

TRAIT MORBID INQUISITIVENESS: HORROR ATTRACTION, RELIGION, AND
THE FINAL GIRL

by

Charley Elles Brown

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

People are attracted to horror entertainment, such as movies, video games, dark tourism, and human-made haunted attractions, to experience fear and scary play. It is also utilized in research on emotional responses. Three types of attractors have been identified: dark copers, white knucklers, and adrenaline junkies. In horror movies, the evolution of threat management is exemplified by the resourcefulness and adaptability of the final girl. Furthermore, the attraction to horror-based entertainment is linked to morbid curiosity. A new research perspective known as trait morbid curiosity has identified this fascination as the development of psychological traits to handle morbid, threatening, and scary scenarios. Additionally, religiosity in horror entertainment displays another variation of social connection and coping development that links attraction to horror and the trait of morbid curiosity. To enhance knowledge and inclusion of the themes of religion and fear attraction, a new scale was developed with the four attractors included as subscales; this scale is called the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS). Validity and reliability evidence were collected to assess the measurement characteristics of the overall and subscale scores on the MIARS. Although the overall scores displayed good internal consistency reliability and a strong correlation with the only other existing measure of this construct (the Morbid Curiosity Scale), the subscale scores displayed neither reliability nor adequate validity evidence. The outcomes are based on a small sample size of 97 participants, and the research was conducted entirely online via the completion of two surveys posted on one social media site. Future directions for research to continue improvement of the scale are discussed.

Keywords: horror, trait morbid curiosity, social psychology, dark copers, white knucklers, adrenaline junkies, religiosity, final girl

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The 1996 horror film *Scream* features the iconic line, "Do you like scary movies?" spoken by the killer known as Ghostface. The film features a protagonist named Sidney Prescott, played by Neve Campbell, who is the final girl. The final girl is a female hero who can anticipate dangerous situations and survive them or confront the threat by the end of the film (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). Sidney's response to the question about liking horror movies is that they are all the same, with a dense killer who is after a sexually alluring female, who is usually a terrible actor. She jokes that the female character always runs up the stairs instead of leaving through the front door, expressing her disdain for horror films (Craven, 1996). Despite coming from a horror movie, the question of why people are attracted to horror is perplexing. Why would anyone choose to be scared by horror entertainment involving ghosts, zombies, werewolves, supernatural forces, or a manic wielding a chainsaw or kitchen knife (Clasen, 2012)?

The concept of horror is viewed as a form of artistic expression in modern psychology, with limited empirical relevance beyond emotional responses (O'Gwin, 2017). It is common for horror films to elicit feelings of fear and disgust (Millar & Lee, 2021). Emotional arousal is often portrayed in research on sexual attraction, not horror fascination (Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). The body of research on consumer attraction to fear-based entertainment lacks practical assessment (Cook et al., 2015; Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). In the entertainment industry, horror often reflects cultural ideologies such as religion and dark tourism (Clasen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). Dark tourism

refers to visiting places with a tragic or morbid history (Zhang et al., 2022). Theories on why humans are attracted to horror entertainment span various fields of study, including anthropology, psychology, and biology (Grafius, 2017; Scrivner et al., 2022). In the field of psychology, one theory regarding the cause of horror attraction is morbid curiosity. Morbid curiosity is defined as deriving pleasure from fear, with three types of fear attractors: white knucklers, adrenaline junkies, and dark copers (Scrivner & Clasen, 2022). Popular culture's relationship with horror has not been directly researched in social psychology, but it has been thematically linked to concepts of fear, anxiety, and dread (Scrivner, 2021). Although horror entertainment is widely studied, its use in psychology is mainly to induce psychological stress. It is not exclusively utilized as a form of measurement for personality or survival traits, as demonstrated by a final girl in horror films (Van Diemen et al., 2019). Currently, there is no reliable way to measure the connection among social theories in horror entertainment, religious horror ideologies, and the consumers of fear-based pleasure seeking.

Background

Morbid Curiosity

Morbid curiosity, or the attraction to unpleasant stimuli or death, is represented in fictional and non-fictional content (Harrison & Frederick, 2020; Scrivner, 2021). Horror-based entertainment, such as films, haunted attractions, video games, and literature, frequently incorporates this concept (Clasen et al., 2019). The first scale designed to assess morbid curiosity, the Attitudes Toward the Media and Sports (ATMS), was developed by Zuckerman and Litle in 1986. The ATMS scale consists of two subscales: Curiosity About Morbid Events (CAME) and Curiosity About Sexual Events (CASE)

(Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). The Attitudes Toward the Media and Sports scale lacks validity evidence and is unreliable for psychological research or clinical application (Scrivner, 2021; Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). The CAME scale demonstrated convergent validity and internal consistency in Aluja-Fabrega's (2000) research, which focused on adapting the scale into the Catalan language for use with adolescents. Despite the adaptation of the subscale, it does not necessarily imply usefulness for a broader population or the complete utilization of the ATMS scale.

In 2021, Scrivner published the Morbid Curiosity Scale after conducting four studies that focused on factor analysis, personality traits, and predictive power to gain a deeper understanding of the trait of morbid curiosity. As part of the development of the curiosity about morbidity, Scrivner (2021) proposed a new theory indicating that trait morbid curiosity is the cognitive process that enables the evolutionary development of attraction and survival. The concept best equates to what horror author Stephen King stated in his 1981 non-fiction book *Danse Macabre*: “we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones.” The Morbid Curiosity scale measures individual differences based on attraction and personality traits interests in morbid curiosity, which is divided into subcategories of paranormal activity, violence, the motives of dangerous people, and violations of the body (Scrivner, 2021). The concept of morbid inquisitiveness presents one theory regarding human attraction to horror-based entertainment, but research on the reason for the desire to seek it out is somewhat lacking in relation to identified personality types of horror consumers and religious horror concepts.

Curiosity is often associated with learning, driven by both internal motivations and external rewards (Goupil & Proust, 2023). In horror movies, the final girl is a female

character who displays a high level of survival and curiosity. Her ability to adapt and survive the attacks of the movie's villain is what sets her apart (Graybill, 2018). Settings that foster learning, creativity, and curiosity can trigger cognitive responses, highlighting the connection between horror entertainment and survival instincts (Hagtvedt et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2022).

Attractors to Horror

Modern psychology lacks empirical knowledge about horror attraction beyond emotional responses related to fear, death, and sex (O'Gwin, 2017). Studies indicate that fear attraction is a neurological response, evidenced by emotional markers and biological changes (Xie & Lee, 2008). The prefrontal cortex is the brain area responsible for the neurological attraction to fear and preparedness (Hudson et al., 2020). The conscious and unconscious mind respond to neural stimulation through interest and excitement (Welsch et al., 2020). The cognitive and affective systems are believed to adapt to social and environmental influences, which can be enhanced by the participants' interaction with fear stimulation (Davis, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). For example, in horror-based video games, biofeedback modules intensify scares based on player experiences and personal fears (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Clasen, 2019; Nogueira et al., 2016). The biofeedback module uses electronic monitoring to adjust video game environments based on a participant's neurological response (Nogueira et al., 2016). Social and environmental cues have also been found to correlate with the attraction to fear-induced stimulation, as factors such as gender, education, and age can impact the frequency of engagement in horror-based entertainment (Clasen et al., 2020).

Research shows limited connectivity between the attraction to fear and psychological development (Anderson et al., 2020). Empirical research on the correlation between horror entertainment and sensation-seeking has not yielded conclusive results due to the use of various horror genres in the studies and the priming effects that occur when participants are exposed to certain stimuli like surveying at a human-made haunted attraction, which can indirectly influence their responses (Martin, 2019). A study by Anderson et al. (2020) suggests that pleasure and fear exhibit an inverted U-shaped relationship, meaning that as fear grows stronger, the pleasure derived from it also increases. However, fear cannot be maintained as pleasurable forever, resulting in a reduction in enjoyment, indicating the importance of achieving an optimal level of arousal for fear stimulation. Psychiatrist Carl Jung's Archetypal theory suggests that artistic representations are driven by human experiences, with images, symbols, plots, and characters all playing a role. The pleasure derived from horror stems from unconscious mythological beliefs, according to the Archetypal theory (Abitha & Paul, 2016). Monsters, such as werewolves, zombies, ghosts, and vampires, are characters in horror-based entertainment that display a relationship between psychology, culture, and environmental conditions (Clasen, 2012). According to the biological evolutionary theory of horror, the attraction to fear-based entertainment is influenced by the biological defense mechanisms that detect dangerous stimuli (Clasen, 2019). This biological growth has expanded based on perceptual and cognitive transformations generated through threat evolution over time (Watier, 2023). Perceptual refers to sensory experiences, while cognitive refers to the acquisition of new information.

In the horror genre, supernatural and fantasy elements are just as important as monsters in fear stimulation (Bey-Rozet, 2021). Horror entertainment often portrays the threat of a catastrophic event, which taps into the participant's fears of the future (Green, 2021). Emotions are crucial in attracting and engaging audiences in horror-based entertainment (Weidmann et al., 2023). The three main types of horror fans are dark copers, who seek to conquer their existential dread; adrenaline junkies, who crave intense emotional experiences; and white knucklers, who want to learn how to cope with and avoid terrifying situations (Scrivner et al., 2022). During the development of The Morbid Curiosity Scale, the concept of dark copers had not yet been proposed (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). Prior to the discovery of dark copers, white knucklers and adrenaline junkies were considered stances, a way of approaching and managing fear in horror entertainment (Clasen et al., 2019). Clasen et al. (2019) reported that variations in personality traits and motivation for learning were reflected in the stances.

Religiosity and Horror Attraction

Throughout the history of horror-based entertainment, religion has shaped the artistic representation of fears and attraction (Azuawusiefe, 2020). Halloween haunted attractions became popular in the 1960s due to two Christian youth organizations: the Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) and Campus Life, now known as Youth for Christ (Hoedt, 2021). Christians continue to use the model for human-made haunted attractions to create Hell Houses (Stewart, 2017). A Hell House is a Christian-based theatrical Halloween production intended to discourage sinful behaviors and encourage participants to lead a life dedicated to God (Hoedt, 2021; Stewart, 2017). The ATMS scale has no questions related to religious themes (Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). Scrivner

(2021) developed the Morbid Curiosity Scale, which includes subscale questions related to the association between paranormal dangers and religiosity, displaying a shift toward religious inclusion. The scale includes questions about various supernatural occurrences, occultism, Voodoo, witchcraft, and exorcisms that are associated with religion (Scrivner, 2021). In horror films, religiosity is often depicted through demonic possessions, which are portrayed as mental and physical maladaptations and temptations of the world (Agnieszka, 2001). Unfortunately, the development of demonological ideology in horror films has been influenced by adverse religious events and stereotypes, which have contributed to a skewed perception of Christian religion in relation to the horror genre (Collins, 2022). According to Graybill (2018), Jael's actions in Judges 4 and 5 can be interpreted as aligning her with the final girl trope, thus presenting an alternative perspective on the passage. The concept of the final girl, a female heroine who survives, displays a connection between Bible stories and modern horror themes. Although commonly misunderstood, secular horror continues to impact religious-based horror ideologies, which is evident in the concept of a Hell House and the final girl (Graybill, 2018; Hoedt, 2021).

Religious traditions have suggested that part of the human experience involves the loss of free will (Boutwell et al., 2021). The Bible outlines this concept through the rise and fall of man, emphasizing the importance of seeking repentance for sins (Smith, 2018). Practitioners of Haitian sorcery, an African-based religion that Christianity and Western culture have influenced, believe Jesus was the first known instance of zombiism (Dawdy, 2019). Dawdy (2019) reported that in Haitian voodoo traditions, the fear is not

of zombies coming after you; it is of becoming one and losing control of yourself, akin to Christianity's loss of free will.

Another mythological creature associated with Christianity is a lycanthrope, that is a human who transforms into a wolf (Shyovitz, 2014). The Book of Daniel connects the concept of animal transformation to bodily conversion in religious horror through Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into an animal or animal-like man (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). Other forms of mythology associated with Christianity and religious-based horror are exorcisms and witchcraft. These concepts are presented as questions on The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021). The concept of witchcraft in the Bible has been debated, particularly regarding the belief that witches raised the spirit of Samuel in the Bible, 1 Samuel 28: 5-25 (Davies, 2023). Early European theologians, prosecutors, and inquisitors stereotyped witches, the devil, and demons to create a cause-and-effect relationship with heinous crimes (Levack, 2014). This is exemplified in the Salem witch trials, which involved the conviction of people who were not practicing witchcraft (Street, 2019). Inconsistencies in reporting past events have led to the association between Christianity and horror due to the lack of empirical information in reporting historical data (Young, 2022).

Including horror-based religious concepts in the new morbid inquisitiveness scale is essential to ensure the scale's relevance in popular culture. By incorporating Christian and religious-based horror themes, the research can develop a scale that accurately captures the nuances of morbid curiosity and the psychological underpinnings of the religious horror phenomenon. Furthermore, religious-based horror attraction may be

another unknown stance in relation to the way Christians manage fear, implicating the attraction towards morbid topics to enhance the stance (Clasen et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

No research to date has investigated the relationships among horror-entertainment attraction, morbid inquisitiveness, Christianity, and the final girl trope. The Morbid Curiosity Scale includes religious themes, but it categorizes them as paranormal dangers (Scrivner, 2021). According to Scrivner (2021), paranormal dangers are phenomena that go beyond scientific knowledge or natural laws. It does not directly indicate that religion or Christianity are factors of attraction in horror-based entertainment, even though Christianity teaches the concept of not fearing evil as represented in scripture and influences horror-based entertainment (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991).

Horror entertainment is economically stable and artistically appealing (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020). Various artistic forms of horror have psychological significance as methods of inducing physiological and biological responses in research (Clasen et al., 2019). Fear and horror-based entertainment attract three main types of viewers: dark copers, white-knucklers, and adrenaline junkies (Scrivner & Clasen, 2022). Research on the attraction to fear to date has not focused on these three personality traits or Christian themes in horror-based entertainment but rather on concepts of curiosity about death and the connection to psychological and neurological reactions (Scrivner & Clasen, 2022; Scrivner, 2021). Furthermore, Christian-based horror attraction may yield insight into a fourth attractor to fear. In empirical research, the relationship between pleasure-seeking and fear is non-linear, as outcomes vary due to differences in horror genres' influence on

arousal dynamics and priming effects by conducting research in locations associated with horror entertainment (Anderson et al., 2020; Martin, 2019).

A new theory of attraction called trait morbid curiosity is gaining attention in modern psychology. It is linked to horror-based entertainment and measured through The Morbid Curiosity Scale, the first evidence-based and reliable tool for psychological use in 35 years (Scrivner, 2021). This theory associates curiosity about morbidity with problem-solving skills that evolved through attraction and survival over time (Hagtvedt et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2022). There is no known link between morbid curiosity and the three fear attractors. This is particularly true for dark copers, as this personality type in relation to horror entertainment was discovered after the development of The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). Additionally, the concept of the final girl, a common trope in horror films and incorporated in Christian-based horror research, is not included in The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021). The attraction toward the final girl or other forms of horror-related tropes may play a factor in new or already-known stances in relation to fear management, allowing the research to expand beyond scale development in the future (Clasen et al., 2019).

Through examination of motivation to consume horror entertainment, research in the field of social psychology can begin to better understand the attraction to horror-based entertainment and its implications for improving coping skills, emotional responses, personality variations linked with scary play, and real-world threats (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). This gap in research can and should be filled by studying the horror-consuming populace, which is the most sourced form of entertainment and stable audience of any film genera (Clasen et al., 2019; Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner & Clasen,

2022). Beyond the fascination with death, individuals who experience fear attraction represent valuable study subjects on the development of culturally specific defensive techniques. The defense techniques go beyond current biological and psychological concepts, offering clinically relevant play therapy for adults in a safe and simulated environment (Clasen et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2021).

Further, exploring the integration of biblical beliefs into horror themes, along with the trait of morbid curiosity and the three attractors to fear, sheds light on the cultural basis of free will, repentance for sins, and the connection between fear and religion in horror entertainment (Boutwell et al., 2021; Smith, 2018). An example of the link between horror themes and the Bible can be seen in the concept of the final girl in horror films (Graybill, 2018). This approach can help expand social and biblical research. A reliable scale with validity evidence is necessary to increase knowledge on horror-entertainment attraction, morbid inquisitiveness, Christianity, and the final girl trope.

Purpose of the Study

This quantitative study aims to develop a reliable and valid measurement of the trait of morbid curiosity as a method of coping based on fear attraction, the final girl trope, and horror-based religious theories. The measurement will be scored for the trait of morbid curiosity as well as subscale scoring to determine whether respondents fall into the category of adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers. It will also address religious themes commonly found in the horror industry, and the subscale will seek reliability evidence for spiritual attraction inclusion in the trait of morbid curiosity.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there convergent validity evidence for the total score and subscales of trait morbid curiosity as shown in appendix C (religiosity, adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers)?

RQ 2: Will the total score and subscales display adequate internal consistency reliability?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Total score and subscores on the newly developed scale for the trait of morbid curiosity will be positively correlated with the scores on the Morbid Curiosity Scale (an existing measure of morbid curiosity).

Hypothesis 2: The total score and subscales will display adequate reliability, as measured by coefficient alpha.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Studying the trait of morbid curiosity, the final girl trope, and the three attractors to fear poses a significant challenge and limitation due to the difficulty of conducting research about artistic expression. The participants in the study may find it difficult to answer questions honestly due to social fears and priming effects. The priming effects may include exposure to various religious beliefs and different forms of horror entertainment, which could impact their responses. There is also a risk that the study outcomes may be skewed if the participants are not attracted to fear or horror. Currently, The Morbid Curiosity Scale is the only measurement tool with validity evidence to utilize as a reference source. The limited number of existing measures may impact the ability to develop a new scale appropriately.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The primary foundation of the study rests on the theory that horror attraction is a social phenomenon linked to beliefs such as the trait of morbid curiosity, religion, and the magnetism to fear, as displayed in the adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers found in previous studies (Anderson et al., 2020; Collins, 2022; Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). The social phenomenon of identifying with fear is exemplified in horror films by the female protagonist known as the final girl (Graybill, 2018; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). The concept of trait curiosity about morbidity extends beyond fascination with death and extends into the creation of practical survival skills based on personality traits (Powell et al., 2022; Scrivner, 2021). The new measure's reliability and convergent validity evidence will be based on the structure of the trait of morbid curiosity in the literature and The Morbid Curiosity Scale, which can be scored and generalized to a wide range of participants (Cook et al., 2015; Scrivner, 2021). The religious ideology in horror is based on Christianity and the literature's connection to religion with horror (Azuawusiefe, 2020; Collins, 2022; Cuneo, 2002).

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Adrenaline Junkies – Adrenaline junkies refer to participants in horror attractions who purposefully seek intense emotional experiences (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Dark Copers – Dark copers refer to participants in horror attractions who seek to overcome existential fear in relation to their self-identity, values, and developed skills (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Final Girl – The final girl is a female protagonist who uses her survival instincts to confront the threat at the end of a horror film (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo. 2021).

Morbid Curiosity or Inquisitiveness – Morbid curiosity or inquisitiveness is an attraction to unpleasant stimuli or the idea of death (Scrivner, 2021).

Trait Morbid Curiosity – Trait morbid curiosity is the cognitive process that facilitates attraction and survival in threat evolution. Trait morbid curiosity is a natural psychological trait that drives individuals to learn about dangerous phenomena to overcome or avoid perceived threats. This theory suggests that trait morbid curiosity involves a balance between exposing oneself to risky content and deriving benefits from developing new coping mechanisms (Scrivner, 2021).

Validity- Validity evidence must be gathered to support the inferences made from the scores on a scale. Validity evidence supports the conclusion that a scale's scores mean what they are intended to mean and can be interpreted as such (Cook et al., 2015).

White Knucklers – White knucklers refer to participants in horror attractions who seek knowledge on ways to deal with threats of terror with the hope of future avoidance (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Significance of the Study

Studies of morbid curiosity have yet to establish a clear link between the fascination with horror-based entertainment and its underlying motivators and attractors (Scrivner et al., 2021). Additionally, research has only minimally explored the possible connection between morbid fascination and Christian themes represented in horror-based entertainment and popular culture (Catherine & Morehead, 2019; Dawdy, 2019). Studying how social phenomena intersect with artistic expression can enhance our understanding of human development, create new coping mechanisms, and improve the reliability and validity of measurements.

Research on morbid curiosity traits, religious beliefs, the final girl trope, and fear attraction can help the field of psychology, biology, and religiosity enhance knowledge on how people move from curiosity about death to coping with fear. Horror-based entertainment can be a valuable tool in therapeutic and research settings. By exploring how humans experience fear, we open opportunities for future studies. Integrating biblical teachings can help bridge the gap between secular and religious research.

Summary

In the movie *Scream* (1996), Skeet Ulrich's character Billy Loomis famously declares that "movies don't create psychos. Movies make psychos more creative." This quote highlights the societal and political scapegoating that the horror industry often faces. However, horror films play an important role in modern artistic expression and significantly influence society (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). The fascination with horror-based entertainment has become a growing field of study, with various theories about the pleasure that fear can induce (Grafius, 2017; Scrivner et al., 2022). One possible explanation for the attraction to scary play, a way to engage with fear in a safe environment like human-made haunted attractions or watching horror films, is the concept of trait morbid curiosity. This psychological trait extends curiosity beyond death, promoting a balance between threatening scenarios and the benefits of fear attraction (Scrivner, 2021). The personality trait of morbid curiosity may be linked to consumers of horror-based entertainment for various tactics of social development, as displayed in white-knucklers, adrenaline junkies, and dark copers (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner & Clasen, 2022). Overall, horror-based performances significantly impact society and should not be dismissed as mere entertainment.

Studying the link between morbid curiosity, horror entertainment, religious-based horror, the final girl trope, and social psychology is essential. This will help biology, anthropology, and psychology understand how people deal with difficult situations and to create future scientific measurements. The relationship between horror-based entertainment and society is linked to religiosity, particularly the belief that humans can lose their free will (Boutwell et al., 2021). Concepts like demons, witches, zombies, and animal transformation in horror have links to various cultural and religious theories. Therefore, it is essential to include religious themes in social research to understand why people are attracted to horror and to expand knowledge of fear management for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The entertainment industry has long been fascinated with horror and dark tourism, which involves visiting places where morbid events occurred. It has become a social phenomenon due to its allure and attraction (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; Scrivner et al., 2022). This social phenomenon is exemplified by the final girl trope in horror films. The viewers of the film are drawn to the female protagonist as she overcomes challenges and survives various threats (Graybill, 2018; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). Horror-based entertainment can take many forms, including manufactured attractions like haunted hayrides or houses, movies, video games, and historical sites or places of great tragedy open for visitation (Zhang et al., 2022). People are attracted to horror-based entertainment due to emotional and biological factors (Scrivner, 2021; Van Diemen et al., 2019; Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). One theory behind the reason for horror-based attraction that has been researched minimally is the trait of morbid curiosity (Scrivner et al., 2021). This concept posits that fascination with death may lead to the development of survival skills for real-world problems (Scrivner, 2021). Within the framework of morbid inquisitiveness, researchers have identified three main types of people attracted to fear: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Various psychological and philosophical theories, such as morbid curiosity and fear attraction, have been explored in a secular context (Johnson, 2013; Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). Throughout the history of cinema and horror-based attractions, religion has significantly influenced art (Azuawusiefe, 2020). Religious traditions also teach about the inevitability of losing free will (Boutwell et al., 2021). The Bible's

teachings on the rise and fall of humanity and seeking repentance for wrongdoing have inspired horror-based entertainment (Smith, 2018). However, associating monsters, devils, witches, and zombies with these religious teachings is a flawed interpretation that involves a conflict between artistic representation, psychology, and the Bible (Collins, 2022; Johnson, 2013).

Description of Search Strategy

The database utilized to identify research included APA PsycINFO, ProQuest, and generalized exploration of articles available via the Jerry Falwell online library resource database through Liberty University. The search strategy included an evaluation of interventions, outcomes, and popular culture articles concerning horror-based entertainment, curiosity, morbid events, attraction, and religiosity. The search process did not include specified delimitations; the initial focus was on articles within the past five years. Due to a lack of robustness and inadequate findings, the identification of previous works in the discovered articles was searched and included in the presenting literature review. The literature review includes support from academic textbooks to enhance the foundational elements of research articles. Conceptually, the religious foundation included a relevant review of articles that included religiosity and horror with no delimitations. The article focuses on Christian foundations and beliefs but includes other religious beliefs to enhance the reliability and robustness of the research. Relative scripture was included via a Catholic New American Bible. A word study in conjunction with identified research and relevant textbooks of the identified scripture is included based on Christian teachings rooted in Catholicism and the Southern Baptist denomination.

Review of Literature

The Horror Industry

In sales, marketing, and advertising, it is commonly believed that a place with a tragic and haunted past would not be a popular choice for vacations or weddings (Edwards, 2020). However, research on horror attractions shows that such destinations have a high attendance (Edwards, 2020; Weidmann, 2023). The media's focus on violence and death is considered a key factor behind the fascination with morbid places (Edwards, 2020). In popular culture, horror entertainment is linked to thematic mental health ideologies, including worry, dread, and fear (Scrivner, 2021). The identified negative emotions have been embraced in the horror industry, where participants undertake macabre endeavors to engage with their feelings (Weidmann, 2023). Horror productions are a core category of the entertainment industry that attracts a wide range of participants and are displayed in movies, video games, haunted houses, and literature (Clasen et al., 2019). The horror industry is not limited to fictional entertainment created by humans. It can also extend to dark tourism, which involves visiting places linked to death, violence, natural disasters, and human suffering (Zhang et al., 2022). Places identified as actively haunted are enhanced by marketing strategies and media boosting the lore of traumatic or disturbing events (Edwards, 2020). Horror productions across multiple foundations of entertainment create fight-or-flight responses that alter emotional experiences (Tashjian et al., 2022). In video games, horror entertainment can enhance a players' experiences and fears through electronic monitoring systems that intensify scariness based on the player's physical reaction to frightening events, known as biofeedback (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Clasen, 2019; Nogueira et al., 2016).

Throughout history, humans have developed specific perceptual, awareness through the senses, and cognitive, the capacity to obtain knowledge, methods to detect potential and immediate threats (Watier, 2023). The continuous creation and consumption of horror stories across space and time suggests that humans possess cognitive skills that help them deal with danger in the real world, which has resulted in a mirrored reflection in popular culture's display of horror entertainment (Clasen, 2012). Research on emotional responses and sympathetic arousal has been limited by a narrow focus on the response itself, neglecting the influence of factors such as religion and popular culture (O'Gwin, 2017; Tashjian et al., 2022).

Attraction

Emotions can prepare people for rewarding stimuli or increase awareness of threats (Hudson et al., 2020). Attraction to fear has been studied as a neurological response that triggers emotional markers and biological changes (Xie & Lee, 2008). The conscious and unconscious mind responds to certain kinds of neural stimulation with attraction and excitement (Welsch et al., 2020). According to Hudson et al. (2020), natural settings that evoke fear can lead to brain activation and stimulation in regions like the temporal areas of the cortex, occipitotemporal gyrus, thalamus, interior cingulate cortex, and prefrontal cortex. The participants' interaction with fear stimulation enhances the response (Davis, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

Biological Attraction

Horror films used in psychological research can induce acute fear, which correlates with homeostasis and clotting in the blood system (Van Diemen et al., 2019). Stress is a factor that causes blood clotting, which can be induced through fear, and can

cause physical symptoms of hand tingling, panic attacks, and nervousness, which may display a link to attraction in horror-based entertainment (Hudson et al., 2020; Van Diemen et al., 2019). Attraction to violence in films is shown through emotional markers in the neurological system. Fear and preparedness are primarily controlled by the prefrontal cortex (Hudson et al., 2020). Neuroscientific research has primarily concentrated on external rewards rather than internal rewards regarding curiosity (Oosterwijk et al., 2020). Violent themes activate cerebral neurotransmitters in the noradrenergic structure, a biological system modulating arousal through noradrenaline, causing fight or flight response to stressors (Aluja-Fabregat, 2000; Hudson et al., 2020; Van Diemen et al., 2019; Xie & Lee, 2008). A study by Xie and Lee (2008) found that individuals with low arousal-seeking traits expressed moderate desire to seek violent cinematic displays, while self-reports showed that heightened arousal induced attraction towards violent films. In contrast, Van Diemen et al. (2019) examined platelet reactivity before and after watching horror films to examine biological measures of fear. Studies have found that individuals who enjoy scary movies may have lower levels of platelet monoamine oxidase (Aluja-Fabregat, 2000). However, Van Diemen et al. (2019)'s research suggests that increased platelet reactivity is associated with acute stress induced by horror films. The lack of knowledge concerning the internal biological systems that drive attraction towards horror-based entertainment is highlighted by the incongruences in platelet reactivity research and its correlation with fear.

Hudson et al. (2020) used fMRI to examine neural responses to a full-length horror film. The research found that acute fear was correlated with jump scares and violent scenes, which activated the prefrontal cortex, paracentral lobule, amygdala,

cingulate cortex, insula, PAG, parahippocampus, and thalamus, but sustained activity was not seen. To strengthen their results, Anderson et al. (2020) used heart monitors to track emotional stimulation and found that female participants experienced more significant levels of fear than males. Scrivner et al. (2022) noted that the development of biological approaches to understanding fear in horror films mirrors changes in the genre towards more violent and sexual themes.

In the biological evolutionary theory of horror, fear-based entertainment attraction causes a biological growth of psychological characteristics like behavioral traits and emotional development (Clasen, 2019). The development of emotional and behavioral traits has evolved due to changes in cognitive and perceptual processing resulting from the evolution of threats (Watier, 2023). With the advent of technology and new methods of socialization, such as Facebook, things that once incited fear may no longer be intimidating. Oosterwijk et al. (2020) found that when individuals purposely exposed themselves to violent or death-related stimuli, it triggered brain regions associated with rewards and incentives. While this may suggest a biological influence, it does not fully explain why people are drawn to horror-based entertainment (Scrivner et al., 2022).

The frequency of engagement in horror-based entertainment is affected by gender, education, and age, as social and environmental cues influence attraction to fear-induced stimulation (Clasen et al., 2020). Yagi et al. (2023) found that older adults had lower curiosity levels than middle-aged and younger participants. This was attributed to older adults' intentional avoidance of uncertain or ambiguous aspects of negative information (Yagi et al., 2023). This can create a priming effect, in which consumers of horror are influenced by external influences like the media and word of mouth (Martin, 2019). In

popular culture, the media can create priming effects by emphasizing negative reports while ignoring positive stories (Edwards, 2020).

Artistic representation reflects human experiences through symbols, plots, and characters, known as the archetypal theory (Abitha & Paul, 2016). External stimuli shape culture's influence on horror, while monsters embody the complex interplay between psychology, culture, and environment (Causadias, 2020; Clasen, 2012; Scrivner et al., 2022). In horror films, fear is not only represented by monsters but also by supernatural and fantasy elements (Bey-Rozet, 2021). The genre often highlights the threat of catastrophic events, reflecting internal anxieties about future fears (Green, 2021). Emotions significantly attract and engage audiences in horror-based entertainment (Weidmann et al., 2023).

Horror Attraction

The first identification of attraction to horror entertainment in psychological research included two types of participants: those seeking a thrill and those wishing to avoid fear (Clasen et al., 2019). Clasen et al. (2019) reported that thrill seekers pursue increased emotional arousal, known as adrenaline junkies in horror-based entertainment. Meanwhile, those who wish to avoid fear seek ways to decrease emotional responses, identified as white knucklers (Clasen et al., 2019). A study by Scrivner et al. (2022) named a third type of participant called dark copers, who seek out horror attractions to cope with feelings of dread. Clasen et al. (2019) examined the reason white knucklers and adrenaline junkies were attracted to fear-based entertainment, concluding that adrenaline junkies seek social stimulation while white knucklers distance themselves from emotional alterations. Research suggests that dark copers balance threat adaptation and emotional

regulation, unlike white knucklers and adrenaline junkies (Scrivner et al., 2022). According to a study by Scrivner et al. (2022), white knucklers reported learning something about themselves after visiting a haunted attraction, while adrenaline junkies experienced increased emotions of joy. Darker copers, first identified in the U.S. study by Scrivner et al. (2022), were also found in a second study with Danish consumers of horror, indicating that the newfound attractor of horror was not just an American anomaly. Dark copers are aligned with existential coping methods of self-discovery and being mindful in the moment (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Scrivner et al. (2022) conducted a study to analyze the appeal of horror-based entertainment among different types of horror consumers, dark copers, white knucklers, and adrenaline junkies in a Danish and American haunted attraction. However, the use of non-random test subjects in the human-made haunted house study may lead to underrepresentation in sampling techniques (Fiske et al., 2010). Scrivner et al. (2022) found that adrenaline junkies are the primary fans of horror, equating the experience of going through a haunted house to the rush of skydiving. Adrenaline junkies make statements such as, “I love the feeling of being scared,” and seek out horror as a means of sensation seeking (Scrivner et al., 2022, p. 93). White knucklers, a consumer of horror who wish to minimize fear, implicated the need to engage in horror to understand themselves better (Clasen et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2022). Scrivner et al. (2022) reported that dark copers' attraction to horror aligned with the concept of morbid curiosity, a drive to engage with and gather information about themes in horror and death.

Inquisitiveness

One theory suggests that morbid curiosity is a reason for attraction to horror-based entertainment (Scrivner et al., 2021). Morbid curiosity is typically understood as an attraction to unpleasant or death-related stimuli (Scrivner, 2021). It is represented in various forms of media, such as fictional works or news broadcasts (Harrison & Frederick, 2020). Powell (2021) reported that morbid curiosity serves three functions: managing emotions related to morbid events, developing skills to manage dangerous threats, and expanding knowledge of dangerous phenomena. The Morbid Curiosity Scale, developed by Scrivner (2021), shows trait morbid curiosity as a psychological trait that drives individuals to seek knowledge about dangerous phenomena to overcome or avoid perceived threats. The concept of trait morbid curiosity expands beyond a mere attraction or fascination to include it as a character trait. The first scale for morbid curiosity was developed in 1986 but needed more validity evidence and reliability for psychological application (Scrivner, 2021; Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). Scrivner (2021) reported that researchers have focused more on concepts of curiosity and how the brain conceptualizes death rather than on the development of skills learned through morbid attractions.

Curiosity Killed the Cat

Research has recognized curiosity as the basis of human functioning and classified it as the intrinsic motivation to seek stimulation (Powell et al., 2022). Adrenaline junkies are driven by a strong desire to seek stimulation (Scrivner et al., 2022). Curiosity is also linked to learning and creativity (Goupil & Proust, 2023). Goupil and Proust (2023) researched the connection between curiosity and metacognition, which is a participant's ability to understand internal informational processes and regulate cognitive and behavioral reactions. Metacognition is also linked to the creative ability to

use emotional management appropriately (Goupil & Proust, 2023; Hagtvedt et al., 2019). People who display white knuckling tend to avoid their emotions and perceive it as a personal characteristic associated with metacognition (Goupil & Proust, 2023; Scrivner et al., 2022). In a 2023 study by Goupil and Proust, curiosity was seen as an inherent reward. Participants can develop greater curiosity through learning environments and self-regulation, leading to a desire to learn and adapt to new schemas and events (Goupil & Proust, 2023). The character traits observed in dark copers can be similar in nature to this concept (Scrivner et al., 2022).

Perceptual curiosity refers to gaining knowledge and skills through surroundings and personal encounters (Edwards, 2020). Edwards (2020) reported that perceptual curiosity cannot be satisfied through a horror film; the participants must have an in-person or first-hand encounter with an identified haunted place or human-made attraction. On the other hand, it is not possible to cultivate epistemic curiosity through sensory experiences or physical interactions (Edwards, 2020). According to Edwards (2020), epistemic curiosity involves acquiring knowledge that cannot be gained directly through sensory or physical experiences. Goupil and Proust (2023) suggest that natural interactions, support systems, adaptive education, and questioning practices can enhance curiosity as a collective. Curiosity drives individuals to seek pleasure in horror-based entertainment to prepare for real-world problems (Scrivner et al., 2022).

The importance of creativity and curiosity in real-world problem-solving was researched by Hagtvedt et al. (2019), explicitly examining skills development as participants move from an idea to a finalized concept. According to Goupil and Proust (2023), creativity is being hindered in Western culture due to participants' limited desire

to learn. This is caused by instructor-guided teaching methods (Goupil & Proust, 2023). On the other hand, research by Hagtvedt et al. (2019) shows that when participants are focused on themes of curiosity, their inquisitiveness increases. The study suggests that individuals who seek out risky stimuli have a stronger inclination toward curiosity (Powell et al., 2022). A method to transition from instructor-led teaching is scary play, where adults engage in horror entertainment to expand self-awareness (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). Scary play is done through engagement in any horror-based entertainment as a means of safely experiencing emotional and behavioral responses in relation to frightening stimuli (Scrivner et al., 2022).

In 2020, Harrison and Frederick studied the connection between morbid curiosity and serial killers. Both male and female participants showed similar interest in the topic, but males were more drawn to violent and sexually morbid events. In horror movies, the final girl character is often portrayed as displaying curiosity and adaptability, which allows her to survive the movie villain (Graybill, 2018). This connection between horror entertainment and the ability to survive threats is also seen in learning environments where curiosity and creativity can lead to cognitive responses (Hagtvedt et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2022). The study suggests that sensation-seeking plays a role in the trait of morbid curiosity and supports the idea that there is a link between curiosity and morbid inquisitiveness (Powell et al., 2022).

Trait Morbid Curiosity

A clear understanding of why people seek out horror-based entertainment is still inconclusive in research. One theory is the concept of trait morbid curiosity (Scrivner et al., 2021). In psychological research, humans tend to focus more on negative factors than

positive ones, revealing a negative bias that requires the development of skills for morbid happenings (Harrison & Frederick, 2020). Uncertainty in outcomes, like death, is a known factor that can trigger morbid curiosity (Yagi et al., 2023). The first scale for measuring morbid curiosity, developed in 1986 by Zuckerman and Litle, was unidimensional and focused more on witnessing violence and sexual acts like pornography (Scrivner, 2021). The Zuckerman and Litle (1986) questionnaire examines how participants' extraversion, psychoneurosis, and psychoticism relate to their interest in morbid and sexual events in the media and sports. The research by Zuckerman and Litle (1986) was based on Eysenck's personality theory but lacked a clear definition of the concept.

Individuals who enjoy thrilling experiences, whether through horror movies or other forms of entertainment, have shown an intense fascination with the macabre (Scrivner et al., 2022). In contrast, those who go out of their way to avoid morbidity are known as morbid adversaries (Edwards, 2020). Research shows that people are drawn to exploring the darker aspects of human nature, such as death, as a means of emotional preparation (Lowenstein, 2010; Scrivner, 2021). This fascination is often called morbid curiosity (Scrivner, 2021). However, a new scale shows that the desire to develop skills based on morbid attraction is a trait or individualized characteristic of morbid curiosity (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner & Clasen, 2022). The trait of morbid curiosity entails seeking out gruesome and violent stimuli in order to expand threat awareness, rather than being in a fleeting state of mind that is induced by horror entertainment or dark media (Edwards, 2020).

The Morbid Curiosity Scale is a personality assessment that measures the level of curiosity individuals have regarding morbid topics such as violent tendencies, physical harm, risky behaviors, and paranormal events (Scrivner et al., 2021). During four different experiments, The Morbid Curiosity Scale proved to be a dependable measure of morbidity as a trait. The scale can offer insights into why individuals consume media that is morbid in nature (Scrivner, 2021). Scrivner (2021) used the scale and the Ten Item Personality Measure to explore how fans of horror-based entertainment have developed increased psychological resilience to emotional stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Scrivner et al. (2021) developed the Pandemic Psychological Resilience Scale to investigate the link between horror enthusiasts and their stress management during the pandemic. The research, however, found that being a horror fan was not associated with increased resiliency or preparedness. Nonetheless, horror-based entertainment fans experienced lower levels of psychological stress (Scrivner et al., 2021).

Powell et al. (2022) delved into the concept of trait morbid curiosity with violent music. As a means of artistic expression, music is created through internal motivation that fosters interest in both the listener and the artist who presents the work (Hagtvedt et al., 2019). Music that glorifies or includes graphic violent themes can grab public attention and has been linked to triggering aggressive behaviors (Powell et al., 2022). According to Aluja-Fabregat (2000), Zuckerman's theory proposes that violent themes in media can stimulate the catecholamine brain system, leading to increased arousal and motivation for those involved in the artistic experience. The catecholamine system is responsible for inducing arousal by activating enzymes in the brain (Aluja-Fabregat,

2000). In a study on the relationship between morbid curiosity and music preferences, Powell et al. (2022) found that individuals who scored high on the Morbid Curiosity Scale tended to enjoy music with violent themes. This was particularly clear in metal, a subgenre of rock focused on death, and rap, a form of hip-hop with often violent and derogatory lyrics. The researchers concluded that there is a direct link between morbid curiosity and pleasure derived from unpleasant music (Powell et al., 2022).

Consumers of horror are attracted to morbid curiosity due to their inquisitiveness, which can take the form of white-knucklers, adrenaline junkies, and dark copers (Scrivner et al., 2022). The desire to seek out horror-based entertainment and engage in scary activities is a coping mechanism that prepares individuals for emotional threats and real-life stressors (Lowenstein, 2010; Scrivner, 2021). The relationship between morbid curiosity, motivation, and attraction needs more research and reliable measurements. The current scale does not include the attractors to fear, and rather than identifying themes for religious horror, it has a scale for paranormal danger. Expanding the theory can lead to new insights into biology, social phenomena, and art, as demonstrated through horror attractions.

Frightening Attractions

Haunted attractions regularly feature intricate storytelling in unsuspecting cornfields, decorated interior buildings, or real-life locations with a history of traumatic events (Weidmann, 2023). In haunted houses, participants seek out terror in an immersive fear environment that allows researchers to conduct field studies that move beyond the restraints of lab-induced emotional reactions (Anderson et al., 2020). In a field study of horror-based entertainment, Anderson et al. (2020) completed a questionnaire with 110

participants aged between 12 and 57 before and after engaging in a human-made haunted house. Using self-reports, outcomes from the study found an inverted U-shape relationship, meaning that as fear increases so does pleasure, but only up to a certain point (Anderson et al., 2020). The mechanism for creating fear in these kinds of immersive horror experiences is done on multiple levels of sensory creation via lighting effects, actor engagement, animatronics, air modulation, and noise variances (Zhang et al., 2022). Scrivner et al. (2021) reported that fear simulation used by haunted attractions equated to a type of scary play. Play therapy or psychological play is identified as rough-and-tumble performance with threatening scenarios that enhance social development for children (Scrivner et al., 2021). According to Scrivner (2021), scary play can be compared to play therapy for adults. Horror entertainment and scary play represent a form of observation rather than a standard approach to measuring fear, making it challenging to calculate fear stimulation. Anderson et al. (2020) tried to circumvent this issue by examining biological indicators through heart monitors and filming jump scare moments, finding places in the haunted attraction that create the most significant level of surprise or shock via fear stimulation. When filming jump scare scenes, the focus was on groups rather than individuals (Anderson et al., 2020). This can cause individuals to falsely identify with group dynamics, as they may desire to conform to the behavior of others in the group (Anderson et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2010). The study conducted by Anderson et al. (2020) reported that there is a linear relationship between heart rate fluctuations during moments of fear and the level of fear in the self-reports of the participants in the haunted attraction. Additionally, the study found an inverted U-shaped relationship between fear and enjoyment (Anderson et al., 2020). This means that in a

haunted attraction, a moment of optimal fear induces terror in individuals, which can be enjoyed up to a certain point before it becomes overwhelming or no longer frightful.

Future research using haunted attractions is a way to overcome ethical barriers to studying threat simulation beyond the lab in which risks are mild and less dynamic than real-world fears (Tashjian et al., 2022).

Black Spot

Real-world fears can be found in dark tourism, which uses real locations of past tragedies to lure in consumers (Sun & Lv, 2021). The initial research on dark or thana tourism labeled this horror-based attraction as a black spot due to a fascination with visiting places associated with death (Edwards, 2020; Sun & Lv, 2021). The dark labeling shows its relation to colors and highlights the contrast between light and dark (Sun & Lv, 2021). The draw of dark tourism is more complex than being fascinated with death (Magano et al., 2022). Even a morbid curiosity about dark tourism may not motivate individuals to seek out real-life haunted locations or sites of past tragedies (Edwards, 2020). Jordan and Prayag (2021) found that visiting dark tourism locations can increase emotional connections to past events and the need for coping strategies, which is linked to the trait of morbid inquisitiveness.

In dark tourism, people are drawn to places associated with death, tragedy, or suffering for historical or personal reasons, which is identified as a normal curiosity (Edwards, 2020; Sun & Lv, 2021). According to Edwards (2020), curiosity is a natural human drive for new experiences and knowledge. Beyond normal curiosity, Magano et al. (2022) found that participants are drawn to dark tourism due to negative personality traits. Participants with these traits may ruminate on sad thoughts, experience self-hatred,

show hostility, or be psychologically vulnerable. These participants may seek emotional stimulation and pleasure from exploring dark ideologies (Magano et al., 2022).

Earlier studies have mainly focused on the impact of sensory channels on psychological experiences, implicating a one-way experimental design (Sun & Lv, 2021). A single-subject research design may not provide conclusive evidence for research assumptions (Fiske et al., 2010). Sun and Lv (2021) argue that in dark tourism experiences, a reciprocal effect between the mind and body requires further explanation. The challenge is to analyze the differences between the factors that motivate attraction and personal characteristics that seek stimulation from tragic places (Zheng et al., 2016). The emotional connection and personal attachment to historical sites with dark pasts implicate research into biological, anthropological, and psychological aspects of thana tourism, but not human-made horror attractions (Grafius, 2017; Scrivner et al., 2022).

Programmed Horror

One of the earliest fear-inducing impacts of cinema came in 1895 when spectators ran from the theater in terror while viewing *The Arrival of a Train at the Station in Paris* (Lowenstein, 2010). Films, classified into various genres by filmmakers, reviewers, and participants who viewed the film, have been used in research to induce emotional responses to death, sex, and fear (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; O'Gwin, 2017). The horror genre is a film category with prominent financial stability and social relevance (Clasen et al., 2019). The popularity of horror films saw its peak during the 1980s, with a decline in viewership afterward (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). New genres in the twentieth century, like slasher films and the revival of the concept of a female hero known as the final girl, have given rise to popular culture relevance and attraction

towards cult classics in the horror film industry (Graybill, 2018; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021).

The Final Girl

The final girl in horror movies refers to the female protagonist who, at the end of the film, displays the skills necessary to survive and confront the terror she has faced (Graybill, 2018; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). The term *final girl* was first utilized in 1992 by Carol Clover, an author and professor of American films, in her non-fiction book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Sutandio, 2023). Sutandio (2023) reported that Clover developed the term after watching American slasher, occult, and rape-revenge films from the 1970s and 1980s. In horror films, the final girl is a well-known trope, which is a cliché found in horror movies (Almwaka, 2022). The final girl trope in horror films presents conflicting views on femininity and sexism (Almwaka, 2022; Sutandio, 2023).

The final girl is typically portrayed as a sexually reserved female with masculine traits (Graybill, 2018; Kooyman, 2014). Kooyman (2014) reported that the killer, in their own horror trope, is often depicted as a male figure who suffers from identity issues, abnormal sexuality, and/or poor mental health. The weapon used by the killer in horror films is often phallic in nature, serving as an extension of the killer's own body (Kooyman, 2014). The identification of gender roles heavily influences symbolism and attraction towards horror entertainment. An understanding of these roles is crucial to fully appreciate the complexities of horror tropes and their appeal. This concept raises the question of whether the final girl in horror movies is a feminist icon or merely a sexualized object for the audience (Sutandio, 2023).

A study on gender roles in contemporary Indonesian horror films showed a shift toward female empowerment as sexualized and victimized female characterizations decreased (Sutandio, 2023). Sustandio (2023) reported that changes in female roles in horror films not only affect entertainment but serve as a platform for societal change in perceptions of females. A study of social roles for female executives was evaluated within the framework of the final girl (Ronald & Mario, 2021). Ronald and Mario (2021) concluded that female executives, like the final girl, Nancy, in the horror film *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, must utilize unique skill sets such as empathy and camaraderie to survive in a male-dominated society.

The concept of the final girl links societal beliefs and survival development over time (Almwaka, 2022). Consumers are attracted to horror films featuring the final girl archetype, who is typically sexualized in the eyes of the male viewer yet ultimately empowered. However, the specific reasons for this attraction remain unknown (Almwaka, 2022; Sutandio, 2023). It is important to note that a fascination with horror and the final girl is linked to the personality trait of morbid curiosity. This trait is a manifestation of survival instincts and how people have evolved socially over time to perceive threats (Scrivner, 2021). The horror genre often features the final girl trope, which showcases the development of survival skills in the face of terrifying monsters and catastrophic events.

Horror Films

The modern concept of horror films is exemplified by the 1960 release of Alfred Hitchcock's American psychological horror thriller, *Psycho* (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020). In this film, Norman Bates, the villain, reenacts his sexual fantasies by imitating his mother,

leading to outbursts of violence, including murder (Grant, 2015). Researchers have found grief as a central theme in horror films, with the antagonistic force of a monster serving as a disturbance to moral self-awareness (Millar & Lee, 2021). Modern horror films have expanded to include traumatic events such as wars, genocide, and natural disasters to create symbolic shock for the viewer (Lowenstein, 2010). This has given rise to subgenres of horror films with increased violent allegories and connections to sexualized and cultural contexts in society (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021).

In the 1970s, slasher films appeared as a new horror genre. According to Hernández-Santaolalla and Bravo (2021), the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Black Christmas* slasher films of 1974 set the standards for the subgenre and outlined principles for the new film concept. The slasher genre of horror films is based on a reaction to real-life violence (Florentin, 2023). The term slasher, according to Florentin (2023), comes from the act of using a knife to penetrate a body, and the genre relies heavily on the graphic depiction of murderous acts. However, the real standard for slasher films, the stalking of sexualized young teens with various weapons and masks, was set by the 1978 John Carpenter film *Halloween* (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). Florentin (2023) expressed that the portrayal of Laurie Strode, the final girl in the *Halloween* series of films played by Jamie Lee Curtis, reveals the disturbing connection between slasher films and real-life traumas. This suggests that individuals with a trait of morbid curiosity may have a cognitive need to consume slasher films to cope with personal trauma.

Critics and researchers have expressed that slasher films overly display themes of sexuality and are glorified forms of pornography (Ménard et al., 2018). Oliver (1994) studied sexuality in horror films beyond violence. Results showed that sexually

permissive viewers were likelier to watch sexually explicit films (Oliver, 1994). Ménard et al. (2019) analyzed the top-grossing horror films from the 1980s through the 2000s and found that only 10 films showed full sexual intercourse. They also found that characters who had on-screen nudity had a 100% death rate (Ménard et al., 2019). Hernández-Santaolalla and Bravo (2021) concluded that horror film remakes display increased violence and sexualized behaviors, including sexual abuse between the final girl and the monster or killer. The sexual motives and false intimacy portrayed in horror films suggest a link to current research on sexual attraction. For instance, sexual attraction can be sparked by various stimuli such as asphyxiation, the act of choking to deplete oxygen levels, or dominance over a partner to invoke fear (Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). However, further evaluation is needed to show cause-and-effect themes in relation to horror and morbid attraction (Gordon, 2014). Additionally, there is a minimized focus on the sexualized characterization of monsters, weapons, and settings (Anderson et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2020; Scrivner et al., 2022).

Van Overveld and Borg (2015) investigated the relationship between disgust, sexual arousal, and emotional regulation by utilizing erotic and horror films. Outcomes showed that up-regulation, arousal generated by threats and sexual content, do not decrease disgust levels for the viewers (Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). Horror films are not just about sexual content. They can generate attraction based on emotional responses as well. The genre often elicits strong emotions that keep audiences on the edge of their seats, making it an incredibly effective and engaging form of entertainment.

Scary Games

Video games enhance storytelling entertainment, like movies and horror narratives, with a greater focus on action that heightens the reality of frightening situations (Christopher & Leuszler, 2022b; Lee, 2021). Skott and Bengtson (2021) report that video games go beyond entertainment and serve as cultural representations that transmit, mirror, alter, and disrupt social normalities. Horror video games fall into two classifications: horror of participation and horror of transportation (Christopher & Leuszler, 2022). According to Christopher and Leuszler (2022), the horror of participation is experienced when the video gamer takes action and witnesses the consequences of their decisions. On the other hand, the horror of transportation is more psychological than physiological, creating a terrifying environment for the player, often using cinematic techniques to immerse them in the game and evoke fear (Christopher & Leuszler, 2022). The horror of transportation is exemplified in the video game *Silent Hill*, which was later adapted into a horror film (Christopher & Leuszler, 2022; Lee, 2021). The virtual world in *Silent Hill* induces fear and vulnerability by creating dark atmospheres that constrict the players' perception. The narrow corridors in the game induce claustrophobia, intensifying the horror alongside the terrifying monsters (Lee, 2021).

Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Clasen (2019) discovered that horror video games do not motivate attraction by simply scaring players but rather by allowing them to challenge and overcome complex tasks. The feeling of horror that a gamer will experience is influenced by various factors such as interactivity, perception, aesthetics, and the supernatural. Each individual horror gamer has a unique psychological response to the genre, influenced by cultural factors (Christopher & Leuszler, 2022b). In this

concept, the trait of morbid curiosity is displayed in the evolution of fears in relation to the unique experiences of video game players (Scrivner, 2021). This is further supported in the work of Christopher and Leuszler (2022b), who found that in horror virtual reality, the participant knows that the video game is not real, yet the brain still sends signals for danger and threats. Implying a sense of scary play in a controlled environment, like a manufactured haunted house (Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022).

Video games have evolved from arcade machines to home consoles, which can now be connected to online platforms (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Clasen, 2019; Suler, 2015). The research on attraction to horror in the cyber world shows that online video games create a stimulating environment that attracts individuals to fear and morbid events, like the attraction to haunted houses and movies (Nogueira et al., 2016). Additionally, horror entertainment online may contribute to an individual's self-identity formation (Suler, 2015). Nogueira et al. (2016) investigated the correlation between horror-based video games and biofeedback in a simulated environment. Heart monitors are commonly used in haunted attractions to measure biological elements of fear, while biofeedback in the cyber world allows the modification of fear elements by regulating physiological responses (Anderson et al., 2020; Nogueira et al., 2016). Although the study found no significant outcomes in between-subject variables, participants expressed increased satisfaction with biofeedback integration in online horror games (Nogueira et al., 2016). Using computer-generated mechanisms and simulation of morbid events or frightening scenarios may help decrease the bias of self-reports and enhance knowledge of the self in cyberpsychology (Jackson, 2018; Suler, 2015).

Biblical Foundations of the Study

Modern psychology aims to understand human nature and existence through a secular perspective (Johnson, 2013). By conducting research and implementing educational practices, modern psychology has formulated theories to improve participants' emotional regulation and critical thinking skills (Spielman et al., 2014). Despite their direct link to understanding our behavioral experiences, existences, and the natural order of life, psychology and Christianity have traditionally been seen as separate concepts (Johnson, 2013). Religious traditions suggest that humans may lose their free will, which can be linked to various psychological diagnoses (Boutwell et al., 2021). A thorough approach to psychology should combine scientific evidence with biblical principles (Johnson, 2013; Spielman et al., 2014). While modern psychology has its roots in the mid to late 1800s, the foundations of both clinical and biblical theories can be traced back to philosophical concepts that preceded contemporary psychotherapy (Johnson, 2013).

History of Religion and Horror

The philosophy of ancient civilizations was often intertwined with supernatural beliefs (Bridley & Daffin, 2018). This occurred when their religious beliefs were not directly connected to the cultural values of the time (Bridley & Daffin, 2018; Johnson, 2013). According to Bridley and Daffin (2018), performing an exorcism was the preferred approach for removing supernatural entities. In Matthew 12:28, Jesus reported that he could expel demons with the help of the Holy Spirit (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). The claim that Jesus could cast out demons with a single command has linked depictions of exorcism in art with horror-based entertainment. The idea of sin in demonic possession is tied to mental and physical

maladaptation and represents temptations in the world (Agnieszka, 2001). The emergence of demonological ideology is linked to religious events and stereotypes that have harmed how religion is seen within horror entertainment (Collins, 2022). This concept of religious influence on horror media is present not only in the United States but also in Islamic cultures (Mohammed, 2021).

The Islamic faith has influenced how the public perceives certain aspects of religion, including religious leaders, the Devil, and supernatural creatures (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; Mohammed, 2021). In a study conducted by Gjinali and Tunca (2020) on horror movies in Turkey, where Islam is the main religion, it was found that participants who had stronger religious beliefs were more attracted to supernatural films. In popular culture, exorcisms have become a prevalent theme in movies and books after the release of the book *The Exorcist* in 1971 and the subsequent film in 1973 (Cuneo, 2002). This renewed interest in exorcisms has caused a divide between Christianity and the integration of psychological and cultural knowledge (Johnson, 2013; Spielman et al., 2014). The idea of casting out evil spirits is often portrayed as a form of magic, which goes against true religious beliefs and promotes a false ideology (Cuneo, 2002). The belief in demon possession is widespread in Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical churches, but the utilization of exorcisms by churches does not align with biblical practices (Agnieszka, 2001). Acts 19:11-12 stated that Jesus gave Paul the ability to perform miracles to heal the sick and cast out demons (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). The healings performed by Paul should be recognized as miraculous and attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit. It should be viewed as a manifestation of religious influence that stems from Paul's devotion to

worshiping the Lord rather than just his physical actions. Cuneo (2002) observed more than 50 exorcisms conducted by Christian religious leaders and concluded that the portrayal of exorcisms in the media did not reflect the rituals and procedures performed in real-life situations.

Thriller

The concept of exorcisms saw a resurgence during the Middle Ages, as religion and psychology became linked. Religious and psychological practitioners used holy water to expel demons and devils (Bridley & Daffin, 2018). This period, known for its spiritual awakening and educational expansion, saw an increase in knowledge about the soul (Johnson, 2013).

Additionally, the idea of lycanthropy, where a person transforms into a wolf, was a source of fear among many people, even beyond the belief in exorcisms (Shyovitz, 2014). Some religious followers viewed Daniel 4:16 as evidence that animal transformation of both body and mind, like in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, was a natural phenomenon (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). However, in modern horror-themed attractions and popular culture, the wolf is often portrayed as a ruthless and savage creature (Beverly, 2020). The idea of a ferocious beast undergoing transformation differs from the concept presented in the Bible. Shyovitz (2014) argues that portraying animalized humans or animal transformation into monster-like concepts in a religious context has created a false ideology for consumers of horror. According to Daniel 4:16, animals are wise beings who can assist humans in changing their sinful ways (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991; Shyovitz, 2014). The transformation referred to in the Bible is a change in one's

mindset, not physical appearance (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). Unfortunately, the mystical aspect of the Bible has often been misinterpreted, which has influenced cultural practices and the development of monsters displayed in horror-based entertainment.

Prosecution

During the Renaissance period, religion was often portrayed inaccurately as a means of punishment and a way to induce fear, resulting in an impact on the horror genre (Davies, 2023; Levack, 2014). Theologians, prosecutors, and investigators in Europe labeled people as witches, demons, and the devil to establish a connection with heinous crimes (Levack, 2014). At that time, religion gained significant importance as a remedy for spiritual issues, while scientific approaches were downplayed (Johnson, 2013). The prosecution of witchcraft during the Renaissance occurred in Europe and the Americas and is known as the witch period. One of the most well-known events of this time was the 1692 Salem Witch Trials in America, which resulted in the death of 20 accused participants suspected of practicing magic and sorcery (Bridley & Daffin, 2018). Although there was no concrete evidence supporting the accusation that the accused practiced witchcraft, the incident was driven by a frenzy of religious fervor (Street, 2019). The Bible identifies sorcery as a sin in Exodus 22:18 and attributes it to witches (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). However, the belief that witchcraft relates to Satan can lead to unjust persecution and murder of those accused (Street, 2019). Despite varying theories, the concept of witchcraft has been widely depicted in horror-based entertainment and is often associated with political and Christian events (Street, 2019).

Protagonist

When examining modern interpretations of biblical concepts and how they relate to slasher films, there is a link between the Bible and the final girl trope (Ménard et al., 2019). In the research by Ménard et al. (2019), this connection is based on the belief that characters who have sinned will ultimately face death. The final girl is often portrayed as a feminist character capable of surviving and defeating the villain or monster (Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021; Ménard et al., 2019). She displays moral values like those found in the Bible and refrains from nudity (Ménard et al., 2019). Additionally, Graybill (2018) found that the final girl is often sexually conservative or a virgin and exhibits more masculine characteristics compared to the other female characters who meet their demise. The final girl trope does not necessarily require the female protagonist to defeat the killer - her primary objective is to stay alive throughout the ordeal (Graybill, 2018). Hernández-Santaolalla and Bravo (2021) posit that the final girl embodies a heroic and socially responsible version of femininity that reflects contemporary cultural values.

Graybill's (2018) research compared the role of the final girl in slasher and revenge films to the story of Judges 4 and 5 in the Bible. These chapters describe how Israel was liberated from bondage (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). Graybill (2018) argues that Jael's actions in Judges 4 and 5 align her with the final girl trope and present an alternative interpretation of the passage. The villain, Sisera, is depicted as a rapist (Graybill, 2018; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). In the final girl trope context, Jael embodies characteristics such as a masculine name and demeanor, non-sexualized portrayal, and a willingness to use weapons and tools (Graybill, 2018). In Judges 4: 17-

22, Jael kills Sisera with a tent peg, which she leaves on his forehead (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). This passage explains how the Bible can be compared to a horror movie in terms of political themes like classism and racism (Graybill, 2018). It also highlights how the portrayal of female heroes in the Bible can be empowering (Graybill, 2018; Jancovich, 2002).

Objectification

In the movie *Scream*, Jamie Kennedy portrays a character named Randy Meeks, who explains a set of guidelines to follow to survive a horror film (Ménard et al., 2019). Meeks emphasizes that the primary rule is to avoid engaging in sexual activity as it is strongly linked to death. The remaining rules essentially extend the first rule, avoiding all sinful behavior (Craven, 1996). For Christians, sin refers to moving from a state of good to evil, as described in the Bible (Wolters, 2005). According to psychological principles, sin is a social phenomenon influenced by biological and cultural factors (Fiske et al., 2010). The Bible teaches that sex outside marriage is considered a sin in Hebrews 13:4 (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). Thus, both the Bible and horror movies emphasize moral values and the negative consequences of sinful actions.

Matthew 5:28 states that one shall not leer with the intent to engage in sexual acts (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). Engaging in sexual acts based on fake attraction poses social and biblical risks (Gordon, 2014; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). The key distinction lies in the underlying motivation for the attraction. Although physical appearance may be admired, the story of Jael and Sisera illustrates the grave consequences of rape, including

death (Graybill, 2018). Horror films often feature sexual content, which conflicts with Christian values regarding sexuality. Examining the Bible's teachings on sexual acts alongside horror movies can provide insight into why people seek fear-inducing entertainment. By integrating biblical principles into clinical psychology, a deeper comprehension of the sinful nature of certain sexual behaviors can be gained (Johnson, 2013). Further analysis of the story of Jael's revenge on Sisera using a tent pin, a portrayal phallic in nature, can help us understand the themes of vengeance and rape in the subgenre of horror known as rape-revenge films (Graybill, 2018; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991).

Religious Morbid Inquisitiveness

Fascination with death and dying is a recurring theme in the Bible, most notably in the resurrection of Jesus (Caterine & Morehead, 2019; Graybill, 2018; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). According to Crooke (2018), the depiction of grace and worship in dark cinematic scenarios associates Christians with zombies, portraying them as resurrected beings who have sinned. The unknown was filled by God in Genesis, connecting primal fears to nature (Detweiler, 2020; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). In Haitian sorcery and popular culture, Jesus is considered the first example of zombiism (Dawdy, 2019). Romans 8:11 states that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, and our bodies will be resurrected to be free from sin (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991). The connection between biblical concepts and zombies is explored in Caterine and Morehead's (2019) study of the proclaimed

resurrection. Caterine and Morehead (2019) expressed that zombies, as compared to Jesus, offer no hope but rather a dismal ideology for the end of humanity.

The connection between zombies and the Bible is further explored in horror movies, with Hell being a common theme (Caterine & Morehead, 2019). According to Caterine and Morehead (2019), the 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead* by George A. Romero portrays zombies inhabiting Earth because there is no space left for them in Hell. The fear of zombies stems from the idea of self-resurrection and the grotesque nature of decaying flesh (Dawdy, 2019). The theme of decaying flesh and death is associated with morbid curiosity, as it reflects an inclination toward the darker aspects of human existence (Scrivner, 2021). The theme of death is common in Biblical teachings, as Psalm 23:4 expresses that we need not fear, as God is with us in the darkest of times (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible, 1991*)

Halloween

During Halloween, Christian-based attractions feature Hell Houses, displaying the concept of Hell and morbid attraction (Hoedt, 2021; Stewart, 2017). Unlike haunted attractions, these events are not simulations of ghostly haunts or maniacs with chainsaws but instead focus on real-world tragedies that can lead to, or stem from, sinful behavior (Hoedt, 2021). The seasonal attraction utilizes scare tactics to motivate American youths toward Christian conversion (Stewart, 2017). According to Hoedt (2021), Hell Houses are ineffective tools for behavior change because they obscure the line between the sacred and the wicked. This could be a challenge of inducing fear, as observed in fabricated haunted houses, despite the Bible's teachings against being afraid (Stewart, 2017).

Summary

The entertainment industry has financially capitalized on people's interest in horror-based content, which taps into psychological constructs of worry, dread, and fear (Clasen et al., 2019; Scrivner, 2021). This content can be human-made attractions or visits to places associated with traumatic events, known as dark tourism (Zhang et al., 2022). Research in the last five years has focused more on dark tourism than horror-based entertainment. The relationship between horror and pleasure follows an inverted U-shape displaying a relationship between the rise of desire and fear (Anderson et al., 2020). This relationship can only peak so far until the fear is no longer pleasurable. While research shows that people generally enjoy horror-based entertainment, it has not yet identified any consistent biological or personality factors that explain the attraction to horror-based entertainment (Anderson et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2010; Van Diemen et al., 2019).

Biological and psychological studies have used horror movies to evoke emotional responses related to death, sex, and fear (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020; O'Gwin, 2017). The horror film industry experienced a surge in popularity during the 1980s and has since maintained social relevance and stability through subgenres such as slasher films (Graybill, 2018; Hernández-Santaolalla & Bravo, 2021). A common trope in horror films is the final girl, who uses her biological and psychological skills to survive and adapt to the threats presented (Almwaka, 2022; Sutandio, 2023). More research is necessary to establish the cause-and-effect relationships between horror themes within biological and psychological concepts (Gordon, 2014; Hudson et al., 2020).

Research has shown that horror movies used in psychological research can cause intense fear, which may affect the body's homeostasis and blood clotting system (Van

Diemen et al., 2019). Researchers have also observed that violent themes in movies can activate certain neurotransmitters in the brain, particularly in the noradrenergic structure (Aluja-Fabregat, 2000; Hudson et al., 2020; Van Diemen et al., 2019; Xie & Lee, 2008).

The prefrontal cortex plays a significant role in processing fear and preparedness (Hudson et al., 2020). Horror video games can be manipulated using biofeedback modules that target the prefrontal cortex and noradrenergic structure, which have not been utilized in other horror research (Hudson et al., 2020; Nogueira et al., 2016).

Current neuroscientific research focuses on external rather than internal rewards when examining curiosity (Oosterwijk et al., 2020). Xie and Lee (2008) studied individuals with low arousal-seeking traits who showed moderate interest in watching violent movies. In contrast, Van Diemen et al. (2019) examined platelet reactivity before and after watching horror movies to determine the biological effects. Previous research has suggested that individuals who enjoy scary movies may have lower levels of platelet monoamine oxidase (Aluja-Fabregat, 2000). Nevertheless, the study of Van Diemen et al. (2019) indicates that increased platelet reactivity is associated with acute stress induced by watching horror movies. The variations implicate the need to expand awareness of the biological components of attraction and the development of skills based on biological development in research.

Attraction and Curiosity

Participants seek pleasure in horror-based entertainment due to a hypothetical association with morbid curiosity (Scrivner & Clasen, 2022). Emotions act as stimulators, heightening our awareness of morbid, phallic, and threat motivation (Graybill, 2018; Hudson et al., 2020). Emotionally, attraction to morbid themes reinforces emotional

expression based on previous events, potentially leading to a falsified positive reactivity to fear and death (Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). Socially, horror-based entertainment provides a controlled environment to expand neurological responses, including the development of survival coping mechanisms and the potential for connection with personality traits (Scrivner et al., 2021).

In 1986, Marvin Zuckerman and Patrick Litle created the Attitudes Toward the Media and Sports questionnaire, but it was never validated or used in psychiatric testing. It took until 2021 for the first validated scale, The Morbid Curiosity Scale, to be published for use (Scrivner, 2021). This means there was a 35 year gap without suitable psychological tools to examine the morbid curiosity trait. Further enhancement of research and evidence-based measurement scales are needed to connect the presenting themes with biblical, psychological, and biological knowledge.

People are drawn to horror-based entertainment and can be classified as adrenaline junkies, white knucklers, or dark copers (Scrivner et al., 2022). Studies on horror entertainment have primarily focused on the emotional response and stimulation to specific stimuli rather than exploring the connection between artistic expression of death, fear, anxiety, and cultural or religious ideologies (Scrivner et al., 2022; Scrivner, 2021). Religious traditions suggest that humans can lose free will (Boutwell et al., 2021). This theme is present in the Bible, where the rise and fall of humanity and the significance of seeking repentance for one's sins are often portrayed in horror-themed attractions (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991; Smith, 2018). A comprehensive approach to psychology should integrate scientific evidence and biblical principles (Johnson, 2013; Spielman et al., 2014).

Religious Representation

Throughout history, religion has been associated with false beliefs in witches, werewolves, and exorcisms (Bridley & Daffin, 2018; Johnson, 2013). False attraction or the willingness to worship false ideas, like demons and sexual promiscuity, is also tied to sin in the Bible (*Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991; Smith, 2018). One approach to expanding social, biological, and psychological research is exploring the supernatural beliefs depicted in horror-based entertainment and how they relate to verses in the Bible as factors of personal values and principles (Gjinali & Tunca, 2020). An analysis of slasher film conventions, sexual behaviors, and the strengths of the final girl can all align with modern concepts of morals and religious support (Ménard et al., 2019). The connection between the resurrection of Jesus and zombie-based horror movies is of interest in social and psychological research (Caterine & Morehead, 2019). The concept of death is a recurring theme in the Bible, especially in the resurrection of Jesus, and displays the association between morbid curiosity and the three identified attractors to horror-based entertainment (Caterine & Morehead, 2019; Graybill, 2018; *Holy Bible: Dove of Peace, Catholic Edition - New American Bible*, 1991; Scrivner, 2021; Scrivner et al., 2022). This concept is exemplified in Hell Houses, where the attraction is centered around sinful behavior instead of the fear of fanatical monsters found in haunted attractions (Hoedt, 2021; Stewart, 2017). Both appeal to people's fear of catastrophes and humans' incautious greed. The inclusion of these themes may hold relevance for future research on fear management skills, as spiritual preparedness may yield a new stance for horror attraction.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The literature review highlights a broad range of research regarding curiosity, religiosity, and horror attraction. However, there has been limited focus on trait morbid curiosity. Currently, The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021) is the only applicable measurement with validity evidence. It does not directly relate to the new themes presented in research and the development of the new scale described in this paper. The Morbid Curiosity Scale fails to incorporate relevant religious themes or integrate the three identified fear attractors, adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers, or typical horror tropes such as the final girl. The proposed research in this chapter presents a method for creating a new scale that combines religious horror themes, fear attraction, and horror tropes. The addition of new themes associated with morbid curiosity, such as religious horror and horror tropes, may expand future research on fear management and the psychological traits of morbid attraction.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there convergent validity evidence for the total score and subscales of trait morbid curiosity as shown in appendix C (religiosity, adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers)?

RQ 2: Will the total score and subscales display adequate internal consistency reliability?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Total score and subscores on the newly developed scale for the trait of morbid curiosity will be positively correlated with the scores on the Morbid Curiosity Scale (an existing measure of morbid curiosity).

Hypothesis 2: The total score and subscales will display adequate reliability, as measured by coefficient alpha.

Research Design

This quantitative study sought to develop a reliable and valid measure of trait morbid curiosity and standard horror tropes, with subscales identifying the three types of fear attractors and horror religiosity. The combination of the subscales and general questions on trait morbidity is theorized to correlate to an overall score of trait morbid curiosity on the new scale. The proposal suggests that there may be a fourth unknown stance in attraction to morbid and horror themes, which is rooted in spiritual and Christian concepts. To establish convergent validity evidence for the new survey, the research utilized Colton Scrivner's Morbid Curiosity Scale (2021) as an instrument of comparison. The only available scale currently to measure trait morbidity is the Morbid Curiosity Scale, although it lacks the inclusion of other relevant concepts. Clasen et al. (2019) and Scrivner et al. (2022) found that morbid curiosity attracts white-knucklers, adrenaline junkies, and dark copers, the three identified fear attractors, which were included in the three subscales of the new measure described in this paper. The religiosity subscale was based on secular history and Biblical integration of psychology, culture, and horror-based entertainment, as outlined by Johnson (2013). The questions covered Biblical themes of witchcraft, animal transformation, exorcisms, the devil, and identifiable sinful actions based on Bible verses (Bridley & Daffin, 2018). All this

information was developed into subscales based on the literature review's formulation of outcomes and theories.

Participants

An online link was created for the survey, which was made available via Google Forms and was shared on Facebook. Included in the link were the survey questions and informed consent through the online platform. Participants were also encouraged to share the survey via a posting flyer with acquaintances to create a snowball effect (Jackson, 2018). The age requirement to complete the survey was 18 or older, and participation was voluntary. Agreement to participate was included in the survey disclosure and demographic sheet (see Appendix A). The survey disclosure and demographic sheet were developed in conjunction with the ethical review board, which resulted in demographic information not being collected to promote anonymity. Data was collected until the sample size exceeded 75, and a total data sample of 97 participants was obtained.

Study Procedures

The survey method was used for the study. Data were collected from Facebook ($n=97$). Participants were encouraged to invite others to complete the survey, creating a snowball effect (Jackson, 2018). The participants were shown informed consent and were assured that their information was being used only for academic purposes via the first page of the online link (See Appendix A). The participants were asked to read the instructions carefully and use a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* to respond to each question on the survey link. The Morbid Curiosity Scale and the new survey items used the same response scale. No experimental manipulations were used during the survey. The responses were collected and labeled

anonymously in numerical order, from 1 to 97, based on the time of collection, for coding.

Data were imported from the electronic surveys into IBM's SPSS software and coded numerically. After reverse scoring negatively worded items, item responses were summed to compute total and subscale scores. The scores were computed twice and verified for accuracy. Analyses sought evidence for convergent validity; the researcher also computed internal consistency reliability for the scale and subscales.

Instrumentation and Measurement

Reference Scale-The Morbid Curiosity Scale

In 2021, Coltan Scrivner created The Morbid Curiosity Scale, as shown in Appendix B, by analyzing data from four research projects. This 24-item scale measures interest in morbidity, fear-induced imagination, and their connection to topics like violence, body infringement, paranormal phenomena, and social dangers (Scrivner, 2021). The Morbid Curiosity Scale (2021) uses a six-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Each subscale is identified by the letters B for body violation, V for violence, M for motives of dangerous people, and P for paranormal danger, which are not communicated to the participant. The total score is determined by calculating the overall average for both the main scale and the subscales.

Scrivner (2021) conducted four studies to evaluate the reliability and validity of The Morbid Curiosity Scale. The first study involved participants aged 19 to 77, with 67% of the sample being Caucasian/white males from the United States. The initial sample size also included individuals of Asian, Black/African American, and Multiracial backgrounds (Scrivner, 2021). In their research, Scrivner (2021) included both college

students and online participants to expand their sample pool. The first study had a sufficient sample size for the scale's general themes, as it was not aimed at any specific demographic group. For the second study, Scrivner (2021) recruited 340 participants ranging from 18 to 96 years old, with the majority being Caucasian/white males. Prime Panels, an online platform for participant recruitment, was used to increase the diversity of the sampling pool. The third study involved 317 participants between the ages of 18 and 66 who were recruited through Prolific, another online participant finder (Scrivner, 2021). However, Scrivner (2021) only shared limited demographic information of the participants in this study. The fourth and final study included 144 participants, mostly males with an average age of 29.2, recruited through Prolific and 44 college students (Scrivner, 2021). For study four, Scrivner (2021) focused on participants' proficiency in English as a key factor in examining threat simulation and alternative threat scenarios.

The Morbid Curiosity Scale (2021) can be taken online or on paper with no qualifications required. The scale's internal reliability was found to be excellent, with Cronbach's alpha value for the overall scale being 0.94 and the subscales ranging between 0.87 to 0.92. The test-retest reliability showed a strong correlation of $r = 0.85$ ($p < .001$), with the subscales showing correlations of Minds: $r = 0.86$, Paranormal: $r = 0.84$, body: $r = 0.81$, Violence: $r = 0.80$ (all p 's $< .001$) (Scrivner, 2021). In the second study, Scrivner (2021) examined the convergent and discriminant validity of additional personality questions to determine the correlation with the trait of morbid curiosity by comparing the outcomes with the Ten-Item Personality Inventory and generalized questions about media preferences. The results of the study revealed that there is a positive correlation between morbid curiosity and individualized variations in relation to

perspectives on horror media, thrill-seeking, and social interest, indicating that these factors contribute to the development of morbid curiosity. The study found a weak correlation between morbid curiosity and age, nature of disgust, animal reminder disgust, and truth or modesty factors. The animal reminder disgust is based on The Discuss Scale Revised and implicates a relationship between morbidity and death, specifically with animals. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test resulted in a normal distribution ($p = 0.75$), and a four-factor confirmatory factor analysis model in study three suggested good model-data fit ($\chi^2 (246) = 555.21, p < .001$).

Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity

A new scale called the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS), as showcased in Appendices C and D, was developed based on the Theoretical Strategy focused on the trait of morbid curiosity. This scale was developed based on new research on fear attraction, horror tropes, and Christian theories of horror entertainment. The development of the subscale and subscore on the newly developed measurement in this study was based on previous literature and popular culture ideologies in the field of horror. Previous research has not indicated that fear attraction/stances, horror tropes, or religion are correlated with the trait of morbidity. However, the data does implicate these concepts as factors of attraction in the field of horror, which may link the fear attractors to the concept of attraction towards morbid topics. Thus, although the items on the MIARS were designed to measure overall morbid curiosity/attraction, the subscale items were written to address the four mechanisms of that attraction (i.e., the three fear attractors plus religiosity).

Researchers have identified two types of people who are drawn to recreational fear: adrenaline junkies and white-knucklers. A third group, known as dark copers, seeks out horror-based entertainment to cope with existential dread and emotional instability (Clasen et al., 2019; Scrivner et al., 2022). Through cognitive and social responses, the MIARS was developed to tap into participants' morbid curiosity when it comes to horror-based entertainment, horror tropes like the final girl, and the three attractors to fear (Clasen et al., 2019)

The section on religiosity in the MIARS was created by combining the key themes of psychological development with Christian doctrine. The purpose of this subscale is to identify spiritual-based religiosity in horror entertainment as a fourth group of people who are drawn to recreational fear. Research on horror-based entertainment in both secular and Biblical contexts has shown that certain elements of Christianity, such as exorcisms, the use of holy water as a weapon, lycanthropy, and witchcraft, are linked to horror-based entertainment (Bridley & Daffin, 2018; Cuneo, 2002; Shyovitz, 2014; Street, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, people showed a heightened interest in religion as it relates to their preparedness and concern for the end of time (Scrivner et al., 2021). The identified three attractors to morbid entertainment are enhanced by the addition of an attractor related to generalized religious themes, and a new subscale was created to assess religiously based morbid inquisitiveness. The development of questions related to morbid curiosity and threat survival was created and tested for internal consistency and convergent validity. Subscores and total scores are created by summing responses to each item, with higher scores implicating higher levels of the construct. The total score represents the trait of morbidity, while the summed subscores reflect each of

the four attractor types. No items are reverse-coded. Informed consent was also included, as showcased in Appendix A. No demographic questions were created or obtained.

Operationalization of Variables

Total Score Variable – The trait of morbid curiosity is an interval variable and will be measured by the total score on the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale and The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021).

Subscale Variable- Attractors to fear dark copers, white knucklers, adrenaline junkies, plus the fourth type of religious-based horror-attracted individuals, are interval variables that will be measured by the subscale score on the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale.

Data Analysis

The research utilized Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the internal consistency reliability of the MIARS subscores and the Morbid Curiosity Scale's total scores and subscores. To provide validity evidence, the research correlated all four subscores on the MIARS with total scores on The Morbid Curiosity Scale via a Pearson correlation coefficient.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

The study only examined adults and their interest in horror entertainment and art. Curiosity about morbid topics is believed to be linked to a fascination with fear and horror-based religion, indicating that it could be a survival trait. However, it is important to note that this research is limited by the fact that it relies on a single validated survey to determine the validity of its constructs. Additionally, there is still much to learn about the

concept of morbid curiosity as a trait, as well as the inclusion of fear stances and religiosity as factors of morbid inquisitiveness.

Moreover, additional respondent samples and additional analyses would be needed to support the validity of the new scale for widespread use. These analyses should include collecting additional types of validity evidence (e.g., divergent validity, construct validity) and a confirmatory factor analysis to support the scoring of the MIARS as a total score plus four subscores. Additionally, demographic information should be collected for future samples to support the generalizability of the results and the acceptability of widespread use of the MIARS.

Summary

The literature review discussed various studies about curiosity and attraction, but there has not been much attention given to morbid curiosity as a trait. Currently, the only reliable and valid measure for this is The Morbid Curiosity Scale (Scrivner, 2021). However, this measurement does not incorporate religious themes, horror tropes like the final girl, or the three fear attractors (adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers) that have been identified as crucial variables of appeal in the literature for horror consumers. This chapter proposed creating a new scale that combines religious horror themes, fear attraction, and horror cliches. It outlined methods to obtain validity and reliability evidence for a new scale. Ideally, the scale development would seek validity evidence via a confirmatory factor analysis. However, due to concerns about sample size, this statistical analysis will not be completed. Future research seeking validation of the MIARS would undoubtedly include this analysis and demographic questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

This quantitative study utilized theories of horror attraction, the trait of morbid curiosity, the final girl trope, and horror-based religiosity to develop a new scale to measure the trait of morbid curiosity. The Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS) produces a trait morbid curiosity overall score with subscale scores focused on attractors to fear: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers. A new, fourth form of fear attraction, religiosity, was included as a subscale. Religiosity in horror attraction is theorized to link the trait of morbid curiosity with spiritual practices and Christian concepts found in horror entertainment.

The research focused on convergent validity and internal consistency reliability evidence for the total scale and the subscales. The data collection process was completed using Facebook, a social media website. A recruitment flyer was posted on various social media pages, and the researcher utilized multiple research survey swap platforms on Facebook to obtain participants for the study. All the responses were collected on a data spreadsheet and maintained anonymously.

Descriptive Results

Demographic Statistics

The demographic sample was kept anonymous, and no demographic data was collected per agreement with the Institutional Review Board. As part of completing the survey, the participants affirmed that they were older than 18. Of the 97 participants, all data were included without exclusions.

Total and Subscore Statistics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the total and subscores of the Morbid Curiosity Scale and the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale.

Table 1
MCS and MIARS Total and Subscore Descriptives

Scale	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
<i>MCS</i>							
Total Score	97	85.55	23.74	27	134	-.170	-.488
Body Violation Motive of	97	18.35	8.40	6	36	.480	-.868
Dangerous People	97	26.62	7.25	7	36	-.817	-.199
Paranormal Danger	97	22.35	7.45	6	36	-.180	-.666
Violence	97	18.23	7.49	6	35	.075	-1.010
<i>MIARS</i>							
Total Score	97	82.04	15.24	27	120	-.322	.781
Adrenaline Junkies	97	12.28	4.25	4	22	-.035	-.670
Dark Copers	97	12.95	3.76	4	23	.243	-.229
Religiosity	97	16.22	5.27	5	30	.178	-.430
White Knucklers	97	15.65	3.26	5	22	-.776	1.609

Note. N = the total number of participants; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum value of the variable; Max = maximum value of the variable.

The total scores for the MCS (M = 85.55, SD = 23.74) display moderate variability in the distribution. The skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the distributions are slightly platykurtic, but overall relatively normal. The MIARS total scores (M = 82.04, SD = 15.24) are fairly similar to the MCS scores, though with slightly less variability. The skewness and kurtosis values of the MIARS total and subscores indicate that the distributions are relatively normal, though the White Knucklers subscale’s kurtosis value is notably larger than the others and positive, indicating moderate leptokurtosis. Overall, the total scores for MCS and MIARS are comparable.

Study Findings

Total Scores: Validity

As shown in Table 2, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to evaluate the relationship between the Morbid Curiosity Scale and the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale, to assess convergent validity evidence for the MIARS.

Table 2
Correlation between MCS and MIARS Total Scores

N	Pearson's R	p-value
97	.713	<.001

Note. N represents the total number of participants; all participants were included in the analysis.

There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the Morbid Curiosity Scale and the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale, $r(97) = .713, p = < .001$. The magnitude of the correlation indicated a moderate to high relationship between total scores on the two scales. These results provide convergent validity evidence for the MIARS.

Total Scores: Reliability

Table 3 presents the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the overall MIARS and MCS.

Table 3
Coefficient Alpha Values for MIARS and MCS Total Scores

Subscale	# of Items	α
MIARS Total	24	.791
MCS Total	24	.927

The MIARS total alpha value was .791 indicating the reliability was acceptable and the MCS total alpha .927 indicates good reliability. The MCS alpha is similar to the alpha of 0.94, which was found during the original authors' initial scale development process. Overall, the total score coefficient alpha values are in the acceptable range for both tests.

Subscores: Validity

To assess convergent validity, subscale scores on the MIARS were correlated with overall MCS scores. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Correlation between MCS and MIARS Subscales*

Subscale	N	Pearson's <i>R</i>	<i>p</i>-value
Adrenaline Junkies	97	.606	<.001
Dark Copers	97	.620	<.001
White Knucklers	97	.001	.989
Religiosity	97	.203	.046

Note. N represents the total number of participants.

There was a statistically significant positive moderate relationship between the Morbid Curiosity Scale and adrenaline junkies subscale questions, $r(97) = .606$, $p < .001$. The dark copers subscale items also had a statistically significant positive moderate relationship with the overall MCS score, $r(97) = .620$, $p < .001$. The correlation between the white knucklers subscale and the MCS was essentially zero ($r = .001$, $N = 97$), indicating no relationship between the two scales. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the Morbid Curiosity Scale and religiosity subscale questions, $r(97) = .203$, $p = .046$, but the magnitude of the correlation was low. Thus, there was slight supporting convergent validity evidence for the adrenaline junkies and dark copers subscales, but not for the other two subscales.

Subscores: Reliability

Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability results are presented in Table 5 for all MIARS subscales.

Table 5
Coefficient Alpha Values for MIARS and the Subscales

Subscale	# of Items	α
Adrenaline Junkies	4	.505
Dark Copers	4	.607
White Knucklers	4	.398
Religiosity	6	.512

The typically accepted threshold for adequate reliability is a Cronbach's alpha value of .70 or higher. The adrenaline junkies subscale's alpha value was .505, indicating that the internal consistency reliability was poor. The internal consistency was questionable on the dark copers subscale ($\alpha = .607$). An unacceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .398$) was found on the white knucklers subscale. The religiosity subscale consisted of 6 items, unlike 4 with the other subscales; with an alpha of .512, the scale displayed poor internal consistency. Thus, the reliability for all four subscales on the MIARS was unacceptably low, indicating that item changes will need to be made to the subscales.

Summary

A new survey called the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS) was developed via a quantitative study. The MIARS measures overall trait morbid curiosity and contains four subscales measuring four attractors to fear: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, white knucklers, and religiosity. To assess convergent validity and internal consistency reliability for the overall score and subscores, scores were correlated with an existing morbid curiosity measure (the Morbid Curiosity Scale) and Cronbach's alpha was computed. The correlation between the MCS and MIARS total scores was .713, which indicates a statistically significant positive relationship and evidence of convergent validity.

Total and subscores on both scales were normally distributed. The MIARS subscores did not correlate highly with the MCS total scores, particularly the white knucklers and religiosity subscales. Thus, there was little to no convergent validity evidence supporting the use of the subscores. The Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales were well below the typically accepted cutoff of .70. However, the alpha level for the total test was acceptable.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

A quantitative study was utilized to seek convergent validity and reliability evidence for a new measure of the trait of morbid curiosity called the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS), and its subscales measuring the attractors to fear: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, white knucklers, and religiosity. Validity evidence was assessed via a correlation with an existing measure of morbid curiosity, the Morbid Curiosity Scale. Internal consistency reliability was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for both the overall MIARS and the four subscales. It was hypothesized that the scale and subscales would display adequate reliability and that the subscores on the MIARS would strongly positively correlate with scores on the Morbid Curiosity Scale. The crucial discoveries, limitations, and values of the scale and subscales will now be examined in greater depth.

Summary of Findings

As identified in the first hypothesis, the total scores on the Morbid Curiosity Scale and the Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale displayed a positive correlation ($r = .713$). This was a statistically significant, moderately strong positive correlation and provides convergent validity evidence to support using the MIARS to measure overall trait morbid inquisitiveness. Additionally, the MIARS subscale scores had a positive relationship with MCS total score. However, the magnitude of the correlations were only moderate for adrenaline junkies and dark copers (.606 and .620, respectively), and were very small for white knucklers and religiosity (.001 and .203, respectively).

The second hypothesis pertained to the internal consistency reliability of the overall scale and subscales. The total score Cronbach's alpha value for the MIARS was .791, which is an acceptable reliability value; the subscale values were all low (ranging from .398 to .607). These alpha values indicate poor reliability for the MIARS subscores but not the total score.

Discussion of Findings

To date, no measurement scale on the trait of morbid curiosity has included items assessing religiosity and the three attractors to fear: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers. The Morbid Curiosity Scale is the only reliable, evidence-based scale to measure the trait of morbidity (Scrivner, 2021). Scrivner (2021) reported that until the development of the MCS, it had been 35 years since any reliable measurement was available for use in the field of morbid curiosity. The development of alternative scales is critical in the expansion of trait morbid inquisitiveness research and for the ability to gain further knowledge about horror attraction. The MIARS sought to link the concept of fear attraction with the idea of trait morbid curiosity. Based on the total score, validity, and reliability evidence, the MIARS is a new scale that may be able to be utilized to examine morbid inquisitiveness as a trait of fear attraction influenced by horror media, fear stances, and religiosity. However, more research with the MIARS is needed before an equivocal statement can be made about its measurement quality, and changes would need to be made to improve the reliability and validity of the subscales.

Horror entertainment can take various forms, including human-made attractions, movies, video games, and dark tourism (Zhang et al., 2022). Adrenaline junkies purposefully seek an intense emotional experience, dark copers seek to develop skills

based on existential beliefs of identity and values, and white knucklers seek knowledge to avoid future endeavors of fear (Scrivner et al., 2022). The different attractors to fear are drawn to a wide range of horror options, and the ability to capture the nuances of each attractor on a scale, along with the concept of trait morbid curiosity, outlines a significant challenge in scale development. This is evident by the outcomes showing that the MIARS did not have strong validity evidence for the subscales on the attractors to fear.

Specifically, there was only slight convergent validity evidence for the adrenaline junkies and dark copers subscales, and no evidence for the white knucklers and religiosity subscales. The subscales also did not display adequate internal consistency reliability. However, the overall scale (i.e., total scores) displayed acceptable convergent validity evidence and adequate reliability, suggesting that the scale may be a good measure of morbid curiosity overall.

The Biblical integration of Christian concepts was included in the religiosity subscale. Religious concepts were included in the MCS but identified as paranormal dangers (Scrivner, 2021). The religiosity subscale had six questions compared to the four questions utilized for the subscales pertaining to the other three identified attractors to fear. However, there was no validity evidence for the religiosity subscale, and reliability was also poor. Although the religiosity subscale on the MIARS is not sound from a measurement prospective, attempting to develop a scale or subscale to measure religiosity attraction to horror is a worthy pursuit given the prevalence of religious themes in horror entertainment.

Implications

Up to this point, the MCS is the only scale to measure morbid curiosity traits. The MIARS is a new scale that displayed adequate reliability and validity evidence and thus can, with additional research, eventually be utilized to expand on the theory of trait morbidity and in clinical practice to measure the trait. Understanding that a trait is like a stance one takes to overcome hardships and can be utilized in times of fear and disgust expands previous knowledge on coping methods and emotional responses. In clinical practice, the new scale and expansion of understanding fear attraction can help clinicians, researchers, and academic professionals develop new strategies for real-world threats in a safe and controlled environment, as identified in the research as scary play.

However, it is important to note that the MIARS subscales measuring the fear attractors did not display adequate reliability, and validity evidence was nonexistent for two subscales and only moderate for the others. As a result, more work would need to be done on the scale before it could be used for this purpose. However, the moderate correlations between MCS and the adrenaline junkies and dark copers subscales do suggest that these attractors may be important to the construct of morbid curiosity, and further investigation is warranted.

Limitations

The study presented several limitations in conducting the research and developing the scale. The topic of horror and the inclusion of religion is a controversial topic that has limitations in research and has been minimally conceptualized in scale development. The initial search for articles focused on work from the past five years; however, this did not yield significant results, resulting in the inclusion of older textbooks and articles. The review of articles on religiosity and horror was comprehensive, encompassing multiple

religions to ensure the research was reliable and robust. While items on the religiosity scale of the MIARS primarily focused on Christian foundations and beliefs, other religious beliefs are also included. A Catholic New American Bible scripture was used, along with a word study and relevant textbooks, to provide a thorough analysis rooted in Christian teachings from both Catholicism and the Southern Baptist denomination.

The study participants may have had priming effects due to social fears about horror beliefs and the concept of Christian-based theories regarding morbid topics. The outcomes could have been skewed if the participants who completed the study did not engage with or lacked knowledge of horror entertainment. Furthermore, the number of study participants was minimal, as only 97 were obtained. This limitation was the effect of the ethical review board limiting the study to one online social media website. Future research on this topic should obtain a more extensive sampling of participants to improve an understanding of the validity and reliability of the scale. Furthermore, respondents' demographic information was not collected. The lack of demographic info eliminated the ability to review and assess the representativeness of the study.

Along with the increase in participants, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is recommended to assess the structure of the scale – that is, an overall morbid curiosity factor, and four factors representing each of the four subscales. Unfortunately, due to the large sample sizes required for CFA, it could not be completed during this initial stage of scale development. Additionally, more work would be needed to address the reliability of the subscales in conjunction with a CFA to assess the construct validity of the scale.

Recommendations for Future Research

A key element of horror attraction, akin to the trait of morbidity, is represented in the varying stances one takes toward fear. This idea conceptually is represented in the three identified attractors: adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers. The presenting research expanded upon this concept with the idea that religiosity may be a new, fourth stance or form of horror attraction corresponding to the concept of trait morbid inquisitiveness. Future research on this topic should further investigate the inclusion of religion and Christian themes in horror as both a stance and a possible attractor for fear. Future research may also identify another possible stance and attractor that was not formally included in the subscales of the MIARS, perhaps related to horror tropes such as the final girl. Ideally, future research may be able to draw upon research on horror film rules as outlined in the *Scream* movie franchise and the traits of the final girl to implicate new themes and developments for the trait of morbidity.

Moving beyond the concept of paranormal danger and specifically integrating biblical ideas into morbid curiosity measures holds many opportunities for the future. This method of integration can help link together secular and biblical research concepts. In many ways, this will help not only with secular research in psychology but also in other fields like biology, anthropology, and the arts.

Upon review of the research design, a modification or retesting may be recommended to explore the reliability evidence of the subscales and validity evidence for white knucklers in particular, given the very low correlation between subscores on that subscale and the MCS. Additionally, the research in this academic setting was limited by only obtaining 97 participants who completed the survey online through social media. Future research should seek to obtain a larger sample of diverse participants.

Demographic information should also be collected from these participants in order to better understand the representativeness of the study. It should also expand the demographic pool beyond online participants on social media and include a more diverse population of individuals. Additionally, construct validity should be assessed via a confirmatory factor analysis to increase validity evidence for the new scale. Enhancing validity and identifying reliability evidence will enrich future studies and practical application of the new scale.

Summary

Horror is considered a form of art in psychology, but its empirical relevance has been limited to emotional responses (O’Gwin, 2017). Studies on consumer attraction to fear-based entertainment lack solid measures of relevant concepts such as morbid curiosity (Cook et al., 2015; Van Overveld & Borg, 2015). Horror often reflects cultural ideologies such as religion and dark tourism (Clasen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). Theories on why people are attracted to horror entertainment span various fields of study. One theory is morbid curiosity, defined as deriving pleasure from fear. Although horror entertainment is widely studied, there is no reliable way to measure the connection between social theories, religious horror ideologies, and the consumers of fear-based pleasure-seeking identified as adrenaline junkies, dark copers, and white knucklers (Scrivner & Clasen, 2022).

This study proposed a new scale to measure the trait of morbid curiosity, with four subscales assessing the three established attractors towards fear as well as the fourth, religiosity-based stance. The overall score displayed adequate reliability and validity evidence in measuring the trait of morbid curiosity. The subscales showcased moderate to

poor validity evidence and lacked sufficient reliability. Further research is needed to determine whether there are indeed subconstructs within morbid curiosity that represent the four attractors to fear proposed in this study: religiosity, adrenaline junkies, white knucklers, and dark copers.

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APPENDIX A: Consent

Title of the Project: Trait Morbid Inquisitiveness: Horror Attraction, Religion, and the Final Girl

Principal Investigator: Charley Brown, Doctoral Candidate, . Social Psychology, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to expand research in the field of trait morbid curiosity and horror attraction. The presenting surveys explore the psychological variations of attraction.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in completing one survey that will take no more than 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?**Participation**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased knowledge on the topic and implication of new concepts for future research.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participants will not be compensated for completing this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Charley Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor Lauren Rolen, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

APPENDIX B: Morbid Curiosity

The Morbid Curiosity Scale

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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Instructions:

Please report how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers, just answer honestly and with your gut reaction.

1. If I lived in Medieval Europe, I would be interested in attending a public execution.
2. If a head transplant was possible, I would want to watch the procedure.
3. I am curious about crime and enjoy reading detailed news accounts about murders and other violent crimes.
4. I think the supernatural is an interesting topic.
5. If I lived in Ancient Rome, I would be interested in attending a gladiatorial fight.
6. I would be curious to see how an autopsy is performed.
7. I would be interested in watching a documentary on motives behind real murders.
8. I would be interested in attending or watching a video of an exorcism.
9. If I saw a street fight break out, and knew I could not intervene, I would try to watch it.
10. I am interested in seeing how limb amputation works.
11. My favorite part of a crime show is learning about why the killer did what he did.
12. I find the Occult interesting.
13. I would be curious enough to watch a duel if I lived in the Wild West.
14. I would like to see how bodies are prepared for funerals.
15. I would be interested in watching an interview with an imprisoned serial killer talking about his crimes.
16. A documentary on Voodoo would interest me.
17. I prefer violent movies and TV shows to be uncensored.
18. I think the preservation of bodies, like in taxidermy or mummification, is interesting.
19. Being a criminal profiler who studies the personality of murderers would be an interesting job.
20. I am curious how a Ouija board works.
21. I am curious what a battle looked like in the Middle Ages.
22. I am curious what the deadliest toxin in the world would do to the body.
23. I am curious about the minds of violent people.
24. I think witchcraft would be an interesting topic to learn about.

APPENDIX C: Morbid Inquisitiveness

Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Scale (MIARS)

The following questions on the MIARS must be answered without skipping a question or leaving one blank. Responses to the MIARS are on a six-point scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Please provide your response indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with the given statements.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1. Many of my favorite television shows and movies include a lot of violence.
2. I would find it fascinating to watch an exorcism being performed.
3. When I feel frightened, I tend to use humor to cope.
4. I am interested in true crime stories.
5. I enjoy visiting places that are alleged to be haunted.
6. Encountering something frightening is a positive experience because it gives me a chance to face my fears.
7. I am interested in the idea of the end of the world.
8. The protagonist in horror films, often known as the final girl, showcases survival skills that I admire.
9. The devil and his place of residence in Hell are identifiably evil.
10. When I get scared, I need to make physical contact with others in order to feel safe.
11. Hearing about morbid events that happen to others makes my life seem ok in comparison.
12. I find learning about serial killers fascinating.
13. In scenarios I believe are scary, I try to avoid interacting with whatever the scary threat is.
14. Haunted attractions, like human-made haunted houses, are fun.
15. I would be interested in a documentary about cannibalism.
16. I believe that religious items, crosses, holy water, and the Bible etc., can help protect me from dangers in the real world.
17. In order to become more courageous, I need to face the things that scare me.
18. During moments of extreme fear, I often scream out loud.
19. Rather than focusing on being scared, I try to think about something else.
20. Ritualistic practices of sorcery, like witchcraft, are Satan’s attempt to spread evil in the world and are a means to boost fear.
21. While engaging in human-made horror attractions, I tell myself that unreal things are real to intensify the fear I feel.
22. I am fascinated by the concept of human-to-animal transformation, like werewolves.

23. The uncertainty I feel in my life leads to feelings of anxiety that can be managed by learning about morbid topics.
24. The clichés in horror films can teach survival management skills for real-world dangers.

APPENDIX D: Morbid Inquisitiveness Subscale Indicator

Morbid Inquisitiveness Attraction and Religiosity Subscale Guide

AJ equals adrenaline junkies, DC equals dark copers, R equals religiosity, and WK equals white knucklers.

1. Many of my favorite television shows and movies include a lot of violence.
2. I would find it fascinating to watch an exorcism being performed. R
3. When I feel frightened, I tend to use humor to cope. WK
4. I am interested in true crime stories.
5. I enjoy visiting places that are alleged to be haunted. AJ
6. Encountering something frightening is a positive experience because it gives me a chance to face my fears. DC
7. I am interested in the idea of the end of the world. R
8. The protagonist in horror films, often known as the final girl, showcases survival skills that I admire.
9. The devil and his place of residence in Hell are identifiably evil. R
10. When I get scared, I need to make physical contact with others in order to feel safe. WK
11. Hearing about morbid events that happen to others makes my life seem ok in comparison. DC
12. I find learning about serial killers fascinating.
13. In scenarios I believe are scary, I try to avoid interacting with whatever the scary threat is. WK
14. Haunted attractions, like human-made haunted houses, are fun. AJ
15. I would be interested in a documentary about cannibalism.
16. I believe that religious items, crosses, holy water, and the Bible etc., can help protect me from dangers in the real world. R
17. In order to become more courageous, I need to face the things that scare me. DC
18. During moments of extreme fear, I often scream out loud. AJ
19. Rather than focusing on being scared, I try to think about something else. WK
20. Ritualistic practices of sorcery, like witchcraft, are Satan's attempt to spread evil in the world and are a means to boost fear. R
21. While engaging in human-made horror attractions, I tell myself that unreal things are real to intensify the fear I feel. AJ
22. I am fascinated by the concept of human-to-animal transformation, like werewolves. R
23. The uncertainty I feel in my life leads to feelings of anxiety that can be managed by learning about morbid topics. DC
24. The clichés in horror films can teach survival management skills for real-world dangers.