

We actually 'become' happy vampires or contented wizards when reading a book

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Bad news for muggle parents! A new study by psychologists at the University at Buffalo finds that we more or less "become" vampires or wizards just by reading about them.

The good news is that, although we might think our teeth are a little sharper after a session with "Twilight," reading satisfies a deeply felt need for human connection because we not only feel like the characters we read about but, psychologically speaking, become part of their world and derive emotional benefits from the experience.

"Becoming a Vampire Without Being Bitten: The Narrative Collective Assimilation [Hypothesis](#)," published in the current issue journal [Psychological Science](#), presents research supporting the authors' hypothesis that by absorbing narratives, we can psychologically become a member of the group of characters described therein, a process that makes us feel connected to those characters and their social world.

Authors Shira Gabriel, PhD, associate professor of psychology at UB, and Ariana Young, a UB [graduate student](#) working in the field of [social psychology](#), also found that the sense of belonging that results from assimilating narratives provokes the same feelings of satisfaction and happiness we would have if we actually were part of the world described.

"Social connection is a strong, human need," Gabriel says, "and anytime we feel connected to others, we feel good in general, and feel good about our lives. Our study results demonstrate that the assimilation of a

narrative allows us to feel close to others in the comfort of our own space and at our own convenience.

"In our subjects, this led to a reported increase in [life satisfaction](#) and positive mood, which are two primary outcomes of belonging," she says.

To test their hypothesis Gabriel and Young asked 140 UB undergraduate students to read for 30 minutes from one of two popular books, "Twilight" and "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." Participants then completed a series of questionnaires that tested their conscious and unconscious responses to the [narratives](#).

As predicted, on both conscious and unconscious measures, participants who read "Harry Potter" identified with the wizards and their world and those who read "Twilight" identified with the vampires and the realm they inhabited.

Their subjects not only connected with the characters or groups they read about, however. They adopted the behaviors, attitudes and traits that they could realistically approximate, leaving aside the bloodsucking and broomstick flying.

"This study suggests that books give us more than an opportunity to tune out and submerge ourselves in a fantasy world," Gabriel says.

"They give us a chance to feel like we belong to something bigger than us and to reap the benefits that result from being a part of that larger realm without having a 'real' social encounter."

She says, "When we enter the narrative (whether through a book, movie, radio or television show), we don't 'become' Harry or Edward, of course, but we do become a member of their world. That feels really good and it changes us."

"Research has found that when we are with a group of our 'real' friends, we shift our behavior to be more like them. We now know that this occurs when we read a book, as well," Young adds.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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