

# **Feeling Frightened at a Horror Film: The Role of Emotion in Cognitive and Physical Responses while watching Horror Films**

## **Abstract**

Horror fiction can be defined as any form of media that is intended to shock, scare, or simply give its viewers a feeling of fear. One of the most consumed mediums of horror fiction are horror films. Horror films are a multi-million-dollar industry, with millions of dedicated fans worldwide, and box-office after box-office success. Franchises like *The Conjuring*, *It*, *Saw*, and *Halloween* all aim to spook their viewers. These films get their praise, and viewership off of giving those who view them a negative experience in terms of emotion and reaction. But how, and more importantly, what reactions are produced as a result of viewing horror films? Looking at the role of fear and how it manifests itself once the title card is shown may just give us an answer.

## **Introduction**

Horror has been ingrained into our society for a vast amount of time, as a cultural phenomenon. Horror, in a sense is its own community with things like conventions, fan groups, cosplay, etc. With such a large following, it is only fair that horror is one of the most vast and consumed film genres of the century. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people in the US line up to see the latest slasher, home invasion, or paranormal flick. Dedicated horror fans cite the feelings that they

acquire while watching wither at home, or in the theater as a driving motivation that keeps them coming back to the genre. One of the most encompassing of not the most encompassing reaction to viewing a horror film is fear.

Fear can be defined as "An unpleasant feeling triggered by the perception of danger, either real or implied" (Mayo Clinic). Because the idea and feeling of fear are so distressing, one would think that would make the general population steer clear of Horror cinema. So why is it that people keep purchasing tickets to the newest Horror flicks?

### **The History of Horror in Film**

Give a brief history on horror in cinema, starting from the 1920s to today's films.

(Why) Do You Like Scary Movies? A Review of the Empirical Research on Psychological Responses to Horror Films.)

### **The Making of Horror Films**

Discuss how things like lighting, music, set design, editing, suspense, etc. are utilized during horror film production in order to bring out feelings of fear in viewing these films.

### **Emotion and Metaemotions**

Discuss the concept of metaemotions and emotions.

(Predicting Emotions and Meta-Emotions at the Movies: The Role of the Need for Affect in Audiences' Experience of Horror and Drama.)

### **Effects of Horror in Childhood**

Some of the responses to watching horror films in childhood, their lasting impact, and a brief discussion on the MPAA rating change.

(Horror movies, TV shows can have long-lasting effects.)

(Rethinking PG-13: Ratings and the Boundaries of Childhood and Horror)

### **Appeal of Horror in Adolescence**

Discuss why adolescents are the biggest demographic in enjoying horror films, and what that means for their development into adulthood.

(Effects of Horror Movies on Psychological Health of Youth)

### **Physiological Responses to Horror**

Discuss culmination of research on the physical responses to viewing horror films.

(Psychology and neurobiology of horror movies)

(The viewing of a "Bloodcurdling" horror movie increases platelet reactivity: A randomized cross-over study in healthy volunteers.)

(Relationship of Terror Feelings and Physiological Response During Watching Horror Movie.)

### **Emotional Responses to Horror**

Discuss culmination of research on the emotional responses to viewing horror films.

(Predicting Emotions and Meta-Emotions at the Movies: The Role of the Need for Affect in Audiences' Experience of Horror and Drama.)

(Horror, Personality, and Threat Simulation: A Survey on the Psychology of Scary Media)

(Enjoyment of Mediated Fright and Violence: A Meta-Analysis)

## **Conclusion**

Review what was discussed in the majority of the paper

## **References**

Horror movies, TV shows can have long-lasting effects. (1999). In *Media Report to Women* (Vol. 27, Issue 2, p. 8-). Communication Research Associates, Inc.

<https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.oswego.edu/docview/210159445?pq-origsite=primo>

Bartsch, A., Appel, M., & Storch, D. (2010). Predicting Emotions and Meta-Emotions at the Movies: The Role of the Need for Affect in Audiences' Experience of Horror and Drama. *Communication Research*, 37(2), 167–190.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650209356441>

Walters, G. (2004). Understanding the Popular Appeal of Horror Cinema: An Integrated-Interactive Model. *Journal of Media Psychology*.

Fukumoto, M., Tsukino, Y. (2015). Relationship of Terror Feelings and Physiological Response During Watching Horror Movie. In *IFIP International Conference on Computer Information Systems and Industrial Management*. Springer, 500-507.

Sultana, I., et al. (2021). Effects of Horror Movies on Psychological Health of Youth. *Global Mass Communication Review*, VI(I), 1-11.

Nummenmaa, L. (2021, March 4). Psychology and neurobiology of horror movies. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/b8tqs>

Antunes, F. (2017). Rethinking PG-13: Ratings and the Boundaries of Childhood and Horror. *Journal of Film and Video*, 69(1), 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.69.1.0027>

Martin G. N. (2019). (Why) Do You Like Scary Movies? A Review of the Empirical Research on Psychological Responses to Horror Films. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 2298. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02298>

van Diemen, J. J. et al. (2019). The viewing of a “Bloodcurdling” horror movie increases platelet reactivity: A randomized cross-over study in healthy volunteers. *Thrombosis Research*, 182, 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.thromres.2019.07.028>

Clasen, et, al. (2018). Horror, Personality, and Threat Simulation: A Survey on the Psychology of Scary Media. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*. 14. 10.1037/ebs0000152.

Hoffner, A. C. & Levine, J. K. (2004). Enjoyment of Mediated Fright and Violence: A Meta-Analysis. *MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY*, 7, 207–237.