

Emotional and Physiological Responses to Horror Films

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A Brief History of Horror in Film (1)

- Horror media has always been a popular form of consumption for the general public.
- With the popularity of film media beginning in the 1920s, horror films quickly became a very popular genre.
- Some of the earliest popular horror films include *The Phantom of The Opera* (1925), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1920), and *Nosferatu* (1922).



A Brief History of Horror in Film (2)

- Without modern elements of sound, special effects, and advanced techniques, horror films of the past were still able to scare their viewers.
- Lighting is a great example of how filmmakers can manipulate the area they are working with to produce great effects in terror or just general feelings of unsettledness.
- Prosthetic makeup is another example of a technique used to make horror films scary. Lon Chaney is known as the father of modern cinematic makeup for the terrifying prosthetics he created and used on many films (Blyn, 2013).

A Brief History of Horror in Film (3)

- In the 1930s, the integration of sound made "talkies" popular worldwide.
- Sound added a new element to horror, with orchestrations providing a chilling backdrop to the films, sound effects, and spoken dialog.
- One of the most popular sound-integrated horror films of the 1930s was *Freaks* (1932), which followed a group of disfigured carnival performers.
- From the 1940s until now, horror has evolved with the advancements in technology and continues to be one of the most viewed genres of cinema.

Fear and Why It's Important

- Fear is defined as " An unpleasant feeling triggered by the perception of danger, either real or implied". (Mayo Clinic).
- Fear is considered a driving motivation for watching horror films by fans and critics alike, you watch something associated with horror because you want to be scared, either willingly or by force.
- Emotion drives fear. Everything that you experience when you view a horror film is caused by emotion.

Emotion and Metaemotion

- Metaemotion is a fairly new concept in the realm of Cognitive Science, but it is one that draws great enthusiasm.
- Metaemotion is defined as "emotion about emotions" (Gottman, 1996). This refers to emotions that can come about as a response to thought and acknowledgement about an emotion being experienced.
- This ties into fear as acknowledgment and awareness on fear experienced can lead to even more emotional responses.

Effects of Horror on Childhood and Adolescence

- Parents are often warned to not let their children consume horror media. However, children often find ways to view horror without their parents knowing, via friends, school, etc.
- Motivations for viewing horror films have been studied to showcase societal gender roles, with young men viewing them to showcase dominance, and young women to be seen as fragile and in need of protecting (Walters, 2004).
- The viewing of horror media in childhood can have both short-term and longlasting effects, such as anxiety, increased heart rate, night terrors, and PTSD (Sultana, 2021).

Physiological Responses as a Result of Watching Horror Films

- When a person watches a horror film and is exposed to fear stimuli, their Sympathetic Nervous System, or SNS is activated. This part of the Autonomic Nervous System is in charge of the "fight or flight" reaction (Nummenmaa, 2021).
- The SNS is responsible for the physical reactions we have when we get scared while watching films, reactions such as nausea, shaking, increased heart rate, rapid eye movement, and jumping.

Emotional Responses as a Result of Watching Horror Films (1)

- Emotion is the driving force behind fear. When a person is actively viewing a horror film, their fear can actually be increased as a result of a person's NFA.
- NFA, or Need For Affect is a phenomenon in which a person has a high desire to be in situations which trigger intense emotions (Bartsch, 2014).
- Emotional responses to viewing horror films include paranoia, anxiety, the feeling of "butterflies", and general nervousness.

Emotional Responses as a Result of Watching Horror Films (2)

- Metaemotion also plays a role in emotions when viewing horror films. People often enjoy going to horror films because they recognize the emotions they feel when presented with fear stimuli.
- This acknowledgment can lead to feelings of happiness, and even adrenaline spikes in an individual.
- People want to *feel*, this is the biggest motivation to viewing horror films.

Conclusion

- Horror Media has been and will continue to be a popular medium in movie-going.
- The fear stimuli that make individuals scared, and their responses to being scared are continuously studied in hopes of creating new mediums to give horror lovers the feelings in which they so desperately crave.

Sources

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