Understanding Views on Sentience and Conservation: A Study of Emotional Experiences with Wildlife

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This paper identifies and measures ñhuman perceptions of animal sentience,ò instilling an emotional approach to reflections on wildlife interactions, conservation, and biodiversity.

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Introduction

The relationship between humans and non-human animals has evolved throughout history and varies between cultures, communities, and individuals. Specifically, how people view and value non-human sentience has been a topic of research among scholars. Jane Goodall was one of the first experts to dismantle the popular concept of the dichotomy between humans and animals by proving that tool-use, culture, and emotional connection are not unique to homosapiens. She suggested that those who have spent considerable time with animals recognize that our non-human companions and wildlife possess sentience. She articulated that, ñonce you are prepared to admit that animals are sentient and cannot only know emotions like happiness, sadness, fear, but especially they can feel pain ð then, as humans with advanced reasoning powers, we have a responsibility to treat them in more humane ways than we so often doò (Jane Goodall Institute, 2019). Because humans play a large role in non-human animal conservation, the extent to which humans understand and experience sentience among non-human beings may impact the future of conservation and the future of human-wildlife interactions and coexistence.

In recent years, experts have called for the dismantling of traditional binaries between homo sapiens and non-human animals. ¥zdemir suggests we break the binary between humans and non-human animals and between humans and nature with governance frameworks like ñOne Nature.ò Such a paradigm calls for humans to move beyond anthropocentric ways of thinking and operating within the global ecosystem. This begins with recognizing animal sentience (¥zdemir, 2020 ®

Problem

As humans continue to encroach upon natural habitats,

sentient beings in order to recognize our common place on Earth. Within this community setting, we want to foster meaningful reflections about human-animal interactions that will influence participantsôown lives. In our call for written narratives, we are hoping to have an immediate effect on both the researchers and the participants. Building off of Richardsonôs ideas, the researchers believe that the writing process will initiate discovery for the participants, inspire connection between human participants and sentient life, as well as produce meaning and create new awareness of reality in the process (Richardson, 2001). The researchers acknowledge that writing cannot be untainted from the life experiences of those wb

to acknowledge and share the personal perspectives of all researchers involved, herein. Each author brings unique experiences, education, and emotion to the table. Sharing these perspectives creates a more open and personal connection between the researchers and the readers. In their work, Treves and colleagues include a section where they acknowledge and share their varying opinions and viewpoints on the topic of preservation. The authors share that, while they all are passionate about the subject and are contributing intellectual content to the article, they are not all perfectly aligned in their views of non-human animal rights (Treves et al., 2019). Similarly, we hold varying opinions and beliefs on the topic of non-human animal sentience and conservation. Thus, Treves and colleagues have inspired this section, which we have chosen to dedicate to the personal narratives of the researchers.

Jeffery believes that deconstructing the deeply-rooted, hierarchical relationship between humans and non-human animals is essential. Eliminating these preconceived notions of human superiority and leaning into the sentient nature of all beings will allow all species to coexist on Earth in a compassionate manner and reduce the severe habitat disruption and subsequent biodiversity loss we currently face.

Douglas argues that sentience is the strongest connection shared between humans and non-human animals; thus, it is the duty of humans to recognize that shared sentience is in direct conflict with anthropocentrism, which has driven the destruction of natural habitats. While concepts of sentience may be too abstract and foreign for some individuals to openly embrace, Reilly agrees with Douglas that attitudes towards human-animal relations must be reconsidered by the common population for real conservation to occur. Reilly feels that anthropocentrism is so deeply ingrained in today's societies that individuals may need time to acclimate to the shifting

paradigm, or else they may reject these ideas outright. Thus, Reilly feels that the best approach is to ease people into these discussions, especially if they are unfamiliar with the topics.

Lynch is compelled to deconstruct dominant species categories and work against the human exceptionalist framework. Inspired by the work of Kirksey and Helmreich (2010), Lynch hopes to bring in perspectives of equality, replacing the language of nonhuman species with multispecies understanding. Additionally, it is imperative to advance our Western public understanding of animal sentience beyond utilitarian valuation of species, and towards an understanding of multispecies as good to live with, and among (Kirksey and Helmriech, 2010).

Richards believes that the binaries that exist separating nonhuman animals from humans are harmful for all species. It is in all species best interest that such binaries and hierarchies are dismantled because all lives have inherent value. Richards hopes that engaging in critical and enriching conversations about animal sentience is an important step in breaking down these traditional barriers.

Trends in Existing Literature

The existing body of research explores the role of values, attitudes, and direct interactions on the relationship between human and nonhuman creatures, citizen monitoring, and conservation practices. There are a variety of trends especially salient to future research on the role of sentience in motivations for better treatment of wildlife. Numerous studies highlight the importance of compassion in human attitudes towards wildlife, reporting emotional variables as the strongest predictor of wildlife management of house sparrows; and, that human empathy toward animals and stronger feelings about sentience may lead to better treatment of animals (Larson et al., 2016; Cornish et al., 2018). Empathetic treatment of animals extends to

perspective (Dolby, 2020). Dolbyôs emphasis on empathy in her study and her use of college students as participants are two things weôd like to mirror in our study. Wallach and colleagues argue for the implementation of compassionate conservation, a form of conservation in which all non-human animal subjects are treated as sentient beings and are seen for their intrinsic value (Wallach et al., 2018). The authors studied various cases of animal conservation and critique the ways they ignore animal sentience and act with an anthropocentric set of goals (Wallach et al., 2018). While we will not be analyzing current conservation efforts, we will be investigating the relationship between views on non-human animal sentience as it relates to attitudes towards conservation. Manfredo and colleagues, through their analysis of sociocultural values on wildlife conservation, define value systems through material culture, stories, value systems and more (2020). This study assesses the impact of values towards non-human animals on wildlife conservation belief. Our study will seek to similarly assess how views on wildlife sentience impact perceptions of wildlife conservation through stories, photos, and other such mediums. In our data collection period we aim to foster a warm and accepting environment for the participants in our discussion group where they will be invited to truly explore their thoughts and feelings about animal sentience. Similarly to Dolby, we will encourage participants to put themselves in the other beingôs place and try to interpret and receive their energy and emotions. We will prompt the study participants to thoughtfully reflect upon their interactions with nonhuman wildlife animals. We want to call attention to the unique energetic bond that is shared between two sentient beings. We will encourage our participants to bring an ever present awareness of consciousness that all living creatures possess. We hope that this heightened awareness can lead to more meaningful discussion, reflection, and continued mutually beneficial

participants through convenience sampling, as the researchers surveyed attendees to an animal welfare symposium (2018). In both studies, participants had already demonstrated a significant interest in animals and animal wellbeing, which impacted results (Larson et al., 2016; Cornish et al., 2018). Our study will be from a more mixed background of people with various interests, not just limited to people who already show special interest in animals.

Areas for Further Study

While the literature on wildlife covers both a range of subtopics and considerable depth in specific areas, significant gaps persist. Specifically, there is much to be studied on the perception of animal sentience by human beings, how this impacts human-animal relationships, and what effects this has on conservation efforts and awareness. Larson and colleaguesôanalysis of experiential factors supports the belief that experiences with wildlife strengthen affective and emotional responses to wildlife stimuli (Larson, et al. 2016). This study opens up an area for research on the role of understanding and appreciation of sentience for the formation of emotional dispositions and attitudes toward wildlife. The work of Cornish and colleagues similarly creates the potential for further research on what exactly motivates people to connect to animal sentience (2018). While the researchers examine demographic factors that influence

previously been attempted in other research. We will prompt the study participants to thoughtfully reflect upon their interactions with nonhuman wildlife animals. We want to call attention to the unique energetic bond that is shared between two sentient beings. We will encourage our participants to bring an ever present awareness of consciousness that all living creatures possess. We hope that this heightened awareness can lead to more meaningful discussion, reflection, and continued mutually beneficial interactions between our study participants and any nonhuman wildlife animals they may encounter.

Research Question

What motivates participants to connect to animal sentience, and how could this motivation lead to better treatment of wildlife? We hope to add to existing literature by filling the gaps concerning the emotional impact of wildlife interaction and actionable effects this has on human beings towards conservation and wildlife habitat protection. Ideally, we will identify patterns and trends in wildlife interactions that demonstrate effective ways to encourage

our participantsôoverall experience with the study. Boston College students are unique in their ability to reflect, communicate, and empathize with others. All Boston College students are required to complete the Core Curriculum which fosters critical thinking skills and the ability to compassionately communicate ideas. Moreover, the Jesuit values promulgated throughout Boston College place a strong emphasis on service to others and working to makP

Data Collection Methods

Participants were invited via text, email, word-of-mouth, and social media to post their wildlife interactions to the Facebook group. Participants were asked to share narratives, photos, videos, or audio files and prompted to reflect on the emotional experiences of their wildlife interactions. A common barrier for citizen science research is sustained engagement and commitment of participants (Paleco et al., 2021). We aim to address this challenge by offering multiple project entry points as well as multiple ways to participate at different levels of commitment in the Facebook group (Paleco et al., 2021). Examples of participation beyond posting include interacting with other posts through likes and comments, watching live stream videos hosted by the researchers, and referring other participants to the group. Data collection began on October 14, 2020 and concluded on April 14, 2021.

Data Analysis

An essential part of our data analysis method is co-creation, which allows our study to build a rich narrative between the participants and the researchers (Bº nish-Brednich, 2018). Bº nish-Brednich emphasizes that unconventional methods of narrative ethnography are in tension with the need for ethnographic research to be taken seriously as a social science (Bº nish-Brednich, p. 9, 2018). While yet, a narrative best captures the emotions expressed by participants regarding their wildlife interactions, and is most true to the nature of sentience. Furthermore, our methods follow an intuitive analysis approach as opposed to analytical coding of the data. Bº nish-Brednich affirms that while ñit is tempting to turn stories into data and devalue the act of deep listening and narrative contemplation,ò the process of ordering stories into narratives is best guided by a qualitative approach that does not lose the emotions in the

participantôs stories by dissecting them (Bº nish-Brednich, p. 10, 2018). Our analysis emphasizes intuitive wisdoms while employing research convention when appropriate.

The data was assessed using a series of qualitative questions that consider the emotions and sentience behind the submitted photographs, videos, and audio recordings. Questions that guide our data analysis include: what type of wild animal is shown? What is the context of the photo? What does the composition of the photograph say about the relationship between the person and the animal? What captions and stories are included? What emotions do the

It is crucial for humans to connect to non-human sentient beings in order to recognize our common place on Earth. Understanding human relationships with other sentient beings can allow us to discover how we can better share our planet and protect precious species. These relationships, built on sentient interactions, are key to the empathetic treatment of wildlife and survival of biodiversity on our planet. Our research intends to instill an emotional approach to considerations of interspecies interactions and caretaking of our natural world. In conducting this research, we hope to produce meaningful outcomes that benefit the participants, the researchers, and wildlife. Through this study, we aim to gain a better understanding of the ways human feelings about animal sentience and emotion can impact the treatment of wild animals and perspectives on conservation. We also want to foster meaningful reflections about the emotional experiences in human-animal interactions in a community setting. Asking participants to explore

Media Type	
Photo	17
Video	3
None	1

College Attended	
Boston College	13
Other	4

Trends

Trend 1: Key words about animal sentience

Because studies in this area of research have investigated human acknowledgement of animal sentience, a chosen theme for analysis was the use of the word sentience or a related acknowledgement of non-human animal emotion within the described interaction. Fourteen, or 63.63%, of the participants commented on the perceived emotions of the animal or animals they encountered. The study was almost entirely composed of female human participants which may correlate to the majority of participants making sentience-related comments. Cornish and colleagues found that females were more likely to engage emotionally with non-human animals (Cornish et al., 2018). However, no participants explicitly used the word sentience in their narrative. Therefore, comments on and related to perceived emotion and spiritual interspecies connection were considered under the theme of sentience.

Trend 2: Key words about human emotional experience

Three of the 22 participants (13.63%) who left narrative posts reported feeling empathy for and/or

human interactions with wildlife animals and their habitats. There were several participants who indicated that they felt apprehensive or fearful about their interactions with wild animals. Three participants of the 22 total indicated that they felt nervous or fearful around animals but two of the three reported ultimately having positive feelings about the interactions.

Trend 3: Transformative effect of experience

Because previous studies suggested that personal experiences with wildlife have the power to change humans' perspectives and actions toward other species, the researchers investigated the transformative nature of the participants' experiences (Larson et al., 2016; Dolby, 2020; Scott et al., 2020). Of the 22 descriptive narratives, 8 participants(36.36%) explicitly described a transformative effect from their experience with wildlife, 7 participants (31.18%) included no reference to a transformative effect of their experience, and the remaining 7 participants (31.18%) included implicit references to the experienceôs contribution to their new perspective. Six of the eight transformative experiences involved a humanôs interaction with a species the participant does not see or interact with on a regular basis. As this research was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, two of the explicitly transformative experiences include references to the importance of connection with other species during this period of isolation. Five of the eight transformative experiences included explicit references to personal action toward conservation. One transformative experience helped a participant feel personally connected to wildlife. There was an overwhelming trend in participantsôexperiences causing reflection on multispecies coexistence. Of the combined 15 explicitly and implicitly transformative experiences, 9 included a reflection on coexistence and the ef

The 7 participants who did not report on the transformative nature of their wildlife experiences showed few commonalities. The species encountered and locations of these narratives were varied. One participant ponders why a snapping turtle returns to their yard on an annual basis. ñHereôs my thought: maybe she chooses our lawn because we have the only natural lawn in the neighborhood!? No fertilizer. No pesticides. No anything.ò Another participant remarked on a sealsôability to coexist with humans in La Jolla: ñ I swam in the water and was honestly surprised by the sealsôlack of hostility and seemingly disregard for humans swimming in such close proximity,ò. The participants are able to acknowledge and reflect on their experiences with other species, but do not report any evidence of a changed attitude or perspective following the interaction. 3 of the 7 participants that did not remark on transformation are students of Environmental Studies.

Trend 4: Species Type

Of the 22 descriptive narratives, 13 posts (59.09%) focused on an interaction with a threatened or rare species that the participant does not commonly encounter in their everyday life. These species included a sea lion, humpback whales, bears, an elk, a deer, sea turtles, bison, mountain goats, a terrapin, seals, swans, and a turkey. Of these 13 posts featuring interactions with rare animals, 6 posts (46.15%) also explicitly described a transformative effect on the participant from the encounter. One participant said their interaction with a sea lion reaffirmed their motivation to protect wildlife and leave animals alone ñto do their thing.ò Another participant was reminded of the importance of conservation and the coexistence of humans and nonhuman animals after their interaction with swans. Moreover, two participants that wrote about their interactions with humpback whales described the encounters as making them reflect on the human impact on the environment and the cruel treatment of whales in captivity, and

described feeling inspired to continue their conservation efforts. Of the 9 posts featuring interactions with more common animals, 2 posts (22.22%) also described a transformative effect on the participant from the encounter. Thus, narratives about encounters with rare animals were 2.07 times more likely to discuss a transformative impact than encounters with common animals.

a. 13 of the 22 posts (59.09%) also included a reflection on coexistence, the human impact on the survival of the species, and/or the effect of human or nonhuman animalôs presence as a possible disturbance to the other. Of the 4 posts that focused on coexistence, all four (100%) were connected to interactions with rare animals. In one post about mountain goats, the participant shared that the experience made them ñrealize that human beings coexist with animals as we share the same earth with them.ò In another post, a participant that interacted with bison explained that the encounter made them ñthink that coexistence with animals is possible.ò Of the 6 posts that dealt with the human impact on nonhuman animals, 3 of the 6 (50%) posts were connected to rare species. One post about sea turtles reminded a participant about ñthe impact that human

animals sharing a space. However, of the 13 posts that reflected on these topics as well as coexistence, 9 posts (64.28%) were from interactions with rare animals.

Trend 5: Composition of Photograph

How did proximity affect how they felt about the animal? Did it evoke respect, fear?

a. Woodpecker: ñHe didnôt seem to mind me standing so close, quietly mesmerized while watching him happily woodboring away; he seemed rather proud to show off his power-pecking abilities. I felt that this woodpecker actually liked the audience, so I followed him and filmed him while naming him Walter.ò

b. Elk: ñ[illegible] most direct expe[illegible]ching him happily w[illegible]ctuae.ò

i. ñThe most remarkable experience was with a group of whales which come through our waters in March and April each year. Seeing these huge animals really puts how small we are into perspective.ò

ii. ñThere we drifted while being surrounded by Humpbacks for three hours.ò

e. Seal: ñAt this cove on the water, many seals gathered around to sunbathe. I swam in the water and was honestly surprised by the sealsô lack of hostility and seemingly disregard for humans swimming in such close proximity. The seals were sunbathing, swimming, climbing on the rocks, enjoying the sun, etcé I was standing super close to two seals who seemed to get in an argument with each other yet did not even bat an eye at me. Pretty neat how accustomed animals can get to being near humansò

f. Bunny: ñIt wasnôt moving at all even when I came close to it, and it wasnôt blinking/itôs eye wasnôt moving. I began to get worried and consider the possibility that the bunny was frozen to death, which scared me and made me feel so sorry for it. I would not consider myself an animal lover by any means, and normally am more afraid to get close to any wild animals. Perhaps the fact that this bunny was so defenseless is what made me not feel threatened by it but rather thinking of ways to try to help it.ò

g. Deer: ñI looked outside the window of my house and saw a deer staring at me and stomping. It was a really amazing experience to see the deer recognize and interact with me.ò

h. Bison: ñOn my way there, I stopped my car to take a look at this group of bison. I watched them for a while, and enjoyed being in their presence. They didnôt seem to notice me, and went about their day grazing and walking around.ò

i. Goats: ñI got a bit nervous as they came close to us to cross the path. They did not seem to mind the fact that there were people all along the path, as long as we did not get too close.ò

j. Sea Lion: ñOn one expedition we encountered a sea lion sprawled on a bench resting. I sat on the bench opposite, about 6 feet away. It looked up, identified me as a non-threat and went back to sleep. I couldnôt help but notice a personality to him, like how you feel when youôre napping on the couch and someone walks in so you look up before grumpily go back to snoozing.ò

45.45% of posts referenced human proximity to wildlife species. Several of these posts

findings by illuminating the verbage used to describe non-human animal emotions and sentience and reinforcing their results regarding a correlation between females and emotional connection with non-human animals (Cornish et al., 2018). Fourteen of the twenty-two participants wrote about the perceived emotions of the animal in some capacity indicating an acknowledgement of non-human animal sentience. In other words, more than half of the participants included comments relating to animal sentience when asked to share a narrative about a wildlife interaction.These perceived emotions ranged ñcalmò to ñaggressiveò and the posts included words such as excited, relaxed, frustrated, unphased, content. Of the posts that included these keywords and sentiments, the species of the animal ranged from local, backyard beings to international, rare species indicating that species likely had no impact on whether or not the participant included comments on sentience. Many of the species are found in the United States, but locations also included Switzerland, Bermuda, Brazil, and the Galapagos. None of the participants, however, used the word sentience indicating that perhaps they experience animal sentience without having learned about the formal concept. Dolby argues for the expansion of environmental education specifically related to empathy and animal sentience which we also recommend as many participants were not as well informed on conservation and the emerging literature on sentience (Dolby et al., 2020). Education specific to this topic being given prior to conducting a study such as this may have implications on results and terminology used.

Trends in human emotion

The data collected shows that humans experience a broad range of emotions when interacting with the lives and sentient spirits of wildlife animals. When participants reported feelings of empathy for non-human animals they felt were struggling in some way, they mentioned how the animals' struggle made them think critically about human and non-human

animal interactions and/or conservation. This finding reflects the work of (Wallach et al., 2018) in which the authors state that summoning compassion is important when thinking critically and ethically about conservation. Interestingly, the compassion several of the participants felt invoked a sense of duty to conserve the lives and well-being of wildlife animals. The majority of participants expressed positive feelings in their narratives recounting their experiences with wildlife animals. This trend is exciting but not necessarily surprising. Moreover, such findings affirm that citizen science groups provide emotive experiences through educating participants on important environmental topics (Paleco et al., 2021).

Trends in Transformative Narratives

The results found in this study are consistent with previous studyôs findings that experiences with wildlife have the ability to motivate human actors toward empathetic actions toward wildlife and affective and emotional responses to wildlife stimuli (Larson et al., 2016; Dolby, 2020. Larson and colleagues found that experiences with house sparrows positively affected participantôs treatment of the species, which is supported by the overwhelming portion of experiences that our study found to be particularly transformative. Dolby found that writing an essay from the perspective of an animal they had previously observed contributed significantly to their environmental education and empathetic connection to animals (Dolby, 2020). Our study contributes to Dolbyôs work by showcasing the power of experiential reflection on humanôs conceptions of and connections with other species. Fifteen of the 22 (68.18%) participants either implicitly or explicitly referred to the transformative nature of their wildlife interaction, suggesting that increased frequency of human-wildlife interactions has the potential to improve treatment of other species. Participant 16ôs statement captured the sentiment of many of the groupôs members: ñThey were very calm and seemed quite content just hanging out

on the mountain. This experience made me realize that human beings coexist with animals as we share the same earth with them. In particular, references to coexistence were highly prevalent. This may be due to humanôs dominance in the natural world, often leading to separation of species. When homo sapiens are encouraged to interact with other species in their typical environment, they are able to deconstruct the dominant nature-society ideological divide. Acknowledging the value of multispecies, as introduced by authors Kirksey and Helmreich(2010), in our shared environment is a crucial step towards just preservation (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010). An overwhelming majority of the explicitly transformative experiences occurred between homo sapien and a species they interact with rarely. This may suggest that species interactions are more powerful when they contrast typical interactions. For example, Participant 2 wrote about their experience with humpback whales: ñThe day was one I will forever remember with the transcendent sounds of whales breaching nearby and the reality of what we've done to these waters sinking in,ò. The participant reported that the experience had a direct impact on their work and contribution to conservation initiatives. Additionally, charismatic experiences with animals may have the potential to be more transformative. Participant 11 connected with a deer: ñIt brought me closer to wildlife and I felt more connected. Instead of just observing this animal from the inside, I was actually making eye contact and being acknowledged by this deer.ò Humans may be more connected and motivated to protect species that exhibit human-like features. The results show that these interactions are important for introducing multispecies connection and sentience. This study was specifically interested in the effect of these interactions on perspectives of conservation; however, only five experiences had a directly positive impact on the participantôs conservation initiatives. These results suggest that there is a causal effect of wildlife interactions on humanôs perspectives on, emotions shared with,

research format create an interactive and meaningful experience for the participants, it can be incredibly transformative for the researchers as Richardson (2001) highlights and discusses at length in her work. Additionally, using a non-random convenience sample created a diverse participant base. The participant pool is composed of all ages over the age of 18, both college and non-college students, and a mix of Boston College and non-Boston College community members. Having a diverse group of participants provided a wide range of interest in wildlife, perspectives, and experiences with wildlife. Using Facebook as the chosen platform for conducting this research allowed the participants to foster connections with each other and the researchers instead of being blind to who the other participants were. This unique online platform provides a new contribution to community building in conducting ethnographic, narrative research. The researchers posted educational videos towards the end of the data collection process to inform the members of the group of the reasons for the research and explaining key concepts in the non-human animal research space. This, along with the inclusion of personal narratives in the manuscript allowed the researchers to co-create with the participants and each other through the contribution of personal anecdotes. Situating the researchers within the narrative space as opposed to a pure observational and reiterative role is what makes narrative research and ethnography unique as noted by Bº nisch-Brednich (2018). What sets our study apart is the contribution of our voices in the research space to educate, influence, and emote alongside participants in true sentient form. This study was largely an original research method design which allowed the researchers to tailor the process to specific desired outcomes and implications for the researchers, participants, and larger field of wildlife research.

Limitations

While the design of this study offered many benefits to the research, there are several aspects that may limit the ability to form definitive and generalizable conclusions. Although extensive efforts were taken to invite interested participants to the group, the size of the sample was somewhat small, with only 22 of 42 total human participants sharing their experiences with the group. The small size of participants allowed for more extensive and inclusive analysis of narratives; however, the sample may not be representative of the greater human population. Additionally, the sample was overwhelmingly female, with only one male participant. The vast majority of participants (77.27%) are college students. So, the findings may be primarily generalizable to female college students. In ñInclusiveness and Diversity in Citizen Science,ò Paleco and colleagues stress the role of citizen science in producing knowledge, which we, as researchers, create through our framing of our narratives and the participants we include (Paleco et al., 2021). In the process of our research, our group has embraced subjective experience; however, it is important to recognize that our identity as female college students contributed to a less than inclusive sample. Lastly, the open ended nature of the prompt led to differences in content, limiting the researcherôs capacity for direct comparison of participant experiences.

Implications

Throughout our study, our intention was to focus on connecting people around the idea of protecting our shared environment. We aimed to instill an emotional approach to reflections on wildlife interactions, and by so doing, shed light on the relationship between participantsô understanding of non-human animal sentience and their opinions on conservation and biodiversity. Based on our results, in which participants readily shared a wide variety of thoughtful narratives about their experiences with wildlife that embraced their emotions and

community could study what the most effective ways are to increase and maintain engagement among participants with these topics. Future researchers could explore if sharing articles, frequently commenting and liking posts, providing new prompts or other content regularly, using ñLiveò features or other facets of these social networking platforms would be the most successful strategies to sustain a long-term and tight-knit community around these ideas.

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Appendix A.

Recruitment and Informed Consent Message (Sent to participant after joining the Facebook group)

Thank you for your interest in participating in our study. Through this research we hope to better understand the ways human feelings about animal sentience and emotion can impact the treatment of animals and attitudes about conservation.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to submit personal anecdotes about your interactions with wildlife. In your responses we encourage you to reflect on your emotional connection to wild animals and your interpretation of animal emotion. We welcome the submission of narratives, photographs, videos and/or audio recordings of your interactions with wildlife.

We are hoping you may benefit from being in this study and in the community created through our platform which will foster meaningful conversations about participantsô human-animal interactions. The researchers hope to generate knowledge about the role of human understanding of sentience in conservation practices that may benefit society.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you if you wish to remain anonymous. If you have questions about this research, you may contact Jennifer Schauer, jennifer.kelly.3@bc.edu, 617-552-4130.

By typing your full name in this text box, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you