

Monster shark movies harm shark conservation efforts

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Undeniably the shark movie to end all shark movies, the 1975

blockbuster "Jaws" not only smashed box office expectations, but forever changed the way we felt about going into the water—and how we think about sharks.

Now, more than 40 years (and 100+ shark movies) on, people's fear of sharks persists, with researchers at the University of South Australia concerned about the [negative impact](#) that shark movies are having on conservation efforts of this often-endangered animal.

In a world-first study, conservation psychology researchers, UniSA's Dr. Briana Le Busque and Associate Professor Carla Litchfield have evaluated how sharks are portrayed in movies, finding that 96 percent of shark films are overtly portraying sharks as a threat to humans.

Dr. Le Busque says sensationalized depictions of sharks in [popular media](#) can unfairly influence how people perceive sharks and harm conservation efforts.

"Most of what people know about sharks is obtained through movies, or the news, where sharks are typically presented as something to be deeply feared," Dr. Le Busque says.

"Since "Jaws," we've seen a proliferation of monster shark movies—"Open Water," "The Meg," "47 Meters Down," "Sharknado"—all of which overtly present sharks as terrifying creatures with an insatiable appetite for human flesh. This is just not true.

"Sharks are at much greater risk of harm from humans than humans from sharks, with global shark populations in [rapid decline](#), and many species at risk of extinction.

"Exacerbating a fear of sharks that's disproportionate to their actual threat damages [conservation efforts](#), often influencing people to support

potentially harmful mitigation strategies.

"There's no doubt that the legacy of "Jaws" persists, but we must be mindful of how films portray sharks to capture movie-goers. This is an important step to debunk shark myths and build shark conservation," she concludes.

More information: Brianna Le Busque et al, Sharks on film: an analysis of how shark-human interactions are portrayed in films, *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/10871209.2021.1951399](https://doi.org/10.1080/10871209.2021.1951399)

Provided by University of South Australia

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