

The term “zombie” is a widely used metaphor in today’s society. Everyone is familiar with the concept of the classical Romero zombie, and the term can be used as a metaphor to describe concepts like insects that hijack other insect’s bodies or Ritalin-riddled children.

In the National Geographic article *Meet 5 "Zombie" Parasites That Mind-Control Their Hosts*, author Mary Bates often uses zombification to describe the process of parasitic insects taking control of other insects’ bodies. Bates states that these parasites “manipulate their hosts from within, causing them to act in self-destructive ways that ultimately benefit the parasite.” She postures that, while zombies may still be just a piece of fiction, these insects turn their hosts into the walking dead.

Bates’ use of zombie metaphor in this article is very effective, as it immediately grabs a readers’ attention and gives the reader a bit of imagery to help imagine the gruesome processes some insects endure or inflict on others. When Bates calls these instances of parasitism zombification, she is carefully choosing her words. She could have compared the parasites to terrorists hijacking a train, but she instead chooses to use a word that is far enough ingrained into the cultural zeitgeist that it is effective, but also far enough removed from reality to avoid offending readers.

This use of the term zombie in this article references a zombie’s lack of free will and self-preservation instincts. For example, in part of her article, Bates describes a parasitic fluke that reproduces inside the intestines of waterfowl. *“The fluke needs to get inside the gut of a water bird in order to reproduce. So inside the killifish's brain, the fluke releases chemicals that cause the fish to shimmy, jerk, and jump. These moves attract the attention of birds, which may eat the fish—and the flukes. The flukes mate, and their eggs are released back into the water in the bird's droppings to be eaten by horn snails and start the cycle anew.”* A zombie acts in a similar way to the above-described killifish. Zombies are stripped of their free will by whatever vector is causing their zombification, and the killifish are stripped of their free will and motor skills by the parasitic fluke that infects its brain. The way in which the fish abandons all self-preservation instincts also mirrors the way a zombie will mindlessly attack people, often leading them into obvious traps or swinging blades. The insects that are controlled by the parasites in this article are very similar to historical zombis, which stem from Haitian Voodoo. According to Haitian

lore, when a person's soul is stolen by a boku, the victim's body becomes nothing more than a vessel for the boku to use (typically as farmhands).

PBS published a multi-authored article about Ritalin use in children. In his section of the article, author Harold Koplewicz claims that, when given Ritalin *"kids will become more zombie-like; they seem to lose their spark. They don't seem to be as fresh and as with it. In those cases... even though the child's able to pay attention, you've lost the essence of who that child is."* "Zombie syndrome" is mentioned later in the text, by co-author William Dodson. Dodson remarks *"It is true that if a dose is too high, the child will have side effects. They will, perhaps, get what they call the 'zombie syndrome,' in which they do become dull. But that can be removed almost immediately by lowering the dose."* This is a very common metaphor used by society, particularly by rhetoricians who are speaking out against overmedicating youths; comparing the little children of America to soulless, empty bodies helps to highlight the negative effect that many people believe these drugs have. Koplewicz's use of zombie metaphor here focuses on the tropes of zombies as emotionless husks. A common trait of zombies is that they mindlessly shamble from place to place, unable to think about anything except for eating. When a parent puts their child on medication, they have their child's best interest in mind, and one of their worst fears is to put their children into more danger.

While metaphors are very useful and creative ways to describe a topic, inappropriate metaphor use can oversimplify a topic and turn off readers to an article.

In the 2012 article *Marching to Dementia*, author Bill Sardi refers to Alzheimer's patients as zombies. Sardi postures *"by the year 2040 there may be as many as 80 million human zombies on the planet, adults who have lost their memory, ability to communicate, make judgments and live independently."* While I certainly see the comparisons drawn by Sardi, and I found the rest of his article (which discusses pharmaceuticals available to Alzheimer's patients) informative and interesting, his early use of metaphor that compares Alzheimer's patients to zombies oversimplified the disease and disinterested me in the rest of the article. Sardi's description makes me imagine people suffering from Alzheimer's as nothing more than shambling corpses with no mind of their own; it degrades people who are already incredibly degraded and trapped in their bodies.

Metaphors are a very powerful piece of rhetoric, and often greatly help to illustrate an author's point. When used properly, a metaphor paints a picture in a reader's mind and highlights points that an audience member may not have previously seen. If used incorrectly, however, metaphors can turn a reader off to a piece, even if the metaphor seems to fit.

WORKS CITED

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