

Sharks: Myths in Society vs. The Facts

Anonymous

English Department, ARCC

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Prof. McCarthy

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When someone brings up sharks what is the first thing you think of? You probably think of a mindless man eater blood thirsty killing machine that will eat anything in their way. Let's look at the movie *Jaws* or *Meg* because they are perfect examples of how the media has depicted sharks in a poor way. They depicted sharks as man eaters and that they will actively hunt humans. People that are scared of sharks would rather have them dead than keep them alive to help the ocean. These movies are portraying sharks in a very horror movie like way which is why I can understand how people are so afraid of them. I would be too if I didn't know what they were actually like. What you need to know about sharks is they don't like to attack humans or eat them. They prefer fish blood over human blood, they are just curios animals and unique animals, and they are a major part of the ecosystem. Sharks are beautiful creatures that don't deserve to be endangered.

Let's start with the biggest thing most people are scared of when they think about sharks. They think they are going to be attacked if a shark gets anywhere near them. I don't have a problem with them being scared of a shark getting close, but they can only be dangerous if you act in the wrong way, most sharks can't even attack you. In the article "Do sharks hunt people?" The people from NOAA (2023) says, "Only about a dozen of the more than 300 species of sharks have been involved in attacks on humans. Sharks evolved millions of years before humans existed and therefore humans are not part of their normal diets." They prove that humans are not on the shark's diet so if they got a choice between a platter of fish or a platter of human, they would pick the fish almost 10 out of 10 times. Another thing the people from NOAA (2023) says, "Sharks have been known to attack humans when they are confused or curious. If a shark sees a human splashing in the water, it may try to investigate, leading to an accidental attack." This means that if you see a shark the worst thing you can do is panic and make commotion

because the way sharks check out stuff when they are curious is they take a nibble out of it. That's why most shark attacks are not fatal. Another thing you need to watch out for is if you are surfing. Surfing is when most shark attacks happen because you are splashing around, and your silhouette can be mistaken as a seal and seals are one of the main foods for some sharks. In the news article "Hawaii Man Punches Shark in Face, 'I'm Not Gonna Die Today'" they interviewed Joshua Holley (2012) who was surfing a shark came up and bit his left foot and all he did was hit the shark in a sensitive spot like the nose, or the gills if you have to. Now in the article "How Many Sharks Are Killed a Year." Ryan Ballard (2013) says, "Experts estimate that humans kill over 100 million sharks every year throughout the globe." That number is insane compared to how many humans are killed by sharks ever year, Ryan Ballard (2013) then says "Each year, around six to eight humans are killed by sharks. The ratio of 100 million to 6 doesn't seem so bad, huh?" We should not fear sharks at all with those numbers, instead sharks should fear us 100 times more than we fear them.

To go along with the last point, many people are scared of sharks because they think they are blood thirsty killers. Another thing I have heard people say is sharks can detect a drop of blood from a mile away so if you bleed at all in the ocean sharks will be attracted and come looking for you. They are partially true sharks have a really good sense of smell, but they can't detect blood from a mile away and most sharks will probably ignore the smell of human or land mammal blood. In the article "How Far Can Sharks Smell Blood?" experts from American Oceans (n.d.) say, "The shark's sense of smell is so powerful that they can detect a drop of blood in an Olympic-sized swimming pool." So, sharks don't have the ability to smell blood from a mile away but still very far. But would they go after it if it was human blood vs. Fish blood. In the YouTube video "Shark Attack Test- Human Blood vs. Fish Blood" Mark Rober (2020) did an experiment where he had multiple surfboards with five gallon tanks on them one with fish

blood, one with human blood, one with just salt water as a control to see if they were just interested in the surfboard and they would pump one drop of each every fifteen seconds. Out of three five-gallon tanks in an hour 0 sharks went to the saltwater control surfboard, 8 sharks went to the human blood surfboard, and 134 sharks went to the fish blood surfboard. This is a prime example that sharks are not very interested in human blood, and it isn't the surfboards they are attracted to it is the movement of a person splashing on top of it, but they loved the fish blood which shows they would prefer fish blood instead of human blood. Even with the very low count of sharks going to human blood you shouldn't swim while bleeding because bleeding is usually not a good thing.

Another myth about sharks I have heard is people saying they are all the same, or they are all voracious predators, or the only good shark is a dead shark. I get if you're scared most people will resort to fight or flight but to kill off a whole species is extreme because there is so many different sharks and only a couple are responsible for attacks, and a lot of bad things could happen if we just kill off the sharks. In "Shark Myths vs. Facts" in response to these some of these myths Oceana (n.d.) says, "There are approximately 500 shark species, but only three (white, tiger and bull) are responsible for the majority of all bites." In total there are only about a dozen sharks that can physically bite a human but like Oceana said great white, tiger and bull sharks are the top contributors. Another thing Oceana said "Sharks play a vital role in keeping marine ecosystems balanced and healthy. Additionally, sharks help coastal economies through ecotourism. Many people are willing to pay large sums of money for the opportunity to dive with sharks." If we just start killing sharks it could cause many fish species to become overpopulated which will cause a major unbalance in many other organisms in the ocean. Andy Cornish (2021) explains other reasons why we need sharks in the article "Shark conservation: An expert explains why they matter to the ocean and need protection." Cornish (2021) says "Creatures that perform

these vertical migrations also help mix the different ocean layers, dragging up nutrient-rich water from the depths and helping to oxygenate and expand the most productive top layer.” Without sharks we lose a main creature that migrates so we would lose a chunk of nutrient rich water. Another thing Corish (2021) talks about is if there was an absence of a natural predator of a sea turtle, they would stay and eat sea grass for much longer than they would with a predator present which results in less carbon absorbing grass so lots more carbon in the atmosphere which is not good.

This is a less popular thing, but I have heard a lot of people say that sharks have small brains which means they have little to no personality. This one puzzled me the most because if they had small brains, they would not be close to the top of the food chain, and if they had no personality then every shark would behave the same way. In the article “Shark Myths vs. Facts” Oceana says, “Sharks and rays have some of the largest brains among all fish, with brain-to-body ratios similar to birds and mammals.” Sharks have a brain to body ratio of 1:2496. Even though humans have a 1:40 brain to body ratio, sharks are one of the highest of all fish. In a study called “New Study Finds Bull Sharks Form Social Relationships” Juerg Bunnenschweiler (2021) Says “these sharks really have a very strong personality. And they're sneaky, and they maybe try to get a piece of food which - you know, coming from behind and try to sneak in and, you know, bump you slightly and in a gentle way.” He has been studying the same 100 sharks for 20 years and he never used cages only free dived, and he would feed them 2 times a day and he would just observe them. If bull sharks are being social and they are one of the main sharks that mistakenly attack humans so if one of the more “dumber” sharks are showing personality you could only imagine the more complex shark personalities that could be seen if we did more experiments.

Another big reason most people that are scared of sharks are scared of them because of their razor-sharp teeth. The razor-sharp teeth are only true in some species of sharks. In the

article “Sharks” The Ocean Portal Team (n.d.) talks about sharks and how they evolved from 400 million years ago which was long before dinosaurs, and how they know when they swam the oceans were their teeth because they shed them a lot. If you are scared of shark teeth you at least know what type of animal it came from, because people that were scared of shark teeth way before now thought they were “petrified dragon tongues” The Ocean Portal Team (2018). Some of the largest fish in the ocean are sharks and they are unable to consume humans. Whale sharks are the largest fish in the ocean, and they have teeth, but they are super small. They don’t even use them for eating, how they eat is they filter Planton and krill out from the ocean. For being a shark and being the biggest fish in the ocean, and they can’t even eat, and digest humans. How can you be scared of them?

After all these myths being proven wrong the only reason, I am writing this is to encourage you to be more open about sharks and support them because we are actively driving them to extinction. While I wrote this, I proved myself wrong with the myth that sharks could smell a drop of blood from a mile away. I grew up thinking this was true. Anyway, hopefully after reading this you will look back at the movies you have seen about sharks and just know they aren’t true, and you can swim freely.

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