
Do books and films affect your mental health?



We all enjoy a good book or an action packed film but the question is: is it good for your mental health? There are various opinions and evidence on this matter. Some think literature and media can make you a better and more creative person, whilst others think that the ultimate destination is depression and sadness. Putting aside the emotions a book or a film can create, they do control the way we think and feel. Could they really help you deal with your own betrayals or your own friendships, or are all of these feelings exclusive to the fantasy world they belong in?

Studies show that, adrenalin junkies get real pleasure out of being terrified by horror films; however, they don't know what's going on behind the scenes in their brain and could therefore be risking their own mental health. This can and does lead to a number of health disorders. It often leads to heart attacks in people who have cardiovascular weakness. Even if you are young and healthy, you could still be vulnerable to this because when you are scared, your adrenaline levels spike, which can cause traumatic memories to float to the front of your mind. They change your brain chemistry and it can remind you of a time when you were in a similar state, even if before the film you had no idea you even had that memory.

Furthermore, it has also been proven that such films can make you more aggressive in real life after watching violence on screen- particularly if you binge-watch. If you are not familiar with the term binge-watching, it means to watch a series of books or films back to back. Research has shown, that doing this can be bad for your mental health and it has been proven that people who have done this feel more depressed, sad and angry afterwards, from being sat in the same place all day, doing nothing.

Despite all of this, media can also be good for your mental health. Even therapists have recommended films and books to their clients to help them with their mental health. For example, comedies can make you happy by making you laugh and reducing your blood pressure. When you laugh for an extended period of time, your blood vessels dilate. Intense laughter for fifteen minutes during a film have the same effect on you as exercising does. Some people come away from these films calmer and happier.

In addition to this, films can make you more creative. Five year olds were tested on their creative thinking and those who had watched a clip from the *'Harry Potter'* films, especially the scenes with

magic in them, scored significantly higher than those who watched something else. This may or may not extend to adults but watching a film with magic in may make you more creative than usual.

It has also been proven that books are great for your mental health as they can make you more knowledgeable in terms of the new vocabulary that you may come across in the books you read. They may also make you more empathetic as you experience the narrative from the protagonist's point of view, going through everything that they go through via the black and white print on the pages. It can also be a benefit of watching film, however it's not as common because the images are put in front of you so you don't have to imagine or conceptualise anything.

Some specific books can have quite a drastic effect on your mental health. Let's take *'Thirteen Reasons Why'* by Jay Asher. The book and Netflix series is a fictional story about a teenager (Hannah Baker), who commits suicide and records thirteen tapes to represent the thirteen reasons why she takes her own life. Viewers and readers, experience it through the eyes of Clay Jensen, who is one of the people who receives the tapes. She goes through: social isolation, bullying, sexual assault and missed opportunities. While many think this book could be a bad thing, there are some good things about the novel. First of all, it opens a door to encourage teens and their families to discuss any issues or problems they may have and it has made people more aware about suicide. While this is all true, there are also a lot of dangerous aspects to the novel. *'Thirteen Reasons Why'* may be a story about a teen's suicide, it isn't very informative about mental illness, which doesn't help its viewers. Also, it doesn't show that suicide is preventable and there has been quite a few cases where it seems that teens have re-enacted Hannah's suicide. This is clearly a horrific and unintended consequence of the series.

In sum, literature and films are perhaps more powerful than you might initially think!



By Charlotte.