Fear and Loathing at the Cinemaplex:
Gender Differences in Descriptions and Perceptions of Slasher Films

Justin M. Nolan
Gery W. Ryan

Department of Anthropology
University of Missouri – Columbia

© May 1999

Direct Comments to:

Justin Nolan
Dept of Anthropology
107 Swallow Hall
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211
Phone: (573)445-4625
Email: c643791@showme.missouri.edu

Abstract

This study investigates gender-specific descriptions and perceptions of slasher films. Sixty American undergraduate and graduate students, 30 males and 30 females, were asked to recount in a written survey the details of the most memorable slasher film they remember watching, and to describe the emotional reactions evoked by that film. A text analysis approach was used to examine and interpret informant responses. Males recall a high percentage of descriptive images associated with what is called "rural terror," a a concept tied to fear of strangers and rural places, while females display greater fear of "family terror," including the themes of betrayed intimacy and spiritual possession. It is found that females report a higher level and a greater number of fear reactions than males, who report more anger and frustration responses. Gender-specific fears as personalized through slasher film recall are discussed with relation to socialization practices and power-control theory.

Introduction

  "Sally is the only survivor of a night of murder and madness; she is captured and tortured by the cannibals in a grisly parody of the Mad Tea Party, but manages to escape and, after a harrowing pursuit down a back road, is rescued by a passing truck driver. The final image is of a berserk Leatherface alone on the highway against a setting sun, wildly swinging a chainsaw overhead in frustration" (Sharrett 1984).

  The passage above describes the closing sequence of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the notoriously violent horror film credited for launching a new genre in American cinema known as "slasher" or "splatter" films. In Carol Clover's horror film analysis *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, the slasher movie is defined as "the immensely generative story of a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived"[1] (1992:21). Indeed, Hooper's *Massacre* provided a template for a number of entries into the slasher hall of fame, most notably John Carpenter's smash *Halloween* (1978) and Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980). However, the production of successively inferior sequels caused the genre to deteriorate by the late eighties, although slasher films are presently experiencing a revival in popularity and appeal. It is precisely this appeal that has motivated studies of the emotional effects of slasher violence and commentaries on the symbolic connotations of slasher motifs and storylines[2] .

  The significance of gender within the slasher genre has recently captured the attention of a number of social sciencists and film scholars (Grant 1996, Clover 1992,1996; Pinedo 1997). For instance, Clover (1996) and Pinedo (1997) offer insightful analyses of the politics of emotions and the construction of sexual and bodily metaphors in contemporary slasher films. From a psychological perspective, hypergraphic films are important because of their capacity to evoke a variety of responses in viewers. Zillman et al. (1986) determined that male and female enjoyment of horror films is a function of moviegoers' level of attraction to companions of the opposite gender (Zillman et al. 1986). Mundorf, Weaver, and Zillman (1989) measured college students' emotional responses to slasher films, and concluded that females enjoy horror significantly less than males, who are both bored and entertained more frequently than females by slasher gore. Inquiry into the personality characteristics of regular slasher film viewers has found the presence of the Machiavellian trait of deceit, an affective preference for graphic violence, and among male subjects, a preference for pornography (Tamborini, Stiff, and Zillman 1987).

  Helpful as these studies may be toward understanding gender perceptions and attitudes toward depictions of slasher violence, scholars of the genre tend to lump informant responses to questions into a limited set of emotional response categories. For example, Mundorf et al. (1989) limited their response set to *fright*, *boredom* and *enjoyment*. Viewers of slasher films exhibit a much broader range of significant psychological and emotional reactions than these which have yet to be identified. Further, what is essentially absent from the literature is a qualitative evaluation of the types of slasher images which elicit these reactions among spectators. For example, what kinds of motifs carry special perceptual and emotional significance for viewers, and how do these motifs differ for men and women?

Recent work by social psychologists and criminologists on male and female victimization provides compelling evidence that certain gender-specific fears are linked to actual crime patterns. For example, Sacco (1990) suggests that males are less susceptible to victimization and attack than females, and that females are more likely to be victimized inside their own homes. When males are assaulted, attacks are usually made by male strangers while women are most often attacked by intimate male acquaintances (Sampson 1987, Sacco 1990). While males are more confident in their capacity for self-defense, they demonstrate greater fear of attack by strangers (Riger 1982). Females have less confidence in their ability to defend themselves in the event of an attack by an opposite-sex offender (Riger and Gordon 1981). The fear of victimization and personal violence upon which all slasher films "prey" is thus contextualized quite differently for the sexes. Exactly how these fears are personalized through the experience of viewing the film, however, has not been determined.

The goal of this study is to determine the perceptual and emotional effects which slasher films exert on both male and female viewers. While this is an exploratory project which seeks to identify salient slasher themes among male and female informants, two hypotheses are proposed. It is postulated that the victimization and fear response patterns outlined above will manifest in the subjects' descriptive recall of slasher films, given the propensity for individuals to project themselves into the action onscreen (e.g., Pinedo 1997). In general, it is expected that (1) male responses to slasher films will be characterized by fewer fear emotions, (2) males will exhibit a greater fear of attack by strangers, (3) females should describe more fear responses and related emotions, and (4) females will display a greater fear of attack by intimate assailants.

Research Methods

We collected two kinds of data from 60 undergraduate and graduate students (30 males and 30 females) enrolled at the University of Missouri. First, we asked them to name and describe in detail the singular most frightening "slasher film" that they could recall. To assure that all the informants described the same kinds of films, we provided them with Clover's (1992) definition of the genre. After completely describing the film, we asked them to identify the emotions they remember experiencing while watching that film.

In all, informants described 29 different slasher films (Table 1). Two informants were unable to identify the name of the film they described.

<<Table 1 About Here>>

We used word counts and semantic network analysis to identify, compare, and interpret themes from the two data sets (see Bernard and Ryan 1998 for reviews of these techniques). Word counts have long been used in mass media studies (de Sola Pool 1952, Danielson and Lasorsa 1997) and are useful for discovering patterns of ideas in any body of text and for making comparisons between groups. For example, Ryan and Weisner (1996) used word counts to compare mothers' and fathers' descriptions of their children. By examining how often words were mentioned, they found that mothers expressed more

concern over interpersonal issues, while fathers appeared to prioritize achievement-oriented and individualistic issues.

Semantic network analysis looks for patterns in texts by examining the relationships among the words (Osgood 1959, Danowski 1982, 1993; Barnett and Danowski 1992). Typically this is done by first identifying key words (often the most frequently mentioned) then counting the number of times informants use each word. The data are stored in an informant-by-word matrix which can be analyzed with multidimensional scaling, cluster analysis, and correspondence analysis.

For example, Jang and Barnett (1994) used semantic network analysis to looked to see if U.S. and Japanease CEO's had discernible national business cultures. They identified the 94 words that CEO's of 18 U.S. and 17 Japanese corporations used most often in annual letters to stockholders. (They ignored a list of common words like "the," "because," "if," ect.) They then counted the times that the 94 key words occurred in each letter and stored the results in a 94(word)-by-35(company) matrix. To assess the similarity among companies, they created a 35(company)-by-35(company) matrix analyzed it with multidimensional scaling. The analysis clearly separated Japanese and American companies. Jang and Barnett used correspondence analysis to get a better feel for how companies constructs were related. This analysis suggests that U.S. executives were more likely to discuss financial information and the structure of their organizations while Japanese executives focused more on organizational operations.

Word counts and semantic network analysis considers neither the context in which the words occur nor whether people use words negatively or positively. These analyses, however, can help us identify important constructs and provide data for systematic comparisons across groups (Weisner and Ryan 1996, Bernard and Ryan 1998).

In our data, we first generated a list of words used in informants' film descriptions. After eliminating common words, we selected the most frequently mentioned descriptive nouns, verbs, and adjectives that had occurred at least three times. From this list, we eliminated words like "movie," "watched," and "remember" that referred to the act of viewing the film rather than to their description of the film itself. We also combined merged words with similar meaning (such as rape and raped and violent and violence) into single entities. In all we generated a list of 40 key word forms.

Next we checked to see which informants mentioned each word and stored these data in a 40 (word)-by-60 (informant) matrix. From this matrix, we calculated separate frequency listings for men and women. To see whether the degree to which men and women overlapped in their overall descriptions, we created a 60 (informant)-by-60 (informant) similarity matrix based on the degree to which informants matched in their word use. We then plotted the similarities among informants with multidimensional scaling (Kruskal and Wish 1978). We used correspondence analysis to examine the general relationships between words and people. Correspondence graphically displays the relationships between row and column variables (in this case words and informants) in the same space (Weller and Romney 1990, Johnson and Griffith 1998). We followed similar procedures to analyze the emotional response data.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Descriptive Image Words

Table 2 shows the frequency of mention for the 40 key words used in the film descriptions. Only words mentioned by at least 3 informants are included. Males were slightly, though not significantly, more verbose in describing memorable slasher images than their female counterparts. Men averaged 22.8 words per description compared to 20.4 words per description for women. The most common words mentioned were *disturbing, horror, girls, evil, scary, killer* and *young*. To better compare the males' and females' descriptions, we have ordered in the words in the table based on the magnitude of difference between their frequencies. The words at the top of the table were used more by men, those in the middle were used by both men and women, and those at the bottom were used more by women.

<<Table 2 About Here>>

The first thing to note is that there is considerable gender overlap in terms of descriptive image words used. Take, for instance, the frequency of terms associated with youth and adolescence: *children, kid, girl*, and *young* are salient image terms for both males and females. These data suggest that many of the most unforgettable images in slasher violence are those in which teens and kids are either the targets or agents of terror. In a psychoanalytic reading of the horror genre, Wood (1984:167) comments that the sexual repression of children and adolescents is a core concept dramatized by the genre that assumes "different forms from infancy, through 'latency' and puberty, and into adolescence--the process moving, indeed, from repression to oppression, from the denial or the infant's nature as sexual being to the veto on the expression of sexuality before marriage. As Wood suggests, slasher films derive much thematic motivation by exploiting the tension surrounding the interplay between youth and sexual curiosity. Underlying numerous splatter films is the message is that torture and death are the punishments for being young and sexually curious. The considerable male and female recognition of this disturbing slasher commentary is evident through the descriptive word use patterns.

Closely related to the theme of repressed adolescent sexuality is the concept of "family horror" (Williams 1996). According to Williams (1996:173), films depicting family horror "serve as allegories....stressing vulnerabilities to parents, the adult world, and monstrous punitive avatars. . . " (Williams 1996:173). In our study, females tend to recall more images associated with family horror, in which the victimizers range from sadistic stepmothers (e.g., *The Kiss*) and schizophrenic fathers (e.g., *The Shining*) to the murderous products of dysfunctional families (e.g., *Psycho*, *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*). The words *father, boy, little,* and *parents* are good examples on Table 2. As suggested by Poggie and Pelto (1969), females in American culture are more actively involved than males in family affairs and kinship organization, which may explain the female predilection to recognize and connect with abject terror in the context of the family.

In addition, females are more cognizant of an additional subtheme within the slasher genre: spiritual or demonic possession. Occult films generally depict women and men as equally vulnerable to spiritual possession, with women emerging as "restored" and men "reconstructed" via the process of exorcism (Clover 1992). Clover (1992) also asserts that the emotional component of these films, like the concept of the paranormal, is

gendered feminine. Thus, female receptivity to images of possession in horror and slasher cinema probably stems from culturally constructed associations between femininity and the occult. Females are also clearly responsive to occult-film images in which children are cast as the aggressors. Sobchack (1996) posits that children have played socially important roles as villains in the dramatization of family terror onscreen (for example, in *The Exorcist, The Omen,* and *Children of the Corn,* it is children who are, or become, possessed). Bordering on the taboo, horror films are not above characterizing children as the perpetrators of murder and evil, in which betrayed intimacy assumes the form of negating the bond between parent and child, and more dramatically, between mother and infant.

Unique to the males' descriptive image word list is an interesting theme not immediately associated with slasher films—a terror of rural people and places. The word *rural* was in fact mentioned by 6 of the 30 males in the sample. *Country* and *hillbillies* are other salient terms occurring exclusively in male descriptions. In a recent essay on popular representations of the rural, Bell (1997) affirms that a number of slasher films generate tension by illustrating this city/country dichotomy. Slasher films often portray the rural American landscape as a bleak and dangerous place, inhabited by uncivilized humans (e.g., *Hunter's Blood, The Hills Have Eyes*) and malevolent animals (e.g., *Cujo*). According to Bell (1997:98), the backwoods frontier is a place where "local patriotism merges into xenophobia," such that "strangers are not merely avoided, but erased." Similarly, Wood (1984) identifies the fear of a threatening "Other" in American horror films. Clover (1992:124) labels this fear "urbanoia," and affirms that "going from city to country in horror film is any case very much like going from village to deep, dark forest in traditional fairy tales."

That urbanoia is more apparent to male subjects than females is not surprising. Recall the hypothesis regarding male fears, and the propensity for males to be victimized (e.g., robbed, assaulted, or murdered) by *strangers*, not by family members or acquaintances. While criminal violence is commonplace in the city, it becomes strangely darker and more dreadful when transplanted to the country. Returning to the power-control theory, it stands to reason that males should be more prone to fear the rural, where civility and urban law may no longer apply, and where existing power structures are conceived to carry no meaning. Clover (1992:132) explains that "much of the ambient horror of these films resides in the fact that statelessness--our collective past--is not dead and buried but is just a car ride away." It is here, in what Bell (1997:98) calls the "sordid underbelly of America," where the aggressor is surely lurking.

So how different are men and women overall? Figure 1 shows the multidimensional scaling of men and women based on the degree to which they used the same words in their descriptions. Clearly the men in the upper left are very different from the women in the lower right quadrant. But likewise, there is a fair amount of overlap between the two groups, with many of the informants clustering in the middle.

<<Figure 1 About Here>>

So who are these people? Figure 2 shows the results of a correspondence analysis that plots the relationships between words and informants. On the right side, the terms

young, evil, devil, possessed/ion, priest, and *parents* are highly concentrated around a group of female informants, suggesting a strong association between female informants and words that reflect convergent images of family terror, occult and possession. The concept of rural terror is coded by words at the top of the display including *rural*, *killer*, *country*, *city*, *massacre*, and *teenager*. With one or two exceptions this conceptual zone is occupied by male informants, whose descriptions reflect the genre's tendency to cast youthful characters as the targets of rural attackers (e.g., *Friday the 13th*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). Trailing down the lower left side of the plot are the words *hillbillies*, *horrible*, *pretty*, *woman*, and *rape/d* alongside a number of male and a couple of female informants. These words are considered a semantic extension of the rural terror theme, and appear to reflect what Clover (1992) calls the "rape-revenge" motif in slasher films. Rape-revenge films frequently pit "country" rapists against hapless "city" victims, and the subgenre does not adhere to strict gender rules in the depiction of its victims. In the infamous *Deliverance* rape scene, a male is victimized, while *I Spit on Your Grave* graphically portrays the gang rape of a woman (though both victims in these cases are city dwellers). The variability of gender in rape victimization patterns may explain why both male and female informants are clustered around the words associated with the rape-revenge motif.

<<Figure 2 About Here>>

Analysis of Emotion Response Words
        To further investigate the gender differentiation regarding responses to slasher films, we now examine the words used by informants to describe the emotional effects of memorable slasher films. Table 3 compares the words used most frequently by males and females in these descriptions. While a total of 73 emotion words were tabulated for the males and 110 were counted for the females, only those words used by two or more informants are listed. Interestingly, there is relatively little overlap between the two lists. A comparison of some of the most salient words for males (e.g., *shocked*, *angry, helpless, agitated,* and *frustrated*), to those used by females (e.g., *nervous, vulnerable, horrified, exposed,* and *betrayed*) clearly indicates a gender split in emotional response to watching slasher films. Females tend to display the kinds of classic fear reactions most likely intended by the creators of slasher movies, who tend to portray women as the terrorized victims of unmitigated aggression. Clover (1996:96) reminds us that "abject terror. . .is gendered feminine" and that this response represents "the essence of modern horror." The women who populate slasher films are often subjected to emotional entrapment that assumes a number of forms ranging from intimate stalking to demonic possession. Not surprisingly, many of the females' emotion narratives mirror this sense of entrapment suggested through the female slasher film characters. Words such as *vulnerable, trapped,* and *alone* reflect the overt terror of entrapment associated with the female characters onscreen and, by projection, to the female spectators in the audience.

<<Table 3 About Here>>

Males in the study report a general uneasiness or disquietude in response to watching slasher violence, but unlike the females, are disinclined to express fear directly. *Disturbed*, *anxious* and *uneasy* are far more common than words such as *terrified* and *scared*. If males are engendered to control their fear reactions, to keep them "under wraps," it appears that fear, *per se*, is substituted by feelings of agitation and frustration in the context of slasher film viewing. In slasher films, it is the male rather than the female who is afforded the expression of rage and anger in the action onscreen, whether he be portrayed as the victim or the aggressor. This may account for the pattern of male emotion responses observed in the sample. Both Pinedo (1997) and Clover (1992) challenge the assumption that male viewers of slasher films are unsympathetic (to female terror) and posit that males are more likely to identify with the surviving heroine, or "final girl" (Clover 1992). Another useful context for interpreting the male-specific response pattern lies in the sociological construction of power-control theory. Power-control theory claims that the justice system of industrialized societies has been socially appointed as a male domain, where males are enculturated to act as instruments of formal control (Hagan et al. 1987). Indeed, Sacco (1990:495) relates the female fear of victimization to power-control theory and its effects on social behavior. Conversely, the anger males describe in response to watching slasher film violence may be a behavioral extension of the engendered responsibility to bring justice to the criminal, the heinous slasher himself.

Conclusion

Using a combination of methods in text analysis, this study shows that men and women have different perceptual and emotional reactions to slasher films. Among men, there is a propensity to identify images of rural terror in describing the slasher antagonist as part of a menacing and unfamiliar landscape. This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that men fear strangers and unfamiliar assailants. Women in the study display a greater fear of images connected with family terror and demonic possession, the latter of which is often contextualized in the home against the backdrop of "the familiar." This observation supports the hypothesis that women's descriptions of slasher film mirror their fears of intimate terror. The findings also suggest that women experience more abject fear when viewing slasher films than do men, a pattern explained in terms of gender victimization onscreen and the engendering of fear response patterns. Men's responses to slasher horror, however, are characterized by feelings of anger and frustration, a phenomenon explained through the tenets of power-control theory, in which an active versus a passive response to the visualization of violent criminalization is realized. These results support the original hypotheses proposed, as well as the conclusions by Zillmann et al. (1986), who assert that male and female affective response to horror films is largely an extension of socialization to gender roles. Regardless of the commercial fate of the genre, slasher films continue to provide social scientists with a useful vehicle for understanding how men's and women's behaviors are mediated by sociocultural prescriptions and by gender role socialization.

Works Cited

Bell, David.
  1997. Anti-Idyll: Rural Horror. Pp. 94-108 in *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation, and Rurality*, edited by Paul Cloke and Jo Little. Routledge, London.

Bernard, H. Russell and Gery W. Ryan.
  1998. Text Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Measures. Pp. 595-646 in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by H. Russell Bernard. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

Borgatti, Stephen.
  1998. ANTHROPAC 3.95. Analytical Technologies, Columbia, SC.

Carroll, Noel.
  1990. *The Philosophy of Horror and Paradoxes of the Heart*. Routledge, New York.

Clover, Carol J.
  1992. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

  1996. Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film. Pp. 66-116 in *The Dread of Difference: Gender in the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Cowan, Gloria and Margaret O'Brien.
  1990. Gender and Survival vs. Death in Slasher Films: A Content Analysis. *Sex Roles* 23(3-4):187-196.

Crane, Jonathan Lake.
  1994. *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror Film*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Donnerstein, E., D. Linz, and S. Penrod.
  1987. *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications*. Free Press, New York.

Duclos, Denis.
  1998. *The Werewolf Complex: America's Fascination with Violence*. Berg, Oxford.

Hagan, J.
  1987. Class in the Household: A Power-Control Theory of Gender and Delinquency. *American Journal of Sociology* 92(4):788-816.

Johnson, Jeffrey C. and David C. Griffith.
  1998. Visual Data: Collection, Analysis, and Representation. Pp. 211-228 in *Using Methods in the Field*, edited by Victor C. de Munck and Elisa J. Sobo. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Kruskal, Joseph B. and Myron Wish.
  1978. *Multidimensional Scaling*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA.

Linz, Daniel, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod.
  1984. The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence against Women. *Journal of Communication* 34:130-147.

Linz, Daniel, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod.
  1988. The Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Violent and Sexually Degrading Depictions of Women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55(5):758-768.
  1989. Malamuth, Neil M. and James V. P. Check.
  1981. The Effects of Mass Media Exposure on Acceptance of Violence against Women: A Field Experiment. *Journal of Research in Personality* 15:436-446.

Mundorf, Norbert, James Weaver, and Dolf Zillmann.
  1989. Effects of Gender Roles and Self Perceptions on Affective Reactions to Horror Films. *Sex Roles* 20(11-12):655-673.

Perloff, L. S.
  1983. Perceptions of Vulnerability to Victimization. *Journal of Social Issues* 39(2):41-61.

Pinedo, Isabel Cristina.
  1997. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. State University of New York Press, Albany.

Poggie, J., and P. Pelto.
  1969. Matrilateral Asymmetry in the American Kinship System. Anthropological
Quarterly 42:1-15.

Riger, S.
  1981. On Women. Pp. 47-65 in *Reactions to Crime*, edited by D. A. Lewis. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.

Riger, S. and M. T. Gordon.
  1982. Coping with Urban Crime: Women's Use of Precautionary Behaviors. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 10(4):369-386.

Ryan Gery W. and Thomas Weisner.
  1998. Content Analysis of Words in Brief Descriptions: How Fathers and Mothers
        Describe their Children. Pp. 57-68 in *Using Methods in the Field*, edited by
        Victor C. de Munck and Elisa J. Sobo. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Sacco, Vincent F.
  1990. Gender, Fear, and Victimization: A Preliminary Application of Power-Control
        Theory. *Sociological Spectrum* 10:485-506.

Sampson, R.
  1987. Personal Violence by Strangers: An Extension and Test of the Opportunity Model
        of Predatory Victimization. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*
        78:327-356.

Sharrett, Christopher.
  1984. The Idea of Apocalypse in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Pp. 255-276 in
        Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film, edited by Barry Keith Grant.
        Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey.

Sobchack, Vivian.
  1996. Bringing it All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange. Pp. 143-
        163 in *The Dread of Difference: Gender in the Horror Film*, edited by Barry
        Keith Grant. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Tamborini, R. and J. Stiff.
  1987. Predictors of Horror Film Attendance and Appeal: An Analysis of the Audience
        for Frightening Films. *Communication Research* 14:415-436.

Tamborini, R., Stiff, J., and D. Zillmann.
  1987. Preference for Graphic Horror Featuring Male versus Female Victimization:
        Personality and Past Film Viewing Experiences. *Human Communication
        Research* 13:529-552.

Williams, Tony.
  1996. Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980's Family Horror. Pp. 164-180 in *The
Dread of Difference: Gender in the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. University
of Texas Press, Austin.

Williamson, J. W.
  1995. *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains
        Did to the Movies*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Wood, Robin.
  1984. An Introduction to the American Horror Film. Pp. 164-200 in *Planks of Reason:
Essays on the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen,

New Jersey.

Zillmann, D., Weaver, J. B., Mundorf, N., and C. F. Aust.
  1986. Effects of an Opposite-Gender Companion's Affect to Horror on Distress, Delight, and Attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51:586-594.

Zuckerman, M. and P. Litle.
  1986. Personality and Curiosity about Morbid and Sexual Events. *Personality and Individual Differences* 7:49-56.

Notes

[1]However, in a content analysis of slasher film victims, Cowan and O'Brien (1990) discovered that males are just as likely as females to die at the hands of a killer. Clover's definition is used here because it mirrors the popular conception and understanding of the genre.

[2] Sociological treatment of the slushier genre has interpreted films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Friday the 13th* as portrayals of the breakdown of the community (Crane1994) and the apocalypse of modern society (Sharrett 1984).

[3]The descriptive word list includes those that were mentioned at least four times in total, independent of the number of informants mentioning each word.

Table 1. Slasher films described by students (N=60).

Halloween (9)	*Two Thousand Maniacs (1)*
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (4)	*The Vanishing (1)*
Scream (4)	*Hellraiser (1)*
Psycho (4)	*The Hitcher (1)*
Friday the 13th Part I (4)	*I Spit on Your Grave (1)*
The Shining (3)	*Seven (1)*
Children of the Corn (3)	*The Omen (1)*
Kiss the Girls (2)	*The Kiss (1)*
Silence of the Lambs (2)	*It (1)*
Pet Cemetary (2)	*Pumpkinhead (1)*
Deliverance (2)	*Cujo (1)*
Copycat (2)	*Hunter's Blood (1)*
Sleepers (1)	*Jaws (1)*
Phantasm (1)	*Friday the 13th, Part III (1)*
Misery (1)	*Unidentified (2)*

Table 2 Frequency of mention of key words from descriptions for men and women (N=60)

Words	Total		Men		Women		Difference
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Men B Women
Teenagers	10	16.7	10	33.3	0	0.0	33.3
Violent/ce	10	16.7	9	30.0	1	3.3	26.7
Disturbing	20	33.3	14	46.7	6	20.0	26.7
Rural	6	10.0	6	20.0	0	0.0	20.0
Dark	8	13.3	7	23.3	1	3.3	20.0
Tension	6	10.0	6	20.0	0	0.0	20.0
Country	4	6.7	4	13.3	0	0.0	13.3
Blood/y	9	15.0	6	20.0	3	10.0	10.0
Chainsaw	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Hillbillies	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Sickening	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Texas	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Killer	12	20.0	7	23.3	5	16.7	6.7
Horrible	6	10.0	4	13.3	2	6.7	6.7
Rape/d	6	10.0	4	13.3	2	6.7	6.7
City	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Death	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Massacre	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Kid	3	5.0	2	6.7	1	3.3	3.3
Night	3	5.0	2	6.7	1	3.3	3.3
Scary	13	21.7	7	23.3	6	20.0	3.3
Kidnaped	4	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	0.0
Children	9	15.0	4	13.3	5	16.7	-3.3
Pretty	5	8.3	2	6.7	3	10.0	-3.3
Woman	5	8.3	2	6.7	3	10.0	-3.3
Far	3	5.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	-3.3
Parents	3	5.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	-3.3
Religious	4	6.7	1	3.3	3	10.0	-6.7
Victims	4	6.7	1	3.3	3	10.0	-6.7
Girl/s	15	25.0	6	20.0	9	30.0	-10.0
Frightening	11	18.3	4	13.3	7	23.3	-10.0
Terrible	7	11.7	2	6.7	5	16.7	-10.0
Father	4	6.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	-13.3
Horror	15	25.0	5	16.7	10	33.3	-16.7
Evil	13	21.7	4	13.3	9	30.0	-16.7
Devil	5	8.3	0	0.0	5	16.7	-16.7
Young	12	20.0	3	10.0	9	30.0	-20.0
Little	8	13.3	1	3.3	7	23.3	-20.0
Boy	6	10.0	0	0.0	6	20.0	-20.0
Possessed/ion	6	10.0	0	0.0	6	20.0	-20.0

Table 3 Frequency of mention of key words emotional descriptions for men and women (N=60)

Words	Total		Men		Women		Difference
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Men B Women
Shocked	4	6.7	4	13.3	0	0.0	13.3
Angry	5	8.3	4	13.3	1	3.3	10.0
Disturbed	5	8.3	4	13.3	1	3.3	10.0
Helpless	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Intrigued	3	5.0	3	10.0	0	0.0	10.0
Terrified	5	8.3	4	13.3	1	3.3	10.0
Agitated	2	3.3	2	6.7	0	0.0	6.7
Fascinated	2	3.3	2	6.7	0	0.0	6.7
Anxious	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Sickened	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Uneasy	4	6.7	3	10.0	1	3.3	6.7
Disgusted	7	11.7	4	13.3	3	10.0	3.3
Frustrated	3	5.0	2	6.7	1	3.3	3.3
Frightened	5	8.3	3	10.0	2	6.7	3.3
Awful	2	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	0.0
Claustrophobic	4	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	0.0
Dread	2	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	0.0
Involved	2	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	0.0
Scared	4	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	0.0
Tense	6	10.0	3	10.0	3	10.0	0.0
Unsettled	2	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	0.0
Upset	2	3.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	0.0
Offended	3	5.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	-3.3
Panic	3	5.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	-3.3
Troubled	3	5.0	1	3.3	2	6.7	-3.3
Excited	4	6.7	1	3.3	3	10.0	-6.7
Paranoid	4	6.7	1	3.3	3	10.0	-6.7
Appalled	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Betrayed	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Exposed	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Horrified	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Repulsed	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Worried	2	3.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	-6.7
Uncomfortable	7	11.7	2	6.7	5	16.7	-10.0
Overwhelmed	3	5.0	0	0.0	3	10.0	-10.0
Alone	4	6.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	-13.3
Trapped	4	6.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	-13.3
Vulnerable	4	6.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	-13.3
Nervous	5	8.3	0	0.0	5	16.7	-16.7

Figure 1. Multidimensional Scaling of Informant-by-Informant Similarities from Film
Descriptions (N=60)

chainsaw
Texas
massacre
m   m city
f
m   death
m   teenager country
m   violent/ce   m
killer   m
rural   m   m   m
m m   f
sickening   f   tension   kidnaped
kid   horror   f
m   night
mm   children   terrible
m   dark   m   f   evil
disturbing   blood/y   f   f
m   young f   f   f   religious
f   girl/s   f   f
f
m   f   frightening   f   f father   possessed/ion
f   f   victims   f
far   devil
f
f
scary
m   f
m
m
rape/d   woman
f

pretty

horrible
m

hillbillies

m