoo dissolved so that zombies came to represent any ethnic group (Kee, 2011, p. 10).

As scholars turn their focus toward post-9/11 horror narratives, the racial metaphors in zombie texts are revisited. Kevin Wetmore (2012) argues that zombie narratives increased in popularity in order to help North American society grapple with their real-life horror experiences and continued apprehension about foreign terrorism. It is this perspective, held by scholars exploring zombies in a post-9/11 context (Bishop, 2010; Briefel and Miller, 2011) that gives way to analyses of zombie narratives as metaphors for risk and the threat of disease. In the face of

reality based horrors such as the events of 9/11, zombie texts continue to be read as articulating an “us versus them” narrative echoing the zombie’s racialized origin in North American popular culture.

In the case where zombies are read through a gendered or sexed lens, the examples are less mainstream, and the analyses call for a more fulsome exploration of these themes. Shaka McGlotten (2014) and Darren Elliot-Smith (2014) make specific inquiries into zombie porn and queer zombie narratives. Their work reinforces understandings of the zombie as Other, in which the zombies queerness is presented in horrific fashion to upset social norms. Natasha Patterson (2008) addresses the field of psychoanalytic feminist horror studies directly, calling for a more in-depth study of audiences in relation to gender and genre. In this, she acknowledges previous work by Carol Clover (1992) and Barbara Creed (1993), but suggests there is more to be explored with regard to gender in the zombie genre specifically. Her work reveals a gap in the scholarship that has yet to be filled in any substantial way. Steve Jones (2013) explores the limits of cultural tolerance through the lens of zombie torture porn, focusing specifically on Trent Haaga’s *Deadgirl*. Jones grapples with the traditional objectivity of a dead (or undead) body versus the increasing subjectivity depicted in contemporary zombie films. He explores how subjectivity problematizes sexual violence in torture porn films where zombies are involved. Through this, he points to gaps in the current scholarship regarding the gendered zombie despite a rich scholarship on gender in horror. In general, scholars engaging with gender and sexuality as it relates to the zombie explore niche examples where these themes are present. Their work reveals the need for a wider exploration of the zombie as gendered or sexed Other in mainstream texts. Interestingly, it gestures toward the possibility of subjectivity with respect to the zombie.

However, some scholars are critical of the work concerned with the zombie as a racialized, gendered or sexed Other. Patricia MacCormack's claim that "zombies are bodies, nothing more, nothing less," (2008, p. 104) allows space for conversation about the zombie body, but critiques much of the preceding scholarship. For MacCormack, a zombie is devoid of race and gender because it is simply human flesh and lacking the subjectivity of human behavioural characteristics. This notion is reinforced by Aayla Ahmad's (2011) exploration of race and zombies. Ahmad reads zombies as the great equalizer, where implications of race become blurred owing to the fact that "zombies are now traded back and forth on the auction blocks of intertextual, trans-cultural venues" (p. 132) so frequently as both gory allegories for social issues and as entertainment. Because of their cultural popularity and discussion, Ahmad argues zombies cannot be hemmed in by specific identifiers anymore.

Though I have elected to bring conversations of zombies as racialized Other together with those doing similar work through a gendered or sexed lens, Kinitra D. Brooks (2015) is critical of this approach. Brooks calls for a more holistic study of zombies that encompasses both race and gender. According to her, academic studies of zombies and race, without considerations of gender (and the same in the reverse) come up short (p. 466), specifically when looking at the roles for black women in zombie narratives. Her analysis brings discussions of race in zombie media to the contemporary moment by looking at current examples of female black characters in zombie fiction such as Michonne from AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010). Brooks' argument calls into question the generally accepted history of zombie scholarship by arguing for a more intersectional approach to race and gender analyses.

1.1c: The threat of the zombie horde: Capitalism and infection

In this section I map the work concerned with the zombie horde as a metaphor for capitalist consumerism and widespread infection. While these conversations are concerned with different social anxieties, I bring them together because of their similar treatment of the zombie. It is in these conversations the zombie horde becomes the primary site of fear, infecting and consuming everything in its path.

The horde has been a site of fear in zombie narratives since George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). It is no accident that it is set in a shopping mall in the 1970's and many scholars have noted this (Wood, 1985; Bishop 2010). Most agree the film is a critique of contemporary capitalism and consumer habits, supported by the characters' interpretation of zombies' leftover shopping habits. That being said, there are further contributions to the academic scholarship that read the zombie horde as a metaphor for the economic landscape using more contemporary examples. Robert A. Saunders (2012) and Gerry Canavan (2011) explore social fears about uncontrolled globalization and capitalistic market forces through the lens of zombie texts. They argue the zombie horde and our fear of it relate to the contemporary economic landscape. Annalee Newitz (2006) argues monsters are born of capitalist culture, and zombies are no exception. She grapples with zombie popularity by arguing the general public is afraid not of the differences presented in certain texts, but of the familiarity (p. 2). This approach suggests we are not meant to relate to the survivors in a zombie narrative, but the horde — the ones consuming. David McNally (2011) also takes this approach, situating zombies as monsters born of capitalism, and critiquing the market from which they develop. He reads contemporary zombies as “creatures of consumption, brazenly mobbing stores and malls and consuming human

flesh” (p. 210), whereas zombies appealing to their Haitian voodoo origins are read as a metaphor for perpetual labour in a capitalist market (p. 211). McNally’s reading of early zombies provides an alternative to the common interpretation of zombie narratives as racialized metaphors. Sheryl Vint (2013) responds to McNally’s approach, arguing the more contemporary zombie horde is a more apt metaphor for capitalist labour forces in which the action of becoming undead is akin to the action of becoming a commodity (p. 135). Vint’s analysis, like Newitz’s (2006), shifts the site of fear to one where consumers of zombie texts relate to the zombies more than the surviving humans, a shift she notes is represented through contemporary zombie narratives where the zombie is less threatening.

However, the zombie horde continues to be read as a threat elsewhere in the literature, particularly as a metaphor for social anxieties related to disease and infection. Scholars explore this trend through examples like the *Resident Evil* (1996) franchise and Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002) in which the zombies (or zombie-like humans) come as the result of mishandled man-made viral infection. To begin, I explore Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz’s (2010) discussion of the origins of plague narratives throughout European history. Through this study they expand on the generally accepted folkloric zombie origin story, adding valuable critique to the scholarship and highlighting how zombies depicted in media today have a close relationship to anxieties related to infection and “transforming economic spaces,” (p. 127). Boluk and Lenz argue that “the plague zombie is a twentieth-century phenomenon, a new monster emerging at the moment when modern science was unmasking the mystery of pestilence,” (p. 135). They appeal to an understanding of the zombie as an evolving monster with an expanding mythos that

has given way to something new, providing space for further study into the contemporary zombie.

Some scholars are interested in the implications of risk within these pandemic, zombie narratives, arguing that the popularity of zombies is a direct result of society's attempt to grapple with cultural anxieties around disease (Bishop, 2010; Zealand, 2011; Gerlach and Hamilton, 2014). Steven Pokornowski (2014) pushes this argument further saying the popularity of the diseased zombie narrative advances a Western health narrative on the global health market. Marina Levina (2015) embraces both the media and the pandemic conversations in her analyses of media pandemics. For her, the media is important in the proliferation of a risk-based narrative like zombies — we need to see the risk in order to anticipate and fear it (p. 87). Finally, Daniel Drezner (2015) argues that zombies are the “perfect avatar for the 21st century threat environment” (p. 829), and that “constant references to the zombie canon can reinforce an apocalyptic perception about the future of modern society” (p. 826). Drezner examines various zombies in the media, claiming organizations using the zombie as a tool for improving public policy campaigns (like the one launched by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in 2011) are creating the social narrative they're trying to prevent (p. 842). He ultimately calls for more creative, dynamic zombie narratives to combat the apocalyptic perception of society — narratives that would highlight the “adaptability, ingenuity, and creativity of human beings” (p. 843). Drezner opens space to begin having a different conversation about zombies in popular culture — one that is less focused on the horrific nature of their undead bodies, or the impending threat of disaster they bring. In both the case of capitalist metaphors and disease metaphors

scholars like Vint (2013) and Drezner (2015) are calling for further study into a more integrated social role for the zombie and the zombie horde.

1.2: Theorizing Monsters and Their Bodies

In the introduction to his 1996 work, *Monster Theory*, Jeffery Jerome Cohen suggests the fascination with monsters in popular culture stems from two goals — to name that which we don't know and to domesticate it (p. vii). The first part of my project is grounded in this claim, focusing on the process of domestication and how the perception of the monster changes through this process. I am informed by theories developed in monster theory, like Cohen's, in which the monster's source of fear is its unfamiliarity and uncontrollability. The theory speaks to the need to control monsters in order to minimize the threat they pose to normality. I appeal to work in identity and difference for the second part of my project, exploring tensions produced around non-normative bodies in social contexts.

Cohen's work builds on Foucault's construction of the abnormal (1974) in which monsters occupy the far end of a spectrum of abnormalities in individuals, monstrosity being the most rare and unknown in society (pp. 56-57). As an individual's monstrosity becomes more common and visible in society, its threat is minimized and so is its monstrous status. Monsters in these cases undergo a process of domestication, whereby they come to be classified not as monstrous but as simply abnormal. They still stand in contrast to the normal, but they are no longer threatening to the construction of "normal" — the threat is controlled. This process is echoed in Jaroslav Svelch's (2013) work with monster video games in which the process of playing the game is read as a process of learning to control the threat. By dispatching the horde

through game play, Svelch argues, we are granted the satisfaction of control over that which threatens our normal social order (p. 194). Svelch, along with Cohen, Foucault and many other scholars (e.g.: Halberstam, 1995; Wood, 2003; Boon, 2007), constructs his argument around the dichotomous distinction between monsters and normality, where normal is superior. Specifically, Kevin Alexander Boon (2007) argues the etymological definition of monster implies “a boundary space between human and non-human,” which presumes “that the human form is the privileged form within all that is natural,” (p.33). Humans are the natural normal and monsters stand in threatening contrast to that. These theories serve as the starting point for my project; I illustrate a shift in zombie media that takes zombies from uncontrollable threats to domesticated monsters, and on to conscious and autonomous individuals in still different bodies.

Building on the work of Cohen, Foucault, and others, I am informed by those arguments made in favour of monsters’ tendency to transgress the boundaries placed upon them (Creed, 1993; Thanem, 2006; Sharpe, 2010). Particularly useful are those claims that suggest the potential for positive change through monstrous embodiment in a way that would destabilize the dichotomous structure of bodily difference in society (Barootes, 2007; Bloom, 2014). I draw on Margrit Shildrick’s (1996; 1999) project of the monstrous body in society to explore the normative ideal body and the ways in which zombie media make visible its tensions. This helps to inform a discussion of zombieness where the individual seeks to appear human despite their distinctly non-human body. This tension between a zombie and its human performance brings up questions about the zombie’s relationship to personhood and self which I explore through Catherine McCall’s (1990) concepts of person. While the normalized zombie is not human, its consciousness, self-reflection and functioning role in society raises questions about its status as a

person and its construction of self. I use McCall's definition and philosophical exploration of these terms to highlight the tensions of personhood and self for non-normative individuals in society. I discuss these in more detail in the analysis in Chapter 3.

However, theoretical approaches to non-normative bodies, particularly those exploring disabled and fat bodies, prove the most productive for this project as lenses through which to analyze the normalized zombie in contemporary zombie media. Specifically, I draw on scholars such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2005) and Lesleigh Owen (2012; 2015) for their stances toward non-normative bodies as socially constructed in contrast to "normal" bodies. Increasingly work is being done to reframe these different bodies as destabilizers of the social dichotomy between "normal" and "not-normal", where everything other than normal is treated as an all encompassing, one-dimensional difference. These bodies are classified in some discourse as lacking or having weakness. This is especially the case according to Minae Inahara (2009) where the disabled body exceeds and undermines the able bodied norm (2009, p. 47). That is to say the different body is not less than the normal body, but rather in excess of, and cannot be reduced to a singular classification of not-normal. I read the zombie as an articulation of this different body in which the zombie body is in excess to the human body as it is neither a living, nor a dead, body.

The zombie's resistance toward classification can be read as an opportunity for freedom from the structures of society. Lesleigh Owen (2015) classifies fat bodies in this way. She describes fat bodies in society as both sexual and gross, lazy and powerful, and something of which society is afraid. The reason, she argues, is because freedom from the confines of normality is threatening to us. Fat bodies are resented in society because they exist beyond the

construction of normal bodies. This suggests the different body is not subservient to the normal body, but rather something beyond, something monstrous, and therefore threatening to the social order. Owen builds on Kathleen LeBesco's *Revolting Bodies* (2004) in which different (fat) bodies that have been cast out of society have a revolutionary power that in turn, society attempts to mitigate through normalization and domestication. Through these discussions of the body and identity in social context I explore the processes of normalization identified in zombie media to a movement toward selfhood and identity ownership for the monstrous body.

1.3: Methodology

Why is the zombie no longer scary? Previous studies of zombies centre around the scary zombie and what that means for our own fears in society. However, I argue these studies do not help to explain the current explosion of the zombie in places that are distinctly not scary. How is it that with all the discussion of zombies as metaphors for our deepest social anxieties, we have examples of zombies trying to hold down jobs, looking for love and bumbling around in children's cartoons? Using elements of monster theory that pertain to controlling the threat and domesticating it, I illustrate zombies' development beyond scariness. I then closely examine two examples of this new zombie to further illustrate and ultimately explain how the zombie has become a normalized figure.

First I present a taxonomy of the non-scary zombie and a heuristic for seeing its shifts in cultural location and meaning. I track the movement of zombies from horror film, to comedy film, to media well beyond cinema. Through the multi-media examples, to which I refer throughout as "zombie media," I illustrate the proliferation of zombies in society and how as a

collective they contribute to an understanding of the “normal” zombie as media. I am an avid consumer of these media and the corpus was amassed, in part, from my own collection; I watch the films, read the novels and survival guides, play the video games, and keep a bottle of kitschy zombie hand sanitizer in my bag. The research for my project was conducted by engaging with these media, consulting reviews, and observing marketing in stores and online. The taxonomy organizes zombie media around themes that mark a shift toward a normalization process including domestication, high-culture, and humour. I plot the themes along a spectrum that shows how the zombie has developed from something scary and uncontrollable to something tame, mundane and (conditionally) incorporated in mainstream society. At the far end of the spectrum I place examples of these “normal,” socially integrated zombies. To my knowledge, no such work has been done so far, so I develop my own taxonomic strategies and map the breadth of zombie media in them. Though these zombies are no longer scary, they still represent a monstrous body that bears (some of) the markings of a decomposing corpse and fail to adhere to human social or biological rules. This allows us to ask: how does society manage these differences, and how do these individuals navigate a society that favours the normal, whole (living) body, in which theirs do not belong?

Following the development of the non-scary zombie heuristic I closely analyze two examples at the far end of the spectrum that best illustrate the processes of monstrous normalization. These examples support the development of the non-scary zombie as an emerging narrative in zombie media, and through these examples I explore tensions of the body and identity for non-normative bodies. I have selected the first season of BBC Three’s television series *In the Flesh* (2013) which is comprised of three hour-long episodes. Also, I analyze the

first season of the CW's *iZombie* (2015), which consists of 13 episodes, roughly 43 minutes each. I look at the première seasons to better understand the full narrative and character growth as it develops from pilot to season finale. These examples feature tamed, cultured, and fully conscious zombies at the forefront of the narrative. Not only are the zombies integrated within society and exposed to the dominant culture in various ways, as protagonists they are given a main-stage platform to share their stories — they are given a voice. Still relying on literature that pertains to the normative ideal and tensions around achieving it, I analyze the main characters of each show, coding both their dialogue and visual cues that signal tensions of appearing human and maintaining the normative status quo. At the same time, my codes are informed by tensions of self and personhood, specifically when the characters question their role or status in society and are granted this status by others. In developing my codes I ask questions such as: how do the zombies hide their zombieness, or how do they perform humanness; how are they perceived in their intimate, community, or public spheres; in what ways do they perform and embrace their zombieness? I look particularly for situations in which the zombie body is at odds with the characters' sense of self, personhood and humanness. The analysis will reveal how these tensions play out in social contexts and how zombieness can be read as a way to understand non-normative bodies. These series were selected for their content as well as their media form. Television, as a domestic medium, reinforces the analysis of the development and proliferation of the non-scary zombie. It is a longer, serial narrative that provides space for growth and development of more complex narratives. Thus, these two shows are currently the most pertinent examples of the development of non-scary, normalized zombie media, due to the narrative they

explore as well as the medium through which they are delivered. They enable a reading of the cultural work of the contemporary zombie, which has ceased to be frightening.

Chapter 2: Lurching Toward Normality: Mapping the Non-Scary Zombie

If the dead were to suddenly rise and devour everything in their path, as a society we'd have some idea of how to react. I say this with confidence due to the widespread proliferation of zombies in contemporary North American media telling us what to do when the dead inevitably rise. This mediated invasion of the undead has provided consumers with numerous detailed examples of what not to do in a zombie outbreak. In addition, within the ever-expanding zombie mythos, we are prepared for whatever version of "zombie" we might encounter — we have ideas of the best weapons, the best hiding places and the best tactics to overcome the zombie threat. However, contemporary zombie media suggest there is more to zombies than controlling the threat and dispatching the horde. Today's narratives feature zombie reintegration programs and infection suppressing drugs; zombies take the lead role in their stories and attempt to navigate a society that hates and fears them; zombies seek to separate from the horde and blend in as part of society. In this chapter I explore how zombies have transcended their position as uncontrollable threat in cinematic apocalyptic nightmares like *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and come to star in lighthearted television crime serials like *iZombie* (2015) in which the main character is a conscious, emotional, employed zombie.

Many zombie texts, and therefore much of the existing academic literature, centre on the fear associated with a zombie invasion. A single zombie can be easily dealt with, but a horde of zombies acts as a threatening force against the regulated, managed, controlled social order. Zombies as part of a horde are unpredictable, unreasonable, and entirely out of control; they are incapable of adhering to social rules because they are instinctively voracious and lack consciousness. This is what leads the zombie and zombie narratives to be read as a metaphor for

any number of other social anxieties in society including capitalist consumerism, the encounter with the Other, globalization, and pandemic threat as I note in Chapter 1. These outbreak narratives², as I define them, follow certain conventions in which zombies are most often presented as contributing to the inhuman, undead force against which humanity must fight to survive. They focus on an outbreak of zombies or a zombie-like infection and they explore how society reacts. Usually the narrative begins at the point of outbreak, with a central main character confused as to why the next door neighbour is incoherently shambling toward them. As the character's understanding of the deadly situation expands, so does the outbreak as depicted through montage-style news broadcasts. The message of these scenes is clear — society we once knew is falling apart, the natural and social order has been upset, and no one is prepared for the horror they now face. In the end, the zombies vastly outnumber the surviving humans and hope of a cure, a sustainable resolution, or the return to the way of the world pre-zombie is lost. Even when a cure is developed, it is short lived, giving the survivors a false sense of security (and fodder for a sequel).

Zombies in these narratives are members of a deindividualized horde destroying and consuming everything in its path. A zombie outbreak spreads by making more zombies, through coming in to physical contact with the living, or via some force of supernatural reanimation (man-made viral outbreak, airborne natural bacteria, radiation, aliens). In general, they have died and returned with an insatiable hunger for brains or human flesh (though there are exceptions to this rule such as those suffering from the rage virus in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002)).

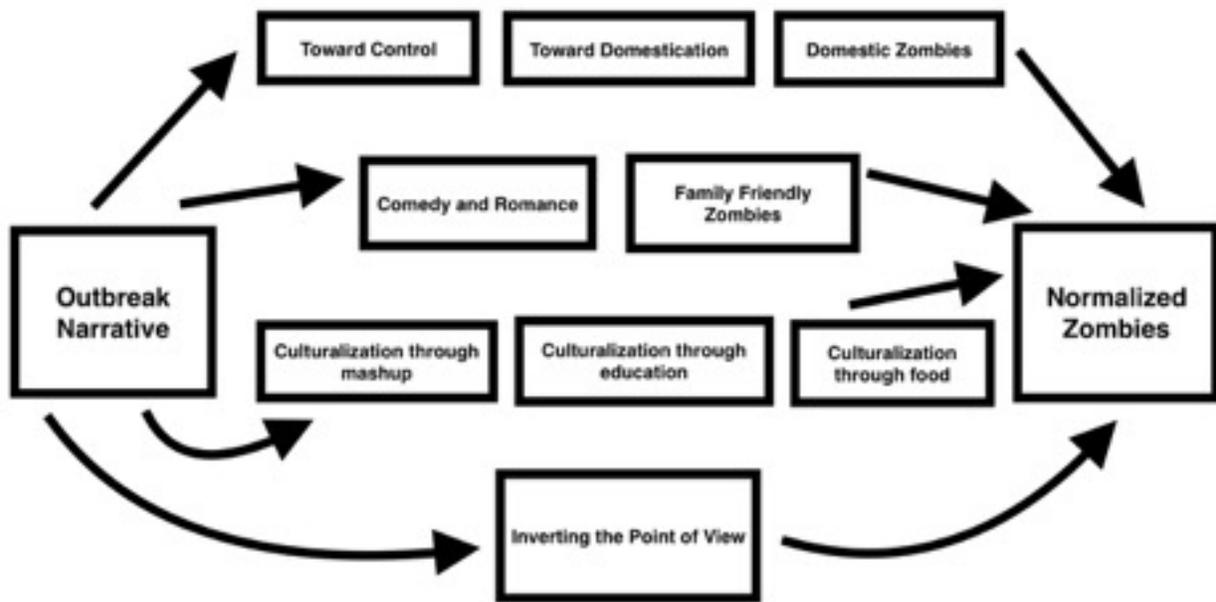
² Not to be confused with Priscilla Wald's (2008) "outbreak narrative" as outlined in her work *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. While Wald is attempting to capture an archetypal narrative form that came to characterize late twentieth century disease stories, I am using the term to signal an archetypal structure within zombie stories.

The reanimated zombie bodies smell of decay, with skin and limbs in varying states of decomposition and dismemberment. These narratives are found in some of the most popular zombie media, including Romero's *Dead* (1968 - 2009) series, the *Resident Evil* (1996) franchise, Max Brooks' *World War Z* (2006), and *The Walking Dead* (2003) comic and television series (2010), all of which have contributed to the zombie's sustained popularity in contemporary media culture. I begin my discussion here, where many have concluded, as the foundation upon which normalized zombies are built.

In order to understand the shift beyond outbreak narratives toward normalized zombies I map the proliferation of zombies across multiple media, including film, television, video games, literature, hygiene products, survival guides and firearm training targets, zombie self-help books, and zombie performance in role playing games, activities, and community walks. This corpus of zombie cultural texts, artifacts and events is analyzed as "zombie media." To that end, the medium is as relevant to the process of normalization for the zombie as the underlying narrative. It is not simply that zombie video games follow an outbreak narrative with which players interact, it is that the game medium implies beatability, players can win in a zombie outbreak and there's a reward for doing so. That *The Walking Dead* (2010) became one of the most popular television shows in its time slot suggests zombie media have achieved acceptance in the domestic sphere — people engage with zombies from the comfort of their homes on a weekly basis. Zombie media are as mundane as hand soap, as gentle as children's movies, and as cultured as classic literature, carving out space in new markets never before open to the zombie. Reading zombies as zombie media allows for a more dynamic and fulsome exploration into the proliferation of zombies in our culture — it is not just that zombies are popular, but that they are

so widely popular in so many ways that differ from the fear-inducing outbreak narrative. They have moved well beyond our traditional media of fear and our practices of mediated consumption of frightening content.

The following graphic maps the ways in which I suggest zombie media have disrupted traditional outbreak narratives and shifted the figure toward a normalized zombie that we no longer fear, to the point where the normalized zombie is displacing the outbreak zombie as the dominant figure³. Specifically, I map shifts in narrative motivation, point of view, genre, and processes of culturalization. As zombie media move beyond the outbreak narrative, the zombie undergoes a process of normalization that culminates in zombie media representing integration and socialization for excluded monstrous individuals.



³ There are a few exceptions where the outbreak zombie still persists. These include the video game *Dying Light* (2015), the continued success of *The Walking Dead* (2010) on AMC and its recent spinoff *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015).

Starting from the left on the graphic, the outbreak narrative gives way to zombie media that try to understand and control zombies including survival guides. This then leads to media which seek to dominate and domesticate the zombie by attaching leashes and collars. From there, zombie kitsch become commonplace in the home, as hand soap and lawn ornaments (see p. 36). Simultaneously along the spectrum, some zombie media mitigate the horror of outbreak narratives by injecting humorous, romantic, or family-friendly motifs into the narrative. These media play on and with conventions of the genre, eventually leading to zombies that bumble instead of shamble, safe enough even for children. As well, zombies undergo a widespread process of culturalization over time, where they are connected to cuisine, education, and various literary and high culture texts. These processes culminate in contemporary zombie media where zombies attempt to navigate their monstrous bodies and reintegrate into society. This shift starts by inverting the point of view in an outbreak narrative from survivor to zombie him/her/itself, then shifts toward telling the zombie's story as it separates from the horde and attempts to relocate itself within society. With the zombie the agent of its own story, he or she manifests subjectivity and individuality, becoming relatable to media consumers. These processes similarly disempower the zombie threat as a threat from outside, bringing it within society as a productive critique, and as a point for audience identification.

2.1: Toward Control, Domestication, and the Domestic Zombie

In Svelch's (2013) work on the monster in video games, he explains that playing through a game – dispatching enemies and attempting to win – provides the player (media consumer)

with a sense of satisfaction at exerting control over their fear. Games present us with monsters that can be analyzed and defeated (p. 194). For Svelch, the physical interaction with monsters during game play emulates control and removal of monsters from our social consciousness (p. 194). Traditional outbreak narratives are set in a hopeless world: even if the characters on screen manage to make it to the end credits, rarely can we assume they make it much further. Even in hopeful final scenes such as that of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) – which closes with the film’s last surviving heroes escaping the zombie horde that has fully overrun their once safe shopping mall, and flying away in a helicopter – there is little indication they have anywhere to escape to as society no longer exists. In general the only option for non-zombie characters in outbreak narratives is to survive for as long as they can before eventually succumbing to the zombie horde. However, exploring the outbreak narrative outside of a film context and through a more interactive medium such as video games expands the options for zombie media consumers; not only do players kill zombies in these media, they can beat them; they can win.

Zombies are not new video game monsters in the same way they are not new film monsters. Much like film, zombies in video games start off slow and shambling, hindered by technology that limits the number of enemies and amount of movement a game could render at one time. Despite this, some early games such as *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* (1993) still make their way onto the top of fan-based zombie video game lists — its pixellated graphics and shambling zombie threats in no way implying an easier gaming experience. As gaming systems advanced, so did the opportunities for overwhelming zombie hordes (Krzywinska, 2008, p. 156). Suddenly, with powerful home consoles from Microsoft and Sony, and PC based gaming, game developers could effectively produce games with more enemies moving on screen, reproducing

the same horde aesthetic that draws so many to zombie cinema. Repeating many conventions of the outbreak narrative – including a small band of survivors (or a sole survivor) fighting against an overwhelming horde and the struggle to survive on limited supplies – zombie video games adhere to popular tropes in outbreak narratives. However, they challenge the hopelessness of a traditional outbreak narrative by giving media consumers the opportunity to not only control the outcome of the game world, but to beat the horde in a variety of bloody ways, and to do so repeatedly by resetting the game. From the moment the game is turned on, the player engages in a process of attempting to manage or avoid the threats around them. Game tutorials teach players the rules to navigate the game world, echoing a step-by-step guide to effectively surviving a zombie outbreak. Player commands (dependent on game and platform) create different actions and outcomes, some necessary for in-game survival (e.g. reload weapon, upgrade skills) others to advance the story (e.g. pick up key items such as a key card, or incriminating government documents). In general, if these rules are ignored or broken, the game's character perishes and the player loses — the zombies win.

The market perspective toward zombie video games is to develop low-risk games that guarantee return, thus proven game elements are frequently reproduced and the zombie video games rarely break convention (Krzywinska, 2008, p. 154). These include an increasingly open world, or semi-open world, environment in which players are mostly free to roam and explore the game world, experiencing the vastness of an overrun outbreak narrative. Some game mechanics ask players to salvage items to build more effective weapons and survival materials. In *Dead Island* (2011), a zombie outbreak narrative that takes place entirely on a tropical island vacation during an outbreak, the players find basic items like batteries, water, tape, energy drinks

and chocolate bars in overturned garbage cans, forgotten suitcases and the trunks of abandoned vehicles. The location of these items indicate a quickly evacuated (or ravaged) area, where much must be left behind. The game mechanics place value on these items, allowing the player to craft them together for more deadly weapons. Combining nails and a baseball bat yields a piercing and bludgeoning weapon, good for many more types of zombie killing. Other games such as *Resident Evil 4* (2005) focus on upgrading firearm power, reload speed, and capacity to make dispatching zombies easier. The crafting and upgrading mechanic in many zombie video games teaches players where to look for useful items if they ever find themselves in a similar, real life situation and asks them to make decisions about effective weaponry and skill building. These lessons offer a pedagogy of survival; players gain a sense of control and agency over the threats around them.

Furthermore, zombie video games contribute to the proliferation of zombie media by making up nearly half of the total revenue for zombies in popular culture in 2011 (Ogg, 2011). They tap in to new market demographics by staying close to conventions of the outbreak narrative, finding popularity with both serious gamers and horror genre enthusiasts, and they expand their consumer capacity through cross-media franchising. The *Resident Evil* franchise began as a game for the Sony PlayStation in 1996 and has expanded to a popular film franchise, action figures, books and other media. As of 2011, *Resident Evil* games were reported to have sold roughly 26 million titles, with *Resident Evil 4* (2005) widely regarded as one of the best zombie video games made. It holds an aggregate *Metacritic* rating of 96% for its original console releases on Game Cube and PlayStation 2 and won multiple awards including Game of the Year

from *Game Informer* and *Nintendo Power*.⁴ Other popular zombie games like *Dead Rising* (2006), *Doom* (1993), and *Silent Hill* (1999) have since been adapted into films. The popularity of these games and their franchises reproduces the outbreak narrative in popular culture while creating an expanding demographic of consumers that know how best to overcome zombies.

Narratively, zombie video games shift the possible outcomes of an outbreak from one of inevitable death to one of beatability. Players feel like they have control over the threats around them and some control over the outcome of the story in which they play. Once consumers realize zombies can be beaten, zombie media develop a didactic voice in which consumers are being taught how best to overcome the horde. This is a shift I see also with the rise in popularity of the survival guide genre of books, one of the first and the most popular being Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003). Brooks' tongue-in-cheek guide has a 3.9/5 rating on the book-based social network Goodreads and was featured at number 24 on the *New York Times* Best Seller List in 2010.⁵ In his work, Brooks develops a taxonomy of zombies, weapons, safe zones, and survival tactics — all with the goal of teaching the media consumer the best way to make it through a zombie apocalypse alive. Similarly, Matt Mogk's *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Zombies* (2011) breaks down zombie basics, zombie science and survival tactics, with the conceit being that not only does the reader *want* to know about zombies, they *need* to know. The readers finish the book equipped to manage the zombie threat and regain control over the horde. When searching for “zombie survival guides” in Indigo and Barnes & Noble's online

⁴ Online ratings and reviews cannot necessarily be considered unbiased when it comes to video games. However, unpacking the complicated nature of the video game reception is the subject for a different paper. For the purpose of my project, these numbers do well to illustrate my point.

⁵ Brooks' follow-up book, *World War Z* (2006) has a 4.0 rating on Goodreads, peaked at number 9 on the Best Seller List, and was adapted into a film in 2013.

databases, between 20 and 40 titles are returned, while roughly 90 titles come up on Goodreads and roughly 400 on Amazon Canada (though a number of these are translations and other media connected to Max Brooks' work), making the zombie survival guide a popular medium.⁶

The didactic approach to zombies extends beyond books, suggesting that in the event of a zombie outbreak society believes it has a chance to overcome the threat of the horde, and preparing for this is accomplished through consuming a variety of interactive, physical media. The film *Zombieland* (2009) broke the fourth wall and addressed viewers directly with its “rules for survival” including cardio training, avoiding public washrooms, and the “double-tap.” Various survival guide apps are available on iOS and Android mobile platforms which follow a similar approach to the guides available in print, but their availability on mobile platforms suggests there is an immediacy to the information. Carry your zombie-killing tips on your personal device so, in the event you encounter a zombie on your daily commute, you can consult your guide to determine if you should fight or run. Web series such as *Zombie Go Boom* are dedicated to teaching survival tips through video tutorials, offering a visual representation of the tactics described in many of the printed survival guides. It puts these tactics to the test in a *Mythbusters*-esque web series (*ZombieGoBoom*, 2011). Bleeding zombie targets are available for online purchase through *Zombie Industries*, allowing consumers to practice their headshot by emptying a clip into the life-sized zombie mannequin. Zombie media tell consumers how to prepare for a disaster; they provide us with the tools and ideas to dispatch zombies and outlast

⁶ This preparedness discourse has transferred into emergency preparedness guides produced by government organizations and public officials such as the U.S. Centres for Disease Control blog which launched a zombie apocalypse preparedness campaign in 2011 complete with blog posts, survival checklists, and a graphic novel.

the outbreak. As a bonus, in the case of the *Zombies, Run!* (2012) mobile app, they also aid us in our cardio health.

The app, available on iOS and Android platforms, allows consumers to fully engage in cardio-based zombie survival training. Boasting 2 million users, the description reads:

You are Runner 5

Hundreds of lives are counting on you. You've got to rebuild your base from a few shivering survivors into a fortified beacon of civilization by collecting critical supplies and avoiding roving hordes. Can you save them and learn the truth about the zombie apocalypse? (Six to Start, 2012).

The app is designed to guide runners through various “missions”, and has been classified by zombie game reviewers as more of an immersive video game than a running app. However, the missions resemble exercise routines more than traditional game play, including time to sprint or jog as well as stretch. The user listens to their own music playlist while running or walking, with the occasional interruption from the app signalling the pursuit of zombies, at which the user is meant to sprint “to survive.” The user gains the benefits of a healthier life style, while emulating a supply runner in an outbreak setting. As well, with the expansion of *Zombies, Run! 5K* the developers gesture further toward health promotion over strictly game-based interaction. The inclusion of training length in the app’s title tells consumers how far they could expect to run after engaging with the app, much like running workshops or fundraisers that promote based on distance. By engaging with the *Zombies, Run!* training app, users train their bodies to physically dominate the threat of a zombie horde. By shifting away from the tone of hopelessness and inevitable death so conventional in outbreak narratives, these zombie media suggest there is opportunity to either kill or effectively avoid zombies. Once we gain this sense of capability, the next step is to fight back and regain the power threatened by the zombie horde — zombies go

from dominating to being dominated, a necessary step before being reduced to domestic and mundane.

Starting with Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), in which Bub the zombie retains some memories from when he was alive, zombie media have considered the possibility for dominating, taming and domesticating zombies. Early depictions of zombies were framed in this way, as slaves controlled by voodoo masters. However, this was replaced with the uncontrolled horde of the outbreak narrative that has been widely accepted as a defining factor of the zombie genre. Outbreak narratives present us with an out-of-control horde (as a deindividualized whole) that occupies a vast threatened space, thus establishing power over zombies begins with separating one from the mass. This individualization is hinted at in some outbreak narratives, but rarely as the main solution in dealing with an outbreak. For example, *The Walking Dead's* (2003) character Michonne is introduced towing two limbless, jawless, chained zombies. She keeps the zombies for their objective usefulness as protection and concealment from the larger threat of a horde, but shows no remorse in dispatching them when their usefulness runs out. In other texts zombies are chained and kept as entertainment, as in Romero's graphic novel *Empire of the Dead* (2014) in which zombies are trained as gladiators. Occasionally texts feature zombies as companions, though their voraciousness is still present, lurking behind a malfunctioning collar or weak link in the chain, as depicted in the final scenes of the films *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Fido* (2006). Still flesh-hungry if turned loose, dominated zombies are the zombies of outbreak narratives — just leashed and collared. They are only as tame as the functionality of the technology applied to keep them in order.

Cohen (1996) explains our desire when faced with monsters is to “name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens” (p. viii). In this way, the film *Fido* (2006) serves as a pertinent example of the shift from domination to domestication, by highlighting a single zombie’s journey to becoming a domestic companion and a household pet. In the film, zombies are treated as wild animals and are enslaved by “domestication collars” for the purpose of low-level labour. The story centres on one family newly in possession of a zombie butler, which they have attained in order to appear the normal middle-class nuclear family. Bill, the father figure in the film, is shown tormenting the zombie in order to manage his fear and reassert his masculine dominance. He keeps it chained up in the backyard, unwilling to let a zombie remain in the house while the family sleeps. It is not until the son, Timmy, decides the zombie needs a name during a playful game of catch that “it” becomes “Fido,” a common name associated with a household dog. At this point Fido is granted a sense of subjectivity if not personhood, no longer referred to as “the zombie” or “it” but by name or “he”. As suggested by Cohen, the process of granting Fido a name is the first step toward gaining power over a zombie’s ability to threaten. Fido eventually gains self-control, independent of the taming effects of the domestication collar, and can be trusted around humans without it. However, Fido remains subservient to the family, earning compassion and companionship akin to the level a beloved household pet might, and by the end of the film he is certainly domesticated. *Fido* articulates the shift from a dominated zombie to a domesticated one — whose presence in the household sphere is no longer unexpected and revolting.

The zombie is further incorporated into the domestic sphere through a process of combining it with a multitude of mundane products, the result of which is a kitschy zombie.

Many products available through online purchase or in novelty stores employ domestic zombies, ones that are easily dealt with through basic hygiene or simply part of day-to-day life.



Examples include “Zombie Oil” massage oil that promises a relaxing aroma after a long day of eating brains; “Zombie Scrub” that promises to slough off dead skin as it decomposes from your body; “Zombie Repellent” hand soap, guaranteed to keep the zombies at bay through regular use; “Zombie Apocalypse Civilian/Military Grade” first aid kits complete with everything you might

need in a zombie outbreak; and zombie hand sanitizer which claims to “kill 99% of all infections” and is an “anti-virus protection and lethal disinfectant.” As well, novelty decor like zombie garden gnomes and bathroom signs claiming “only you can prevent the zombie apocalypse” imply that proper hand washing will prevent the spreading of a zombie infection, and bloody and decapitated gnomes are acceptable and amusing yard ornaments. Individually these items do not add up to much beyond endeavours to capitalize on zombie popularity. However, when read as part of zombie media, the kitschified zombie becomes part of a larger shift toward incorporation (toward co-optation) of the zombie in domestic spaces and toward new, untapped markets.

Where zombies were once popular only among fans, zombie hand sanitizer is for everyone. Zombie survival guides taught consumers the most effective way to kill zombies was through fire or a shot to the head, but now they can be dealt with through basic hand washing and sanitizing. Previous to this, the dominated zombie was a vicious creature, controlled only by the chain that bound it. However, mundane, kitschy media suggest zombies are invited into the domestic space as decorative trophies for the lawn and objects for our amusement. Society has realized the goal laid out by Cohen — zombies are domesticated and disempowered, posing little threat beyond the odd scrape or common cold.

2.2: Genre Bending: Comedy, Romance and Family-Friendly Zombies

The traditional outbreak narrative most often comes out of the horror or action-thriller genres. Consumers of these genres are confronted with their deepest social anxieties, often through gore, death and other horrific scenarios. This narrative allows the zombie to be read as

horrific embodiment of social fear of the Other, capitalism, consumerism, and pandemic outbreak. However, increasingly zombie media stop telling us to scream and run from the zombie and instead they ask us to laugh at it, to be romantic with it, to let it play with the children. By spreading through other media genres where traditional zombie behaviour, such as consuming living humans and falling apart from decomposition, might be less welcome, the zombie's power to terrify reduces. That said, zombies have always been a particularly campy monster on screen, their gross, undead bodies serving as canvases for writers and directors to continuously devise newer, bloodier ways to kill. Inserting comical zombie deaths provides audiences a moment of catharsis while the rest of the on-screen world is still in horrific ruin.

Using humour as a mechanism to deal with on-screen cinematic horror is commonplace in zombie films and has become a convention of the horror genre in general, drawing the criticism of many horror film scholars (Worland, 2007; Dixon, 2010). This argument stems from the level of self-referentiality inherent in contemporary horror films, in which the characters, setting and other elements are self-aware, and aware of the conventions that bind them. Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996) series explores this conventional awareness as the characters refer to elements of the genre and predict their own deaths as they are pursued by an unknown masked killer. Joss Whedon's film *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) takes the self-awareness a step further by framing the horror-genre in which the film functions as a trope-producing machine in which the outcome of the story is crafted for the sole purpose of satiating a higher power that feeds on horror conventions. The shift in zombie media from cathartic death, to zombie comedy (or what is referred to in more casual film critique as "zom-com" or "zomedy"), is produced from the

horror genre becoming self-aware, and from zombie media specifically realizing their own conventions.

Initially, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) asked consumers to laugh at zombies, and the outbreak narrative itself. A parody of and homage to Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Shaun* takes place during a London-based zombie outbreak. Instead of trying to survive, kill zombies, or find a cure, the protagonist Shaun's main goal is to gather up his loved ones and hide in the bar "until this all blows over." While not the first time a zombie has provided some comic relief in an otherwise grim scenario, *Shaun* was the first to popularize it, grossing over \$30 million U.S.. Five years later, *Zombieland* (2009) built on the zombie-comedy popularity, grossing over \$24 million in its opening weekend and over \$100 million worldwide during its theatrical run. Combining elements of survival training, comedy, and romance set against an outbreak background, the film capitalizes on its audience being familiar enough with zombies and the genre in which they traffic to laugh at their demise. Characters Columbus, Wichita, Tallahassee and Little Rock travel across a decimated U.S., avoiding roaming zombies and searching for supplies. Moments of tense battle are juxtaposed with intimate fire-side conversations between the film's romantic leads or the unfortunate murder of zombie-acting Bill Murray. I say "unfortunate" rather than "devastating" or "tragic" because the ironic circumstances of his death (he was dressed as a zombie to *avoid* being killed) invite the audience to laugh instead of mourn. While *Zombieland* is a zombie film at its core, its play with comedy and romance suggest a zombie outbreak is not the humanity-ending crisis traditional outbreak narratives suggest. Its self-awareness of the zombie figure and the outbreak narrative highlights the shift from horror for the purpose of fear to an archetypal genre we can make fun of. At the

point when zombie media present zombies that are familiar, controllable and especially funny, zombies are not nearly as scary.

This trajectory is discussed by Foucault in his lectures on the Abnormal (1974) and monsters in society. Foucault defines a monster as rare and extreme (p. 56), whereas the abnormal is familiar and common (p. 57). As zombies become more commonplace, the conventions of the outbreak narrative continue to be reproduced, eventually opening them to parody as a genre. Following a similar trajectory and breaking from genre convention, zombie media also traffic in romance narratives. Zombies have a harder time saving face as horrific monsters when they fall in love. In Isaac Marion's book *Warm Bodies* (2010), and the 2013 film of the same name, the zombie protagonist R returns to the living after he develops feelings for Julie, a woman he encounters during an attack. The story works as a post-apocalyptic retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* except instead of the characters dying at the end, R comes back to life and saves everyone. Suddenly, zombies are not revolting, decomposing and threatening, they are the heroes of their stories, saving humans and "getting the girl", trading one set of genre conventions for another.

Finally, zombie media make the leap into family-friendly content through animated movies and games. Despite the relatively common outbreak narrative in popular zombie video games for home console and PC platforms, zombie media have moved onto mobile platforms often with a more G-rated aesthetic. *Plants vs. Zombies* (PopCap Games, 2009) is one such game, selling over 300,000 copies in its first nine days of sale in 2010, setting an Apple store launch record at the time. The game has since become a lucrative cross-mediated franchise. Despite its bright, friendly aesthetic *Plants vs. Zombies* is ranked highly alongside other horror-

based zombie video games with a *Metacritic* rating of 88% and regarded by some as one of the best zombie video games to date. The tower-defence style game, along with its sequels and spin-offs, asks players to defend their yard from approaching zombie hordes. The artwork is cartoony, with smiling plants facing down slack-jawed zombies. The gore of traditional zombie media has been traded in for peashooters and sunshine, earning the game an “Everyone” 10 and up age rating, for “fantasy violence” (PopCap Games, 2009).



Plants vs. Zombies is so far removed from horrific outbreak narratives, that its sequel was featured in Chevrolet’s ad for the 2016 Chevrolet Traverse’s wi-fi capability, in which children were thrilled to learn they could all play the game from within their parent’s vehicles. As part of their marketing campaign, Chevrolet connects zombies to family values through positioning them as a desired figure in the family vehicle. Outbreak narratives have always cautioned against

letting zombies into the vehicle, but with the family-friendly aesthetic of *Plants vs. Zombies*, zombie media are now welcome on family road trips.

Other examples of zombie media valuing a family-friendly aesthetic and opening up to untapped markets outside the horror fan demographic include games that began as outbreak narratives, but have since expanded to incorporate the less scary zombie. The *Zombies!!!* (Twilight Creations Inc., 2001) board game was originally rated at ages 15 and up for violent themes and artwork. The game asks players to navigate an overrun town on their way to a helipad, the location of which is revealed through game play. However, in the spin-off *Zombies!!! Jr.* (Twilight Creations, 2015), players put their “parents, siblings, and neighbours” in “time-out” after they turn into zombies. The game’s tone and artwork are more family-friendly, with brighter colours and a lack of gore. As well, game play boasts a co-op option so children can “play with a buddy,” culminating in a rating of ages 8 and up. The game is one of over 20 editions and expansions from the brand, but the first to be marketed as a kid-friendly option, suggesting a shift toward zombies as non-threatening as they expand to new markets for children and families.

Further to this, zombies are far less threatening when they appear in children’s movies. Dreamwork’s *Hotel Transylvania* (2012) and its sequel *Hotel Transylvania 2* (2015) show zombies as bumbling hotel staff — indicative of the domesticated zombie. The zombies serve as slapstick comedy, recalling elements from zombie comedies, and their gross physicality contributes to the gags. In a scene from the first film, the zombies are depicted as bellhops, collecting luggage from a recent guest arrival. They clumsily smash through the ceiling and walls of the car to collect the bags — a scene knowingly reminiscent of zombie outbreak narratives

where they crash through doors to get to their meal. In a scene from the second film, a zombie has poor motor skills and gets his hand caught in the carriage door, only to have it ripped off as the carriage pulls away, the hand still dangling from the side. In both cases the joke is on the zombie's inability to execute menial tasks of hotel staff because of its undeadness — time and time again, the zombie's body betrays it. These scenes, placed within the context of a children's movie, suggest that zombies can be defanged (or de-zombied) through the comedic use of their undead bodies to the point where they are suitable for young audiences, thus expanding zombie media to new, broader markets.

As tame as they are though, the funny, family-friendly zombies of *Hotel Transylvania* (2012, 2015) and *Zombies!!! Jr.* (2015) still bear resemblances to members of the horde in an outbreak narrative. They lack autonomy and subjectivity, often without speaking lines and are rarely given names. Though the strict conventions of the genre have been broken and zombie media have moved beyond the outbreak narrative, zombies continue to be excluded from society, not treated as equals to other agential subjects.

2.3: Climbing the Rungs of Cultural Hierarchy

A third process through which zombies are normalized is through what I call culturalization. Zombies have traditionally been confined to horrific spaces and are widely considered to occupy the lowest level of already low-brow cinema (Mogk, 2011, p. 220), but contemporary zombie media suggest they are shedding this reputation. Narratively, the idea that zombies might be able to engage with cultural items in a meaningful way has been explored in film from Romero's Bub in *Day of the Dead* (1985) to R in *Warm Bodies* (2013). The zombies in

these texts are exposed to pre-apocalypse cultural items including popular music, artwork and simple pastimes in the hope of triggering past-life memories and humanizing them. Zombie media in society emulate these scenes as zombies increasingly take on more cultural value. Zombies are mashed-up with classic literature and pop-culture texts reminiscent of the way R hoards cultural products in his makeshift home (*Warm Bodies*, 2013). Through cookbooks and “recipes for brains” (*Zombies for Zombies*, Murphy, 2009, pp. 217-227) zombie media suggest zombies are learning to not only enjoy their food, but how to prepare meals. And the presence of zombies as an avenue for serious academic study in university level courses ranging from health to literary studies suggests legitimacy through education — despite zombies’ lack of brain function. In these examples, zombie media do not experience normalization because of the stories they communicate directly, but rather through the medium of communication.

The cultural mashup carries different definitions depending on the medium being mashed up. In music it refers to blending two songs to make something new, in literature it involves working from a source text and adding in new elements from popular culture to offer a skewed retelling of a familiar, often classic, work. Zombie media do not mashup any one specific way bound by narrative, or medium, or genre, instead they do so by blending two cultural products to benefit from their mutual popularity. Taking an already popular cultural text and adding in zombies has become common place for film, television, games, and literature. Because zombies are themselves an incredibly popular figure in the contemporary moment, they bring with them their own level of marketability. Thus I adopt a broad definition of mashup to explore zombie media in which all products in the mashup are mutually elevated in terms of their financial and cultural capital.

Some examples of the zombie media mashup include the popular video game series *Red Dead Redemption* and *Call of Duty* in which zombies are incorporated into the franchise through downloadable content or playable modes (Rockstar, 2010; Treyarch, 2008). Archie Comics and Marvel Comics run zombie story lines in which the characters from *Riverdale* and the Marvel Universe face new zombified challenges (*Afterlife With Archie*, 2013; *Marvel Zombies*, 2005). The Star Wars universe gets a dose of the zombie infection with Joe Schreiber's novel *Star Wars: Death Troopers* (2009) in which a mysterious disease spreads from ship to ship through the galaxy. Not even The Beatles can escape a zombie mashup in *Paul is Undead: British Zombie Invasion* (Goldsher, 2010) in which the British musicians shamble their way to stardom, performing and devouring their fans. These popular culture mashups speak to the shared popularity of zombies and the cultural texts with which they blend, reinforcing zombies' position as mass culture juggernauts.

As zombie media spread to classic literature, further liberating them from their traditional low-brow cinematic confines, the cultural status of the zombie is affected even more. Zombies take on Queen Victoria in *Queen Victoria: Demon Hunter* (Moorat, 2009), are interpreted as the inspiration for Dante's *Inferno* in *Valley of the Dead* (Paffenroth, 2009), and spread through Oz in *Undead World of Oz* (Thomas, 2009). They pose new threats to Charles Dickens' original characters in *I Am Scrooge* (Roberts, 2011), Marvel's *Zombie Christmas Carol* (McCann, 2012) and *Oliver Twisted* (Sharpe, 2012). However, none of these mashups gained as much popular and critical attention as Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) which climbed to number three on the *New York Times* Best Seller List in 2009 and has since been serialized and adapted into comics, video games and a film to be released in 2016. The *AV Club*'s

Donna Bowman, in reviewing the book, said Grahame-Smith's additions to the original text by Jane Austen, "add some interest, pathos, and essential motivation to Austen's subplots" (2009). Bowman explains Grahame-Smith simplifies Austen's complex language but "retains her enchanting style and vocabulary," (2009) and goes on to note the mashup lends renewed appreciation for an already highly regarded novel in the Victorian genre. The positive critical reception of a zombie mashup with such a classic story indicates zombies have shed their low-brow reputation and are becoming "civilized." Zombies certainly bring with them their own popularity when combined with other cultural texts through their own ubiquity in popular culture, but when mashed-up with other popular cultural texts zombies are granted legitimacy through familiarity and culturalization, increasing their overall cultural capital.

This legitimacy is reinforced beyond popular cultural artifacts as the zombie becomes a serious topic for academic study. With increasing popularity, North American colleges and universities are developing entire courses around zombies and their cultural importance. "Zombies in Popular Media" is offered at Columbia College in Chicago, and by "Doctor of the Dead," Arnold T. Blumberg at University of Baltimore. The Health and Societies department at University of Pennsylvania offers "A Zombie's History of Medicine and Technology" while the Anthropology department at George Mason University offers a course simply titled "Zombies." Michigan State University offers an interactive online course open to students, visiting scholars and the public titled "Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse — Disasters, Catastrophes and Human Behaviour" in which students work through survival and crisis scenarios as a group, learning about social behaviour along the way. In Canada, the University of the Fraser Valley offered for the first time in 2015 "Zombies on the Brain: Popular Culture & the Living Dead."

Zombies are given the opportunity to stand alongside their monstrous cousins, (e.g. the vampire) as culturally rich mirrors through which to understand society. The outbreak narrative is explored as a metaphorical disaster scenario to further discuss human social behaviour in crisis situations. Zombies are a lens through which to explore the “history of western medical knowledge and practice,” (UPenn, 2016). Zombie media as entry points for academic inquiry suggest a new legitimacy for zombies. Where they were usually relegated to conversations within genre specific film and media studies courses, increasingly zombies are being elevated to new forms of academic study. This relates back to my discussion of zombie media teaching us to overcome outbreaks through video games and survival literature. By elevating zombies as serious topics for academic inquiry and applying them as lenses through which to examine the human condition, we come to understand zombies as viable, culturally valuable and important figures. First we learned how to beat them, now we are learning from them.

Zombies are further elevated in terms of their cultural standing in society through a developing connection to food and practices of eating. Zombies’ relationship to food has traditionally been one of violence and voraciousness. The proclivity of zombies to overcome and kill humans, ingesting their flesh or brains without indication of satiation, remorse, or pleasure reinforces the understanding that zombies are entirely removed from humanity and incapable of passing as human. Consumption has been one of the mainstays of the zombie mythos, but contemporary zombie media gesture toward a broadening of the zombie palate and overall relationship to food. Eating for pleasure rather than simply for primal sustenance is an inherently human quality — the ability and desire to prepare and enjoy one’s meal. The video game *Zombie Pizza* (2009), available on iOS devices, suggests zombies can be satiated with pizza. Liv Moore

from The CW's *iZombie* (2015) is sustained on brains, but can only stomach them drenched in hot sauce. The self-help guide *Zombies for Zombies: Advice and Etiquette for the Living Dead* (Murphy, 2009) details how to remain healthy as an undead being, including proper eating habits that guide you away from devouring the nearest human. "As a result, you'll be able to completely satisfy your hunger, and that farmer's son, little Jimmy, won't become a mid-afternoon snack." (p. 67). Murphy directs readers to consistently eat "normal, household rations" in order to avoid ending up "all Hord-ey" (p. 68), suggesting that by normalizing their eating habits, zombies may retain some autonomy from the horde. Further to this, the book includes a collection of brain-centred recipes (pp. 217-227) urging zombies to prepare their food as regular meals as opposed to the usual zombie habit of relentless consumption, and the brains in question are animal rather than human.

Taking the relationship between zombies and their meals a step further, *The Snacking Dead* (Walker, 2013) brings zombies and food together by disguising an otherwise regular cookbook in a zombie outbreak narrative. The book blends cooking with zombie survival tips like "Most canned goods stay at peak condition for 3-5 years" (p. 47) and "A long-handled metal pizza peel is an ideal weapon against the living dead ... be sure to rinse well with bleach before using again with pizza" (p. 17). It goes beyond parodic recipe titles like "Secretly Sadistic Jalepeno Poppers" (p. 53) and "Nail Biter Chicken Fingers" (p. 143), and staged photos of food on garbage can lids and other salvaged serving platters, to bring consumers a journey from living to undead, appetizers to "last call" (pp. 155-157). The story follows Pam as she goes from serving guests at a dinner party to shambling around as a zombie looking for snacks. Even in her undead state, Pam looks for ways to enjoy her food and elevate its presentation. After adding torn

grass as garnish to her recently slain “snack,” Pam observes “the plant wouldn’t help fill her hunger, but the smell was nice and it enhanced the overall experience.” (p. 146). Zombie-Pam recognizes and appreciates the aesthetic value of garnish rather than instinctively, instantly devouring the sheep carcass in front of her. In these zombie media, the relationship between zombies and the food they eat is more akin to that of humans — zombies take pleasure in their food, looking for ways to savour and enhance it. By shedding the zombie habit of voracious, unthinking consumption, zombies reflect on the quality of their food, its taste and its presentation. Zombies are humanized through an elevated relationship with their food, and it isn’t long before they are capable of rejecting their flesh cravings on the basis of morality as much as palate.

Zombies have spent much of their cultural history as the lowest of horror cinema monsters. They have neither regard for cultural goods, nor do they possess any social skills or any consciousness on which to impart civility or culture. Zombies of traditional outbreak narratives are entirely removed from humanity — their very existence defies what we know about human life and death, and they cannot be reasoned with or regulated. However, contemporary zombie media problematize what we know about the zombie. A zombie that doesn’t immediately gnash at the nearest human, without regard for its surroundings or itself defies expected behaviour. These unexpected zombies are found in the linkages with classic literary texts and other popular culture mashups, mutually elevating their value. They are found in university classrooms as subject of academic inquiry, as serious topics to consider crisis management, human interaction, and the influence of popular culture on the contemporary moment. As well, these are the zombies that develop cultural relationships with food, breaking

free from the conventional expectations of mindless consumption. Literature, education, and food are three processes through which zombies become culturalized, Evolving from kitsch and zombies that are entirely dominated by the humans that reproduce them, these media provide a different type of power to the zombie. Culturalized zombies have power to act independently of the reputation that precedes them and are capable of sustaining their own culture while contributing to the cultural value of other artifacts and products. This lays the groundwork for autonomous zombies, with the mental and emotional capacity to connect with culture and reflect on the society that produces it.

2.4: Inverting the Point of View: Zombie Protagonists

Increasingly, the point of view in zombie narratives is flipped and survivors are no longer in charge of the story — the zombie becomes the storyteller. It is a necessary shift toward grounding the moral sensibilities and eventual tolerance for zombies that appear further along the spectrum (see diagram on p. 25). By changing the point of view, media consumers develop empathy for the zombie and eventually come relate to its experiences. We've already seen zombies treated as domesticated animals, but now with a shift in point of view they gain sentience and reasoning to the point where they become moral subjects and it becomes more problematic to kill them without a second thought.

This process begins through an inversion of roles — zombies become the protagonists of their stories, seeking out and destroying the human enemy. In Ryan Mecum's *Zombie Haiku* (2008) the main character searches for its human meal, only able to articulate itself in the traditional 5,7,5 syllabic poem. In the book, *The Brain Eaters Bible* (McGhoul & Kilbane, 2011),

a survival guide format is applied, except in this case readers are assumed undead, and the advice centres around how best to find and kill humans. Similarly in the board games *Humans!!!* (Twilight Creations, 2008) and the more casual *Zombie Dice* (Black Monk, 2010) the goal is to successfully devour humans without being killed first.

Undead-ness is not implied, rather it is performed in zombie walks across North America and Europe. Thousands of humans don torn clothes and bloody makeup and lurch down city streets together. Though emulating a horde, these walks do not pose a threat to the surrounding business, no one gets eaten, and the calculated organization complete with road closures suggests an overall integration of zombie occurrences within urban society. Similarly, in *Humans vs. Zombies* (Sappington, B. & Weed, C., 2005) a zombified version of tag, players are either a human or a zombie. The game was originally developed at Goucher College and continues to be primarily played on college and university campuses. It starts with a single zombie versus the humans, but as the game progresses more humans are tagged, growing the zombie horde. Zombies must tag humans before they are shot with Nerf guns or balled up socks and the game only ends when one side has completely eradicated the other. By engaging with the game players take on the persona of zombies and must abide by rules laid out for zombie behaviour, as well as players as a whole. Engagement with games like *Humans vs. Zombies* further blurs the lines between “us” and “them,” as a player may take on multiple roles throughout gameplay. If a zombie is shot, it must retire to a designated zone for a period of time before being allowed to re-enter the game space. As well, there are various zones where play is prohibited including washrooms and inside classroom buildings. The rules enforce regulation for both humans and zombies existing within the constructions of the game’s narrative. Taken outside the game

context the zombie becomes regulated. Though they are conscious, capable of making choices, and held accountable for those choices, fear of the grotesque, violent zombie persists.

A discourse of tolerance and regulation is replicated in zombie media that explore the zombie as a redeemable figure that can be reintegrated into civilized society. In these media zombie experiences become autobiographical as they attempt to navigate the rules and constraints imposed either directly or indirectly on them. Direct rules include government administered zombie suppressing drugs and zombie-free zones, whereas indirect rules include social pressure to appear as human as possible. Cohen classifies the monster as “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (p.7). For him, monsters embody social differences coming in contact with the society that cast them out. In the case with the zombie, the difference embodied is literally differences of the body. The zombie body cannot pass as is — it does not appear, move, or consume like a “normal” body. In traditional outbreak narratives, the zombie body pushes against social ideas, seeking to destroy normal bodies. It is abject. However, in contemporary zombie media, the zombie seeks to pass. It seeks to blend in with “normal” bodies and hide its difference. The zombie can thus be read as a queer figure navigating a heteronormative environment, and we can identify with its lived experiences through the first person perspective with which it presents us. This allows for a more complex set of goals for the zombie in a society working toward tolerance and integration. In these media the zombie attempts to reconcile its appearance, hide its undead-ness and build social relationships.

In the film version of *Warm Bodies* (2013), R realizes he is different from the other zombies, and does not want to continue in the zombie practices of his horde. He is made-over by Julie and Nora to hide his zombie-ness from Julie’s father (who would undoubtedly kill R if he

knew his true self). The initial act of naming him R grants him an identity that transcends his zombie self. Then R showers and cover up is applied to his grey skin with the hope that he will successfully pass for human. Similarly, in *Zombies for Zombies* (Murphy, 2011) a parody of the popular *For Dummies* genre of books, there are tips for helpful pharmaceuticals and proper grooming techniques to manage a zombie body and self. In contrast to the reaction of the outbreak narrative, the first advice given in *Zombies for Zombies* is “not to panic” (p. xiii). At this point, becoming a zombie is not a state of panic, it is simply a fact of life that one must now learn how to manage. The book makes a deliberate separation from the zombies of outbreak narratives (p. xiv) reinforcing the stance that these zombies have moved beyond the horde. As a final note in the close of the introduction, Murphy states his main goal for the book as being “devoted to furthering your cause so that you can continue to be a vital part of our society and economy.” (p. xxi). Murphy seeks to civilize the zombie so it can remain part of society.

Literature and comics have been playing with the idea of a zombie as a conscious, contributing member of society in the first person perspective longer than other media. *The Zen of Zombie* (Kenmore, 2007) acts a self-help guide for people wishing to find zen through embodying a zombie lifestyle. In *Brains: A Zombie Memoir* (Becker, 2010) the academic-turned-zombie seeks a world where zombies and humans can live alongside each other and in *Dust* (Turner, 2011) the zombies speak, form relationships and eventually die, emulating “normal” human behaviour. As well, in the comic *iZombie* (Roberson & Allred, 2010) the character Gwen Dylan holds down a job, forms friendships (though with other monstrous figures) and develops a romantic relationship. In all these examples the motivation for the protagonists lies in establishing their place in normal society. Gwen does not remember her previous life, so she

creates a new one where her undead body does not revolt those around her. She befriends a weredog and a ghost from the graveyard in which she works and spends most of her free time drinking coffee in a nearby diner. For the most part Gwen is living a normal life as a zombie, passing when she needs to and hiding her unique dietary requirements from her coworkers. When traditional zombies rise from their graves and threaten the city, Gwen deliberately separates herself from the horde by defending humans.

At this point along the spectrum (see diagram on p. 25), the zombie rejects the horde both mentally, socially, and physically, by separating itself and avoiding horde-behaviours. The difference between these zombies and those individualized through domination lies in the power dynamic. The zombie is not forced to separate from the horde in a move to eliminate its power and gain dominance, the zombie exerts agency over its own self and body, thus breaking from the control of a unified horde. Zombies that choose to reclaim their autonomy must do so over the horde first, thus preparing the foundation to eventually gain autonomy in the society that regulates them.

2.5: The Normalized Zombie

Despite the still few examples of normalized zombie in mainstream zombie media, some narratives begin to explore the possibility through themes of reintegration, such as in the films *The Returned* (2013), and *Dead Rising: Watchtower* (2015) and *28 Weeks Later* (2007), but these quickly devolve to traditional outbreak narratives. In these media zombies are a controlled threat, those infected are kept human or “normal” by pharmaceuticals or other behaviour suppressing technology, though before long the method fails and the panic of an uncontrolled zombie

outbreak is repeated. Were it that reintegration-focused zombie media all went this direction, the potential for a normalized zombie would be a dead end. However, in the television shows *In the Flesh* (2013) and *iZombie* (2015) (inspired by the comic) the main characters are zombies who live their lives among “normal”, “civilized” society with no world-ending outbreak in sight. I explore these in detail in the following chapter as situated at the furthest end of the normalized zombie spectrum.

Contemporary zombie media move well beyond the traditional outbreak narrative creating a cultural landscape where the zombie is a conscious, emotional, and subjective being. How does the zombie in its new social role reconcile its monstrous body? How does it pass, or manage daily tasks? How does it perceive of its humanness or lack thereof? At the point where the zombie separates itself from the horde and seeks human connection, it begins to ask these questions and society undergoes a shift. Where once the main way to manage a zombie threat was by killing as many as possible before inevitably being overcome, society now has the capacity to tolerate zombies in day-to-day life. Due to their embodied difference this can't occur without regulation on an institutional and social level.

This process occurs through a series of nuanced changes in the way zombie media function in society, first as a niche sub culture enjoyed and reproduced by fans, but now as a cultural giant capable of tapping into nearly any market demographic and finding success. Themes of control give way to domination and domestication, making the zombie commonplace in the household. Breaks from horror convention create new ways to tell the zombie story eventually leading to a family-friendly zombie, self-aware and open for parody. The zombie is then read as a legitimate and important cultural product, shedding its low-brow cinematic

reputation. The contemporary, normalized zombie is granted space in society, and with it comes a new set of challenges pertaining to the zombie body and its presentation of self in society.

Chapter 3: Tensions of the Body and Identity for the Normalized Zombie

Previous discussions of the zombie's capacity to articulate deep social anxieties are problematized when the zombie ceases to function as part of a horde and begins to function as an autonomous individual. Once zombies speak, reflect on their actions and the actions of those around them, and make conscious choices, killing them with increasing violence and efficiency raises a new set of moral questions. Are they persons? Do they have access to the same social and political rights as humans? Zombies are seen less as monsters we fear and seek to overcome, and more as (different) individuals attempting to navigate a social environment organized to reject them. Thus, with normalized zombies emerging in contemporary zombie media, we can read the zombie as a marginalized identity in a normative society. The zombie transcends its monstrous origins and yet continues to experience separation from and inferiority to "normal" humans, perpetuating the perception of social and biological difference.

In becoming a zombie, an individual undergoes a transformation that leaves them between human and non-human, alive and dead, normal and abnormal. On one side of their internal conflict, zombies do not physically function as humans and thus may never be considered humans. However, on the other side, these zombies attempt to reclaim their connection to the personal, human identity they possessed pre-zombie. Drawing on scholars such as Catherine McCall (1990), Margrit Shildrick (1999), Rosmarie Garland-Thomson (2005) and Lesleigh Owen (2012; 2015) I argue that normalized zombies represent a tension in which the individual grapples with unachievable social expectations of a "normal" functioning body, its connection to humanity and personhood, and their potential to construct an anti-normative identity.

To illustrate, I analyze the television series *iZombie* (CW, 2015) and *In the Flesh* (BBC Three, 2013 - 2014). In both series the main characters are zombies living in a human's world. They take strides to hide their zombieness from their family, social circles and the general population and navigate feelings of self-hatred and guilt over their past and sometimes current zombie actions. I explore the tensions of the body and identity construction in these series in three ways: Kieran (*In the Flesh*) and Liv's (*iZombie*) attempt to appear human, their struggle with personhood and a sense of self, and in the ways they embrace their zombieness.

In the Flesh focuses on perpetually 18-year-old Kieran Walker as he returns home to his family and small community in Northern England after being rehabilitated. Kieran (nicknamed "Ren" or "Kier") struggles to reintegrate into his local community that remembers all too well the zombie outbreak ("the Rising"). Zombies are legal persons, and perceived through a medicalized logic in which they are said to be suffering from Partially Deceased Syndrome (PDS). They are required to take a daily injection to suppress any "rabid" behaviour, the state of which is referred to as being "untreated". The injection, Kieran is told, rebuilds synapses in his brain responsible for memory and thus Kieran is haunted by flashbacks of his final kill as an untreated zombie. Although zombies are rehabilitated and reintegrated in society, the prejudices in Kieran's home town run deeper than the government can reach and zombies are still perceived as violent uncontrollable threats to humanity.

The series consists of hour-long episodes (three in season one, six in season two), and was originally released on the BBC Three network before being released in North America (BBC America); it is now widely available for streaming services like YouTube. While I reviewed the entire series for my project, my analysis centres on the first season as it focuses on Kieran's

experiences navigating his new life as a “treated” zombie. More importantly, it depicts key moments in the confrontation and construction of Kieran’s identity, including attempts to pass as human and encounters with other “treated” zombies. The series takes a dramatic tone for the most part, with moments of dark humour and nods to the traditional zombie outbreak genre. In one such scene when the family home is threatened by violent anti-zombie community members, Kieran’s parents quickly revert to survival tactics, wielding weapons fit to deal with a horde including a spiked cricket bat and chainsaw. These actions are out of place in an emotional narrative about a teenager’s struggles with identity and purpose, but remind us that *In the Flesh* is aware of its genre origins. Analytically, the show portrays struggles of identity development in resistance to social norms against the landscape of a society that is aware zombies exist, and continues to reject them.

In contrast, *iZombie* introduces us to a social environment that is culturally aware of zombies, but only in the sense that they are fictitious horror monsters in film and video games. Olivia “Liv” Moore is the central zombie figure and narrator of the show, often bookending episodes with a voiceover reflection. Liv eats the brains of the deceased delivered to the Seattle Police Department morgue and with each brain she gains elements of that person’s personality traits and memories. She uses these “side effects” to her advantage by helping to solve homicide cases while hiding her zombieness. The show is structured as a crime serial, with a new case to solve in each episode, and thus a new brain for Liv to eat. While reflecting on the moral culpability of eating brains, she grapples with the remorse of giving up her dream job and calling off her wedding, both of which she feels compelled to do after becoming a zombie. Liv struggles

to hide her zombieness and maintain relationships with her family and friends, while developing a sense of community around her new form.

Tonally, the show takes a light-hearted approach, with witty and self-aware scriptwriting, and invokes both the zombie genre and the crime-serial genre. By trafficking in both genre conventions, *iZombie* signals to viewers that although Liv is a brain-eating zombie and can infect with a simple scratch, she is not about to wreak zombie horror havoc on the cookie-cutter structure of the 45 minute murder case. *iZombie* was adapted from Chris Roberson and Michael Allred's comic of the same name, but apart from Liv's general appearance (white-blonde hair, chalky pigmentless skin, darkly shadowed eyes) and reaction to brains, bears little resemblance to the original text. However, the show gestures to its source material by maintaining a comic-book aesthetic in its opening credit sequence, illustrated by Allred,⁷ and injects bright, high-contrast colours into many scenes. The first season consists of 13 episodes at roughly 42 minutes each and airs weekly on the CW network in the U.S. It also releases weekly on Rogers Canada's *Shomi* streaming service making it more widely accessible. *iZombie* finished its second season in April 2016, but my analysis focuses primarily on the first (March 2015 - June 2015). This allows me to analyze a completed storyline and make comparisons between première seasons of my two selected series. I closely analyze key moments of identity construction including the scenes where Liv reveals her zombieness to friends and coworkers, and her reaction to a non-sentient, non-civilized zombie. *iZombie* allows me to critically discuss society's normative expectations of the body and an individual's construction of self and identity.

⁷ Michael Allred is the original artist for the comic series and was brought in to illustrate the opening credit sequence for the television adaptation.

In the previous chapter, I discuss zombie media as a cultural force in which zombies undergo a transformation from terrifying productions of social fear to familiarized, culturalized and conscious individuals. They are simultaneously normalized and abnormal — they are a familiar part of our cultural landscape, but they still represent bodily differences that prevent them from returning to fully human form. In concise narrative structures, the erasure of difference and return to human form is made possible by the convenience of a conclusion. However, in episodic structures that rely on the difference of their characters, cures are not viable options. Should Kieran or Liv return to human form, they would cease to be zombies, removing the driving narrative element of the show. It is important to study *iZombie* and *In the Flesh* as examples of bodily difference and the tensions of identity construction because these zombies cannot become human again. They do not have the option of fully eliminating their differences and must instead navigate a normative society in which they do not fit.

3.1: Appearing Human

When your body is in a state of decay and your dietary habits prevent you from participating in family mealtime, it becomes challenging to keep up human appearance. As a zombie, this is a daily struggle for Kieran in *In the Flesh*. His day-to-day life consists of a series of performances and misdirections to hide his zombieness from those around him. The focus is not on his newly constructed identity as a zombie so much as how he will pass for human in an environment that subscribes to a bodily ideal. This reinforces a normative body-centric approach to personal and social identity, in which an individual's physical form is implicated in how they think of themselves and are thought of by others. Shildrick (1999) in her study of embodied

monstrous difference conceives of this ideal as an “achievement, a model of the proper where everything is in its place and the chaotic aspects of the natural are banished” (p. 80). She approaches difference and non-normative bodies, not as the result of accident or disease, but as a condition of life. Thus difference in this case is constant and not separable from the individual’s lived experience. According to Shildrick, the normative assumption of a standard, ideal body is something individuals are expected to strive for and “requires unceasing maintenance and/or modification to hold off constant threat of disruption” (p. 80). This is Kieran’s goal in his attempt and maintenance of human appearance; by presenting viewers with appearance-conscious zombies, *In the Flesh* reinforces unachievable normative body assumptions.

In the Flesh takes place a few years after “The Rising”, in a time when zombies are starting to reintegrate into society. The series opens on Kieran’s final days in the treatment centre and immediately focuses on the contrast between a governmentally regulated rehabilitation facility and a small Northern England community. Kieran’s immediate environment is clean, white and serene. He meets one-on-one with doctors about his condition and emotional state and attends group therapy sessions with other zombies. These scenes are contrasted with clips of a meeting turned angry anti-zombie rally in which we learn is Kieran’s home town of Roarton. The meeting is held inside a high-windowed stone church, making for a low-light setting that juxtaposes the bright setting of Kieran’s rehabilitation. Even outdoor scenes are shot in overcast weather, giving the community a distinctly morose, mundane tone. The positioning of the two settings – the one Kieran is leaving, and the one to which he is returning – highlights a tension in which a regulated environment is safe, although artificial, compared to the real world Kieran

must navigate. Encouraged by the doctors urging him back into society, Kieran takes steps to hide his zombieness before he even leaves the treatment centre.

Orderly: Blue or brown?

Kieran: What?

Orderly: Your eye colour before you died. (“Episode 1”, 2013).

Initially Kieran pauses when asked about contact lenses, as he takes a moment to consider the colour choice. But before he can entertain the idea of adopting a new one, the orderly asks for his pre-zombie eye colour and hands him brown contacts to match. This exchange signals not only Kieran’s passivity in the construction of his identity but also the normative assumption that reintegrated zombies will seek to achieve and maintain their pre-death bodies.

In a later scene, Kieran is shown with his contacts in and applying a thick layer of “cover-up mousse”. His zombie skin is chalky and white, but with the cover-up he can give the effect of living pigment. The application of humanizing cosmetics highlight Kieran’s attempts to appear as human as possible and also reminds us of the superficiality of his “humanness”. Shot from over his shoulder into a mirror, viewers are aligned with Kieran and the process of hiding his zombieness is reflected back to him and us. This framing suggests hiding one’s difference is a move to appear “normal” for both the public and the self.

Once back home in his community and with his family, Kieran’s tension between zombieness and humanness is amplified. His parents manoeuvre awkwardly around their son, clumsily navigating their grief over his suicide⁸ and relief at his return. They try to reclaim some semblance of familial routine by avoiding the reality of his zombie form and ambiguously

⁸ Kieran commits suicide after his best friend and secret lover is killed in action with the Royal British Army. Shortly after, the dead rise from their graves, and Kieran comes back as a zombie. His parents have not seen him since they buried him a few years prior.

referring to his death as the time he was “away.” Kieran’s father makes small talk about the collection of films he’s amassed in Kieran’s absence, and is excited to watch with him. He brings out a selection of board games for them to play and fails to notice the irony that Kieran no longer beats him at *The Game of Life*. Part of Kieran’s zombieness dictates that his body no longer metabolizes, but his parents wish to reclaim familial rituals including family mealtime. When Kieran reminds his mother that he doesn’t eat anymore, she asks him to “just pretend for a bit” (“Episode 1”, 2013). These moments show how Kieran’s parents contribute to his difference as one that should be hidden or ignored, asking him to pretend that his body still functions the way a human’s would and expecting him to engage in “regular” social practices and rituals. These are expectations placed upon Kieran, but he is also responsible for perpetuating the stance toward his zombieness through his acquiescence.

After his mother asks him to pretend to eat, Kieran picks up his fork and mimes eating dinner with the family. In a later scene he is shown doing this automatically and engaging in normal dinner conversation about the food. When his father asks how he likes dinner Kieran responds that it’s “delicious; melts in the mouth” (“Episode 1”, 2013), and then pretends to take another bite. In the morning, the process of applying his human cover-up appears routinized, the final step being to dump his coffee out his bedroom window before descending to the kitchen. Kieran’s father offers him a top-up and instead of reminding him that his body does not process coffee Kieran simply says, “No thanks, trying to cut back” (“Episode 2”, 2013). This is an acceptable response to the denial of morning coffee, and Kieran’s father goes on to agree that perhaps cutting back the caffeine intake would be good for his health as well. The normality and normativity of the scene is reinforced by Kieran’s mother enjoying breakfast at the kitchen table

and the pleasant melodic score. This relates to Scott Yates, Simon Dyson and Dave Hiles' (2008) discussion of negative normalization approaches toward devalued individuals. They say the "modern legacy of normalization is largely a force maintaining the status quo" (p. 247) in which normalization is the dominant lens through which individuals with learning disabilities are discussed and devalued. Kieran's interactions with his parents support the status quo of normalization in the sense that they do not wish to disrupt normative expectations of Kieran's difference and instead choose to ignore it.

Yates, Dyson and Hiles call for action on three levels to integrate devalued individuals positively, the second of which implicates primary social systems like that of Kieran's family (pp. 248-249). His parents neglect to acknowledge his difference and embrace it in a positive and productive way thus reinforcing the inferiority of Kieran's difference, and maintaining the appearance of the "normal" status quo within the community. In both the dinner scene and the morning coffee scene Kieran appeases his parents by maintaining the perception of his humanness. In her discussion of living with a fat body in a thin-centric world, Owen (2012) appeals to Erving Goffman's concept of "covering" for one's identity in which "stigmatized persons attempt to minimize their stigmatized attribute in order to make 'normals' feel more socially comfortable" (p. 299). In this case Kieran's stigmatized attribute is his zombie body, and the "normals" he is making socially comfortable are his parents. Both his parents and Kieran himself are implicated in the perpetuation of a "normal" bodily ideal, one that Kieran should pretend he possess. It isn't until he encounters another treated zombie that the tensions between passing for human and embracing difference are explicitly addressed.

As soon as he is left on his own, free from the protective gaze of his parents, Kieran decides he needs to revisit his gravesite. He is plagued by the memory of his pre-zombie self in which he slit his wrists after his friend and lover was killed in action with the Royal British Army. Feeling trapped and hidden in his home, he ventures out to seek closure. Despite hiding under a large hoodie and avoiding contact with others, he encounters a young woman in the graveyard who recognizes him. Kieran tries to avoid her and runs away, assuming she recognizes him from before he died. She pursues him and is ultimately impaled on a piece of rebar Kieran holds for self defence. Then she laughs. We recognize her as the hunting partner from Kieran's "untreated" zombie flashbacks. Previously, they were unable to exchange greetings and pleasantries, but now as reintegrated zombies she introduces herself as Amy Dyer. Because Kieran committed suicide and many in the community attended his funeral his appearance in a public setting instantly signals his zombieness, thus he instinctively tried to run from being recognized. While he and his parents may engage in processes of passing and avoidance, outside the home this performance breaks down — Kieran is unable to hide his zombieness in social, community settings.

Despite Kieran's initial hesitancy to become friendly with Amy, she eventually convinces him that creating connections with like individuals is healthy for his survival. Finally, Kieran is free to discuss himself without the veil of human performance. Kieran and Amy amble through carnival grounds while on a day trip, though Kieran is still visibly uncomfortable with being in public. He buries his hands in his pockets and shrugs his shoulders, keeping his head as low as he can. This scene is shot in a rare moment of highly saturated sunlight, reinforcing Kieran's apprehension toward exposure in public places. This behaviour is in line with Owen's (2012)

observations of individuals living with fat bodies. She notes that individuals whose bodies don't fit within the expectations of society feel it is better "to be home, safe and comfortable, than venture into the risky, possibly hostile, almost certainly humiliating, social environment" (p. 296). Kieran recognizes the potential risk of being in a populated, public place and is visibly uncomfortable in the scene. Amy's posture juxtaposes his by strolling confidently with her head held high; she tries to loosen him up.

Amy: So we got our contacts in, our cover up on. You wear too much of that stuff, by the way.

Kieran: Yeah, and you don't wear enough.

Amy: I'm thinking about going au naturally [sic], actually. ("Episode 2", 2013).

In this exchange Amy recognizes the role of cosmetics in attempting to pass for human, but also mocks the futility of the attempt. She is not worried about being exposed or having her identity as a zombie revealed, because she is comfortable in her own body and identity. I read Amy's approach to her zombieness as parallel to representations of the fat female body. Anne Hole (2003) explores the fat, female comedian as a disruption of the expectations of "normal" femininity. She describes this body as "less-than-Woman" and "more-than-Woman" because it resists normative feminine ideals, but also overflows the space in which women are permitted to exist. Thus, the fat female body is free from "normal" gender expectations (p. 318), in much the same way Amy approaches normative expectations for zombieness. She considers the possibility (and, in a later scene, follows through) of going "au naturally," removing her humanizing makeup, and freeing herself from the expectations placed on her body by society.

As well, she recognizes the artificiality in Kieran's perception of himself. By commenting on the abundance of cover-up he applies, Amy suggests Kieran is not as hidden as he thinks he

might be. Kieran makes a similar argument about the amount of cover-up Amy applies. This exchange reinforces that both are performing human identities, putting on a façade for the public eye, though neither seem convinced (or is convincing). Amy is unfazed by Kieran’s criticism, and proudly states she is considering shedding the human costume and fully embracing the physicality of her zombieness. Kieran is confronted with the possibility of denying the normative expectations of bodies in exchange for embracing zombieness. This echoes Shildrick’s (1999) challenge of the normative assumption of a given body and the “sense of a foundational and certain form which then may be compared to an ideal template” (p. 80). Amy represents a challenge to the certainty of a type of body, against which all bodies should be compared. The concept of going without contact lenses and cover-up is still out of Kieran’s reach, but Amy exposes him to the possibility that his identity need not be constructed against the expectations of human normality.

Kieran and his family approach his difference as something that must be hidden or avoided. They ask him to pretend his body continues to function as a human’s would and he obliges. When in public, despite taking cosmetic measures to hide his zombieness he feels on display and worries about being recognized. He hides in the family sphere to maintain a status quo of familial normality, whereas hiding his zombieness in the social, community sphere is necessary for his protection from ridicule and potential violence. Through all of this Kieran is appealing to a normative assumption about his body in relation to “normal” bodies. He maintains a human appearance that supports an unachievable ideal. However, through Amy, Kieran is exposed to the possibility of an anti-normative ideal — the possibility that his body and identity could be more than “no longer human.”

Liv Moore in *iZombie* also hides her zombieness from those around her, not because of social prejudice but because zombies remain the work of fictional horror in the public consciousness. Liv's death and subsequent reanimation occurred outside her family and regular social circles, so those closest to her have no reason to suspect her zombieness. Where Kieran's zombieness was signalled because of his familiarity in the community, Liv passes for human by default — her difference is (mostly) invisible. Her struggle is in managing a consumption-centric, non-normative body while performing a series of identities to avoid questions about her behaviour.

In order to successfully pass for human after becoming a zombie, Liv gives up her residency position at a hospital in favour of a position with the Seattle Police Department morgue. The choice of employment helps Liv appear human to members of the public. The zombie mythos surrounding Liv and other zombies in *iZombie* means they must consume brains in order to retain their consciousness and agency over their bodies. Liv's choice of employment, with easy access to brains was a deliberate choice on her part, presumably because working as a surgeon would prove problematic for her dietary needs. Liv subscribes to the notion that her difference affects where she is permitted to safely work, she is not externally forced to give up her residency position, but rather internally seeks to pass. In reading Liv as a devalued individual, this choice appeals to Yates, Dyson, and Hiles' (2008) description of devalued individuals in society. They explain that "devalued groups tend to be cast into negative roles and these social expectations cause devalued individuals to live up" (p. 248) to them. Because zombies are generally derided as the horrific work of fiction in the *iZombie* universe – something people kill in video games – Liv sees herself as a devalued individual in society. She determines

she is safer working in a (mostly) isolated environment where there is no living flesh to tempt her appetite, thus living up to the social expectation that zombies remain hidden from the population (or that they don't exist).

Furthermore, Liv gets visions showing the cause of death of the deceased which she uses to help implicate their murderers. With close proximity to the investigations, both physically and now mentally, Liv assists on various homicide cases. To the general public, she is a police medical examiner with a keen eye for solving murders. However, for Clive Babineaux, the detective with whom she partners on cases, she must perform another level of identity to further mask her zombieness. When she reveals details about a murder victim, Clive becomes suspicious of her connection to the case. Ravi, Liv's boss and the only one to know her true identity, offers what he believes to be a more plausible solution.

Ravi: She's psychic —

Liv: — ish ("Pilot", 2015).

Liv accepts the persona, but only in part. She knows that taking on another performance will further problematize her ability to hide her secret from the world. In a later moment of reflection she muses, "I'm having a hard enough time pretending I'm alive, let alone throwing a performance as a psychic into the mix" ("Pilot", 2015). For Liv, performing different identities for professional and social spheres is the only way to keep her true identity secret, but she worries about her ability to perform them successfully and consistently. Eventually, she embraces the psychic identity and thus the show takes on its crime serial structure. But without Liv's layered identity performance, the technical structure of the show would not function in the same

way. Liv's employment as a police medical examiner and her performance as the psychic investigator on murder cases allow her to appear human and keep her zombieness hidden.

Liv's struggle to appear human is also reflected in her consumption habits. If she doesn't consume brains regularly enough, hunger takes over and she becomes a violent, voracious being driven solely by her insatiable need to feed. For Liv and the zombies in *iZombie*, consumption of brains is directly tied to their ability to successfully pass. Liv recognizes this and orchestrates a situation allowing her access to brains. However, she resents her dietary needs and the process of consuming brains, so while the consumption maintains her humanness, she avoids normative food behaviour. When Ravi finds Liv consuming brain-ramen with hot sauce for lunch, and subsequently discovers her zombieness, she tells him she tries to do it as "infrequently as possible" ("Pilot", 2015). As well, zombies lack normally functioning taste buds, therefore Liv tries to mask the reality of brain consumption by adding copious amounts of hot sauce to anything she consumes. In discussing the taste of brains with fellow zombie, Blaine, they reflect that a brain is:

Blaine: The single most disgusting thing a person can eat.

Liv: That it is.

Blaine: It's the consistency that kills me

Liv: I can't get around it. There's that weird metallic taste

Blaine: Is it metallic? I don't even know. I used to be a serious wine guy ... now everything I drink is like iodine.

Liv: I saw a kid eating a peanut butter cup last week and I almost cried. I miss food so much. ("Brother Can You Spare a Brain?", 2015)

Liv's initial relationship to her dietary needs is strictly to maintain functionality — she does not engage in a social relationship with preparing and enjoying her food. She pines over the lost relationship with food and the enjoyment of taste. Remove brains from the conversation, and Liv

sounds like the cultural stereotype of someone resenting a restrictive diet. Samantha Murray (2008) addresses the connection of consumption and over consumption in the construction of fatness in society. Liv's management of her brain diet links traditional zombie consumption habits with discussions of the "fat" body. Zombies have voraciously consumed for as long as they've gathered in a horde and shambled across media. Their consumption is often read as a metaphor for social anxieties about uncontrolled threats to Western society. Liv controls this historical notion of consumption on an individual level, fearing what she might become if she goes without brains for long enough. Simultaneously she avoids over consumption, appealing to what Murray (2008) identifies as a "moral panic about excessive desire (particularly in women), about a refusal to regulate one's needs and impulses" (p. 16). Liv walks the line between traditional zombie consumption tendencies and contemporary approaches to food and consumption for non-normative bodies. She focuses discussions about consumption and zombies on the individual and surrounding social influences rather than an overwhelming force that threatens Western normativity.

Fabio Parasecoli (2008) explores the role of food in popular culture through various lenses, including the relationship of food to the perception of body image. Liv resents her new dietary needs and thus the body that requires them, choosing to consume rarely and in secret. Parasecoli writes: "our bodies frequently bother us, to the point where we end up perceiving them as some external burden imposed on our real self, that inner self that does not succeed in shining through the obtrusive flesh" (p. 13). Liv appeals to this relationship with food in that she perceives herself as separate from the dietary needs of her body — only eating as a necessity

rather than eating as a social, normative process. However, in later episodes her attitude shifts and Liv is shown engaging with more regular social norms around food consumption.

The first meal we see Liv consume is instant ramen with added shrimp-sized pieces of brain. Soon we see her prepare tacos, pizza, salad, smoothies and pasta, each with a healthy dose of hot sauce; for each new brain, a new dish is prepared. Liv used to eat her meals in secret, but once her zombieness is made visible to Ravi, she eats with him. It isn't until her zombieness is revealed that Liv conforms to normative behaviour with her food, but she is no less successful at passing for human when it comes to those not in the know. A traditional zombie body could not prepare a meal, nor would it sit down and enjoy lunch with a coworker. As a result, when Babineaux finds Liv's lunch in the cafeteria, he assumes she has added shrimp to her pizza. He has no reason to suspect brains or the zombie that consumes them.

As Liv develops a social relationship with the brains she needs to eat, her success at passing for human is elevated. Not only is she able to pass by staving off the all-consuming hunger that defines her zombieness, she is able to pass by engaging in a series of social norms regarding food consumption. She takes pleasure in preparing her food and engages with regular meal times. Although consuming brains or human flesh is inherently connected to zombie behaviour, Liv masks her dietary needs as normal human behaviour.

As Liv consumes the brains of murder victims, she uses the visions to reinforce her employment performance, but the brains also grant her elements of the deceased's personality. Through Liv's adoption of different personality traits in each episode, she performs a different identity. In the pilot Liv consumes the brain of a kleptomaniac and begins to pocket small red items. She also discovers the ability to speak Romanian. In a later episode she consumes the

brain of a sociopath and loses the ability to feel empathy for her actions. In another, she eats the brain of a peppy teenager, before eating the brain of the teenager's pothead boyfriend. These all cause Liv to take on different qualities of these identities; she changes her way of dress, her demeanour, and the register of her voice with each new brain. Liv's adoption of different identities and the ease with which she moves between them points to the inauthenticity of public identity performance. As viewers, we know Liv is performing when she exhibits the tactical awareness and marksmanship of a decorated war hero, but those around her take this performance for truth. Even Liv's best friend, who clings to the elements of Liv's pre-zombie identity, reads the dramatic shift from energized exercise partner to lazy burnout, from one brain to the next, as simply a change of mood. Only Liv, Ravi and the viewers know that Liv's different performances are symptomatic of her brain consumption as a result of her zombieness — the secret identity she strives to keep hidden.

The superficiality of Liv's performances while experiencing the personality of different brains speaks to a tension regarding the normative bodily ideal. She emulates various human identities though at no point does she alter her physical form, she is always a zombie. Shildrick (1999) explains the normative construction of an ideal body as something that individuals strive for, but may never achieve. An individual is expected to conform to an ideal body type in order to be understood as a person and anything "resistant to this is swiftly rejected" (p. 84). Thus as social beings we engage in a series of performances so that our bodies appear within this sphere of normality. These performances may change depending on the social situation, but they are all measures to hide the true identity. In the case of zombies, bodies cannot conform to the

expectations of a normal body and thus may never be fully considered normal. The zombie body reflects the social body which does not and cannot conform to the expectation of a normal body.

3.2: Not Human: Tensions of Personhood and the Self

Kieran is plagued by nightmares of the last person he killed in his untreated state. He wakes from a flashback in his room to find Jem, his sister, hovering over him.

Jem: What are you? Are you a demon? A monster sent from hell?

Kieran: I don't know. ("Episode 1", 2013).

This scene articulates a tension I explore in this section in which zombies must navigate their own internal struggles of identity while justifying themselves to those around them. There is low, morning light coming through the curtained windows giving Jem an ominous, threatening appearance. They speak in hushed tones, amplifying the intimacy of the scene. Jem is not concerned with Kieran's internal struggle or the external, social and governmental factors that grant him personhood; she is only concerned with his answer in the moment. She asks *what* he is, as though his biological status as a human being is the main factor in determining whether or not she recognizes him as her brother. In this scene, Jem articulates a divide between physical humanness, and personhood or the self in which only one's status as human counts toward their accepted identity. Once an individual ceases to possess these human properties, their status as a person is questioned or removed entirely, spurring questions of "what" rather than "who".

McCall (1990) takes up this distinction and the nuances of meaning between "human being" "person" and "self," arguing that, because the term "person" is commonly used but underdefined, it becomes problematic with questions of identity (p. 1). She breaks down philosophical

approaches to these terms, arguing that “human being” pertains to the biological characteristics of an individual, “the self” pertains to the experiential nature and is constructed internally, and “personhood” is constructed by what is thought of an individual in the public domain (pp. 12-15). Personhood is thus socially granted to an individual and can be taken away. Normalized zombies may not be human beings, but they traffic within tensions of personhood and selfhood that question “who” they are, rather than simply “what.”

In both *In the Flesh* and *iZombie*, Kieran and Liv reflect on their place in society and their reason for returning from the dead. They struggle with the moral culpability of their zombie actions and they make internal and external claims for their personhood. In this way, they work through a tension of understanding themselves as both zombies and persons. Initially Liv ties her personhood to her biological form. She resents her zombie status and laments what she has lost since becoming a zombie. In contrast, Kieran who chose to end his human life does not wish to return to it, but also resents his current zombie form. Both zombies understand personhood and their identity as related to status as human beings. In a society that favours humanness, neither Kieran nor Liv know what to make of themselves when they don't abide by the laws of human biology, or where they stand in relation to those around them.

Liv's struggle for personal identity is experienced internally with her coming to terms with her zombie form before being able to move beyond the shadow of her previous self. Immediately after becoming a zombie Liv takes steps to alter her public identity through a change in employment, but she still understands herself as lacking personal identity because of her zombie form. She asks herself who she is, and what purpose she serves as though both of these things were tied to her status as a human (“Pilot”, 2015). While eating brains on wheat

crackers with hot sauce she reflects, “I am only one thing. I’m a stomach — hunger incarnate. When I’m hungry, I forget my lunch used to be a person. When the hunger’s bad, I forget I used to be one too” (“The Exterminator”, 2015). Liv does not consider herself a person but rather a body with a singular function. She does not entertain the possibility of zombieness as person, but reduces her personal identity to her hunger for brains. It is not until she is confronted with a non-conscious, voracious, and violent zombie that she realizes the opportunity for a zombie to be granted personhood. Immediately when faced with the zombie, she depersonalizes it and her reaction reflects that of the common cultural reaction to traditional outbreak zombies.

Liv: We have to kill it.

Ravi: Her. She’s a person.

Liv: She’s a timebomb.

Ravi: You are talking about *killing* somebody. (“The Exterminator”, 2015).

In this scene Liv has consumed Marvin’s brain, a murdered sociopath, and taken on his personality traits. The personality shift functions as a lens through which Liv can grapple with her internal struggles. Without the ability to feel, she sees the zombie as nothing more than an outbreak risk reflecting the common understanding of zombies. Despite recognizing the zombie as Marcie, a woman she previously worked with, Liv does not see her as a person so much as an object to destroy. Furthermore, Liv sees herself reflected in the zombie, or what she could become should she stop eating the brains that keep her functional. When confronted with her potential self, she immediately rejects it and throws a rock at it, showing no empathy for the zombie. Because the zombie is simply a body without consciousness in this scene, Liv’s rejection of it speaks to her rejection of the physical zombie form and with it, the rejection of her body and herself. Ravi, Liv’s faithful human ally, grants the zombie a level of personhood and recognizes

the moral implications of killing a non-human person, whereas Liv refuses to acknowledge it as a person or human being. Liv must overcome the sociopathic brain and the voracious zombie to overcome her body-centric perspective of identity. Once she does this, she is able to process the weight of her actions and comes to understand herself as a moral self above simply “hunger incarnate”.

In a closing monologue of self reflection Liv discusses the feeling of being a monster and killing another individual. She gestures toward a divide between zombie and monster that furthers the development of the zombie as identity.

Liv: I've been a zombie for months, but I never felt like a monster until I ate Marvin ... Marcie was real. She was alive. She was a person and I killed her ... That's the thing about pain. Really feeling it doesn't make it stop, it just shows you you're still alive. (“The Exterminator”, 2015)

Liv separates her zombieness from monstrosity and determines that human sociopathic qualities and the inability to show compassion for others are more monstrous and problematic than simply being a zombie. She realizes she doesn't feel like a monster, despite her zombieness, marking the realization of herself as a person, and yet not a human being. For McCall (1990) this distinction comes at the ability to reflect and recognize the self within (p. 14). Though Liv engages in reflective monologues each episode, suggesting an already present sense of self, her confrontation of the physical zombie body and her ability to overcome it in the third episode points to the separation of physical form from personal identity. Liv comes to understand herself, her feelings and her role in society as non-reliant on her biological classification as human.

Liv's monologue also blurs the lines between feeling/selfhood, and living/personhood. In reconsidering Marcie (the zombie she killed in the previous scene) as alive and a person Liv no

longer views “human being” as the defining characteristic of personhood. Despite a long tradition of zombies considered dead and reanimated beings, this reconstruction of the zombie as not only a person, but a living person supports the argument that an individual’s physicality is not tied to their personhood. McCall’s work suggests a widespread assumption of the need for an entity to follow biological laws of humans including growth, change and age (p. 15) to be perceived as a person. This suggests once an individual dies, it no longer has personhood, and therefore the reanimated zombie, that breaks human biological laws of life and death, is certainly not a person. However, Liv in the monologue considers both herself and Marcie as zombies *and* alive/persons. This suggests other factors contribute to their aliveness including feelings, morality, and self-reflection. For Liv, the capacity to feel emotional pain reminds her she is alive. It is an important development from her earlier stance toward life in which she claims she is only “pretending” to be alive. Liv comes to understand herself as a living person because of her emotions and lived experiences rather than her physicality. Ravi never questions Liv’s personhood when he discovers her zombieness, and is quick to grant that same personhood to Marcie, despite her lack of human consciousness. However, Liv still questions her personhood and only comes to terms with her self after granting Marcie personhood.

The challenge for Liv in developing her sense of self and her public perception of personhood occurs at the intimate level when her best friend, Peyton, discovers her zombieness. An attacker breaks into their shared apartment and tries to kill Liv after knocking Peyton

unconscious. Liv transforms into “full-on zombie mode”⁹ and stabs the attacker (also a zombie) in the head. Peyton wakes to see this and is horrified at Liv’s monstrous body.

Peyton: What are you?

Liv: I’m —

Peyton: You’re barely bleeding. How are you not dead?

Liv: I’m not going to hurt you. I would never hurt you.

[Peyton backs away from Liv, crying]

Peyton: You killed him. You stabbed him through the head. And your eyes, what happened to your eyes?

Liv: I’m just going to tell you. I’m going to tell you and trust that you know I’m still me. (“Dead Rat, Live Rat, Brown Rat, White Rat”, 2015)

Peyton immediately understands Liv as different, as not human. She asks “what” instead of “who,” questioning her personhood, much like Jem does when she perceives Kieran. Despite Liv’s assurance that she is still the same person, Peyton only sees factors of Liv’s physicality: her eyes, her strength, her lack of cardiovascular function. Liv explains that she is a “new version” of herself and a zombie in hopes that Peyton will understand and resist normative expectations. Instead Peyton disappears, and is absent from the season finale, seemingly too scared of Liv and her new form. In relaying the encounter to Ravi, Liv reverts to her old resentment of her zombieness and disgust at eating brains. Peyton’s rejection reinforces a body-centric perspective about what is “normal” and Liv wishes to return to human form. She tells Ravi: “last night my best friend looked at me like I was a monster. Which incidentally I am. I want my life back Ravi. I eat brains. It’s disgusting. I am disgusting” (“Blaine’s World”, 2015). All progress Liv makes toward establishing a sense of self is removed along with Peyton’s denial of Liv’s personhood.

⁹ A temporary transformation that essentially gives Liv superpowers, but also makes her look more menacing, more gross, and more like a traditional zombie. I discuss this transformation further in section 3.3: Zombie and Proud: Challenging the Ideal Body (p. 84).

In contrast, Kieran's development of self and personhood in *In the Flesh* plays out in his resistance to his community and the depersonification thrust upon him by its members. This is in part because the series provides fewer opportunities for Kieran to reflect autobiographically through monologues than in *iZombie*. Instead of reflecting on his identity, Kieran must construct it through interactions and confrontations with those in his community and other treated zombies. As I discussed in the quote opening this section, Kieran's physical human identity is questioned by those around him. When he tells Jem he doesn't know what he is, she notes that her brother was never a monster, suggesting that his form relates to her ability to perceive him as her brother. In Jem's logic, if he is a monster, then he is not her brother and does not belong in the home, but he can't be her brother because her brother committed suicide a few years prior. Kieran is just as confused about his physical identity; instead of attempting to deflect her accusations by making claims for his humanness, Kieran appeals to their shared experiences and tells Jem stories from their childhood to prove himself a sibling. This appeals to McCall's (1990) definition of the self, in which "the concept of a self reflects the experiential nature of the individual" (p. 14). Kieran connects to Jem through experience and memory, something not possible of zombies in the outbreak narrative, and establishes his internal sense of self, while she grants him personhood through the acknowledgement of sibling connection.

Later when Kieran comes into contact with Rick, his best friend and ex-lover (also a zombie) there is tension regarding Kieran's public identity.

Rick: It's Ren you tar'

Phillip: He's a —

Rick: A what? ("Episode 2", 2013)

Kieran is segregated to a back hall in the local legion because of his zombieness. Rick is also a zombie, but is welcomed in the community as a war hero and the community engages in ignoring his zombieness. Kieran is not granted the same invisibility for his difference. Rick sees that Kieran has been given differential treatment and is taken aback. He is not subjected to the same prejudice as Kieran and is therefore blind to the distinction between person (“It’s Ren”) and zombie (“He’s a —”). Phillip, a parish councillor, nervously tries to explain that because Kieran is a PDS sufferer, a zombie, he must be segregated. However, Rick only sees Kieran as his pre-death, pre-zombie self and therefore challenges the argument that his physical state relegates him to the legion’s PDS section. Rick’s identity is not in question in this exchange, but Kieran’s is, despite both being zombies. Kieran is not granted the same privileges as other zombies, implying that his humanness (the cause of death) is tied to how he is thought of by those around him. Rick died in combat with the military, Kieran committed suicide; Kieran’s return from the grave is treated as an affront to the laws of humanity, Rick’s is treated as a miracle. From Rick’s perspective Kieran is still the same “Ren” from before death, regardless of physical form. Being recognized as a person by someone close to him is a positive interaction for Kieran, though still problematic. Because Rick was not present for Kieran’s suicide and funeral, he doesn’t grant him personhood based on his zombieness. Instead, he calls back to memories of Kieran before death and therefore understands his personhood based on Kieran’s human form, not his zombie form. When confronted with Kieran’s zombieness, the dynamic between the two changes.

Rick and Kieran are in the forest pursuing untreated zombies with Rick’s father, Bill. The government gives a reward for the safe capture and delivery of untreated zombies to rehabilitation facilities, but Bill would rather see them all killed. He urges Rick to shoot the

zombies, while Kieran pleads for them to be saved. The scene's tension builds as Kieran and Bill's claims blend together with a cacophonous score. Rick takes aim at the zombies, and Kieran reacts by stepping in front of the gun's barrel. Bill's arguments can still be heard in the background, but Kieran is the focus in the scene, his zombieness winning out over Bill's and the community's prejudice. He removes his humanizing contact lenses and appeals to Rick: "They're like me. You going to shoot me as well?" ("Episode 2", 2013). In this moment Kieran reveals his zombieness to Rick and asks him to come to terms with it as part of his identity. By connecting the untreated zombies to himself, Kieran challenges Rick to remove the personhood he previously granted him. He implies that if Rick doesn't perceive untreated zombies as persons, then he can't perceive Kieran as such. After a brief standoff, Rick lowers the gun and walks away silently. In this moment Rick grants both treated zombies like Kieran (and himself, though this becomes more clear in a later scene)¹⁰ and untreated zombies a sense of personhood.

While working through tensions of personhood within his community, Kieran also attempts to understand his zombieness through a sense of self. In a group therapy session he shares the guilt is "crippling" ("Episode 1", 2013) and in discussing his emotional stance with Jem he expresses the remorse "feels awful" ("Episode 3", 2013). These moments of moral strife signal Kieran's understanding of himself as a moral being, which contributes to his construction of self. He goes on to express regret and shame over his actions.

Kieran: I'm not one of those people who thinks that what we did was alright, because it was necessary for our survival or because we were somehow part of an advanced species so killing the living doesn't count. It does count. ("Episode 3", 2013).

¹⁰ In Rick's character development this is the first time he acknowledges zombies as having the potential to be anything but "rotters." In the final episode of the season, he removes his cover-up and contact lenses, and confronts himself in the mirror before confronting his father with his zombieness.

Kieran doesn't identify with the position that zombies should be absolved of their guilt. He understands himself to be a morally responsible individual judged based on a normative moral compass. This stance he constructs in contrast to government regulations which state that the actions of PDS sufferers in their untreated state were not their fault ("Episode 1", 2013) and in contrast to a growing zombie-elitist movement.

Kieran develops a sense of self by appealing to his experience in his interactions with his sister and through the moral culpability and reflection on his actions. He is granted personhood in one-on-one interactions with his sister and with Rick, representing the intimate family circle. However in the broader community sphere, Kieran's personhood is still in question, marked by his zombieness. This is represented through Bill's approach to Kieran and zombies in the community. Having protected the town from "The Rising", Bill holds deep prejudices toward "rotters," treated or not. This extends to Kieran, but not to his son because Bill refuses to acknowledge his son's zombieness. He views Kieran as a threat, and implores Rick to kill him: "He's not a person Rick, he's an animal. Worse than an animal — they might walk and talk but rotters are evil" ("Episode 3", 2013). Bill acknowledges the consciousness and verbal capacity of zombies, but this doesn't grant them personhood in his view. This stance represents the general opinion of the social community sphere Kieran must navigate. Despite being perceived as a person at the family level, and at the public level through legal definition and government policy, Kieran's personhood is removed at the community level to the point where his life is threatened.

Kieran and Liv are granted personhood at different levels of social interaction. Liv's is, for the most part falsely based on the assumption she is still human. When Ravi discovers her

zombieness, he immediately restores her personhood and extends it to any zombies, no matter the state of consciousness. In this, Ravi takes the stance that because they *used* to be a person, they still are. When Liv's zombieness is discovered by her best friend, her personhood is taken away; Peyton understands Liv as a "what" instead of a "who" and thus Liv perceives her sense of self in accordance with this. Conversely, Kieran's family circles are the most prominent in granting him personhood, as well as the larger public, legal sphere. It is in the middle space, at the community level, that he must navigate his personhood and is denied this status on the basis of his zombieness. Kieran and Liv articulate a tension in motion between the development of a sense of self, and personhood at different levels of social interaction. Whereas before zombies were monsters and therefore never persons, now we must consider not "what" they are, but "who," and the answer to this question is intimately tied to social context.

3.3: Zombie and Proud: Challenging the Ideal Body

By reading zombies through a lens of different bodies, be they disabled, fat or otherwise marginalized in a normative society, characters like Liv and Kieran have the opportunity to subvert traditional cultural depictions of difference. Some disability studies scholars are concerned with the problematic binary between disability and "normal" bodies (Inahara, 2009; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Titchkosky, 2009). They address disability as a social construction in which disability is marked "as subordinate, rather than an essential property of bodies that supposedly have something wrong with them" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1557-1558) or contest the concept of disability in contrast to able-bodied entirely, seeking to deconstruct the binary that separates the two (Inahara, 2009). Likewise, this is a project taken up by scholars in

their approach to the construction of “fatness” in society (Hole, 2003; LeBesco, 2004; Owen, 2012, 2015). To possess a fat body is to challenge the normative bodily assumptions about space, size, and behaviour and to be free of these constraints. Owen (2015) writes: “we resent fat bodies because they appear free from the tyranny of normality” (p. 9). The potentiality to deconstruct social binaries with respect to marginalized bodies and the freedom associated with anti-normative bodies are two tensions I see playing out through zombies like Liv and Kieran.

Initially Liv resents her zombieness in *iZombie*, but begins to take agency over the differences her new body possesses. After meeting and dating Lowell, a British musician turned zombie, she becomes more comfortable with herself and her body. For the most part, Liv’s zombieness does not visually challenge the normative ideal. She is short and thin, has blonde hair, a pale, chalky complexion and dark eyeshadow around her eyes to signify her undeadness. As episodes progress the severity of her shadowed eyes lessens and her skin loses the chalky paleness in favour of a more matte finish. Her hair, which began as an uneven, greasy bob evens out and develops a shine indicative of recent trips to the salon. In these ways, Liv’s character reproduces the normative ideal, suggesting her zombieness is something quickly and easily overcome. However, there are moments where her zombieness is laid bare and embraced in ways that subvert the construction between her and humanness.

Inahara (2009) conceives of disabled bodies not as less-than “normal” bodies, but as more-than, saying the disabled body is a “multiplicity or excess which undermines this able-bodied norm” (p. 47). The disabled body is not lacking some part of the formula that makes up a “normal” body, but is rather something over and above this normative conception. The play of Liv’s name – “Liv Moore” – points to this. As viewers we are only briefly introduced to her pre-

zombie identity in the series pilot; the story of Liv Moore really begins once she becomes a zombie. Not only is she literally “living” more after death and reanimation, but because zombieness is where her story begins, it's suggested she is able to embrace more of what life has to offer as a zombie than as a human. In this, Liv’s difference is positioned as being more, or in excess of the social norm. This is played out further when her zombieness spills over with super strength, speed and combat skills.

When her survival is threatened, Liv transforms into what she refers to as “full-on zombie mode.” Her eyes dilate red, her veins show black through her skin and she emits a guttural snarl. Her zombieness is suddenly visible and her difference amplified, highlighting certain qualities of her anti-normative body. The first transformation is instinctive and involuntary; she gains super-human strength and speed after she is shot in the stomach. Only after killing her assailant does she transform back into her more socially acceptable form, though it is now apparent that her difference is always present, ready to spill forth (or be drawn upon) when threatened (or desired). After the first introduction of the “full-on zombie mode,” Liv meets Blaine and they discuss the realities of being a zombie.

Liv: I guess I call it zombie mode

Blaine: Really, aren't we already in zombie mode?

Liv: Well actually I call it full-on zombie mode.

Blaine: So is raging out at all interesting to you? (“Brother, Can You Spare a Brain?”, 2015)

Blaine asks about raging out seductively, as though he is interested in the power of his zombieness. Liv gives Blaine a sidelong look in response; she is not at all interested in entertaining the more violent qualities of her zombieness. She wishes to continue passing for human. However, soon after this interaction, Liv is accosted by a suspect in one of her cases and

instead of fleeing to a more public place, she chooses to handle the situation in private, transforming deliberately into “full-on zombie mode” and breaking his nose. She then calmly walks away, turning back into her regular form.

The ease with which Liv transforms as she becomes more comfortable with her zombieness is reminiscent of a superhero shedding his/her secret identity in favour of their super identity to apprehend a villain. While Liv becoming more comfortable with her zombieness can be read as a positive representation of different bodies, the “full-on zombie mode” suggests a parallel with the “supercrip” — the inspirational and unrealistic media representation of disability. This connection between superhero identities and disabled bodies is explored in Jose Alaniz’s (2014) exploration of death and disability in superhero comics throughout the 20th century. Drawing on Joseph Shapiro, Alaniz defines the stereotype of the supercrip as the inspirational disabled person who when depicted in the media is “deeply moving to most nondisabled Americans and widely regarded as oppressive by most disabled ones” (2014, p. 31).¹¹ Alaniz argues that super powers, especially those that make certain disabilities invisible, can be read as an overcompensation for perceived difference or lack and that superheroes represent the supercrip stereotype in this way, thus circumventing normality through their transformation. “In going from one extreme of marginality to the other, what the supercrip leaps over is not tall buildings but ‘normality’ which lies presumably somewhere in the middle, as inaccessible as ever” (pp. 32-33). Liv, when she transforms into “full-on zombie mode,” develops heightened abilities that make her difference more visible and also more impressive.

¹¹ Australian comedian and disability rights activist Stella Young (2014) describes this as “inspiration porn” in which the able-bodied society views individuals living with disabilities as objects of inspiration rather than as people.

She overcomes her assailants in a display of super strength, speed, or combat skills, making her zombieness an inspirational story of accomplishment in the face of adversity. While embracing her zombieness in this way can be seen as challenging the normative ideal – one that Alaniz points out is perpetually inaccessible – when I read Liv’s “full-on zombie mode” as paralleling the supercrip stereotype, it becomes an overcompensation for her everyday lived experience and the daily lived experiences of individuals with marginalized bodies.

Liv’s strongest embrace of zombie identity comes when she meets Lowell. He instantly identifies her as a zombie based on the physical qualities they share (“pale skin, obsessively trimmed nails”) and is subsequently drawn to her (“Flight of the Living Dead”, 2015). They begin dating and Liv is reintroduced to social interaction she believed to be a thing of her human past. In one scene the camera frames Liv from the shoulders up lying naked on a bed. Her eyes are closed and she moans pleurably as sensual music plays in the background. The camera pans down to reveal Lowell giving her a foot massage and Liv continuing to emit sexually satisfied noises. In a voiceover monologue she explains: “I’d forgotten what it was like to be touched. This foot rub dessert is tasty, the main course was...” (“Dead Air”, 2015). The monologue cuts off as Liv appears to climax and the scene ends. The highly sexualized scene presents Liv as a romantic and sexual being. Previously, Liv was able to express her sexuality when a particularly sexually charged brain altered her behaviour, but on her own Liv was denied this opportunity. She ends her engagement when she becomes a zombie, implying that a zombie body is not permitted to be a sexual one. However, with Lowell she is able to fully realize her zombie identity and develop a healthy social and sexual relationship. This supports a deconstruction of norm-centric society in which different bodies are perceived as deviant to

normative sexuality. Most often they are depicted as sexually dangerous, asexual or “sexually incapacitated, either physically or emotionally” (LeBesco, 2006, p. 45), but Liv’s experience suggests a more positive opportunity for different bodies, one where they may enjoy sex.

LeBesco argues for the potential of individuals to challenge normative expectations about fat bodies, though in her study finds little mainstream media redefining sex and beauty as anything but thin and “normal.” She finds more examples of the redefined fat body in alternative media, noting there is still a gap in overall positive representation. Referencing one example of a book of nude portraits she explains how it “fosters positive valuation of fat women’s sexuality by allowing beauty and fat to exist in the same package” (p. 47). I read Liv’s zombieness as articulating a parallel to representations of the fat body and the rediscovery of sexuality. Her relationship with Lowell signals that Liv’s development of zombieness and beauty, or in this case zombieness and sexual attractiveness, can exist in the same package. As well, in reading Liv as paralleling fat, or disabled bodies, I argue her relationship with Lowell represents a challenge to the undesirable non-normative body.¹²

Her monologue continues in the next scene while she commutes. A radio broadcast is heard in the background describing a hamburger as a “juicy, mouthwatering thick slab of beef” and Liv thinks about the human things she no longer has access to as a zombie.

Liv: Life, or whatever we zombies agree to call the daily grind, means being bombarded with almost constant reminders of the things we can no longer enjoy.

[Radio talks about melting cheese]

Liv: Cheeseburgers.

[She switches the radio to a blood donor advertisement]

¹² There is also existing scholarship on the relationship between disability and sexuality such as studies by George Taleporos and Marita P. McCabe (2001), Russell Shuttleworth (2007), Sarah L. Shulz (2009), and Shildrick (2007).

A rosy complexion.

[Switches again, this time a life insurance advertisement plays]

Progeny.

[A bus drives by with the words “Great.Morning.Sex” on the side, advertising for call in radio show]

Sex on the other hand

[The scene flashes back to the previous sex scene]

That’s back on the menu for this zombie. (“Dead Air”, 2015)

The fragmentation of this scene highlights the influence of social, cultural factors affecting an individual’s perception of his/herself. Owen (2012) observes in her study of living with a fat body that “from the moment a fat person awakens in the morning, s/he is reminded of living fatly in a thin-centric world” (p. 294). This speaks to everything from the construction of shower stalls and doorways to bus seats and weight limits on exercise machines. Owen explains fat individuals are constantly reminded of their fatness through the social and cultural constructions around them. Liv parallels representations of the individual living with a fat body in this scene through the radio reminders of humanness. As the non-human media consumer in a human environment, Liv is reminded of the things she cannot access as a zombie; she is reminded that the world was constructed for the normative human body with little room for deviation beyond this. Liv switches the radio repeatedly, but is constantly reminded of the human world she does not have access to. Her commentary acknowledges the norm-centric society in which she exists, and is required to navigate. However, when it comes to sex she challenges the normative expectations about sex and different bodies — she realizes herself as a sexual being.

That being said, by the end of the season Liv is desperate for a cure for her zombieness. The language of a cure reinforced by both Liv and Ravi throughout the series produces a tension when read through the lens of different bodies as it suggests difference is curable and undercuts

Liv's development of a positive zombie identity. While Liv has the potential to challenge the normative body expectations by owning her zombieness, she sadly reverts back to a perception of herself as "disgusting" and incomplete. The series highlights tensions of normative body expectations that Liv believes she must live up to. It makes visible the complicated and perpetual identity management for non-normative individuals in society.

In contrast, Kieran and *In the Flesh* produce a more hopeful, positive representation of difference as he develops his identity. In the season finale of *iZombie* Liv reverts back to resenting her zombieness, whereas Kieran fully embraces and finally overcomes the oppression of his community represented through Bill. At first, Kieran is ashamed of his zombieness and controlled by guilt over his prior actions. He tells the doctors at the zombie treatment centre he doesn't feel ready to return home. He leaves his contact lenses in and wears makeup consistently, keeping the mirror in his room shrouded. His growth in constructing a positive anti-normative identity begins first through exposure to alternative ways of understanding zombieness. Before leaving the treatment centre, Kieran's roommate tells him of the growing underground zombie movement led by the Undead Prophet. The implication from the Prophet is that zombies should be free to live outside the regulation of the human social order and he speaks of creating a community around this notion. This is Kieran's first encounter with the possibility of developing relationships with like individuals instead of resigning himself to a life of zombie isolation. Initially he rejects the possibility but as the episodes progress, Kieran is shown searching the Undead Prophet online and considering some of his teachings. I link this to Garland-Thomson's (2005) project for feminist disability studies in which the theoretical lens "uncovers communities and identities that the bodies we consider disabled have produced" (p. 1557). Only because

zombies are marginalized in the *In the Flesh* universe could a community like that of the Undead Prophet's followers manifest. Only because zombies are reintegrated into society and granted legal personhood are characters like Kieran able to construct a viable identity, albeit a marginalized and devalued one. The narrative portrays the production of community around marginalized identities as an ongoing political struggle and as never easy.

Once out of the treatment centre, Kieran is separated from individuals like himself such that any opportunity at creating a community around their shared identities is removed. However, when he meets Amy he is presented with the opportunity to create social connections with other like individuals. During Amy and Kieran's excursion to the carnival, they discuss the differences of humans from zombies.

Amy: What is every living person afraid of?

Kieran: Us?

Amy: Death, the big sleep. Deep down fearing the reaper is the reason why everyone's so messed up in their heads. They know the end is nigh but there's nothing they can do about it so it drives them nuts and they live their lives with one eye on the clock. We don't have to do that. We can smash the clock to pieces and that is an incredible blessing. ("Episode 2", 2013)

Amy is confident in her own body and not afraid to be seen as a zombie by the public. In this exchange with Kieran, she isolates human fear as being tied to fragility of life and the finality of death. Where humans must abide by certain biological laws, zombies are exempt. Their bodies do not age, or die, they are not afflicted by disease or physical pain. Instead of viewing this as an abomination to the expectations of human existence, Amy suggests it is a gift. Amy reflects a positive perspective toward non-normative bodies through her approach to zombieness. She doesn't see her physical form as hindering her lived experiences, but rather as an enhancement.

Freedom from the normative expectations allows Amy to more fully appreciate the second chance she was granted and the body she possesses.

Kieran's growth toward fully embracing his zombie identity is propelled forward after he is reunited with Rick. Navigating the line between his pre-zombie identity and his present one, Kieran comes to realize that hiding his true identity from those around him is detrimental to his health. Desperate to avoid repeating the same suicidal fate he experienced as a human, Kieran begins to see value in his second chance at life. When he and Rick are alone, he encourages Rick to stand up to his father saying, "you don't have to do everything he tells you — not anymore" ("Episode 2", 2013). Where once their relationship was rejected by Rick's father, Kieran sees their shared zombieness as freedom from his expectations. This implies Kieran believes in a gained power in his zombieness that was not previously present as a human.

The season culminates in Bill rejecting his son entirely, stabbing him in the head and leaving his body for Kieran to find. He determines that the Rick that came back from war is not his son, but an imposter and a threat. This occurs only after Rick confronts his own zombieness in the mirror and asks Bill to accept him as he is. Upon finding Rick dead on his front porch, Kieran confronts Bill. The argument traffics in two conversations that were a long time coming between Bill and Kieran. While Kieran yells about Bill's misplaced prejudice toward zombies and his ignorance of his son's own identity, it becomes clear that he is also finally venting about Bill's homophobia and resentment toward his son's affection for Kieran. The first time Rick dies Kieran collapses within himself and commits suicide; he never verbalizes his feelings about Rick. This time he confronts the prejudice that kept them apart. Kieran blames Bill for both of Rick's deaths, and through embracing his zombieness, also takes active control over the

situation. He repeats Amy's earlier words and calls the zombieness a "second life, a gift" ("Episode 3", 2013). No longer is Kieran ashamed of his zombie identity, but rather sees it for the positive opportunities it presents and the freedom from normative social expectations.

In the final scene of the first season, Kieran is shown standing above a grave, with the camera shooting from inside looking up at him, as dirt is shovelled on to the coffin. It is clear Kieran is burying his past and embracing his "second life." He is burying Rick and the crippling depression that resulted after Rick's first death. He is burying Bill (who is killed by an angry townsman after Kieran confronts him) and the oppressive prejudice of the community sphere that prevented him from existing as a zombie outside the safety of his home. Lastly, in the finality of this scene Kieran is confronting the guilt over his actions as an untreated zombie. By closing on a grave, the site of his initial rising, and showing Kieran as above the grave surrounded by blue sky the scene juxtaposes his flashbacks of clawing his way out the grave in the middle of the night, hungry for brains. In the final moments of *In the Flesh's* first season, Kieran stands as a positive representation of an anti-normative person, prepared to embrace his difference and develop a productive identity not contingent on the limiting construction of "normal."

Through connections with other like individuals Kieran and Liv develop a sense of identity that embraces their zombieness. They challenge the construction of "normal" as a superior state by highlighting their abilities and expressing their reanimation as a "gift". However, Liv's positive representation of difference is undercut by the language of a cure running throughout the season that becomes her main, desperate desire by the season finale. The series presents us with Liv's dilemma in such a way that we are sad Kieran, on the other hand,

fully symbolically overcomes the oppression levelled against his zombieness, confronting Bill for both of Rick's deaths. He comes to understand his zombieness as a blessing and presents a positive opportunity for anti-normative bodies that don't subscribe to the binary that places difference as less-than normal.

3.4: The Normalized Zombie and What it Means to be Human

Kieran and Liv begin life in these series as zombies navigating a world that hates them. Their understanding of self is based on a normative construction that says they do not belong among humans. They take steps to conceal their zombieness either for the ease and comfort of those around them or for their own safety. In reading Liv and Kieran through a lens of non-normative bodies they make visible tensions of daily life for non-normative individuals. Their experiences gesture toward self management, in both body and identity, as perpetually in motion, ever-changing in the social context, and precariously reliant on those around them. For as much as Liv develops her sense of self, it is undone in a single interaction with her best friend. Zombieness exists in contrast and in tandem with humanness in these series as a parallel to tensions of living non-normative in a normative environment.

However, it is this very tension between zombieness and humanness that suggests they might be more human than society gives them credit for. Liv and Kieran spend the majority of their time questioning what it means to be human. Kieran reflects on his actions and considers what it means to be a morally culpable individual. He feels the need to make amends for his actions in his untreated state before he can move forward with his life. Liv spends each episode contemplating an element of humanness and her relationship to it. She reflects on the difference

between being a “monster” because society says so and acting monstrous toward other humans, settling on the fact that being a zombie does not equate being monstrous. They spend more time contemplating humanity and humanness than the non-zombie public responsible for granting (or withholding) their status as persons.

Chapter 4: Same Yet Still Different: Zombies as Normalized Monsters

When discussing this project with friends and colleagues, the most common question they ask is if the zombie is just the latest in a long line of monsters to go from terrifying to culturally oversaturated and critically spent. People listen to my spiel about normalization and our waning fear of the horde, and when I pause to catch my breath, they blink and say, “so like what *Twilight* did to the vampire?” While yes, zombies are monsters that have risen and fallen in popularity over time, and many assume their current popularity and total media proliferation is short lived, and while yes the normalized zombie has in many respects been “de-fanged” as the vampire is widely considered to be now, the zombie and the vampire remain distant cousins when it comes to their representation and role in society.

I see the vampire as traditionally representing seduction, longevity, and high-class culture. They live in sprawling mansions with wealth collected over years of existence. They have deep memory, the result of living for centuries, or having it passed down through generations. They are conscious. In general, the vampire does not appear in reflection and is therefore never confronted with the image of him/her/itself. The vampire’s construction and understanding of self is not involved with reflecting on its visual difference. It doesn’t walk down a crowded street and catch a glimpse of itself in a store window, its difference on display and starkly contrasted with those around it. Whereas the zombie’s difference is visible, and reflective. He/she/it is consistently confronted with its difference; Kieran hides from his reflection, only looking into a mirror when applying cover-up, ashamed of the visual image of his difference. The zombie differs from the vampire in that it cannot hide from its difference. Its body is a constant visual reminder that it doesn’t fit.

A vampire's power to hunt and feed off the living lies in their sexual magnetism; mere mortals are drawn to the epitome of beauty, unable to resist. Vampires don't have to worry about appearing human the same way a zombie does. They don't have to worry about adhering to a normative bodily ideal, because they are the ideal. They represent the unachievable standard of beauty within society, and are frozen as such through their immortality. The vampire has always been one part scary and one part sexy — it traffics in that blurry space between terror and seduction that draws so many couples to horror movies for date night. It wasn't such a far jump then to go from scary-sexy, blood-thirsty killers to the scary-sexy, blood-abstaining teenagers of *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005). The romance is written into the space between an exposed vein and a kiss. This isn't to say vampires don't have their own host of tensions to navigate in society, but their limitations are not the zombie's limitations. The zombie's movement toward non-scary is less inevitable, less a product of its mythos and the very genre in which it is located.

In general, outbreak zombies' wounds do not heal: cuts, breaks, and dismemberments remain as they decay. The zombie body only gets more gross, and further from the human body as time goes on. Zombies are unable to contain their bodies, often drooling, dripping, or dragging various bodily elements as they shamle mindlessly toward their next meal. However, as the zombie body is normalized, it is contained. While the zombie becomes a manageable threat, so does the zombie body become a manageable (and managed) body — though this is imperfect and fleeting. The zombie makes tension visible: tension of life and death, of “normal” and abnormal, of human and not. These tensions remind us that conversations of the body, of identity and of personhood are complicated, bumpy, and always in motion.

In S.G. Browne's novel *Breathers: A Zombie's Lament* (2009) zombies are devalued individuals in society with strict regulations designed to disrupt the living humans (breathers) as little as possible. They are granted minimal rights, and even less protections from harm causing many of them to prefer isolation over public spaces. Andy, the novel's main protagonist, laments his lack of humanness and thus personhood in the eyes of society, wondering why the divide between living/human/normal and undead/zombie/different is so firmly entrenched.

I don't really understand it. I mean, it's not like we're any different than we were before we died. We crave security, companionship, and love. We laugh and cry and feel emotional pain. We enjoy listening to Top 40 music and watching reality television. Sure, there's the whole eating-of-human-flesh stigma, but that's so George Romero. Outside of Hollywood, the undead typically don't eat the living (Browne, 2009, p. 37).

Andy tells us zombies are "no different" than before they died, when they would have been granted personhood simply by default of being human. He makes claims for the same emotional connections sought by humans including "security, companionship, and love" and I would add a sense of community to this list as Andy slowly realizes the individuals he attends Undead Anonymous meetings with aren't just fellow zombies, but his friends. Andy even expresses an appreciation for the same mundane leisure activities enjoyed by humans, appealing to social norms with regard to entertainment. *Top 40* music and reality TV may not be enjoyed by all, but their consumption is certainly normative in contemporary society and according to Andy, zombies are no exception. Andy is aware of his cultural origins realizing that the stereotypes he deals with on a daily basis are the result of harmful media representations of zombies as voracious, mindless, "Hollywood" creations. He reframes the discussion of zombies as threats to human life to one of stigma, where zombie oppression can be read as systemic cultural mistreatment of a devalued group. In one short moment slipped into a chapter that otherwise only

exists in the *Breathers* universe, Andy marries the two halves of my project. He nods to the normality of zombies existing in society and the general perception of them as horrific, gross, and apocalyptic. He reframes them as domestic, mundane, appreciative of humour, and self-aware. And he does all this against the backdrop of being devalued in society, as different from humans, despite similarities, all because he defied the laws of human biology and rose from the dead.

Andy's lament can only exist because the zombie is undergoing a cultural shift from non-conscious, flesh-hungry, generic horde member to a sentient, self-controlled being, reflective of its place in society. As I discuss throughout this project, this is the fully realized normalized zombie we are increasingly producing across zombie media. The figure of the zombie is in motion, it is transitioning and being leveraged in new, untapped markets. Its cultural capital is elevated and its legitimacy is traded across academic disciplines, and public health and crisis organizations. When it comes to zombies, because we have been conditioned to believe we can beat them, we feel we must. Zombieness becomes something to eradicate or, more recently, something to fix — to make “normal.” However, once the story is told from the zombie's point of view and their lived experiences are made relatable, the language of overcoming a zombie threat is problematic. Language of developing cures, fixing zombieness and returning a zombie body to its once human form parallels criticisms of normative approaches to social difference. Any and all deviations from the ideal body are generalized as non-normative and thus open for debate regarding permissible visibility, and social, political, and legal status as persons. Social pressures indicate that if these bodies do not conform to “normality” they are lacking. This is the

way I've chosen to interpret the contemporary, normalized zombie, though it is not necessarily the only way.

Within the two series I discuss, Kieran's homosexuality and suicide provide room for conversations regarding mental health and sexuality. Liv's zombieness, and her transformation into "full-on zombie mode" bring up questions about the monstrous female form in contemporary media. The Undead Liberation Army, an extremist pro-zombie group that figures prominently in the second season of *In The Flesh* signals a tension between reclaiming rights and earning respect for devalued individuals and reproducing the same marginalizing binary between two groups. Looking more broadly, we increasingly produce normalized zombies that ask questions about their existence, goals for their second-lives, and struggles navigating a society that tells them they don't belong. The zombie media we are producing don't fit within the existing discussions of horde-based, fear-inducing, outbreak zombies, so there is a growing need to bring these two together in discussion.

We're past the point where zombies are monsters we seek to destroy; these are not the zombies we reproduce and engage with. Zombie scholars have been expecting the end of the zombie's popularity for years, or clamouring for suggestions on ways to retain its relevance as metaphorical representation of social fears and anxieties. However, if zombie media is any indication, the zombie isn't losing relevance; its relevance is changing. It is a different zombie we hand to kids on mobile gaming platforms so they can shoot it with peas and cabbages; it is a different zombie who fights for his/her/its rights as a legitimate person in society. With this project I suggest not an end, but a starting point from which to explore normalized zombies as

they exist in contemporary zombie media and how popular culture metaphors more generally can assist us as we grapple with problems of social exclusion and cultural norms.

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