



Gender Roles and Themes: Children in Films

Andrew Musgrave

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This is the first in a series of eight volumes entitled **Children in Films**.

Some of the most SHOCKING, FRIGHTENING and VIOLENT FILMS are those involving children. Because children are innocent and vulnerable their appearance in movies as little monsters and victims can be effectively EXPLOITED by the film industry.

By reference to over 200 films we are reminded of our favourites as well as the more obscure and the controversial. While there are children who remain true to traditional gender roles, we are shown others portrayed as TOMBOYS and EFFEMINATE victims, as our perceptions of GENDER STEREOTYPES are manipulated.

Children enter the movie business with PRECONCEIVED ASPIRATIONS, but these are inevitably shattered. While child actors have to portray intimate emotions, become typecast, and have disrupted childhoods, playing these roles has a perverse effect on them, as fame throws them to an unsympathetic media.

We are shown how the child actor may be exploited by casting agencies, pushy parents, and directors who wish to pursue risqué scenes, at the same time admiring the successful and ASTONISHING PERFORMERS.

Finally, we are led to question the imbalance in the number of child actors across the GENDER and ETHNIC DIVIDE.

The full range of titles in this series, **Children in Films**, are: 1 Gender Roles and Themes; 2 Families Step-kids & Orphans; 3 Tomboys Adventurers & Talented Kids; 4 Childhood Friendships: Peers, Pets & Grown-ups; 5 Make Believe Horror & the Supernatural; 6 Puberty & First Love; 7 Childhood Trauma: Illness, Death, Divorce & War; 8 Physical & Sexual Abuse.

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