

Transcript for Professor Gernsbacher's Lecture Video: "Why Do We Binge-Watch?"

Ever had that experience of binge-watching a TV series, and you become so absorbed that you forget to eat lunch or you miss your subway stop?

Or you keep clicking for the next episode and when you look up, the house has gotten dark around you, and you realize you've been watching for hours?

Oh, wait just a minute. I read that wrong. Here's the correct quote:

CLICK - Ever had that experience **READING A NOVEL** when you become so absorbed that you forget to eat lunch or you miss your subway stop?

CLICK - Or you're **TURNING THE PAGES** so fast, when you look up, the house has gotten dark around you, and you realize you've been squinting to see the words.

CLICK - We call this "getting lost in a book," and we could all name a novel that has caused us to

CLICK - Get lost in a book. In a Two Thousand and Fourteen article on the website, Thought Catalog, Francesca Saunders urges us to QUOTE

"Curl up in your bed, on the floor, the backseat of a car, the plastic bench of a train. Open up a book and ... Fall so deeply into this imagined world, [that you] forget where you are. You stop hearing anything that isn't on the page in front of you." UNQUOTE

CLICK - What does getting lost in a book feel like? Saunders relates that QUOTE Getting lost in a book is like getting hit by a truck, like waking up at 10 pm from a nap. It is disorienting beyond belief, startling, and life affirming. UNQUOTE

It is not only book sellers who urge us to

CLICK – Get Lost in a Book. And it is not only book publishers who print posters exclaiming that

CLICK – It's ok to get lost in a book.

CLICK – The British government's health information website, Health Exchange Dot org, recently told its citizens to make

CLICK – Today's Resolution: Get Lost Reading a Book

CLICK - A recent article on the website io9, which, ironically enough, focuses on the subjects of science, and technology, and futurism, asks

CLICK – Does anybody read books the right way anymore?

Which the author explains as QUOTE "I am not talking about paper versus digital. I'm talking about curling up with a good book **FOR HOURS**. Sitting in a hammock, or in a chair by the fire, just totally pulled into a book. Is the long, totally focused book-reading session a thing of the past?" UNQUOTE

Indeed in the past, people who curled up with a good book for hours were considered

CLICK – **bookworms**. There was an erroneous belief that adults, and in particular, children who loved to read books for hours on end

CLICK -- Were lonely and friendless

CLICK -- and didn't know how to play.

But no empirical study ever bore out those erroneous beliefs. For example, a 1927 study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* reported that children whose favorite activity was reading books, were just as likely as children whose favorite activity was not reading books, to engage in playing games and having fun.

Similarly, a 1959 study reported that females, from age 10 to 29 who read for at least an hour a day – and who gasp! listened to the radio at least two hours a day – were just as likely to belong to youth clubs and associations, to organize festivities and gatherings; to participate in camps, picnics, and outdoor games.

However, as a child growing up in the 1950s, I can tell you, that most of our parents weren't on board with our reading books till the wee hours of the morning. Therefore, most of us book lovers developed the fine skill of

CLICK – reading under the blanket with a flashlight.

CLICK [and pause]

CLICK [and pause]

CLICK [and pause]

CLICK [and pause]

CLICK [and pause] Why do people want to read a book for hours, to devour the book from cover to cover? Why do people love to get lost in books?

For the same reason that people want to binge watch TV shows:

1. Because it's fun. When over 100 university students, who were avid readers were asked to indicate their primary motivation for reading, nearly 90% said QUOTE **"Because of the fun and enjoyment reading provides."** Similarly, a primary reason why avid TV-series watchers watch TV series is because it is fun to do so. It provides affective enjoyment.
2. Because it's available. Indeed, that's what the term Video on Demand means. In a two thousand and fourteen journal article titled, "The Netflix Effect," researcher Sidney Eve Matrix – what a great name! – reports that TV viewers are becoming increasingly less content to abide by traditional weekly and seasonal programming schedules. In the same way, avid book readers are not content to read for only 30 minutes a day. Book readers have access to the entire book, and they want to read it. Because it's available.
3. Because it allows developing deeper connections with the characters. Researcher Sidneyeve Matrix reports that episodes, which are viewed in rapid succession, allow viewers to bond with the shows' characters considerably more quickly.
4. Because it's already paid for. In a class of 120 undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 86% reported having access to Netflix in their apartment, house, or dorm room. Although the students weren't queried about whether they paid for the Netflix subscriptions themselves, someone paid for it. And subscription services, like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and the like, bank on the principle repeatedly demonstrated by restaurants. People are, for example, more likely to pay for a dessert if it is part of a package deal than if they have to pay for it separately.
5. Because it's usually commercial free. Binge watching, whether it be from DVD box sets or Netflix, comes without commercials that interrupt the flow of the show.

6. Because it's what many young people did as children. Disney executive Nance Kanter reports that QUOTE Diving into" a clump of episodes is a natural behavior for young children, because they "like to watch multiple episodes in a row and even the same episode over and over." At Amazon, 65% of the most replayed TV shows on its Prime Instant Video service are for children.
7. Because it's what everyone else is doing. In an undergraduate class of 120 students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 96% of the students report having watched more than one episode of a TV show in one day. Data released by Netflix show that for one of its most popular dramas, 25% of Netflix subscribers finished the entire 13-episode series in only two days.
8. Because it provides community. Researcher Sidney eve Matrix writes that QUOTE "the Netflix effect that enables weekend-long binges on Arrested Development is not just about convenience and customization ... but also about connection and community." Such community is also enjoyed among people who read the same book, which is why for decades we have had book clubs. In essence, we now have TV binge-watching clubs.
9. Because it enables a shared culture. In late February two thousand and fifteen, when Netflix released the fourth season of its hit show, House of Cards, the University of Wisconsin-Madison twitter feed took full advantage of the shared culture. Knowing that students would be tackling midterm papers, at this point in the semester, the twitter feed posted a vine of

CLICK – Frank Underwood rapping his infamous class ring on his desk, with a message intended to be culturally familiar among students,

CLICK – When you finally turn in that paper. **[Rap knuckles]**

10. Because it's becoming culturally acceptable. Researcher Matrix writes that QUOTE

Most mass-media reportage about television binge watching adopts the rhetoric of moral media panic to suggest that sustained TV spectatorship is a health risk.

For adult viewers, the choice to spend an evening or a weekend glued to the screen, immersed in consuming multiple episodes or even an entire season of television programs at once, is framed as a "guilty pleasure" or a "dirty secret" not unlike gorging on snack food.

Likewise, journalists compare episodes of Breaking Bad, Orange Is the New Black, and other popular Netflix binge-worthy fare regularly to potato chips—tasty for sure, impossible to stop snacking on after consuming." UNQUOTE.

But because the majority of the population is now ingesting their TV shows in larger than 30-minute bites, the notion of losing oneself in a TV show could well become as common as the notion of losing oneself in a book, which brings us to another common motivation for binge-watching:

11. To not be left out.

CLICK - FOMO. Need I say more? And lastly, one of the most common motivations for binge-watching is the basic, cognitive motivation

12. To find out what happens next. As one viewer of the TV show 24 recounts: "It was the worst, you just had to keep playing the next show, next hour, and then all of a sudden a day disappeared from your life. Then you finished a season and HAD to go get the next [it was] terrible but awesome."

But isn't all of that binge-watching bad for us? For as long as we've had media, there have been fears that too much media is bad for us.

CLICK- Sixteenth century British philosopher Francis Bacon believed that too much reading was bad for us.

But just as we currently advocate to

CLICK - Get Lost in a Book tonight, in 30 years, we will probably advocate to get lost in a good TV show. Because, as author Jim Davies explains, QUOTE "In the huge range of different human cultural inclinations, one of the most widespread is a fondness for stories. We just love to get lost in a good book or a good movie" or a good TV show – even a good series of TV shows.

CLICK and pause