

Research Note

Mixed emotions: A qualitative exploration of northern Illinois whitetail deer-related decision making

Jonathan R. Hicks

Department of Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Services, Minnesota State University, 213 Highland North, Mankato, MN 56001, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Emotion
Wildlife
Management
Decision making
Deer
Recreation

ABSTRACT

This pilot study sought to explore the ways in which northern Illinois land managers and decision makers were influenced personally and professionally by emotional interactions with white-tailed deer. Utilizing in-depth interviews, the study focused on three research questions: (1) What emotional responses are elicited by interaction with deer? (2) How do emotional responses to deer change over time? (3) How do relationships with deer affect support for deer management policy? Qualitative data suggested that: participants viewed deer as a symbolically significant species; contextual factors influenced emotions toward deer; “outsiders” and trophy hunters were perceived negatively; and personal feelings and management priorities required balance. The theoretical frame was informed by Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and the Theory of Emotional Memory (LeDoux, 2007). Implications for theory, research, and management are discussed.

Management implications:

1. This article demonstrated that to better understand the role of emotions in whitetail deer-related decision making, managers should be aware that: previous emotional experiences likely influence but do not dictate subsequent emotional responses.
2. Even in areas typically thought to be “urban,” hunters perceived to be “outsiders” can present unique managerial challenges.
3. More effective public educational practices should likely be equal parts informational and relational.

1. Introduction/Background

I grew up in north central Illinois in a city that was fortunate to be surrounded by natural areas and open space. I was one of the lucky kids who had the chance to bicycle through prairie paths and explore creek beds. As a child, deer were an uncommon site in city parks. By the time I was a young adult working at a local environmental center, deer sightings grew increasingly common not only in many local parks, but in residential neighborhoods, cemeteries, and recreational areas. Their increased visibility was undeniable.

I was several years removed from residing in northern Illinois when I returned in 2012 to conduct a study about local land managers' attitudes toward a state-funded sharpshooting program designed to minimize the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), a highly infectious disease that was first chronicled in that part of the state. Relying on my own lived experience, my goal was to use my knowledge of the area to gain a more in-depth understanding of the controversial and occasionally contentious issue. However, what began as a simple exploratory study about managers' attitudes related to a single disease yielded results that were far more reaching.

What follows is a qualitative exploration of the managers' emotions related to white-tailed deer and how those emotions contribute to their

decision making. This study is the culmination of returning home as a researcher to a place I once knew well. After several years away, I found that the once-cherished white-tailed residents of these places were responsible for mixed emotions in the land managers charged with the task of overseeing their existence. Those managers and the emotions they expressed are the subject of this research.

My interviews identified that decision makers in northern Illinois' parks and preserves generally do not consider themselves scientists, nor do they identify as conventional members of the public. However, in a sense, land managers must operate in both realms, considering both scientific knowledge as well as the values of the public that often fund their efforts. When making decisions about deer, managers must also temper their scientific sensibilities with their personally held beliefs and values; this creates the potential for personal dilemmas and complex emotional responses. Manager emotions toward deer inadvertently became an important component of this study; one so significant that it warranted its own consideration. What follows is an exploration of decision makers' attitudes toward one of the most commonly observed and controversial species in the area, whose mere presence proved to be capable of eliciting wide-ranging, complex responses, even from the most seasoned of managers.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2016.10.003>

Received 12 January 2016; Received in revised form 20 July 2016; Accepted 13 October 2016

Available online xxxx

2213-0780/ © 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

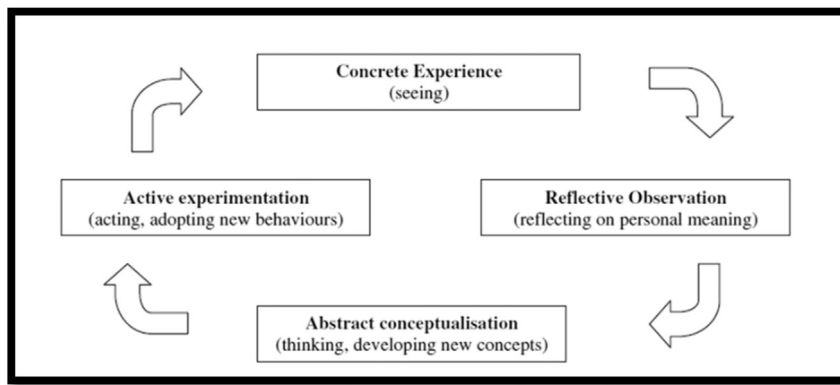


Fig. 1. Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

2. Literature review

In that past decade, there has been steadily increasing consideration of human emotional responses to wildlife. Vining (2003) wrote at length about the value of exploring the connections that exist between humans and wildlife. She referred to “magic”, a term describing the sense of awe and wonder that accompanies peak experiences and “the sense that something very special and powerful has occurred”. Similarly, Serpell (2000) posited that connections with animals extended beyond logic and emotion and were the result of a deeper spiritual connection.

In Estes Park, Colorado residents viewed wildlife as central to their collective narrative (Wondrak, 2002). Along Alaska’s Dalton Road, seeing wildlife was cited by visitors as emotionally significant by half of respondents (Farber & Hall, 2007). Seeing young animals, being in reasonably close to animals, and observing natural behavior were all cited as being particularly powerful experiences.

White-tailed deer, a prevalent charismatic species through much of North America is also adept at inspiring emotional responses from people. Manfredo, Sneegas, Driver, and Bright (1989) found that among Illinois hunters, having experiences with deer enhanced positive feelings, including but not limited to family togetherness, independence, friendship, and connectedness with nature.

Of course, not all interactions with wildlife are positive. Indeed there is a rich research history devoted to understanding nuisance wildlife or human-wildlife conflict – situations in which the wildlife encounter is framed as a pest, bother, or as having various other kinds of disbenefits. Ultimately, just as with positive responses to wildlife, these negative reactions are closely tied with emotions. Virtually all manner of species have at times been considered nuisances, with deer a frequently cited example (Boulanger, Curtis, & Blossey, 2014; Decker & Gavin, 1987; Waller & Alverson, 1997).

Though more and more researchers are actively considering the role of emotions in wildlife-related leisure, the field is still very much in its infancy. There is evidence to suggest that with a deeper understanding of emotion will come an increased ability to plan leisure settings and implement policy reflective of public values. While research into the significance of emotion in leisure and wildlife continues to grow in quantity and sophistication, there is a noticeable lack of attention paid to decision makers. Just as the public has emotional responses to wildlife, I hypothesize the same is also true of the managers that make land- and wildlife-related decisions. As such, this study will focus on three primary research questions:

1. What emotional responses are elicited by interaction with deer?
2. How do emotional responses to deer change over time?
3. How do relationships with deer affect support for deer management policy?

3. Theoretical framework

While this study was exploratory in nature, it was not without a vital foundation formed in previous literature. Manfredo (2008) said “Improvement in understanding human behavior will ultimately be obtained by understanding the interrelationship of cognitive concepts such as attitudes, values, and norms with affective concepts such as mood and emotion”. This study sought to explore decision makers’ emotional responses to interactions with deer, the ways in which their emotional responses have changed over time, and how their relationships with deer affected support for deer management policy. For the purposes of this study, my exploratory questions were framed by two theories: the Theory of Emotional Memory (TEM) (LeDoux, 1996, 2007, 2012) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemilis, 2000). In short, TEM provided the platform with which to consider emotional facets of experience. Specifically, TEM suggests that stronger emotional significance of an event leads to a stronger presence of that event in memory and recall. TEM helps to explain why individuals are capable of remembering highly emotional events in great detail, from their wedding day, to where they were on September 11, 2001, to how they felt following involvement in a deer-automobile accident.

ELT allowed me to consider the processual nature of learning, and is contingent upon the notion that understanding of an event/issue can shift with experience. Further, ELT acknowledges the importance of cognitive reflection following an event. Acknowledging one’s reflection process is critical to understanding one’s lived experience as this cognitive exercise is the basis for attaching meaning to an event. Such an approach is inspired by the work of Dewey (1981 via Asfelt, Urberg, & Henderson, 2009, p.38) and others who suggested the two components of any truly educative experience were hands-on and reflective. In a wildlife context, ELT accounts for the process by which individuals describe experiences as being positive or negative. Together, TEM and ELT provide an appropriate vantage from which to consider managers’ complete experiences with deer, which include elements of cognition, emotion, meaning making, and memory (Fig. 1 and 2).

4. Methods

Emotions toward white-tailed among northern Illinois environmental decision makers were considered using semi-structured interviews conducted in July 2012 and lasted between 20 min and 2 h, with the average interview lasting approximately 55 min. Interviews were conducted both in-person and via telephone as was most convenient for the participants. Interviews were audio-recorded for detail, with in-interview participant observation notes also taken for context and follow-up questioning. All interviews were scheduled and conducted by the author, and potentially suggestive words such as emotion, feeling,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4759902>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4759902>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)