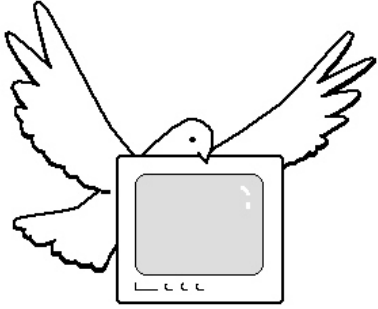


**EDUPAX**



**Our Fascination With Violence  
By Joanne Richard, Toronto Sun**

So your kid wants to be Freddy or Jason?  
Your daughter wants to dress up as  
assassin Uma Thurman from Kill Bill? Just  
what's a parent to do?

"What kind of message are we giving our kids by glorifying violence and worshipping psychopaths," asks Dr. Arlette Lefebvre, a renowned child psychiatrist at Sick Kids.

"It's all about survival of the most brutal. And whenever children start taking on the identity of murderers, this is not a good thing," she says. "When violence is encouraged in order to be interesting and entertaining, there's something wrong."

It's a wakeup call for parents, she says. "It's up to parents to take a stand and point out personal values and the discomfort of portraying violent characters. With younger children, you can steer them in the direction of fun and interesting."

Costumes don't have to be gory to be good, says Lefebvre, adding that it's up to parents to encourage homemade, imaginative costumes rather than store-bought killer costumes.

According to Dr. Glenn Sparks, although kids master control of fearful characters by playing them out at Halloween, he finds the increasing goriness a concern and potentially problematic.

"We continue to push the envelope and just where is it going to stop?" asks Sparks. "To what extent do we want to put such gruesome images in the cultural mainstream?"

Sparks ascertains that it impacts on our emotional desensitization: "It's not healthy for our culture overall to be less sensitive to violence in real life."

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Fri, October 29, 2004

The Fear Factor

## HALLOWEEN LETS OUR REAL FEARS ESCAPE -- IN A CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT

By JOANNE RICHARD, TORONTO SUN

BOOOOOOOOOOOOO! Scare you? Seems most of us like a little fright on Halloween night.

That's because it's a natural, safe high. According to the experts, we get an adrenaline rush when we triumph over the imaginary clutches of a gory ghoul or blood-drenched Dracula.

It's actually the arousal that's the thrill, not the fear: "Being scared in a controlled situation is a pleasant thrill for many -- so-called thrill seeking behaviours like jumping out of airplanes, riding roller coasters and going to scary movies produce high levels of arousal that many people find enjoyable because the risk of actual harm is small," says psychology professor Dr. Brad Schmidt.

### 'SEXUAL AROUSAL'

"Although fear itself is inherently unpleasant, fear also contains arousal -- the same sort of arousal one experiences during sexual arousal -- which can be perceived as pleasant. Even though fear itself isn't pleasurable, the relief that one experiences after a fright can be -- partly due to the release of stress hormones," says Schmidt, director of the Anxiety and Behavioral Health Clinic at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

It's cathartic: The artificial danger allows us to be the masters of our own fate and take control, says Dr. Glenn Sparks. "As terrorism holds centre stage and real fears are being dealt with, Halloween allows people to control things they're scared of and overcome them.

### PLEASURABLE

"They control the menace and experience gratification. And they're not under any threat in the final analysis," he adds.

According to Sparks, fear is perceived as pleasurable. "People can make the mistake that fear itself is a pleasant emotional state but we don't enjoy the fear itself or being scared. It's the high that follows -- we come away with a sense of euphoria and gratification. We've made it through.

"And it seems the scarier the better," says Sparks, a Purdue University communications professor who studies emotional reactions.

Arousal intensifies emotions and "it doesn't go away automatically, it takes time to decay and so this is what we remember and like about it," he adds.

According to Schmidt, we all have the capacity to experience anxiety and fear. "The physiological effects are pretty consistent across people. All animals have developed this capacity based on evolutionary pressures. Anxiety is a mechanism that was developed because it is adaptive to avoid and effectively deal with true threats.

"The physiological changes that occur when we are anxious (e.g. increased HR, respiration) serve important purposes -- they are preparing us to more effectively deal with a potential threat. Your racing heart will allow you to more effectively run away from the threat by increasing blood flow to the major muscle groups."

So while fear is necessary, it's not a very desirable emotion and, for some, to invite scary images in to invade the psyche is not an option. Scary movies, haunted houses and roller coasters are too much to handle.

"It's a very delicate balance. For some, the unpleasant simply outweigh the positive."

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## FRIGHT NIGHT

Want a great first date? Take her to a haunted house.

According to Dr. Glenn Sparks, "taking a date to a haunted house can actually be extremely functional for the relationship."

What gives? "Studies show if males provide the appropriate socialized cues, then they'll be viewed as more attractive."

So, no screaming, guys.