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Recurring *Scream*: Trauma in Wes Craven's Slasher

by

Ben Muntananuchat

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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with a concentration in Film Studies
Department of Humanities & Cultural Studies
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Abstract

This thesis investigates trauma representation in the horror film trilogy *Scream*, by director Wes Craven and based on the story and characters by screenwriter Kevin Williamson. The franchise is a satirical body of work that uproots the formulaic narrative aspects of the slasher film subgenre, of which it belongs to. Craven and Williamson's method of critiquing the subgenre employs the usage of its cinematic tropes, though elevating them to a level of postmodern parody. I analyze traumatic representation within the franchise's layers of mediation and postmodern narrative elements, which are often highlighted in academic discussion. The trauma observed revolves around protagonist Sidney Prescott, who I argue exhibits symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead of employing conventional techniques used to convey trauma in film, such as the flashback sequence, *Scream* adopts a form of representation grounded in the very framework of the slasher film, as well as its own contemporary preoccupation with mediation. Turning to theories of trauma by the likes of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, I thematize the franchise's reconfiguration of slasher film tropes as performative of Sidney's recurring trauma, as she navigates her way through the film's violence and technological mediation as the "final girl" responsible for ending the killer's reign of rampage.

Recurring *Scream*: Trauma in Wes Craven's Slasher

Introduction

In 1996, veteran horror filmmaker Wes Craven was set to venture off into a new era of the Hollywood slasher film. The story, conceived by then newcomer Kevin Williamson, would go on to dismantle the fabric of many a slasher classic, including Craven's own *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, as well as countless others such as John Carpenter's *Halloween* and the *Friday the 13th* films. What would set Craven and Williamson's endeavor apart from the others does not involve an amplified amount of bloodshed, endlessly gruesome gore, or uninhibited carnage. Rather, their film would begin to construct a bridge adjoining the framework of the slasher film with the larger implications that come with the concept of trauma. All things considered, this newly arranged conception of the age-old slasher film allows for the subgenre to take new shape, foregrounding the inextricable ties it has to traumatic memory and experiences of the human condition.

What came of their collaboration would come to be known as *Scream*. Released in December of 1996, the film follows of a group of high school students pursued by a deranged serial killer in the fictional town of Woodsboro, California. While the

narrative opposition of serial killer versus teenagers is nothing new to the slasher subgenre of horror film, Williamson's script pushes past the limitations of the traditional blueprint and, alongside Craven's direction, *Scream* is able to harness the crippling sense of fear and horror that the genre invokes as well as allowing the film to take on a more self-aware direction, poking fun at some of its most iconic predecessors and the formulaic antics of the subgenre along the way. Their work in crafting this film resulted in a horror production conscious of the slasher film's narrative tropes prevalent among the rampage of *Friday's* machete-wielding maniac Jason Voorhees, and the resident "Boogeyman" of the *Halloween* series. Where *Scream* departs from its established counterparts can be found in its self-reflexive and postmodern dialogue and story along with the characters that they are presented through. Since then, Craven and Williamson's self-aware experiment with the slasher subgenre has become the leading topic of conversation when discussing the franchise's legacy in retrospect.

Scream's interpretation of slasher victims as smart, witty, and knowledgeable of the overarching genre motifs allows the film to critique the traditional mold and destabilize the boundaries of conventional slasher material. With each passing installation, the franchise alters the landscape of the subgenre by complicating the occurrence of the typical slasher scenarios within the narrative and reconstituting the meaning and usage behind each. Some of the most notable tropes within the slasher subgenre typically involve a group of highly sexualized adolescent youth, who, amid

the increasing chatter about a serial murderer in town, continue to prioritize their hormonal curiosity over safety. They commonly make misguided and downright naïve decisions that prove to be detrimental to themselves as victims of the subgenre, for instance, going off alone to a secluded area and prematurely reveling in the death of the killer, only to later be reunited with the assailant in a surprise attack. Many of the slasher film's tropes outside of the main characters operate as obstacles in their escape, including vehicles that cannot start, weak phone signals cutting off communication, and an incompetent and disbelieving police force. By the end of the film only a small portion of the original group will remain, as the more skeptical and rambunctious characters tend to falter. Craven and Williamson acknowledge all of these tropes and present them in a comical and subversive way by crafting characters who mimic the same observations that real life moviegoers and critics have made about the characters and situations that come with the subgenre. The humor is born out of the slick execution of the franchise, which consistently entangles the characters and dialogue with the world outside of the film by calling on the audience's knowledge of common horror film tropes in order for its intelligently witty backbone to shine through. In slightly more complicated terms, the film and its characters are aware of the usage of these tropes and the audience's familiarity with the genre. To shake up this dynamic, the characters concretely regurgitate these tropes as scenarios to watch out for in their list of "rules one must abide by to successfully survive a horror movie," as character

Randy Meeks, the Woodsboro High horror buff, calls them.¹ Ultimately, *Scream's* characters still fail to avoid these common mistakes, which adds another meta aspect to the film - they *have to die*, no matter their intelligence, due to the format of the slasher film, which further nods to the awareness of the film among the audience it attracts.

Based on this, the franchise functions as postmodern film due to its tendency to recognize the fellow slasher titles it so often references, its ability to critique the subgenre's cliché situational conflicts through satire, and its insistence on entangling such subject matter through modes of mediation, such as telephones, cameras, televisions, and film itself. The franchise expresses this through the adolescent characters in peril at the start of the franchise. The Woodsboro High School student body, well-versed across a wide variety of genres ranging from horror films to thrillers, frequently quote lines and pull references from titles such as *Basic Instinct* (1992) to even more obscure titles such as cult slasher film *The Mutilator* (1984). Because of their strong familiarity with horror films specifically, the savvy group of friends are able to discern “what to do” and “what not to do” when in a worst-case slasher scenario by observing how the decisions made by characters in horror films either aided in their survival or led to their demise. However, their knowledge of the slasher film's stereotypes operates as a double-edged knife, if you will, as Woodsboro High's students regrettably find

¹ Menard, A.D., et al. “‘There are Certain Rules that One Must Abide by’: Predictors of Morality in Slasher Films”; statistically studies the accuracy of slasher film tropes in determining morality based on factors such as nudity/sexuality, demeanor, and ethnicity.

themselves next in the line of danger despite feeling as though they have outsmarted the victims of the films they so often recite.

In response to the postmodernist backbone of *Scream*, the existing scholarly work on the franchise heralds it as enacting a turning point in the genre of horror. Academics and film critics alike emphasize the film's referential and satirical nature as a means of elevating the slasher subgenre toward the more contemporary plane of postmodern society in the 1990s. Though the conversation flourishes in the realm of cinematic postmodern presentation, notions of trauma grounded within these films offer a fresh point of interest and analysis. This franchise, from *Scream* (1996) through to its closing feature *Scream 4* (2011), heavily fixates on trauma relations sparked from the continuous plot of the franchise. In *Scream*, protagonist Sidney Prescott's world is turned upside down after the vicious rape and murder of her mother, Maureen, one year prior to the events of the film. Sidney must now find the power to outrun her own assailant, hellbent on sending her to an early grave right next to her mother. Over the course of the film, the mysterious serial killer known as "Ghostface" makes his way through those around her until the film reaches its pivotal twist-two individuals were behind Ghostface's mask all along: Sidney's boyfriend Billy and his best friend Stu. Their motive, to punish Sidney for her mother's actions, remains with Sidney throughout the series. Billy surmises that Maureen's affair with his father destroyed their familial household, and as a result Billy recruited Stu as his partner for the killings. Maureen's

double life comes to a head in Sidney's, leaving her to come to terms with the implications it now has on her.

With this franchise, Craven and Williamson manipulate how the film presents its otherwise conventional slasher film characteristics, remediating the aspects of trauma in the characters depicted, particularly with Sidney. Not only does *Scream* manipulate how it presents itself as a postmodernist take on the slasher, it represents trauma and memory as a result of violence made visible by the film's fixation with technological media. Through the killer's menacing telephone calls, the sensationalized news coverage of the murders, the haunting photographs of Maureen left behind at crime scenes, to video recording the murders as they take place, the franchise represents trauma through various means of mediation. In place of the more straightforward method of visualizing traumas through narrative flashbacks, the abundance of mediated matter often recalls Sidney's past and therefore supplants it into the present. This thesis examines the franchise's nuanced manifestation of the trauma that Sidney possesses. Migrating from one film to the next, the trauma of her mother's death remains throughout her life, returning in the form of a cloaked figure out to get Sidney.

This thesis incorporates the highly discussed intersection of postmodern mediation and the slasher film subgenre in the original *Scream* trilogy. In discussing these elements of the franchise, this thesis charts an alternative route of analysis and cinematic examination often left unrecognized or under-analyzed. By turning to

scholarly figures and established concepts in the world of trauma studies, *Scream's* self-reflexivity and satirical framework no longer only serves as commentary and critique of the slasher subgenre's conception, but also serves as the formulation and narrative representation of trauma in the overarching storyline across the three films. Though it is important to remember that the various concepts of trauma covered in this thesis vary in detail and understanding, they aid in reinforcing the importance of trauma in the character of Sidney Prescott as well as the film's central conflicts and events as the film moves forward in time. Sigmund Freud and his concept of repetition-compulsion in traumatic memory, as well as Judith Herman's foundational studies on post-traumatic stress disorder, aid in understanding how Sidney, along with other characters, are marred by these traumatic deaths that stick with them as a result of how extreme the experiences were. Turning towards more contemporary research overlapping postmodernism and trauma, I will look to the work of Cathy Caruth and Roger Luckhurst who will help in contextualizing trauma in cinema while additionally lending a hand in dissecting the role of mediation in constructing more physical and visible representations of trauma in *Scream's* story, setting, production, and editing. Though the character of Sidney does not physically exhibit any symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, I argue that the repetitive structure of the slasher film along with Sidney as the veteran final girl cinematically reconfigures concepts of trauma studies such as the return of the repressed, belatedness and latency, and repetition to

achieve mastery. In lieu of the now common cinematic methods for representing trauma, much like a flashback, *Scream's* aspects of trauma are ingrained within the media itself: in the form of the film franchise, the dense preoccupation with technology and mediation in each installation, and the satirical, self-referential dialogue and narrative. While the referenced theorists provide differing perspectives and understandings on the trauma discourse, their distinctive claims about trauma pave the way for this uncharted interpretation of the franchise's traumatic mediation that this thesis gravitates toward.

Conducting close readings with each installment uncovers how Sidney's trauma acts as the anchor for each film, while also further exemplifying the postmodern plane of discussion that often surrounds the franchise as a whole. Sotiris Petridis' historicization of the horror film's turn to postmodernist techniques in filmmaking, as well as Valerie Wee's concept of "hyperpostmodernism" in the late-90s slasher film, substantiate the role and presence of postmodernism in the slasher film and the *Scream* franchise. Both Petridis and Wee contextualize the postmodern impact that *Scream* had in the slasher subgenre and horror overall. Although each impose their own distinct and nuanced interpretations of the franchise's postmodern context, this thesis mainly refers to their work in historicizing the film within the time period and its spot in the slasher film community.

Before approaching the crossroads of trauma and postmodernism, this thesis begins by introducing the film from its inspired conception at the level of what came to be the “serial killer” entity and the phenomenon of its existence and conception in early 1970s America. This has proven crucial to the film’s creation as the rise of the serial killer heavily merged aspects of modern media and the act of serial murder, a lethal combination evident in Craven and Williamson’s collaborative work. Writer Peter Vronsky in *Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters* explores the nature of the serial killer, both in explicating their mind and personality as well as the media’s critical part in the creation of the sensationalized serial killer.

Origins of *Scream* and the rise of the “Postmodern Serial Killer”

The humble beginnings of *Scream* (initially titled *Scary Movie*) begin at the helm of up-and-coming screenwriter Kevin Williamson. Having worked on smaller budget films in the past, Williamson penned the script of the first film after finding inspiration from news coverage he had seen of a killer on the loose in the college town of Gainesville, Florida. The then unidentified killer was responsible for the morbid and macabre murders of five college students from the University of Florida and its neighboring Santa Fe College in August of 1990. The killer was later apprehended and identified as Danny Rolling, but more widely referred to as “The Gainesville Ripper.” His carnage involved stabbing the students to death and arranging their bodies, often

dismembered, in disturbing fashion for their roommates to discover (Ott). This murder spree took place nearly two decades after the beginnings of what would be known as the American “serial killer” in the late-1960s and early-1970s (Vronsky 4). According to Vronsky, the rise of the “postmodern age of serial homicide” came to fruition at the start of this time period. He traces the act of serial homicide as rampant around the 1970s following a decade of high media coverage on the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy. The increase in serial killings during this time period coincides with the beginnings of the contemporary slasher subgenre. Films such as Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 1974 and Carpenter’s *Halloween* in 1978 are often touted as foundational to the subgenre and would go on to become slasher classics, as well as two of the most recognized franchises in the genre of horror. Historically, I draw a link between the slasher film’s preoccupation with a central psychotic figure and the social construct of the postmodern serial killer. Both of these aspects served as inspiration for the original screenplay for *Scream* as Williamson penned his initial story based on his curiosity in watching the media coverage of the Gainesville murders. As a result, the screenplay forged a link between his fictionalized and mediated serial killer tale with one that existed independent of the frame of the film.

To further elaborate on the “postmodern serial killer” Vronsky examines high-profile serial murderers synonymous with the era’s inception. This term details the

symbiotic relationship between media and society and how this pairing gave birth to the concept and dynamics of the modern contemporary serial killer. Vronsky outlines the postmodern serial killer as possessing qualities that don't necessarily impart feelings of fear or danger. For instance, the postmodern serial killer is widely seen as charming, well-spoken, and well-educated at face value-all qualities that do not necessarily hint at the presence of a maniacally disturbed individual. The "postmodern" serial killer that Vronsky emphasizes thrives on anonymity in plain sight, and is usually revealed to be the type of person who, apart from killing, lives an ordinary life, holds an ordinary job, and forges through life as if they were normal fixtures in an everyday crowd (Vronsky 7). Vronsky identifies Ted Bundy as the first highly publicized postmodern serial killer, who exhibited such qualities and was able to initially elude suspicion due to the unlikeliness of someone as seemingly well-kept and adored being such a cold-hearted killer (Vronsky 4). By referring to other infamous murderers and their cases such as Charles Manson, Vronsky exposes the 60s and the 70s as the time when the serial killer first gained airtime by means of media outlets and coverage. The dynamic relationship between media and the concept of the serial killer directly applies to the *Scream* franchise and is visible in its handling of murder and mediation, and the trauma that is filtered through. This unstable codependent relationship comes to a head in the series, as topics such as mediated violence are addressed and pressurized in the dialogue and narrative. Not only does the franchise poke fun at the subgenre's iconic

past, the characters within the film also discuss the likes of Bundy and other notorious killers whose crimes were concurrent with the emergence of the slasher film.

Though the franchise incorporates bits of reality in its discussion of horror film and serial homicide, it traverses the sphere of truth by structuring its fictional narrative around the history of horror media and the different societal implications that the subgenre undertakes in the more contemporary world of 1990s America. While the franchise adapted real life violence into a fictional film, it's important to note that the correlation between the concept of the serial killer and a fictional film is not direct, and it poses complex questions and ideas. Though this particular franchise is inseparable from postmodern critique of the subgenre's roots and history, turning to theories concerning real life trauma and studies on the postmodern serial killer allows this thesis to observe real historical contexts within a fictional film franchise that suspends itself above these issues.

Postmodernism in the Slasher Film

As this thesis inches toward the close analysis of the franchise's installments, I first desire to substantiate and signify the postmodern aspect within the franchise. In order to do so, discussing the instances of postmodernism merging with the films at the level of subgenre guides the overall trajectory of this project. Due to the film's meta-reflexive method of presenting its plot and themes, taking a more in-depth look at

postmodernism in the slasher subgenre provides clarity leading into the survey of theoretical work on trauma essential to this piece, as well as how I attribute these studies on postmodernism and trauma when analyzing the films in closer detail. A sizeable portion of the existing conversation accentuates *Scream's* entanglement with postmodernism. Valerie Wee focuses on slasher films released in the latter portion of the 1990s. In her article "The *Scream* Trilogy, 'Hyperpostmodernism,' and the Late-Nineties Teen Slasher Film," Wee remarks on the heavily debated postmodern characteristics of *Scream* and puts forth a fresh angle on the franchise as a work of what she calls "hyperpostmodern" tendencies. She writes that she, "would like to suggest that the *Scream* trilogy does not merely continue the postmodern, 1980s slasher cycle, nor does it simply recirculate the already familiar postmodern characteristic of blurring the boundaries between reality and cinema" ("The *Scream* Trilogy" 47). Rather than clumping the film with the namesakes of John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper, Wee argues that *Scream* belongs to a new era of the slasher film, one that Sotiris Petridis coins as the "post-slasher" era, an era that succeeds the normalized slashers of the 1970s and 1980s, in "A Historical Approach to the Slasher Film," (Petridis 80). His work primarily focuses on historicizing *Scream* within the larger timeline of postmodern horror, linking it to Craven's own self-aware revamp of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise just two years prior to *Ghostface's* introduction. Petridis' work also establishes the influence of the new millennium in altering the terrain of the 90s slasher film by drawing upon the

growing technological anxieties of Y2K and the United States' many political tensions, including 9/11, which he claims brought an end to the style of postmodern critique exhibited in Craven's films and ushered in an era of sensationalized violence in horror media. Both Petridis and Wee view the film as a turning point in the subgenre and markedly understand it to be beyond the common term of "postmodern." Wee comments on the thematic hyperintertextuality of the film series. She further distinguishes her notion that the series collapses spatial, temporal, and textual boundaries through a screenplay that recalls its own past scenarios and timestamps, and the pop cultural moment of the releases through what she calls, "cross media-specific boundaries" ("The Scream Trilogy" 49). To further elaborate, Wee elevates the film's intertextual tendencies and its ability to narratively reference other titles in the subgenre that served as inspiration for the film itself, as well as the film's habit of referencing real world topics that exist outside of the film's diegetic world and incorporating them into the series in mediated fashion.

Wee's insights prove very useful for this analysis in that it serves as a comprehensive study of postmodernism in slasher films and its historical context. She reinforces her findings as responses to the "development of new media technologies such as cable, video, and an increasing range of digital media, the emergence of a new teen demographic in the United States, and the entertainment industry's escalating commitment to cross-media promotional and marketing practices" ("The Scream

Trilogy” 50). Wee’s research is helpful for my discussion on *Scream’s* multilayered presentation of media and mediated trauma in that it simplifies how to process the overlapping layers of mediation when reading specific scenes taken from each film.

Additionally, Wee’s “Resurrecting and Updating the Teen Slasher,” touches on how the film series hardly depicts “superhuman” serial killers, rather it’s ordinary teenagers and young adults who wind up donning Ghostface’s mask in these films (“Resurrecting and Updating” 55), harkening back to Vronsky’s description of a postmodern serial killer. Wee deduces that *Scream* does cultural work in the time of its release, noting escalating violence in American high schools in the late 20th century. She claims that this franchise, through the depiction of young and trendy antagonists, potentially harbors a commentary on the plight of the teenage experience in light of violent school circumstances, such as the ever-ongoing issue of school shootings (“Resurrecting and Updating” 55). The phenomenon of high school violence further contextualizes *Scream* in the socially and politically dense climate of 1990s America, where adolescent violence grew rampant while, according to Vronsky’s timeline, the postmodern serial killer era was coming to a close.

Common in both Petridis and Wee’s works is the sense that Craven and Williamson’s film surpasses the notion of postmodernism and finds itself both affixed with the traditions of the overarching subgenre and far into the future where it

transcends the bounds of the slasher film and the cinematic mode, opening wide a rift between various media, fiction, and reality.

The Slasher Subgenre

In an effort to explicate the *Scream* franchise down to its slasher template, Carol Clover's work in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* emphasizes the integral elements of the typical slasher film that *Scream* upends through its postmodern techniques. Clover's book discusses gender politics in the slasher film world, a study that can be applied and understood through this franchise's protagonist. Looking into Clover's work on the slasher subgenre, she establishes the specific terminology and conventional structure that make up the tried and true components of the run-of-the-mill slasher film. In her book, Clover discusses the history of the slasher and the cultural work it conducts through cinema by destabilizing gender norms. She discusses how slashers represent the female body through violence, sexuality, femininity and masculinity. Clover debuts the term "final girl" in her book, a title designated for the lead heroine of a horror franchise who, through strategy and strength, is able to subdue the usual "psycho killer" out to get her (Clover 35). Quite literally, the "final girl" in most cases outlives her friends, becoming the sole survivor and the quintessential example of how to survive a horror film. This in turn provides an interesting point of departure for the final girl in this franchise, Sidney Prescott. As the

resident final girl for the duration of the series, Sidney knows her way around a slasher scenario and possesses what is needed to earn the title and stay alive.

In understanding Clover's explanation of the final girl's characteristics, I observe the character of Sidney as a thorough "final girl" in Clover's standards. According to Clover, the final girl is "boyish" and is distinctly an outsider to her female friends who embody a more overt feminine attitude (Clover 40). The final girl is understood to be level-headed and smart, more so than the other females depicted alongside her, which thereby aligns the final girl more with the male bodies, yet the final girl is depicted as fearful and somewhat shy of boys (Clover 40). Clover's criteria for the final girl is found in Sidney, who in the first film repeatedly enacts the sense of "rejection" and apprehension towards intimate advances made by her boyfriend, and eventual killer, Billy. This is seen through Sidney's more androgynous clothing styles compared to the outright feminine wardrobe of her female counterparts. Another point of reference that Clover mentions is the tendency for final girl character to be given a masculinized name (Clover 40)- in *Scream*, Sidney's name is spelled in the traditional male variation of the name, with an I instead of a Y.

The slasher film generally puts forth this strong final girl for viewers to align themselves with. On the opposite end, the killer is typically male and considered a disturbed social outcast usually due to an underlying traumatic childhood experience, as evident in the psychotic killers like Michael Myers (*Halloween*), Jason Voorhees

(*Friday the 13th*), and *Leatherface (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre)*. The slasher film supplants stereotypical gender roles and characteristics and helps to contextualize and reflect on society's entanglement with these very systems. This subgenre functions as a nuanced lens on gender identity as Clover proposes the slasher film's male-heavy viewership is encouraged to reassess their gender beliefs by aligning with the female heroine rather than the male representations on film, which usually meant the killer or the misogynistic acquaintances of the final girl (Clover 46). To continue, Clover questions these dynamics and how the slasher becomes a place where gender roles are manipulated, often reversed, and presented anew while destabilizing the relationship between the movie audience and the gendered conventions of American society.

Reflecting on Clover's work through Sidney Prescott offers up nuanced ways of interpreting the character as the final girl of the series, as well as the traumatic backstory that is tied closely to her present self in the films. Sidney fits the bill as the final girl by being the mature one of her group, for her strength in overcoming *Ghostface*, and for the very presentation of her character as less stereotypically feminine than her counterparts. Complicating her stance as the final girl is the film's concentration on postmodernism. Due to the self-parodying attitude of the film, Sidney often rejects the slasher film and refutes the intelligence of the characters. Her criticism of the slasher film and its established character archetypes references her own positionality within a horror film landscape of her own. In the first *Scream* film, while

unknowingly speaking to the killer over the phone, Sidney declares, “What’s the point [of horror films] they’re all the same? Some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can’t act, who’s always running up the stairs when she should be running out the front door, it’s insulting.” Though Sidney’s skepticism is made to point out the flaws in the final girls of horror’s past, *Scream* muddies the water by presenting a final girl aware of the common mistakes characters make in horror films, yet still falls victim to them when in similar predicaments. To make matters worse, not only does Sidney have to tackle the duties that come with being the final girl, she must also confront her personal traumas as they inevitably rebound through the slasher structure and narrative plot in a manner similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. Further complicating her final girl role, Sidney’s traumatic offscreen past recalls the kind of traumatic childhood backstory often experienced by psycho killer figures in slasher films, elevating the presence of trauma as central to the diegesis by linking together bodies, characters, and slasher structures through the experience of trauma.

Studies in Trauma & Representation

Moving away from postmodern and slasher film discourse, trauma studies serves as the core between all three of these houses of knowledge, specifically in this franchise. Keeping in mind the previous concepts and topics introduced thus far, trauma studies interconnects these independent fields of study through the argument I

pose throughout-that *Scream* serves as a film franchise of traumatic representation through the mediated postmodern ways in which Sidney's traumatic experiences are reproduced throughout the films. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud presents his theory of repetition-compulsion, which he defines as the reoccurrence of traumatic events and memories in order to mentally comprehend and move past the effects of the experience, rather than continuing the cycle of the unconscious memory reappearing time after time (Freud 14). His work deals with repressed memories in the unconscious mind. He goes on to further explain that the repressed returning into the conscious mind brings about discomfort. This discomfort, as Freud puts it, relates to the initial discomfort which resulted in the repression of the experience in the first place (Freud 15). Freud describes the unconscious not as a structure that pushes hard against any type of cure, rather it "has no other aim than to force its way through the pressure weighing on it, either to consciousness or to discharge by means of some real action" (Freud 14). Freud understands that the conscious and preconscious ego work to apply pressure to the unconscious, thereby securing the repressed material as repressed. This process enacted by the conscious and preconscious ego then tries to facilitate the pleasure principle, which would work to avoid the instance of "pain" that would potentially show up through the repressed memories (Freud 14).

Applying Freud's concepts to the franchise, I theorize that the fragmented and intrusive killing sequences of slasher films mirror the motion of repetition-compulsion,

and that these kill sequences work much like the return of the repressed. The slasher franchise fully depends on the inevitable return of the traumatic past that continues to resurge time after time. Just as Sidney seemingly recovers from the trauma of her mother's murder in *Scream*, the new batch of killings erupts just a year later. Right from the beginning of the film, Ghostface harasses Sidney over the phone and repeatedly alludes to Maureen's murder, constantly reminding Sidney of the loss of her mom as new bodies are showing up all over town. Again, I question the structure of the slasher and the fragmented instances of violence enacted by Ghostface as constructing the return of Sidney's traumatic childhood memory of finding her mother's lifeless body. Sidney's friends share their demise with Maureen, killed by stab wounds, which then graphically provokes the audience and Sidney into remembering Maureen. Considering Freud's concepts, I analyze Sidney's role as a perpetual final girl as a method toward mastery, to move forth from the traumatic events in her past by being able to control and "master" the paralyzing memories and episodes that have plagued her.

Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman discusses child neglect and abuse from the child's point of view, including the prolonged effects and detriments it poses. Part of Herman's work emphasizes "The Child Grown Up," in other words how one in adulthood copes with a traumatic past. Although Herman's work deals with physical and psychological child abuse and maps that course through to adolescence, these concepts and understandings on post-abuse development relate to Sidney's adolescent

experiences, despite her character not physically experiencing direct child abuse.

Herman states, “The child survivor is left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative. She approaches the tasks of early adulthood — establishing independence and intimacy —burdened by major impairments in self-care, in cognition and memory, in identity, and in the capacity to form stable relationships” (Herman 110). This quote indisputably profiles the hardships that follow Sidney after her mother’s death, and after her many escapes from the clutches of death. Though Sidney experiences no form of parental abuse within her family, in this case discovering her mother’s dead body figuratively acts in place of such an experience and serves as the traumatic childhood memory that resurges in the form of a killer in each film. Herman’s descriptions of a child abuse survivor growing up coincides with Sidney’s predicament, in that Sidney becomes the prime example of an adult survivor who is at high risk for further victimization, as the violence and potential for death return in all three sequels in this franchise (Herman 111). According to Herman, the child survivor, due to an unstable and violent past, has a hard time maintaining intimate relationships due to issues concerning safety and fear of burgeoning and immediate danger (Herman 111).

Moving on from Freud and Herman, I bring forth the study of trauma in the realm of its aesthetic and artistic representation in media. Roger Luckhurst’s *The Trauma Question* explores how trauma can be portrayed through cinema. Several key techniques used in film that explicitly shape how trauma is represented are mentioned and

described. Luckhurst details the how cinema shaped how the general public relates to post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short. He specifically researches the cinematic “flashback” and how it was among several techniques that cinema crafted in an “attempt to convey the experience of traumatized subjectivity” (Luckhurst 178). Along with flashbacks, Luckhurst presents other traumatic cinematic forms, such as the backwards-moving plot as well as the mosaic plot, of which the events come together after the fact (Luckhurst 178). From the mid-20th century forward, these cinematic techniques served as the most common methods of representing trauma in cinema and television. However, this franchise implements other strategies in place of these conventional tropes. Sidney does not physically experience a flashback depicted in the film, and while the films do not adhere to the traditional sense of puzzle plots or eternal loops, the postmodern self-referential aspect of the *Scream* franchise allows for a different kind of flashback or repetitive plot, one that transplants the past into future installments. Though not the same as the flashbacks that Luckhurst discusses, the postmodern and self-reflexive characteristics of this franchise take the place of the more traditional flashbacks.

Bringing forth concepts of traumatic memory alongside postmodernism, Cathy Caruth’s *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* provides a more contemporary understanding of trauma that I directly link to the franchise’s thematized postmodern trauma. In her work, she presents an investigation into the pathology of trauma as often “assimilated

or experienced...only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth 4). This serves as Caruth's understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder, though she expands her research on latency in media such as film and literature. For Caruth, the postmodernist concept of fragmentation, gaps or lapses, and moments of repetition operate as the construction and representation of trauma. I find her claim of post-traumatic stress disorder to be compelling and fitting with my own stakes in discussing *Scream* as a medium for understanding trauma and memory and its complicated temporal relationship. With Caruth's concepts in mind, Maureen's death along with Sidney's discovery of her body stand outside the realm of human understanding in the mind. Due to its intense and graphic nature, it is only able to be experienced in what is described as latency, or a belated period of time, because of how extreme the event in question was in the first place (Caruth 4). Caruth explains that the "forgetting" and foregoing of experiencing a certain event (at the time it takes place) does indeed count as true experience, and that it is the latency of the event that functions to manage the historical experience. Because it is not fully experienced and assimilated at first go, it can only be experienced and connected to another place and time, "it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all," (Caruth 8).

Like Luckhurst, Caruth also discusses the phenomenon of the flashback, though in physical and diagnostic terms, specifically in real cases of traumatic experience in

people and patients afflicted by the occurrence of traumatic memory. Caruth argues that the occurrence of such phenomena is rooted in the issues concerning the integration of the traumatic memory. The flashbacks serve as signs that these instances and moments had failed to become fully integrated and assimilated into one's consciousness (Caruth 152). She proclaims the flashback's ability to reproduce in "full detail" how experiences in one's life are tied to the way in which they evade full conscious interaction and embodiment (Caruth 153). An important aspect of Caruth's work revolves around what she refers to as "carrying the impossibility of knowing." To elaborate, Caruth theorizes that examining the results outside of its originating event allows for a new type of engagement and understanding where the afflicted bears witness to the trauma through the "impossibility" itself.

Transitioning to the analysis of the *Scream* franchise, Caruth's work on trauma and belatedness provide a deeper understanding of the slasher film, its repetitious recurrence of murder, and the continued plight of Sidney against the many Ghostfaces she comes across. Thinking along the lines of Maureen's murder and Caruth's work, the mode of the slasher film and the mediated reconstructions of Sidney's traumatic past serve the purpose of latency of the original event-a way for Sidney to experience the event in full due to the force and magnitude of the event numbing her from assimilation in the first place.

Traumatic Analysis of Ghostface

Venturing through some of the touchstones of trauma studies facilitates a point of entry into *Scream*'s intersection of trauma representation and intertextual media. I will put forth close readings of the first three installments of the franchise, beginning with *Scream* (1996), *Scream 2* (1997), and concluding with *Scream 3* (2000). These three films collectively make up what is known as the original *Scream* trilogy. With the release of the third film in 2000, the foundational backbone of the trilogy comes to a close. This installment lays to rest the underlying conflict and rippling effect of Maureen Prescott's tumultuous past and puts forth an end to Sidney's constant run from danger.

Despite the end of the trilogy, the franchise has been rebooted a number of times, starting with the reunion of Craven and Williamson for *Scream 4* (2011), a sequel and soft reboot of the series which takes place over a decade after events of the preceding film and depicts Sidney's return to Woodsboro on the 15th anniversary of the town's original murder spree. Though the film reignites the hyper-meta and technologically mediated style of the original trilogy, the decision to introduce a new core cast after such a large gap in narrative time severs any underlying association of Maureen Prescott as the motivating factor behind the killings. The film appropriately acknowledges its place within the franchise and does so by satirically examining clichés

of film reboots and remakes,² the very clichés that *Scream's* television adaptations would inadvertently suffer from. MTV's short-lived adaptation of the same name in 2015, as well as VH1's complete overhaul of the series in 2019 titled *Scream: Resurrection* altogether abandoned the metatextual awareness of the films. Considering *Scream 4's* shift in character and direction, and the thematic departure of the television adaptations, I find it imperative to this thesis that I only analyze the first three films in the franchise.

1996's *Scream*, the first of the series, starts with a haunting opening sequence that serves as the culmination of the many concepts of trauma and mediation referred to in this thesis. The film opens with a static shot of a ringing telephone. As a hand comes into frame to answer, the camera reveals a young teenage girl. She insists to the mysterious man on the other end of the phone that he must have the wrong number and politely hangs up. Casey Becker, a student of Woodsboro High School, is home alone and waiting for her boyfriend Steve to arrive as she readies some snacks and a video for them to watch upon his arrival. As the night progresses, Casey begins to receive more calls from the man. The calls take a turn for the worst when the caller teases that he is able to see her from outside. After a series of hang-ups and returned calls, the tormenter reveals that he has Steve tied up to a chair on back the patio. He

² Lizardi, Ryan. "Re-Imagining' Hegemony and Misogyny in the Contemporary Slasher Remake"; analyzes slasher remakes based on their tendency to allegorically address and question the very social hierarchies and power structures previously conveyed in their respective franchises.

threatens to kill Steve unless Casey can correctly answer a series of questions that he poses to her, all pertaining to horror films. Ultimately, Steve is killed when Casey falls for a trick question, and after rejecting any further participation in the killer's game, he breaks into her home to pursue her.

The opening of the film ends with Casey's parents returning home to find her body hanging from the tree outside. The murder of Casey Becker and Steve Orth catches the attention of local media outlets who then flock to the high school the morning after the incident. The students arrive for class to find the horde of reporters outside and learn of Casey and Steve's gory fate. In comes the protagonist of the film, Sidney Prescott. She meets with best friend Tatum Riley out front where Tatum reluctantly states, "this is the worst crime they've seen in years, even worse than...well, it's bad." The crime she references is none other than the rape and murder of Maureen Prescott, Sidney's mother. Her death takes place a year before the events of the first film, and yet the violence of it all has somehow come back to the forefront of Sidney's mind. Casey and Steve's murder operates as a reminder for Woodsboro, a reminder of Maureen's life violent death and the toll it took on the community. Casey's end recalls the death of Maureen, except now through the formulaic tropes of the slasher film, with Casey receiving taunting phone calls while home alone. Though the scene narratively harkens back to the trauma of Maureen for Sidney and Woodsboro, the referential conversation over the phone serves as the first instance of mediated trauma, while the

topic of the conversation is the result of the film's entanglement with intertextuality and postmodern representation of the slasher. Over the course of the film, the killer shifts focus onto Sidney and her close circle, leaving her menacing phone calls and attacking her at home and at school. The resurgence of violence in such a small town paired with the deaths of such young victims spurs a wave of disbelief and controversy against Sidney's confrontations with the elusive killer.

While the film presents other important instances of traumatic representation, I find significance in the film's the climactic unmasking and its ability to connect instances of violence in Sidney's past to the violence in her current life. Again, it is revealed that Sidney's boyfriend Billy Loomis and his best friend Stu Macher were behind deaths of her friends as well as her mother. Their motive behind the murders deeply involve Maureen as she maintained an affair with Billy's father, previously unbeknownst to Sidney. Keeping this aspect in mind, it inspires in me a desire to perceive the film as a product of trauma, all related to Maureen and her grisly demise. Starting with Freud, one way to analyze this film is to understand it as an example of repetition-compulsion. In this case, Sidney's fight against the Ghostface figure is metaphoric for the trauma that comes with dealing with her mother's death the year prior. Maureen's death is further referenced as she was stabbed to death by Billy and Stu, who went on kill their victims in the same fashion as they did Maureen. As stated before, I argue that the film aids in structuring Sidney's trauma through its narrative

and its postmodernist attitude, rather than a straightforward scene that presents the trauma on the surface. Keeping repetition-compulsion in mind, the slasher film dynamic of a young girl vs. serial killer is representative of the trauma Sidney experienced when discovering Maureen and the way in which she died.

To say that the slasher subgenre's character dynamics represents Sidney's traumatic internal struggle is to suggest that her trauma embodies the mode of the film itself through mediation. Ghostface, as the tangible representation of Sidney's trauma, targets her as the central kill of the film, as a traumatic memory would plague that of a person who has undergone a traumatic event. Referring back to Freud, it is interesting to consider how he understands the motion of traumatic memories as the return of repressed memories concerning a past event that was too excruciating to be dealt with or presently experienced with the conscious mind at the time of the event. These memories return to help the individual mentally heal from, understand, and grasp the originating source of the trauma. I propose this notion is reflected throughout the entire trilogy as a part of a slasher subgenre format, as well as how the trilogy documents the progression of Sidney's life despite having to escape the wrath of the Ghostface killer time and time again.

Turning to Caruth, I employ her understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder as experiencing the initial traumatic event, that it is not just a way of "repression" or a "defense" mechanism, rather "as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond

the shock of the first moment” (Caruth 10). As the series proceeds, Sidney is plagued by killer upon killer out to correct a “wrong” from the past, with that wrong itself being tied to Maureen’s reputation and familial tensions that were brought to light. Because of the severity and brutality of the event, Sidney failed to fully “experience” and possibly process the event in her psyche, causing the event to make reappearances throughout her life thereafter in the form of a “memory.” Where I apply pressure to this argument alongside Caruth’s work would be the representation of memory related to the post-traumatic style of the film itself. Sidney doesn’t merely experience a firsthand flashback to a previous event in her recent past. Rather, the narrative structure of the film produces a sense of traumatic memory created through the highly mediated sentiments of its two sequels in the original trilogy, much like the morbid phone calls the killer uses as a calling card. In addition to this, the highly postmodern incorporation of media along with the wide array of technology depicted in the films also work to represent Sidney’s trauma in more technological and mediated ways, an aspect that progressively grows as the series carries on.

Though the sequel was released 1997, *Scream 2* depicts Sidney two years after the events of the previous film. Now enrolled at the fictional Windsor College, Sidney is once again embroiled in a murderous fiasco as she and fellow survivors Randy Meeks, Sheriff Duey Riley, and investigative journalist Gale Weathers are thrust back into the violent path of Ghostface. The film opens with two Windsor College students, Phil

Stevens and Maureen Evans, out for the night at a local theater premiere of “Stab,” a film-within-a-film existing solely within the realm of *Scream*. “Stab” serves as a horror film that dramatizes the overall story and events of Sidney’s life as depicted in the first film of the franchise. This opening facilitates a callback to the first film in a multitude of ways. As the camera follows Phil and Maureen into the theater auditorium, the theater’s screen is also seen playing the recreated “Stab” version of Casey Becker’s murder.

These films become linked through the simultaneity of the openings, drawing back to the opening death of Casey and her boyfriend to foreshadow the demise of Maureen Evans and boyfriend Phil Stevens in the same vein. The film intercuts scenes from “Stab” as Maureen and Phil settle into their seats, exit for the restroom, and head for the concession stand. As I have thematized, these quick disruptive shots of the theater screen also represent the notions of traumatic memory in place of the more conventional flashback. These shots emerge out of the film’s present diegesis to represent a relative moment in the franchise’s past, seemingly imitating the motions of traumatic memory resurfacing after the root of the initial traumatic experience. The trauma of Woodsboro is restructured in this sequel, as Maureen Evans’ death unfolds parallel to the deaths on the movie screen in the auditorium. The traumatic scars left by Ghostface are constantly reminded of in this opening scene, as the entire audience in attendance is dressed head-to-toe in Ghostface’s traditional disguise, from the black

cloak to the ghoulish mask, all of which were given to the theater by the film studio.

This overwhelming abundance of Ghostface imagery allows Ghostface's past to bleed into the present scene by calling back to the first film in a visceral and jarring way, which allows for spectators to link the events of the film together. The death of Maureen Evans signals a sense of familiarity and symbolism through the recurrence of the name Maureen, while this resurgence also calls upon the circumstances of Maureen Prescott's murder and the deadly ramifications that followed suit. The similarity in name is also revealed to be purposeful, as the group pieces together that the victims all bear similar names to the original victims of Woodsboro, signaling a copy-cat serial killer is at the helm of their conflict and further implicating Sidney's past.

This opening scene collapses the events of *Scream* through the "Stab" movie. The death of "Maureen," further suggests the numbing nature of these events in their original moment in time and implies a sense of repeated delayed returns in the form of traumatic memories and further invokes the concept of latency and belatedness in trauma. Much like how I process these films as constructing trauma through its mediated forms, I understand this opening scene as similar to Casey's death. Where Casey's death served as a mediated reminder of Maureen Prescott's death, the opening of *Scream 2* recalls both Maureen Prescott and Casey Becker, layering these mediated traumas within one another. This film-within-a-film technique is key in how I observe this organization as a means for presenting concepts of traumatic memory in the non-

fictional realm of the *Scream* franchise. *Scream 2* deviates from the more conventional mode of flashbacks that allow for a firsthand glimpse of an event in the past as it occurred. Rather than applying conventional methods of presenting concepts of trauma and memory, Craven and Williamson choose to intersect the film's diegesis with the film-within-a-film aspect, essentially recreating the very scenes and overall narrative of the first film, compounding the not-too-distant past and the inescapable stakes it holds as the franchise moves forth. The technical and creative aspect of relying on a film-within-a-film to address bigger concepts regarding trauma also brings into question how the film utilizes postmodern approaches in presenting its ideas and themes.

Dissecting this aspect through Caruth, the film-within-a-film redramatizes *Scream* but in the temporal landscape of Sidney's college years. Though the events of the first film took place during her time in high school, "Stab" is released two years into Sidney's education at college. The film's release years after the murders in Woodsboro serves as an example of latent historical experience for Sidney to confront in her now present life with the release of "Stab." This notion can be elevated further to the level of cinema, in that *Scream 2* and the *Scream* franchise overall functions as a belated and latent experience of Maureen's death at the ambiguous hands of three different supposed killers.

Scream 2 is crafted in a fashion that further explores the dynamics between itself as a film and the audience that watches it and applies even more instances of mediated

trauma than its predecessor did. While this sequel indeed employs the usage of satire and self-parody, it becomes increasingly more intertwined with technology, and it is this usage of technology that the return of repressed traumatic memory is constructed. While the opening uses a theater screen to act as a spyglass into Woodsboro's massacre, elements of "Stab" reappear throughout the film as we follow Sidney and the other characters through the diegesis. Nearing the middle of the film, a scene between characters Duey and Randy takes place as they meet in the student cafeteria to discuss the new batch of murders. While talking to one another, the camera cuts to a shot of a television screen mounted on the wall above the two. Onscreen an entertainment news program plays as Tori Spelling is being interviewed by real life entertainment journalist Nancy O'Dell. While Spelling plays herself, what brings about more postmodern complexity is that she stars in "Stab" as a fictionalized version of Sidney, and that in the interview she discusses her role as Sidney while very much playing herself as Tori Spelling. As complicated as that sounds, it is this layering of narratives and fiction/nonfiction that gives this franchise its badge of postmodernism. The film is constantly preoccupied with media and reality in the way it presents its narrative, so much so that the characters reference existing media outside of the film, just as "Stab" incorporates real life actors playing themselves in a film that only exists within the world that Craven and Williamson created themselves. As the interview on the television screen unfolds, we push through yet another layer of mediation apart from

the interview, as O'Dell and Spelling turn their heads toward a screen where a clip from "Stab" plays out. The clip recreates a scene from *Scream* where Sidney and Billy run into one another in the school hallway a day after Sidney had been attacked in her home and Billy had been deemed the top suspect. The actual scene from the first film and this dramatization in "Stab" are mirror images of each other with slight differences in dialogue. The frame of the clip then enlarges to engulf the frame of the actual film itself, as if we were watching the original scene unfold before our eyes. The foregrounding of this clip functions similarly to that of a flashback despite it being a dramatized account of the actual event in question. The clip expanding to the entire frame denotes emphasis and draws focus to the scene and in doing so pauses the temporal setting of the cafeteria with Dewey and Randy in the process. I observe this occurrence as representative of the disruptive nature of traumatic memory and experience as the memory of Sidney and Billy comes to full attention. While the film operates around the standard slasher film's killer vs. victim format, the ways in which each killer refers to Maureen (through menacing phone calls, notes, and photos) just serves as yet another reminder of the traumatic memory of her death that was never fully assimilated by Sidney, and arguably, was stretched out into the collective narrative of the *Scream* franchise that Craven and Williamson carefully crafted.

Moving into the final film of the original trilogy, *Scream 3* picks up two years after the events at Windsor College. Sidney has left college and has moved to a remote

area of California where she lives alone in a desolate wooded area. At this point in time, Sidney lives in hiding and goes by a different name, all to avoid a repeat of the past killings she had survived. *Scream 3* very much presents itself as the concluding installment to the franchise. It brings together Sidney, Dewey, and Gale after having gone their separate ways after the events at Windsor College. The film takes place primarily in Los Angeles, California and Hollywood, and centers on the production of "Stab 3: Return to Woodsboro," the third installment in the "Stab" series. "Stab 3" tells a completely fictional story about a return to Woodsboro for Sidney and friends. Unfortunately, the inevitable return of Ghostface (in *Scream 3*) marks the beginning of the end for production, as one by one the cast of the doomed film become real-life victims themselves.

Scream 3 can be seen as the culmination of the traumatic memories of Maureen's death. Once again, the film self-reflexively incorporates self-referential material in its overall postmodern approach and layout. The film traverses yet another interesting intersection of mediation and trauma through the basis of film and cinema itself. As Sidney, Dewey, and Gale try to piece together the clues to identify the Ghostface killer, they must now find the answers in the many different scripts and rewrites for "Stab 3" after realizing that the killings are all modeled after the order of character deaths in the various screenplays. I believe *Scream 3*, more than its past installments, gives off the most self-aware and postmodern structure, through its technical way of referencing the

past films and the way in which it handles “Stab 3” as a meta-reflexive method for trauma to be confronted by Sidney, through the dialogue and stage sets of the fictional film’s soundstage. This installment explicitly details its roots in Maureen Prescott’s murder, as the killer leaves haunting photos of Maureen from a young age, later revealed to be headshots from her brief stint as an actress for B-horror films in the late 60s and early 70s. The use of Maureen’s photographs more physically spurs memories involving of her death, but it further leads to questions of Maureen’s role in the film and franchise. The incessant trail of photos persuades the group into delving deeper into the meaning behind why they’re being left and the point at which these photos were taken. More importantly, as *Scream 2* drew upon the events of the film before it, *Scream 3* concretely implicates Maureen and makes clear that she holds some sort of answer to the madness.

Most interestingly, two scenes from the film invoke a meeting ground between Sidney’s past and present. After Sidney comes out of hiding and heads to Los Angeles, she stumbles upon Angelina, the actress chosen to play her. As she and Angelina chat about the film, Angelina walks away leaving behind some of her belongings. Sidney takes it upon herself to return them to her and follows her through the empty soundstage containing a replica of Woodsboro. The replica includes a recreation of her father’s home and Stu Macher’s house, where Sidney initially killed Ghostface. Sidney, overwhelmed with emotion, ventures through the film set version of her home as she

walks past crime scene after crime scene. As she does so, dialogue from the first film can be heard playing in the background, such as her conversations with Billy in her bedroom, as a way to mark a memory that Sidney is actively remembering. The house, an almost exact replica of her home, motivates the audience into linking Sidney in this film to Sidney back in Woodsboro. Sidney's slow gate makes for a literal "walk down memory lane," as she walks into her makeshift bedroom and sits on the bed. She mimics the actions she took the night of the initial attack in her home back in 1996 by opening the door of her closet so that its doorknob sits beside the doorknob of her bedroom door, which would cause for the doors to jam if the killer were to attempt to barge in.

The scene plays out like a literal flashback of a memory, though the film finds a different way of representing it through the guise of "Stab 3" and by having Sidney seemingly re-immers herself in a now tactile version of her traumatic past, enacting a kind of experiential simulation³. This notion is further exacerbated as the actual Ghostface killer attacks her once again, this time on the set. Sidney finds herself running up the same stairs she did as a teenager, however the events unfold in a different way. Though it is unspecified whether or not the audio is supposed to signify her inner

³ Scholar Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* defines simulation as, "No longer that of a territory, a referential being, or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." He views civilization as rooted in these systems, that reality is composed of a multitude of models and copies embedded within the fabric of modern society.

thoughts or if they are indeed being played by the killer, Sidney hears the voice of her mother lure her into the replica of her Maureen's bedroom. She walks into the blood-stained room where an echo of voices can be heard. Audio clips of Billy and Stu revealing themselves as the killers in the first film are heard overlapping with the new dialogue of Maureen saying, "I couldn't protect you at all!" The scene ends with the body of her mother rising from the floor, covered in a bloody police sheet, as she draws closer to Sidney.

This explicit portrayal of Maureen provides the extreme vision of how the memory of her death has floated alongside Sidney throughout the franchise. It also presents a complicated and interesting relationship between Maureen and Ghostface. Though it can easily be interpreted that the voices and visuals surrounding Maureen in the film represent the reemergence of traumatic memories, Maureen's symbolic return in *Scream 3* carries with it more complexity than it does answers, and it introduces facets of her life that had previously been unknown to Sidney or the group as a whole. Though the criteria behind Caruth's understanding of a physical flashback does not necessarily exist in this example, some similar processes prevail. Caruth writes that "the traumatized are called upon to see and to relive the insistent reality of the past, they recover a past that encounters consciousness..." (Caruth 152).

Conclusion

The release of *Scream* nearly 25 years ago has left a wide-ranging impact on cinema in the decades that have come and gone. While critically acclaimed, the film also attained popularity among veteran horror fanatics as well as attracting the teenage demographic. While the center of each conflict is revealed to be a kind of copy-cat killer, either paying homage to their murderous inspiration or acting out of vengeful motive, Craven and Williamson's film sparked a handful of copy-cats themselves. In the years following, slasher titles such as *Urban Legend* (1998), *Cherry Falls* (2000), and Williamson's own screenplay *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) further catapulted the burgeoning era of teen slasher horror that would come full circle with the subgenre's most recognized and established franchises. 1998 saw the release of sequels to two pre-*Scream* franchises, *Halloween* and *Child's Play*. The films *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* and *Bride of Chucky* would borrow from Craven and Williamson's structural approach and emphasis on the youth by introducing a new central cast of teenaged characters. *Scream's* influence is literally present in *H20*,⁴ which features a scene where two characters are watching *Scream 2*. Alternatively, the movie poster for

⁴ At the 00:48:10 mark of Steve Miner's *Halloween H20: 25 Years Later* (1998), boarding school students Molly (Michelle Williams) and Sarah (Jodi Lyn O'Keefe) are seen in their dorm room while their TV set plays a scene from *Scream 2* (1997) depicting Ghostface coincidentally threatening a student, Cici (Sarah Michelle Gellar), over the telephone.

Chucky is a direct parody of *Scream 2*'s poster, down to the design, coloration, and typeface.

While some of these films may have earned their spot and legacy in the horror universe, *Scream* remains distinct among its peers due to its evolution throughout the franchise. Effectively blending in the chaos of the slasher film's aesthetic and the humor of the self-critical dialogue, Craven and Williamson reconstituted what a slasher film was and what it could be, by blurring the lines between horror and comedy, and fiction and reality. In retracing the steps of the pioneering slasher films, this postmodern slasher unearthed new territory and topics of conversation. In addition to the postmodern slasher discourse covered thus far, this thesis situates trauma studies and concepts of trauma representation in the middle of it all. Rather than implementing the traditional cinematic strategies used to convey trauma in certain characters, the *Scream* franchise conveys trauma through the framework of the slasher film, including the sudden and repetitive nature of violence and death in the narrative. This trauma, stemming from the violent rape and murder of Maureen Prescott, resurfaces with each passing installment for her daughter, Sidney, in the form of Ghostface, a visual identity taken on by a different murderer wearing the trademark disguise. The franchise transcends boundary lines, often referencing fellow horror films and historical social events of the period in the hyper-reflexive script. It is through the postmodern breaking

of boundaries that this franchise is able to harbor topics of trauma in the very fiber of film.

Recalling the earlier survey of slasher film character traits, the characters depicted here are the archetypal slasher film characters- they're sexually active and they often make rash decisions leading to their end. However, their intelligence and self-awareness to outside media marks a departure from the bland cookie cutter molds of the slasher film's past character set. While these new-age teens inevitably meet their end despite being aware of their fatal situation, the unorthodox self-reflexivity of the characters promotes reexamination of each individual beyond their stereotypical traits.

While trauma is arguably present in all horror films, even the slashers of Hollywood's past, the postmodern execution of this franchise doubles down on the presence of Sidney's trauma, and suspends it as a structural foundation for the plot and construction of the film. With this in mind, because the nature of the slasher film is contingent upon cyclical violence and death, Sidney's trauma consists of not only her mother's murder, but the bouts of tragedy that she herself has made it through with each passing film. With the postmodern approach of self-referencing itself, the *Scream* franchise's use of a-film-within-a-film with the fictional slasher "Stab" places Sidney's trauma front and center, with *Scream 3* physically reconstructing the very traumatic events of Sidney's past with the production of "Stab 3."

By poking fun at the cinematic tropes of the slasher film, this franchise uncovers other sources of trauma that bid interesting implications within the ongoing story taking place, and the societal traumas rooted within the slasher subgenre. Remembering Williamson's inspiration behind the story, the film is inseparably tied to the concept of the serial killer. As stated earlier, the university murders at the hands of serial killer Danny Rolling in Florida served as direct influence for Williamson, while Vronsky's exploration of the serial killer details the history and emergence of what he refers to as the postmodern serial killer. The beginnings of the postmodern serial killer occurred around the same time as the beginnings of the slasher, leading one to draw ties between the two seemingly distinct realms. Upon further analysis, Vronsky's profile of the postmodern serial killer directly matches that of *Scream's* dynamic duo Billy and Stu. They are the everyday citizen, charming and unassuming. They don't exhibit any hint of violence or characteristics that would cause one to question their actions or entertain the possibility of inner turmoil. Sidney is only aware of Billy's rage and hostility when he is revealed to be one of the killers at the conclusion of the film. This goes for the entire franchise as each unmasked killer is revealed to be an unsuspecting character that had been in and out of frame throughout the duration of each film. The ability of the postmodern serial killer to "hide in plain sight" is indeed exemplified in these films.

Vronsky further elaborates on the postmodern serial killer's preoccupation with media and technology, which also holds true to the abundance of technology displayed

in each film. From phones, televisions, film, cameras, the layer upon layer of technology sprinkled in this franchise harkens back to what Vronsky noted as the growth of publicity and media coverage of serial murderers in the '60s and '70s, and how the growing use of technology had caused the killer to evolve and become a fixture of modern media while at the same time remaining anonymous. These societal ties implicate the franchise as reflective of the phenomenon of the serial killer, and other instances of America's trauma. Along those lines, one can also turn to Wee's reading of the film as representing the growth of violence in American high school culture. Furthering this, *Scream* represents a moment in 20th century America that dealt with the cultural phenomenon of the serial killer in conjunction with the rise of modern technology. Craven and Williamson's film explores this new landscape and the residual effects of violence and the traumas manifested from them, while navigating new anxieties with modern advances moving forward toward the turn of the millennium. One understanding is that the franchise dissects the plight of the teenager in the 1990s climate while siphoning it through the structure of a slasher film.

The turmoil of the teenager involves the complexities of sex and identity, which Sidney Prescott conveys and represents through her trauma. Though Sidney is distinct from the typical final girl for her knowledge and overall disapproval of the slasher film, she harbors the strength of the final girl and sometimes finds herself stuck in the formulaic issues and theme that these films portray. Returning to Clover, she discusses

slasher films as deeply ingrained in the realm of sex and identity in the structure of the films, the female protagonists, and the large male viewership these movies accrue. As stated earlier, a common trait among slasher film characters is this highly sexualized undertone. While the surface-level conflict of the films is to outlive the killer, the amount of slasher films that heavily include sex is high. *Scream* is no different, and actually grounds sex as a big trauma in the franchise. While Maureen carried a romantic reputation that Woodsboro found distasteful, her death brings to light how sex is often viewed in the world of the subgenre. In the films, one of the cardinal rules of surviving a horror movie coincidentally is to abstain from sex, otherwise certain death is imminent. Maureen's death revolves around the action of sex, and is constantly reminded of in each film, significantly in the third. Franchises like *Halloween* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are rooted in traumatic sexual nature, as Clover describes, and *Scream* arguably elevates the trajectory of such trauma with Maureen and Sidney. This was set up early on in the first film, where Billy spends his time coercing Sidney into spending the night with him, despite Sidney's anxiety around thought of doing so. When Sidney and Billy do have sex at the end of the film, Billy soon after reveals himself as the killer and his motive behind the actions, seemingly waiting for his night with Sidney before pulling the rug out from under her.

Taking all of this in, sex becomes a driving force in the trauma of the franchise, and further examines the implication of sex typically conveyed in past slasher films and

complicates it more by incorporating the social climate outside of the film and interconnecting reality with its many layers of mediation. Perhaps the mediation of trauma in the film reflects on the postmodernist serial killer's ties to technology, and the media's cycling of trauma and violence through the same technology, and further exemplifies the anxieties concerning society's transition into a more technologically advanced world. As Craven and Williamson bombard the slasher film world with a franchise self-aware of its boundless dialogue and ever-reflexive critiques of pop culture, the reflexive trauma depicted in the many forms of mediation remind the moviegoer that the trauma on the silver screen may be more than just a horror movie. The film manipulates the audience's familiarity with horror tropes, though who's to say that it also doesn't manipulate the audience's personal relation to the traumas onscreen? In closing, a quote from *Scream 3* puts it into perspective- "What's your favorite scary movie?" Sidney asks a detective. They both agree, "my life."

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