Let’s Talk About Death!

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As scholars, we can learn a lot from popular media about how to attract and share our research with a broad audience. These popular forms of entertainment have long been using academic work for their own benefit.

Popular media has demonstrated that the public has an interest in archaeology, especially the morbid and unusual finds. But how do we do this?

**Popular Media’s Good Behavior**

- Titles grab your attention
- Short and to the point stories
- Tells an engaging story using variety of voices and historical references

**Popular Media’s Bad Behavior**

- Sources are not always shared
- Evidence and methods not provided
- Often focus on single (most sensational) conclusion, not the variety of possible interpretation

Through blogging, we can leverage the popularity and sensationalism of popular media for our own benefit, correct the misconceptions, and provide an accessible expert voice.

Here, I demonstrate three case studies in blogging where sensational news was used to open conversations about mortuary archaeology.

**Discussion**

Vampires do not exist, but past peoples did have fears about supernatural entities that may have sucked blood, and their actions did effect treatment of the deceased. However, conceptions varied differently from ours, and we can’t assume that all deviant burials are vampires.

**Discussion**

What is more fascinating than aliens is that human skulls can be shaped in this way! In Ancient Peru, these elongated skulls were a symbol of elite identity. The individuals who claim these are aliens never released the evidence and only share it on their expensive alien tour.

**Discussion**

Anthropophagy is the act of humans eating other human beings. It can be ritualistic, to violate or venerate the dead, or nutritive, meant to provide sustenance during times of starvation. Our modern taboo against the practice can lead to non-contextual and biased interpretation.