Favorite Movie Monsters and Their Psychological Appeal

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ABSTRACT

A nationwide and demographically representative sample of 1,166 people responded to a survey exploring choices for a favorite movie monster and reasons underlying the choice. Results of the study indicated that, irrespective of demographics, the vampire is the king of monsters. With a few exceptions (e.g., Chucky, Dracula and sexiness), males and females were generally attracted to the same monsters and for similar reasons. Regarding age differences, Younger people were the more likely to prefer recent and more violent and murderous slasher monsters, such as Freddy Krueger, and to like them for their killing prowess. Older people were more attracted to earlier vintage, non-slasher monsters like Karloff’s Frankenstein. Slasher and non-slasher monsters who ranked in the Top 10 in terms of popularity, differed in two important respects: Slashers were preferred for their killing prowess while non-slashers were preferred for their being objects of empathy, pity or compassion. Overall, though, monsters were particularly liked for their intelligence, superhuman powers, and their ability to (safely) show us the dark side of human nature.
INTRODUCTION

The film industry is one of today's most successful enterprises and brings in billions in revenue. But why and how are consumers, in this case filmgoers, film renters, and film buyers, allured? The answer may lie in what film does for its viewers. Film appeals to viewers' appetites for a vicarious experience and the emotions that it brings. Given previous results of research on differential viewer reactions to films from differing film genres [1,2], different film genres may be expected to provide different vicarious and emotional experiences. In the case of horror films, it is believed to be the thrill of fright, the awe of the horrific, the experience of the dark and forbidden side of human behavior that lures people into the dark mouth of the theater to be spooked [3].

According to statistics provided by the online archives of the industry newspaper, Variety, of the 250 or so top grossing films released by the American film industry each year, approximately 15 films (6%) are of the horror genre. Numerous academics and non-academics have written extensively on the topic of horror films, movie monsters, all-time scary films, and the like. Some, like Michael Apter [4] and his theory of detachment and parapathic emotions, have looked at theoretical reasons why people seem to enjoy the ostensibly negative experience of being frightened by a movie experience. Potential for escape into safe distance is paramount. Others [3] have looked at why horror films are good "date" movies or, like Jonathan Crane [5], have outlined how the horror genre has changed over the years, evolving into a type that is far more violent and explicitly bloody. Researchers like Ed Tan [6] have demonstrated that film emotions are not ersatz stepchildren of authentic emotions. Rather, film-induced emotions are real experiences because the film, in collusion with the audience eye and audience desire to be
transported, can fool the brain. In other words, a horror film can be “really scary” -- if we allow it!

Since the early part of the 20th century, when the horror film genre was born, scary movies have developed into different clusters of themes. Silent film era horror films, primarily European, were a mixed bag of legends and science fiction (e.g., *Metropolis* (1926), *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Golem* (1920), Edison's *Frankenstein* short (1910), and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919)). Following the era of silent films came the now-legendary era of the sympathetic monsters of the 1930s, as exemplified by Universal Studio’s monster triumvirate, Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Mummy, and their spin-offs and sequels. According to Crane [5], these monsters were generally seen as misunderstood outcasts from society, to be pitied, and even occasionally, as with Dracula, found to be attractive. Audiences are said to have identified with these monsters, who were portrayed as existing on the outside of the normal community. Perhaps the monsters’ onscreen plights tapped into audience feelings of social inequity and recollection of social torment at the hands of their social peers.

The 1950s was awash in science fiction-fantasy monster pictures addressing such things as science run amok, fear of alien invaders (*The Thing [From Another World]*, 1951, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956) and the disastrous and unanticipated consequences of radioactive fallout (e.g., *Them*, 1954 and *Godzilla*, 1956). The late 1950s brought a new wave of monsters directed toward a different audience than those who sought out monsters in the earlier decades. The new audience was the youth market, and the monsters and their monstrous behaviors addressed the sensibilities of young males and females. According to Skal [7], this transition from multi-generational appeal of films in general, and of horror films in particular, to a principally youth-oriented market developed as the buying power of the young began to increase
in the late 1950s. Beside youth oriented dramas like Rebel Without A Cause (1955), the angst of adolescence was further explored with films like I Was A Teenage Werewolf (1957) and I Was A Teenage Frankenstein (1958). Here, the monsters were not “the other” but, “us,” possibly in all our adolescent hormonal rage and confusion. Filmmakers Roger Corman and Sam Arkoff, among others, opened up a treasure trove of box office dollars by appealing to this hungry market of young filmgoers and the youth-oriented film market made its move to become the 800 pound behemoth it is today.

As horror films became more gruesome, more explicit, more horrifying than terrifying, more shock than suspense, the older audiences began to stay away in droves. According to research by Fischoff [8], a trend could be observed: as viewers age, their appetite for violence decreases and their attraction to the new, bloodier horror genre decreases as well. A momentum begins and, in response, Hollywood shifts from targeting adult market audiences to targeting primarily teen market audiences. Box office goals dictate that such movies increasingly and violently focus on the plights of young people, thereby further alienating middle age and older moviegoers, further locking the horror genre into what has become the youth culture juggernaut.

Helped by the collapse of the old Hayes or Motion Picture Code in the 1960s, Hollywood issued itself the license to shock, titillate, and nauseate. This was coupled with advances in the technology of special effects, and assured that the tradition of horror and suspense was traded in for a new tradition of horror, shock and gore, all to the delight of this bulging youth market [5, 9]. The zombie ghouls of George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead (1968), Leatherface, from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), Michael Myers, from Halloween (1978), and Freddy Krueger, from A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) became the youth culture’s new monsters of
choice. The cinematic vehicles for these emerging horror icons ran red with blood and the screens groaned under the accumulating weight of dismembered limbs and heads.

Film monsters have proven to be such unforgettable characters that in many instances they have become part of our culture. Most Americans would recognize a picture of Frankenstein, Dracula, King Kong, Godzilla, or the Mummy, before recognizing the current U.S. Vice President. These monsters have become instantly recognizable icons, through novel characterizations and product merchandising, and through repeated film presentations.

This recognition factor is not exclusive to monsters from older films. Freddy, Jason, and Michael have made their bid for fright “immortality.” As social climates, film technology, local and national film policies change, so do monsters, both in form, behavior, and sensibilities. Are these changing monster types appealing to some groups and not to others? Cowan and O’Brien [11] found that in slasher-monster films, the slashers are primarily men, and sexy women were more likely to die than non-sexy women. Males on the other hand, were targets for death if they possessed negative masculine traits (their sexual allure did not matter). One might expect that females would be put off more by slasher-monsters than males because women are punished for being sexual while men are merely punished for being arrogant, pushy, or selfish, suggesting an implicit equation between female sexuality and negativity. Yet, Fischoff [12] found that although females and males do not differ in their attraction to the horror film genre, they do differ in their attraction to violence, males liking violence in movies more than females do. Are females less attracted to violent movie monsters as well? Further, does age matter? Do people of different ages wax nostalgic about different monsters? If so, why? In other words, what makes horror monsters attractive and what makes them unattractive to different age groups and genders?
Sadly, there is little empirical research on what or who are people’s favorite monsters and what reasons underlie such affections. No study of which the present authors are aware has systematically sampled a national population for their individual preferences on these movie monster matters. This study was designed to explore our favorite monsters and why we feel connected to them. It also sought to explore the following research questions and hypotheses derived from the abundant but solely speculative literature on horror movies and movie monsters.

**Hypotheses:**

**H**\textsubscript{1}. Young people will prefer more recently conceived movie monsters while older people will prefer vintage film monsters.

**H**\textsubscript{2}. Young people will prefer film monsters that are more violent and disposed to killing large numbers of people than will be older people.

**H**\textsubscript{3}: Young people, rather than older people, will be more likely to prefer film monsters that are attractive because of their killing inclinations.

**H**\textsubscript{4}: Females will prefer less violent movie monsters than males.

**Research Questions:**

**RQ**\textsubscript{1}. What are the favorite film monsters?

**RQ**\textsubscript{2}. Do males and females differ in terms of the specific monsters they find favorites?
PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

Members of the Media Psychology Lab\textsuperscript{1} at California State University, Los Angeles under the direction of the first author conducted a year-long, nation-wide survey of (among other things) the preferences people have for certain movie monsters. Data collection took place between September 2000 and August 2001. A variety of direct and indirect contact venues were employed to garner responses from academic and nonacademic settings. This resulted in a cross-sectional, convenience sample of 1,166. The sample included 597 females, 567 males, and two individuals with gender unspecified. On average, females tended to be younger than males, $M_{\text{females}} = 30.6 \text{ years}, \text{SD} = 15.99, M_{\text{males}} = 38.03 \text{ years}, \text{SD} = 17.9, t(1121.8) = 7.43, p < .001$.

The participants ranged in ages from 6 through 91 with a mean age of 34.2. The sample is skewed toward younger respondents because of the more ready access to the substantial number of college students. The total number of people who were classified as “Young,” (25 years or younger), “Middle” (26-49 years) and "Older"(50+) is 531, 371 and 253 respectively. These three age range categories were found to be highly effective for comparing age groups in previous research on film preferences [1, 8].

A long and a short version of the survey, described below, were used to collect data. For those respondents who filled out the long version of the survey, the age distribution was even less representative of those over 50 (n = 38), further attenuating the proportionate presence of older respondents in our sample. Respondents came from the four major racial/ethnic groups, Caucasian, Asian, Hispanic and African-American. Ethnicity was included to assure sample representativeness rather than as an intended independent research variable.

\footnote{1 We would like to thank Ana Franco, Angela Hernandez and Leslie Hurry for their assistance on this research.}
The survey questionnaire was developed over a number of open-ended pilot studies to elicit a range of items addressing reasons for individual monster preferences. People were asked to respond to potential monster preference reasons on a 4-point Likert-type Scale ranging from 0 (no influence) to 3 (very influential). The final survey contained 43 closed-ended reasons (see far left column, Table 1) for a monster being a favorite.

--See Table 1 in Appendix--

In order to collect more data on favorite movie monsters citations when people did not have the time to fill out a long list of reasons behind the monster cited as a favorite, an abbreviated version of the survey without a check list of reasons was designed and administered in rapid response street interviews.

**Slasher Monsters**

For purposes of specific hypothesis-related analyses, all monsters cited by respondents were classified into one of two categories: slasher or non-slasher. The operational definition of a slasher monster in the present study was that it was human, superhuman, or humanoid (precluding such creatures as the blob, or the shark from *Jaws*), portrayed on screen as a serial or mass murderer, and motivated by some deluded or self-justifying revenge or outrage. It was also necessary that the murders committed by the monster generally were unrelated to the monster’s actual survival needs (e.g., vampires and blood needs). Further, a slasher monster should be portrayed as generally experiencing no remorse for its murderous rampages. Monsters who murdered for reasons such as fear, survival, or reproductive needs (e.g., the creature in *Alien*) and were not necessarily mass murderers, were classified as non-slashers.

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2 The survey also looked at scariest films. That data will be presented at a later date.
Examples of familiar slasher monsters are Freddy Krueger from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series of films, and Chucky, the demon doll from the *Child’s Play* series. Examples of familiar non-slasher monsters are Karloff’s Frankenstein, Lugosi’s Dracula and Gill Man from the *Creature From the Black Lagoon* film series.

**How Designations Were Determined**

The determination of a monster as a slasher or non-slasher was derived from judgments and assessments of film monsters by academics authors [5, 11, 13, 14], comments obtained during pilot studies, and the judgments and observations of the research team. Two members of the research team decided into which category a monster would fall and, if no agreement was obtained, a third team member helped decide the classification. In 95% of the cases, there was no such disagreement. Of the 1,038 monsters cited, the total number of monster citations falling into the slasher category is 290 while 748 fall into the non-slasher category, $\chi^2 (1, N = 1,038) = 202.1$, $p < .001$.

Adapting a data reduction procedure employed by Wilkins [15], an additional classification of the 43 reasons for a monster being a favorite was used for ease of interpretation. Forty-two of the 43 reasons were collapsed or subsumed into 9 Scales. The names of the scales and the code numbers of the reasons which comprise them are part of the information presented in Table 2

--- See Table 2 in Appendix ---

Reasons were placed in scale categories on the basis of shared dimensions of surface meanings. For example, there are two items or reasons which comprise the **Respondent Self-Reference Scale** (Scale 1): Reason 2 (“monster reminds me of myself”) and Reason 36 (“I first experienced the monster as a child”). Of particular interest in the present study and its
hypotheses, was Scale 6, **Dimensions of Killing Scale**. It contained nine items with reference to such reasons as “monster enjoys killing” (Reason 11) and “monster kills lots of people” (Reason 14).

For analytic purposes, each respondent’s score on a scale was the sum of the scores on each of the reasons comprising the scale. Recall that each reason could range in score from 0-3. Using reason sums allows for comparisons between monsters on each scale, but not for comparisons between scales because scales varied in number of component reasons. The number of reasons comprising a scale ranged from 2 to 9.

**RESULTS**

Data was collected from a respondent pool of 1,166, most of whom indicated a choice of favorite movie monster, some of whom didn’t. However, as only a subset of this total answered the long form of the survey with the 43 reasons for a monster being a favorite, the number of respondents (N) for data analysis was limited to 700 respondents’ survey protocols. The larger tally of favorite monsters is based on an N of 1,034 respondent survey protocols.

There were 205 different, favorite individual movie monsters cited (the top 25 are listed in Table 4 in the Appendix), ranging from Freddy Krueger, Frankenstein, and the Werewolf to facetiously nominated outliers (rare mentions) such as actresses Shelley Winters and Barbra Streisand, and popular music icon Michael Jackson. Ten percent (132) of respondents reported no favorite movie monster. Of that number, 78 were female (60%) and 54 were male (40%). Thus, 6.7% of females and 4.6% of males had no favorite monsters, \( \chi^2(1, N = 1,166) = 3.63, p<.06 \). While previous research [1] has shown that females and males do not significantly differ in terms of preference for films of the Horror genre, results from this study suggests that they do differ in terms of likelihood of having a favorite movie monster.
Age and Vintage of Favorite Monster

Hypothesis 1 predicted that young people will prefer more recently conceived movie monsters while older people will prefer monsters of an earlier vintage. The correlation between the average age of the respondent selecting a monster and the year that the film introducing the monster was initially released (or, if the there were many sequels, the average year of release of the sequels) is \( r = -.63, p < .001 \). Hence, as the monster film’s release year advances or increases, the average age of the respondent selecting it decreases, supporting \( H_1 \) predictions.

Taking another angle of regard and looking more closely at the 25 most favorite monsters in terms of citations frequencies, Table 3 contains data arranged according to the average or mean age of respondents selecting one of these monsters, as well as the standard deviation of the age mean. The monsters are ranked from the lowest mean age of respondents selecting them to the highest mean age.

--- See Table 3 in Appendix ---

When inspecting the Film Source Release Year column in Table 3, it is clear that, with minor exceptions, monsters from the 1980s and 1990s dominate the top third of the list. The average ages corresponding to those selecting these monsters cluster in the <25 yrs. or Young category. Monsters from the 1930s through the 1950s, again with minor exceptions, occupy the approximate bottom third of the list with mean age of respondents choosing them in the Middle to Older age ranges. In other words, younger respondents, who numerically dominated the sample, were partial to more recent vintage movie monsters while middle age and older people (who were in the numerical minority of the sample), were partial to earlier vintage movie monsters. Previous research on favorite film preferences \([1, 8]\) shows that this age effect, i.e., an
inverse relationship between age and a favorite film’s initial release date, is found not only for horror films but for films of all genres.

Looking at the adjacent standard deviation (SD) statistics (degree of dispersion of individual scores around the mean of all the scores) in Table 3, another trend emerges. The five monsters which topped the list (Scream Killers, It [from *It The Clown*], Candyman, Chucky, and Michael Myers) fall into the slasher monster category. These slasher have both the lowest average age of respondents selecting them (ranging from 18.4 to 22.7), and the lowest SDs (e.g. SD = 2.9 when compared with a mean of 44.3 and a SD of 20.5 for Frankenstein). By contrast, the more classic non-slasher monsters have yielded data (as indicated in Table 3) with higher average ages and larger SDs. The implication here is that earlier, more classic Hollywood monsters have a broader age appeal than do later Hollywood monsters, who seem to appeal principally to younger respondents.

Monster preferences by respondents in the Middle Age range show the broadest generational straddle, finding monsters from the 1930s to the 1980s very appealing but, with the exception of Hannibal Lecter, finding few 1990s monsters with any appeal. Clearly, all the results support predictions of Hypothesis 1.

**Monster and Violence**

**Age and Monster Violence**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that young people will prefer more violent, slasher-type monsters than will older people. While there is no space for presenting the classification of the 205 individual monsters cited by respondents, each was classified as either a slasher or non-slasher. Of the 205 monsters, 45.4% of Younger people cited monsters classified as slashers while the figures were 21% and 9.7% for Middle and Older people respectively, $\chi^2 (2, N = 1,034) =$
104.59, p < .001. Each age group was significantly different from each other and in the expected direction. This supports the prediction of H2. To illustrate this trend, Table 4 shows the “Top 25” monsters for each Age category with slasher:non-slasher designations.

-- See Table 4 in Appendix --

Gender and Monster Violence

When it comes to gender, results were opposite to those predicted in H4. This hypothesis predicted that males would prefer the more violent and rapacious movie monsters, the slashers, as it were. Surprisingly, results show that females, not males, cited the higher percentage of slasher movie monsters, 34.5% compared with a male citation percentage of 27.9%, $\chi^2 (1, N = 1,034) = 5.23$, p < .02. This is a complete reversal of prediction.

Similar gender results are obtained when viewed from a slightly different angle. Table 5 shows the ranking of the “Top 25” monsters cited by Gender.

-- See Table 5 in Appendix --

The Spearman rank order correlation for male and female rankings of Top 25 Monsters is significant, $r_s = 68$, p < .001. Males and females essentially tallied similar lists of favorite monsters with minor exceptions in terms of the ranking of certain monsters, specifically Chucky (ranked 4th for females and 12th for males) and Regan, the possessed girl in the original Exorcist, played by Linda Blair (ranked 7th for females and 14th for males). Furthermore, females were about 40% more likely to mention vampires than males and twice as likely to mention killers from Scream. Beyond these differences, however, and other than shifts in rankings, males and females were effectively in agreement when it came to favorite monsters. H4 - females will prefer less violent monsters than males - seems to have found no support. Moreover, in response
to RQ2, “do males and females differ in terms of the monsters they find favorites,” the answer appears to be not much.

What differences there are between males and females may be more readily found when looking at reasons for selecting a monster as a favorite.

**Rationales Behind Favorite Monster Choices: Scale Scores**

Space limits a detailed presentation and discussion of the nine scale variables developed for the present study. Focus will be confined principally to Scale 6, Dimensions of Killing.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that, compared with older people, younger people will be more likely to prefer film monsters who are attractive BECAUSE of their killing inclinations. Results cited above concerning H2 established that there is essentially a negative relationship between age and preference for very violent film monsters such that as age goes up, preference for violent, murderous film monsters goes down. But as to the reasons for preferring a monster, comparisons between genders and between age groups is instructive.

Scale 6 of the nine scales developed for analysis of monster choice reasons is comprised of all items concerned with dimensions of killing, e.g., monster enjoys killing, kills many people, kills deserving people, etc. ANOVAS (statistical tests for calculating significance of differences between groups on specific variables [e.g. age]), reveal significant differences between age groups and genders in scores on this scale.

**Gender**

In the instance of Gender, Males were significantly more likely to favor monsters because of their killing capacity than were Females, t(577.5) = 1.99, p < .05. Males had a mean score on Scale 6 of 9.83, SD = 5.82 while females had a mean score of 8.91, SD = 5.94. Thus, although females, as discussed above, were slightly more likely to prefer monsters that were classified as
slashers, they were somewhat less likely than males to prefer them for their wide range of killing parameters, and somewhat more likely than males to prefer monsters because of positive psycho-social characteristics (Scale 3), e.g., monster has a sensitive side or shows compassion.

Age

Again referring to Table 2 but, now, regarding age, an ANOVA for age on Scale 6 yielded a statistically significant effect, $F(2,687)=13.55$ $p < .001$. A post hoc comparison of significance of differences between Young, Middle and Older age group means supports the hypothesis, $M_y = 10.07$, $SD = .27$, $M_m = 8.33$, $DF = .42$, $M_o = 6.09$, $DF = .86$. Each age group is significantly different from each other at alpha levels greater than .05. Thus, age and preference for a monster because of the variety of ways and the variety of types of people it kills were, as predicted, inversely related. Hence data support prediction of $H_3$: young people prefer monsters more for their dimensions of killing than do older people.

Slashers and Non-Slashers

Looking at Table 2 in terms of how slasher and non-slasher monster choosers scored on Scale 6, results indicate that, as might be expected, persons who selected slasher monsters, such as Freddy Krueger or Michael Myers, had significantly higher scores on the Dimensions of Killing Scale than those who selected non-slashers, such as Dracula or Godzilla. Slasher choosers obtained a mean score on Scale 6 of 12.27, $SD = 4.35$ while non-slasher choosers had a mean score of 7.84, $SD = 6.03$, $t(627.8) = 11.01$, $p < .001$. It is noteworthy also that on Scale 9, concerning empathy, pity, and compassion for monsters, those who chose non-slasher monsters scored significantly higher on this scale, $M = 5.33$, $SD = 2.62$, than those who chose slasher monsters, $M = 4.78$, $SD = 2.47$, $t(523.7) = 2.05$, $p < .04$. 
Rationales Behind Favorite Monster Choices: Reason Scores

All Monsters

Table 6 contains an overall rank ordering of reasons why a monster was chosen as favorite. Ranking was derived from computing the mean of all respondents rating of that reason as it applied to their monster choice. The top five reasons have nothing explicitly to do with how murderous a monster is. Rather, the qualities of intelligence, superhuman strength, embodying pure evil, not being inhibited or morally constrained, and showing us the dark side of human nature, garner the most appeal. Thus, a theme running across most monster preferences concerns issues regarding evil, absence of moral inhibition, and an exploration of the dark side of human nature. Only in later reasons offered do we find dimensions of killing to be of primary importance.

-- See Table 6 in Appendix –

Reasons by Gender

Male and female participants answered with similar reasons as to why a monster was their favorite. When analyzed by multiple t-tests, in only three instances were significant differences revealed. Three reasons out of 43 being significantly different could have easily occurred by chance and only one of the three reasons was related to violence while the other two dealt with identification. Males were more likely to explain their selection of Godzilla (M\text{males} = 1.15, M\text{females} = 0.25, t(691) = 3.42, p<.001) and King Kong (M\text{males} = 1.71, M\text{females} = 0.43, t(691) = 2.14, p<.05) because they felt the monster “reminds me of myself.” As regards reasoning related to violence, Chucky was selected by males more often than females because “I like the way the monster kills people” (M\text{males} = 2.67, M\text{females} = 1.00, t(691) = 6.5, p<.001). All other monster comparisons showed little difference or no discernible pattern of differences in selected
reasoning among males and females. Consequently, Hypothesis 4 predicting that females would be less attracted to monsters that were violent than would males was not supported by the present data.

**Reasons by Age**

Hypothesis 3 predicted that young people would prefer film monsters for different, more violent reasons, than older people. Four items address the issues surrounding killing or dimensions of killing: “Monsters enjoy killing,” “monsters kill lots of people,” “monsters kill deserving teenage males,” and “monster kills deserving teenage females.” Results of an analysis of variance of the mean of the sum of these four variables supports the prediction. In contrast to respondents of Middle and Older age ranges, Younger respondents find a monster attractive because of the numbers of people it kills and who in particular it kills to a significantly greater degree, $F(2,683) = 11.29, p < .001$. A post hoc analysis revealed the differences between Older ($M = .77$) and Younger ($M = 1.24$) to be significant and that between Younger and “Middle” ($M = .96$), to be significant. The differences between Older and Middle, while in the predicted age direction, were not statistically significant. Older people, by contrast, found reasons of social rejection and alienation to be the bulwark for their monster preferences.

**Reasons Underlying Preferences Broken Down For Individual Monsters**

For purposes of space and comprehensibility, discussion here will be limited to the Top 10 Favorite Movie Monsters. Referring again to *Table 1*, which displays the mean scores on all 43 reasons for the Top 10 Favorite Monsters, recall the scores on each reason can range from 0 to 3. Any mean score less than one would indicate that that reason was not particularly important in that monster being considered a favorite. Hence, data discussion will generally be restricted to reasons with mean scores above 1.
The highest mean reason scores in each row are printed in **bold**. Suffice it to say here that on matters concerning killing dimensions, slasher monsters generally score highest, something already seen in the presentation of results regarding Scale Scores, especially Scale 6.

Using highest scores in each column, printed in *enlarged bold italics* to provide a thumbnail characterization of each monster’s most salient characteristics which contributed to their being a sample favorite, interpretation of results suggest the following:

1. **Vampires** engage viewers most because of their intelligence and because they never die or age. They are also the sexiest of all monsters, with Hannibal Lecter coming in second. Vampires share another commonality with Hannibal, their taste for humans although Hannibal is noted for sins of the flesh while Vampires drink -- not wine, but blood.

2. **Freddy Krueger**, one of the slasher monsters, is principally highlighted as “pure evil,” but a close second is that he is “realistically horrifying.”

3. **Frankenstein** scores high on compassion and sensitivity and the fact of his being both an outcast and an example of where science can go wrong.

4. The most outstanding feature of **Jason Voorhees**, of *Friday the 13th* is that he is an unstoppable killing machine. His veritable cornucopia of methods of murdering a seemingly endless number of adolescents and the occasional adult is impressive to Jason’s fans. He scores the highest of all 10 monsters on all relevant killing variables comprising Scale 6, with a mean score of 13.52. His closest rival on Scale 6 is Freddy Krueger, who scores only 12.29. Considering that his body count does not compare with those of Godzilla or the creature from *Alien,* it is an impressive accomplishment to be effectively anointed the King of Killers. Jason’s audience appeal is further abetted by his immortality, his apparent enjoyment of killing, and by his superhuman strength.
5. **Michael Myers**, of *Halloween* fame, like Jason a slasher monster, is also the embodiment of pure evil but stands apart from others in his highest score for serious psychological problems, $M = 2.75$. Michael’s closest rivals are Chucky, $M = 2.53$ and Hannibal, $M = 2.36$. Why Michael is seen as more troubled than Jason is not discernible from the data. That it may be related to his witnessing his sister having sex in the introductory episode of this franchise, which putatively led to his psychotic reaction and murder of his sister, is one possibility.

6. **Godzilla**’s most dominant features are that it acts out of self-protection or rage, that it has superhuman strength and that, as a result of atomic testing in the Pacific, it is a product of science and technology gone very wrong. Its destruction of cities and its inhabitants seems, perhaps, “understandable” in this light. That Godzilla became a hero of sorts over the span of the film series, also may help explain its favorite status. Godzilla ranks third lowest in a penchant for killing, higher only than King Kong and Frankenstein.

7. Another slasher monster, **Chucky**, the demon doll from the *Child’s Play* series, was, it may be recalled, picked three times as often by females as males. Enjoying killing, having serious psychological problems, and embodying pure evil are his principal virtues for being a favorite. Many females who selected Chucky wrote in the reason that this little monster “is an unlikely agent of murder.” The reason was written in 25 times and it was with reference to Chucky 75% of the time. Finally, like some other monsters, such as Vampires, Hannibal and Alien, Chucky is considered quite intelligent and, for that reason, a most appealing monster.

8. **Hannibal Lecter**, the most recently minted of the Top 10 monsters, totally lacks any supernatural “gifts,” but his intellectual appeal is the highest of all, $M = 2.76$. Likewise, because of his non-supernatural status, he provides his admirers with an appreciation of the workings of
an insane mind. His mean score on this reason of helping us understand insanity is 2.24. Lecter’s closest rival on this variable was Michael Myers whose mean score on this reason is 2.13. And, top scorer again, Hannibal is viewed as the monster who is least morally inhibited or constrained. Thus, Hannibal’s non-supernaturally adulterated, sardonic cannibalism makes him a righteous target for judgment about human failings. At the same time, such failings seem to be part and parcel of his audience appeal.

9. King Kong is the king of the sensitivity and the recipient of the most pity. He is rated as having the most sensitive side of all the 10 monsters, M = 3.0 is the most misunderstood, M = 2.85 and the most compassionate, M = 2.5. He virtually ties with Godzilla as having his violence justified because he acts out of self-protection and rage.

10. Finally, the creature from Alien is a favorite in large measure because one never knew the monster was going to kill (‘everybody’ was usually a safe bet) and because it was so horrifying looking, M = 2.93. Freddy Krueger’s score on this reason, M = 2.43, was a distant second. Intelligence was also a strong point. So, intelligence, unpredictability, and sheer physical “horrificness,” all teamed up to place the lizard mother from Alien in the current pantheon of movie monsters.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that females are less likely than males to prefer movies that show violence and gore. The present study found no evidence for consistent and systematic differences between the genders in terms of monster choices. Therefore, no support for our third hypothesis could be confirmed regarding greater or lesser preferences for murderous monsters. Nevertheless, the study did find that females were less likely to have a favorite monster than males. It may be that females, particularly the younger women and those who did choose a
monster and enjoy horror films, are just as "blood thirsty" a cast of viewers as their male counterparts. Further research might examine if other factors influence the responses of female subjects such as the presence of a self-reliant female briefly victorious protagonist in the horror films chosen such as Sigourney Weaver’s Ripley in the *Alien* series and the women who live to scream another day in so many slasher horror films, women such as Jamie Lee Curtis in several *Halloween* episodes.

In terms of favorite monsters, most emphatically the fictional vampire species in general, and Bela Lugosi’s Dracula in particular, is the king of the netherworld of film monsters. This may be due to the timeless nature of the story as well as the countless vampire remakes that have flooded cinema over the years and the popularity of imitating Bela Lugosi. Moreover, the physical repulsiveness of Nosferatu, F. W. Murnau’s Dracula knock-off notwithstanding, Dracula has most often been played by very attractive men who serve to increase the sexual power of the character in prowess and romance. This has served to boost the monster’s appeal for both men and women, although women, understandably rated vampires significantly more sexy than did males, $M_{\text{male}} = 1.29$, $M_{\text{female}} = 2.11$, $t(49.2) = 3.03$ $p < .001$. In the Top 10 list of monsters, for all respondents, vampires were rated as the sexiest ($M = 1.86$), followed a distant second by Hannibal Lecter ($M = 1.13$). With high ratings on looks and brains, and an appeal to both men and women, it is perhaps no wonder that the vampire (especially Dracula) is the most popular movie monster.

Why is a serial murderer like Dracula considered sexy and attractive? Psychological research has reaffirmed conventional wisdom repeatedly in studies showing that we are more ready to empathize with and excuse handsome or beautiful people when they commit crimes than is our disposition when it comes to the non-handsome, the non-beautiful defendants [16]. We
also tend to attribute more positive personality characteristics to attractive people [17]. Even in “monsterland,” it seems, it pays to be beautiful or handsome --and sympathetic! Recent films on the Ann Rice literary creation, Vampire Lestat, prompt both sexual and sympathetic responses from fans of her books and the derivative movies.

Vampires have an additional virtue…of sorts. As a western society, we fear aging and death and the Vampire character is ideally tempting in both regards. He or she never ages and never dies. The Vampire also has supernatural powers that may be appealing to those who feel powerless.

**Motives for Murder**

The results of our study support the hypotheses that younger moviegoers prefer more recent horror film monsters and are far more partial to slasher monsters than are older moviegoers. Results also support our hypothesis that younger viewers prefer a newer generation of horror monster and, it may be surmised, a cinematic style and storyline drenched in the sensational and novel forms of bloodletting and mortal dispatch favored by the likes of Freddy, Michael, Jason and their brethren of evil. Slasher monster storylines place the acts of murder in the foreground. What little there might be in terms of rationale for the seemingly endless orgies of death in which these films commerce, is unceremoniously relegated to the background, as if to say, “Why ask why?”

Contemporary monsters might easily be considered psychopathic in their bloodlust as they withhold even a scintilla of remorse. In other words, older monsters struggled with their stature as deviants and killed for survival (Dracula), out of fear-induced rage (Frankenstein) or, as with the Wolf Man, bestial possession. This monster triumvirate, in their original film
movie monsters

appearances, yearned for the deliverance of death. Indeed, it was Lugosi’s 1931 Dracula who uttered the plaintive lines “To die. To really be dead. That must be glorious.” [5, p. 73]

But the modus operandi of contemporary monsters? Contemporary monsters seem to kill because…they kill. Even though brief psychological explanations are given in various modern slasher films, such as revenge against their original aggressors, they do not seem to stand as important during the subsequent installments. In fact, the psychological “explanations” or “motivations” for mayhem mentioned in the premier episodes of the various monster franchise film series, seem obligatory rather than substantive and frequently exercise no palpable durable influence on character motivation or behavior. It is not surprising then, that in subsequent iterations of the movie, intelligible motivation for murder all but disappears. The murder’s the thing!

These changes in film styles (quick, bloodless dispatch vs. explicit slaughter) and reinvention of the formulae for character motivation (existential despair vs. sheer nihilism) may reflect altering value trends in popular culture. Or, they may bespeak a culture which itself was or is still reflecting social and political nightmares in contemporary society [5, 13, 18]. Whether legendary horrormeisters such as George Romero, Tobe Hooper or Wes Craven were (and are) speaking for a post-Viet Nam war, politically cynical generation, as they have claimed in film interviews, or are merely people of a generation, is a moot point. But the explicitness of their filmic violence in the 70s seemed to be echoed in the 80s and 90s in other horror franchises series like Scream and the Hannibal Lecter oeuvre, and in the explicitness of music lyrics, body adornments, piercings, and the clothing styles for the culture of youth, Hip Hop and otherwise. Lecter continues to mimic the prevailing culture of America, both civilized and savage. He
looks very much like us [7]. A monster for the millennium, Lecter wears his evil on the inside not on his face. His disfigurement is spiritual, not physical.

The Appeal of Evil

For once, it seems, Hollywood got it right. The respondents in our survey saw Lecter as pure evil: not evil in looks, but evil in deed and evil in conscience. In Lecter, evil is the charming gentleman next door, not the freak in the circus or the drooling psychotic ‘off his meds.’ Yet, for all his charm, Lecter still carries on the tradition of Freddy and Jason. He kills for both pique and pleasure, for gamesmanship, for hunger and for lust. He is remorseless and the film asks the viewer to share, or at least overlook his peculiar tastes. Charm, Hollywood would have us believe, excuses almost everything. Lecter’s insouciant airs make him a monster for the American 90s and beyond—Id incarnate. Greed is good and murder can be fun…and filling too.

There is clearly a cultural as well as a generation gap between those under 25 and those over 40. The horror films and favorite monsters reflect this gap. So did results from research by Fischoff and his students on favorite film quotes [19], which indicated that young people favored more violent and vengeful quotes from movies than did older respondents.

In general, different monsters are adored for different reasons but, overall, characteristics such as superhuman strength, intelligence, luxuriating in the joy of being evil, and being unfettered by moral restraints are some of the most popular reasons favored by the sample. Moreover, monsters are admired for holding a mirror up to our darker sides and assisting us in understanding evil. Perhaps it is the evil that we fear lurks in all of us, the evil that, in reality, dares not show its face or speak its name. But it is an evil that does dare parade itself across the movie screen for our vicarious enjoyment and delectation.
Beyond what a monster may show us about ourselves and our darker side, our results indicate that what monsters must do above all is behave horrifically and evoke in us extreme emotions, especially the adrenalyzed emotion of fear. Looking scary is useful as well. Moviegoers also relish their monsters displaying such positive traits as compassion, sensitivity, humor, and intelligence. Moreover, the supernatural powers that the monster possesses are attractive. Our modern and classic literature and legends show that we humans fantasize about having powers beyond the normal. Whether we’re rooting for Superman or Dracula, good or evil, superhuman powers are an audience favorite.

**Remakes Suffer By Comparison**

It is worth noting that over 90% of the people who cited classic monsters who were reprised in modern remakes, specified their favorites to be the original, not the remakes, suggesting that remakes tend to disappoint. Remakes of films such as *Godzilla*, *The Thing* and *King Kong*, for example, were each singled out for particular rejection by respondents. The myriad of actors portraying Dracula over the decades once Bela Lugosi’s star went into decline, including such notables as Jack Palance, Christopher Lee, Frank Langella and, most recently, Gary Oldman, seemed to carry on the tradition of the romantic vampire, but Lugosi’s Dracula was still the most frequently mentioned incarnation.

**Where Generations Agree**

A closing thought about the monster preferences of the young versus the older viewer. Younger viewers do celebrate the riot of blood and dismemberment unleashed by contemporary film monsters. But it must be noted that the more classic film monsters have appeal across generations -- an appeal far broader generationally than the appeal of later monsters! Younger respondents like classic monsters. They like them almost as much as do older respondents and,
as evidence shows, for many of the same reasons: outsider, misunderstood, sympathetic, frightened, and compassionate. Perhaps those qualities are most exquisitely represented in the monster who is taken from his home, placed in an environment he doesn’t understand and is brought to his iconic demise because of the love for but not of a woman -- King Kong. Kong is a monster with whom people of all generations seem to readily identify and sympathize. The youth of today are no exception.

Remarkably, though, it would appear that younger movie goers have another set of criteria that they invoke for the modern movie monsters: who they kill, how they kill, and how often they kill, counts for a lot, and the bloodier, the better!

This mass murderer dimension of monster appreciation is largely absent from the metrics and aesthetics employed by older respondents. This may reflect a co-existing set of preferences in younger minds that they handle easily, a set of tastes that straddle generations of popular culture and film monsters. Jenkins [20] offers the suggestion that violent entertainment like this serves four functions for young people including fantasies of empowerment, of transgression, intensification of emotional experience, and acknowledgement that the world is not always a safe, friendly place. This youthful juggling act, this plasticity of filmic preference, may both astonish and offend older people, but it’s one that younger people have come to find rather normal. Whether it means something deeper and more disturbing about real life tolerances for rape and murder and real life appetites of younger viewers for death sports and snuff films, is presently unknown. Nonetheless, it is a frequent subject of alarm and dire speculation [21, 22].

When these younger viewers approach middle age, whether they continue to find such explicit violence and mayhem as appealing as they do now is another open question. Research cited earlier suggests that time alters such appetites. But perhaps times have changed and, like
greed on Wall Street, a monster mired in murder, mutilation and mayhem will remain an allure not to be outgrown but, rather, a timeless source of an evening’s entertainment for the entire family.
REFERENCES


