

Media Kit

Brian A. Sharpless

***Monsters on the Couch: The Real
Psychological Disorders Behind
Your Favorite Horror Movies***

Chicago Review Press

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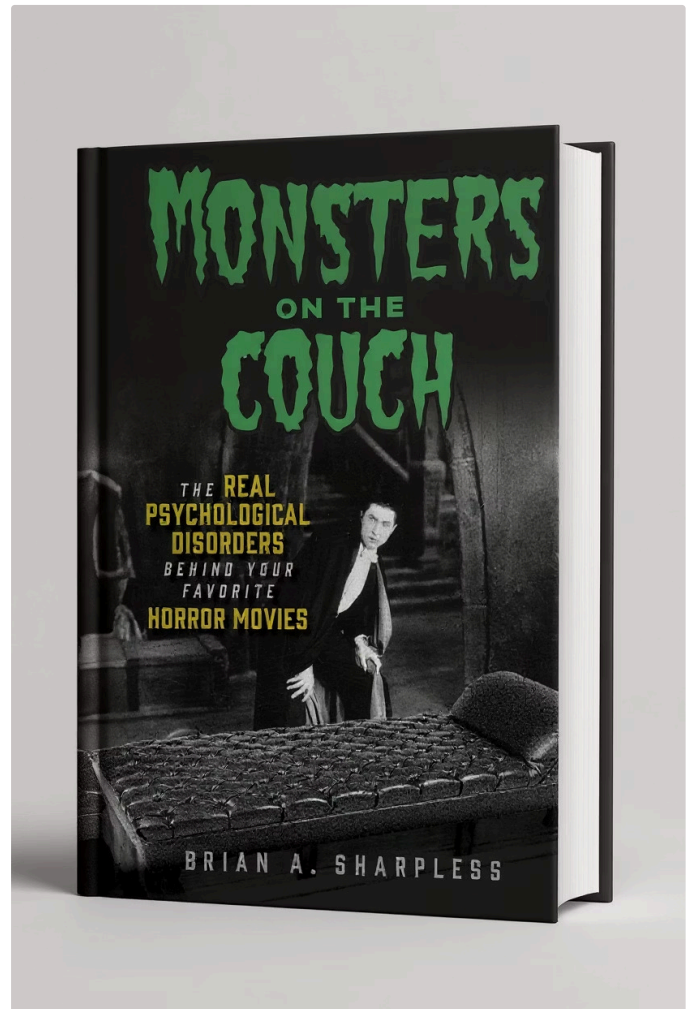
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Monsters on the Couch by Dr. Brian Sharpless

In **Monsters on the Couch: The Real Psychological Disorders Behind Your Favorite Horror Movies** (Chicago Review Press), clinical psychologist Dr. Brian Sharpless unpacks what horror movies have been showing us all along: the human mind is both complex and frightening.

This insightful, darkly funny, and thoroughly researched book reveals the psychological disorders at the heart of cinema's scariest characters, from vampires and Renfield's syndrome to zombies and Cotard's delusion. Although always respectful to those suffering from real conditions, Dr. Sharpless has fun with some of the questionable plots and acting in the movie versions.

Dr. Sharpless' work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Time Magazine*, *National Geographic*, *The Boston Globe*, *Huffington Post*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Daily Mail*, *Psychology Today*, *New York Magazine*, *BBC*, and numerous other publications, including TV appearances in *National Geographic*, *History's Greatest Mysteries*, *Mysteries Decoded*, and *The Shocking Truth*. Along with presenting his work at professional conferences, he is a frequent speaker for popular science organizations in the US and Europe.



About the Book

The Psychological Journey

Clinical psychologist Brian A. Sharpless invites readers on a fascinating, mind-bending journey through horror's most iconic monsters in his book, *Monsters on the Couch*.

Exploring Horror's Icons

Why do werewolves make us nervous? What does Freddy Krueger have in common with a real-life syndrome that causes sudden death at night? Why are zombies the perfect metaphor for losing touch with reality, and how close are their symptoms to an actual psychiatric disorder?

Blending Science & Cinema

In *Monsters on the Couch*, Sharpless answers these questions and more by blending psychological science with cinematic thrills. From *Dracula* to *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing*, Sharpless examines how filmmakers use, and sometimes misrepresent, mental illness, fear, and the psychology of the monstrous.

This book is for horror fans, psychology enthusiasts, film scholars, and anyone curious about the darker aspects of the human mind. Whether you're a genre superfan or just love a good Halloween binge-watch, *Monsters on the Couch* will change the way you view these movies.

"What drives a person to spend hundreds of hours writing a book on monsters and unusual psychological disorders? I suppose I had other life choices. I could have seen more patients, taught another class, or written a few more research articles. However, something made this particular clinical psychologist spend months and months of his finite time on our spinning blue orb learning about some very strange topics and sharing them with others." – Dr. Brian A. Sharpless

Meet the Author



Brian A. Sharpless, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and author. He's an internationally recognized expert on unusual mental health conditions, including sleep paralysis, exploding head syndrome, clinical lycanthropy, and other rare phenomena.

His latest book, *Monsters on the Couch*, explores the real psychological conditions that underlie your favorite horror film characters. He joins us today to talk about what Freddy Krueger, zombies, and vampires can teach us about the human mind, and why fear might just be good for us.

Website: briansharpless.com

Academic Background

Brian has taught at Pennsylvania State University and Washington State University. His work has been featured in outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*. He has also appeared on television shows such as *National Geographic*, *History's Greatest Mysteries*, *Mysteries Decoded*, and *The Shocking Truth*.

Dr. Sharpless earned BAs in Psychology and Philosophy from Pennsylvania State University, followed by an MA in Philosophy and a PhD in Clinical Psychology from the same institution. He completed his internship as well as post-doctoral clinical and research fellowships at the University of Pennsylvania.

Author's Expertise and Publications

Academic Appointments

He has held faculty appointments at the Pennsylvania State University, Washington State University, and the American School of Professional Psychology, as well as a visiting research fellowship at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Published Works

Dr. Sharpless is the author of *Monsters on the Couch: The Real Psychological Disorders Behind Your Favorite Horror Movies*, which examines how horror films are associated with genuine mental illnesses. It has recently been translated into Russian. His other books (Oxford University Press) include *Sleep Paralysis, Unusual and Rare Psychological Disorders*, and *Psychodynamic Therapy Techniques*, the last of which has been translated into Turkish and Chinese.

Research Impact

He has published over 50 scholarly articles and contributed to leading journals, including *The Lancet Psychiatry*, *Sleep Medicine*, and *Sleep Medicine Reviews*.

When he isn't seeing patients, writing, or giving talks, Dr. Sharpless enjoys exploring castle ruins, traveling through Europe's spookier sites, playing guitar, and collecting horror movie memorabilia.

Book Excerpt

Staff at the prison were getting nervous. Since these employees get paid to break up fights, prevent escapes, and use latex gloves and flashlights to search for contraband hidden in the strangest of places, they're not exactly squeamish shrinking violets. However, some recent happenings in the cell block didn't quite make sense. Iron supplements had been stolen from the medical ward. No, not opioids or other more entertaining prescription-strength meds, but the same vitamin tablets the unincarcerated could easily pick up at their local CVS or Tesco. Also, some of the more aggressive inmates were worried they might have acute anemia, but were tight-lipped as to the reason why. The events seemed to be related, but the well-known prison code of silence made it difficult to connect the dots. Eventually, a formal inquiry reached the obvious conclusion: there was a vampire in the prison.

Prison officials had difficulty accepting this answer and thought that the attending psychiatrist, Dr. Richard Vanden Bergh, might be making a bad joke. After all, gallows humor is not uncommon in locked wards. But it was no joke: a prisoner—we'll call him "Paul"—had been regularly trading sexual favors for human blood since his confinement began.

Now, if I asked you to conjure up an image of the prototypical "vampire," what would come to mind? My psychological instincts tell me that it would probably depend on your age and movie/literary tastes. If you're a centenarian, you might imagine a pale aristocrat wearing a cape and speaking with the otherworldly Hungarian intensity of Bela Lugosi from the original *Dracula* (1931) film. Baby boomers perhaps envision Christopher Lee's imposing figure in Hammer Films' 1958 version of the same story. Gen Xers like me probably imagine the tough, soap dodger / glam metal stylings of a young Kiefer Sutherland (i.e., David) in *The Lost Boys* (1987). We might also think of the elegant and ostentatiously dressed yet whingey Louis played by Brad Pitt in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). And, of course, millennials likely picture the angsty, teen-heartthrob poutiness of Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) in *Twilight* (2008).

Regardless of your age or cinematic inclinations, I suspect that none of you dreamed up a nondescript twenty-year-old car thief from Denver, Colorado, wearing an orange jumpsuit. However, that is indeed a fair representation of the vampire Paul, identified by the good Dr. Vanden Bergh. But Paul's strange tale might seem less odd if we first discuss his non-cinematic forebears: the vampire of folklore.

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Perfect for Halloween and Beyond

Perfect for spooky season reading, Halloween programming, or timely pop culture coverage, *Monsters on the Couch* is both entertaining and insightful. It's not just about what scares us, but why.



For Horror Fans

Discover the psychological underpinnings of your favorite movie monsters and gain new appreciation for classic horror films.



For Psychology Enthusiasts

Learn about rare and unusual psychological disorders through the lenses of history, science and popular culture.



For Film Scholars

Analyze how filmmakers have intentionally or unintentionally incorporated real psychological conditions into their monster creations.

This Halloween, meet the real monsters inside the mind: *Monsters on the Couch* reveals the real psychological disorders behind horror's most iconic movie villains.

Suggested Interview Questions

About the Author's Background

- What first sparked your idea to connect classic horror films to real psychological disorders?
- You've joked about "misspending" your youth watching horror movies. How did those experiences shape your clinical curiosity?
- Did you encounter any resistance from colleagues regarding the idea of writing a book that blends clinical psychology and pop culture?

Specific Cases & Examples

- What would a "real" case of someone who thinks they turn into an animal look like?
- Can you tell me about the case of the "were gerbil"?
- Was the real Dracula a vampire? Did he drink blood?

Horror & Psychology

- What can horror movies teach us about our collective fears and anxieties?
- Are there any myths about mental illness that horror movies tend to reinforce rather than challenge?

More Interview Questions

Deeper Psychological Insights

- You discuss clinical lycanthropy and Cotard's syndrome. Are there disorders that you wish more people understood?
- How has studying these "monstrous" conditions changed your view of what it means to be human?
- Was there a particular movie monster you found yourself empathizing with the most?
- What was the most surprising real-world case you came across in your research?
- How did you decide which disorders and films to feature in the book?

Contemporary Horror & Mental Health

- Do you think contemporary horror movies are doing a better job at portraying mental illness with nuance?
- Why do you think vampires, werewolves, and zombies have persisted as archetypes for so many centuries?
- In your view, is horror a safe space for people to confront the parts of themselves they'd rather avoid?
- What do you hope mental health professionals might take away from your book?
- What's one misconception about psychopathology you wish you could dispel for all horror fans?

Book Information and Contact

This Halloween, discover what horror movies have been showing us all along: the human mind is both complex and frightening. *Monsters on the Couch* reveals the real psychological disorders at the heart of cinema's scariest characters.

Book Details

Title:	<i>Monsters on the Couch: The Real Psychological Disorders Behind Your Favorite Horror Movies</i>		
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Publisher:	Chicago Review Press		


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 Brian A. Sharpless is available for interviews, podcasts, Halloween programming, and expert commentary on the psychology of horror, unusual psychological disorders, and the intersection of pop culture and mental health.