

SO DISGUSTING, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF THE SCREEN: CAN  
PERSONALITY TRAITS AND DISGUST SENSITIVITY INFLUENCE PEOPLE'S LOVE  
FOR HORROR MOVIES?

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## ABSTRACT

SO DISGUSTING, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF THE SCREEN: CAN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND DISGUST SENSITIVITY INFLUENCE PEOPLE'S LOVE FOR HORROR MOVIES?

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Personality traits have been found to be associated with disgust sensitivity. For example, sexual and moral disgust have been found to be strongly correlated with the honesty-humility factor in the HEXACO model (Tybur & de Vries, 2013). However, questions have been raised as to what makes some individuals find disgusting horror movies enjoyable, while others are left mortified. To better understand these differences, participants were assessed using the HEXACO-PI-R-60, the Three-Domain Disgust Scale, the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale, and an adapted Enjoyment of Frightening Films measure within the current study. Ultimately, the present study explored if there were any individual differences among people on personality and disgust sensitivity measures in regard to preference for horror movies. Nine out of sixteen of my hypotheses were supported within this study. The results revealed significant correlations between the numerous variables and a main effect of sexual disgust, extraversion, and sensation seeking on enjoyment of frightening films.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“The mythic horror movie, like the sick joke, has a dirty job to do. It deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidity unchained, our most basic instinct let free, our nastiest fantasies realized...and it all happens fittingly enough, in the dark....”*

— Stephen King, Why We Crave Horror Movies

In the above quote, Stephen King, who is a legend within the horror realm, details how humans experience these basic urges such as fear, homicidal rage, and sexual desire, which he has deemed as “anticivilization emotions.” According to King (2004), the purpose of horror movies is to appeal to these dark emotions within ourselves and attempt to lessen their psychic energy. Once an individual has released these overwhelming, negative impulses, they can then become more focused on spreading positive emotions of love, friendship, loyalty, and kindness. He goes on to explain that “horror movies act as an important regulating function, defusing people’s destructive urges and helping to maintain society’s psychic equilibrium” (King, 2004 p. 516).

While this seems like a logical explanation, it actually contradicts previous research on how humans regulate their emotions. According to Zillmann’s (1988) mood management theory, individuals are driven to find and strengthen positive mood states and avoid or change negative states. This theory has been particularly applied to media psychology with the notion that individuals’ media preferences are based on hedonistic needs and desires (Bartsch, Appel, & Storch, 2010). However, as detailed in the first paragraph, some individuals do have a yearning for tales of tragedy, horror, and even disgust. This fine line that divides positive and negative affect is constantly blurred, especially with horror movies (Bartsch et al., 2010).

With this balancing act between positive and negative affect, it is important to determine how far is too far. According to McCauley (1998) screen violence can be deemed as unattractive and unenjoyable if it veers too close to reality. Documentaries and news broadcasts about torture and murder are seen as too graphic and disgusting; however, a person being viciously torn apart and eaten by zombies (*Day of the Dead, 1985*) or a crazed cannibal casually feeding a man pieces of his own severed brain (*Hannibal, 2001*) are appreciated and even found to be fascinating to some viewers. So, what makes gore and disgust sought after and pleasurable to some viewers in the context of horror movies, but viewed as repulsive in more realistic contexts? Perhaps individual differences, such as personality traits and disgust sensitivity might better help to explain societies' variability when it comes to the level of disgusting stimuli they are capable of handling.

In the proposed research, I examined what makes people find enjoyment within horror movies. Specifically, I examined if individual differences explain preferences for horror movies. My research expands on previous investigations that have also studied potential links between horror movies and individual differences. However, I also analyzed novel variables, such as the HEXACO-PI-R-60 (which is an inventory that analyzes six major dimensions of personality), the Three-Domain Disgust Scale (TDDS), the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS-8) and addressed the question as to whether those variables further influence ones' enjoyment of horror movies.

In doing this research I expected that pathogen disgust within the TDDS would be positively correlated with emotionality from the HEXACO-PI-R-60 model. I also hypothesized that the sexual disgust domain would be negatively correlated with openness to experience, but positively correlated with honesty-humility. Furthermore, sensation seeking would be positively

correlated with extraversion and openness to experience. I also expected that the moral disgust domain would be positively correlated with extraversion, honesty-humility and conscientiousness. I hypothesized that liking of horror movies would be negatively correlated with all three domains of disgust, honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness. Additionally, liking of horror movies will be positively correlated with sensation seeking and openness to experience.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Disgust**

Disgust is a diverse emotion with specific behavioral, cognitive, and physiological dimensions (Olatunji et al., 2007). It elicits various responses within the body to protect one's self against an assortment of acts or substances that could potentially cause harm, contamination, or disease (Olatunji et al., 2007; Tybur, Lieberman, & Griskevicius, 2009). Expressions associated with disgust are generally stable across situations, cultures, and even species. They consist of the culturally universal facial expressions, distinct physiological responses such as nausea and vomiting, and certain behaviors or behavioral tendencies, such as distancing oneself from the disgusting object or situation (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1999; Olatunji et al., 2007).

Disgust, compared to other basic emotions, is relatively short in duration and low in experienced intensity. It also elicits a sense of "offense" or deviance/imperfection that ultimately makes the individual experience a feeling of something "not being as it should be" (Rozin et al., 1999). This concept of disgust has evolved as society has progressed to better adapt to the world around us. Original theories of disgust primarily focused on oral ingestion that could be harmful or distasteful to the individual (Olatunji et al., 2007). Today, however, disgust has expanded to include other evolutionary based elicitors that deal with contact and interactions with those around us, such as being physically intimate with someone we just met, and moral behaviors, like stealing from a blind person. Rozin et al., (1999) describes this evolution of disgust as expanding from "out of mouth" to "out of mind".

Rozin et al., (1999) reviewed various disgust elicitors, and concluded that the emotion functions in four main domains; core disgust, animal-nature, interpersonal, and moral disgust. Core disgust examines ingestion of certain foods, animals, and body products that can cause

contamination within the body. Animal-nature disgust functions as a way to make humans distinct from animals by hiding or humanizing certain domains such as eating, hygiene, reproduction, injury, death, excretion, and decay. Interpersonal disgust serves as a selective tool in helping individuals be more critical concerning contact or intimacy with the people around them (e.g. sharing food, clothing, liens, and physical contact), especially with those outside their own social circles. Lastly, moral disgust involves those who go against the social order or violate social norms such as situations involving racism, hypocrisy, or ‘sleazy’ behavior (Rozin et al., 1999; Olatunji et al., 2007).

### **Disgust in Horror Movies**

Although previous discussion focused on the withdrawal or negative affect associated with disgust, disgust elicitors do possess a sort of allure or entertaining quality in some situations. Rozin et al., (1999) describes some examples of people finding amusement with disgust, such as with novelty stores selling fake vomit or feces, or television shows that focus their humor around disgust (e.g. bodily excretions, inappropriate sexual references, and language) such as *Beavis and Butt-head* or *South Park*. The attraction to disgust is said to be, in part, due to humans engaging in activities that involve manipulating and testing their limits of decency or safety established by our culture (Rozin et al., 1999). In one example, Rozin et al., (1999), refers to people finding enjoyment within horror movies (McCauley, 1998). In this case, they continue by stating that “the body responds with withdrawal and/or negative autonomic events, but the mind knows the threat is not real. This disparity between body and mind, or mind over body, seems to produce pleasure. Only constrained or apparent risks are attractive, however; real, out-of-control experiences of disgust or fright are rarely sought after or enjoyed” (Rozin et al., 1999 p. 440).

It appears that not all screen violence is attractive to viewers. McCauley (1998) has researched how certain screen violence elicits automatic and implicit disgust reactors within individuals, while other contextually similar scenes evokes enjoyment and pleasure. One such study on disgust sensitivity by Haidt, McCauley, and Rozin (1994) had college students watch three documentary-style movies involving violence and gore. The first movie showed a monkey having its skull opened and its still-pulsating brains being served to the awaiting diners. The second movie showed a slaughterhouse where steers were having their throats slashed open and then hung to be butchered. The final movie depicted a young girl having head surgery where the surgeon pulled the child's skin away from her skull to conduct the surgery. The students in the study were told they were in a control condition for a hypnotism experiment and that the investigators needed to find out what normal and awake subjects were willing to deal with. They were also told they could switch off the movies if the scenes became too intensely graphic for them to handle. Results indicated that the students did not find the movies to be entertaining and actually turned them off, on average, a little more than halfway through. There were also gender differences with female students turning the movies off at about the halfway mark, whereas the male students lasted about three-quarters of the way through before shutting them off. There was also a correlation with disgust sensitivity, in that those who scored higher on the scale, tended to turn the movies off sooner. A little less than 10% of the students made it all the way through the movies, but even those participants rated the movies as disgusting or disturbing (Haidt et al., 1994). However, the question remains then, as to what makes these movies any different than your typical gory, Hollywood horror movie?

## **Theories About the Appeal of Horror Movies**

### **Societal Fear Theory**

Several theories, that will be further discussed, have been suggested as to why there is such an appeal with horror movies, but not realistic violence (McCauley, 1998). One such theory is the concept of societal fear. It discusses how horror monsters and villains symbolically represent secular, underlying trends that are current within the time period the particular movie is released, that is a fear of the spread of the AIDS virus can be represented by an interest in vampires. Societal fears also represent deep-seated personal fears such as the ideas of death and aging; concepts that represent mortality and the feeling that there is no escape from these realities. Horror movies play on both the specific fears of a society and the universal fears of human beings (McCauley, 1998).

### **Catharism**

King (1981) states that “we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones” (p. 13). This quote is derived from Aristotle’s concept of Catharism in that it emphasizes the idea of purgation, which is the purification or cleansing of something. As such, horror movies draw out negative emotions, such as fear, rage, and disgust, to help alleviate the mind and protect the social order by allowing for a safe outlet for these otherwise “unsafe” emotions (McCauley, 1998). Tamborini and Stiff (1987), for example, found support for this idea of catharsis relating to individual’s fascination for horror movies. In their study, they interviewed young people (predominately 18-21-year old’s) leaving the theater after having just watched the popular horror movie, *Halloween II*. The interview assessed one’s overall liking for horror movies and reasons why they favored this particular genre. The reasons that were highly correlated with liking for horror movies were “because they are exciting” and “because they are scary” (both  $r = .67$ ).

Although there is more to the idea of Catharism, these findings suggest that people go to horror movies in order to experience emotions normally associated with danger, but in a context where they still feel safe (Tamborini & Stiff, 1987). Along with this idea of having a safe environment where people can experience this outlet of negative emotions, research has also shown that males report more interest in and liking for horror movies compared to females (Tamborini & Stiff, 1987; Tamborini, Stiff, & Zillmann, 1987). Common beliefs have long been held that adolescent males are the majority consumers within the horror genre (King, 1981). This assumption is in alignment with the catharsis hypothesis that states that males feel more hostility and aggression than females and therefore, need an outlet for these negative emotions.

### **Curiosity/Fascination Theory**

Another theory, posed by Carroll (1990), suggests that horror movies don't necessarily help one alleviate negative emotions, but rather appeal more to societies' curiosity; "horror attracts because anomalies command attention and elicit curiosity" (p. 195). In this sense, horror movies strive to violate societal norms, which, in turn, fascinates people to the extent that they rarely see these violations within society (King, 1981). This idea is known as the curiosity/fascination theory and it proposes that people enjoy horror movies, because it immediately and directly satisfies individuals' curiosity (McCauley, 1998). This is similar to catharsis in that, one can experience this norm violation within a safe context, because in the end, the movie ultimately doesn't challenge the norm. In alignment with this theory, Tamborini et al., (1987) found that the deceit subscale of the personality trait for Machiavellianism was a strong predictor ( $r = .39$ ) of preference for horror movies. This deceit scale measures one's approval for using dishonesty to achieve one's own goals. They suggest that readiness to use deceit may be

linked to liking for horror movies because both imply “a desire to violate the norms of socially acceptable behavior, or to see them violated by others” (Tamborini et al., 1987, p. 548).

### **Sensation Seeking**

Another variable commonly associated with liking for horror movies is the personality trait, sensation seeking. “Sensation seeking is a psychobiological personality trait used widely to document individuals’ need for novelty, complexity, and intensity” (Stephenson, Velez, Chalela, Ramirez, & Hoyle, 2007). Sensation seeking is frequently measured by Zuckerman’s (1978) Sensation Seeking Scale, which includes four subscales that measure predispositions toward disinhibition, boredom susceptibility, experience seeking, and thrill and adventure seeking. Those who rate high on sensation seeking are classified as searching for intense stimulation, such as by engaging in thrilling and risky activities, like bungee-jumping, rock-climbing, fast and risky driving (including driving while intoxicated), gambling, and attending horror movies (Stephenson, et al., 2007). Furthermore, regarding horror movies, Tamborini and Stiff (1987) found that liking for horror movies was positively correlated ( $r = .21$ ) with some of Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking subscales including disinhibition, experience seeking, and thrill and adventure seeking. Tamborini et al., (1987) determined that preference for horror movies were correlated with some of the Sensation Seeking subscales as well, including disinhibition, experience seeking, and boredom susceptibility ( $r$ ’s of .29, .17, and .18 respectively for male and female scores combined). Edwards (1984) also found that the total score for Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking Scale, along with all four subscales, were highly correlated ( $r = .51$ ) with interest in horror movies. Therefore, it is likely that horror movies provide that sense of arousal and appeal to those who are especially high in sensation seeking (McCauley, 1998).

## **Snuggle Theory**

Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, and Aust (1986) have proposed that attraction to horror movies could stem from the idea that they allow for men and women to practice and strengthen traditional gender roles. While watching a horror movie, men can showcase their fearlessness and capability by acting apathetic when faced with gore and disgust, and women can show their sensitivity and need for protection by articulating a sense of fear. This is known as the snuggle theory of horror and it details that liking of horror originates, in part, from men and women successfully behaving, under emotionally stressful circumstances, in agreement with societal guidelines. To test this theory, Zillmann et al., (1986) had undergraduate participants, watch a scene from *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, Part III*, with opposite-sex confederates who expressed either distress, indifference, or mastery. After the movie, the participants then filled out a questionnaire about their affective reactions to the movie. Results showed that participants enjoyed the movie more when the confederates acted in accordance to their specified gender roles (i.e. males articulating mastery and females showcasing distress). They also found that males typically enjoyed the movie more than females throughout all the conditions. Questions can be raised that perhaps watching a movie by oneself can have a different effect on a person than when they are in a group.

## **Mood Management Theory**

Zillmann's (1988) mood management theory states that people choose their entertainment sources to either maintain a positive mood state or alleviate oneself of a negative mood state. For example, according to mood management theory, an individual experiencing a state of boredom should have the desire to lessen or change this negative mood state, leading to a yearning for arousing entertainment, such as a horror movie. This concept is related to the linkage between

sensation seeking (susceptibility to boredom) with liking for horror movies. However, the paradox of horror's appeal is not clarified within the mood management theory; i.e. where small doses of fear and disgust may help alleviate one's state of boredom, but it is not clear as to why massive doses of fear or disgust are not appealing to viewers as well (McCauley, 1998).

### **Relief Hypothesis**

It may also be that the successful resolution at the conclusion of a horror movie is what viewers find enjoyable; the relief hypothesis (McCauley, 1998). King (1981) deems this as “the magic moment of reintegration and safety at the end... that makes the *danse macabre* so rewarding and magical” (p.14). McCauley (1998) further explains that if horror movies represent societies' worst fears showcased on-screen, then it makes sense that seeing these fears resolved at the end is reliving and thus enjoyable. This hypothesis is said to be related to B. F. Skinner's (1969) concept of negative reinforcement; the removal of an unpleasant stimulus ends up being rewarding. Once the movie concludes and the “monster or villain” is vanquished making the hero(s) triumphant, this allows for the viewer to experience the rewarding sensation of relief. Unfortunately, not all horror movies end with a concise conclusion or the threat being completely resolved. For example, the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* series always hints that the killer, Jason Voorhees, might not be dead, such as a camera shot of where his body was, but is now missing. However, regardless if the movie ends in such a suspenseful manner, the audience still realizes that it is fictional and, therefore, their lives are not threatened (McCauley, 1998). Carroll (1990) states that “in order to respond appropriately to something like a horror film...we might believe we are confronted with a fictional spectacle. If the audience were to believe itself in real danger, the experience of a horror movie would not be enjoyable at all; rather, viewers would be “calling out the army”” (p. 67-68).

## **Horror Theories Pinned Against Reality Horrors**

After reviewing potential theories into what makes individuals find horror movies attractive; the question still remains as to why people found the three aforementioned documentaries (i.e., the live monkey served as a main course for a dinner party, the slaughterhouse, and the facial surgery) so disgusting, but Hollywood horror movies are seen as enjoyable.

Interestingly, the violence and gore in the documentaries was fairly comparable to Hollywood horror movies. The focus of death and dismemberment in the documentaries are common themes throughout horror movies and, therefore, would disturb those who are weary of their own mortality. In this sense, these documentaries play on societal fears just as much as horror movies do, therefore, those more consciously attuned to these kinds of fears should find both the documentaries and the horror movies disgusting and disturbing, but that however that was not the case (McCauley, 1998).

Regarding the catharsis theory, if horror movies appeal to individuals by producing and resolving one's negative emotions, such as fear and disgust, then the three disgusting documentaries should have likewise been appealing and fitting under this theory. The same goes for the curiosity-fascination theory. The unique content of the three documentaries should have fascinated the participants and made them want to see what happened at the end. They all also violated social and moral norms, which should have sparked some curiosity and fascination as well, but they were clearly not rated as generally appealing (McCauley, 1998).

Furthermore, those ranking high on sensation seeking should have been attracted to the idea of witnessing something arousing and unusual; however, only 10% of the participants watched the documentaries all the way through.

According to the snuggle theory by Zillmann et al., (1986), the participants should have been attracted to the three disgusting documentaries because it gave them the opportunity to showcase their gender roles. However, during the study, while only one participant at a time watched the documentaries, they were observed and instructed by two researchers—one male and one female. Thus, each participant had the chance to practice their respective gender-role reinforcements i.e. mastery for males and distress for females. Yet, this opportunity was evidently not enough to make the documentaries appealing to the viewers (McCauley, 1998).

Zillmann's (1988) mood management theory was less applicable within this study, in that, the participants were faced with strange and unknown content, whereas people who willingly go to see a horror movie know to expect excitement and fear. Nevertheless, it appears that the subjects turned off the disgusting movies because they believed they would feel better when they were no longer viewing them. This shows that the participants felt that the only way to alleviate their negative mood state was to stop watching the films that were causing them distress. This idea of turning off the documentaries is also somewhat related to the relief theory, in that the participant's most likely felt some sort of relief when they quit watching the documentaries. There is also speculation that perhaps participant's felt relief when they turned the documentaries off instead of watching them to their conclusion, because they could not anticipate if there would be a satisfying resolution of the violence and gore in these documentaries compared to what they have come to expect in horror movies.

### **Relief Hypothesis Examined During and After a Horror Movie**

It should be noted then, that the previously discussed theories and research about the appeal of horror have not been very helpful in understanding why fictional violence and horror is attractive, but real violence like the three disgust documentaries is not. Therefore, the question

still remains, when is horrific violence appealing and when is it not? In hopes to better address this question, McCauley (1998) conducted a study to reexamine the relief hypothesis by having participants watch a clip from *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, Part III* and give two ratings of their enjoyment of the movie; one during a brief pause in the middle and the other at the end of the movie. If the relief theory is correct, then enjoyment of the movie should be highest at the end when the villain is “vanquished” and the hero “gets away”. Results indicated that participants rated their enjoyment higher during the middle of the movie rather than at the end. This contradicts the relief theory, in that negative emotions experienced during a horror movie are not enjoyable, but rather the enjoyment should occur when the “threat” is gone and positive emotions are then experienced as a result of the conclusion of the movie. This study showed that not only did participants say they found enjoyment within in the movie before any resolution had occurred, but that they also liked it more while they were in the middle of the movie than when they were looking back on it. These results show that participants’ ratings of enjoyment during and after the movie clip had little to do with the balance of positive and negative affect, but rather enjoyment was related to the participants thinking the movie was involving, exciting, and not boring. This supports previous literature on the association of liking for horror with sensation seeking, including susceptibility to boredom and inclination for the thrill of new experiences (McCauley, 1998). In other words, participants are finding the involvement and excitement from the horror movies enjoyable regardless of whether watching the movie makes them feel good or bad.

### **Turning a Negative into a Positive**

These conclusions however, still do not resolve the paradox of the appeal of horror. One possible resolution McCauley (1998) suggested is that humans are able to enjoy being frightened, disgusted, and saddened. Apter’s (1992) theory goes beyond the appeal of dramatic

fiction by incorporating the idea of “psychological reversals” in which various dangers become attractive when the arousal associated with danger can be experienced within the safety of a protective frame (McCauley, 1998). McCauley (1998) gives examples such as skydiving and mountain climbing because these activities can be seen as dangerous yet arousing, however, self-confidence allows for the protective framework that makes individuals experience excitement rather than fear or anxiety when engaging in these activities. Another theory as to how negative emotions become positive, is that the emotions experienced during a horror movie are qualitatively different from everyday emotions (McCauley, 1998).

Returning to the three disgusting documentaries, McCauley (1998) suggests that perhaps the difference in enjoyment was solely due to the difference between fact and fiction: these movies were viewed as disgusting rather than enjoyable, because participants were overwhelmed with cues for reality and were therefore lacking the frame of a dramatic fiction. “They were unappealing because they were documentaries, too brief and unrevealing about the people in them to support identification with any of these people” (McCauley, 1998, p. 161). However, documentaries and news reports of violence and gore can be enjoyable to some people. McCauley (1998) details about a report of a whole family bringing a picnic lunch to watch a public hanging. Perhaps this kind of enjoyment involves some other form of distancing or protective framing to occur in place of dramatic distance. Specifically, research has looked into disgust sensitivity and how that could potentially play a role in the level of enjoyment one might experience when viewing a disgusting horror movie.

### **Disgust Sensitivity**

With both negative and positive perceptions of disgust, it has been shown that disgust sensitivity exists on a continuum that varies around individual differences, age, gender, and

situations (Olatunji et al., 2007; Rozin et al., 1999; Tybur et al., 2009; Tybur, Bryan, Lieberman, Caldwell Hooper, & Marriman, 2011). Tybur et al., (2011) defines disgust sensitivity as referring to “the degree to which an individual experiences disgust toward common elicitors (e.g., spoiled food)” (p. 343). Regarding gender, research has also shown that sex differences exist when it comes to disgust sensitivity with women generally being more sensitive to disgust than men (Olatunji et al., 2007; Tybur et al., 2011). Most research has also tended to focus on younger populations (i.e. college students) when looking at disgust sensitivity (Haidt et al., 1994; Tybur et al., 2011). However, discrepancies have emerged regarding individual differences, particularly with neuroticism and disgust sensitivity. For example, Templer, King, Brooner, and Corgiat (1984) found that high scores on their disgust measure positively correlated with a high level of neuroticism. Haidt et al., (1994) also found neuroticism to be positively correlated to their disgust sensitivity scale. Tybur et al., (2011) however, did not find a significant covariation among the Three Domain Disgust Scale (TDDS) and neuroticism. Hennig, Possel, and Netter (1996) also found that high and low neurotic individuals do not differ in self-reported disgust toward movie clips that showed vomiting, handling a decapitated horse heard, and eating food that had been spit on.

In regard to the other Big 5 personality traits, Tybur et al., (2009) found that they were related differently to the three domains of disgust sensitivity (Pathogen, Sexual, and Moral). Sensitivity to pathogen disgust was positively correlated with neuroticism; sensitivity to sexual disgust was positively correlated with conscientiousness and agreeableness and negatively correlated with openness; and sensitivity to moral disgust was positively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Conversely, none of the correlations surpassed  $r = .23$ , therefore indicating that sensitivity to disgust is unique from any Big Five trait

(Tybur et al., 2009). This uniqueness has led researchers to further examine disgust sensitivity in comparison to various other personality measures, such as the HEXACO model (Lee & Ashton, 2004).

### **HEXACO, the Dark Triad, and the Similarities**

The HEXACO Model was developed by Lee and Ashton around 1999. In their book, they discuss how they were running a factor analysis on their Big Five personality data when they realized that along with the factors that mimicked the Big Five, a sixth factor emerged. This sixth factor was characterized by adjectives like, truthful, frank, honest, unassuming, and sincere; on the opposite side, it had adjectives such as sly, calculating, hypocritical, pompous, conceited, flattering, and pretentious (Hahn, Lee, & Ashton, 1999). Lee and Ashton contacted other researchers who had conducted lexical studies in various European languages and found that they too saw a sixth factor emerge within their data. “In every study, the six factor solutions were similar, consisting of five factors roughly similar to the Big Five, plus another factor that suggested “honesty and humility” versus their opposites” (Lee & Aston, 2012, p. 14). They realized that the Big Five should be revised to incorporate this sixth factor, but with the Big Five already widely accepted among researchers, they instead created a new framework called the HEXACO model. The acronym “HEXACO” was appropriately named because it indicated both the number of factors (the “hexa” prefix) and the names of the factors which incorporated similarities from the Big Five: (H)onesty-Humility, (E)motionality, e(X)traversion, (A)greeableness, (C)onscientiousness, and (O)penness to Experience (Lee & Ashton, 2012).

In Kowalski’s (2010) book, she discusses socially aversive personalities, however three in particular have been receiving the most empirical attention: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. The construct of Machiavellianism (the manipulative personality) was developed

from Richard Christie's selection of statements from Machiavelli's original books (Christie & Geis, 1970). Christie used various statements to create a measure of normal personality by showcasing reliable differences in participants' agreement with the items. Further research showed that participants who agreed with these statements were more likely to act in cold and devious ways in laboratory and real-world settings (Christie & Geis, 1970). While attempting to describe a subclinical version of the DSM-defined personality disorder, Raskin and Hall (1979) ended up creating the construct of narcissism, which is now used within a non-clinical or "normal" setting. Some facets retained from the clinical syndrome were entitlement, dominance, and superiority. Items were refined on student samples and collected in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The adaptation of psychopathy to the non-clinical field is the most recent of the three. Character elements include high impulsivity and thrill-seeking along with low empathy and anxiety (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Even with their diverse origins, these personality traits composing the "Dark Triad" share several features. To fluctuating degrees, all three involve a socially malicious character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, deceit, and aggressiveness. Following their advancement within non-clinical settings, there has been substantial empirical evidence that these three traits have some amount of overlap with one another (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Lee & Ashton, 2014). This overlap could only be accounted for in part by the Big Five personality factors (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The Dark Triad, therefore, became an important contribution within the realm of personality psychology because it focused on three manifestations of a common predisposition to be exploitive and manipulative of others (Lee & Ashton, 2014).

The development of the Dark Triad and the HEXACO model coincidentally share associations. It was also discovered that the additional lexical factor shared similarities with the Dark Triad, in that the more negative adjectives associated with the sixth lexical factor were closely parallel to all three Dark Triad constructs (Lee & Ashton, 2014). In another study conducted by Ashton, Lee, and Son (2000) these relations were further empirically verified when the researchers analyzed a Korean lexical marker scale which represented Honesty-Humility. Furthermore, Lee and Ashton (2005) and Lee, Ashton, Wiltshire, Bourdage, Visser, and Gallucci (2013) also found the low pole of the Honesty-Humility factor to be identical to the Dark Triad variables. Specifically, Lee and Ashton's (2005) study indicated that all three Dark Triad traits were strongly negatively correlated with the HEXACO Honesty-Humility factor. Lee et al., (2013) used two different samples and results indicated that the common variance shared by the Dark Triad was similar to the (low) Honesty-Humility, with latent correlations ranging from  $r = -.80$  to  $-.94$  for self-reports and from  $r = -.84$  to  $-.94$  for observer reports. They also found that each Dark Triad variable was related to HEXACO dimensions: Machiavellianism overlapped with low Agreeableness and low Extraversion, Narcissism with high Extraversion, and psychopathy with low Conscientiousness and low Emotionality (Lee et al., 2013). “Honesty-Humility represents individual differences in an inclination to cooperate with others even when one could successfully exploit or defect against them (i.e. fairness-based cooperation). The common element of the Dark Triad can, therefore, be viewed as a willingness to exploit others when this is perceived to be advantageous” (Lee & Ashton, 2014, p. 3). These results, therefore, show that the theoretical interpretations proposed for Honesty-Humility can also be applied to the Dark Triad.

## **HEXACO and Disgust Sensitivity**

Several studies have examined how disgust sensitivity relates to measures of personality using the Five-Factor model and the NEO-FFI (Haidt et al., 1994; Olatunji, Haidt, McKay, & Bieke, 2008). However, assumptions made from these studies might be limited by aspects of the Disgust Scale (Haidt et al., 1994) and the lack of the sixth personality trait (honesty-humility) from the HEXACO model (Lee & Aston, 2004). First, the Disgust Scale does not take into consideration sexual or moral disgust and secondly it assesses individuals on how bothered by, upset by, or overall avoidant of situations that are peripherally associated with disgust (e.g. avoid walking through a graveyard) (Tybur & de Vries, 2013). The development of the TDDS (Tybur et al., 2011) offered solutions to these discrepancies by including sexual and moral disgust domains and directly asking participants to detail how disgusted they are by acts and situations described by these items. Past literature had also not examined the HEXACO's connection with disgust sensitivity. Therefore, Tybur and de Vries (2013) wanted to test the relationship between the TDDS and the HEXACO model. Their results suggested that the sexual and moral disgust domains are more strongly correlated with the honesty-humility trait in the HEXACO model rather than the agreeableness trait previously found using the FFM or NEO-FFI (Tybur & de Vries, 2013).

While past research has examined relationships between personality traits and disgust sensitivity, little is known about the impact that these factors may have on one's enjoyment of horror movies. It is possible then that these individual differences could be predictors of the type of person that enjoys horror movies.

## **The Proposed Research**

The proposed research was designed to test the extent to which one's liking for horror movies is predicted by personality traits and disgust sensitivity. I expected that in doing so, pathogen disgust would be positively correlated with emotionality. Additionally, sexual disgust would be negatively correlated with openness to experience, but positively correlated with honesty-humility. Furthermore, sensation seeking would be positively correlated with extraversion and openness to experience. I also expected that moral disgust would be positively correlated with extraversion, honesty-humility and conscientiousness. I hypothesized that liking of horror movies would be negatively correlated with all three domains of disgust, honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness. Additionally, liking of horror movies would be positively correlated with sensation seeking and openness to experience.

This was a two-part study; Part A served as an instrument validation check for the modified version of Sparks' (1986) Enjoyment of Frightening Films (EFF) Scale, along with analyzing newly created frequency/descriptive questions. The EFF Scale was modified to add additional questions associated with liking for horror movies from various other measures (Tamborini and Stiff, 1987; Zuckerman and Little, 1986). In part B participants completed the TDDS (Tybur et al., 2011) to get a sense of where they ranked on the level of disgust they were capable of enduring. They also completed Lee and Aston's (2009) HEXACO-PI-R-60 model of personality. Then the participants completed the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS) created by Hoyle, Stephenson, Palmgreen, Lorch, and Donohew (2002), which is a shortened 8-item version of Zuckerman's (1978) original Sensation Seeking Scale. Finally, the participants completed the modified EFF Scale along with the other questions taken from part A. For both

parts, a within-subjects design was used. However, those who completed part A were excluded from being eligible to complete part B.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

### Participants

For part A and B, male and female participants over the age of 18 and residents of the United States were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participant pool, a web service that allows individuals to take online surveys for compensation. Compared to other survey websites and sampling methods, MTurk has been shown to be just as reliable in terms of data collection (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). To estimate minimum sample size for part B, a power analyses using G\*Power 3 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007) was conducted with an assumed  $\alpha$  of .05, power of .80 and a medium effect size ( $\eta^2 = .25$ ). The power analysis specified running roughly 130 participants for part B. Since part A was serving as an instrument validation check, a power analysis was not conducted for this section.

A total of 203 participants (135 females and 68 males) completed part A, which was entitled "Liking for Horror Movies" on MTurk. This portion took no more than 10 minutes to complete and those who participated received a monetary compensation of \$0.5 for their time. Participants were predominantly Caucasian ( $N = 164$ ), heterosexual ( $N = 171$ ), and included ages ranging from 19 to 70 ( $M = 37.71$ ,  $SD = 10.89$ ).

Part B, was entitled "Is your Personality Related to your Liking for Horror Movies?" on MTurk and had a total of 138 participants (92 females, 45 males, and 1 transgender). This portion took no more than 20 minutes to complete and those who participated received a monetary compensation of \$0.25 for their time. Participants were predominantly Caucasian ( $N = 114$ ), heterosexual ( $N = 120$ ), and included ages ranging from 19 to 70 ( $M = 36.50$ ,  $SD = 11.09$ ).

## **Measures**

### **Three-Domain Disgust Scale**

The TDDS (Appendix B) measures sensitivity to pathogen, sexual, and moral disgust across 21 items measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 0 (*Not at all disgusting*) to 6 (*Extremely disgusting*). Each item details a situation, act, or concept chosen based on its ability to elicit disgust. Some sample items listed for pathogen, sexual and moral disgust respectively include; “Accidently touching a person’s bloody cut”, “Hearing two strangers having sex”, and “Forging someone’s signature on a legal document”. The TDDS has good internal consistency (pathogen = .77, sexual = .86, and moral = .82) (Tybur et al., 2011).

### **HEXACO-60 Model**

The HEXACO-PI-R-60 (Appendix C) assesses the six major dimensions of personality which are: (H)onesty-Humility, (E)motionality, e(X)traversion, (A)greeableness, (C)onscientiousness, and (O)penness to Experience (Lee & Ashton, 2004). While the 100-item version may be more commonly used, the 60-item version is just as suitable when time is limited. The 60-item version has also been shown to have good internal consistency with reliabilities ranging from .76 to .80 compared to .81 to .85 for the 100-item version (Lee & Ashton, 2009). Each item is measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Some sample items for each domain respectively are; “I wouldn’t use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed”, “I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions”, “I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall”, “I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me”, “I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute”, and “I’m interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries” (Lee & Ashton, 2009).

### **Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS-8)**

While Zuckerman's (1978) original Sensation Seeking Scale is widely used, it has received criticism for its unreliability, length, and forced-choice responses, thereby provoking others to create similar, yet shorter self-report measures to use instead (Stephenson, et al., 2007). One such measure is the BSSS-8 (Appendix C) created by Hoyle, et al., (2002), which, unlike other measures, mimicked Zuckerman's conceptualization of sensation seeking by still taking into account the four components that make up sensation seeking—thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility (Stephenson, et al., 2007). The BSSS-8, therefore, measures sensation seeking across 8 items, while also including two items from each component. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). A sample item includes; “I would like to try bungee jumping”. The BSSS-8 has adequate internal consistency with a reliability of .70 (Stephenson, et al., 2007).

### **Enjoyment of Frightening Films (EFF) Scale**

A modified version of Sparks' (1986) 10-item scale measuring Enjoyment of Frightening Films was used to assess liking for horror movies (Appendix D). Along with using Sparks' original 10-items, there was also an addition of two items taken from Zuckerman and Little's (1986) Attitudes Toward the Media and Sports Questionnaire (ATMS) and Tamborini and Stiff's (1987) study on the appeal of horror movies. The two items included were; “I find most horror movies disgusting” and “I like horror movies because the good guy(girl) usually wins in the end”. Furthermore, all items were changed to use the wording “movies” instead of “film” as well. Before beginning, participants were instructed to answer each item while thinking about their past experiences with horror movies. The modified 12-items were measured on a 5-Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Along with the modified questionnaire, 8 frequency/descriptive items regarding one's experience with horror movies and movies in general were also created for use within this study. These items were either open-ended or multiple-choice. A sample open-ended item used was, "How often do you watch movies per year, whether it be online, a movie you rented/bought, or at the theater?" A multiple-choice sample item used was, "Overall, how much do you like watching horror movies?". Response options varied depending on the question. These items were exploratory in nature and only used for exclusion criteria, in that those who reported seeing 2 or fewer movies per year were excluded from further analysis. Therefore, these items were not included in the analyses.

For part B only, the inclusion of three attention checks were implemented to make sure participants were reading the questions before answering. This was used for exclusion criteria as well, in that those who failed any of the 3 attention checks would be excluded from analysis. A sample included was "The word "building" has more letters than the word "tent".

### **Procedure**

Before participants began either part A or B of the study, they were first asked to read and electronically sign a consent form by clicking "yes" that they agree to participate and were at least 18 years of age as required by the IRB (see Appendix A and B). Part A was serving as a validation check for the modified and newly created creations. During this portion participants filled out 8 frequency/descriptive items regarding their experience with horror movies and movies in general. They then filled out a modified version of Sparks' (1986) Enjoyment of Frightening Films scale. Following this, they then answered some demographic questions (Appendix G), and then finally were thanked for their time and instructed on how to claim their monetary compensation via MTurk.

Before data were fully collected for part A, I decided to pre-register my study on Aspredicted.org (Appendix H). Aspredicted.org is a site that generates a pre-registration document which researchers can then publish online for the public to view. This allows a researcher to be more transparent with their data collection and analyses and furthermore, encourages data sharing and replication within the psychological science community.

For part B, after participants signed the consent form, they completed the TDDS (Tybur et al., 2011). Next, they were asked to fill out Lee and Ashton's (2009) HEXACO-PI-R-60 model of personality. Afterwards, they filled out the BSSS-8 (Hoyle et al., 2002) and finally, they completed the 8 frequency/descriptive items and the modified version of the EFF scale (Sparks', 1986) from part A. Upon completion of all dependent measures; the participants then filled out the same demographic section from part A and were thanked for their participation within the study and allotted their compensation for their time.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### **Part A Analyses**

Before running any analyses, there were a total of 221 participants, however, data were excluded if the participants didn't finish the study or if they had never seen or rarely watched movies (< 2). This exclusion criteria, resulted in a total of 203 participants. After reverse coding items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 11 the modified scale achieved great internal consistency with a reliability of .94. An aggregate measure was then computed for EFF by averaging participants' responses to all 12 items. Afterwards, a factor analysis was conducted to determine if any items needed to be excluded for part B. The factor analysis revealed that all of the items were clustering under one factor called "Enjoyment of frightening films", except for item 12, which stated; "I like horror movies because the good guy (girl) usually wins in the end." This item was taken from Tamborini and Stiff's (1987) study on the appeal of horror movies. This item was therefore omitted from being used within part B.

### **Part B Analyses**

While running part B, a scaling issue on Qualtrics occurred. For clarification, Qualtrics is an online survey platform that allows you to create and share surveys, along with developing reports on results collected. This scaling issue added an extra scale point to half of the TDDS, therefore, making the data collected for that survey invalid. After fixing this error, 73 responses had to be discarded, which also resulted in a second round of data collection. Fortunately, no errors occurred the second time and data were fully collected and analyzed for part B.

Similar to part A, before running any analyses, there were a total of 176 participants, however, participants' data were excluded if they did not finish the study or if they had never seen or rarely watched movies (< 2). Also, those who failed attention checks were excluded from

the analyses. This exclusion criteria, resulted in a total of 138 participants. All four scales achieved adequate internal consistency with reliabilities including; TDDS = .89, HEXACO = .83, BSSS = .79, and EFF = .96. Afterwards, each factor of the various scales was computed for the TDDS, the HEXACO-PI-R-60 model, the BSSS-8, and the EFF scale. Furthermore, I converted the totals into z-scores to exclude any outliers that were three standard deviations above or below the mean. I then ran a bivariate correlation between all the personality traits measured (i.e. TDDS scores, HEXACO-PI-R-60 scores, and BSSS-8 scores) and the EFF scores.

As seen in Table 1, correlations were computed among personality traits and EFF scores. The results suggest that 9 out of the 16 hypotheses were supported. Those were that pathogen disgust was positively correlated with emotionality,  $r(138) = .31, p < .001$ , sexual disgust was positively correlated honesty-humility,  $r(138) = .29, p = .001$ , but negatively correlated with enjoyment of frightening films,  $r(138) = -.39, p < .001$ . Sensation seeking was positively correlated with extraversion,  $r(138) = .21, p = .012$ , openness to experience,  $r(138) = .23, p = .006$  and enjoyment of frightening films,  $r(138) = .29, p = .001$ . Moral disgust was positively correlated with extraversion,  $r(138) = .18, p = .038$  and honesty-humility,  $r(138) = .33, p < .001$ . Finally, enjoyment of frightening films was negatively correlated with honesty-humility,  $r(138) = -.26, p = .002$ . All other correlations were either not significant or not analyzed further within in this paper.

To further understand these bivariate correlations, I conducted a hierarchical linear multiple regression, wherein enjoyment of frightening films was regressed onto the TDDS scores, the HEXACO-PI-R-60 scores, and the BSSS-8 scores. As seen in Table 2, the model for all the predictors entered (sexual disgust, honesty-humility, extraversion, and sensation seeking) had an  $R^2 = .27$ . Therefore, roughly 27% of the variance was being explained by these variables.

Furthermore, the regression analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship for EFF on sexual disgust ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $t = -4.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), extraversion ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $t = -2.61$ ,  $p = .010$ ), and sensation seeking ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $t = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Honesty-humility was not significant;  $p = .560$ . In other words, those who enjoy watching horror movies tend to be introverted, not easily disgusted by sexual acts, and are sensation seekers.

Interactions between the variables were not fully analyzed and, therefore, will not be discussed in this paper.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Personality Traits and EFF Scores*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlations									
			1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Moral Disgust	3.29	1.61										
2. Sexual Disgust	2.76	1.50	.35***									
3. Pathogen Disgust	3.89	1.10	.18*	.41***								
4. Honesty-Humility	3.30	0.66	.33***	.29**	-.13							
5. Emotionality	3.26	0.68	.18*	.32***	.31***	.17						
6. Extraversion	3.02	0.67	.18*	-.01	-.05	-.02	-.17*					
7. Agreeableness	3.17	0.66	-.01	-.02	-.18*	.29***	-.06	.04				
8. Conscientiousness	3.62	0.62	.11	.01	.10	.21*	.01	.18*	.09			
9. Openness to Experience	3.62	0.75	.26**	-.06	-.11	.24**	.11	.01	.21*	.30***		
10. Sensation Seeking	3.05	0.78	.10	-.04	.16	-.37***	-.05	.21*	-.15	-.21*	.23**	
11. Enjoyment of Frightening Films	3.55	1.08	-.08	-.39***	-.02	-.26**	-.09	-.13	-.07	.01	.09	.29**

Notes. N = 138 participants. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 2**  
*Summary of Regression Analysis for Enjoyment of Frightening Films*

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	β
<i>Model</i>	.52***	.27***	
TDDS_Sexual			-.36***
HEXACO_HH			-.05
HEXACO_X			-.20**
BSSS_Total			.30***

Notes. Dependent Variable: EFF\_Total. \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

While the horror genre as we know it today originated some 200 years ago, the concept of “horror”, specifically horror stories can be dated back to early Egyptian times and perhaps even further through word of mouth. Horror stories have been used as lessons to keep children safe or from misbehaving, as an entertainment method, and as a way to rationalize with the unknown and unexplained, such as in an afterlife (Wilson, 2017). However, variations of horror have also evolved throughout the years and with enhanced technology, depictions of horror have now become more realistic and, therefore, more terrifying to the viewer. Furthermore, horror has not only been associated with making individuals feel shock or fear, but also disgust as well. Nevertheless, some individuals are not affected by gore and violence depicted in horror movies and even enjoy watching such scenes. This threshold, however, seems to be subjective for each individual.

Thus, the present research sought to examine if there were any individual differences among people on personality and disgust sensitivity measures in regard to preference for horror movies. I hypothesized that pathogen disgust would be positively correlated with emotionality. Sexual disgust would be negatively correlated with openness to experience, but positively correlated with honesty-humility. Furthermore, sensation seeking would be positively correlated with extraversion and openness to experience. I also expected that the moral disgust would be positively correlated with extraversion, honesty-humility and conscientiousness. Additionally, I hypothesized that liking of horror movies would be negatively correlated with all three domains of disgust, honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness. Moreover, liking of horror movies will be positively correlated with sensation seeking and openness to experience.

As mentioned earlier, I found support for 9 out of 16 of my hypotheses. Those being that pathogen disgust was positively correlated with emotionality. However, sexual disgust was positively correlated with honesty-humility, but negatively correlated with enjoyment of frightening films. Furthermore, sensation seeking was positively correlated with extraversion, openness to experience, and enjoyment of frightening films. Additionally, moral disgust was positively correlated with extraversion and honesty-humility. Finally, enjoyment of frightening films was negatively correlated with honesty-humility.

Comparable to Tybur et al., (2009) finding, those who are easily disgusted by germs or the thought of being more animal-like in nature (i.e., eating with our hands, not bathing, using the bathroom outside, etc.) tend to be highly emotional and experience high levels of anxiety and fear about physical dangers and life stressors. Tybur and de Vries' (2013) finding was also supported, in that those who are easily disgusted by sexual acts tend to be fair and are uninterested in lavish wealth or special entitlement over others. This interaction, in particular, is hard to explain. Perhaps individuals who are classified as being more honest and humble find sexual acts to be devious. Furthermore, it was also found in this study that those same individuals do not enjoy watching frightening films, which can be explained by the horror genres inherently sexual nature. On the other hand, as seen in this study and in past literature, sensation seekers tend to be more outgoing, imaginative, open to learning new and unusual ideas, and like watching frightening films (Stephenson, et al., 2007). This can be explained by sensation seekers need to be involved in thrilling, novel, and potentially risky activities. Additionally, those who are easily disgusted by immoral acts are outgoing and honest/humble as well, also similar to Tybur et al., (2009) and Tybur and de Vries' (2013) findings. This finding also makes sense in that those who are moral tend to be fair and enjoy being in group settings. Lastly, low scores on

honesty-humility have been found to be associated with high scores on the dark triad (Lee and Ashton, 2005), which consists of traits that lead to a cold, manipulative interpersonal nature (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, & psychopathy). While I did not fully measure these dark triad traits in the current research, it stands to reason that individuals high in these traits would also find horror movies enjoyable.

While the correlational results provided a great deal of insight, the regression analysis further elaborated on the variables that were the strongest predictors of enjoyment of frightening films. The regression results indicated that EFF scores were negatively associated with sexual disgust and extraversion. However, EFF scores were also shown to be positively correlated with sensation seeking. Therefore, those who enjoy watching horror movies tend to be sensation seekers, not sensitive or easily disturbed by sexual disgust, and low on extraversion (i.e., introverted).

The results for sensation seeking, in regard to enjoyment of frightening films, strongly supported past findings (Edwards, 1984; Tamborini & Stiff, 1987; Tamborini et al., 1987). The positive relationship between sensation seeking and enjoyment of frightening films suggests that sensation seekers may use horror movies to manage their moods, as Zillmann (1988) would suggest. That is, they may be drawn to horror movies suspenseful nature, whereas others may find the suspense too much to bear.

Some individuals seem to be deterred from horror movies, particularly individuals higher in sexual disgust sensitivity, as evidenced by the negative correlation with the enjoyment of frightening films. As mentioned earlier, horror movies are often inherently sexual, and thus, some people may be driven away by this. Therefore, it may not necessarily be the fear that decreases their enjoyment, but the sex.

Interestingly, honesty-humility ended up not having a significant association with enjoyment of frightening films within the regression model. This could be due to other moderating variables influencing the relationship or lack thereof in this case. However, although not hypothesized, enjoyment of frightening films was negatively correlated with extraversion. This relationship is somewhat less clear and seems contradictory to the finding on sensation seeking. However, perhaps introverts seek other forms of sensation in comparison to extraverts. Such as, introverts may find thrill and excitement when viewing an intense horror movie scene at their house, whereas extroverts might need more risky activities that involve human interactions to appease their sensation seeking nature. Also, according to the HEXACO scale descriptions, those who are considered introverted view themselves as unpopular, feel awkward in social situations, and are less lively and optimistic than others. Therefore, perhaps horror movies inherently somber vibe appeals to introverts because they can relate to the misunderstood killer or the cliché survivor who normally isn't the most outgoing or popular character.

Taken together, these results suggest that individual differences, such as personality traits and disgust sensitivity, play a significant role in ones' liking of horror movies. They also suggest that some of the variables relate to one another and could be used to help explain why individuals act in certain ways. For example, it's important for parents and teachers to understand that introverts and extraverts can be classified as sensation seekers but may find stimulation in separate ways. It's also important for the entertainment industry, particularly within the horror genre, to be aware that in order to market to a wider audience, they may need to remove some sexual content within their movies. This alone could be a potential deterring factor for individuals on whether they enjoy watching horror movies.

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

There were some important limitations to this experiment. First, the sole analyses were inherently correlational which, therefore, allows for limited ability to infer causation about the results found within this study. Secondly, the sample may have been biased in that on Mturk the study was entitled, “Is your Personality Related to your Liking for Horror Movies?” This title may have drawn fans of horror movies in and discouraged participants who were not fans of horror from taking the study. Likewise, there was a disproportionate sample of predominantly White, heterosexual females who participated in the study, which is unrepresentative of various other ethnicities and genders within society. Also, in regard to Mturk, participants were paid to take the study, which could have caused them to rush through the surveys without giving their answers much thought in order to quickly obtain their payment. Lastly, as this was a single study, replication is needed to further discern the results found.

I believe it would be valuable for future studies to continue researching possible links between individual differences and liking of horror movies. As stated earlier, associations between the different variables have real-world applicability and understanding these links could better help to explain how and why individuals think and act as they do. I also think it would be interesting for future studies to examine other measures and genres, such as the Five-Factor model of personality and dark comedies. Using similar measures could allow the researcher to further compare results and correlations. Furthermore, using a similar genre that still incorporates dark, potentially gory content, but with comedic relief would also make for an interesting comparison. Also, along with gathering a larger sample size, it would be ideal if future researchers could obtain a more diverse sample. Past literature has primarily found that males and younger populations tend to be less sensitive to disgust and like horror movies more

(Zillmann et al., 1986; Tamborini and Stiff, 1987; Haidt et al., 1994; Tybur et al., 2011).

Perhaps ethnicity and education also play a role in ones' liking for horror movies, along with other demographic factors. Additionally, researchers could use a different medium for data collection, such as administering it face-to-face within a community or through other online sources like Reddit or Facebook, where money wouldn't be a factor. This could allow for more variability and/or more control in regard to participants. Lastly, it would be interesting to see if individual differences also play a role in the enjoyment of viewing horror in a realistic setting. Perhaps these individual differences allow a person to tolerate horror and disgust within any context or maybe there's something significant about all movies that signals the viewer to take on a different mindset as Apter (1992) and McCauley (1998) discussed, resulting in the viewer finding enjoyment within the film.

### **Conclusion**

The present study set out to contribute to the existing literature on personality and disgust sensitivity by investigating any associations between those variables and their further influence on an individuals' liking for horror movies. The results of the study supported several of my hypotheses and were in alignment with past findings as well. However, future research that addresses the limitations mentioned within the current study will hopefully find similar, if not more, associations between the variables analyzed. This, in turn, will further our knowledge about the variability of individual differences, particularly in relation to liking of horror movies.

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## **Appendix A: Consent Form Part A**

Here are some questions you might have about this study.

### **What is the purpose of this research and what will be asked of me?**

The purpose of this study is to determine your preference for horror movies.

### **How long will the research take?**

The study, in total, should take 10 minutes or less.

### **Will my answers be anonymous?**

Your name will not be used at any time within this research and any identifying information will not be shared with any individual outside of the approved researchers. MTurk, however, is not fully anonymous as the researcher can see the participant's URL address, but as stated above any identifying information will not be shared or used at any point during or after this study. Please see the following website for any questions regarding Amazon's MTurk privacy policy:  
<https://www.mturk.com/mturk/privacynotice>. This notice describes Amazon's privacy policy. By visiting the Amazon Mechanical Turk site, you are accepting the practices described in this Privacy Notice.

### **Can I withdraw from the study if I decide to?**

Yes, you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You may also decline to respond if you do not wish to answer.

### **Is there any harm that I might experience from taking part in the study?**

No, there is no foreseeable harm from participating in this research.

### **How will I benefit from taking part in the research?**

You will be compensated with 5 cents for your time and you will have contributed to furthering knowledge within social psychology and future studies as well.

### **Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about the research?**

If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Ellen Sigler, Associate Professor, Psychology Department, Western Carolina University at 828-227-3365 or at esigler@wcu.edu or Ashley Dillard at amdillard2@catamount.wcu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828- 227-7212 or irb@wcu.edu. This research project has been approved by the IRB.

I have read the consent form and by stating "yes" I authorize that I am at least 18 years old and will participate in this study.

- Yes
- No

## **Appendix B: Consent Form Part B**

Here are some questions you might have about this study.

### **What is the purpose of this research and what will be asked of me?**

The purpose of this study is to examine how people's personalities may be related to their preference for horror movies. Participants will take a disgust sensitivity measure, two personality measures (HEXCO and the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale), and a preference for horror movies measure.

### **How long will the research take?**

The study in total should take 20 minutes or less.

### **Will my answers be anonymous?**

Your name will not be used at any time within this research and any identifying information will not be shared with any individual outside of the approved researchers. MTurk, however, is not fully anonymous as the researcher can see the participant's URL address, but as stated above any identifying information will not be shared or used at any point during or after this study. Please see the following website for any questions regarding Amazon's MTurk privacy policy: <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/privacynote>. This notice describes Amazon's privacy policy. By visiting the Amazon Mechanical Turk site, you are accepting the practices described in this Privacy Notice.

### **Can I withdraw from the study if I decide to?**

Yes, you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You may also decline to respond if you do not wish to answer.

### **Is there any harm that I might experience from taking part in the study?**

No, there is no foreseeable harm from participating in this research.

### **How will I benefit from taking part in the research?**

You will be compensated with 25 cents for your time and you will have contributed to furthering knowledge within social psychology and future studies as well.

### **Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about the research?**

If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Ellen Sigler, Associate Professor, Psychology Department, WCU at 828-227-3365 or at [esigler@wcu.edu](mailto:esigler@wcu.edu) or Ashley Dillard at [amdillard2@catamount.wcu.edu](mailto:amdillard2@catamount.wcu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the WCU Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828- 227-7212 or [irb@wcu.edu](mailto:irb@wcu.edu). This research project has been approved by the IRB.

I have read the consent form and by stating "yes" I authorize that I am at least 18 years old and will participate in this study.

- Yes
- No

## Appendix C: Three Domain Disgust Scale

### Three Domain Disgust Scale

#### Items

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The following items describe a variety of concepts. Please rate how *disgusting* you find the concepts described in the items, where 0 means that you do not find the concept disgusting at all and 6 means that you find the concept extremely disgusting.

		Not at all					Extremely	
		disgusting					disgusting	
1.	Shoplifting a candy bar from a convenience store.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	Hearing two strangers having sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	Stepping on dog poop	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	Stealing from a neighbor	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	Performing oral sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	Sitting next to someone who has red sores on their arm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	A student cheating to get good grades	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	Watching a pornographic video	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	Shaking hands with a stranger who has sweaty palms	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	Deceiving a friend	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	Finding out that someone you don't like has sexual fantasies about you	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	Seeing some mold on old leftovers in your refrigerator	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.	Forging someone's signature on a legal document	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
14.	Bringing someone you just met back to your room to have sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
15.	Standing close to a person who has body odor	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
16.	Cutting to the front of a line to purchase the last few tickets to a show	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
17.	A stranger of the opposite sex intentionally rubbing your thigh in an elevator	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.	Seeing a cockroach run across the floor	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	Intentionally lying during a business transaction	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	Having anal sex with someone of the opposite sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	Accidentally touching a person's bloody cut	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

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**HEXACO-PI-R  
(SELF REPORT FORM)**

© Kibeom Lee, Ph.D., & Michael C. Ashton, Ph.D.

**DIRECTIONS**

On the following pages you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Then write your response in the space next to the statement using the following scale:

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure of your response.

- 1 I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery.
- 2 I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute.
- 3 I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me.
- 4 I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall.
- 5 I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions.
- 6 I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
- 7 I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries.
- 8 I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal.
- 9 People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.
- 10 I rarely express my opinions in group meetings.
- 11 I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.
- 12 If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.
- 13 I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song, or a painting.
- 14 When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details.
- 15 People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.
- 16 I prefer jobs that involve active social interaction to those that involve working alone.
- 17 When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable.
- 18 Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
- 19 I think that paying attention to radical ideas is a waste of time.
- 20 I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought.
- 21 People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.
- 22 On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic.
- 23 I feel like crying when I see other people crying.
- 24 I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.
- 25 If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert.
- 26 When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized.
- 27 My attitude toward people who have treated me badly is "forgive and forget".
- 28 I feel that I am an unpopular person.
- 29 When it comes to physical danger, I am very fearful.
- 30 If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.

Continued...

- 31 I've never really enjoyed looking through an encyclopedia.
- 32 I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by.
- 33 I tend to be lenient in judging other people.
- 34 In social situations, I'm usually the one who makes the first move.
- 35 I worry a lot less than most people do.
- 36 I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
- 37 People have often told me that I have a good imagination.
- 38 I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time.
- 39 I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me.
- 40 The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends.
- 41 I can handle difficult situations without needing emotional support from anyone else.
- 42 I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.
- 43 I like people who have unconventional views.
- 44 I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act.
- 45 Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do.
- 46 Most people are more upbeat and dynamic than I generally am.
- 47 I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.
- 48 I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.
- 49 I don't think of myself as the artistic or creative type.
- 50 People often call me a perfectionist.
- 51 Even when people make a lot of mistakes, I rarely say anything negative.
- 52 I sometimes feel that I am a worthless person.
- 53 Even in an emergency I wouldn't feel like panicking.
- 54 I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
- 55 I find it boring to discuss philosophy.
- 56 I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan.
- 57 When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.
- 58 When I'm in a group of people, I'm often the one who speaks on behalf of the group.
- 59 I remain unemotional even in situations where most people get very sentimental.
- 60 I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.

## **Appendix E: Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS-8)**

Response Categories:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither disagree or agree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

1. I would like to explore strange places
2. I get restless when I spend too much time at home
3. I like to do frightening things
4. I like wild parties
5. I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables
6. I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable
7. I would like to try bungee jumping
8. I would love to have new and exciting experiences, even if they are illegal

### **Appendix F: Modified Enjoyment of Frightening Films (EFF) Scale**

Thinking about your **past experiences** with horror movies, please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement.

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neither agree nor disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

Spark's (1985) Enjoyment of Frightening Films (EFF) Past experiences with Frightening Films

1. Frightening films contain endings that are too shocking for me to really enjoy.
2. The frightening films I have seen have almost always contained too much graphic violence to make them really enjoyable.
3. I feel exhilarated inside my body when I watch a scary film.
4. I don't enjoy the feeling of being frightened when I watch a scary film.
5. Frightening films have so much blood that you can't enjoy yourself.
6. Scary films show too many people being abused or victimized.
7. Scary films entertain me.
8. I love the feeling of my adrenalin flowing when I watch the most horrifying parts of horror movies.
9. As far as I'm concerned, the scarier a movie is—the better.
10. The faster my heart beats when I see a scary movie, the more I enjoy the film.

Zuckerman & Little (1986) ATMS (reworded as strongly agree to strongly disagree) and Tamborini and Stiff (1987)

1. I find most horror movies disgusting.
2. I like horror movies because the good guy(girl) usually wins in the end

Frequency/descriptive items

1. How often do you watch movies **per year**, whether it be online, a movie you rented/bought, or at the theatre? (Open-ended)
2. What is your favourite movie genre (i.e. Comedy, Action/Adventure, Romance, Sci-Fi, Horror, etc.)? (Open-ended)
3. In this study, **horror movies** are defined as gory/slasher flicks. How often do you pick the **horror genre** when deciding on what kind of movie to watch?
  - Almost Always
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  - Never

4. Overall, how much do you like watching horror movies?
  - Extremely
  - Somewhat
  - Indifferent
  - Very Little
  - Not at all
5. How likely are you to view a horror movie with someone else (family, friends, significant other, etc.)?
  - Every time
  - Almost every time
  - Occasionally/Sometimes
  - Almost never
  - Never
6. How likely are you to watch a gory, true life documentary?
  - Every time
  - Almost every time
  - Occasionally/Sometimes
  - Almost never
  - Never
7. How much would you like watching a horror movie if it were based on a true story?
  - Extremely
  - Somewhat
  - Indifferent
  - Very Little
  - Not at all
8. In your own words, please write why you do or do not enjoy viewing horror movies. Feel free to write as much as you would like. (Open-ended)

## Appendix G: Demographics

**Please select the answer that best fits your gender**

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other

**My age is \_\_\_\_\_**

**Please select the answer that best fits your ethnicity/race**

- Caucasian/White
- African American/Black
- Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Asian
- Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Other
- Mixed

**Please select the answer that best fits your sexual orientation**

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Bisexual
- Other
- Prefer not to say

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- Other
- Prefer not to say

**Please select the answer that best fits your political affiliation**

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other
- No affiliation
- Prefer not to say

## Appendix H: Pre-registration



### SO DISGUSTING, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF THE SCREEN; Masters Thesis (#5529)

**Created:** 09/14/2017 04:00 PM (PT) **Public:** 09/14/2017 04:03 PM (PT)

**Author(s)** Ashley Dillard (Western Carolina University) - amdillard2@catamount.wcu.edu

#### 1) Have any data been collected for this study already?

It's complicated. We have already collected some data but explain in Question 8 why readers may consider this a valid pre-registration nevertheless.

#### 2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?

To what extent is liking of horror movies predicted by personality traits and disgust sensitivity? This will be a two-part study; Part A will determine the reliability of a modified version of Sparks' (1986) Enjoyment of Frightening Films (EFF) Scale along with various other frequency/descriptive questions. The EFF Scale has been modified to add additional questions associated with liking of horror movies. Part B will then have participant's complete two personality measures (listed below), a disgust sensitivity measure (listed below), and the modified EFF Scale along with the other questions taken from part A.

#### 3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.

For both parts, liking for horror movies will be the dependent variable. To measure this, we will be asking various frequency/descriptive questions regarding ones' liking for horror movies. An example question is "How often do you pick the horror genre when deciding on what kind of movie to watch"? Finally, participants will take a modified version of the EFF Scale, which is designed to assess the degree to which individuals enjoy horror movies, and the characteristics of horror movies that they enjoy.

#### 4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

For both parts, we will be using a within-subjects design. That is, all participants will follow the same procedure and complete the same measures. See above for part A's procedure. A different group of participants will be recruited for part B of this project, and they will be asked to complete the Three Domain Disgust Scale (TDDS), the HEXACO-PI-R-60, the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS-8), and the modified version of the EFF Scale from part A.

#### 5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.

For part A we will be running a factor analysis to determine if any items need to be excluded for part B. For part B we will be running bivariate correlations between the personality traits measured (i.e., TDDS scores, HEXACO-PI-R-60 scores, and BSSS-8 scores) and liking for horror movies.

#### 6) Any secondary analyses?

To further understand these bivariate correlations, a hierarchical linear multiple regression will be conducted, wherein liking for horror movies is regressed onto the TDDS scores, HEXACO-PI-R-60 scores, and BSSS-8 scores.

**7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.**

For part A, we will have a total of 200 participants. After data has been analyzed and changes have been made to this portion, such as excluding questions that weaken the reliability, we will then conduct part B of the study, which a previously calculated power analysis suggested running roughly 130 subjects.

**8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., data exclusions, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)**

We will have three attention checks inserted throughout part B of the study, therefore, participants who fail any of these attention checks will not be included in data analysis. We will also exclude any participant's data who have never seen or rarely watches movies. Furthermore, while our main interest is in participants who express a liking for horror movies, we will also be analyzing those who do not like horror movies for exploratory purposes.

Concerning the question about data collection already in progress; we believe this pre-registration should still be considered valid, due to the fact that no analyses have been run thus far. Furthermore, we have only collected about half of the intended number of participants we need for part A, and part A is simply a validation check for the modified and newly created questions.

Version of AsPredicted Questions: 1.10

Available at <https://aspredicted.org/t2nw4.pdf> (Permanently archived at [http://web.archive.org/web/\\*/https://aspredicted.org/t2nw4.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/*/))