

Editor's Note

I collaborated with a friend on this piece who helped me put these words on paper after we watched the SeaWorld Roundtable Debate. Her name is KW. This is Part I of a series of articles that will describe our feelings and thoughts on marine mammals held in marine parks, the people who take care of them and the fans that love them.

As we started thinking about the similarities between whales and humans held in captivity, we came across an interesting article by Rachel Clark. According Rachel's article, [Freeing Lolita from SeaLand](#), she states "Miami Seaquarium's white paper reads like a classic example of bondage psychology". We contacted Rachel and she encouraged us to write more on this topic.

It is not our intent to trivialize human rape and that is not the purpose or spirit in which this article was written. We are writing this article for the purposes of bringing attention to ideas that have not been widely discussed in the media.

Orcas and Humans in Captivity

The [Seaworld Roundtable](#) debate took place on June 5th 2014 in LaJolla, CA. Present were [Todd Robeck DVM, Phd Vice President of Theriogenology](#) (the study of animal reproductive medicine), senior killer whale trainer at SeaWorld Kristi Burtis, University of Illinois Professor [Susan Gray Davis](#) and Dr. Naomi Rose of the [Animal Welfare Institute](#), a veteran orca biologist. The SeaWorld Roundtable was hosted by Scott Lewis and Lisa Halverstadt of [Voice of San Diego](#). The debate lasted for nearly 2 hours.

One of the things we realized after the Roundtable debate were that parallels do exist between whales in captivity and humans held in captivity. We wanted to explore those similarities.



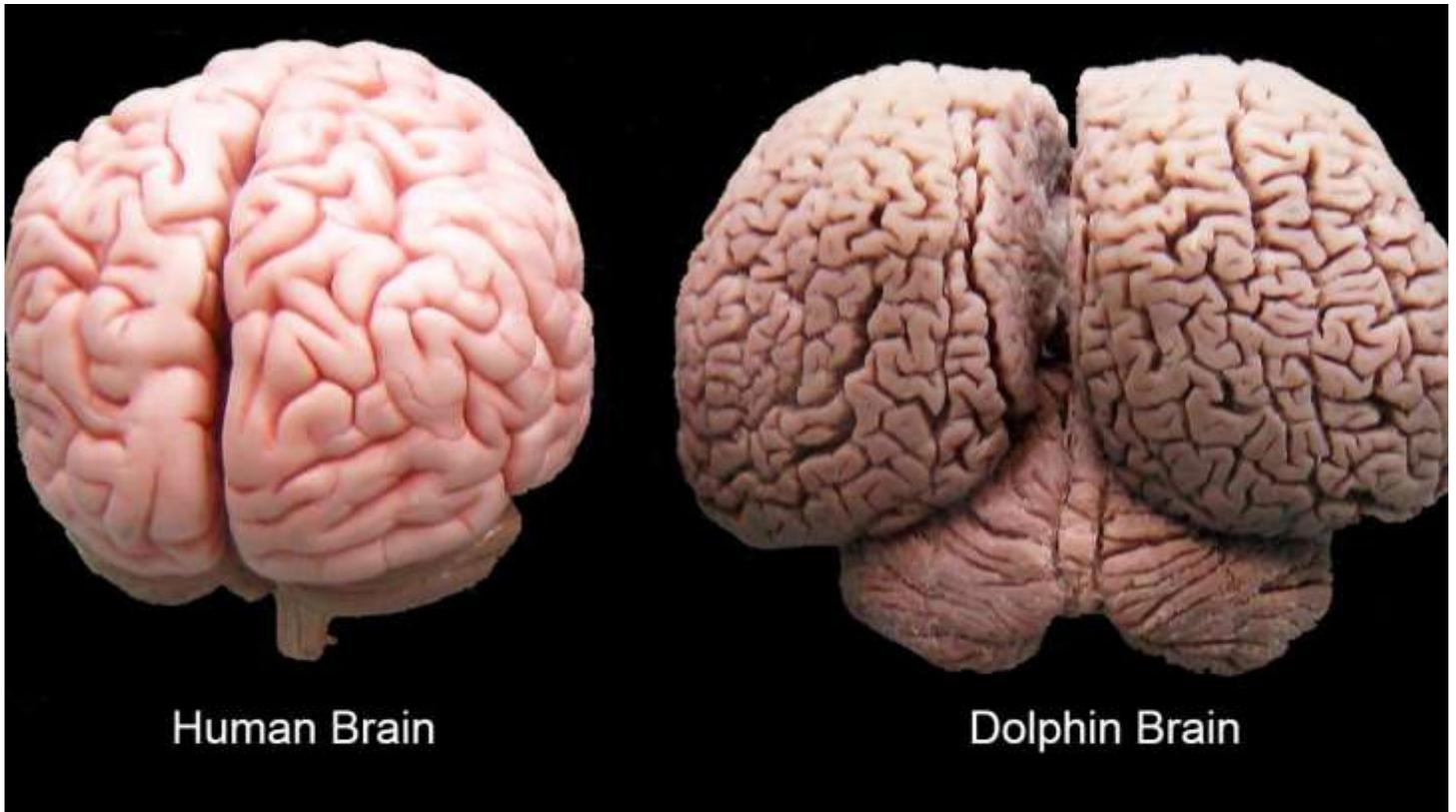
Jaycee Dugard Compound



Tilikum's Compound

Why Compare Whales with Humans?

According to Maddalena Bearzi in her [article](#) published in National Geographic there are only two other mammals that share the same complexity as humans: whales and primates. Whales and dolphins are large-brained mammals that have highly developed neocortexes. The neocortex is responsible for higher-order thinking, conscious thought, language and spatial reasoning. They also have the same spindle neurons that humans have which are responsible for social cognition, recognition of error, motivation to act, self control, etc. Whales and dolphins are reported to have three times the number of spindle neurons than humans.



What makes them Interesting

What makes whales and dolphins so interesting to humans? One dolphin trainer said that the trainers are attracted to their speed, enthusiasm, beauty, strength and personality. They are highly evolved mammals that are capable of interacting intelligently with people. Their exquisitely developed brain also allows them to develop complex societies within their ecotypes; they do this by using language and social skills.

Whales are unique in that they have best friends and can remember who owes them a favor, just like humans. They educate their calves and pass down traditions. They also engage in cooperative hunting and share food resources throughout their social groups. In the wild, many ecotypes of killer whales live in matrilineal societies and generations of great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers and daughters living together for their lifetimes.

Additionally, whales have a highly developed limbic system within their brains and, like humans; this allows them to experience happiness, grief, sadness, anger and love.

"Adaptation Process" of humans, killer whales, dolphins and other Cetaceans

*"What is important is that these animals have **adapted** well to this environment" - Todd Robeck*
[SeaWorld Roundtable](#), LaJolla, CA

*"These killer whales have **adapted** well to their surroundings" SeaWorld [Website](#)*

*"These animals are in excellent condition and well **adapted** to their living environments" in an [article](#) dated August 2013, Michael Scarpuzzi VP of SeaWorld Zoological Operations*

Humans and whales have a strong innate will to survive. Humans and whales adapt to captivity in what Dr. Rebecca Bailey, a family therapist who works with missing and exploited children, refers to as the "Adaptation Process". At its most fundamental level, people and possibly whales adapt to captivity in order survive. Historically this has been confused with Stockholm Syndrome.

To the uninformed, this may look like people or whales have formed healthy relationships with their captors; or in the case of marine mammals, their human caretakers. We believe that whales, like humans, are forced to adapt to their new, dismal life as a captive.

Parallels between whales and humans in captivity: Captive Orcas



Lolita being captured Photo Credit: Peta.org

Wild caught orcas and dolphins living in captivity were violently captured and taken from their ocean habitat and families. They are trucked or flown to a sterile aquarium that bears no resemblance to their former ocean home. Captive orca and dolphins are not allowed to live in pods that resemble their natural pods in the wild. Wild orca and dolphin pods offer infinite opportunities for social interactions. In captivity, those opportunities do not exist; they are forced into artificially controlled groupings.

Whales unable to act on their own Behalf

Once in captivity, the adaptation process with human caretakers begins. Whales are forced to be completely dependent upon humans for all aspects of their survival. They no longer live a balanced natural life and are stripped of their agency. This means they no longer are initiating, creating or acting on their own behalf.

Trainers and veterinarians control when captive marine mammals eat, procreate, play, and make them perform tricks for the public, which is an attempt to replace the exercise they would normally receive in the wild. Natural feeding, hunting and foraging patterns are lost. Killer whales are routinely forced into small pools for many hours at a time where they are unable to turn around and forced to float on the surface of the water. Some orcas have spent the majority of their days or nights in dark, tiny modules unable to swim or turn around.

Drugged to suppress natural instinct to Hunt?

Recently, SeaWorld [documents](#) revealed the use of benzodiazepines (tranquilizers) and anti-depressants in their orca and dolphin population to presumably alleviate stress, anxiety, frustration, obsessive-compulsive behaviors and depression. This common practice was carried over from the veterinary care in the agricultural industry. Perhaps these medications are used to suppress the natural instincts of these predators and their instinctual biological urges they have to hunt, swim, and socialize with their ecotypes. Or perhaps they are used to possibly alleviate boredom or frustration of being held captive.

In the wild, these animals live a balanced life by foraging for food, swimming, socializing and resting. In captivity, trainers are unable to meet their daily needs.

Captive born Whales

Orcas and dolphins born in captivity will never experience their natural environment or natural law, which includes living with their families for a lifetime for many of the ecotypes. Captive born marine mammals will never experience swimming hundreds of miles a day and diving to great depths, choosing their mates, being with their grandmothers, or eating live fish — their natural diet. They are deprived of the essence of what makes them an orca or dolphin.

Parallels between whales and humans in Captivity: Abduction Survivors

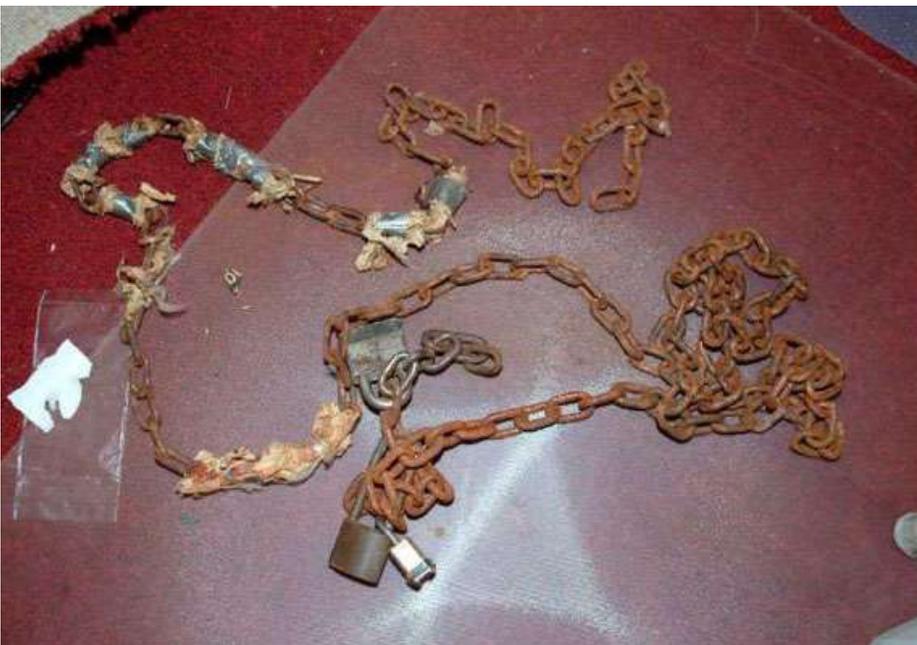


Photo Credit: ABCActionNews.com Chains found in Ariel Castro's House of Horrors

Unfortunately, many women and children are abducted and held captive. Some abducted individuals are able to survive and others die in captivity. Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus, Michelle Knight, Elisabeth Fritzl, [Jaycee Dugard](#), and Elizabeth Smart are examples of women who have survived abduction and years in captivity. We can learn a lot about their abductions, and life in captivity from information that is widely available to the public.

Captured, drugged, Abused

The women above were captured and forced into a life of confinement. Their abductors took them away from their natural families, communities, schools and removed them from society. They were held against their will for years. They were raped, beaten, and in some cases, their kidnappers confined them to small dark spaces. They were threatened, manipulated, drugged, and intimidated to assure compliant behavior. Some of them ended up having children while being held captive. All of them escaped captivity.

Abducted individuals forced into an "Adaptation Process"

After they are captured and confined, abducted individuals are forced to go through an adaptation process with their captors in order to survive. This adaptation process, although dysfunctional, creates a symbiotic relationship that allows the abducted individual the ability to survive captivity, confinement and abuse.

Kidnappers strip victims of their Agency

Abducted individuals are stripped of their agency and are not allowed to initiate, execute or control their actions on their own behalf. Their captors make all of their decisions for them and they are forced to rely upon their captors for all of their daily needs.

They are denied the experience of forming healthy human bonds and living a natural balanced life in the context of our "normal" society, communities, and neighborhoods. Dr. Bailey quoted one abducted survivor who said: "it is necessary to survival to act like a prey but think like a predator".

This implies that human kidnap victims do not empathize, fall in love with or bond with their captors as some people suggest.

Children born in Captivity

Of those abducted individuals who have had children in captivity, their children were unable to experience a natural family life, or were unable to develop relationships with friends, grandparents, aunts and uncles. While in captivity, children are deprived of a healthy natural human childhood, happiness and safe home environment.

Similarities between humans held in captivity vs whales in Captivity



Photo Credit: <http://cetuscetus.tumblr.com/>

I reached out to Rebecca Bailey PhD directly, the founder of an innovative program called [Transitioning Families](#). Her program helps the reunification of families who have been victims of abductions, exploitation or other violent crimes. She assisted Jaycee Dugard and her family with freeing themselves from years of manipulation that occurred while being held captive by Philip Garridos.

I sought her opinion on whether or not she felt that captive orca and their caretakers could develop unhealthy dysfunctional bonds with one another. I also asked her if, in her opinion, do any parallels exist between kidnap victims and their captors; and captive whales and their caretakers?

Here is Dr. Bailey's statement on whether or not parallels could exist between captive orca and captive humans:

"In my mind there are some absolute parallels. Starting with the fact that captivity is a completely unnatural environment where a strong sense of dependency is fostered. The dolphin or whale, much like an individual that has been abducted, becomes dependent on the abductor for food, light, safety etc. They learn to adapt to survive which must never ever be confused with love. To a recovered abducted survivor "love" is an insulting concept. In captivity an unnatural state of dependency is fostered and has more to do with survival than anything else."

"In the words of one abducted survivor it is necessary to survival to act like prey but think like a predator. I have no idea how a dolphin or whale thinks but I do know the level of dependency fostered is so extreme it removes any sense of agency from the captive which can appear to the uninformed like a healthy symbiotic relationship which is in fact quite one sided."

Can we then assume that those captive whales have, like kidnap victims, develop a twisted reliance on their trainers out of self-preservation?

Killer whales, dolphins and beluga's can be seen as "cooperating" with the trainer demands most of the time. Does this mean they are happy? Or have they just gone through the adaptation process and adapted to a life in captivity— much like what Jaycee Dugard had to do to survive 18 years in a backyard compound?

Our hope: Caretakers rethink Relationships

We conclude that similarities do exist between humans in captivity and whales in captivity and something can be learned from these parallels. Our hope for the future is that human caretakers of marine mammals will rethink their relationships with whales and dolphins. We envision a "new" relationship that preserves and values the natural lives of marine mammals as well as the lives of their human caretakers. A common life in which love and sharing do not require the high price of deprivation, loss of life human or whale, or forfeiture of freedom. We need to improve the lives of those whales in captivity and caretakers need to re-think whether whales and dolphins should be in captivity at all.

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