

Cathartic Effect of Horror Movies: Analyzing Viewer Experiences and Film Elements

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Abstract : This study explores the psychological mechanisms behind the cathartic effects of horror films, focusing on how these narratives facilitate emotional release and psychological exploration. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the "uncanny"- 1919, Aristotle's catharsis, Zillman's Excitation Transfer theory, and Kristeva's notion of the abject, the research examines how horror films serve as symbolic confrontations with repressed fears and anxieties. A qualitative approach involving interviews with 10 participants and narrative film analysis reveals key themes such as poetic justice, vicarious gratification, emotional regulation, and the suspension of disbelief, all contributing to the emotional and psychological impact of the genre. The findings highlight that horror films provide a safe space for confronting existential fears, including death and the unknown while offering emotional release through intense fear and moral resolution. Participants reported experiencing emotional relief and psychological catharsis, using horror films as tools for coping with stress, phobias, and depressive states. Additionally, horror's ability to reflect societal anxieties and provide insight into cultural and personal fears further underscores its therapeutic potential. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the psychological benefits of horror, suggesting that the genre functions not only as entertainment but also as a unique mechanism for emotional and existential exploration.

Keywords : catharsis, horror movies, unconscious emotions, film elements

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