



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS



UNIVERSITY
FILM & VIDEO
ASSOCIATION

The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family

Author(s): PAT GILL

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (WINTER 2002), pp. 16-30

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of the [University Film & Video Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688391>

Accessed: 17/07/2012 02:24

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Illinois Press and University Film & Video Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Film and Video*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family

PAT GILL

IN 1978, *HALLOWEEN* HERALDED a new sub-genre of horror, the teen slasher film. Combining inventive violence and a clever, eerily evocative suburban mise-en-scène with engaging, believable, contemporary teen protagonists and a superhuman killer, director and co-writer John Carpenter created a new, effective type of film thriller. There were earlier films that featured teen-aged protagonists, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Carrie* (1976), some of them gorier and almost all of them more expensively made,¹ but Carpenter's camera work and narrative style distinguished *Halloween* from these predecessors. Accompanied by creepy piano music composed by Carpenter, the Steadicam roams through the small town streets, stalking the victims. Its point-of-view merges into and out of the killer's; every innocuous movement is made suspicious, every suburban commonplace menacing. The suburban haven, away from the dangers of the city, not only fails to protect its children, it has become the breeding ground of living nightmares unknown to urban landscapes.

In films following *Halloween*, suburban and small town teenagers are put in danger time and again, at home, at school, at camp, and on holiday. These films seem to mock white flight to gated communities, in particular the attempts of parents to shield their children from the dangerous influences represented by the city: wide-

PAT GILL is an associate professor in the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She has written on filth, crime, passion, nostalgia, and "male anxiety films" of the 1990s.

spread crime, easy access to drugs, unsupervised friendships. The danger is within, the films seem to say; the horror derives from the family and from the troubling ordeal of being a late-twentieth-century teenager. Several critics have noted horror films' overt relation to and covert dependence on the American family, and I rely on their excellent discussions in the argument that follows.² My focus is much narrower than the general category of horror, however, and much more punctual. I focus on teen slasher films, posit the reason for their arrival in the late 1970s, their modifications through the years, and their recent parodic incarnations.

Slasher Roots

Linked to a tradition of horror whose inception is most often located in English gothic, contemporary horror films extend and revise themes that dominated earlier horror films. Critics generally fix the beginning of English gothic in the second half of the eighteenth century, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).³ Contemporary horror plays out many of the defining characteristics of the gothic: defenseless heroines; suppressed passions; unspeakable desires; fearful landscapes and haunted, uncanny interiors; untrustworthy and suspicious relations and relationships; terrifying uncertainty and stifling knowledge; familial secrets and their dreadful exposure; and jarring juxtapositions of the moral and the monstrous, the sexual and the grotesque, the virtuous and the violent.

Mark Edmundson believes that contemporary horror films represent a degradation of the

gothic tradition. He explains that the initial wave of gothic fiction afforded a “means of insight,” a “vitalizing effect” (xiii) in its revelation, in darkened shades, of a world of layered complexity. He finds that most of today’s gothic does no such thing, calling contemporary gothic (as manifested in selected films, sordid confessional television talk shows, the reporting and analysis of the O. J. Simpson trial, and some recent fiction), “no-fault, dead-end and politically impotent” (68). The attraction of this latter type of gothic, Edmundson explains, is that it “offers epistemological certainty; it allows us to believe that we’ve found the truth” (68). The truth is that the world is a hopeless, terrifying nightmare.

For Edmundson, gothic despair is a salve, a manufactured, albeit gloomy, meaning that relieves us of making meanings of our own, of living through an engagement with “the complexity of our problems and the breadth of our responsibilities” (68). It is also a catalyst for what Edmundson calls “a culture of facile transcendence,” a contemporary willingness to look for salvation in the forms of simplistic pop psychologies and group therapies, psychic hotlines, uplifting popular novels and self-help books, narratives of angelic intercession and spiritual redemption, and “fantasies of renewal” such as *Forrest Gump* and *Iron John* (179). In this argument, Freddy, the gleeful, brutal murderer of adolescents of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), serves a bizarrely apotropaic function: his savage presence wards off the far more unsettling circumstance of unknown evil, of personal guilt and social indifference. Our contemporary gothic fears astonish us, freeze us intellectually, successfully short-circuiting the possibility of any imaginative personal or social transformation. Gothic despair becomes an end in itself, a point of stasis resistant to visionary change.

Although few critics share Edmundson’s view of the psychological relief to be found in seeing the world as an evil, randomly violent, godless universe, most do find that gothic horror functions in psychologically and culturally significant ways.⁴ Critics have analyzed the otherness

and enforced alienation of the murderer, monstrous protagonist, as well as the gender dynamics at work in the representation of horror.⁵ They have pointed out the family relations or repressed fears and desires elaborated by horror scenarios,⁶ and have described the cultural assumptions and political circumstances at play and under attack.⁷ In general, critics who examine familial horror speak of family structures gone horribly awry, not merely of deep-rooted dissatisfactions and unbearable repression, but also of simulated or makeshift family units engaged in repugnant, gruesome behavior: of obsessed father-creators and refractory son-monsters; appalling mothers and endangered or psychotic sons and daughters; creatures in savage search of or rebellion from deficient parents; parents in hideous hunt for or in ghastly revenge of lost children. Teen slasher films are indeed densely populated by instances of all these characters and arrangements. The family structure that interests me in horror films, however, is an absent one. Teen slasher films both resolutely mock and yearn for the middleclass American dream, the promised comfort and contentment of a loving, supportive bourgeois family.

Slasher films show teenagers in peril, with no hope of help from their parents. Mostly these parents are generally too busy or too involved in their own problems or pleasures to help. Even caring, concerned parents are impotent; often they are hapless and distracted, unaware of their children’s problems and likely to dismiss or discount their warnings and fears. Indeed, parents like these need guarding, and children frequently find themselves in the stressful adult role of protector.⁸ At times the parents, albeit unwittingly, have created the monsters. Some action in their past has brought about this relentless evil force to wreak havoc among their children. What is striking about most of these films is the notable uselessness of parents, their absence, physically and emotionally, from their children’s lives. Teens must deal with the extraordinarily resilient monsters on their own.

For the past thirty years, sociologists, psy-

chologists, and family therapists have pointed out the accelerated changes in the structure of contemporary families, theorizing recently on the ramifications of these changes on the development of children. In general, divorce has been seen as the primary catalyst in these changes. In the opening paragraphs of *The Divorce Culture*, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead writes

The entire history of American divorce can be divided into two periods, one evolutionary and the other revolutionary. For most of the nation's history, divorce was a rare occurrence and an insignificant feature of family and social relationships. In the first sixty years of the twentieth century, divorce becomes more common, but it was hardly commonplace. In 1960, the divorce rate stood at a still relatively modest level of nine per one thousand married couples. After 1960, however, the rate accelerated at a dazzling pace. It doubled in roughly a decade and continued its upward spiral until the early 1980s, when it stabilized at the highest level among advanced Western societies." (3)

"Currently," report E. Mavis Hetherington, Tracy C. Law, and Thomas G. O'Connor in "Divorce: Challenges, Changes, and New Changes," "it is estimated that half of all marriages will end in divorce and that approximately 60% of these dissolutions will involve children" (209). For Whitehead, divorce is less a cause than a product of what she sees as an "ethical shift" in the meaning and value of family responsibility. "Beginning in the late 1950s," she contends, "Americans began to change their ideas about the individual's obligations to family and society. Broadly described, this change was away from an ethic of obligation to others and toward an obligation to the self" (4). Whitehead explains that she does not mean that people suddenly engaged in a wholesale abandonment of familial duties, but that "they became more acutely conscious of their responsibility to attend to their own individual needs and interests" (4). It was this new emphasis on self-fulfillment and individual growth that allowed for a reconception, and increase, of divorce.

"Postmodern parents are not necessarily more self-indulgent or less self-sacrificing than modern parents," David Elkind remarks. "It is simply that the demands of postmodern life are different from those that obtained in the modern world. . . . This said . . . the imbalance of the family's ability to meet the needs of its members has shifted in favor of adult needs over those of children and youth" (3-4). Adolescents seem to suffer most, or at least the most visibly, from the changes in the families caused either by divorce or by other structural modifications of the family. "Given the intense biological, physical, and cognitive changes that are occurring during this time," write Monica McGoldrick, Marsh Heiman, and Betty Carter, "in combination with the search for one's identity and the inherent confusion around negotiating and regulating boundaries and emotional distance between one's family and the outside world, adolescents are extremely vulnerable for developing symptoms" (428). Elkind agrees, arguing that adolescents need "protected time," a time in which adults need to provide their children with values and limits. Unlike adulthood, Elkind explains, adolescence "is a period of extremely rapid physical, emotional, psychological and social growth. This period of rapid growth leads to a metamorphosis unlike any transition that occurs in adulthood. Adult transition takes place within a relatively fixed firmament of physique, mental ability, and established social roles. Adolescent transitions do not. Even though young people are now exposed to demands for identity formation from an early age, they still need time in adolescence to adjust to their new body configuration, their new emotions, their new thinking abilities, and their new patterns of social interaction" (153).

The family dynamics and adolescent troubles in slasher films graphically bear out the concerns of the writers above. Parents in these films are generally absent, either physically or emotionally. They have demanding jobs, working late in the evening. They go on business trips or on vacations without the kids, or on getaway weekends with friends. Sometimes the

parents have drinking or drug problems, or are involved in new relationships. Some parents are well-meaning but inept and insufficiently attentive, making a show of interest while failing to grant the seriousness of their children's worries and fears. Other parents are exacting, abrupt, and impatient, too concerned with their own pleasures and desires to pay attention to the needs of their children. At no time do parents attempt to set values or explain limits.⁹ They may constrain their children, but they never teach them. The adolescent heroes in slasher films are cool, resourceful, and independent, but the grim events that unfold suggest the psychological and physical price they pay for their freedom from parental intrusions and the precocious self-reliance they are forced to develop. In *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980), *A Nightmare of Elm Street*, *Hell Night* (1981), *Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), *Fright Night* (1985), *Night of the Creeps* (1986), *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Hellraiser* (1987), *Pumpkinhead* (1988), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), *Cherry Falls* (2000), and their many sequels, teenage protagonists must face their horrors alone or with their peers. As their fellow adolescents fall to one monstrous force or another, they must save themselves and their world on their own.

In *The Kids' Book of Divorce*, a 1981 guide written by twenty children between the ages of eleven and fourteen, a chapter entitled "Do We Turn Out Differently?" lists what the young authors feel to be the commonly held myths about children from broken homes. The myths state that children whose lives differ from perceived standards "would become mentally disturbed; would commit suicide by the age of 21; would get rare diseases; would be on drugs; would become alcoholics; would become thieves and rob banks, steal cars, etc; would get divorced themselves; would murder their siblings, talk back to teachers; become violent; smoke pot in class; would be angry all the time; would be lonely all the time; have no friends; would think something's wrong with them" (111). The authors bravely assert that "we think these things are not true" (111), but they fight

an uphill battle. The writers are painfully aware that the myths promote their own fulfillment, that they are as much prescriptive as descriptive. Friends, parents, teachers, and social institutions that adopt these assumptions inadvertently help to confirm them by their expectations and heightened recognition of social maladjustment in certain designated groups. After twenty years, many sociological studies, political arguments, and fact-finding reports still subscribe to what these strikingly self-aware children contended were harmful, influential myths.

Adolescents in teen slasher films inhabit worlds constructed from these and kindred myths. If the roots of these myths are in stresses introduced into the late-twentieth-century American family by the intensified prevalence of divorce, the result in these films is a world emptied of the family as a resource for coping with growing up. The self-absorbed parents of these films, whether divorced or together, provide no useful knowledge, no understanding of their children's needs or fears, no viable models for negotiating the world, and certainly no protection from that world. Even the most well-adjusted protagonists, the good girls and boys whose moral integrity marks them as special and valuable, feel alienated and different, dissatisfied and lonely. Homes in these films do not provide a haven from a world gone bad, or even a place of safe retreat. The boundaries of these homes are entirely permeable to evil.

Slasher Worlds

The violence attributed to children of broken homes is either projected onto the ubiquitous, supernatural Other stalking the school hallways, the hometown streets, the lover's lanes, and the bedrooms of its victims, or it is retaliatory, the necessary response to repeated malevolent attacks from a stalking monster. Teenagers, especially vulnerable because of their precarious position on the cusp of adulthood, mask their inchoate desires and childish fears in self-conscious poses of cool carelessness. It is no accident that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's*



Relentless killer Jason Voorhees (Kane Hodder) returns once more to wreak havoc on unsuspecting teens in *Friday the 13th Part VII—The New Blood*. Copyright © 1988 Paramount Pictures Corporation. Photo credit: Michael Ansell.

high school is located near a cemetery that is a gateway to hell. The offhand cruelty of high school social exchanges; the anxiety and dread that accompany adolescents uncertain of their bodies and feelings, an uncertainty most poignantly brought out in awkward public and personal encounters; the day-to-day stress, shame, humiliation, and bewilderment of negotiating hierarchies and cliques that seem vitally important—all become more oppressive, even overwhelming, when combined with an absent home life. The teenagers in slasher films are plagued by the putative symptoms that result from broken homes; the screams provoked by the anomalous monsters stalking these adolescents are a cry for help unheeded by adults.

Slasher films covertly engage an odd nostalgic yearning for a traditional family and traditional family values. A number of books have argued that baby boomers suffer from the cognitive disconnect between their lived experiences and the sentimental family fare they saw on TV. *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Make Room for Daddy*, and *My Three Sons* depict families at ease socially and financially, where parents disagree only on minor matters, momentary misunderstandings and temporary hurt feelings are the only distress, and solutions to problems emerge within twenty-two minutes.¹⁰ Some critics suggest that because

these idyllic portraits could never be matched in real domestic situations, the young baby boomers, the first generation to be brought up on TV, felt dissatisfied with their own relations and deprived of proper family experiences.¹¹ If young baby boomers did not recognize their parents in these television comedies, however, then they also did not recognize themselves in the relentlessly cute, groomed children whose innocence and simplicity were never tarnished and always carried the day. Contemporary young viewers had the instant reality check of their daily lives to inform them that they were watching fantasy. The familial relations and childhood experiences elaborated in these early television productions seem to reflect the fantasies of adults rather than the predilections of contemporary children. Had Beaver or Kitten ever appeared at a real playground, they would have been dreadful bores.

If the immensely popular slasher films indicate a popular mood, it is not baby boomers pining for the idealized lives of television families, lives they realized were unlike their own and those of their friends. It is teenagers of the 1970s and later who seem willing to watch endless reruns of these shows on Nickelodeon and TV Land. In rerunning such shows, these channels feed viewers' appetite for nostalgic recreations of a mythic past.¹² The clever, tongue-in-cheek promotions of these old shows highlight

episodes' trite moral summaries, insipid plots, unfortunate fashions, and astoundingly stupid dialogue. Despite the mockery, it seems as if later generations view these series as forms of history, as somewhat sappy but fairly accurate versions of the lives their parents enjoyed as children but that are denied their progeny. The teenage protagonists of slasher films reflect this adolescent cultural apprehension of past harmony and present dysfunction. Surprisingly conversant with television and film "classics," they frequently allude to well-known characters and bits of dialogue, as they jokingly refer to a motherly cohort as "Mrs. Cleaver" or comment in a tone both droll and ominous that "we're not in Kansas anymore." The locale of teen slasher films—the small town or attractive suburb—revisits the setting of family television programs of the 1950s and early 1960s. Slasher films seem to delight in undoing the happy domestic scenes and comfortable, safe communities of that television era, replacing them with vapid or nasty family encounters and a lurking, murderous neighborhood presence. These cinematic attacks on the façade of contentment and security have a wistful edge; the satiric jibes at the suburban dream are fueled by a sense of injustice at the false promise they hold.

This indictment of and longing for the bourgeois American family is not new to films. In deliberate contrast to television programs featuring model parents solving a superficial familial problem each week, many films of the 1950s and early 1960s offered hard-hitting investigations into troubled family life.¹³ Although most of these films looked at the hypocrisy, moral turpitude, and indignity of relationships among adults, some films, such as *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Home from the Hill* (1960), explored the anguished, often violent responses of teenagers to problems at home. The selfishness and inadequacies of the parents in these films are comparable to those of the parents found in teen slashers. There seems always a hope of parental redemption in these earlier films, however, a hope missing in nearly all of the slashers. And even when parents fall short in the films of

the 1950s, there are other adults—social workers, teachers, police—who manage to help, who understand the issues and make a difference, who, in short, behave as adults. It is the wholesale nature of the indictment in slasher films that marks the difference between them and their predecessors.

In slasher films, the decay of the family makes children not merely defenseless but also prone to danger. A comparison of the two *Cape Fears*, one a suspense film of the early 1960s and the other a thriller of the early 1990s, helps to highlight this condition. The original *Cape Fear* (1962) tells the story of a wily, sinister criminal (Robert Mitchum) who stalks and eventually attacks an upright lawyer (Gregory Peck) and his innocent, well-adjusted family. The evil clearly comes from without: the sadistic crook threatens the safety of the wife and daughter, but he never unsettles the family as a unit. The family members remain loving and supportive; there is no doubt that the lawyer's behavior is righteous and his ethics admirable. In the later *Cape Fear* (1991), the lawyer (Nick Nolte) is compromised professionally and personally. He has negotiated shady legal transactions and has had an affair, putting severe strain on his marriage. In both films, the father manages to protect his family and kill the assailant, although in the 1991 version the criminal is astonishingly resilient, repeatedly recovering from catastrophic injuries to batter family members once again. In this later *Cape Fear*, the family unit is restored under duress, but its original fault lines exposed it to danger, separating members from one another and making them liable to repeated harassment. The villainous ex-con (Robert De Niro) attacks the family at its most vulnerable point: the teenaged daughter. Aware of the tension between her parents, the young woman (Juliette Lewis) is rebellious and disaffected. She has no respect for either parent; she makes perilous decisions on her own. As a consequence, the killer is able to lure the daughter, to charm and eventually terrify her.¹⁴ The overwrought family situation has put the daughter at risk.

The families in the slasher films of the 1980s

and 1990s, like the family in the second *Cape Fear*, put the children at risk. In contrast to both versions of *Cape Fear*, however, in slasher films there is no redemption of the original family. There is no enduring core of parental strength, not even one compromised by ambition, adultery, or distraction, to be recovered through the struggles of horrified parents. Many of the friends of the survivors in slasher films possess attributes associated with children of broken homes, the attributes decried as destructive myths in the *Kids' Book of Divorce*. These adolescents are careless about their well-being and willing to take risks for new pleasures. Uninterested in schoolwork or academic achievement, sexually active, well-acquainted with drugs and/or alcohol, self-consumed and cynically dismissive about love, marriage, and their future, sociable but often unkind, these teens suffer bizarre, gruesome deaths. Given money, clothes, and cars to make up for the lack of attention and affection of their parents, supported in their unethical or unlawful doings by strident mothers or fathers unwilling to learn the truth about their children, these teens are not an endearing lot. Doomed by their own shallow natures, the products and the victims of their unrestricted lives, they die without ever having lived, unmourned and unloved.

In *Halloween*, protagonist Laurie's irresponsible but nonetheless good-hearted friends think of their babysitting jobs as opportunities to share drinks and beds with their boyfriends. One by one they are killed in drolly macabre fashion by Michael Myers, an asylum escapee who years ago at the age of six murdered his sister for preferring sex to taking care of him. The resilient Laurie fends off the repeated attacks of Michael, while protecting her charge, aided at last by an outsider, the doctor who tended to Michael in the asylum. No police come to her rescue. No neighbor folk in the small, picture-pretty Illinois town show up to help—indeed, they turn off their lights as she pounds on their doors. No parents, either of the teenagers or of the children left in their charge, call to check on their children or arrive to keen over them. Laurie learns the hard facts of teen

slasher films: family is more often a hindrance than a help, law enforcement is suspicious and ineffective, and surviving into adulthood demands a full comprehension of and a comparable response to savage evil.

Slasher Survivors

Carol Clover sees in these films the story of the "Final Girl," the one who "encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril" (35). Clover argues that the gender of the Final Girl is "compromised from the outset by her masculine interests, her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls" (48), making her a masculinized individual who uses ingenuity, skill, and deadly weapons to kill her attacker. "The Final Girl has not just manned herself," Clover contends, "she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with" (49). For Clover, the plot that pits the ferocious, repressed slasher against the armed, blood-drenched, surviving girl would "seem to be one of sex and parents. The patently erotic threat is easily seen as the materialized projection of the viewer's own incestuous fears and desires. It is this disabling cathexis to one's parents that must be killed and re-killed in the service of sexual autonomy. When the Final Girl stands at last in the light of day with the knife in her hand, she has delivered herself into the adult world" (49). That the survivors find themselves in sequels battling these demons once again, however, suggests that it is not a break from but a primary eroticized attachment to parents that is overcome and internalized. It is not what the protagonist finds or becomes at the end of these films that engenders the sequel, but the return of the absence from their beginnings.

By the late 1980s there were as many final boys or boy and girl teams as final girls, and the sexual inhibition of the young heroine was no longer an issue. Indeed, in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (1989), Freddy invades the dreams of the unborn child of the heroine, an unwed teenaged mother. Clover's

contentions that the films construct “gender-bending scenarios” and their “own brand of gender transgression” (231) rely on the congenially androgynous Final Girls with whom young men as well as young women could identify.¹⁵ The masochistic identification with the survivor that Clover posits still occurs in later slasher films, but it is not gender but character type that enables this viewer relation. What Clover sees as androgyny in the Final Girl seems more like mature self-possession. In *Halloween*, Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) is not depicted as sexually ambiguous; her moral attributes, however, are shown to be as important as her physical ones. The sexual activity of her friends serves as one more indication of their giddy, thoughtless natures, suggesting not that Laurie is sexually repressed, but that her friends have no proper sense of hierarchy, no responsibility to themselves or others. The final person in slasher films does not so much bend gender as age, somehow gathering into her or his character the maturity and responsibility missing in the adults.

The young people who survive possess traits in common: they are smart, determined, quick-thinking, and inventive, but most importantly, they are caring. They protect the weak, tend to the wounded, go back into known peril to help their friends, and risk their lives to save the group. In short, they are parental. It is not that Oedipal conflicts and incestuous desires do not inform the narratives of these slasher films, but that the overarching psychic drama seems to be one of loss.¹⁶ The discontented teens all seem to be in a state of mourning for something they cannot quite describe, and they use sex, drugs, and drink as substitutes for it. The monsters haunting the streets, dormitories, and dreams of the protagonists are less figures of patriarchal control and punishment than the ogres of childhood nightmares and the social hell of adolescence, which remain undiminished because no parent comes round to dispel them. If the monsters are the products of the parents, it is as the residue of their absence, indifference, and failure to understand.

The slasher villains themselves testify to the

lost potential of childhood, to the absence of family. Survivors are those who worry about themselves and others, who voice moral concerns about the activities of the group, who feel guilt and remorse for their actions, and who accept the burden of setting things right, even if that means killing someone or some thing. These protagonists recreate the proper, ideal family, one they have never experienced at home, performing the acts necessary to carry on in a world in which parents can never be counted on. The survivors are not many. Most of the youths in slasher films are disengaged from the demands of life, although active in the pursuit of momentary pleasure. Nothing within or without has prepared them to recognize or face the demons that threaten them. They lack traditional consciences, what used to be called moral fiber.¹⁷ They are replicas of their parents, junior versions of what they despise and resent. In their embittered killing sprees, the slashers leave behind gory trails of what they found when they arrived: wasted youth.

Slasher Logic

The generational transmission of violence also has its roots in this punning sense of waste. Michael Myers of *Halloween* was ignored by his sexually active sister and abandoned, at least at the moment, by his parents, who arrive home from their nighttime excursion to find him standing outside with a knife dripping with the blood of his murdered sibling. Fifteen years later, Michael wreaks havoc on babysitters (and their friends) who are about the age of his sister when he killed her. Jealousy and incestuous desire may well contribute to Michael's actions, but rage at failed family care seems to provide the more compelling motive. Clinically, Michael, along with Jason of *Friday the 13th* and Freddy of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, would be diagnosed as character-disturbed individuals, individuals who are “unattached” emotionally. Because they have not bonded properly with their parents, they have not developed a sense of humanity and so become increasingly aggressive and hostile. “It is vital to understand

attachment if we are to stem the tide of high-risk children growing up without a conscience” (47), warn Dr. Ken Magid and Carole A. McKelevy. “To be closely involved with their children, parents need more time on a daily and weekly basis. . . . Never before in the history of this country have so many parents been away from home and their children at the most critical times” (118–119). In slasher films, the consequences of insufficient bonding take on spectacular proportions as the enraged, conscienceless products of unhappy homes rise from the dead to haunt vulnerable adolescents. In their sly manner, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* teach hard-hitting conservative lessons about parents’ responsibilities to children.

Michael and his compatriot slashers are also the hobgoblins of childhood fantasy, indestructible beings who seem able to be everywhere and do anything. They can be seen both as the representatives of the childhood fears never put to rest by adult explanation and refuge and as the manifestations of teenage angst unmitigated by adult intervention. The principals, guidance counselors, teachers, and law enforcement officers in slasher films fail time and again to understand and protect the youth in their care. Often venal and cruel, compelled by political pressure or ambitions, they willingly sacrifice the children in their care, covering up incidents and blaming the innocent in order to keep their jobs or to gain power. Even those adults who seem sincerely concerned cannot communicate with the young people, and the misunderstandings always allow for more dead teens. In the humorous and somewhat satirical *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the guidance counselor is a loser who tries to seem hip and in touch. He nods knowingly at the students’ fears and warnings, making inept analogies to his “time in ‘Nam” while wholly oblivious to the death and destruction taking place in the here and now. The parodic slashers such as *Buffy*, *Scream* (1996) and its sequels, *Scary Movie* (2000), *Psycho Beach Party* (2000), and *Shriek If You Know What I Did Last Friday the 13th* (2000), dramatize greed, unconcern, inepti-

tude, failure, and absence as the typical attributes adults bring to present-day teen life. The narratives of these parodies may be clever and funny, but they still function exceptionally well both as horror films and as covert satires.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, popular, rapid, astonishingly ignorant high school cheerleader Buffy (Kristy Swanson) learns that she possesses the mark of the slayer. As a consequence, she must save the world from an onslaught of vampires and zombies who emanate from the cemetery near her high school. At first she resists her calling, far more concerned with shopping and the prom than with safeguarding life as we know it. She is the ideal offspring of her feckless, self-obsessed parents, who seem vaguely fond of her but who pay no attention to her whatsoever and have no inkling of her activities, happily leaving her alone on weekends with her boyfriend. As Buffy begins to recognize the imminent outbreak of evil and her duty to prevent it, she becomes less and less like her friends and parents. Personal and social responsibilities alienate her from all she knows. Returning home late on a school night after her first night slaying demons, Buffy meets her mother in the front hall, who demands, “Do you know what time it is?” Buffy stutters out the correct time and her mother turns, hitting the face of her watch. “I knew this thing was slow! You pay a fortune for something—Honey!” she calls to her husband, “Come on, we’re gonna be late.” The scene unfolds as a joke: the suggestion that Buffy’s mother might be worried about her daughter or angry that she is out late on a school night is quickly and cleverly undercut by her self-absorbed comments. As Buffy comes to accept her role, she no longer feels comfortable in the solipsistic world of her parents. Her life is transformed. No longer a thoughtless teen destined to become a replica of her thoughtless mother, she becomes a concerned, savvy young adult. Like most survivors in slasher films, parodic and “serious,” Buffy becomes a caregiver and a caretaker.

In some slasher films, the protagonists hope to reestablish a diminished family unit after retrieving a mother or father from supernatural



Cheerleader Buffy Summers (Kristy Swanson) takes on the responsibility of ridding the world of vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Copyright © 1992 Twentieth Century Fox. Photo credit: Ron Phillips.

danger. In these films, the children become wise, determined parents, protecting their wayward, naive moms or dads from the counterfeit pleasure of sex and romance. In *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (1988), young Kirsty (Ashley Laurence), incarcerated in an asylum and accused of killing her father and stepmother, travels to hell to retrieve her father. Heedless of his daughter's warnings, sexually enamored of his predacious new wife Julia, Kirsty's father became caught in the netherworld that his wife and her paramour, his (dead) brother Frank, had opened up in *Hellraiser*. Kirsty fought to free her father in the first film and is quick to answer his cry for help from beyond the grave in the second. After harrowing, extraordinarily gruesome encounters with various manifestations of hell, Kirsty discovers that it is her uncle Frank, not her father, who has sent for her in "his own private hell," a chamber in which everyone but he is enjoying sex. He plans to spend an eternity exploring the physical endowments of his nubile niece. Escaping her uncle, Kirsty reunites with Tiffany, another young asylum inmate, and together they fight to close the gates of hell, Kirsty acting as a protective older sister to the fragile, mute Tiffany. As Kirsty points out in *Hellbound*, her life seems a nasty fairytale. She loses her father to the sensual delights offered by her wicked stepmother and is forced to deal on her own

with the sordid sexual behavior of the adults. She realizes that her continued existence demands that she abandon the hopeless task of restoring her family. She cannot have her parents, but she can be one to another damaged girl; the film ends with Kirsty and Tiffany walking out of the asylum to freedom.

In *The Lost Boys*, Michael and Sam (Jason Patric and Corey Haim) discover that their mother's sweet, nerdy suitor is actually a blood-sucking Peter Pan who needs a Wendy to tend to his crew of juvenile vampires. This smart, deft film metaphorically suggests the fate of those missing children whose faces were once found on milk cartons and postcards. Hungry, frightened, they are easy prey of the bloodsuckers haunting the streets. *The Lost Boys* affords a frightening yet poignant glimpse of a horribly perverse makeshift family of street hustlers composed of bitter, crafty young runaways. As in *Hellbound*, this film highlights the predatory nature of adults. The lesson of both films is that adults will exploit children for their own ends whenever possible, and parents not only are often unwittingly part of the problem but also are unwitting encumbrances to the solution. In these films, parents actively endanger their children by bringing deadly strangers into the home.

In the most well-known examples of teen slashers, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on*

Elm Street and their multiple sequels,¹⁸ the killers derive directly from parental malfeasance. In the first of the *Friday the 13th* series, the slasher turns out to be the mother of Jason Voorhees, a child who drowned at camp because of inattentive camp counselors. When the campgrounds reopen after years of dormancy, this mother takes her revenge on the group of young people hired to ready the camp. The mother's implacable fury at these new counselors, teens who had nothing to do with the death of her son, suggests a displaced anger, a terrifically nagging rage and guilt for depositing her son at camp instead of tending to him herself. In the second entry, *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981), Jason has been miraculously resurrected, full-grown and wearing mom's hockey mask, out to murder any teens who cross his path as a form of homage to and retribution for his dead mother. Jason avenges a family he never had and a mother he hardly knew. The survivors of Jason's attacks are those who understand Jason's psychotic investment in his dead mother, or who have had family problems of their own that make them especially attuned to and concerned for others.

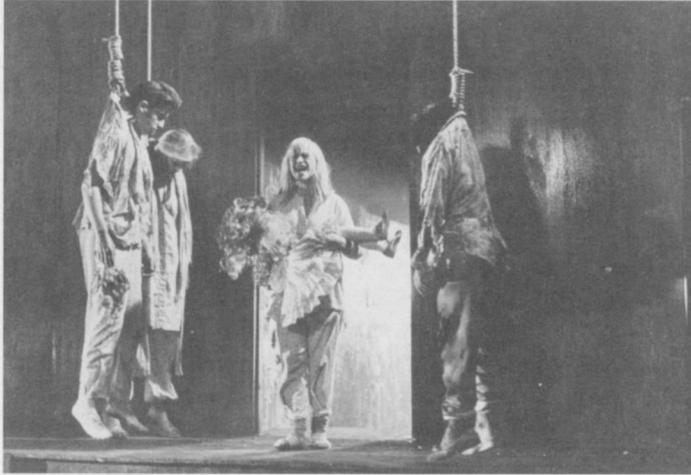
Slashers on Elm Street

The *Nightmare on Elm Street* series is perhaps the most overt indictment of parental dereliction and disregard, and is worth discussing in some detail. Freddy Krueger infiltrates the dreams of the adolescents of Elm Street, turning them into nightmares in which the dreamers flee from the ever-changing, ever-present slasher to their inevitable, horrid deaths. Before Freddy became a supernatural dream stalker, he was a child murderer, killing "over twenty children in the neighborhood." Finally apprehended by the police, Freddy was freed on a legal technicality. The parents of Elm Street took the law into their own hands, literally incinerating him.¹⁹ Years later, he has returned to reclaim the children of the mob that killed him, his face horribly scarred by burns and one of his hands covered by a glove with long, thin, razor-like fingers. In the first *Nightmare*, Nancy

(Heather Langenkamp) finally wrests the truth about Freddy from her alcoholic, divorced mom, who, though shown material proof, refuses to believe that Freddy is responsible for the rash of teen murders. Nancy's father, a police officer who has much to lose if the murder of Freddy is uncovered, is concerned for the safety of his daughter but loathe to believe her reports of her nightmare. Nancy must face Freddy on her own, and although she demands that he restore her friends and family to life and seems for a moment to gain her wish, the film ends with the garish murders beginning again.

In *Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985), Freddy takes control of the body of Jesse (Mark Patton), a teen-aged boy whose family has moved into Nancy's house on Elm Street. In this film, the parents are well-meaning but incapable of understanding the threat to their son. They bicker about how to treat Jesse, suspecting a wayward nature or drugs, but fail to investigate these or any other cause of their son's malady. These parents seem fairly innocuous: they find their teenager exasperating, and while they expect him to behave maturely, they respond to him as if he were a child. They care about but do not know their son, and have no idea that any more effort on their part is necessary. The film reveals with woeful clarity the inadequacies of this disengaged family. Behind the façade of a happy home in the heartland lies parental ignorance and teen torment. Children's questions and accusations are met with denial or excuses by parents who do not wish to engage them fully. The prosperous middle class family in their comfortable, well-appointed house hides terrors that will fatally affect their children.

In general, the parents in the *Nightmare* saga refuse to discuss Freddy, and are impatient with and dismissive of their children's desperate fears. "It's not you," Nancy, the lone survivor of the first film, tells the adolescents during a tense therapy group encounter in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: The Dream Warriors* (1987). "Your parents, my parents, they burned him alive, and now we're paying for their sins." Nancy has grown up to become a psychiatric coun-



Survivor Kristen (Patricia Arquette) finds her friends in the horrific dreamscape of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. Copyright © 1987 New Line Cinema.

selor specializing in dream therapy, hoping to help others who suffer as she did from deadly nightmares. Nancy's insider knowledge and sincere concern enable the teens to drop their defenses and bond with one another, becoming the "dream warriors" of the title. Nancy helps to form a family of sorts, but dies in her attempts to protect "the last children of Elm Street."

One of the young clinic inmates, Kristen, seems especially good at entering others' dreams and helping them to elude Freddy. Her mother tells the staff at the clinic that Kristen's behavior is simply a bid for attention, and she is obviously annoyed when Nancy comes to interview her about the inciting factors of her daughter's illness, which the mother attributes off-handedly to the removal of her credit privileges. Kristen's bedroom is filled with drawings and other paraphernalia graphically indicating Freddy's presence, but her mother has obviously never bothered to investigate. The teens in the therapy group reveal similar strained relations with their parents. Kristen and two friends manage to survive to *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988), but neither her friends nor she will make it any further. Freddy slaughters the two friends within the first ten minutes, and Kristen, the last remaining Elm Street child, and her new friends are left to cope with Freddy's new atrocities.

Again, parents figure as callous, destructive forces in their children's lives. Kristen's boyfriend Rick and his sister Alice live with their spiteful, alcoholic father, who detests Kristen and treats his children as servants. Kristen's mother is even more egregious in *Nightmare 4*. Bored by the discussion of Freddy, she decides to calm her daughter's anxieties by slipping a tranquilizer in her soda.

"Something the matter with the cuisine?" the chain-smoking, elegantly dressed mother asks.

"Well mom, I'll tell you. When two of your friends die in the same day, let me know what it does to your appetite."

"You're just tired. Don't think I haven't noticed that you haven't been sleeping, young lady. That has got to stop, honey."

Suddenly feeling groggy, Kristen realizes that her mother has fed her sleeping pills. In quiet terror, she asks, "Oh God, What did you do?"

"Look Kristen, I'm sorry. I'm just—"

"Sorry? Sorry that you and your tennis pals torched this guy and now he's after me? In case you haven't been keeping score, it's his fucking banquet and I'm the last course!"

"Kristen, we went over this in therapy!"

"No mother, you just murdered me. Take that to your goddamn therapy."

The caffeine pills and coffee Kristen had been taking to stay awake cannot counter her mother's pills. Kristen unwillingly succumbs to sleep. Her final, fatal encounter with Freddy is the direct result of her mother's actions.

After Kristen and her other friends die one by one, Alice gains strength and courage, putting Freddy to rest (temporarily). Newly indulgent and heartsick over the loss of his son, her father tries to pull himself together to be a parent to his daughter, but it is she who consoles him, a beaten, diminished man. In *Nightmare on Elm Street 5*, Alice's unborn child affords Freddy an opportunity to wreak more havoc, and to save her son, she must resurrect Freddy's dead mother, a nun raped by a multitude of criminally insane asylum inmates (presumably all of them the father of Freddy), to drag Freddy back into the womb. The parents of the now murdered boy who fathered Alice's child want to adopt the baby, and threaten to take it away from Alice as soon as she delivers. Alice's father supports her desire to keep the baby, but is woefully unable to help her. Alice must fight for her incipient family both in the dream and the real world, aided only by a (dead) mother who knows her son Freddy should never have been born.

In *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (1991), part six of the series, Freddy's child, a full-grown psychologist working with troubled youths, must kill her father to save a new batch of adolescents from being destroyed. The film opens with an irate father lecturing his son in the visiting room of the Recovery House. As the father angrily departs, he snaps at the psychologist, Maggie (Lisa Zane): "Nice job on my kid. I expected to see some improvement." "He's not a Toyota," she snaps back. Turning to the boy, Spencer, she asks

"You okay?"

"Yeah, Dad just came to lay down some ground rules for when I come home. No more running away. No more setting cars on fire."

"Well, there are other ways of getting his attention besides blowing up the garage."

"Yeah, he barely even blinked. All he wants me to do now is to grow up to be him—

an exact copy. Frankly, I don't feel like playing football and raping co-eds."

"One of these days," Maggie replies, "you're going to have to face your father."

Freddy is happy to help. He arranges a nightmare in which Spencer becomes a computer-generated action figure who engages with his father, a giant bully who beats his son to death. Two other teenage patients encounter their abusive parents in nightmares concocted by Freddy, and these teens die horribly as well. In the *Final Nightmare*, parents are materially responsible for the miserable lives of their children and symbolically responsible for their deaths.²⁰ In this film, abused children cannot face their fears and survive. Only the adult child has the power to counter the evil effects of parents, and the only good parent is a dead one.

In the *Nightmare* films, as in the *Halloween* series, the only adults who offer a modicum of help are health care professionals who directly work with the suffering teens. Slasher films have depicted psychiatrists and, especially, clinic directors as ignorant, self-serving, and exploitive, but there always seems to be one or two therapists among the corrupt lot who try to understand and protect the teens. That they generally fall short suggests the broad breakdown of the social institutions that support children and the family. Slasher films expose a dreadful, deadly abyss at the core of middle-class family life. They provide negative examples of what family clinicians, psychologists, social workers, and sociologists see as efficacious domestic environments. It is the failures of the family that make children vulnerable to the nightmares of adolescence, failures of moral character, understanding, and protection.

Slasher Consequences

In her introduction to *Normal Family Processes*, Froma Walsh, while acknowledging the difficulties in creating any single model for health, identifies a number of "important processes for healthy family functioning" (58). These include:

- Connectedness and commitment of members as a caring, mutually supportive relationship unit (“We are family”).
- Respect for individual differences, autonomy, and separate needs.
- For nurturance, protection, and socialization of children and care taking of other vulnerable family members, effective parental /executive leadership and authority.
- Adaptability: Flexibility to meet internal or external demands for change. To cope effectively with stress or changes that arise.
- Open communication characterized by clarity of rules and expectation, pleasurable interaction, and a range of emotional expression and empathic responsiveness.
- Effective problem-solving and conflict-resolution processes. (58)

Walsh notes that her list records optimal conditions, and that “typical” functioning families use strategies that incorporate and adapt these processes to their specific needs. Slasher films portray families in which none of these processes are working. These films offer a sustained conservative critique of family life, mourning the middle class dream while mocking it. Parents refuse to commit to their children: their disinclination, work, pleasures, or addictions prevent them from taking their parental responsibilities seriously. None of the parents, even the most well-meaning and kind, ever succeeds in making the connections necessary to create a functioning family. As a result, children either become shallow, selfish replicas of their parents, susceptible to deadly mishaps and grisly predators, or stalwart survivors of an adolescent hell who must relinquish their deficient families in order to create functioning ones of their own.

NOTES

1. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* concentrates on the macabre makeshift family of grisly murderers; the teenaged victims say little; the viewers know nothing about them. They are little more than screaming, running prey. *Carrie*, too, differs from what I call teen slashers in that the title character is also the (sympa-

thetic) slasher; in teen slashers, the killer is a monstrous, often dead, villain.

2. See in particular Jackson and Williams.

3. Valdine Clemons places the roots of Gothic in the Medieval/Renaissance periods.

4. For an excellent, succinct summary of the varying critical assessments of horror films, see “The Horror Film” in *The Cinema Book*.

5. Such as Halberstam, Freeland, Clover, Dika, and Pinedo.

6. See, for example, Carroll, Clemons, Williams, Telotte, and Schneider.

7. See Halberstam, Sharrett, Botting, and Tropp.

8. *The Lost Boys* and *Hellbound: Hellraiser II*.

9. Indeed, some parents (*Disturbing Behavior* [1998]) willingly have their children surgically altered to become hard-working, well-behaved, docile children, and some teachers (*The Faculty* [1998]) happily sacrifice their charges to aliens. For readings of the conservative political implications of the depictions of families, see Williams, Conrich, Sharrett, and Jan-covich.

10. Coontz offers compelling historical testimony to counter the myth of the functional traditional family.

11. See Taylor, Harris, and O’Brien.

12. Jameson makes a stronger claim, contending that in the late twentieth century, a nostalgic, sentimental conception of the past has replaced history in the popular conception (11).

13. For a discussion of this “adult fare” and its promotion, in part as a hard-hitting alternative to syrupy television, see Klinger.

14. Maltin writes that the 1992 *Cape Fear* “fleshes out its characters” and “adds interesting psychological layers,” but he complains that it turns into a horror film, calling it, interestingly, “*Cape Fear* for the Freddy Krueger generation” (210).

15. Both in his book and in “Trying to Survive,” Williams offers strong counters to Clover’s claims.

16. For a reading that contends against this and posits a strong Oedipal dynamic for the slasher film, see Williams 211–237 (*Hearths*); he sees Freddy and the like as manifestations of a virulent patriarchy.

17. In both *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and *Pumpkinhead* (1989), teens accidentally kill a pedestrian. Their slack ethical standards, revealed either in their attempts to cover up or in their failure to accept the consequences of their deeds, unleash a hideous moral scourge that haunts the guilty and terrorizes new teens for a number of sequels.

18. On the popularity of slasher Freddy Krueger and the merchandizing of the films in which he appears, see Conrich.

19. Other slasher films have adopted the narrative ploy of generational debt. In *I’ve Been Waiting for You* (1998), a teenage girl is thought to be the vengeful reincarnation of a witch her New England townsfolk

burned a hundred years ago; in *The Clown at Midnight* (1998), high school students die one by one as they help to clean up an old opera house in which a teen's mother was murdered.

20. Freddy appears one last time (so far) in *New Nightmare* (1994). Heather Langenkamp, the actress who played Nancy in parts one and three, plays herself, an actress haunted by nightmares of Freddy as Wes Craven readies a new script. In an extraordinarily reflexive manner, the film questions the nature of reality and the power of stories to create and contain evil. Heather's child Dylan loses his father to Freddy's machinations, witnesses the grisly death of his nanny, is repeatedly terrorized by Freddy, and watches his mother brutally kill the monster. We are left to wonder about the lasting effects of his hideous experiences. The film elaborates on the familial issues addressed in the other installments and suggests as well that Freddy's iconic status has dangers both inside and outside the frame. Even for spectators, knowing about Freddy is not without its costs.

REFERENCES

- Botting, Fred. *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991.
- Carroll, Noel. *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Clemons, Valdine. *The Return of the Repressed: Genre Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien*. Albany, State U of New York P, 1999.
- Clover, Carol. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.
- Conrich, Ian. "Seducing the Subject: Freddy Krueger." Silver and Ursini. 223–236.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Vera Dika, "The Stalker Film, 1978–81." Waller. 86–101.
- Elkind, David. *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994.
- Edmundson, Mark. *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sado-masochism, and the Culture of the Gothic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Freeland, Cynthia A. *The Naked and Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror*. Boulder: Westview P, 2000.
- Grant, Barry Keith, ed. *The Dread of Difference*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1996.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horrors and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.
- Harris, Judith R. *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do*. New York: Free P, 1998.
- Hetherington, E. Mavis, Tracy C. Law, and Thomas G. O'Connor. "Divorce: Challenges, Changes, and New Changes." Walsh. 208–234.
- "The Horror Film." *The Cinema Book*. 2nd ed. Ed. Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink. London: BFI, 1999. 194–208.
- Jackson, Kathy Merlock. *Images of Children in American Film: A Sociocultural Analysis*. Metuchen: Scarecrow P, 1986.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1992.
- Jancovich, Mark. *Horror*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1992.
- Klinger, Barbara. "'Local' Genres: The Hollywood Adult Film in the 1950s." *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*. Ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill. London: BFI, 1994. 134–146.
- Magid, Ken and Carole A. McKelvey. *High Risk: Children Without a Conscience*. New York: Bantam Books, 1988.
- Maltin, Leonard, ed. *Leonard Maltin's 2002 Movie and Video Guide*. New York: Signet, 2001.
- McGoldrick, Monica, Marsha Heiman, and Betty Carter. "The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Perspective on Normalcy." Walsh. 405–443.
- O'Brien, Jodi. *Social Prisms*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forks P, 1999.
- Pinedo, Isabel Christina. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.
- Schneider, Steven. "Monsters as Uncanny Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror." Silver and Ursini. 167–191.
- Sharrett, Christopher. "The Horror Film in Neo-Conservative Culture." Grant. 253–276.
- Silver, Alain and James Ursini, eds. *Horror Film Reader*. New York: Limelight, 2000.
- Taylor, Ella. *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989.
- Telotte, J. P. "Through a Pumpkin's Eye: The Reflexive Nature of Horror." Waller. 114–128.
- Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture, 1818–1918*. Jefferson: McFarland, 1990.
- Unit at Fayerweather Street School. *The Kids' Book of Divorce*. Ed. Eric E. Rofes. Lexington: Lewis Publishing, 1981.
- Waller, Gregory A, ed. *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987.
- Walsh, Froma, ed. *Normal Family Processes*. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford P, 1993.
- Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. *The Divorce Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1997.
- Williams, Tony. *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson P, 1996.
- . "Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980s Family Horror." Grant. 164–180.