

## **Genetic Monsters:**

### **Loss of Innocence and Decision Making in *Sleepaway Camp* and *XXY***

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*Sleepaway Camp* and *XXY* are two films that represent monstrosity from a genetic point of view. In this paper, I will analyze all the sexualities presented in both movies through the queer notion, and criticize the barriers imposed by heteronormative power to our understanding of sexuality and the world, to fully understand the characters' behaviors. This frame study will be also useful to acknowledge how repressions work, and of course how two movies with diverse style of filmmaking and from different contexts and times can assimilate those supposed monstrosities according to their own rules.

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Angela (Felissa Rose) arrives to a summer camp with her cousin Richard (Jonathan Tiersten). During her camp stay she has to deal with her shyness, but also with the harassment from other teenagers, while unconventional crimes take place around them. Although we don't know until the end, Angela has a body different from the other girls; she has a different body because she was born as a boy, but due to a family trauma, her aunt, doctor Martha Thomas (Desiree Gould) forced her to dress and behave like a girl. Even though on the surface *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983) is a typical American slasher, Angela's secret tweaks the film's narrative to try to understand how a teenager can deal with a monstrous, unconventional body at a stage in which she is starting to have desires for another bodies.

Alex (Inés Efrón) is a teenager who has a type of chromosomal disorder called Klinefelter syndrome (KS), better known as XXY, which causes his body to not develop in the same way as most teenagers. Among other differences, Alex has both the male and female sexual organs slightly developed, because of that extra X chromosome. This is not always understood by the people around him, and he has already had several problems to face because of his condition. Argentinian drama *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007) revolves on the idea that what is different is monstrous, for the simple fact that it is unlike most people, a deviation from the norm. In this sense, each person around Alex has a particular vision on him, and even he calls himself a *monster*.

Both *Sleepaway Camp* and *XXY* represent monstrosity from a genetic point of view. Their main characters have bodies that do not match with their looks – those bodies are traversed by cultural stereotypes of each society. In both movies, teenagers aren't understood as they would like to, and although they bond with some people, they find too difficult to socialize with the rest of them. Both movies can also be seen as a crude

portrayal about sexual initiation and conflicts with sexual orientation in early teenage years, for which monstrosity could function as a defense mechanism or an escape way, depending on each individual. In this chapter I would like to demonstrate how both films show monstrosity as a condition of being different that teenagers assume and reaffirm, and how, through this reaffirmation, an unavoidable confrontation with the others occurs; because «space, or place, with the latter intimating a more focused area of interaction, is vital not just in relation to the form of the monster, but also to the levels of disturbance it creates»<sup>1</sup>. I would like to suggest that the decisions that these *monsters* make, depend to a large extent on the environments to which they are subjected, and also that their subsequent actions are a consequence of that context.

To reach my goal, I will analyze the sexualities presented in both movies through the queer notion, which evokes «images of deconstruction and liminality»<sup>2</sup> but also questions «existing structures and binaries»<sup>3</sup> and criticize the barriers imposed by heteronormative power to our understanding of sexuality and the world, to fully understand the characters' behaviors. This frame study will be also useful to acknowledge how repressions work, and of course how two movies with diverse style of filmmaking and from different contexts and times can assimilate those supposed monstrosities according to their own rules.

## 1. Through Queerness

Queer studies came to challenge a vision of sexuality that was established in terms of binomial categories. In other words, queer studies raise a critique of «making of a culture of sexuality, a culture that creates sexual selves, that establishes sexual identities, and that sets up a sexual hierarchy around notions of sexual normality and abnormality»<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, a queer theory pretends to move away from common places, attacking the idea of heteronormativity. Then, this theory looks to «destabilize and deconstruct the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities»<sup>5</sup>. It is safe to say that queer theory attacks what has

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<sup>1</sup> S. Bacon (ed.), *Monsters: A Companion*, Peter Lang, New York 2020, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> T. Harper, N. Taylor, M. Blythe Adams (eds.), *Queerness in Play*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2018, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> S. Seidman, *Foreword*, in K. E. Lovaas, J. P. Elia, G. A. Yep (eds.), *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain*, Harrington Park Press, New York 2006, p. iii.

<sup>5</sup> K. E. Lovaas, J. P. Elia, G. A. Yep, *Shifting Ground(s): Surveying the Contested Terrain of LGBT Studies and Queer Theory*, in K. E. Lovaas, J. P. Elia, G. A. Yep, cit., p. 6.

been naturalized, and also questions other theories which fail to include all kinds of otherness, but make them invisible through a new categorization. We can distinct sex as those «biological distinctions between men and women»<sup>6</sup>, and gender as the «social, psychological, and cultural differentiations between men and women»<sup>7</sup>. Although both definitions are subject to further modification (especially sex), this mention constitutes a good starting point for the understanding of the characters that will be analyzed in this article.

Both *Sleepaway Camp* and *XXY* bear witness of the times in which they were made. The first movie reflects the uncertainties of a wave of budding theories – particularly the Second-wave Feminism, and the emergence of more focused gender studies – while the other movie is undergoing a social change that welcomes it and transforms it into an object of study; critical value given to *XXY* depends to a greater extent on the context and the time in which it was made, but we also have to take into account its narrative style, which is part of what was called “New Argentine Cinema”, which used to privilege the contemplative gaze over the fast dynamics of events, reflecting in its narratives «a series of global political, economic, and technological transformations that affected the world of labor, the public sphere, and private and intimate life»<sup>8</sup>.

So, both films are completely different, as seen through a cinematic lens. However, as I stated previously, both have a powerful topic in common, which revolves on an alternative view on genders in teenagers. Movie genre styles take different approaches for this topic, but we can compare them and try to understand how genetics envisions a sort of marked destiny in their actions – or not.

Both movies set different situations for their main characters. On the one hand, we meet Angela as a shy, withdrawn teenager, with a body that has not yet developed like other girls of her age. At times, her attitude seems strange, and the movie doesn't say a word about her personal story until the very end. Because of that, *Sleepaway camp* couldn't be seen as a case of alternative gender identity if it didn't have its famous final revelation. In that scene, Angela, just after murdering Paul (Christopher Collet) – Richard's best friend – displays herself naked on the beach in front of campus' people as

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<sup>6</sup> D. J. Canary, T. M. Emmers-Sommers, *Sex and Gender: differences in personal relationships*, The Guilford Press, New York-London 1997, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> G. Aguilar, *New Argentine Cinema. Other Worlds* (2006), transl. by S. A. Wells, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, p. 1

if she were a sideshow freak. Because of this scene, the film acquires a totally different meaning from what we may have thought previously; narration explain to us, via flashbacks that go back to Angela's childhood, how was her gender transformation and it is showed as a kind of childhood trauma.

On the other hand, narrative style of *XXY* focuses on other issues, which seem to be more important than to reveal a mystery. In Puenzo's movie, we know from the beginning that Alex has a different body than the traditional binaries standards. Instead, the centre of the story is the decision that Alex has to take: he stops taking the pills that regulate his hormonal balance, which can lead to the primacy of one of the two sexes, the male, in his body. Although he isn't too feminine, Alex is dressed like a woman, he has a long haircut, uses a little makeup and he is socially treated like a woman.

Before continuing, it is necessary to clarify an important difference between the two characters: Alex is a teen intersex, whose chromosomal variation makes it possess an alternative gender to the classic male/female pairing. There is no doubt that he belongs to a genetically given otherness. On the other side, Angela is subjected to a trauma caused by her aunt, who forced her to behave like a girl when she was, in fact, Peter, a boy whose sexual identity is always ambiguous. However, a movie like *Sleepaway camp* motivates to be «read against the grain»<sup>9</sup>, because today we can, through queer theories, reread a character that was understood in binary terms. Then, we may have a different understanding of its character's gender. Next, I will take a brief look at the spaces inhabited by these teenagers.

## **2. Spaces, Places, Landscapes**

Environment is a determining factor in pointing out which issues affect each individual. To Angela, the camp is an attractive place for several reasons: it brings her the opportunity to interact with people of her same age, and to establish emotional relationships – something quite absent in her life – even opening a door to a romantic crush. At the same time, this place exposes her as someone different, while she is subjected to the mockery of these teenagers. While she finds some allies (Richard and Paul, who she is going to date), the rest of the people are hostile to her presence, even without knowing her true

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<sup>9</sup> L. Dawson (ed.), *Queer European Cinema. Queering Cinematic Time and Space*, Routledge, London-New York 2018, p. 2.

gender. Alex lives in another ambiguous environment, since despite being supported by her parents and friends, the rest of the people who live in the town where she lives – especially teenagers- treat her like a phenomenon. In his case, people know her condition, and that this condition is an excuse for rejection.

At the beginning of *XXY*, we find out that Alex and his family have moved from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Montevideo, Uruguay, because Alex committed a violent act at school against the people who made fun of him. Between his parents Kraken (Ricardo Darín) and Suli (Valeria Bertuccelli) there is an obvious tension arising from their opinions about what decision Alex should make. Suli thinks that he must take the pills and undergo, if possible, a surgery that defines his identity once and for all. To his father the situation is not so clear, since he feels inclined to let Alex decide what he wants to do with his body. Around this conflict, the beach is a landscape that allows Alex to explore his identity: a visit from a family gives him the special occasion to see if his sexual desire can come true and if it is satisfactory or not.

The lack of information is a useful narrative tool for *Sleepaway Camp*, since as viewers we are inclined to think that Angela, although tender and innocent, is hiding something. If we think to landscapes, we must address to them several meanings. For example, a landscape is, in an aesthetic sense, a scenery, because it represents «the visual, tangible aspect of the world»<sup>10</sup>. Also, a landscape can be thought as nature, with implications of «a pure and unmodified state»<sup>11</sup>. Finally, landscape could definitely be an environment: in this way, Brian Roberts says that a landscape contains «influences surrounding people»<sup>12</sup>. In this movie, spaces are always landscapes, places made up of enclaves other than the urban one in which the natural is the predominant, and which are traversed by a certain people's gaze. In *Sleepaway Camp* action takes place in lands located on the shores of lakes and in the Woods; these spaces are suitable for living new experiences, and that is what Angela wants. In this slasher, disruptions caused by the crimes happen off-screen, so that «threatens the manifest space of the frame»<sup>13</sup>. However, what is interesting is that, despite being a horror movie, we have our object of attention always in front of us.

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<sup>10</sup> P. Atkins, I. Simmons, B. Roberts, *People, Land and Time. An Historical Introduction to the Relations Between Landscape, Culture and Environment*, Taylor & Francis, London-New York 2014, p. 8

<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, p. 9

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> F. Pascuzzi, S. Waters (eds.), *The Spaces and Places of Horror*, Vernon Press, Wilmington 2020, p. xiv.

Therefore, both movies take place in open spaces, which are useful to portraying uncertainty in their main characters. An open space stimulates a myriad of possibilities for action: thus, it is a new world for Angela, an experience she looks at with constant amazement, while to Alex, living on a beach with access to the sea gives him a place of reflection and contemplation, facing the decision that he must meditate. Next, I will take a look at the way these teenagers perceive themselves, as well as how they are shaped by the people around them.

### **3. How they see themselves?**

Both Angela and Alex face difficult situations that force them to take extraordinary decisions. At first, Angela has a hard time trying to hold a conversation with people, and she just stares at them. When she dares to talk to Paul – the only person who approaches her with good intentions – she begins to be bullied, so she decides to vent her fury against a world that does not understand her by murdering anyone who get in her way to happiness. We need to remember that Angela is Peter, and that this contained fury could be her way of expressing disappointment at the non-acceptance of her current identity. This identity is even confusing to herself, since although she is not a transgender person, it is evident that she does not really feel bad being a girl; in older reviews of this movie, it has been theorized that Angela/Peter would actually have homosexual desires, but perhaps this interpretation is affected by the already discussed bias that tends to binomiate or polarize the categories, deliberately ignoring other alternatives. In other words, these reviews did not have the necessary theoretical framework to propose an alternative about Angela's sexuality, since the use of trauma within the story, aligned with the aforementioned binomial queer theories, simplified the explanation of her identity.

Alex looks exhausted because of the pressures he receives from his mother and from people who don't seem to understand him. When Ramiro (Germán Palacios), a surgeon who specializes in operating on human bodies arrives at his house with his wife Erika (Carolina Pelleritti) and teenage son Álvaro (Martín Piroyansky), Alex seeks to attract the latter to give free rein to his carnal desires. Alex dresses like a girl – somewhat androgynous – but he perceives himself as a boy. By going off the testosterone-regulating pills, Alex shows that outside pressure has broken down his inhibitions and that he really wants to be who he feels he is.

Precisely, an important difference between Angela and Alex is the acceptance of their bodies. While Angela seems to ignore why her body is different from that of the other girls – due to the traumatic effect of having been forced by her aunt to be a girl – Alex is fully aware of his condition and his conflict revolves about who he wants to be. In fact, more than once, Alex calls himself a monster. He doesn't really believe in that assertion, but he perceives that this is the way other people see him. When the guests arrive at his house, Alex embodies himself in a monstrous figure, since instead of going out to receive them like his father does, he hides under the floor of the house – think of those wooden houses that are assembled on a prudent distance from the sandy soil to avoid moisture, flooding and other issues. From that refuge, Alex exchanges glances with Álvaro, as if he were isolated from what is happening on the surface.

From the beginning we can see Alex's environment through Álvaro's eyes: from the portraits in the family's living room that show Alex as a girl, a vision perhaps projected from the mother's desire, to the dolls labeled with his name and manipulated as objects to represent his same genetic condition, these images allow both the young guest and viewers to understand how Alex is feeling before he tells it. The first confrontation between these two teenagers takes place on the beach, and the first topic of conversation is masturbation, a subject that Alex deals with without any shame and – according to what can be read between the lines – as something they share or as a way to generate empathy (or closeness, for that matter). He even goes so far to ask Álvaro to have initiation sex, to which the boy is surprised, but doesn't say anything, provoking Alex's anger.

Álvaro is also going through a stage of indecision regarding his sexual orientation. Haunted by Ramiro's shadow, he rejects a piece of meat that Suli offers him, claiming that he is a vegetarian and that he «doesn't like to try anything new», a statement that actually stems from fear of rejection by his father, and that is premonitory in relation to what is going to happen later with Alex. His father has a dominant character and through his verbal expressions and gestures we can see that he could be a violent person. At first, Álvaro seems closed to any physical contact, but Alex's irruption into the space where he spends time alone and his willingness to be sexually initiated by him pushes the shy boy to make a decision about his own identity.

In both movies, pointing words have a devastating force, and express the emotions of the protagonists both explicitly and implicitly. Alex seeks to subvert the concept of



“weird” to designate a person, or at least to use it as a positive qualifier. Álvaro too, saying to Alex «You are not normal, you are different, and you know that», in a gesture that encompasses both Alex’s self-awareness as intersex and also because he knows he can use it to generate attraction. In *Sleepaway Camp*, Judy (Karen Fields), one of the Camp’s girls, asks: «How can Angela talk with the boys all day, and we’ve to play volleyball? What’s she... special?», and later she tells Paul that she didn’t think Angela was the kind of girl for him, hinting that she could notice that Angela is different. Also, she tells Angela about never taking a shower with the other girls: «You’re queer or something?», as an insult, adding that «You haven’t reach puberty yet», and «I bet you never had your period» as a way of stigmatizing her as monstrous for not having gone through the typical circumstances of every teen girl; here, Angela’s configuration as a monster is given by the female assumption that, although inevitably crossed by a patriarchal gaze, has a feminist air since, for them, the monstrous thing would not be the blood associated with the period and the female body, but the absence of it.

Visual imagery is another procedure used to describe the looks of these characters. While looking at Alex’s drawings in a notebook, Álvaro realizes that he needs help because he is experiencing a situation that affects him. In one of those drawings, his semi-naked body has a shirt that has the word *help* written on it: a literal reference to his state of mind. Although Álvaro does not have the same genetic condition, he is reflected in Alex’s concerns due to his latent sexual restlessness. In *Sleepaway Camp* Angela’s monstrous body is veiled from the eye of the viewer until the ending scene, and we only access her real body through metonymies, such as the substitution of the penis with phallus shaped objects. Moreover, the teens’ ways to speak of the others border on the bizarre. Judy, the bullying girl, mocks Angela’s lack of physical attributes by saying that «She’s a real carpenter’s dream: flat as a board and needs a screw!», a joke that has a bit of adolescent mockery of those girls who take longer to develop their bodies, and also alludes to the perception of something that they still cannot explain, a suspicion with no more foundation than that of not having information about.

Angela doesn’t want to be touched. At least, not in a sexual manner. She is good with kissing and taking hands with Paul, but when he wants to advance further towards sex, she gets uncomfortable. The film shows us little by little the origin of that discomfort, and it is partly related to the experience – funny, according to her memories – of seeing her

own father in bed with another man. This memory – in which we see Angela and Peter<sup>14</sup> laughing – shows the distorted vision of the children on the bodies, which they observe as if they were cartoonish. In the next section, I will observe where the monstrosity resides in the bodies according to the dominant social perspective.

#### 4. Monstruous bodies

At the beginning of *XXY*, Kraken and a colleague are performing surgery on a sea turtle. The emergence of these turtles in the movie is not accidental, since «they are not only ectodermal, but also depend on the temperature of the environment to determine their sex at birth»<sup>15</sup>; analogously, the change of environment means for Alex the possibility of choosing his own identity. The intervention on the bodies is permanently present in the movie, as is the idea of deformity or of a body different from traditional bodies. There is even a scene in which Alex and Álvaro walk through jars containing fetuses placed in formaldehyde and maldeveloped or with physical abnormalities. At this point, we need to remember that there is a «biological normativity»<sup>16</sup> which barriers any «biological indifference»<sup>17</sup>. Since «there are healthy biological norms and there are pathological norms»<sup>18</sup>, being the second «not the same as the first»<sup>19</sup>, this sequence works as a frame of reference to understand that we are entering a world in which there are other corporalities different from the ones we are used to seeing.

The body of Inés Efrón is appropriate for the role of Alex as she is thin and has tiny breasts, giving an androgyny look that can be associated with a fifteen-year-old teenager. In addition to intentionally showing that thinness to suggest the lack of breast development, the film's narrative highlights other corporalities and other not-so-traditional relationships. Alex's pet is an iguana, which he caresses completely naturally, and with genuine empathy. Besides, Alex feeds that animal image that people have of him: there is a scene in which, while Ramiro cuts cold cuts on the kitchen counter, Alex

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<sup>14</sup> In flashback scenes, Angela character was played by Colette Lee Corcoran, while Peter was played by Frank Sorrentino.

<sup>15</sup> M. Fradinger, *Corpos anfíbios: metamorfose e ectoentidade sexual em XXY (2007) de Lucía Puenzo*, in “Cuadernos de Literatura”, XX/40, 2016, p. 1 (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> G. Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), transl. by C. R. Fawcett, Zone Books, New York 1991, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

takes a container of milk from the fridge and, when taking it in a rather careless way, the milk spills on his face and body. This scene could represent the overflowing eroticism that the young man is unable to master, but on the other hand it works very well to show how Alex builds himself as monstrous in the sight of others, performing an action that perhaps goes beyond a *normal* behavior in an everyday situation. After that, Alex takes that freshly cold cuts and puts a slice in his mouth. I don't imagine this scene posed as a seduction game, but rather as a self-conscious gesture by Alex who seeks to exceed the limits of what is expected.

Ramiro has a special relationship with the physical. Being a surgeon, he enjoys the act of cutting food, and in the aforementioned scene where he cuts a piece of cold cuts in the kitchen, he smells his fingers with pleasure. Álvaro points out that his father «Doesn't slice bodies» as Alex says, but rather that he is interested in cases such as those of people with polydactyly, whom as a surgeon he helps by removing “excess” fingers. From a disturbingly conservative point of view, Ramiro would be a heavenly corrective arm that comes to correct those monstrous bodies whose configuration deviates from what is considered normal in today's society.

Kraken also has a direct relationship with the physical, dealing with marine animals. The difference between these two subjects is their take on the established order: to Ramiro, it seems that heteronormativity is the norm, but to Kraken it is more important that each subject has the possibility to decide what he wants. Alex's father's name can't be ignored, since it refers to a famous cryptid from the northern seas which, according to the descriptions available, would be a monstrous being since, if it were real, it could be some gigantic mollusk and a giant, «like the Monster, is abjected or excluded as diametrically “other” to sociocultural or physiological norms»<sup>20</sup>. So, it isn't surprising that Kraken too perceives himself as someone different from the rest, probably out of empathy with his son.

Other monstrous bodies in *XXY* are those of the turtles mutilated by the fishing nets because of getting trapped in it. Kraken treats one of them, which has lost its front limbs. This specimen – as it happens with other animals in similar conditions – will no longer be able to lead the same life as before. In the animal kingdom, a mutilation is equivalent

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<sup>20</sup> L. Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden. The Grotesque and the Gigantic in Renaissance Landscape Design*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2016, p. 133.

to losing capabilities, and with it their place in a group of members of their species. On the docks Esteban (Jean Pierre Reguerraz), one of the fishermen – Vando’s father, a boy (Luciano Nóbile) beaten by Alex because of some fight about which we don’t have any details – celebrates the fact that Kraken removes his son from the fishing area because according to him «There are too many endangered species» there; this verbal aggression obviously accounts for Alex’s sexual condition, and places him in the place of something different, something that should be kept away because it would have a monstrous connotation. Then Kraken confronts Esteban by threatening him, thereby showing that brutality can come from a *traditional* body.

In some scenes from *Sleepaway Camp*, we can see eroticized bodies. However, the sudden presence of violated, deformed or exacerbated bodies is exploited with greater insistence. The movie plays with the spectators’ point of view: when Angela takes a shower, spectators think they are spying on the body of a teenager without really knowing her. When the lifeless body of Kenny (John E. Dunn) – one of the boys who made fun of Angela – appears on the beach, he is a monstrous figure: it is not because of the pallor of the inert and frozen body, but because he has a look of horror embodied, he is surrounded by plants and a small snake comes out of his mouth. Another boy who had made fun of Angela (Billy, played by Loris Diran) is intentionally attacked with a beehive, and as a result he dies, and his face is completely covered by bees, replacing his socially-accepted attractive body with a monstrous face, covering any features of humanity in him. The face of Artie (Owen Hughes), the camp’s cook, after being pushed into the pot of boiling water is also shocking: that face became red and completely covered in blisters, while the ill-fated abuser screams in maddening pain.

Judy’s death, is the most bizarre of all. Lying on her bed, she is killed with a hair straightener, in a violent act that includes rape; this scene contains graphic violence – suggested from the shadows on the wall – since that tool becomes a phallus that penetrates her until her death. It’s a very invasive intervention in a teenage body and also hints at Angela’s possible phallic wishes, foreshadowing the later discovery. This scene has similarities with the scene in *XXY* where Alex penetrates Álvaro sexually with his penis. Angela and Alex use their genitals as a source of empowerment, show determination about who they want to be in their lives, and change the bodies and lives of other people.

When Angela finally takes off his clothes in the controversial final scene of *Sleepaway Camp*, she looks disheveled, quite a departure from her previous image as a virginal teenager. In addition to her hair, she is completely naked – with her penis exposed to anybody’s sight – bloodied, opening her mouth in joy and looking at people out of the corner of her eye in a creepy way. She has just committed her latest crime, and she still carries the knife with which she made it. All that blood spread over her virginal body, although it is not her blood, works as a fine irony with respect to the joke that was previously played on her about puberty: now, she’s got blood, she is growing, but we spectators were at the time really confused about her condition. Is she a monstrous girl? Is she a traumatized boy? Is she something else? Is she monstrous?

Both films generate, then, the feeling of being in the presence of an unfinished story. The ending of *XXY* is shrouded in uncertainty: we can’t really know what it will hold for Alex. Apparently, he has stopped taking the pills and his body will continue to develop as a male, while his female organs will tend to atrophy. He earned the respect of his parents, even though society was not yet ready for him. We can think of it as an open ending. Although we don’t know what happens from then on, Alex managed to get away with his desire because the decision is in his hands, and that was the most important goal for the whole movie.

## **5. Conclusion**

After all, it seems that having a body that is different from the norm (that is, heteronormativity) brings with it an empowerment that translates into actions on other bodies, almost always over those who seem more comfortable with heteronormativity. When a person perceives himself as a part of an otherness, being passive seems not an answer. Regardless of which paths are chosen, you have to make decisions. Sometimes, of course, those decisions do not fit with the environment that surrounds you.

Looking at other bodies is always an act traversed by cultural norms that are not natural, although they are usually naturalized. According to the movies we just analyzed, for those people whose bodies do not fit the norm, the sight of others passes through them and, instead of destroying them, helps to find an answer to the mystery of who they are. In this article we have seen how two subjects with bodies deviated from the norm see themselves, catalyze the space that surrounds them and act accordingly, thinking of

themselves as the axes of their decisions. In one case, the decision was crossed by family trauma and the lack of guidance led to collapse. In the other, despite the harassment, better accompaniment translated into a chance to live their own life in their own way.

As I said, Angela did not have the necessary support from her environment, which – added to her personal trauma – led to a criminal or destructive attitude towards all those who did not understand her. Hence, she can't be cured: she is hopeless. For Alex, thanks to the support of his family, friends and the opportunity to explore his sex, the end of *XXY* is the beginning of a path that does not necessarily imply destruction, but the strengthening of his identity. These endings are congruent with the time they were made: Angela is exposed as monstrous within the framework of a conservative American society, while Alex, already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, receives at least the benefit of the intersex debate; she is still seen as a monster, but the ending reveals hope for his future.

*Sleepaway Camp* and *XXY* are very different movies, with very different moods. Even so, the crossing of both stories can be useful to think about tough decisions to be made by a young person, especially when the environment struggles to make those decisions more difficult. While these bodies often tend to push these individuals to their limits, it is true that a more tolerant environment helps to channel that locked-up emotion and visualize a possible life path.