

Playgrounds in the Zombie Apocalypse: The Feral Child

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'Brutal' and 'gut-wrenching': these words are representative of viewers' responses to Episode 414, 'The Grove', from AMC's *The Walking Dead*. In this episode, Lizzie and Mika Samuels, sisters and two of the child survivors of the zombie apocalypse, brutally meet their ends. Lizzie, no longer able to distinguish between life and death, stabs and kills Mika, and Carol in turn shoots Lizzie, claiming that Lizzie 'can't be around people'. These characters, in tandem with other depictions of children survivors of zombie apocalypse(s), call into question the dividing line—if one remains, as established society crumbles—between human and animal, feral and civilized, and pack and society, and the extreme degree to which trauma plays a role. Themes of texts analysed in this paper, such as AMC's *The Walking Dead* and Max Brooks' novel *World War Z*, and others such as the recently published *The Girl With All the Gifts* by M.R. Carey, include re-socializing children and forming communities in which the children can become rehabilitated into productive contributors (of course with varying degrees of success). These children are the most vulnerable, and hypothetically the most adaptable, survivors as they struggle physically and mentally. This paper considers questions including to what extent survivor communities are really packs, and if they do foster a more animalistic, instinctive approach to survival, how children mature into this so-called 'society'. Viewing children in this light summons up viewer and reader responses to 'horror' that are more in keeping with reactions to real-life cases of abused and neglected 'feral' children than with the 'horror' produced by a zombie-themed text. This paper also ventures to question to what degree zombies themselves form packs or communities, thereby casting further reflection upon human endeavours.

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