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Talking With Exotic Pet Owners:
Exploratory Audience Research on Wildlife Television and Human-Animal Interactions

by

Susannah L. Smith

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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TALKING WITH EXOTIC PET OWNERS:
EXPLORATORY AUDIENCE RESEARCH ON WILDLIFE TELEVISION
AND HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS

Susannah L. Smith

ABSTRACT

This qualitative grounded study explores the potential relationship between wildlife TV viewing and human-animal interactions for exotic pet owners. The method involved 13 in-depth interviews and a qualifying open-ended questionnaire with 37 individuals. The interviews gathered viewers' interpretations of two different human-wildlife interactions on TV and served as a launching point for discussion. Findings supported the literature in that wildlife TV was an important source of information, emotion, and contradictory messages. Themes also emerged regarding participants' characterizations of their relationships with their pets. Drawing from social cognitive theory, this thesis suggests the following potential motivators for participants to model animal interactions as seen on screen: 1) visual instruction that increases viewer efficacy; 2) identification with the spokesperson; and 3) emotional connection to the animal. The study concludes with preliminary recommendations for wildlife programming on TV.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

There was plenty of decent merchandise at the Noah's Land Wildlife Park auction in October 1997, including zebras, monkeys, and a variety of carnivores...a woman with no animal-care experience emerged as the high bidder for a quartet of adult bears. The animals were housed in a chain-link enclosure, and following her triumphant bid the winner reached in to pet one of the bears on the head...the shaggy mammal jerked its head and, in a flash, bit at her hand. The terrified woman—too stunned even to scream—yanked her arm from the cage, and...two middle fingers had been bitten off.

*—Green, *Animal Underworld: Inside America's Black Market for Rare and Exotic Species*, 1999, p.160*

On March 5, 2008, the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service testified before Congress, stating that the United States is “a major consumer nation in the wildlife trade black market” (Perez, 2008, p. 2). This is not only a threat to many species and native habitats, but interactions with wildlife are dangerous to humans as well (Ebrahim & Solomon, 2006). Exotic pets, whether they are reptiles, birds, cats, or other large carnivores, sometimes attack their owners. In addition to an increased interest in wildlife, wildlife television programs often feature exotic animals in ways that viewers may perceive them as approachable. The deaths of two celebrated wildlife

television professionals, Steve Irwin and Timothy Treadwell, have prompted discussion regarding the potential for viewers to emulate their wildlife interactions as seen on television. In fact, a wilderness ranger from Katmai, Alaska, reported people approaching bears and following them, apparently trying to mimic the behavior of Treadwell (Lee, 2005).

This thesis grows out of an earlier exploratory pilot study where I interviewed 10 animal enthusiasts and found that wildlife television potentially provided an emotional connection for viewers with animals on screen. This study uses 13 in-depth interviews and 37 responses to a qualifying open-ended questionnaire to explore exotic pet owners' relationships to wildlife television and their animals. Findings supported the literature in that wildlife television was not only an important source of information for this particular group of exotic pet owners but also provided a potential emotional connection with animals. The role of television in developing an emotional connection between viewer and animal remains unexplored in the literature. I frame this study with social cognitive theory because the emotional connection, as well as the visual instruction and relating to the spokesperson, may be potential motivators for viewers to mimic the animal interaction as seen on television.

Background

It is estimated that the number of exotic animals *legally* transported into the United States between 2002-2005 was more than twice the number of people living in the country (Ebrahim & Solomon, 2006). Impossible to track is the number of animals that die in order for one to make it to the border alive. Once here, the lifespan is usually shortened due to the animals' lack of proper care. While most of the illegally imported

wildlife may not make it alive, some wild parrots and rare reptiles brought in as pets carry zoonotic diseases that can transfer to humans (Ebrahim & Solomon, 2006). Interactions with wild animals, both native and exotic, are also quite dangerous to humans. The owner of a wildlife sanctuary in Florida was hospitalized after being attacked by two of her cheetahs (Burdi, 2008). In 2005, wild alligators in Florida killed three people in just one week (Lemonick, 2006).

It also has been noted that audiences may see wildlife only on television and believe that wild animals are approachable. Bartlebaugh, founder of the Center for Wildlife Information, sees a direct connection between humans feeding animals on screen and in the wild. And, he stresses, it is dangerous for both the person and the animal: “Currently there is over \$100 million being spent to give the public the impression it’s okay to approach, follow, interact with, touch and feed wildlife...it’s become the up close and personal generation of wildlife” (as cited in Kelly, 2005, p. 2).

Palmer, director of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking, claims: “Many presenter-led programs have gotten out-of-hand as hosts will seemingly do anything to try to achieve high ratings with super-charged and constant excitement” (2008, p. 1). He points to lower production costs along with the sensationalism of interacting with captive animals on screen as motivators for this genre to flourish. Even further, he has questioned the ethics of interacting with wild animals and the potential effects this may have on viewers. Palmer remarked, “How ironic that films made by people who are trying to further our understanding of wildlife are a leading cause of bear mortality” (p. 77).

While on-camera wildlife experts may want their audience to become passionate about animals, instead viewers may go out and mimic the same behaviors seen on television. These on-camera interactions often portray wildlife as pets and may encourage people to pursue animals in their own backyards. The ethics of wildlife television are garnering attention as the genre is becoming more marketable to a general audience.

Wildlife television is a genre that must be defined. Traditionally there has been a distinction between classic wildlife filmmaking and the development of the nonfiction genres of wildlife television (Chris, 2006). The major categories of wildlife programming in both film and television have been identified as: *blue-chip*, *heroic/adventure*, *welfare*, and *conservation* (Webber, 2002). Clark (2006) extends these to include *expert and wildlife*, *action-adventure*, *library*, and *children/family*.

What differentiates these categories is the presence of a narrator, the focus and complexity of the educational material, and other factors relating to the focus of the show's entertainment. For example, *blue-chip* is a film industry term that refers to natural history documentaries known for their sweeping expanses of wild places accompanied by voice-over, but there is no on-camera host (Cottle, 2004).

In *action-adventure* shows, the presenter is actually at the center of the drama, as the late Steve Irwin was in *Crocodile Hunter*. These shows, with the focus on people interacting with wildlife, characterize the majority of programming available to viewers (Clark, 2006, p. 47). This trend of diversification of wildlife programming and the increased ratings associated with presenter-centered shows has been debated (see Chris, 2006; Cottle, 2004). Concern for the ethics of handling a wild animal is a key issue, especially when it means savings on a production that does not have to wait for the

animal to come to the camera crew. In addition, there is significant revenue generated when the host becomes a celebrity, as seen with Steve Irwin.

Also gaining in popularity is the portrayal of wildlife on television talk shows, a proposed subgenre that has not been analyzed. Usually, the appearances resemble *action-adventure* shows and often feature celebrity spokespeople. However, this is not the only case; amateurs often are featured with a trained animal. Whether this animal is wild-caught or a domestic pet often is not clear. In addition, zoos and aquariums often lend talk shows spokespeople to appear with animals from their facilities. This thesis is concerned with the distinction between animal-centered and presenter-centered wildlife television.

Viewer motivation may be linked to an emotional connection that up-close wildlife television potentially provides. While an emotional connection to animals has been linked to environmental concern (Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Vining, 2003), the role of television in developing an emotional connection between viewer and animal remains unexplained. This study explores how this emotional connection occurs and, if applicable, if it motivates viewers to interact with exotic animals.

Problem Statement

Social cognitive theory is the interpreting theoretical framework for this study, offering an in-depth look into the motivations behind human behavior. It also provides a multidisciplinary approach to wildlife conservation. A recent appeal has focused on the applicability of psychology in conservation biology: “New communication approaches and deeper understanding of human emotions, identities, attitudes, and values related to the natural world are some of the tools psychologists can offer” (Saunders, Brook, &

Myers, 2006, p. 702). This social psychological perspective significantly adds to the qualitative literature that addresses wildlife conservation and human behavior.

The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship of wildlife television to select individuals who interact with exotic animals. This study takes a multi-method approach. First, 13 in-depth interviews were conducted in which exotic pet owners discussed the perceived relationship between wildlife television and human-wildlife interactions. Then, 37 exotic pet owners responded to a qualifying open-ended questionnaire that clarified some of these interpretations.

During the in-depth interviews, the participants were asked about their media experiences. Participants watched two videos that served as launching points for discussion, in which they discussed their reactions. This form of media audience research explores participants' interpretations regarding a particular program and how it potentially reflects their sense of identities (Höijer, 2008). The videos represented two different genres of wildlife television that focused on the animal (animal-centered) and the interaction of the animal with the presenter (presenter-centered). The open-ended questionnaires gathered information on exotic pet owners' wildlife television viewing and their descriptions of their animals. This added a qualifying element to the interviewees' interpretations of human-wildlife interactions.

A qualitative method is necessary in which to delve into the meanings that emerged through each individual's experience. This study used in-depth interviews and responses from an open-ended questionnaire with exotic pet owners. It attempts to determine how emotion may serve as a motivating influence to model the behavior as

seen in wildlife television by using a grounded theory approach to describe emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A qualitative research design allows for the examination of particular viewer emotional reactions and how they may be translated into behaviors in their daily lives.

As the literature review that follows shows, wildlife television is a primary source of environmental knowledge and attitudes for Americans. It also has the potential to forge emotional connections between viewers and the animals on screen. How viewers interpret these experiences that combine entertainment, information, and emotion is dependant upon each individual's motivations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

With regard to this study, the literature suggests that wildlife television is an important source of information, provides an emotional connection, and contains contradictory messages. Research has long been conducted on the media's portrayal of environmental issues and explanations of science (Aldridge & Dingwall, 2003; Brother, Fortner & Mayer, 1991; Jeffries, 2003; McComas, Shanahan & Butler, 2001; McKibben, 1992). The genre of nature documentaries and natural history programming has also been analyzed extensively (Bousé, 2000; Chris, 2006; Cottle, 2004). The focus has been on the public representations of nature, as seen in the cultural narratives of wildlife film.

Some studies have questioned media's role in contributing to environmentalism regarding belief or attitude (Besley & Shanahan, 2004; Shanahan & McComas, 1999). Only recently, however, has there been a distinction between the types of wildlife programming and their potential effects on the audiences that watch them. This literature suggests that wildlife television: 1) is an important source of information for viewers; 2) provides a potential emotional connection for the viewer with the animal; and 3) gives an up-close view of animals that is unnatural and contradictory.

Wildlife Television: A Source of Information

Early research findings point to a negative relationship between television use and environmentalism (Novic & Sandman, 1974; Ostman & Parker, 1987). Current studies,

however, propose that *motivated* viewers use wildlife television as a prominent source of information. O’Keefe, Ward, and Shepard (2002) find that people used a variety of channels in seeking out environmental information. Viewers choose channels on the basis of not only availability and content, but also the channels’ ability to provide additional information to their existing knowledge. This suggests that talk show viewers—even when they are watching an animal interaction—may *not* be seeking out wildlife information.

Recent research also looks at the link between wildlife programming and viewer beliefs, and how they may lead to environmentally friendly behaviors (Clark, 2006; Holbert, Kwak & Shah, 2003). Key findings suggest that wildlife television is among the most important sources of animal information for the general public. In fact, Clark (2006) finds that viewing leads to a small positive contribution to viewers’ selected environmental actions. The determination of this behavior is influenced by a variety of factors. Not only individual interests but also the environment of engagement are factors that pre-determine the positive influence of a show.

Wildlife television shows that appear to have the greatest impact regarding encouraging conservation action among viewers are those that focus on the animals, not the *interaction* with the presenter (Clark, 2006; Holbert et al., 2003). However, the viewer’s existing attitudes and beliefs also play a part in leading to pro-environmental activities. Indeed, Holbert et. al (2003) confirm that preexisting environmental attitudes influence television viewing: “Those who show a concern for the environment will most likely consume programs that share their outlook and provide some information relevant to their concerns” (p. 182).

Viewer motivation is also present in a study on the viewing patterns of wildlife television in the lives of a population of African Americans and Hispanics (VanVelsor & Nilon, 2006). VanVelsor and Nilon (2006) find that media are an important source of information for the urban minorities in the study. In fact, 65% of their study participants also indicated that watching wildlife television account for much of their *emotional* responses toward animals. For example, some even recollect their fear at seeing animals, such as snakes, on screen. The authors conclude that a connection with wildlife depends upon “positive personal experiences with nature and wildlife in a safe and supportive environment” (p. 173).

Champ’s (2002) interviews suggest that wildlife media are not only informative and entertaining but serve as a “grounding” function for some viewers, in that they may serve as a connection to deeply held beliefs (p. 273). This adds to the discussion of the emotional dimension of the influence of wildlife media on people’s value orientations towards animals and the environment. Media not only have a growing influence on environmental attitudes in the United States, but also are regarded as forging valuable emotional responses from viewers.

Wildlife Television: The Emotional Connection

There may be a direct relationship between getting people to care about wildlife and protecting it. Social marketing and the emerging field of conservation psychology explore this relationship (see McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Monroe, 2003; Saunders, 2003; Vining, 2003). Some even point to a correlation between caring for an individual animal and caring for the natural world, but other factors that influence these relationships are

difficult to determine (Myers & Saunders, 2002). It is even more complex to describe what makes an individual act on behalf of the environment.

Mayer and Frantz (2004) use an ecopsychological perspective to enhance scientific views of the connection between humans and nature. Their findings emphasize that a person's oneness with nature is inherent, and that this is a predictive measure to a person performing environmental behaviors. Again, this emotional feeling of a connection to nature may be a potential motivating factor for a person's behavior. This is seen in the current study's group of participants in their descriptions of their relationships with wildlife.

If affective learning is based on an emotional connection with living things (Kellert, 1996), then wildlife television may play an integral role in cultivating an appreciation for wildlife conservation through provoking emotions. However, based on the previous research regarding conservation action, viewers tuning in to an entertainment-filled variety show are not necessarily suited toward wildlife conservation action. Without a predisposition to seeking wildlife information, viewers may not be engaged with enough environmental concern to learn from the conservation message delivered by the presenter.

Wildlife Television: Up-close and Contradictory View of Animals

The potential for a viewer to gain an emotional connection with a wild animal often depends upon an unnatural closeness that is contradictory to the verbal conservation message. Kellert (1996) introduces this contradictory nature of wildlife television:

Wildlife on film and television may constitute an anesthetized experience of nature fundamentally compromised by its occurrence within the comforts and

artificial confines of the human habitation. This encounter with wild lives is essentially contrived, divorced from the constraints, complexities, and realities of the real world. (p. 90)

Although he notes a positive change in wildlife film and television toward a more realistic portrayal of wildlife and the environment, there remains concern for views of animals that are too close. This may lead to a dangerous feeling of comfort between a viewer and a wild animal. Corbett (2006) reiterates this concern ten years later. She continues to emphasize the danger of this comfortable feeling:

When we watch gorillas in their forest “home,” we’re tempted to say that we “know” gorillas because we saw them in their habitat doing their own thing. But in reality, the camera has presented us with an unnatural, atypical view....

Wildlife movies also promise that we can view nature without getting involved in it—as if the bison will stand politely for its photo and not “interact” with you. (p. 128)

Often the spokesperson asks the viewer not to interact with a wild animal, yet the camera is making eye contact with it. Bousé (2003) continues this line of questioning regarding the personal experience a viewer may receive during such an up-close animal encounter. He contemplates whether seeing dangerous animals at a “stroking distance” potentially “invites feelings of intimacy” that could lead to misinterpretations (p. 124).

He brings up two issues relevant to this discussion. First, he refers to the “highly artificial” access that television provides through these close camera angles. He argues that the focus is on the emotional quality of the story and not in portraying the animals in a realistic way. What results is an “*impossible* intimacy” that may resemble our

experiences shared with our domestic pets, not that of a wild and possibly dangerous animal (p. 125).

The second issue results from these emotional ties. Bousé (2003) suggests that even if viewers relate to animals in an empathetic way, this may not necessarily translate into actions to protect wildlife. Kellert (1996) also notes uncertainty as to the effects of televised animal encounters that are unrealistic: “It remains uncertain how much this vicarious experience can positively shape people’s values of nature and living diversity” (p. 90). The camera provides an unnatural view of wild animals that is not only potentially dangerous; it may give viewers a positive emotional connection similar to what they share with their pet dog. This represents a shift in research to focus how this emotional connection translates into viewer motivation and its potential influence on human behavior.

In this thesis, participants were selected because they already have exhibited the behavior of interest; as exotic pet owners, they have already interacted with a potentially dangerous animal. This takes us to a focus on the viewer and the components involved when discussing the potential influence of media on human motivations for behavior. Even further and more specific to the proposed study is social cognitive theory in which the nature of learning from mass media is examined. Following is a description and how it provides the theoretical framework from which to examine these potential effects of wildlife television.

Social Cognitive Theory

Wildlife film and television programs often feature a spokesperson interacting with wildlife. While the programs are frequently accompanied by a verbal conservation message, an underlying visual instruction may be taking place. According to SCT and modeling, viewers may actually be learning how to interact with wildlife by simply watching. It is possible that this, in effect, provides viewers with the efficacy to carry out the same activity on their own. In addition, SCT predicts that people who most identify with the spokesperson are more likely to model the behavior.

The influence of mass media on human behavior has always been a prominent debate within the field of mass communication. It is also of interest in the field of psychology, among others, in which experts explore the variables that potentially influence the actions of humans. SCT uses a social psychological foundation for explaining human behaviors. It applies a dynamic model that reaches into the realm of mass communication. Bandura's famous Bobo doll experiments (1977) suggest that children will learn a rewarded behavior through observation, and represent his early work on social learning theory, which serves as the foundation for SCT.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) involves a continuous reciprocal relationship between peoples' inner forces and external influences. A basis for this explanation is the power of *modeling*. Different from imitation, modeling is not a simple, immediate form of mimicry. There are three effects of modeling influences: 1) *observational learning effect*—when people learn new behaviors from watching others perform them, 2) *inhibitory effects* on previously learned responses from watching others being rewarded or punished for their actions (as seen with the aggression in the Bobo doll

experiment), and 3) *disinhibitory effects* on formerly inhibited behavior after observing people perform threatening behavior without being punished (as viewed when phobias dissipate as people watch others successfully deal with them) (p. 6). The observational learning effect applies to this thesis in that viewers may actually learn how to hand-feed grapes to a bear after seeing it done on television.

Modeling is successful because it shortens the acquisition process. Imagine learning how to operate a tractor through trial and error. This would not only be tedious and inefficient, but dangerous. It would be easier, and safer, to watch someone operate it first. Bandura (1977) states:

It follows from social learning theory that observational learning can be achieved more effectively by informing observers in advance about the benefits of adopting modeled behavior than by waiting until they happen to imitate a model and then rewarding them for it. (p. 37)

Learning still involves reinforcement, but allows for it to be *delayed* and for behaviors to be learned *before* they are performed. A core belief is *efficacy*: “Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (p. 270).

Perceived efficacy not only affects people’s actions, but also their outlook on themselves, their environment, and on other people. It is about people striving to take control of the elements in their lives and to be able to exert influence: “Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act” (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Internal incentives, such as efficacy, may be just as powerful as external, or social, ones.

In wildlife television, this applies to the pet-like image of an exotic animal on a leash. If people see a wild animal handled the same way as a dog, they may feel like they can handle one just as easily. When people are successful at an activity, it allows them to acquire the tools necessary for future actions, thus enhancing their perceived abilities. *Vicarious verification* provided by social models also allow for people to strengthen their efficacy beliefs: “Because in most activities, appraisal of one’s own capabilities depends more on how well others perform in similar situations than on the performance alone, vicarious verification is especially influential in the development of self-knowledge” (Bandura, 1986, p.511).

Symbolic modeling becomes an efficient way for people to acquire knowledge through others’ actions. Media play a powerful role in providing people with this constructed reality, making the transmission different from a simple mimicking of behavior. Bandura argues that people have a limited reality from which to draw—they travel to and from the same places of work, school, and family: “Because the symbolic environment occupies a major part of people’s everyday lives, much of the social construction of reality and shaping of public consciousness occurs through electronic acculturation” (2001, p. 271). This suggests that people who depend upon the images of reality in the media are socially impacted by it even further. The efficacy of symbolic modeling is one of the integral components that connects SCT to its role in mass communication.

Also important is the understood similarity with the model: “Seeing people similar to themselves succeed by perseverant effort raises observers’ beliefs that they, too, possess the capabilities to master comparable activities” (Bandura, 2001, p. 3).

Research explores the powerful connection between children's and adolescents' television viewing with their perceived self-identification (Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007). Eyal and Rubin (2003) find a correlation between viewers' aggressive disposition and their identification with television characters of the same nature. According to SCT, aggressive characters may reinforce the aggressive inclinations of those viewers.

In addition, adults are viewed as subject to the powerful symbolic environment of media just as much as children (Stern, 2005). In advertising, it is assumed that adults' consumer behavior will be affected by social modeling. Bandura states, "Seeing others gain desired outcomes by their actions can create outcome expectancies that function as positive incentives; observed punishing outcomes can create negative outcome expectancies that function as disincentives" (2001, p.276). This applies to some the participants in the present study: they may see themselves as similar to the spokesperson and may be motivated to model the behavior.

For *some* people, mass media provide a constructed reality that allows for social learning. Symbolic modeling becomes an efficient way for people to acquire knowledge vicariously through others' experiences. The transmission is different from a simple mimicking of behavior. People go through highly individualized processes before they are apt to follow, retain, and behave as the exhibited modeling.

SCT applies a dynamic model by which to interpret human-wildlife interactions on film and television. It combines a concern for media content with an emphasis on audience variables. This predicts that certain people, in a particular environment, will

model behavior they see on television if they see it is being reinforced and if they believe they can successfully do it.

The theory is based on a multidirectional and mutually dependent relationship: the environment shapes people and they shape it as well. Therefore, SCT identifies human behavior as being dynamic. Bandura's (1986) model (see *Figure 1.*) recognizes that this is an ever-changing relationship, in which one influences the other. Different circumstances dictate the shift in power of influencing variables. It is a mutually dependent relationship: the environment shapes people and they shape it as well.

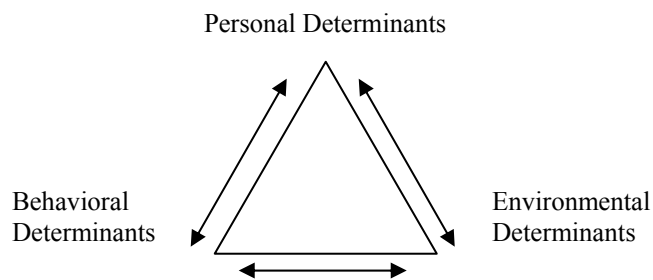


Figure 1. Triadic Reciprocal Causation (Bandura, 2001, p.266)

Each of the determinants is in constant adaptation with the others, and relies upon each other to be regulated. For example, personal determinants include emotional and biological dispositions that may be altered due to the environment. Watching television with friends at a bar is different from watching at home alone. In addition, the perceived rewards—whether immediate or predicted—has an impact on the behavioral determinants.

This thesis focuses on the personal and behavioral determinants as reflected in the participants' interpretations of wildlife television. Potentially, an emotional connection to the animal could serve as a motivational process. The selected population of this thesis

revealed particular individuals who may have relevant emotional reactions. In addition, these viewers may respond to the emotions on-screen in a vicarious way:

What gives significance to vicarious influence is that observers can acquire lasting attitudes, emotional reactions, and behavioral proclivities toward persons, places, or things that have been associated with modeled emotional experiences. They learn to fear things that frighten models, to dislike what repulsed them, and to like what gratified them. (Bandura, 2001, p. 280)

Thus, a powerful motivating factor is the combination of relevant social relationships with a heightened emotional value. This would be exemplified when a viewer experiences an emotional reaction to an animal spokesperson that is respected and admired.

Combining the notion of self-efficacy with the emotional element in respect to fear also applies to the contradictory nature of wildlife programming. For example, Bandura notes this powerful combination: “Fears and intractable phobias are ameliorated by modeling influences that convey coping strategies for exercising control over things that are feared. The stronger the instilled sense of coping self-efficacy, the bolder the behavior” (2001, p. 280). This suggests that an up-close view of a potentially dangerous animal being led by a leash, like a dog, may communicate to a viewer not only that the wild animal is not to be feared, but also that it may be controlled.

Modeling and self-efficacy in SCT may explain the social learning of wildlife interactions and how viewers are affected by the visual images of wildlife portrayed as pets on television. According to vicarious modeling, certain viewers actually may be learning how to interact with wildlife by simply watching. In addition, the emotional

reactions may heighten motivators to behavior. It is possible that this, in effect, provides viewers with the efficacy to carry out the same activity on their own.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the potential role of wildlife television in the lives' of participants who own exotic pets. The elements of SCT provide the foundation in which to explore the potential motivators for the participants to model the exotic animal interactions as seen on screen. These include: 1) the potential efficacy of the visual instruction; 2) the identification with the spokesperson; and 3) the emotional connection. The next section describes the approach this thesis takes to explore the reactions of the present study's participants to wildlife television.

Audience Research

This thesis is concerned with how the participants in this study make meaning from wildlife programs and how their interpretations potentially effect their actions with animals. Specifically, it aims to explore in participants' interpretations of wildlife television the presence of the elements of SCT: attention to visual instruction, identification with spokesperson, and emotional connection to animals. In order to explore these elements of SCT, this thesis concentrates on how the audience communicates their views of wildlife television in general and on their specific reactions to on-screen activity.

In this sense, the present study incorporates both the views of an "active" and "passive" audience approach (Neuendorf, 2001, p. 345). The study's participants are active in that they are not manipulated by a program's intended message; they are each unique in their selection and interpretations of wildlife programming. However, the theoretical framework for this study does claim that *certain* viewers will be motivated to

model a behavior as seen on screen. This observational learning is considered to be the passive aspect of this approach.

The passive aspect considers the actual media content, the specifics of the human-animal interactions in wildlife television. Perse's (2001) cognitive-transactional model includes the "salience of visual cues" (p. 51) and how they may be instrumental in triggering a behavioral response in a particular individual. This relates to the importance of close-ups of exotic animals on screen and how the animals are portrayed visually. Such cues may activate a person's *schema*, or mental framework, associated with wildlife (p. 45). In this thesis, it may apply to a leash on an animal as a cue to associate it with a pet-like image. This is the portion of this study's approach that considers *certain members* of the audience to be passive to the visual instruction on screen.

This thesis also moves from the "source-centric" approach to "audience-centric" approach (Neuendorf, 2001) because it is concerned with two different genres of wildlife programming and the interpretations of exotic pet owners to them. Important explanations for viewer reactions would include self-designations into groups, such as religion or party membership; influence of others, such as parents, spouses, teachers; and the unique characteristics of the individual (Perse, 2001, p. 35). This model is pertinent to the present study's group of exotic pet owners in considering their self-identities and how this may be a factor in their interpretations of wildlife television.

As active audience members, the participants' interpretations of the wildlife videos in this study are taken as reflective of their identities as members of their particular group of exotic pet owners. In this way, their responses are interpreted as

“official talk” and “personal talk” that carry with them their unique positions (Dahlgren, 1988, p. 292). This is in contrast to an ethnographic reception study in which participants are viewed watching television in a naturalistic context (see Gillespie, 2005; Lindlof, 1987; Lull, 1980).

This thesis also takes the perspective of *moderate constructionism*, in which “people bring basic perspectives, interpretations, cognitive schemas or social and cultural frames of reference with them to an interpretive situation, such as the viewing of a television programme, or an interview” (Höijer, 2008, p. 278). In this way, the reception interviews in this study were aimed at uncovering the particular participants’ “reality-based cognitive schemas” (Höijer, 2000, p. 199). It was my intent to investigate the unique “identity positions” of each participant as they emerged in each interview (p. 279).

This thesis is an exploratory qualitative audience research study and therefore cannot make claims regarding the effects of television. It does, however, seek meanings from participants’ interpretations that are categorized into a model that fits a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach relies upon certain “theoretical generalizations” in which conclusions are drawn to apply to wider cases (Höijer, 2008, p. 285). The participants’ interpretations of wildlife television are taken as part of their unique identities within a group of exotic pet owners. Their responses are categorized to make meanings that may apply to others in similar situations. To support this type of theoretical generalization, this is a multi-method thesis that involved a purposive and rigorous selection process of study participants, as described in the next section.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the role of wildlife television for select individuals who own exotic animals. Wildlife television is not only an important source of information but also provides a potential emotional connection for viewers with animals. This study uses 13 in-depth interviews and 37 responses to a qualifying open-ended questionnaire to explore the interpretations of participants to wildlife television and attempts to identify potential motivators for study participants to model the human-animal interactions as seen on television. A multi-method and qualitative research design is necessary in which to delve into the meanings that emerge through each individual's experience. Following is a description of the pilot study, the participants of this study, the in-depth interviews, the qualifying open-ended questionnaire, and the procedure.

Pilot Study

I conducted the pilot study in 2007. The audience reception study described viewer reactions to a human-wildlife interaction on a television talk show in which the visual message contradicts the spokesperson's verbal educational message. The method included 10 in-depth interviews of participants at an alternative pet exposition who watched a clip of Jeff Corwin and a bear on the talk show *Ellen* (one of two clips chosen for this study as well). The results suggested that viewers distinguish between entertainment and information seeking in their television content selection; viewers

placed an emotional value on their interpretations of respect for the animal; and viewers noticed a conflicting message between what the spokesperson says and does regarding the animal. The present study is a follow-up to this pilot study in that it included another clip of wildlife television and expanded the number of participants and the duration of the interviews.

Participants

Participants were identified through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's database of wildlife permit holders in the state of Florida (<http://www.myfwc.com/permits/petshop.pdf>). Designated permit holders have licenses to house certain exotic animals and the wildlife code for all three classes require standard caging and safety from escape. Class I permits include a license to exhibit and sell and are not intended for personal pets. Such animals include large primates, large carnivores, and elephants. Class II permits allow for pet ownership and individuals must demonstrate 100 hours of experience plus complete a written exam (or have one year of experience in caring for the particular species). Class II wildlife includes certain monkeys, mid-sized carnivores, and alligators. This study involved a purposeful sample of Class II permit holders: those individuals who seek exotic animals as pets.

Initially, all 111 registered Class II permit holders were contacted with an introductory letter to the study that stated they would be called to answer questions about wildlife television (Appendix I). As a result, the author received many calls from people interested in the study and the in-depth interviews were with the people who initially called.

The people interviewed were over 35 years old, and the oldest was an 82-year-old woman; eight of the participants were female and seven were male. This reflected the gender balance of Class II wildlife permit holders, in which a little more than half are registered to females. The species owned by the interviewees also reflected what was listed as registered: the majority (66%) owned exotic cats, followed by primates (19%), crocodilians (9%), and canids (6%). The species owned by the participants are indicated after their remarks. The interview sample was purposive in that it reflected the gender balance, the species ownership, and geographic diversity of all Class II permit holders in the state of Florida. All participants interviewed signed a consent form.

In-depth Interviews

A total of 480 minutes of audio were recorded, and the interviews lasted from 25 minutes to over an hour. Sometimes, they were conducted at the exotic pet owners' homes and involved tours and introductions to the animals. This portion was not recorded, but added to the rich picture of each individual. The in-depth interviews usually began with the participant viewing two wildlife television video segments. The first was the one used in the pilot study: it featured a well-known wildlife professional, Jeff Corwin, on the talk show *Ellen* (see Appendix II for the transcription). The segment aired in October 2006 and was retrieved from You Tube in 2007. Corwin was targeted not because of his celebrity status but because wildlife professionals regard him as credible. The first prompt used a 2-minute segment of Corwin interacting with a bear on a leash as Corwin hand-feeds it grapes. This scene's visual message of sociable human interaction with a wild, potentially dangerous animal contradicts Corwin's verbal message to viewers to be wary of animals in the wild.

While Corwin is explaining what to do if approached by a bear (*not to run*) and what not to do (*do not feed it*), he is petting it and hand-feeding it grapes while DeGeneres is running away from it. These are mixed messages. Most importantly, the activity of the bear constantly interrupts the dialogue. Even Corwin admits that the activity is “distracting.” These constant interruptions may make it difficult for a viewer to receive the verbal conservation messages. The question becomes, How do viewers interpret this message?

The second video segment shown during the interviews featured another wildlife professional, David Attenborough, also talking about bears (see Appendix III for the transcription). However, it is different in that Attenborough does not interact with the bears on camera. While it may be argued that his presence is a way of interacting with the wild bears, he does not physically interfere with the natural behaviors of the bears by touching them or feeding them. It is not in an entertainment format, like the talk show segment, and is considered a different genre because of the focus on the wild bears in a their natural habitat. For the purposes of this study, the two video clips represent two genres: one is presenter-centered (Corwin) and the other is animal-centered (Attenborough).

After each video segment, participants were asked, “What is your initial reaction?” The viewers’ interpretations were expressed through follow-up open questions such as, “Tell me more” or “What else?” During this last phase of the questioning, participants were asked about their media exposure. In addition, the participants were asked to describe their relationship with their animals and how it developed.

In preparation for the in-depth interviews, some participants voluntarily gathered photographs of exotic animals that had been a part of their lives. This process framed the interviews and allowed for the participants to be more specific in their responses. This technique helped the participants to clearly describe their accounts (Lindlof, 1995, p. 188). By showing photographs of wildlife that had been influential in their own lives, in addition to my pre-selecting segments to view, provided a richer picture.

In addition, the photographs added a unique form of perspective, what Collier and Collier (1986) refer to: “The impact of photographs in interviewing is in the response to imagery reflective of the life experience of the informant” (p. 122). A respondent mailed in a photograph with handwriting on the back that served as his direct thoughts (“This is my best friend”). Even further, the photographs depict the animals in their shared space with other family members. For example, one photo was of a cougar sharing the play slide with the owner’s daughter. Another owner shared a photo of her bobcat on the toilet. During the interview, this facilitated the discussion on how the animal was regarded in the participant’s life. This type of “photographic feedback” added to the participants’ self-expression (p. 118).

During the interviews, the videos served as launching points for discussion, in which the participants discussed their relationship with wildlife television. This, along with the photos, is similar to the method of photo-elicitation, in which the visual prompts allowed for more in depth discussion of an issue (Rose, 2007).

Qualifying Questionnaire

The qualifying questionnaire (Appendix IV and V) was sent to the remaining Class II wildlife permit holders that had not been interviewed (minus the returned due to

change of addresses). Thirty-seven out of 91 responded, a 41% response rate. Together with the interviewees, the study reflects the responses of 50 individuals; almost half of the registered Class II wildlife permit holders in the state of Florida.

The qualifying questionnaire served to broaden the foundation for this thesis. Responses from the in-depth interviews helped to formulate the open-ended questions for further clarification on the relationship to wildlife television and how the participants related to their exotic pets. The responses provided descriptive statistics that allowed for comparison. This multi-method approach offers a rich description and background to the views expressed in the study.

Coding

Throughout the analysis, themes were categorized using the software program HyperResearch, a qualitative data analysis package. The 480 minutes of interviews were transcribed and transported into the software program. This computer-assisted analysis allowed for the organization and constant comparison of data. Twenty-two themes emerged based on in-depth interviews; these focused on the reactions to the two videos and the resulting discussion regarding the participants' interpretations and their descriptions of their animals. In the analysis meanings are described regarding the participants' relationships to wildlife television and to their relationships to their exotic pets.

This study follows the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in which meanings are uncovered through the voices of the participants. Differences in opinion were sought out through a selection process that incorporated people with representative gender, geographic distribution, and species owned. In addition, extensive

data collection was necessary in which to analyze the themes that emerged from this study (Creswell, 2007). The purposeful sample showed different perspectives on the role of wildlife television in the lives of select exotic pet owners.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The findings are divided into three sections that include: 1) wildlife television that is watched and preferred by animal enthusiasts who participated in this study; 2) reactions by the enthusiasts to the videos showed during the in-depth interviews; and 3) how animal enthusiasts in this study describe and relate to their exotic pets. The results were consistent with the pilot study in that participants made a clear distinction within the genre of wildlife television regarding entertainment versus information. Many emotional reactions were also present, adding to the literature and presenting future questions regarding the role of emotion. Viewers did detect conflicting messages between what was said and what was done, and they usually recalled the predominant action present in the video. Also, participants had something to say about how they developed an interest in wildlife.

Watching wildlife television

The majority of animal enthusiasts who responded to the open-ended questionnaire and participated in the interviews indicated that they watched wildlife television. Of the open-ended questionnaires, every respondent indicated an interest in wildlife programming, either as a child or today. At times, responses indicated a lack of program availability when growing up. The question was phrased broadly to allow for the respondents to write in what they interpreted as wildlife television.

The responses usually focused on channels that provided wildlife programming. However, there was one program that was specifically mentioned far more than any others, *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*. It not only was named more than any other wildlife program but also more than any other channel: 62% of the mail-in respondents wrote in that they watched this program growing up (59% were male). Many of the respondents also named channels as a source of wildlife programming, such as: Animal Planet (57%) National Geographic (46%), and Discovery (26%). Disney captured some (14%) responses as well as PBS (1%). Specific animal spokespeople mentioned were Jack Hanna (1%) and Jacques Cousteau (1%).

Some respondents to the open-ended questionnaires stated a general watching of all wildlife television available today. For example, one woman listed watching Animal Planet, National Geographic, and then wrote, "anything I can find." Another woman was a self-described Animal Planet "junkie." She indicated the same appetite for viewing and listed specific programs she watched today:

What, if any, wildlife television did you watch growing up?

Whatever was on back then...*Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, Tarzan, etc.*

What, if any, wildlife television do you watch today?

Where do I start? I'm pretty much an Animal Planet junkie: *Wild Kingdom, Untamed-uncut, After the Attack*, although those two shows sometimes make me look away! *The Blue Planet*...I also watch Saturday morning shows about animals, meant for teenagers: *Animal Atlas* and *Wild about Animals*
(Mail-in response: Woman, cougar owner)

Watching wildlife television was an activity discussed during the in-depth interviews. Most participants were knowledgeable of the wildlife programs available growing up as well as those on today. As with the open-ended questionnaires, the focus

of the question about wildlife television viewing was not on the frequency and duration. The purpose was to get a sense for exposure and preference of program genre. It would be asked at different times during the interviews, sometimes after the participants watched the videos:

Interviewer: Have you ever watched him [Jeff Corwin]?

Father: Yeah, that's Jeff Corwin. You've seen him on TV before, right? [To daughter].

Daughter: Yeah, on Animal Planet? I remember him. I've watched him before.

Father: Jeff's okay. He does a pretty good job.

Interviewer: Growing up, did you watch any wildlife TV at all?

Father: Sure. I'm considerably older so the only thing I watched was, the only thing that was on was *Mutual of Omaha*. (Man, reptile breeder, panther/primate owner)

During the in-depth interviews, four of the participants (three of them were male) also mentioned *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* as a preferred program to watch growing up. It was often remembered as being the only one available. Usually, part of the program title was recalled, or the one of the hosts, Jim Fowler or Marlin Perkins was named.

One woman in the interviews talked about watching wildlife television as a child in a nostalgic way, and compared it to what she watches today:

By the time I was 10 years old they were carrying, what was that called, *Mutual of Omaha*? Yes. That was the only animal program that I can think of that was programmed. And of course the whole family watched it. And back then they were filming different parts of the world, different animals in their natural environment, the way they are naturally. National Geographic has some wonderful programs....When we talked earlier about *Mutual of Omaha*...the younger guy [Jim Fowler]...he now brings animals on programs sometimes, there's another guy down here that brings creatures on to shows, he's very good, I'm trying to think of his name. (Woman, wolf owner)

The only person interviewed that indicated she did not watch wildlife programming also claimed to watch little television. She even acknowledged how this may be atypical by calling herself the “la la lady”:

Interviewer: So, you've never seen him [Jeff Corwin]?

No. No, I don't know who he is. I told you I don't watch much TV. This is the la la lady. I know who Ellen DeGeneres is though. Just barely. I've seen maybe five seconds. (Woman, cougar owner)

However, at the end of the interview she did mention how much she liked wildlife television spokesperson Jack Hanna, whom she has met. This suggests that although she may not watch wildlife television, she was familiar with and had seen at least one spokesperson interact with exotic animals.

The responses from both the open-ended questionnaires and the in-depth interviews reflect a group of individuals that were aware of and watched a variety of wildlife programming. Many of them remembered watching select programs, such as *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, growing up. The frequency and duration of viewing was not the focus of the questions, it was the type of wildlife programming that was relevant to this study. The exposure to wildlife television and the type of wildlife programming that was sought out is seen in the next section.

Wildlife television as a source of information

The type of wildlife television watched by the animal enthusiasts in this study was often described as informational. Many responses to the open-ended questionnaires included specific listings of wildlife channels and programs that reflected an interest in

watching material that fed their animal interests. One specifically indicated it was a way to “learn” about animals:

How did you develop an interest in wildlife?

From the time I was a child, I spent my days in the woods looking for frogs and snakes, etc. Later on, rescue of wildlife became a passion.

What, if any, wildlife television did you watch growing up?

Mutual of Omaha, Nat[ional] Geo[graphic]...anything with or about animals, Africa, anywhere in the world to learn about them.

What, if any, wildlife television do you watch today?

All wildlife shows on TV. The TV has Animal Planet, Discovery, Nat[ional] Geo[graphic], outdoors, etc.” (Mail-in response: Man, macaque, lemur primate owner/rescuer)

During the in-depth interviews, enthusiasts also distinguished between wildlife programming genres. For example, “nature” programming was preferred:

Interviewer: Do you seek out any type of wildlife television?

I do in the sense that I watch a lot of nature, like the nature channel. But the shows about animals, animal-planet type shows, I never watch those. I'm not really into the cutesy shows like those. Those tend to be the cutesy shows like watch me wrestle the alligator type thing. (Man, serval cat owner)

In the above example, the man did not like the “cutesy shows” that he assumed dominated the programming on Animal Planet. His preference paralleled what many of the participants valued, which was an educational message. This preference for wildlife programming with a conservation message was prominent during the conversations, and was evident in the reaction to the videos shown during the in-depth interviews.

Many not only recognized educational programming as being natural but also mentioned a dislike for “sensationalism:” “I'd like to see it done—have a show every six months devoted to animals—where it can be done more professionally, more information

given and less sensationalism” (Man, lynx owner). And one woman stated: “Shows where animals are fighting—that's sensationalism—that's not a good way to educate kids, the food chain sort of thing...”(Wolf owner). Sensationalism was often described in the same context as when an animal is regarded as entertainment. This was also seen during the reactions to the videos: “I really don't like to see animals on talk shows, things like that, like the *Ellen* show” (Woman, panther owner).

Even further, a preference for certain wildlife spokespeople would eventually surface during the conversations. A woman who had remarked early on that she did not like watching Jeff Corwin later said: “Actually, I like animal shows, I love watching animal shows” (Panther owner). Another woman stated, “I try to watch a lot of nature stuff, National Geographic, Animal Planet” and then later said, regarding Corwin, “that guy, he really bugs me” (Cougar/bobcat/wolf hybrid owner). There were just as many that felt strongly for Corwin as did not like him. This suggests that some participants in this study not only sought out certain wildlife programming but also preferred some spokespeople to others.

The distinction between entertainment and information seeking exists in the literature as having a significant influence on peoples’ viewing behavior and what they expect to get from a television show. The results from these interviews show that in this particular group, participants are aware of this distinction as well, whether or not they actually practice their preference for information seeking over entertainment. In the next section are the participants’ reactions to the videos that combine information with entertainment.

Reaction to the videos

The initial focus of conversation during the in-depth interviews was based on the participants' reactions to the videos. The results reflected those of the pilot study in that 1) viewers placed an emotional value on their interpretations of respect for the animal, 2) viewers noticed a conflicting message between what the spokesperson said and did regarding the bear, and in addition, this study revealed that 3) viewers had an appreciation for what was perceived as natural, and 4) a disdain for disrupting anything wild.

Emotional value is attached to "respect" for animal

The in-depth interviews usually began with the participant viewing the first video (Corwin) and then the second (Attenborough) to which I would ask for an initial reaction following each one. The reactions were often emotionally charged. They varied from disgust to frustration to a little anger, and all depended upon what was conveyed as "respect" for the animal. This suggests that people interpret respect for the animal in different ways.

This initial reaction to the Corwin video contained strong emotions:

Interviewer: Do you have an initial reaction?

Disgusting. It's disgusting. Unfortunately, they just didn't do it right and they could have done this in a much better way. Now, to let the bear get out of control like that and all the laughing like that, it made it like a sick cartoon. And this is going to endanger the bear and do worse—it's going to help the bear go extinct more than, it's sad, but it wasn't done properly. (Man, wolf owner)

He further discussed how he enjoyed another animal presenter, Steve Irwin, because he showed animals in a way that had “respect for the animal” because his style was “doing it in the condition where the snake is.”

When discussing the Corwin video, viewers placed no value upon animals used solely for entertainment. They used emotionally charged words such as “shameful,” “degrades,” and “stupid” to describe the use of animals for human entertainment: “That one with Ellen DeGeneres, that was a sick one. I mean, I like her but that show made me think less of her just from seeing that footage” (Man, wolf owner). Viewers reacted negatively to the audience laughing and to what they interpreted as an absent conservation message. The following two quotes echoed the sentiment of not having animals doing “funny things” for human entertainment:

Interviewer: You are not a big fan of animals on TV?

No. No! Absolutely not! I do not think we should show cutesy animals doing funny things. I don't have a problem with a Madagascar Hissing Roach and something that's not going to jump out. (Woman, cougar owner)

That's shameful. I think it's uhh...degrades the bear, the bear...uh, they were laughing, there's no message of conservation there. Well, first of all, a lot of them probably thought they were watching a comedy. They watched the bear eat the telephone and chew the furniture. And maybe it was nervous laughter, I'm not sure, I wasn't there! But I would say they would go away from that thinking maybe they had just been to the old-fashioned Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey circus type things—and strictly for entertainment, absolutely no value as far as bear conservation is concerned. I just think it's shameful. I would never do anything like that. (Man, cat sanctuary)

For some viewers, respect for an animal involved a notion of reality that included a reverence for what is wild. This became evident when viewers compared the Corwin video, where the bear was on a stage, to the Attenborough video, where the bear was in

the wild. Problems arose for a viewer when the presenter, for entertainment purposes, began to interfere or alter what occurred naturally:

I didn't realize how fast bears could go...I enjoy seeing things like that [Attenborough video] because there's the animal in its natural environment doing its natural thing. I learn a lot more about that animal that way than having it tethered on a chain on a TV show [Corwin video]. Here's the difference: the *Ellen* show, there's an audience there and everyone's clapping and mooing they're seeing up close what they bear is doing. It's funny—ate and turned up the chair and stuff—I learn absolutely nothing about that animal except how it reacts under stress in that situation. That poor thing, he's pawing at the lens, he wants to eat, he wants to not be there, he wants to get away, you don't really learn much about the animal. Thought it was real funny but that's entertainment, that was nothing but entertainment, not about learning about that bear. Because everybody already knows that bears are predators. What he was saying, people realize that already, it was just for the entertainment part of it. That is what that was about. (Woman, panther owner)

Eventually, many viewers in the study questioned the emotional value of the segment based on how the animal was handled. Some did not like the bear “out of control”:

It was funny the way Ellen Degeneres was standing back, away from the poor little animal [voice inflection changes to almost baby talk]. He's a bear, he's young, poor thing, and he's precious. But because of the dimension and size of the animal, and the guy [Corwin] had some wimpy little leash on it, and no one else to help him with the animal. He was by himself. I thought it was a wrong way to bring it out and show it to the public. It's climbing all over the furniture and knocking things off the table, it's out of control. The animal's out of control. And when they bring an animal out on a show like that it should be with another handler, to assist, I don't know if they had not fed the animal recently so he's be looking over everything, I don't know, or let him play out so he's calmed down....There are better ways to educate people—than throwing grapes to bears! [Laughs] I don't think they got much from it. I don't think they got much from it. Because the guy was spending much of his time trying to control the bear. And I think he knew that the little string he had him on wasn't sufficient. Or he could have encouraged him down off of the chairs. He didn't tell us anything about the bear. He didn't tell us anything about the bear. It was sensationalism is what it was, which is the wrong way to bring a message across. (Woman, wolf owner)

I can't think of anything positive at all. I see nothing positive at all. Other than getting back to my old broadcasting days...it probably sells advertising, probably creates some jobs for people...but as far as conservation value, was that a black bear? If it were a grizzly, you probably wouldn't have done that. But that bear is

ruined now. What can you do with that bear? He's not afraid of people, he's going to be somebody's responsibility for the rest of his life, so, I don't see anything good about that. (Man, cat sanctuary)

Often there were critiques and even complaints regarding Corwin's handling of the bear:

Well, I've seen him [Corwin] do so many things wrong...turn his back on it, letting him get so close to her. But more of that, it's just petting it when they calmed him down, rubbing him and stuff. You have to have a permit and license—you can't touch a Class I animal if you don't have a Class I permit. They told me they get people like him special permission and special permits, like movie stars and people like that. And I don't think it's fair. I called and complained about it. Yeah, that's why I called Fish & Wildlife and talked to [Captain X] because I want to know why you know these people keep letting these people on TV touch these animals but not the general public and you're saying you don't even want them near them. And you're complaining to me! She is the general public, just because she's a star. I've seen her with all kinds of animals, in her hand, bottle-feeding them. Holding the bottle down instead up like you should—you should really hold the bottle up. (Woman, cougar, bobcat, wolf hybrid owner)

As I understand it...we're USDA licensed, for felids, and we cannot take them out of the cage and parade them on a leash, to schools. I think the rule is 45 pounds, I'm not sure, and this bear was clearly over 45 lbs, I don't even know if this was lawful...Even if it were an Asiatic, it doesn't matter. If the animal is over 45 pounds, as a feline, you cannot take them out as ambassador cats...And I think that sometimes Jack Hanna and Jeff Corwin, they get in under the radar, and if I were to do that, I'd be fined and my licensed possibly revoked. We have to have, for example, the Florida panther and the mountain lion have to be behind chain link, with a perimeter fence around them. So how can you take one out and be safe and legal on a television set? It's like Siegfried and Roy, those cats have to be behind 9 gauge chain link with a perimeter around it. You put them on stage, their hair trigger goes off and someone gets hurt. (Man, cat sanctuary)

“That was another thing...didn't he say that someone from the audience was throwing grapes, and Corwin was concerned, and if that was the trainer don't you think he should have had a better working relationship?” (Man, lynx owner)

Another woman, who did not have a problem with how Corwin handled the bear, still felt strongly about how animals should be treated: “It's all in respect. There's a difference between someone who throws out food to a wild gator and someone who does

their homework, learns about the animals, and gets a permit.” Her reaction to the Corwin video reflects this interpretation of respect for the animal:

To me they're all educational. I like interaction. I think that Jeff [Corwin] did a good thing. He left the bear to do what he wanted to do, instead of showing that you can tame it, keep it controlled. And I think that is what makes a difference. If he had put it on a leash and had it sit next to him, held him back, and did that kind of thing I think it would have been interpreted differently too. That he can be trained. But he let him do what he wanted and kind of didn't give him any clues or cues or anything....I like the way he did it because it shows that you're not going to control this bear. He let it do what he wants. Also, it will show aggression if you startle it, like when the camera guy got too close. He let the bear do what he wanted. He wasn't going to control it. That's how I interpreted it. Whereas you have trainers saying keep it calm, it looks like they are controlled, maybe fun to have....I think the way Jeff Corwin did it was great. Ellen was great. He did try to control it. (Woman, marmoset monkey, petting zoo owner)

For this woman, the constant bear activity was interpreted as *freedom* where for others it was “lack of control” on the handler’s part.

For viewers in this study, the emotional reactions centered upon what they viewed as respectful to the animal. Respect for an animal was interpreted differently, but a common thread involved what was natural. How the spokesperson handled the bear was sometimes interpreted as interfering with the animal. Most of the participants in the study had much more to say about what the spokespeople *did* than what they *said*. The next section looks at the conflict between what was said and the action on screen.

Observation of “mixed messages”

As in the pilot study, animal enthusiasts in this study who watched the videos reacted to what they noted as “mixed messages” between what was said and what was done regarding the animals. When asked in an interview, the participants were sophisticated in analyzing the educational message of the Corwin video:

Well, it [Corwin video] was funny. Probably was not a very good clip. It wasn't a good clip in that I think it encourages people to get close to bears, and that's

generally not a good idea. I mean the guy was saying the right things, but what you saw was saying the exact opposite of what he was saying. What you saw was, 'oh, look the bear is really cute' and it's eating all this funny food and just being adorable, so, overall it probably was not a very beneficial clip. He was saying, the question was, 'what do you do if you see a bear in your yard?' And what he's saying is 'you should enjoy it at a distance, you should stay inside' but what you see on the screen is the bear playfully pawing at the camera, the bear taking stuff off of the table. The guy says, 'a bear that's being fed is a dead bear' but then the bear is eating food [laughs]—it was eating people food right there on the camera! So, it was conflicting messages. (Man, serval cat owner)

I was a little bit surprised. Because he [Corwin] told Ellen not to run from a bear, and then he told her to run. What? I'm getting a mixed message there....So that's the dangerous part, I think, showing the humans with those guys and it's like saying 'it's okay to do this'—it's an endorsement. (Man, cat sanctuary)

And I don't think what he [Corwin] said was particularly educational. 'What do you do if you see a bear?' Well, yes, you do not throw it food, if you take a picture, fine. I don't think he was very effective in what he said. (Woman, wolf owner)

One man noted the contradictory nature of the Corwin video and then discussed the nature of wildlife programming and how mixed messages are common to many of the shows:

I think this [Corwin video] is a mixed message really. Because he's talking about what to do if you see this bear in the wild and yet he's got a tame bear on a leash. So I don't think it translates into what he's trying to show. It's not that he's afraid of him but that he's got him on a leash so it's almost like a pet. I mean, they can hurt you, especially if they have young. Like the Steve Irwin style—it does send a mixed message. What I find is that the people that are doing it on the shows, first and foremost it's entertainment so a lot of tricks they use to get what they need to. And what I find with animals, at least the animals interacting with people on TV, is there's no middle ground. It's 'oh, it's just like a regular house cat' and you just see five minutes of this thing. You don't see it when it's sick, when it's aggressive. You saw it was chewing the hell out of the set and it goes off stage! Or, it's older and completely vicious and it shouldn't be having contact with people, like the 'when animals attack' videos. There's no in between of right down the middle which is what it really is: you've got your good times, you've got your bad times, your intermediate times. So I don't think this public interaction of wild animals is fairly represented. They're looking for ratings, and the message is going to be mixed. (Man, lynx owner)

Further comments indicate that viewers in this study did remember some of what Corwin said and most of what the bear *did*. It was the bear's actions that they recalled.

Following are reactions that suggest recalling the visual over the verbal:

See what they're doing...even with Ellen's show, I watch the bear. I don't see what's going on with the others, I watch the bear. I'm watching him with the chair, and seeing how destructive...I'm thinking that way, where others are thinking 'oh, he's so cute.' That's the way I see it. And he's chewing up the couch. (Woman, marmoset monkey/petting zoo owner)

No one is going to sit there and pet the animal because it doesn't want that. He's looking for food. He's doing what his natural thing is and it's trying to eat the chair and look for food, eating the phone, whatever. He didn't want to sit down, he didn't want to be there. (Woman, panther owner)

Other viewers remarked that the bear's activities potentially *overpower* what is said by the spokesperson: "They're not paying attention to what he's saying, they're watching what the bear's doing" (Woman, panther owner), and: "It [visual] does, it does overpower it. People tune out what the guy's talking about. They just see a cute bear there. A cute bear eating food! Eating people food! Crawling on furniture..."(Man, serval owner). This man states that the visual is key to learning:

People are visual learners. I'm a visual learner. I learn a lot visually. But what I thought Jeff Corwin and that video—you're not with a tame bear—visually look at what he's doing with that bear. He's letting him do what he wants for a reason. They watched the bear eat the telephone and chew on the furniture. (Man, cat sanctuary)

The viewers' had a strong recall of the bear's activity and it appeared that the action of the bear was just as powerful, if not more so, as what Corwin said. Some suggested that this consistency was critical to the message as well. As described in the next section, most of the participants in this study who watched the videos preferred the second [Attenborough] video, due to its consistent message.

Appreciation for what is “natural”

The majority of the viewers in this study preferred the second [Attenborough] video because the bears were portrayed as wild in their natural environment. Interest focused on life cycle, diet, and in how the animal negotiates its environment to survive. Not only was there an appreciation for what was shot in nature, but for seeing things as they are, or “wild” held great significance for many of the enthusiasts. One viewer notes a preference for the consistency of a “wild animal in the wild”:

The one [video] that I'm drawn to is the outside one [Attenborough], the natural one. It was shot beautifully. And it was very very informative. I found out everything I need to know about that bear in the wilderness, what he likes to eat...an idea of the landscape, geographically where the animal likes to be. And that he is a wild animal out in the wild. The difference with the other one [Corwin video] is that he is a wild animal not in the wild. So, the one I'm drawn to the most is the second one. (Woman, cougar owner)

The viewers also described a relationship between what is wild, natural, and educational—without the direct interference of a person. Many note this depiction of the bear on stage with Corwin as distinctly different from what is educational:

Well, the second one [Attenborough video] was more educational, with learning about the bear and what his life cycle and the way his diet changes in the year. It was shown in his natural environment. The two views are very different. To see it in the wild shows it as a forceful creature to be able to survive out there and to have it on a stinky little leash on a stage. (Woman, wolf owner)

Well, this video [Attenborough] was much better. This video showed the bear in its natural environment, eating the food he's supposed to eat, without an audience. So, it probably comes from a show that is not as popular, but it's a better clip overall. (Man, serval owner)

He [Attenborough] does it in a way that shows how the bear eats and the proper way. And he does it in a way where he's standing there, and the bear is going after the salmon, and yeah, when they come out of hibernation they've got to pack on the pounds because they sometimes haven't eaten in four months. And they have to live off of the fat from the salmon. (Man, wolf owner)

Different tone, different tone, and the animals of course are suited to doing their natural things outside and with the fish, getting all the nutrients they need, playing around in the water and they do not have a collar and they're not chained up and they're not knocking phones over in an interview set. (Woman, cougar owner)

One man liked the realism of the Attenborough video. Even his young daughter recognized this distinction of “more nature” and liked the same video better because of it:

Interviewer: Did you like one video more than the other?

Daughter: I like that one [Attenborough].

Interviewer: Why?

Daughter: Because it has more nature.

Interviewer: More nature?

Dad: Yeah, I agree. It's more realistic. It's not just somebody with a bear. (Man, reptile breeder/primate/panther owner)

This preference for what is natural was often expressed in terms of how programming “should be done.” For example, one man stated: “These are grizzly bears by the way, instead of black bears. I've seen this before and that's how it should be done. It should be done in their territory, the bear's territory. I mean, being there in the wild...” (Wolf owner). Another viewer had similar sentiments:

That animal [bear in Corwin video] was stressed and in an unnatural environment. I think there are some, like the second one [Attenborough video] for instance, that's in its natural environment. I really don't like to see animals like that bear tethered on the end of that chain, you know walking around on stage on the *Ellen* show. My reaction to that is I really don't like that because even though the guy is trying to do an educational thing about the animal I think he could have had a big video and had it on screen and showed it in its natural state and had just as much of an effect as bringing the animal on there. (Woman, panther owner)

These responses represent what the viewers in this study preferred in wildlife programming, what they often referred to as “natural.” They valued what was

consistently presented in a realistic setting. The next section gathers negative responses to when the natural is interfered with by the spokesperson.

Disdain for disrupting the “wild”

During the interview discussions most of the enthusiasts recognized the opposing views of what was portrayed as wild in the Attenborough video versus the human involvement of Corwin video. Any human involvement seemed to be frowned upon:

I'm noting the contrast between the two clips. One is 'ha ha ha aren't the bears cute,' and then you show where a bear is supposed to be, and the bear's trying to survive and it's totally different—a totally different story, a different tone....And the first one [Corwin video], they're probably trying to rationalize, you know, having a bear on a TV show. They probably have an exhibitor's license and with this audience, you've got this wild animal in the middle of the audience laughing and it probably knows it's a bear but it's non-stop laughter, not canned laughter but real laughter. And the other one [Attenborough video], there's great sound, the bear's out in the wild, although I think it was a different type of bear...however, that particular bear they were showing its claws, what a bear really looks like, and he was surviving out in the wild. And it wasn't pretty, if that were a person out there the person would have been fair game too. (Woman, cougar owner)

Although there was an appreciation for a wild animal struggling in its natural environment, this did not appeal to viewers when the animal was “controlled” by a human, as in the Corwin video:

I don't think he [Corwin] had very good control of that bear there. I think he had poor control, not that I'm saying we need to control, control, but the situation on a show like that I just thought that was not the proper way to bring it out to show it to the people. I think he would have had more time to educate people if he had the bear under more—control. I don't know any other word to use. It's wrong. Because quite frankly, if that little bear had gotten out of control there, and had gotten into the audience, he would have not belonged there to begin with. Authorities could have been called, something disastrous could have happened to that poor animal because he was not properly handled. That stupid little string he had him on was ridiculous! He needs another handler to help him. If that bear got out of control and out of that measly leash he had him on, it probably would have probably become a 'dead bear'! In a different avenue of getting there. (Woman, wolf owner)

I don't think that was the bear's handler [Corwin]. I think it was just somebody that took him out there to walk him out on the show, because he didn't have control of him at all. The bear could have eaten the phone and gotten electrocuted or something. He had no control over that animal, really. You could see that Ellen was nervous. She had enough sense to stay away. (Woman, cougar owner)

The issue of human control over a wild animal was also seen in viewers' comments regarding the safety of the bear and everyone—spokespeople and audience—involved in both of the videos. Primarily, their reactions were directed toward concern for the bear in the Corwin video: “I guarantee they had darters there, people with rifles. If that bear had done a swipe that bear would be dead in a second, because of the liability, lawsuits...things like that” (Man, wolf owner).

Well, to the general public, they don't know...that he should have his eye on that bear. I know that he should have his eye on that bear. If they were there, and too close to them, they'd get attacked. And if they don't know what to do they'd really be in trouble [laughs]. (Woman, cougar/wolf hybrid, bobcat owner)

In addition to controlling a wild animal, viewers in this study did not like it when the spokesperson was “interfering with the animal”:

Interviewer: Do you have a preference between the two video clips?

This. The second [Attenborough] one. Because he's not interfering with the animal...that said, I don't know if the bear that Jeff Corwin had wasn't rescued or mother was shot and unable to be released into the wild. However, I liked the other one. It's more animal and less people. It may be different if it was a wolf expert without wolf...(man, wolf sanctuary)

Some viewers in the study also critiqued the Attenborough video for interfering with the wild bears: “It could have been a naturalist photographer that could have been there and shot the same thing, without the man being there. And then it would have been 100% safe, I think” (Man, cat sanctuary).

It was nice. Bear got the deer. That one man was a little close, he appeared maybe 12 feet from the bear, then turned his back on him, he should not have done that.

That alarms me, it looks like he turned his back on a bear. You don't do that! Turn your back on a wild animal! (Woman, cougar owner)

One man even indicated disappointment at the second video because

Attenborough was close to a wild animal: “But I don't understand why they think they have to be around a wild bear, for that to be good television” (Cat sanctuary owner).

Only two viewers in the study stated that they liked the Corwin video. One noted the difference of the settings—one natural and the other wild—between the two videos. He remarked that the animal was able to do “bear things”:

The [Corwin video] bear's not aggressive, it's just doing bear things. I didn't have any particular problem with it. They're completely different. One [Attenborough] is a depiction of their life in a natural, wild setting, and the other is more of a home setting. (Man, lynx owner)

The other viewer that liked the Corwin video interpreted that Corwin was not interfering with the bear on stage. She had liked his handling of the bear in that it showed respect for the animal’s natural behavior. In comparing the two videos, she claimed not to see a difference between the two:

I don't feel either [video] was showing them in any different way. Neither one was showing that they're aggressive, and neither was showing that they're tame. Totally natural. (Woman, marmoset monkey, petting zoo owner)

What she did react to was what she interpreted as “natural,” a common thread with most of the reactions to the videos. Therefore, even when viewers did not have an issue with Corwin’s handling of the bear, it was due to a preference for natural behaviors with little human interference.

The reactions to the videos during the interview discussions revealed that most in this group of animal enthusiasts preferred programming that focused on natural animal behaviors in a wild environment. Specifically, an educational message was described in

the same context as what was acclaimed as “natural,” and viewers often disapproved when the spokesperson interfered what was interpreted as “wild.” The next section focuses on how the participants in this study described their own relationship with their exotic animals.

Talking about their animals

Participants in this study were asked about their exotic pets and how they developed an interest in wildlife. The results of the open-ended questionnaire and the in-depth interviews revealed that these animal enthusiasts attach strong emotions to their relationships with their exotic pets; express their interest in wildlife as existing since a young age; and fed this interest in wildlife through wildlife television and other mediating factors.

Emotional Connections

The open-ended questionnaire included a question regarding how the enthusiast described their animal. While the majority of the respondents (57%) marked “pet,” next was “family” with 37%, and then “rescued” with 29%. Not one respondent marked “business.” One man marked “other” and wrote in that his pet cougar was “my best friend!” Several responses indicated that the enthusiast had owned their exotic pet for more than 10 years. One man wrote of his commitment to his pet monkey that he had cared for 18 years.

During the in-depth interviews the pets were described with terms usually associated with family members. Most of the participants that were interviewed outside of their home, away from their pets, brought in photographs (without my asking). They showed them to me while describing the animals with intense emotion:

That's my baby, that's my princess...she was instantly my best friend ever....I had the two cats for three years and they literally died a few weeks apart...it was so sad, really, really sad...those are my babies. (Woman, cougar owner)

One man, who also revealed he did not have any children, referred to his pets in that way:

“That's the babies. Gotta show off the babies, it's like children” (Lynx cat owner). Some animals were given their own areas of the house, like the macaque monkey who had his own dresser, watched television with the family, and, as the husband proudly stated, “ he even sucks his thumb.” Another woman also proudly showed me a photograph of her bobcat using a toilet.

Even when the enthusiasts' exotic pets had to live outside, due to regulations, there was still a way for them to share in the family life. One man had built a special ramp up to an enclosed area outside of his bedroom window for his cougar to look into. A woman showed pictures of her bobcat with her daughter “playing” on the slide. Another man described, with great emotional intensity, how he and his wife shared their lives with their wolves:

Who's looking in? [Pet wolf is looking through the window]

That's probably Saxon or Romeo...they love to sleep right by the bedroom door [from outside]...and they have to watch us when we're in the kitchen because we share our lives together—it's not like I control their life and they don't control my life—we share our lives together and if they don't see me one day, they get very nervous and they know something's wrong...(Man, wolf owner)

The emotional connection for the enthusiasts with their exotic pets was sometimes described as a way to fill a void:

I always had Siamese cats, back then they were imported from England. After I retired, my son did not want me to be alone. He came in with an Asian leopard cat. Jason [leopard cat] is now 12 years old. My baby, Jimmy (serval cat), is now seven...they're sweethearts. Jimmy sleeps with me, talks to me. He's protective of me, I love him dearly. (Woman, serval/leopard cat owner)

One woman talked of her photographs of her grandchildren riding on the back of her caimans (smaller crocodilians, known for being aggressive). After, she said: “My new one [caiman reptile] I got as a hatchling last fall. After my husband passed away two years ago I decided it was time to get another caiman” (Caiman reptile owner).

The animal enthusiasts that participated in this study described their exotic pets in terms that reflected their intense emotions for their animals. This was expressed through their relationships with their pets and extends to their views of wildlife, as described earlier in the reactions to the videos. This suggests that emotion is a potential factor in the development of an interest in exotic animals. The next section looks at how they developed their interests in exotic animals as *pets*.

A childhood interest

Most of the participants in this study described their interest in wildlife as being there their whole lives—as opposed to a direct influence from a certain event, person, or surroundings. It was not uncommon for them to describe moments of discovery when they were children. In the open-ended questionnaire, one man responded:

“I was interested in wildlife and reptiles from [a] very early age. I caught a turtle when I was 4 years old (50 years ago). I was never the same after that.”

The discussions during the in-depth interviews also revealed that an interest in wildlife was discovered at an early age:

[We] didn't have TV when I was little....When I was five or six years old I was interested in turtles. After I got married I got Greek tortoises. They were affectionate and each had personalities...I had a savannah monitor, skunks, a bobcat, tortoises from all over the world, snakes. (Woman, Caiman reptile owner)

I remember when I was a little boy we took in a litter of feral cats that had been dropped off in our driveway and one of them was quite ill and we had to

euthanize that cat, and I was like five years old...and I remember having feeling from these situations, I wanted to help. (Man, cat sanctuary)

How I got into wolves...my mother used to play Peter and the Wolf, it's an opera. My mom said when you're in your 50's or 60's you've got to have a hobby, something you really love—like wood working or something—and I always loved dogs and animals and snakes...but I wanted something that had its own conscience. (Man, wolf owner)

Sometimes, the interview discussions revealed that being different meant possessing a “drive” that was separate from the family:

I always wanted to live on a farm. My family is not into animals. My thing was a horse. Had to have a horse. My aunt and uncle lived on a farm and nobody ever showed an interest to me in animals I just had this drive. When I grew up, that's what I went out and did. I'm a hunter too. So, I love animals but I can still go out and hunt. I love all animals. I fear some. If I were to see a bear in the wild I would just hide and watch. I like to watch animals. They're amazing to me. (Woman, marmoset monkey/petting zoo owner)

Their family forbade some enthusiasts that were interviewed to have an exotic pet:

Interviewer: When you were a kid, what [animals] did you have?

I wasn't allowed to have reptiles as a kid, even though I collected them and had them—hidden from my parents—but they were pretty cool, I had a kinkajou, a couple of dogs.

Interviewer: So, it was your thing, not your parents?

Right, it was my thing. (Man, reptile breeder, panther/primate owner)

Interviewer: What animals did you have when you were a kid?

I was in New Jersey and it was forbidden and illegal. No chance. No possibility in the state where I was living. That was part of the reason I moved here...on a trip to Miami, we went to Lion Country Safari, the Serpetarium- the zookeeper said ‘if you have this much interest at seven maybe you'd want to work here.’ My mother would have nothing to do with it! Should I be critical of my mother's parenting skills or should I thank her for saving my life? (Man, lynx cat owner)

The participants in this study talked about their exotic pets with strong emotions, sometimes as if they were family members or as something that was different from the

family. Most of them referred to their interest as existing for as long as they can remember. The next section points to other factors that may have helped develop an interest in having exotic animals as pets.

Wildlife television and other mediating factors

Although most of the animal enthusiasts that participated in this study recognized a calling early on in their lives, some pointed to other factors that helped to develop an interest in wildlife. These factors included wildlife television, zoos, growing up in a rural background, and other people.

One respondent to the open-ended questionnaire stated a direct influence of watching wildlife television on his interest in wildlife: “My interest as you might imagine was developed by TV, *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom*” (Man, mountain lion owner). Another respondent—who also indicated watching *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom* and Animal Planet—included television and seeing wildlife “in person” as influential: “After seeing wildlife on television and in person I always wanted to work with big cats” (Man, serval cat owner).

Zoos were mentioned by a few of the participants in the study: “My mother used to drive me to the zoo every day, I would clean all the cages...they wouldn't let me in the jaguar cage...”(Woman, cougar owner) and “I went to the San Francisco zoo a lot...”(Woman, cougar, bobcat, wolf hybrid owner).

A small number of enthusiasts that were interviewed indicated growing up in a rural background. For example, the woman who had caiman reptiles said: “I'm a country farm head from Iowa.” Another man mentioned growing up on a farm:

I grew up in Germantown, Tennessee, which, then, was a rurally isolated area, and my dad was big into Tennessee Walking Horses...so I grew up on a horse farm, with chickens, ducks, pigs—typical farm, small farm. (Man, cat sanctuary)

One woman remembered having access to exotic animals through a traveling circus:

Interviewer: When did you get your first exotic animal?

My first was when I was in Oregon in the mountains. These people were doing a circus in town, they were there with their bears. So we got to take the bears on a leash, well, a chain. They had three brown bears and three Siberian grizzly bears—babies—and when they wanted a bottle they'd say "mom" and when you'd put your finger in their mouth they'd suck on it like this...it was cute you know. We'd like hang out together and I'd go up there all the time...we'd take the bears along the river on the chains and people would canoe by and they would say 'look there's bears'...(Woman, cougar/bobcat/wolf hybrid owner)

The in-depth interviews also revealed that, for two of animal enthusiasts, their first exotic pet was given to them. For example, two of the women interviewed received their exotic cats (both of them, cougars) from people that thought the women would provide a better home for the animals. One of the women was also given an exotic cat by her father as a child, and later, by her husband. She said: "I don't think I would have ever bought a cougar on my own." These two women who did not seek out their exotic pets also claimed not to watch wildlife television (one was the self-described "la la lady").

Mediating factors such as zoos, growing up rural, and the influence of other people were noted by a fraction (2% or less for each) of participants in this study as having an influence in their wildlife interests. Although this is a small number, it is significant to this study because they potentially played a part in the participants' lives. It is possible that these mediating factors were present in the lives of more enthusiasts I talked with—they may have talked about them more if I had asked specifically about each one, as I did wildlife television.

The findings revealed that wildlife television was not only an important source of information for this particular group of animal enthusiasts but also provided a potential emotional connection with animals. The findings also revealed that 1) animal enthusiasts placed an emotional value on their interpretations of respect for wildlife on television; 2) animal enthusiasts valued wildlife programming with a conservation message that was consistent between what the spokesperson said and how the animal was portrayed; 3) animal enthusiasts had a preference for wildlife programming that was perceived as natural; and 4) had a disdain for programming that was interpreted as disrupting the wild. What is relevant to this study is the role that emotion played for animal enthusiasts in their reactions to wildlife programming and in how they described their relationships with their exotic pets. The role of emotion as a potential motivator to interact with exotic animals will be the focus of the discussion section.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The findings in this study suggest that *emotional* reactions to wildlife television surround enthusiasts': 1) notion of respect for an animal; 2) reverence for the wild; and 3) characterizations of their relationships with their exotic pets. This further suggests that emotion potentially plays a role as motivators for their own interactions with animals. This section examines the possibility of emotion serving as a motivator—for a small number of animal enthusiasts—in which to model human-wildlife interactions as seen on television.

Modeling a behavior

SCT suggests that if a person watches in the appropriate context, he or she may mimic the behavior on television. Even further, one who most identifies with the spokesperson not only may be more likely to watch, but also may be subject to vicarious modeling. I am interested in whether the emotional reactions of *certain* individuals to wildlife programming, coupled with identifying with the spokesperson, motivates them to model the human-wildlife interaction they may witness on television.

While most of the participants interviewed valued wildlife programming that was pristine and wild, one man admitted to liking the *interaction* of the spokesperson with the animal. He stated that he liked Jeff Corwin and watched him “a lot” on television. He

then began describing a certain program he had watched on Animal Planet that he liked better than the Jeff Corwin video I had just shown him:

The one that maybe would have been more interesting was the one, did you see the one with Jennifer Aniston and the bear? With the grizzly? I'm not a big J.A. fan but she was pretty cool with this bear–grizzly–it would only take one shot for the bear to decapitate her. And that was interactive. There's all kinds of stuff like that around. (Man, lynx owner)

During the interview, the same man talked about another program on television that showed a man interacting with wild sharks. Later, he admitted to hand-feeding wild sharks as well:

Wanna talk about something on TV...it was either on Animal Planet or Discovery...a story called shark man and 'tonic immobility'–putting sharks to sleep under water–they sent him to the Bahamas and he trained with the lady that showed me how to do it...I tangled with an eight and a half-footer [shark] and broke my finger! I went back and did it [hand-feeding sharks] twice more after that, the year after and the year after that. (Man, lynx owner)

This suggests that the man acted out a human-wildlife interaction that he witnessed on television. It is possible that his affinity was for spokespeople who interacted with wildlife and that were male, like him. He described how he liked Steve Irwin's style of interacting with animals:

I liked him [Steve Irwin]. He's a showman. When you are putting on a performance, certain standards are required...Irwin's venomous handling techniques worked well. (Man, lynx owner)

He went on to discuss Steve Irwin's death after interacting with a wild stingray:

I would love to see what happened. I don't want to see him die. I just want to see what happened. It's an animal behavior thing. I would like to see what he did. Seeing it and describing it are two different things...I want to see it on video. (Man, lynx owner)

His desire to “see” Irwin's interaction with the wild stingray, suggests that television provides a visual instruction for him. This is not to say that wildlife television is the

reason for his interest in wildlife—he had earlier been described as having a calling for wildlife at an early age. In addition, there are other mediating factors for his interest—he had also stated a love for reading as a child and had also visited zoos. However, it is possible that a male spokesperson interacting with a wild animal provided a model for him.

An animal spokesperson, when interacting with an animal, may act like a *teacher* for the animal enthusiast. For example, another man in the study liked Corwin's handling style as well. He had this to say about the Corwin video:

Initially, when I saw the bear on stage, I felt it was going to be another animal exploitation type of thing, but when I saw Jeff Corwin everything just went away and I just watched and I became the student because I would never critique what he, uh, he would be the one I would call and ask questions. Even though I have more experience with my animals than he has with my animals. I have to say, I think Corwin loves animals as much as anyone. (Man, wolf sanctuary)

His description the he “became the student,” is a powerful suggestion that the interaction on television provided a visual instruction for him.

In addition, he talked of his interpretation of Corwin's “love” for animals. What I witnessed in this man was a love for his animals as well. He had taken me on a tour of his wolf sanctuary in which he provided a home for rescued wolves. I was introduced to and watched him affectionately interact with a wolf that had been physically abused by a previous owner. It is possible that he saw this love for his animals reflected in Corwin's love for his. This emotion could be a potential motivator for his behavior to interact with exotic animals. In addition, he was a self-described “animal nut” when he was a child and recalled watching Jim Fowler and Marlin Perkins on *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*.

As previously mentioned, this suggests that watching wildlife television is not the source for the will to interact with wildlife, but may provide the visual instruction and self-efficacy needed for *certain* individuals to model the behavior. This may be especially applicable to individuals seeking out wildlife television as a source of information, not entertainment, like many of the animal enthusiasts in this study. In addition, some enthusiasts stated a preference for certain spokespeople, possibly because they reflected traits in themselves. Themes emerged regarding the ways in which some of the individuals in this study expressed themselves and may be reflected in their preferred wildlife programming: *being different*, *protecting a species*, and *taming the wild*.

Being different

The theme, *being different*, was seen in many of the enthusiasts in this study. It was in their descriptions of their emotional connections with their animals, why they acquired their exotic pets, and even in how they were compared themselves to their families. This man revealed his interactions with exotic cats that may have been interpreted as “really different”:

I just wanted to do something really special and really different—and just being taken by those ocelots [exotic cats]. Back then, you could buy ocelots in a pet store, with no license. We lived in Atlanta, with two ocelots, in an apartment! And that was not a good situation. They used to go swimming with us in the community swimming pool, things like that. We drove everybody off! They don't smell real good. (Man, cat sanctuary)

During the interview one woman revealed that she had a calling that was different from her family, and even they thought she was “the crazy one” because of her wildlife interactions:

I grew up wanting every kind of animal, wanting stray animals- bringing them home and getting into trouble- giving them baths, putting flea powder on them.

Interviewer: So, you didn't have them in your family?

No, my family always thought I was crazy- I was the crazy one and now they think I am even more crazy. (Woman, cougar/wolf hybrid, bobcat owner)

Sometimes the participants described an emotional connection with their exotic pets that they interpreted to be special. The woman that had previously said she had a “drive” to interact with animals that was different from her family, also said: “I think of myself as Mrs. Doolittle because I have my own way of communicating with the animals, each animal knows me and I know them.” Then, she discussed with her husband why their family liked Steve Irwin:

Husband: They [his children] liked the guy that just died by the stingray, I liked that guy...yeah, Steve Irwin. I loved his shows.

Interviewer: What did you like about him?

Husband: He was crazy.

Wife: He'd do anything. He wasn't afraid of animals. And that's how I am. My kids aren't like that. They can give or take.

Husband: that's the guy I used to watch all the time (Husband of marmoset monkey/petting zoo owner)

The woman compared her behavior to what her husband described as Irwin’s “crazy” behavior. This suggests that she related to Irwin’s interaction with animals because she saw the same traits in her. It is also interesting that their children watched Irwin as well, but apparently they do not share her lack of fear of animals.

Being different is a theme that incorporates how many of the enthusiasts in this study viewed their emotional connections to animals and how they may be different from their families. Owning and interacting with exotic animals is different as well. For some

of the enthusiasts, this may be a trait they see in as reflected in the animal spokespeople they watch on television.

Protecting a species

The theme, *protecting a species*, encapsulates the animal enthusiasts' passion for wildlife and their respect for wild animals and natural environments. It also includes the emotional connections to their exotic pets and to what they see as their "mission" to protect what is wild. This was seen in the man who had rescued exotic cats:

We don't have animals that have been taken from the wild. I don't go out and try to do what these people do in the wild. That's not my specialty. I take in animals that many times were pets that didn't work out. Others were at sanctuaries that couldn't meet the code requirements. And we bring them in, try to make them happy...they'll be here for the rest of their lives. And my mission is to see if I can go in with these animals, try to work with these animals, what we call behavioral enrichment. And we're successful. We find that even animals sent by FWC [Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission] that are 'dangerous' animals, we can usually have a breakthrough. At least one person will be able to go in with them... if we keep meddling with [wildlife], paving over their habitats, they'll be gone. In fact, we may be the last keepers of these guys. (Man, cat sanctuary)

This man had earlier described how he and his wife shared their apartment with two ocelot exotic cats which he stated was "not a good situation." He later talks of another exotic pet that he purchased on impulse:

Interviewer: What triggers someone to get an exotic pet?

It's impulsive. And I did that with one of those two macaws [parrots] out there. We went to Tallahassee, almost 20 yrs ago, I was bored and was looking through the classifieds and saw 'macaws for sale'...and I said 'hey, this would be fun, while she's [wife] in school I'll go and get a macaw' and I didn't even have a cage. So I bought that animal and brought it home and I still have it. But I guess I'm one of the unusual bunch because a lot of people will do that, they'll keep it for a couple of weeks and, like, Bliss, the serval [cat] out here, her last keepers had her for two weeks and declared her a dangerous cat and sent her—a \$2,000 cat—for free, because they could not manage the cat. And people do that, it's impulsive. (Man, cat sanctuary)

This man admitted to making an “impulsive” purchase of an exotic macaw but he remained committed to that animal because he still cares for it, twenty years later. This type of commitment was seen in many of the participants in this study. It is this commitment that also makes up the theme, *protecting a species*.

An 81-year-old woman (the one whose son gave her an exotic cat to keep her company when she retired) apparently had a connection that manifested itself into a mission to take care of the animals: “All my life I've always loved animals, injured and sick animals were brought to me. I love all animals but exotic cats fascinate me. There's a look in their eyes.” Another woman, now in her seventies, used to travel around in her “RV” with various exotic animals, giving lectures about wildlife. She told me: “I’m against turning animals loose and disrupting the ecology.”

Defiance is sometimes a part of being a protector. For example, this man makes comments regarding protecting animals:

It's important to tell people and to share how important it is to save land for all of the animals, especially the mammals- if I take a hammer and slam your hand, you cry out, a wolf would cry out in pain too- they feel pain the same as we do and anybody who would be cruel to animals is as bad as a child molester. I was the type of person who if anyone burned a cat I would get gasoline and light their leg on fire. (Man, wolf owner)

Protecting a species describes the recognition of what these enthusiasts have the utmost respect for: wild animals in a natural environment. It combines an emotional connection to wildlife with the commitment to care for it, sometimes defiantly. It is possible that some animal enthusiasts may relate to this trait in a spokesperson.

Taming the wild

Taming the wild describes some of the animal enthusiasts in the study who were aware of and described the potential danger of interacting with their particular pet. Sometimes, the defiant nature of the enthusiast was seen as an aspect of controlling what was wild. This was interesting because so many of the enthusiasts appreciated wildlife programming described as about “nature” and that did not interfere with the wild animal.

For a few individuals, the way they described handling their exotic animals involved controlling them. Even the woman in her seventies who owned caiman reptiles said: “People used to say to me 'you cannot tame a caiman' and I proved them wrong!” She went on to describe how her grandchildren rode on the backs of the reptiles.

The man who admitted to hand-feeding sharks also described his interactions with his lynx cats: “They'll put you in the hospital, no question—they crunch up chicken quarters like a potato chip. If you're going to cry over two or three stitches you have no business doing it!” There was a sense that he enjoyed the danger aspect, especially as he went on to describe his desire to handle venomous snakes. Another man in the study—the only one that I am aware of—actually had a license to handle venomous snakes.

One woman, in particular, had commented on the poor animal handling techniques of Jeff Corwin due to their unsafe nature. Throughout the interview, how she handled her animals emerged in ways that contradicted what she said was safe:

Some people say ‘why do you do this?’ [Interact with big cats] I just go by: if they're [big cats] capable of doing that, I just take it that when I go in with them they will do that. He can jump 20 feet in the air and 20 feet across the cage so I'm not going to think any day that he's not going to do something that is in his nature

to do. Number one rule, which is, common sense. Number two is never turn your back on them and course smaller cats like Cheyenne, the bobcat I have, she sleeps with me, I have her in my bedroom. But the bigger cats, you turn your back on them and you're prey. (Woman, cougar/wolf hybrid, bobcat owner)

Later, she said:

I hand-feed all my animals. We'd go in with the lions and hand-feed them, and I could kiss them on the lips...We had a whole lot of fun with those bears! We'd put a jellybean in our mouth and the bear would get it. Yeah, the bears came to my daughter's sixth birthday party, she had her arms around them and the other kids were like standing back, like you're crazy. And they're never tame. People say 'oh, they're tame, you tamed your animals' and I'm like 'no, they're not tame' they're wild animals—it's what everyone thinks—but no, they're always wild. My family gets mad because I won't get on an airplane but I'm with these wild animals...you can't control an airplane. (Woman, cougar/wolf hybrid, bobcat owner)

For this particular animal enthusiast, she was aware of the potential danger of interacting with her exotic animals. Even further, there was a contradiction between what she said was safe and how she described her actions. She appeared to receive an emotional connection through her interactions with her “wild animals” that apparently she could control more than an airplane. *Taming the wild* describes this theme that emerged among a few of the animal enthusiasts. While many of the enthusiasts, in some sense, were aware of and spoke to the danger of interacting with their pets, only a few talked about it with such emotion. Therefore, there also may be a potential connection between this personality trait and what enthusiasts seek out in an animal spokesperson.

These emergent themes, when combined together into one individual, are marked where the shapes overlap in *Figure 2*.

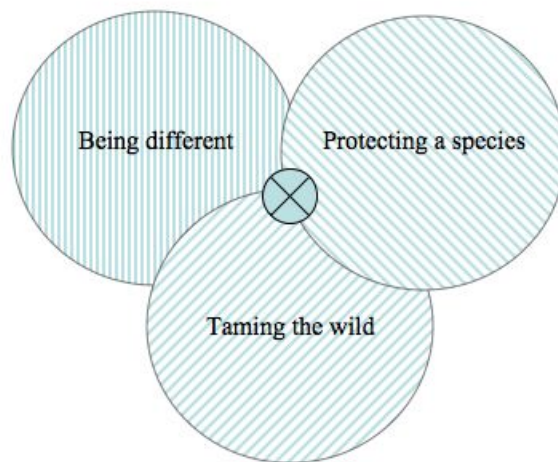


Figure 2. Emergent themes: exotic pet owners' relationships with their animals

The point at which they overlap may provide the necessary personal determinants required for a person to be receptive to modeling a human-wildlife interaction as seen on television. As described earlier, only a few of the animal enthusiasts interviewed had all of these characteristics. And even then, that is not to say that they necessarily were influenced only by wildlife television. Other mediating factors, such as zoos and other people, may have provided models.

The most important trait in the people interviewed for this thesis was that they had a permit to have these animals. They were rule-followers. The concern should be for the

people who watch human-wildlife interactions on television who have the above traits *in addition* to a disregard to permitting requirements.

The themes that emerged in this study explore characterizations that were present in some animal enthusiasts that were interviewed. For some of these individuals, the motivators to carry out a behavior as seen on television may be emotion, relating to the spokesperson, and feeling that they have the self-efficacy to carry out the behavior. According to SCT, televised human-wildlife interactions may provide not only the modeling but potentially give viewers the self-efficacy to try it on their own. The emotional connection to seeing a wild animal up-close, combined with the visual instruction of a human-wildlife interaction with a charismatic spokesperson, make a powerful combination. This may have the tendency to motivate certain viewers to mimic the behavior.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This emergent and grounded study explores the potential relationship between wildlife television viewing and interpretations of human-wildlife interactions for animal enthusiasts who own exotic pets. The meanings that emerge from this analysis suggest that wildlife television was not only an important source of information for this particular group of animal enthusiasts but also provided an emotional connection with animals. This leads to important questions regarding the effects emotion has on viewer behavior toward wildlife.

This study begins an exploration into the characteristics that make up particular viewers who may be likely to model human-animal interactions as seen on screen. The themes that emerged described these traits as *being different*, *protecting a species*, and *taming the wild*. The discussion revealed that participants with all three of the emergent themes combined to create a potential for modeling wildlife television. Emotion was key to many of the participants' reactions to wildlife television and potentially serves as a motivating factor for interacting with exotic animals.

Research suggests that the entertainment genre of wildlife programming—opposed to a nature documentary—is not likely to produce environmentally friendly behaviors in the viewer (Clark, 2006; Holbert, Kwak & Shah 2003). What is lacking in the literature is an investigation into the potential relationship between the genre of wildlife

programming viewed and human-wildlife interactions. This study starts this investigation by exploring the interpretations of animal enthusiasts to human-wildlife interactions on television. It found that many of the participants who interact with exotic animals valued wildlife television that featured a spokesperson not interacting with what was concerned “wild” or “natural.”

Implications for Wildlife Programming

This study has further implications for how to portray wildlife responsibly and incorporate an empowering conservation message in wildlife programming. An element of SCT that may be used is pro-social modeling, in which people can be encouraged to “behave altruistically” through “exemplification” (Bandura, 2001, p. 282). Models are powerful when they prove to the viewer that they, too, will benefit from the rewards, or reinforcement. This social action is applied in social marketing as well. The learning of an appropriate behavior through its modeling in mass media has been determined to be an effective tool in public communication campaigns (McGuire, 1981).

Due to the findings regarding the animal enthusiasts’ reactions to the two genres of wildlife television, future study is needed to establish criteria involved in a responsible conservation message. I suggest a preliminary model for an “ideal” wildlife program in *Figure 3*. These include incorporating the following elements: 1) an emotional connection between the viewer and the animal; 2) displaying the animal’s natural behaviors with little human interaction; and 3) a verbal conservation message that is consistent with the action of the animal. Combined together, these elements possibly would provide programming that would not only be sought after by those interested in wildlife, but would deliver a responsible conservation message.

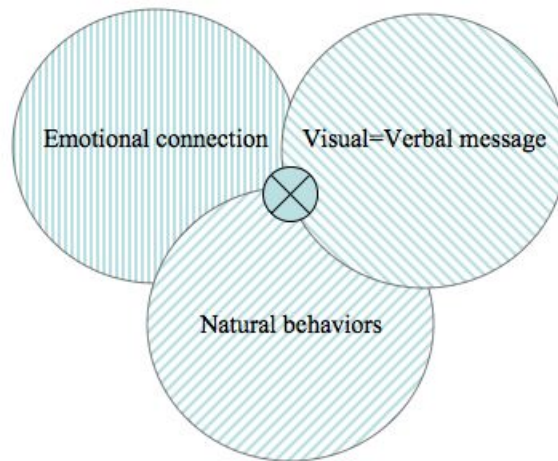


Figure 3. Preliminary model for an entertainment-education wildlife program

The symbol in *Figure 3* represents the area where all three elements overlap, an ideal combination for a wildlife program. I propose to create this model program that would combine the emotional elements of an up-close interaction with a wild animal with modeling the corresponding responsible human behavior. In an entertainment venue, such as a talk show, this would entail up-close encounters with an exotic animal that is portrayed as wild without obvious human interaction. For example, instead of the spokesperson hand feeding a bear, the bear would “discover” food that is hidden. This would highlight the animal’s natural keen sense of smell. Meanwhile, the spokesperson could demonstrate the proper *human* behavior by putting people food in a bear-proof container.

Through this preliminary model, I suggest that wildlife programming follow the trend of entertainment-education interventions (Singhal & Rogers, 2002).

“Entertainment-education is defined as the intentional placement of educational content in entertainment messages...a strategy used to disseminate ideas to bring about behavioral and social change” (p. 117). Wildlife programming and human-wildlife interactions on talk shows should take the form of this entertainment-education. They should focus on modeling the desirable ways to interact—or not interact—with wildlife.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study had many shortcomings, including the selected sample. As previously mentioned, the animal enthusiasts who participated in the study were all permit holders. They were not only “rule-followers,” but acquired the necessary animal handling experience to care for their exotic pets. They also had spent time and money to secure the permit, and subjected themselves to public record. Most importantly, they were committed to their pets and often took in those that needed care due to others’ lack of responsibility. Future research should focus on those enthusiasts who have not demonstrated the commitment of getting a permit (although this would be difficult). In addition, the participants were all over the age of 35. The interpretations of younger animal enthusiasts should be studied as well.

While the enthusiasts provided a rich combination of interpretations, however, they all had an interest in animals. Future studies would benefit from getting interpretations from people who do not have the background with animals and who more frequently view talk shows. Only one participant watched *Ellen* regularly. However, most of them had watched Jeff Corwin regularly. But none of the participants had seen Jeff

Corwin with an animal on the Ellen show. In a sense, this study produced its own audience solely for the project. Having an audience with little knowledge of animal interactions could produce entirely different reactions—possibly more in line with what the producers intended. In fact, the pilot study did get limited reactions from the general public that were entirely different from this group of animal enthusiasts.

The interviews were not in a naturalistic context, and the viewing habits as reported relied on self-report. In some instances the situations were more naturalistic because the television viewing was sometimes interrupted by animal behaviors (a wolf and pup were growling at each other; a marmoset monkey jumped on the laptop showing the video; exotic serval cats were running through cat door into the room). These provided enough interruptions to necessitate another study that incorporates this viewing context. In most cases there was strict attention paid to the video because the participants knew it was an academic study. In addition, they knew it centered on wildlife television.

However, as qualitative fieldwork, the purpose is not to generalize, but rather to gain insight and a richer understanding of the ways people may interpret human-animal interactions in a wildlife program. Results highlight the importance and the standpoint of the viewer in interpreting wildlife conservation messages on television. According to this thesis, wildlife television may provide modeling and perceived self-efficacy, but it is the condition of the viewer that ultimately determines how the message is interpreted. This portrayal of a wildlife interaction as socially sanctioned may potentially increase the confidence of a viewer to interact with an exotic animal, especially if it also forges an emotional connection to wildlife.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

LETTER TO EXOTIC PET OWNERS

Dear _____,

June 2, 2008

My name is Susannah Smith, and I am a graduate student at the University of South Florida. I am contacting Class II wildlife permit holders in the state of Florida as interview subjects for an academic study. I am interested in your perspectives because, as a registered permit holder, you are a responsible wildlife pet owner.

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship of wildlife television with human-wildlife interactions. I will be calling you to ask a few questions regarding your interest in wildlife television; it will take only a few minutes.

The results will be used for my master's thesis, and your identity as a participant will be protected and known only to me as the researcher.

If you have any questions or would like to contact me directly, you may email me at xxxxx@mail.usf.edu, or call xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you,

Susannah L. Smith, Graduate Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

APPENDIX II

CORWIN VIDEO

- Corwin You know what, this is a powerful animal. This is a very, very, powerful creature. And by its nature it's not an aggressive animal but if it was in a situation where it needed to defend itself it certainly...
[BEAR IS MOVING ABOUT, EATING GRAPES THROWN OFF CAMERA]
It's like someone from the audience is throwing grapes, and I'm going to take them.
- DeGeneres It's actually the trainer...
[LAUGHTER]
- Corwin The thing about these bears is that they require...
[BEAR CLIMBS ONTO DESK AND TELEPHONE]
...they require an incredible...he can do whatever he wants, call New York, whatever. Here are your glasses...
- DeGeneres Boy, that smells!
- Corwin He loved your book by the way...
- DeGeneres How big will this get?
- Corwin This bear could easily push 300 pounds in size...
- DeGeneres It's going for the Altoids.
- Corwin No Altoids...it's a very distracting creature, isn't it?
- DeGeneres What should you do if you see a bear? Ummm...
- Corwin If you see a wild bear on your property?
- DeGeneres Yeah.
- Corwin Well, what you would do is you would enjoy that bear, maybe take a photograph of it, but the last thing you would want to do is...
[LAUGHTER AS THE BEAR EXPLORES THE DESK]
...something that attracts the bear to your property. They have a saying in wildlife management that a 'fed bear is a dead bear' because once that bear gets used to people...
[LAUGHTER AS BEAR CLAWS AT CAMERA]
- DeGeneres No, what I'm asking is, say you're hiking, what should you do if you see a bear?
- Corwin You should make lots of noise, you want that bear to know that you're there, in its presence...
[CONTINUED LAUGHTER AS BEAR CLAWS AT CAMERA]
...and basically give the bear lots of space.
[BEAR CLAWS AT CORWIN]
I'm not the camera, beat him up!
...Never run from a bear, never ever run from a bear, because a bear can outrun you. For example, you run over there!
- DeGeneres No! [LAUGHTER]

APPENDIX III

ATTENBOROUGH VIDEO

Attenborough [VOICE-OVER]

Their diets will be clearly defined by a seasonal cycle.

[WILD BEARS ARE FORAGING FOR FOOD]

Now, in April, they eat roots. Roots are followed by grass. It's easy food, but they will quickly go on to the next course if something really big shows up.

[WILD BEARS ARE EATING A WHALE CARCASS]

This whale carcass will last them nearly a month. But, by May, fresh meat is on the menu.

[WILD BEAR CHASES DOWN A DEER]

Mid-summer, and they're back on the salmon.

[BACKGROUND: WILD BEAR FISHING IN RIVER]

[FOREGROUND: ATTENBOROUGH ADDRESSES CAMERA]

This bear has been out of hibernation for about four months. Surprisingly, it has not gained any weight. But, if it is to survive the coming winter, now is the time it really has to pack on the pounds. Salmon, one of the most important sources of food for bears, is now available in quantity, as the fish migrate in thousands up the rivers to spawn.

APPENDIX IV

LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Class II wildlife permit holder,

July 20, 2008

My name is Susannah Smith, and earlier this summer I contacted you about participating in a University of South Florida study on wildlife television. During that first contact, I was attempting to interview as many permit holders as possible. I have conducted many interviews throughout the state but am not able to reach everyone, even by phone.

To date, the results have been gratifying, but I am now trying to increase the number of participants to further diversify my findings. I understand you likely have a very busy schedule and have little time to complete an interview in person. However, I am hoping that instead you will participate in this study by filling out and returning the enclosed questionnaire. It should take less than five minutes to complete, and I have included the return envelope with postage.

As a master's student at USF this study is part of my thesis. Your identity as a participant will be anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like to contact me directly, you may email me at xxxxxx@mail.usf.edu, or call (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Or, if you would like to talk with my thesis advisor, Dr. Kenneth Killebrew, he may be reached at xxxxxx@cas.usf.edu or (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you,

Susannah L Smith, Graduate Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

APPENDIX V
QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a study being carried out at the University of South Florida. Participation in the survey is voluntary and your answers will be anonymous. The results of this survey will be used for academic purposes.

Please answer the following questions and return in the envelope provided. If you have questions, please contact Susannah Smith at xxxxxx@mail.usf.edu or (xxx)xxx-xxxx. Thank you!

1. What animals do you own? Please list.

Felines:
Primates:
Other:

Reptiles:
Canids:

2. How do you describe your animals? Please circle one or more:

Family member
Pet
Other:

Business
Rescued

3. How did you develop an interest in wildlife?

4. What, if any, wildlife television did you watch growing up?

5. What, if any, wildlife television do you watch today?

Background information:

Female

Male

age:

What is your profession?