
[8]Oral presentation

[8-17]A mother's rage: Horror tropes and the sociology of gendered mental health in *The Babadook*

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Female horror film protagonists are often confined to misogynistically stereotypical categories, such as Paula Quigley's "mother-as-victim" and "mother-as-monster" tropes. I propose to use a psychosocial framework to consider how Jennifer Kent's 2014 Australian horror film, *The Babadook*, functions as an avant-garde challenge to these clichés and to the mental health establishment. I argue that the film's main character, Amelia, follows a polarized trajectory from feminine depression to masculine antisocial personality disorder, eventually embodying characteristics of both genders in order to save herself and her son. I will support this assertion by considering how the horror genre affords the film's social potency; it uses violence to shock the reader and transmit controversial, politically progressive messages in a fantastically-inflected, accessible popular genre. It does so not to condone the brutality that the film portrays, but to call for action on the part of mental health professionals. By both highlighting and subverting the false dichotomy formed by traditional gendered conceptions of mental health, *The Babadook* questions the typical treatment of mental illnesses, in which diagnoses and research are often based largely on gender, and instead argues that patients must be helped to express qualities linked to both genders in order to heal.