

Prof: 'Twilight' film may really bring vampires to life for some

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The upcoming "Twilight" film may not only entertain moviegoers, but it also has the potential to encourage people to really believe in vampires, says a Purdue University mass media expert.

"Research on paranormal beliefs shows that when a fictional story is successfully presented in a realistic way, it can move people to believe or at least move them away from disbelief and toward more uncertainty about the supernatural," says Glenn Sparks, a professor of communication.

Sparks has published several studies about the effects supernatural television shows have on the way people form and adjust their beliefs about the supernatural. "This reminds me of what happened with the 1973 film 'The Exorcist.' Many people said they had never considered demon possession before, but some of those who saw the movie began thinking it was a possible phenomenon."

"Twilight" opens Nov. 21 and is based on the popular book series by Stephenie Meyer. The story, which is a romance and thriller, is about a teenage girl who falls in love with a vampire. Part of the storyline highlights vampires who are capable of living among humans. The film is rated PG-13.

In addition to realistic depictions increasing a person's belief in the supernatural, Sparks says the believability also is reinforced when the audience can relate to the characters.

"Regarding any paranormal belief, when something is depicted as real but it really isn't, there is always some general concern about that because it blurs the line between reality and impossibility," Sparks says. "This is certainly more likely with this film's young teenage audience."

Sparks, who also studies the scary effects of movies, recommends that parents research films in advance by viewing descriptions of their violent content at www.kids-in-mind.com/ . The Web site also ranks sex, nudity and profanity.

He also suggests that parents talk to their teenagers and younger children if they see the movie to get a sense of how a child understands the storyline and supernatural effects.

"Teenagers' belief systems are still forming, so they are more susceptible to being influenced by such films," he says.

Provided by Purdue University

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