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NEWS



Tuesday April 14, 2015

Zombie Family Values

Researchers studying the first three seasons of the AMC hit show *The Walking Dead* found the show and its characters push family as the best hope for the end times, rather than government, science or religion, and this redefinition of

the zombie genre can help explain how the show has amassed its 14-million-per-episode fan base.

"'Family,' according to *The Walking Dead*, matters most at the end of the day — and at the end of the world. Government and its science programs cannot save us," according to a study by Joshua Ambrosius, assistant political science professor, and Joseph Valenzano III, communication professor.

The journal *Communication Monographs* will publish "People in Hell Want Slurpees: The Redefinition of the Zombie Genre through the Salvific Portrayal of Family on AMC's *The Walking Dead*" April 14. *The Walking Dead*, which recently completed its fifth season and currently is the most-watched cable television show, is about a group of survivors enduring a zombie apocalypse in the American South.

Ambrosius and Valenzano watched all 35 episodes of *The Walking Dead*'s first three seasons twice and documented references to four social institutions that appear prominently in the show: science, religion, government and family.

They found, rather than *The Walking Dead* supporting the traditional 'leftist and subversive' critique of capitalism, individualism and Western society, the show displays a shift within the zombie genre that now prioritizes family as the central societal institution. The pair discovered the show presents but discredits science, religion and government as sources of salvation — just as the American public today is demonstrating less confidence in scientific, religious and political institutions.

In addition to the importance of family, Ambrosius and Valenzano also found *The Walking Dead* embraces alternative definitions of family other than the traditional nuclear family.

"Despite some Americans today trying to live as a 'family of one,' this option becomes increasingly difficult after the apocalypse. Characters who lose loved ones quickly learn they must find a new family or risk the fate of the 'walkers,'" according to Ambrosius and Valenzano.

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Photo credit: AMC TV, The Walking Dead