

# FRIGHTFUL FANS: THE PROFILE OF HORROR MOVIE LOVERS

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It's a fantastically frightful time of year for moviegoers, with studios springing their most spine-chilling creations on audiences ahead of Halloween. *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension* and *The Last Witch Hunter* hit theaters last week, and *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse* claws its way onto screens this week.

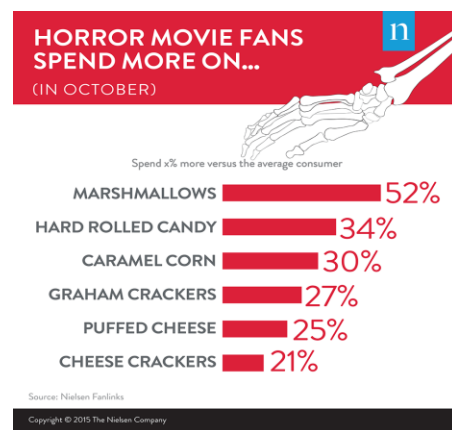
While scaredy cats may be waiting for it all to pass (hopefully in a well-secured safe room), millions of horror fans across the nation are treasuring this time of terror.

Who are these thrill-seekers? According to Nielsen Fanlinks 2015 data, horror movie fans are 23% more likely than the average consumer to be between the ages of 35 and 44. That means quite a few are Gen Xers who grew up watching Wes Craven slasher classics like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Scream*. Today, this group seems happy to make fear a family affair, as horror movie fans are 24% more likely to be part of a three or more person household, with children skewing between the ages of 6 and 17.

Macabre movies are also especially popular among the diverse horror fan audience; horror fans are 23% more likely to be Hispanic than the average consumer and 15% more likely to be African-American.

True to the Halloween spirit, horror movie aficionados love their sweet treats; fans spend \$146 per year on average on carbonated beverages, \$21 more than the \$125 that the average consumer spends. Popcorn is also in high demand with fans. Horror lovers buy 5% more popped popcorn and 6% more unpopped popcorn per year than the average consumer. In October, they load up on the candy, spending 34% more on hard rolled candy and 30% more on caramel corn than the average. S'mores seem to be a popular snack, with horror movie fans spending 52% more on marshmallows and 27% more on graham crackers than the average American.

Finally, horror movie lovers seem to have a soft spot for cheesiness, both on-screen and off. In fact, they spend 25% more on puffed cheese snacks and 21% more on cheese crackers than the average consumer.



## Why Some People Love Horror Movies While Others Hate Them

By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S., *Associate Editor*

Some people can't get enough of scary movies. They've seen scores of scary films — *over and over*. They catch horror flicks on opening night. They have DVD collections at home.

Personally, I wouldn't be caught dead watching a scary movie. They freak me out, leaving me unsettled for days — the images a record player in my mind. In fact, I have a hard enough time sitting through the scarier scenes of "Sons of Anarchy." (I watch it with my boyfriend, and sometimes need to leave the room.)

With Halloween upon us — the prime season for horror films — I was curious to find out why some people savor scary movies. And others, like me, can't stand them.

### The Excitation Transfer Process

According to Glenn Sparks, Ph.D, a professor and associate head of the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University, one reason for the appeal is how you feel *after* the movie. This is called the excitation transfer process. Sparks's research found that when people watch frightening films, their heart rate, blood pressure and respiration increases.

After the film is over, this physiological arousal lingers, Sparks said. (We're just not aware of it.) That means that any positive emotions you experience — like having fun with friends — are intensified, he said. Instead of focusing on the fright you felt during the film, you recall having a great time. And you'll want to come back for more, he said. However, if your experience was negative, you might not. For instance, let's say you were on a date that wasn't going well or you got into a car accident on your way home, Sparks said. Again, because your lingering arousal heightens any emotions you experience, the negative feelings might sway you to skip a scary flick in the future.

## **Different Wiring**

Some people are simply wired to enjoy high levels of physiological arousal, Sparks said. According to the literature, he said, about 10 percent of the population enjoys the adrenaline rush. (Not surprisingly, these individuals also love rollercoasters. Not surprisingly, I do not.)

Similarly, wiring may explain why others hate scary movies. Specifically, some individuals have a harder time screening out unwanted stimuli in their environment, Sparks said. For instance, they might be hypersensitive to the temperature in a room or the tag on their shirt. These same individuals are more likely to have intense physiological reactions to horror films.

## **Novelty**

Some people turn to scary movies because they're novel. All of us are wired to pay attention to anomalies in our environment, Sparks said. Since danger disrupts routine, curiosity about change is important for survival. Sparks equated the pull of frightening films to stopping at the scene of a gory accident: "You don't see that every day," he said.

Something else you don't see are the visual effects, which tend to be fantastic, he said. Some people get enamored with effects and like to figure them out, said Joanne Cantor, Ph.D, Professor Emerita and Outreach Director at the Center for Communication Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Still, negative emotions can trump novelty, Sparks said. If we experience high levels of fright, seeing a scary movie just isn't worth it. "Negative emotions are stored in the amygdala [which] in contrast to positive emotions are particularly resistant to being extinguished," Sparks said.

Individuals might "suffer lingering emotional fallout if something in the environment reminds them of a scene," he said. After seeing "Jaws," some people stopped swimming in the ocean and felt eerie about lakes and pools, Cantor said.

Others might avoid films that come too close to home. Students have told Sparks they avoid films featuring a terrorized babysitter because they babysit.

## **Gender Socialization**

Research suggests that more men enjoy scary movies. This might be because men are socialized to be brave and enjoy threatening things, Sparks said. Men may derive social gratification from not letting a scary film bother them, Sparks said. It's the idea of mastering something threatening, he said.

"Men often like [scary films] as date movies because women are more likely to seek physical closeness when they're scared, and men can show off their strength and bravery," Cantor said. (This is aptly called "the cuddle effect.")

In one study males liked a horror movie more when they saw it with a female who *was* scared, and females liked the movie more when they saw it with a male who *wasn't* scared.

## **Other Reasons**

Some people may like scary movies because they enjoy the adrenaline rush of being scared while being safe, Cantor said. "Some people like anything that gets their minds off their own problems," she said.

Individuals who are highly empathetic may not like scary movies, she said.

## **Kids & Scary Movies**

Parents need to be especially careful about what their kids watch, according to both experts. Cantor's research found that college students who watched scary movies or shows before 14 years old had trouble sleeping and felt anxious about typically safe activities or stopped engaging in them altogether. (You can download the full text [here](#).)

"Until the age of 5 to 7, seeing is believing," said Cantor, who wrote the book *Teddy's TV Troubles* specifically for calming down kids after they've been scared by the media.

Even if it's make-believe, she said, it's still scary for young kids. For older kids, realistic threats, such as kidnappings and child molestation, are scary, she said. Teens, like adults, are more scared over abstract threats, such as disease and the supernatural, she said.

"Parents need to pay attention to how their children react to movies before deciding if a particular show is right for them. Intense fright reactions are much easier to prevent than to undo," Cantor said.

### **Frightful Fans Article #1**

Paragraph 1- Summarize the article, including all important information in clear writing.

Paragraph 2- What information surprised you from the article? Explain why. What information was expected from the article? Explain.

### **Why Some People...Article #2**

Paragraph 1- Summarize the article, including all important information in clear writing.

Paragraph 2- Discuss one idea/topic/argument that you either agree OR disagree with from the article and expand with your own thoughts. Why did you agree/disagree? How does it make/not make sense to you? How is this important to the topic?

Paragraph 3- Would you characterize yourself as a fan or not of Thriller/Horror movies? Explain your response, then use some of the information from the article to explain WHY you are or are not a fan of this genre.