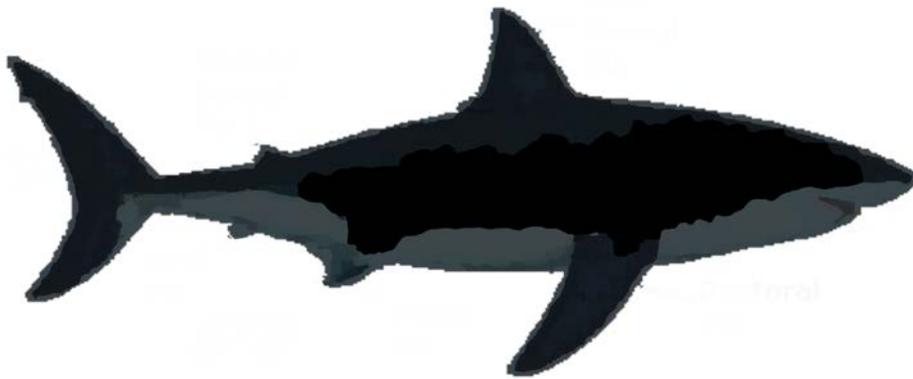


Dismantling media produced fear toward predators

Nicole Pavla Schafer



University of Otago

2011

Abstract

Top predators like the shark were once revered as guardian deities - now they are demonized as terrorizing killers. While once respected and worshipped they are now considered to be the epitome of evil and malevolence. This transformation in our emotional response and perception is due in large part to the media. The media creates fear with their use of framing, images, and agendas that emphasize the sensational. Fear is a motivating force and a compelling emotion used by the media to increase ratings and keep the reader or viewer interested. Predators are receiving negative publicity and it is impairing conservation efforts launched on their behalf. A change in the media's treatment of predators and a significant change in their audience's expectations may be the only way to develop a more realistic and appropriate public attitude toward predators. This thesis will explore this predicament by creating an understanding of what fear is, how it is generated, and how the media uses it, before suggesting solutions that might decrease sensationalism and increase the factual content of media reports.

The creative component of the thesis, the twenty-five minute film *Tangled Waters*, illustrates how the small community of Dunedin, New Zealand brought an end to a forty-year practice of shark netting. In 1967, Dunedin placed anti-shark nets off three beaches to protect beachgoers from great white sharks. Ratepayers came together and campaigned to not only save themselves \$38,000 a year of council spending, but also to positively support their local marine wildlife. The film *Tangled Waters* is an example of a way to educate people on a current events news story on predators without sensationalizing the topic. The film demonstrates a method of presenting predators in a factual framework while promoting conservation efforts on their behalf.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Andrew Scott for his dedication, support, and filming skills during the production of our documentary *Tangled Waters*. I appreciate all the feedback and support my fellow Science Communication peers gave us during our filming and campaigning. A big thanks to the residents of the city of Dunedin who helped us not only make a great film, but also came together to safeguard the sharks in the Otago waters by pushing their city council to vote in favor of the removal of shark nets.

Thank you to Sue Harvey for her administrative expertise and general knowledge.

Thank you to Ross Johnson, my supervisor, for suggestions towards the improvement of the creative and academic component.

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“We are not just afraid of predators, we are transfixed by them, prone to weave stories and fables and chatter endlessly about them, because fascination creates preparedness, and preparedness survival. In a deeply tribal sense we love our monsters.”

- E.O. Wilson, 2000

Introduction

“Sharks: [reciting] I am a nice shark, not a mindless eating machine. If I am to change this image, I must first change myself. Fish are friends, not food.” – *Finding Nemo*

Sharks, bears, lions, wolves, crocodiles are all apex predators. Apex predators, also known as top predators, are the animals that have no natural fear of predation, except humans. They are at the top of their food chain. Equipped with strength, a mouth full of teeth, and precise hunting skills, they keep the populations of their prey in check. They maintain a balance in the ecosystem, are a measure of the health of the environment, and yet they have the worst reputation.

This paper will be focusing on sharks, though all apex predators are in a similar situation. Surveys show that humans place sharks at the top of their list of horrific animals they wish to avoid (Campbell & Smith, 1993). Can you blame them? It is hard to care about a wild animal perceived to be a carnivorous man-eater. We read in papers, witness on the web, and watch on the news numerous gruesome stories about sharks, how dangerous they are and how they are constantly attacking people in the water, which leads us to believe that it is true.

The reality is different. There are on average 65 shark attacks a year in the world and five fatalities. From 1580 – 2010 there have been only 2,320 shark attacks (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010). More people have been hit by lightning, won the lottery, or injured themselves during a home repair (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010). Shark attacks are rare and most people can live their entire lives having never seen a shark outside of an aquarium. On those rare occasions when a shark mistakes a human for prey or is just satisfying natural curiosity, the media has their own feeding frenzy.

The world's culture was once filled with legends and folklore and sharks were included in those traditions. Sharks were considered to be deities, gods, and guardians of the people with whom they shared the coast and water. They were respected and prayed to. It was not until the Greek historian, Herodotus, 2500 years ago, started to tell the story of the shark casting it in a different light, as a killer, that attitudes began to change (Carwardine, 2004). These sensationalized stories grew in popularity while the stories of the sharks as guardians began to fade. With advancements in digital communication, information became more accessible and so did the dramatized shark stories.

Even though sharks have been swimming the waters for 400 million years scientist and the general public know little about them (Flynn, nd). Shark research was initiated by Aristotle, but underwater observation were not possible until the 1940s (Carwardine, 2004). Only now is information on sharks slowly coming to the surface. With our minimal knowledge and extremely limited first-hand experience of sharks, we need to ask what makes them so terrifying. Why do we fear sharks if we have never seen one and have never been attacked by one?

Our fear no longer comes from first-hand experience or stories that our family tells us. The public is told what to fear and how to react to that fear by the media. The media creates fear to make the viewer more interested in lead stories and stay interested throughout the whole television program or newspaper article. The media has a collection of methods that are used to hook an audience and keep them interested. These methods have been around for 300 years, but with the current need to deliver information quicker than ever as well as in a highly competitive and fragmented market, the facts relating to the reports are not checked and they are often delivered in a highly sensational manner to gain and sustain attention (Davies, 2009). By creating fear and focusing it on predators the public receives a misleading

representation of predators and unlike their human counterparts, they cannot go on air or write in to defend themselves.

This misrepresentation is damaging conservation efforts made on their behalf. Whether your opinion of a shark is a positive or negative one, the world needs sharks. The elimination of predators has ecological impacts that directly affect us (Myers, Baum, Shepherd, Powers, & Peterson, 2007). The more positive press they can receive the more the public will care about them. Caring about sharks or any predator is good for the environment and for us.

0.1 Academic and Creative Link

This paper is written in conjunction with the short film *Tangled Waters*. *Tangled Waters* is a film that discusses the past, present, and future of the anti-shark nets located off the beaches of Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand. It covers the governmental debate over the anti-shark nets and how the small Dunedin community came together to make a difference by ending a forty-year practice and supporting their local marine wildlife. It is a comedic journey involving sharks, surf, and local politics.

The film does not sensationalize sharks, but instead uses a factual framework to deliver the information. The campaign and the film made it possible to educate people about sharks and about their importance in the ecosystem. All information in the film was fact checked, delivered in a clear manner, void of embellishment, and presented both sides of the argument. The film is a demonstration of how the media could represent predators.

0.2 Rationale

Very little information is available about what might be considered our natural perception of sharks, i.e. a perception untainted by media reports. Most research has concentrated on the response generated by films like *Jaws*. The research that is available is

statistical in nature and highlights how infrequent attacks on humans by predators actually are. However, these statistics are overwhelmed by the sensationalized stories that appear in the media and are largely ignored. New Zealanders promote their amazing wildlife for tourism, usually featuring penguins and albatrosses. That interest could be extended from the land and into the water with the promotion of their local marine species, like sharks. The film *Tangled Waters* could assist Dunedin residents with the promotion of sharks. The academic portion will examine the methods the media uses to create fear in television viewers and in newspaper readers. It will suggest steps the media can take to correct their delivery of reports regarding sharks as well as actions for the viewer and reader to take.

Disclaimer

This paper is not produced to portray sharks or any predators as cuddly or playful animals; its objective is to help us to develop a positive and appropriate respect for the animal. Please be careful when in a predator's habitat or territory, enjoy them at a safe distance.

Chapter 1 - History's Contribution

“All kind of fish eat man, only shark get blame.” - Jamaican Proverb

Card shark, loan shark, pool shark, pawnbroker, bondsman, lawyer, politician, and insurer are all called sharks and not because of their positive qualities. Instead the word shark is used to “designate (and damn) crafty, rapacious individuals who employ swindling, usury, and blackmail to gain their own ends” (Webster, 1962, p.22). A shark has never been accused of swindling, blackmailing, or being a scoundrel, the main reason being that they cannot. Besides being used to describe people the word ‘shark’ is also used to mean: to rip cloth, to treat a person badly, and *Hamlet* used it to mean: to be hasty or sly (Webster, 1962). Our negative impressions of a shark have led to the name being used as a five-letter insult.

This chapter will discuss the evolution of our perceptions of sharks and the reasoning behind them. Historically the first stories of sharks were positive ones; they were the stories of a deity that looked after the people living by the water. Now sharks are compared to crooks and thieves. The negative outlook we have of sharks has been around for almost 2500 years, far too long ago for any of us now living to remember when prayers went out to sharks instead of harpoons.

1.1 Folklores & Legends

Before the shark was described as evil, dangerous, and sinister it was called protector, guardian, and god. Folklores and legends are a way of understanding a culture, they reflect the culture's history and beliefs. Folklore, legends, myths, and tales are often interchangeable when looking at the stories that have been told to explain the world around us and the values of a particular society and culture. Sharks can be found along every coast in the world so any

littoral societies have a story to explain the predator in their water. Most of the stories of sharks come from Polynesia: Samoa, Tonga, and Hawaii. The stories from these islands and their fishing culture portray sharks in two distinct ways. The shark is either a guardian or a deity, often called Hina, who protected the people or acted as a charm for fishermen.

As a guardian it protected the people of the tribe either because tribesman have become sharks, they were either changed by magic (Collocot, 1921) or shape shifted (Webster, 1962), or the shark is in some other way associated with the tribe. As a guardian it would keep the tribesman out of harm, making them immune to shark attacks (Collocot, 1921). In Hawaii the legends suggest that if a boat capsized the fisherman would call on sharks to ride on their backs to safety (Beckwith, 1917). If someone was attacked it was believed to occur because that person had committed a misdemeanor or crime on land, such as trespassing or stealing food and the shark intervened to provide justice by attacking that criminal (Bataille-Benguigui, 1988). In Samoa, a shark fin made of coconut fibers was placed within a garden to warn thieves of their fate. It suggested that if food was stolen the thief would be devoured by a shark (Baughman, 1948). A similar method was used in West Africa; the fin was placed in a sacred grove to protect the food (Baughman, 1948).

In some cultures sharks were also seen to be gifts from gods, but could still be fished (Bataille-Benguigui, 1988) and were commonly thought to assist fishermen. In Hawaii fishermen called to the sharks when they went to fish so the sharks would bring all the fish closer to the boats (Beckwith, 1917). In appreciation, the first fish caught at the beginning of the season were taken as a sacrifice to the sharks at the shark temple (Baughman, 1948). If a fisherman had a stillborn child, through a series of rituals at that same temple, he could place the soul of his child into the body of a shark that would become the protector and guardian of his house (Baughman, 1948).

On other islands such as Gilbert, Solomon, Tahiti, Mortlock, Peleu, and Tikopia they had a similar view of sharks. Sharks were viewed as gods, deities, good spirits, lords, and guardians. In Tahiti and Tikopia these sharks were once again involved as active mediators (Bataille-Benguigui, 1988) and practiced divine vengeance (Baughman, 1948) upon those that committed crimes against the community. In the Mortlock Islands the sharks were guardians and the good spirit shark, called Ulap, would scare off other sharks when a canoe capsized to keep the people safe (Baughman, 1948).

In many cultures sharks were perceived as having a major role in fashioning the day and the landscape. On the Peleu islands sharks were considered to have a daily task. It was believed that a shark would take a piece of fruit that was thrown to it and swim to the bottom of the ocean. You knew the shark was taking it to the bottom of the ocean because night would come, the shark was in control of bringing darkness (Baughman, 1948). There were similar beliefs in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia the shark called Mana was a whaler shark that was stabbed by an ancestor and in its fury it used its teeth to cut the river systems that run through Australia (McDavitt, 2002). In New Zealand the Maori believed the shark to be a guardian spirit and it was identifiable in the sky as the Milky Way, which had been placed there by a demi-god. (Hutching, 2009). These sharks had assisted in the creation stories of these ancient cultures.

On the other side of the world in the Americas, a sharks' place in the culture was more ceremonial in nature. In Honduras, Guatemala, and other locations of Mayan civilizations shark jaws and teeth were found in ruins associated with religious ceremonies (Baughman, 1948). In the Aztec civilization in Mexico sharks were slain as a sacrifice to assist in preventing the land from sinking into the water (McDavitt, 2002). Though in South America it was believed that underwater people, called Oritu, treated sharks as land people treated

dogs. They would use the sharks for hunting just as land people used dogs for assisting them with hunting (Baughman, 1948).

More diverse stories involving sharks are found throughout the rest of the world. The Inuits believed that the shark in their waters was providing them with food; they would find animals that had been wounded by sharks that they could eat (O'Reilly, 2004). The shark was a provider. In Greece, the sharks were respected. The Greeks saw how sharks treated their young and took it that they loved their young more than any other fish. (Baughman, 1948). In Japan, the sharks were ministers of justice and a charm for fisherman, a view similar to that held by the Polynesians (Baughman, 1948).

Sharks in some cultures were used as a sacrifice for religious practices, but it was rare that a human was sacrificed to a shark. The sacrifices that were made to sharks were of fish or fruit. If a person was attacked it was a punishment, they had committed a crime and the shark as a deity had to provide the justice. It is important to note how few cultures considered the shark to be malevolent. Hawaiians had a shark that was evil and other cultures have stories where humans outwit sharks, but they are not as common. Cultures that had 'evil' sharks were rare and usually seen or cast as a counter to a 'good' shark.

The myths and folklore of the past tell the stories of sharks, stories that are now absent from present day cultures. Though myth and folklores are often the foundation for beliefs today, those regarding sharks have just about disappeared. The shark god stood for good, but fisherman no longer call on sharks for assistance and protection. Communities no longer welcome the sharks into their waters. The perception of sharks as gods and guardians has been displaced. Now they are almost universally perceived as monsters.

1.2 A Change Of Mind

Positive shark stories may once have been central to a culture's belief system but they were gradually marginalized. While some are still recited today these positive representations of sharks are now perceived as myth and legend. Though shark attacks were justified in the myths it is unlikely that there was no fear associated with them. However, it was a fear that could be justified and was not sensationalized. Sharks were an animal to be respected. Hawaiian thieves that stole fruit from the garden possibly avoided the water due to their belief that they might be punished by sharks. And people who had been attacked by a shark may have been innocent of any wrongs, but the society would not hold a shark hunt nor did the residents avoid the water for the rest of their lifetime. That behavior came along with the Greek historian Herodotus (485-425 BC) who more than 2500 years ago set the trend for future reporting by sharing sensational stories of gore (Carwardine, 2004). His stories focused on reports of sailors being eaten by sharks after a sea battle off the coast of Athos (Carwardine, 2004).

Sensational shark stories appeared again in 77AD penned by Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder. He reported on sponge fisherman being attacked and by the 16th century the French naturalist Guillaume Rondelet stretched the science of observation by "describing complete human bodies removed from the stomachs of sharks, including on one (perhaps apocryphal) occasion, a knight in a full suit of armor" (Carwardine, 2004, p.11). The first eyewitness description committed to paper about a shark attack occurred in 1580. A large monster called Tiburon tore apart a Spanish seaman who had fallen overboard and was in the process of being rescued. "That report was the beginning of a lot of bad press for sharks" (Musick & McMillan, 2002, p.157).

In 1749 a shark attack was immortalized in a work of art. An English sailor named Brook Watson was attacked by a shark in the Havana harbor in Cuba while swimming. Nine

sailors rescued him from the attack; he had lost his right leg to the knee. Years later Watson asked John Singleton Copley to paint a record of the event. Copley had never been to Cuba or seen a shark, but he did not let that stand in his way. He consulted maps and prints to assist him in depicting the Cuban harbor, but did not for the image of the shark. The shark has an odd appearance and features including an ear painted on it (National Gallery of Art, 2011). The image, *Watson and the Shark*, was a sensation due to the grisly subject matter (National Gallery of Art, 2011).

Not everyone was negative toward sharks; Aristotle (384-322BC) avoided sensationalism and instigated one of the first recorded ‘scientific papers’ on sharks. His groundbreaking work called *Historia Animalium* was a composite of his research of local wildlife found around the Mediterranean (Carwardine, 2004), which included his observations of sharks and how they differed from other fish. He was surprisingly accurate when it came to his observations on the skin and cartilage made skeletons. Then there was a 2,200-year wait for more scientifically accurate breakthroughs regarding sharks. In the 1940s Jacques-Yves Cousteau went underwater to observe sharks and started to get a better understanding of this fish (Carwardine, 2004). Scientific observations were assisting us to understand sharks, but not combating the ‘dangerous’ image that sharks had gained and was already deeply engrained in our ideas about this animal.

Attitudes toward sharks in the twentieth century were largely fashioned by a book and a film, called *Jaws*. In 1916, along a part of the New Jersey shoreline in the USA, several swimmers were killed. Though this event was tragic, the follow-up to the event hurt sharks in a way that has yet to be repaired. A creative and talented man named Peter Benchley wrote a book that Steven Spielberg turned into “one of the most successful movies of all time” (Carwardine, 2004, p.12). You would be hard pressed to come across someone who has not seen the movie and practically impossible to find someone who has not heard of it. The

movie *Jaws* had a significant impact on our thinking. It has scared people out of the water for years and impaired shark conservation ever since (Musick & McMillan, 2002). It increased shark fishing in the U.S. and participation in fishing tournaments to a level never before experienced as anglers attempted to land the largest shark (Musick & McMillan, 2002). In 2002 Peter Benchley wrote another shark book, this one entitled *Shark Trouble*, but this book had a different take on sharks where he admitted that “we knew so little back then, and have learned so much since, that I couldn’t possibly write the same story today” (Carwardine, 2004, p.12). Every year we learn more and more about sharks, though they have been around for 400 million years our knowledge of the species has always been deficient (Carwardine, 2004).

Though shark attacks happen every year all over the globe, the numbers of attacks are few in number. They still shock people, though historically, that shock was rarely sustained for long. That situation changed with a more pervasive media and an incident in World War 2. During that war a large number of people were in the water due to shipwrecks and downed planes in what were considered shark-infested waters (though all waters can be shark infested). The USS *Indianapolis* was on its way to the Philippines when torpedoed by the Japanese and went down in twelve minutes. Nine hundred men made it into the water. Several days went by where man and shark swam the same waters, but eventually the sharks got curious and exhausted men were starting to die (Carwardine, 2004). By the time the rescue came there were only 316 survivors (Carwardine, 2004). There is no way to tell how many died due to starvation or hypothermia and how many were taken alive and died due to shark attacks (Carwardine, 2004), but between sixty and eighty sailors were attacked by sharks (Musick & McMillan, 2002). With the improvement of communication technology these reports spread quickly and were just as sensationalized as Herodotus’ first shark attack report.

1.3 The Last Fifty Years

Shark attacks are a reality and should not be disregarded, but as our understanding of sharks improves the media needs to report on the rarity of shark attacks, so the public will not see sharks as killing machines but as an animal with whom they share the waters.

In the last fifty years scientists have been coming together gathering research to determine the likelihood of a shark attack. Are sharks cold-blooded killers or are they subjects of a fisherman's tale that keeps growing? The International Shark Attack File (ISAF) was established in 1958 by the Smithsonian Institution and is now jointly operated by the Florida Museum of Natural History and the American Elasmobranch Society¹. George Burgess maintains the records that contain medical and autopsy reports, victim or rescuer interviews, dozens of shark jaws, shark teeth, and dentitions. Though surrounded by these tragic events he says:

[t]here are so few incidents compared to the millions of people who go in the water in any given year. Of those few attacks, most are unprovoked. Why? Certainly not because sharks are out to get people. Probably 95 to 98 percent of attacks are feeding-related—a shark simply using its jaws and teeth the way they are meant to be used.

(Musick & McMillan, 2002, p.158)

Another man familiar with shark attacks, H. David Baldrige noted in his 1974 analysis of shark attacks that “sharks attack people in essentially every location where it is possible to get a man and a shark together” (Musick & McMillan, 2002, p.163). There is only one prerequisite to a shark encounter as Baldrige observed; it “is the simple combination of natural shark habitat and humans in the water” (Musick & McMillan, 2002, p.163). Sharks are not hunting people; humans are entering a wild animal's habitat where they risk an encounter with that animal.

¹ Elasmobranch refers to sharks, rays, and skates in the subclass Elasmobranchii and class Chondrichthyes.

In the past, local people avoided areas where sharks were or limited their time in the water to either bathe or fish; they used common sense. With the invention of wet suits in the 1950's people were able to spend more time in the water and were happy to swim, dive, and surf in colder water. The advent of the wetsuit also allowed people to enjoy their water based pursuits whatever the season. Improvements and affordability in water transportation allowed people to intrude into areas where sharks and people had not met before (Carwardine, 2004). More than half the population of the U.S. lives within 80 km (50 miles) of the sea and most other maritime nations share similar statistics (Carwardine, 2004). People enjoy water-based activities, but tend to forget the risks that go with it.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand faced a spate of Great White (*Carcharodon carcharias*) shark attacks off three connected beaches. Dunedin is a town on the coast that is famous for its wildlife. Penguins, albatrosses, seals, sea lions, and sharks can all be found within this contained geographic area. It has a unique marine environment due to the water currents that come down around the South Island of New Zealand and form a warm marine 'cul-de-sac' off the Otago coast (Darby, 2003). Sharks follow these oceanic subtropical waters from the Tasman Sea around Stewart Island, where there is a large aggregation of great white sharks, up to this 'cul-de-sac' (Darby, 2003). The sharks, when ready to depart this general area will travel back through these warm waters. A number of shark species are found in the Otago waters including the great white due to the water and available prey populations like fish and seals.

Prior to 1960 shark attacks off Dunedin beaches were unheard of, but in the late 1960s and early 1970s three fatal attacks occurred within 18 months. It was believed that sharks would not attack in water cooler than 68°F (20°C), but New Zealand proved that to be a myth (Musick & McMillan, 2002). Theories arose in the press suggesting that the attacks were caused by: a meat company dumping leftovers into the water, the sewage pipe not

flowing far enough out from the shore, a substantial seal population – usually popular shark prey, and the more popular theory of a rogue shark. Some claimed the attacks were due to a unique combination of factors: accessible and safe swimming beaches near an urban centre in a location that appealed to sharks because of the confluence of the currents and large seal colony (prey), but nothing was ever proven or looked into further.

It took over 2000 years to slowly demonize the shark god, but the biggest shift from guardian to monster has happened only in the last 400 years. Though science has slowly started to overturn myths that portray the shark as a monster, stories stigmatizing sharks are still plentiful. Historically the shark was a guardian, but presently the shark is largely thought of as that monster out of Spielberg's movie. The last fifty years has seen a boost in shark research as well as shark attack research (Musick & McMillan, 2002). The statistics identify just how rare shark attacks are, but this seems to be over looked by the general public. The public is focused on the fear.

Chapter 2 - Fear

“No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.”

– Edmund Burke

Fear is an emotion or sensation that is the result of a perceived threat. Due to the sensationalized shark stories that have become increasingly common through time, sharks are no longer considered guardians but have become a threat, an animal that makes people fearful. Fear can be internal (fear of embarrassment) or external (fear of sharks). It is not an emotion that dissipates quickly, but lingers. The sensation can reproduce, grow, and remain for hours, days, months, or even years (Altheide, 2002). It can come in different levels and make you cautious, paranoid, or even phobic.

In the United States twenty-two percent of people claim to have an extreme fear of animals; 5.7 percent suffer from an animal phobia as a result of that fear, making “animal phobias the most prevalent of all specific phobias” (Antony, Craske, & Barlow, 2006, p.111). Phobias such as selachophobia, the fear of sharks; ichthyophobia, the fear of fish; agrizoophobia, the fear of wild animals; and phagophobia, the fear of being eaten, all relate to the fear of predators (An A to Z List of Phobias, 2009). This chapter will discuss the way in which an individual fear has been cultivated, expanded, and has become a societal fear.

To understand how media uses fear we must first clarify the terms the media uses. News reports tend to confuse risk, danger, and fear, using the terms interchangeably (Altheide, 2002). Danger is the threat. It prompts the question, “can this hurt me and to what degree?” Risk, is the amalgamation of the probability of the occurrence and the level of the consequence of the occurrence (Botterill & Mazur, 2004). Danger prompts us to calculate the risk and the risk can precipitate a fearful response.

2.1 Our Reasons to Fear

Historically it used to be that an object was feared; now more commonly the fear is not specific to an object but is a general feeling. “Societies associated fear with a clearly formulated threat: the fear of death, the fear of a specific enemy, the fear of hunger... Today, many see the very act of fearing as a threat in itself” (Furedi, 2007, p.4). Risk was first identified in the Middle Ages and related to maritime events, such as making a successful voyage across oceans and seas where the only thing to fear was an ‘act of God’. Then in the nineteenth century risk was no longer considered exclusive to nature, it became involved in the life of humans, it became social. Risk was found in the relationships between people and society (Altheide, 2002).

To understand our perception of risk four influences are recognized by psychological science. “First, we fear what our ancestral history has prepared us to fear...[s]econd, we fear what we cannot control...[t]hird, we fear what’s immediate [and]...[f]ourth, we fear what’s most readily available in memory” (Myers D. G., 2001, p.10). How do predators fit into these perceptions? With the first our ancestors were directly fighting for food alongside predators and predators killed some of our ancestors resulting in our present day fear of predators. With the second perception, we cannot control a wild animal, hence the term wild. Thirdly, sharks are curious creatures that inspect things with their mouth, which happen to be full of sharp teeth. A bite of curiosity can be fatal and death can be immediate. And finally having an animal chase you or try to bite you is an event that lingers in the memory.

You are more likely to be injured during a bike ride than attacked by a shark, and yet fear of getting on a bicycle is a rarity. Between 1990 and 2009 there have been 15,011 bicycle fatalities and only 14 shark fatalities (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010). In the state of Florida alone there have been 112,581 bicycle injuries but only 435 shark non-fatalities (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010). Using the same four perceptions of risk

let us look at bike riding. First, bikes are on the ground, in our comfort area, and the distance to the ground from the bike is small. Second, the only way the bike moves is through the rider's actions, that control consoles the rider. Third, if a fall does take place it usually only results in the breaking of some bones or the scraping of some skin assuming correct safety gear is worn. Fourth, because the injuries are usually minimal and the media rarely reports on bicycle accidents it is easy to forget a few bruises and the media does not remind you of those injuries.

It used to be that our fear came from our own life experiences, the knowledge was gained directly. For example, if a dog bit you, you became wary of dogs. Other people's experiences were incorporated in 'morality tales,' cautionary tales or stories told by parents, relatives, and friends. As a result of being told about a friend's scar from touching a hot stove, you learned to be cautious of hot stoves. Now these cautionary stories no longer come largely from friends and family, they come to us through the mass media (Altheide, 2002). This change led legal theorist Christopher Guzelian to look at this

distinctive feature of contemporary fear culture. He believes that 'most fears in America's electronic age' are the results of 'risk information (whether correct or false) that is communicated to society'. He concludes that it is 'risk communication, not personal experience, [that] causes most fear these days.' (Furedi, 2007, p.3)

The majority of the world's population has never been attacked by a shark and a large portion has never seen a shark outside of an aquarium. So without this first-hand knowledge how do people know to be scared of sharks? They had to be informed by someone else whether a family member or the media.

Once fear has been created it is often followed by accusations and attacks on the source of the fear, which increases a sense of disorder that can prompt panic reactions and rash decisions (Altheide, 2002). This can be extremely hazardous if the 'risk' is false or if the

accused is innocent. After a shark attack, local residents tend to go on a shark hunt where they try to catch and kill any sharks. This still occurs today as we have seen in Australia and other locations where sharks are prevalent (BBC, 2011). The chance of catching the shark that performed the actual attack is negligible, so instead many sharks that were not involved in the initial attack are killed. This is an example of actions prompted by fear accompanied by a need to blame something and seek retribution. Fear can alter our actions from rational ones to illogical ones and alter our perceptions from neutral ones to ones filled with hatred. As an individual our fear may have come from first-hand experience, but with the increase of fear based media stories individual fears are being widely disseminated creating a societal fear.

2.2 A Society's Identity

Fear is no longer just an individual response but one that can permeate all of society. We fear as an individual and as one of a group. 'Feeling rules' are the rules that regulate our responses and influence our behavior. These rules inform us on what to fear and how we should fear it (Furedi, 2007). This goes along with 'cultural scripts' that allow us to understand emotions such as fear. Not only does one have to understand fear on an individual level, but also the interaction with others that allows us to respond to threats that are facing society. A shark may only attack one person in the water, but everyone on the beach is affected as well as anyone who reads or watches the report on the attack. Our reaction to fear is now based on the way our culture indicates how fear should be experienced and expressed (Furedi, 2007). We have to remember that fear does not just happen (Altheide, 2002).

This fear that is being seen in contemporary societies has also been given the label 'raw fear' (Furedi, 2007). This is a fear that was once focused strictly on tangible threats but has now become volatile. The fear is not focused and without any logical connections it can drift from one problem to another (Furedi, 2007). This form of fear has led us to believe we

are overly vulnerable and in a 'crisis of causality' where we can only sit and wait for the worst possible outcome (Furedi, 2007). The viewer or reader is 'at risk' when a passive and dependent attitude towards the media is adopted (Furedi, 2007). In this role the fear is more than an emotion, it becomes part of their identity altering their behavior and attitude (Furedi, 2007).

Emotions, however, including fear can be looked at rationally. Taking an active and independent stance different from that of the media can assist us to do this. It involves "rethinking our cultural standards, and the way they have come to inform our emotional cognition, such that a degree of dispassion replaces a knee-jerk reaction for venting and reassurance" (Stearns, 2006, p.223). The city of Dunedin, New Zealand is a case in point in terms of knee-jerk reactions. After the shark attacks that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s they rushed to fish and kill sharks and then they placed anti-shark nets off their beaches to catch and kill sharks. At that time it was understandable that the citizens of Dunedin needed something to give them a sense of security in the water, but to continue the practice for forty years and have city councilors still believe nets are necessary is an emotional decision not a rational one given the incidence of shark attacks. The nets cover a minimal amount of the shoreline allowing sharks to swim around and over the nets. Their maintenance is inadequate and they are riddled with massive holes. The sharks they catch and drown are not the targeted species the nets were placed in the water to deter, according to Dunedin City Council records. Therefore they are endangering marine life and not protecting swimmers. Logically the nets have no purpose, but emotionally they suggest security.

President Franklin Roosevelt said, "[l]et me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." He made this statement before he knew the full capabilities of the media. Roosevelt is quite correct in stating that fear is our worst enemy and allowing others to make us feel that there is a constant threat against us and that we must live in a

continuous state of fear is the only thing that should be feared. The media reports in a manner which suggests that every conceivable experience can be transformed into a risk (Furedi, 2007). Chapter 3 will review the methods the media uses in order to achieve this end. Dangers exist but can be overcome. Taking an active role in the absorption of information delivered by the media as well as learning to manage our emotions will allow us to reduce our fearfulness, increase our rational decision-making, and reduce our knee jerk reactions.

Chapter 3 - Media Toolbox

“The news is all about death.” – Dan Rather

As discussed in Chapter 2 fear is a strong emotion that is more commonly prompted by the media than by our own experiences, taking it from the individual level to a societal one. In this chapter we will look at the tricks of the media trade to see how that fear is fashioned into an article or news clip. Fear based news programs have two objectives: first, the teaser aims to get the viewer interested and the second goal is to convince the viewer that there is a solution to relieving the sense of fear and that that information can be found in the news story (Serani, 2008). To be successful in doing this the media needs “dramatic anecdotes in place of scientific evidence, promoting isolated trends, depicting categories of people as dangerous, and replacing optimism with fatalistic thinking” (Serani, 2008, p.241). In order for the viewer or reader to accept this sense of risk and fear the media has to package the report in a particular manner using the following methods:

- Framing
 - o Problem Framing
 - o Lead Framing
 - o Framing Manipulation
 - o Human-Impact Framing
 - Misfortune Frame
 - Agony Frame
- Creating a Trend
- Emotions
 - o Probability Neglect

- Information Deficiency
- Images
 - o Media Loop
 - o Money Shot
- Headline

These methods can be used individually or in a variety of combinations to create fear based news. The media amplifies the fear and manipulates the stories and trends in order to keep the viewer or watcher in a state of fear.

3.1 Frames

Frames are used to present a particular event in the overall format. Frames are unlike formats, formats are the editing, style of the presentation, and the reason we can easily identify a talk show, news broadcast, or sitcom. “Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and, above all, how it will not be discussed” (Altheide, 2002, p.33). The problem frame is when the media presents topics, stories, and issues in a format around a narrative proclaiming that there is something wrong (this is the tease) and they know what it is and have the answer to the problem (Altheide, 2002). It is about making problems seem interesting and entertaining (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999).

The media takes actual people and actual locations and packages them with ambiguous events and concerns to cause a sense of disorder (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999). Putting these stories at the front of the news is lead framing, bringing viewer’s attention and interest to focus on those particular stories that take the lead (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). These stories leading the news tend to be attractive and constructed to have “intriguing story slants or news hooks. This is done by giving emphasis to certain aspects of the story and downplaying others” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.59) with the objective being to grab the attention of the viewers and keep them reading or watching.

These lead frames can be further manipulated. There are five methods or versions of manipulation: the factual frame, the conflict frame, the misfortune frame, the agony frame, and the economy frame. The factual frame is the most accurate frame to use. The factual frame presents “events and issues in a straightforward fashion - that is, without dramatic embellishments and without indication of implications” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.66). This is the frame that would best represent predators. This framing acts as a control, all other frames are the use of the factual frame with additional information such as elaborations, dramatic embellishments, and suggestions of consequences (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004).

Depending on what focus the story gets depends on the information added to the factual frame. The conflict frame “emphasize[s] the hostile confrontation of individuals or groups in pursuit of diametrically opposite goals” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.66). In the case of a shark attack this could be used to show conflict between lifeguards and beachgoers. The misfortune frame “indicate[s] the victimization of people in terms of loss of possessions, health, or life” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.66). For a shark attack story the focus of this frame would be on the victim and unlike the conflict frame it would not focus or mention the lifeguards or other beachgoers. The agony frame “report[s] such victimization in emotional terms, focusing on people’s suffering during the following experienced adversity” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.66). The attack story would not only mention the victim, but would also recognize the beachgoers, witnesses, or anyone involved as a victim too. The economy frame “[gives] attention to the economic circumstances and consequences of the reported events and issues” (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.66). This story would focus on the lack of visitors to the beaches or swimmers in the ocean after an attack. If the attack took place in a tourist destination it would discuss the loss of revenue to the hotels and city. Depending on what

aspect of the story the media wanted to emphasize would determine which frame they adopted.

The old journalistic maxim, "if it bleeds, it leads" goes hand in hand with the idea that there is great appeal in others misfortunes and in sob news (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). Human-impact stories have great appeal to viewers because they involve humans. Humans can see themselves in the situation or believe the stories of misfortune and suffering could just as easily have been them (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). Communication research has shown that

[b]ringing human suffering and devastation to the fore, along with the emotional upheaval in coping with adversity under openly hostile circumstances, may thus be considered the critical ingredients that gives the agony and conflict leads their apparent power to arouse a need for further information about the reported events.

(Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004, p.76)

The human-impact frame can be even further broken down for media use into the misfortune frame which underlines calamities and catastrophes (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004) and an agony frame that focuses on general misfortune and emotional upheaval (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004).

A study was performed looking at the attention lead stories received using conflict and agony frames. The result was an increase of reading time (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). When these frames were used without the human association the readers were not as interested, the curiosity was decreased (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). People like hearing about people. Their emotions become involved when reading about others triggering their interest to continue reading about their welfare and to see if the ending is a positive or negative one (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). The frame of a story informs the reader and viewer on what aspects of the story the media deems

important. That same frame can be used to stimulate emotions to keep the reader and viewer interested.

3.2 Creating a Trend

When the media gets a story that is attractive to their needs they will keep reminding you of the story. They may not add any new information to the original story but by reiterating the isolated incident they can make it a trend (Glassner, 2004). For example “[b]etween 1990 and 1998, the murder rate in the United States decreased by 20 percent. During the same period, the number of stories about murder on network newscasts increased by 600 percent” (Glassner, 2004, p.820). There was less crime, but those watching the news got the impression that crime was on the rise, not dropping, leaving Americans to feel that they were living in a more dangerous time. “Americans are living in perhaps the safest time in history” (Glassner, 2004, p.819) yet feel they are in greater danger than ever before.

Shark attacks are events that the public are led to believe are far more numerous than they really are because they are considered by the media to be very newsworthy (Botterill & Mazur, 2004). Shark attacks are such a rarity they do not even fit the definition of being a risk to the general public, but they are considered ‘sexy’ news. In 2000 five fatalities due to unprovoked shark attacks were reported yet falling coconuts killed more than fifteen times that number (Botterill & Mazur, 2004). It is very difficult to find an article on coconut deaths. Misuse of home improvement equipment injuries, biting by New Yorkers, bicycle accidents, hunting incidents, boating, cars, and cancer are just a few of the things that are significantly more likely to injure or kill you than a shark, but do not create nearly as many news stories (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010).

In general, predators cause very few human deaths. In the 20th century all over the world the Black, Brown, and Polar bears killed 362 people. A coyote killed one person,

wolves killed 607, and hyenas killed 6. Tigers killed 12,599, leopards killed 840, lions killed 552, and pumas killed 18 people. So for the entire 20th century 14,984 people were involved in a fatal attack by an animal (Löe & Röskaft, 2004). The reality is that “[a]s our society becomes increasingly involved in outdoor and wilderness recreational activities, there is an inevitable rise in the number of associated injuries and fatalities” (Montalvo, Wingard, Bracker, & Davidson, 1998, p.248). These numbers are not numbers to be ignored or belittled, but when compared to other fatalities, can be seen in a different light. Smallpox killed 300 million, natural disasters killed 3.5 million people, and smoking killed almost 100 million people in the 20th century (White, 2010). There are more everyday situations we should be concerned and careful about than shark attacks. If the media really wanted to capture the big picture and talk about the most deadly animal the news would be printing constant stories about mosquitoes responsible for two million deaths annually (Coleman, 2004). “But news story about a mosquito just doesn’t have the “bite” of a shark story, obviously” (Coleman, 2004, p.13). Sharks are big and are relatively unknown and therefore sell more stories. So, when the rare event of an attack happens the media increases the proportion of such stories published and establishes a trend. Making a trend fits into the fourth influence of our perception of risk (as discussed in Chapter 2), that we fear the most current memory (Myers D. G., 2001). With the media constantly reminding the viewer and reader of an event, that information and the inherent fear attached to it becomes their most current source of information.

3.3 Emotions

Fear is a strong emotion to call upon; it motivates people, gives them incentives, and lingers in their conscience and unconscious. Experiments have shown that “communications containing ‘emotional’ appeals were comparatively more effective than communications

which relied exclusively on ‘rational’ argumentation” (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953, p.57). Using emotions to appeal to an audience motivates them to continue reading or listening until they hear the result or conclusion. Besides the news, health authorities use this same approach. Anti-smoking campaigns, like *The Truth*, show body bags and people in hospitals to scare you away from smoking. Cancer clinics show family members with patients or deceased family members to frighten you into getting regular check-ups. Though these organizations do it to make sure you are taking care of yourself and remain healthy, they are still using scare tactics based on our fear of death.

Emotions also cause probability neglect. Statistics are commonly used to help viewers understand the likelihood of an event occurring. This allows viewers to evaluate the level of risk or danger. So when told that the chance of being killed by a shark attack is 1 in 300,000,000 people would look at this number and understand that the chance of them being attacked is very low (Benchley, 1995). Unfortunately, viewers and readers focus on the outcome (death by shark attack) than the probability that this outcome will occur, this is called probability neglect (Sunstein, 2003). In one study it was “found that people’s perceptions of riskiness did not vary among risks of 1 in 100,000, 1 in 1 million, and 1 in 10 million” (Sunstein, 2003, p.123). When our emotions are triggered our brain seems to ignore the logical judgments. This emotional response combined with the lack of a rational analysis with the level of risk can lead to a ‘ripple effect’ (Sunstein, 2003). ‘Ripple effects’ are a result of fear (as discussed in Chapter 2 as knee jerk reactions) where there is a demand for action, whether it is a legal intervention or a personal action, such as a shark hunt (Sunstein, 2003). These actions may not reduce the risk and may inflame the situation.

Fear can give people the drive they need or the drive they did not know they had. They want to act to stop themselves from feeling the risk, danger, or fear. In the 1960s and 1970s Dunedin, New Zealand suffered from a spate of shark attacks. Dunedin is a small town

and with a fear-driven need to act they came up with a solution that would be the fastest though not the most rational. People learn from past experiences and from what the media tells them. It was the practice then, and unfortunately still is today, to go hunting for the shark involved in a shark attack; this is a ripple effect in action. Shark hunting is a useless practice, but is often the hasty response to an attack. It is an immediate response which seeks an immediate result in order to assuage the public's sense of fear. When the hunting was unsuccessful in Dunedin they moved onto anti-shark nets. While hunting was strictly an emotional reaction at least some research took place on the decision relating to the nets. Still the method of netting they chose was not the most appropriate one, but was influenced by the amount of money available and raw emotion.

Once the emotion of fear has materialized the next desire is to relieve the fear. The viewer wants to be reassured as quickly as possible, they want the media who has put them in this emotional state to reassure them through resolutions, plans, judgments, evaluations, etc. (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). The viewer or reader wants the emotional tension to be relived or at least significantly reduced (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). They want the threat averted even if there is no immediate or direct threat to them. Once this emotion has been aroused the public will continue to follow the story until the emotion has to some degree been alleviated. The longer the program or newspaper can hold out on the conclusion the longer they will have the attention of the readers or viewers. This is the goal of the media, to keep you watching and reading and by sustaining the sense of fear they try to sustain your faithfulness as a reader and viewer.

3.4 Resolutions

The mass media (newspapers and news broadcasters) influence what people think about by shaping public agendas and showing viewers and readers only certain aspects of the

world and ignoring other parts (Altheide, 2002). After the decision has been made on which stories are newsworthy they will use different frames to order the importance of those stories. They tell us what is important and what the viewer should care about and they only have a very short time to do it in, whether it is a thirty-page newspaper or a thirty-minute broadcast.

The media only has a very short time to interest viewers into staying tuned in to watch their program. They will give just a small amount of information (the teaser) or a list of the stories that you will hear on the program. These stories are usually human-impact stories and contain some sort of basis in fear; this captures our attention. This is understandable, movie trailers have a few minutes to hook us, books have the back cover to interest us, and the news has a thirty-second advertisement to demand our attention. Unfortunately, when the issue we are interested in comes on to be fully reported there is often no further information revealed. The breaking story they keep reminding us about does not offer the information we require; we learn little from it. It does not go beyond the surface and often contains errors because the fact checking part of the journalistic process has been bypassed (though may be corrected later) (Davies, 2009). Those missing elements that we did not know about at the start, were the things the viewer needed to know to alleviate their concern, the reason they continued to watch the program (Serani, 2008). Regrettably for the viewer it gives them a fragmented sense of knowing and with constant changes being made to the story they are constantly adjusting and readjusting their level of certainty (Serani, 2008). The viewer is pretty much going through a trauma from the disconnected content being shown and cannot make sense of the information, resulting in them erecting a stimulus barrier that makes the person become concerned and defensive (Serani, 2008). This increases their fear level and tension because there is no resolution.

3.5 Images

A picture can say a thousand words, but are the words speaking the truth? Using an image in a context outside its original context creates a media loop. “Media images are constantly recycled, reproduced in a new context, and reexperienced” (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999, p.479). An examples of this could be the showing of shark migration footage when talking about a shark attack. The shark attack may not have occurred at the same time as the shark migration, but they are publicized together. Showing a shark being fished or killed while talking about the same species attacking people could give viewers the idea that the shark fished is the same shark that was involved in the attacking. Media looping by presenting an image juxtaposed to non-related information is now extremely common.

The images used in media looping can be of a graphic nature. Broadcasters who once shied away “have recently begun to overcome earlier conceptions of audience squeamishness and/or moral discomfort and most now actively seek out” (Cottle, 2004, p.93) those graphic types of images and stories. Instead of avoiding those images and just telling the story they preface the item with a disclaimer or warning notifying you of the graphic nature of the images. In the case of predators this could be a picture of the attack, wounds left from the attack or of the fatality. These images are used to convey a dramatized story subframe of scenery, motive, climax, actors, and action (Stech, 1994). By carefully framing these images they become provocative and key factors in persuading an audience that an apex predator is a threatening monster (Stech, 1994).

The Money Shot is a term that emerged from pornographic filmmakers and is now used in all genres of filming; it is the shot that is thought to be what the audience wants to see. Producers, cinematographers, and directors all feel the pressure to acquire the money shot, it is the television moment that gets the ratings (Cottle, 2004). When dealing with a predator it is the kill shot, the shot that shows the prey being attacked. There will be plenty of

blood and it will evoke sympathy for the prey and resentment towards the predator. To raise the levels of fearfulness you cannot show a shark swimming calmly in the water - you need to show teeth and blood.

The modern media works in a realm where visuals dominate and the culture has moved toward the use of iconic symbols (Barry, 1997). So often sharks are used as an iconic image of evil. We are an image-driven society and the media is using that to their advantage (Barry, 1997) By society becoming dependent on receiving information through visuals we become more adept at understanding the meaning behind those images, our 'visual literacy' improves, but only in the direction already established in our brains (i.e. if a shark was evil previously the shark is evil presently) (Barry, 1997). Instead, we need to improve our 'visual intelligence' and understand how images are manipulated and the reasoning behind their use so the public can counter fear-based news and images with knowledge and understanding (Barry, 1997).

3.6 Headline

Combine teeth with an eye-catching headline and you have everyone's attention. The headlines are usually just a few words written by a creative person to get the attention of the reader or watcher. It is typically described as a summary or extract from the story, but there are exceptions (Bell, 2009). There are headlines that contain a quotation, highlight a single detail from the story, or contain material that is found nowhere else in the news item (Dor, 2003). According to the senior editors of *Ma'ariv* there are approximately ten properties that make a good headline, they are:

[1] Headlines should be as short as possible.

[2] Headlines should be clear, easy to understand, and unambiguous.

[3] Headlines should be interesting.

[4] Headlines should contain new information.

[5] Headlines should not presuppose information unknown to the readers.

[6] Headlines should include names and concepts with high 'news value' for the readers.

[7] Headlines should not contain names and concepts with low 'news value' for the readers.

[8] Headlines should 'connect' the story to previously known facts and events.

[9] Headlines should 'connect the story' to prior expectations and assumptions.

[10] Headlines should 'frame' the story in an appropriate fashion. (Dor, 2003, p.708-715)

These properties are important since most readers spend their reading time scanning headlines rather than reading the complete stories (Dor, 2003).

The effort involved in reading a headline is insubstantial (Dor, 2003). It allows you to get maximum clarity on the subject for minimal effort (Dor, 2003). That is why so much effort goes into designing a headline so readers can maximize their understanding of the entire story by reading only a few words (Dor, 2003). There is a lot of pressure on the headline because there are two types of readers. The first type will read the headline and will continue to read the story only if that headline supplied them with a good reason to expect more information from the story. The second type will read the story despite the headline because they are willing to put the extra effort in and find enjoyment in reading (Dor, 2003). The same goes for TV headlines or titles. For example TV shows such as *Maneaters* (Tigress Productions), *Ultimate Killers* (BBC NHU), *Shark Summer* (BBC1), *Blood in the Water* (Discovery Channel), *Great White Appetite* (Discovery), *When Animals Attack* (Fox), *World's Most Dangerous Animals* (CBS), and *Sharks: Hunters of the Sea* have great titles. They are short, they supply you with expectations regarding what will be shown, and they

include or imply a name with high interest value, shark. If you were to watch any of these shows you are likely to see blood, sharks, the money shot kill scene, and dangerous situations. You would not watch these shows expecting to hear how unlikely a shark attack is or see them peacefully swimming and ignoring prey in the water. These are the headlines that evoke fear and get straight to the point of the story.

The media does not create the risk, but it does amplify it (Altheide, 2002). By focusing (framing) stories on violence, dangers, and death the viewer is continuously encouraged to be fearful. The media is guilty of fear mongering with their graphic images, eye-catching headlines, and sensationalized stories (Glassner, 2004). To take these stories and repeat them to create a trend nurtures that fear, especially when a resolution is not offered. Using the viewers and readers emotions to hook them into the story is not the issue, but when those emotions are not alleviated reactions become irrational and can lead to ill directed accusations and dangerous actions. This is dangerous because the viewer or reader may not be in possession of all the correct information. Stories are usually not being properly fact checked (Davies, 2009). In bringing this sort of action to its audience the media may be doing more harm than good.

Chapter 4 - The News Room

“The man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing, but newspapers.” - Thomas Jefferson

Story framing, trend creation, image looping, and the writing of engaging but misleading headlines – these are the actions that are central to the media’s strategy when it comes to gaining our attention. These methods can give us straight facts or they can be manipulated to create fear. Audiences have the right to question the trustworthiness of those delivering the news and their interest in being the purveyors of fear and horror, but they also need to understand the pressure the media is under. Consider the newspaper, it comes out daily and inside you find information about sports, theatre, fashion, literature, upcoming events, road work, car sales, job openings, murders, weather, stock reports, real estate, crime, drugs, lost pets, notices, and personal ads. The paper is full of information and the next day it all needs to be new. Before the 1890’s papers were limited to only political stories, since then they have made space for a variety of topics and gone into wide circulation. Around 1900, they become sensationalized with eye-catching headlines and lurid stories (Baldastry, 1992). “On a typical day crime news accounts for one-third of the content of a daily newspaper and up to half of many local TV news broadcasters” (Krajicek, 1998, p.7). Stories of violence (like crime and animal attacks) dominate the news.

4.1 A Shift in the Stories

This evolution of the newspaper from a strictly political journal of record to an all-encompassing but sensationalized conveyor of news is a result of commercialization (Baldastry, 1992). Initially newspapers were specialized and contained little information

outside of the paper's defined interest. Now one paper must cover what ten papers used to cover. One paper must try to catch everyone's interest. This puts a lot of stress on the paper. The paper is no longer a privately owned or small public business; it is now a commercialized industry that must cover everything as quickly as possible (Baldastry, 1992).

In Gerald Baldasty's book The Commercialization of the News in the Nineteenth Century he sorted through the content of several newspapers. In two of his data tables he looked at the newspaper content in metropolitan areas from 1831-32 (looking at 5 papers) and 1897 (8 papers). The median percentage for political content went from 50.5 to 19.1, but crime and court news went up from 2.5 to 7.2. Other topics that the papers covered increased as well, such as; leisure, science, and history, but business news and comic strip content went down. To be more specific, the Charleston Courier's percentage of newspaper content on the topic of politics dropped from 62.4 to 22.1, but the percentage on crimes and courts went from 2.1 to 22.1 (Baldasty, 1992). The move towards topics more likely to generate a fearful response in the reader has dramatically increased over time making sensational news the norm for newspapers and broadcasters.

Tabloid newspapers search for the sensational, emphasizing their hook and headline, but to a broadsheet newspaper the term sensational is a form of criticism "implying that the newspaper has abandoned serious news in favor of cashing in on stories that elicit emotional responses" (Davis & McLeod, 2003, p.208). The crime news found today in newspapers and on television originated as early as the mid-1600's and was sold to the upper and educated class of England. Pamphleteers peddled stories of death, misdeeds, and red-hot accounts of crimes (Krajicek, 1998). In Davis and McLeod's paper *Evolution and Human Behavior* they looked at the frequency of newspaper story categories over periods of time: 1700-1750, 1751-1800, 1801-1850, 1851-1900, 1901-1950, and 1951-2001 and ranked the stories. For accidental/natural injury/death stories, the ranking through the six periods was 2, 2, 2, 1, 1.5,

and 2 giving this type of newspaper story an overall ranking of 1 for 301 years. The overall ranking for newspaper stories that followed accidental/natural injury/death was 2, murder/physical assault, 3, robbery/vandalism, and reputation 4 - meaning that front-page news has not varied much over the past 300 years (Davis & McLeod, 2003). Newspapers are not the only guilty party, TV is as well. Two-thirds of Americans get their information from local news (Earp, 2010). “61% of all lead stories on local news are dedicated to crime, fires, disasters, and accidents” (Earp, 2010). This trend seems to be apparent in all forms of the media.

4.2 News Empathy

The increase in the number of stories and amount of information that has to be conveyed on a daily if not hourly basis can have its downsides. Like most people put under pressing deadlines, the work starts to suffer. The way it suffers in the news is that inaccurate information is included. “Cardiff researchers found that, even in the best national papers in the country, only 12% of their stories were their own work and that only 12% of the key facts were being checked” (Davies, 2009, p.60). This is not done on purpose; this is a product of time constraints. David Broder, a political writer, stated the situation perfectly in his 1979 speech honoring Pulitzer Prize-winners

‘I would like to see us say – over and over until the point has been made - that the newspaper that drops on your doorstep is a partial, hasty, incomplete, inevitably somewhat flawed and inaccurate rendering of some of the things we have heard about in the past twenty-four hours – distorted, despite our best efforts to eliminate gross bias – by the very process of compression that makes it possible for you to lift it from the doorstep and read it in about an hour. If we labeled the product accurately, then we could immediately add: ‘But it’s the best we could do under the circumstances,

and we will be back tomorrow, with a corrected and updated version.’ (Davies, 2009, p.44)

It was a brutally honest statement that as readers of any newspaper we need to be aware of.

Local papers cover local news; national papers cover national news and both have a large number of stories and a vast amount of information to sort through. The news it seems is too extensive for a single paper. Journalists and researchers can only choose a small selection of the news to place in the paper to share with their readers. The readers knowledge and attention comes from those selected topics. This is sometimes referred to as ‘hypodermic needle’ theory, meaning that viewers and readers acting as passive consumers get injected with the information the media chooses to report on (Jowell, Roberts, & Fitzgerald, 2007). We can only expect to get so much out of a ten to thirty page paper. Stories that are days or weeks old tend to be written as current events leaving the reader wanting to know the resolution of the issue, but they are sometimes denied either because the issue is no longer leading news or it has been overlooked. Another scenario is that the information that is being delivered is incorrect. We as readers and watchers have to read more than one paper, watch more than one news channel, and find more information online if we are to stay properly informed.

4.3 Trustworthiness

As viewers and readers we trust those that deliver our news, they are supposedly the informed ones and as readers and watchers we are stuck in one location looking for information about the world around us. Journalists and news anchormen set the news agenda and as viewers and readers we have to have the confidence that those delivering the information are making responsible decisions (Krajicek, 1998). Our trust and confidence in the media comes into question when accuracy is not their number one priority and scare

inducing stories take precedence over accurate information (Sunstein, 2002). This seems like a more reasonable perception considering the amount of drama, evil, and suffering we are exposed to through the media (Altheide, 2002).

These news stories do seem to take priority with publishers and editors, but there are media outliers (Altheide, 2002). In 1994 television station WCCO in Minneapolis took a stand against this form of media by swearing off body-count journalism. They were the first station to do this and a few have followed suit. WCCO prefer to report a more ‘family-sensitive’ story than a sensationalized one (Krajicek, 1998). They proved that there are other ways to deliver the news that do not involve scaring their audience. They are a rare form of media, but hopefully one that will prosper and increase in number. According to Krajicek, viewers and readers confidence in the media would increase if there were more stations, papers, and television networks offering family-sensitive stories instead of ones runs by high authority individuals like Murdoch² who believe they are in the entertainment business (1998). Obviously in his news we will continue to get body counts, graphic pictures, and other bold reports that provoke fear in the viewer and reader.

4.4 Confusing Horror

The use of body counts, graphic pictures, and fear easily makes the difference between the news and a drama show or horror film difficult to discern. The news should not be attracting an audience through its novelty value – a technique more commonly used in horror films. Should the public be interested in the news in the same way they are interested in horror films (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000)? According to the theory of VMH (violence, mayhem, and horror), “viewers of media entertainment react to the events on the screen in

² Rupert Murdoch owns and runs television networks and stations, newspapers, magazines, and book publishing companies in five continents, such as Twentieth Century Fox film studio, HarperCollins book publisher, *The Sunday Times of London*, *New York Post*, etc (Krajicek, 1998).

much the same way that they would react to the same events if they witnessed them in real life” (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000, p.78). VMH combined with Magic Bullet Theory, the theory that media messages act on us directly, because the audience is passive, creates cause for concern (Earp, 2010). We want people watching the news to learn how to rationally and accurately react to a situation, so they will react in the same manner if actually faced with that situation. The media should not want the public acting like a character in a horror film.

In the case of predators if the media is promoting shark hunts and antagonistic attitudes towards sharks then this behavior will only continue in the future. Instead the media should correct the behavior so viewers and readers will know what actions to take if found in a similar situation. This should be the defining separation between news and horror films: news is reality and films are entertainment, the similarities between the two should be decreased, and if possible any relationship between the two clearly delineated.

Stories of crime and violence have been increasing for hundreds of years and are prevalent in the news today. The experienced journalist and anchormen are trusted to convey the information they believe to be important to us. There are inaccuracies and mistakes, but to some extent the public needs to empathize with the journalists, given the amount of information that they have to deal with, the difficulty they have in verifying sources, and the time pressure under which they work. These are the issues that face any daily journalist, but the delivery of the accurate information should be the main concern of any paper and should be the concern of the electronic media as well. It would be an improvement if reports were presented in the most factual manner and de-sensationalized, but in fact ‘family-sensitive’ news is a rarity. So, is the news sensationalized because that is how the media delivers the news or because that is what society wants to read and watch (Krajicek, 1998)? Can predators be interesting if they are not killing machines? These are questions that the following chapter hopes to answer.

Chapter 5 - Finding a Solution

“Look, Chief, you can't go off half-cocked looking for vengeance against a fish. That shark isn't evil. It's not a murderer. It's just obeying its own instincts. Trying to get retribution against a fish is crazy.” - Peter Benchley, *Jaws*

We are faced with a fear we know little about, it lurks out of sight, and only makes headlines when it makes a mistake about the nature of a prey item. Sharks are a mystery to the public and to those who deliver the news. Are we fearful of sharks because of our ancestors, our experiences, or the media telling us we should be scared? “Several decades of work have yet to resolve definitely whether television and newspaper reports about crime and fear are a ‘cause’ or ‘effect’ of public concerns about crime and fear” (Altheide, 1997, p.648). Most of us have never seen or encountered a shark so “truth, accuracy, and validity are not measured against a notion of reality attained through experience but against one attained through other texts, particularly fictional ones” (Papson, 1992, p.69). These stories of fiction are not always appropriately labeled. These fictional stories can be attributed to a lack of research and fact checking by the media, but presented as a story of truth.

The media has a responsibility to do their part by checking their sources and their facts. When it comes to science related stories the information changes quickly, but there are certain things that will always remain true. Sharks are not animals that lie in wait to attack. Sharks follow the same migration paths every year; they do not come together in secret. They do not need to be anthropomorphized and cast as a villain; they need to be seen as what they are, a big fish. When stories of shark attacks do hit the headlines the media needs to offer resolutions. They need to stop blaming animals that cannot defend themselves and offer solutions that are rational. They could suggest that we avoid beaches that sharks inhabit, that

we do not swim with or near their prey items, that we avoid swimming during their most active hunting times, become more aware of our surroundings, and do not indulge in shark hunts to revenge earlier incidents. The public is apt to forget that we are the intruders and that a shark is a wild animal that we cannot control.

The media may sensationalize the stories they are reporting, but it is as much the public's fault that sharks make headlines. *Gunton's Magazine* on the subject of sensationalism complained, "[t]here are more people who will give a cent for twelve pages of scandal, abuse, caricature, and venal representation than will give two cents for clean, wholesome news" (Davis & McLeod, 2003, p.209). The media offers their stories to us and we read them, we look for these stories so the media offers them, it is a vicious cycle and one established early in life. A group of second grade students (123 students) were involved in a study where they were asked to choose between a video about scary sharks or bunnies (Trice, 2010). Forty-four boys and twenty girls chose to watch the shark film. Two versions of the shark film were shown; one high in action and excitement and one low in action and excitement. Those that chose the scary shark film preferred the high excitement one. This was the opposite reaction to those children who had chosen the bunny film who preferred the low in excitement version. Children who seek out or choose films that are high in excitement will continue to do so as they age (Trice, 2010). People are 'hardwired' for items high in excitement, whether it is stories, movies, or actions, our attention is drawn to danger-conveying signals (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). The public enjoys reading the sensationalized stories about sharks because of the sense of danger.

5.1 Impairing Shark Conservation

Historically we prayed to and worshipped sharks. We now curse them. What does this say about human evolution? "[A]nimal representations may indirectly reveal something about

how a culture regards and thus treats living animals” (Baker, 2001, p.xvii). People hate animal abuse, but can still hate the animal. Thinking negatively about these animals might well be considered abusing them and the conservation efforts in place to protect them. For at least 400 million years sharks have inhabited the waters that only recently we started to colonize (Flynn, nd).

According to the most widely accepted scientific estimate, people kill more than 100 million sharks every year. Many experts believe that even this figure may be an underestimate. No shark species has yet been declared extinct, although it is very likely that some have disappeared without our knowledge; several species are critically endangered and a number of regional stocks have already been wiped out. (Carwardine, 2004, p.12)

It is rare to find people whose first choice for a donation is to a shark conservation fund; it is common to find ones who donate to pandas and horses or other things soft and cuddly. An animal may get our attention through the headlines, but that does not necessarily mean it gets our support.

Sharks suffer from overfishing and more recently the practice of finning. Due to their slow growth and delayed sexual maturity their stock takes decades to recover (Stevens, Bonfil, Dulvy, & Walker, 2000). Besides their monetary value to humans they are important to the health of the environment. The “ecological impacts of eliminating top predators can be far-reaching and include release of mesopredator³ prey populations from predatory control and induction of subsequent cascades of indirect trophic interactions” (Myers, Baum, Shepherd, Powers, & Peterson, 2007, p.1846). Humans all over the world have persecuted and eradicated apex predators for a millennia either out of fear or because they competed for

³ A predator that is midranking on the food web (Praugh, et al., 2009). Tends to be of a smaller size than an apex predator and increases in abundance when apex predators are eliminated. Examples are raccoons, skunks, foxes, and cats.

food, but these actions were counterintuitive (Praugh, et al., 2009). When sharks, as a predator, are removed from the environment, their prey species increase in biomass (Stevens, Bonfil, Dulvy, & Walker, 2000). This can result in burgeoning populations of fish, seals, birds, and turtles. This may sound like a positive effect, but when those species increase their prey items decrease.

Here is one scenario: tiger sharks are removed from the environment. The sharks' main prey items are seabirds. These seabirds are no longer being hunted so the population increases. Seabirds eat tuna; with so many more birds a lot more tuna is eaten decreasing the tuna population. If the sharks were in the environment they would keep the seabird population in balance, which in turn would keep the tuna population in balance (Stevens, Bonfil, Dulvy, & Walker, 2000). Generally the removal of a predator, such as sharks, carries the risk of ecosystem degradation (Myers, Baum, Shepherd, Powers, & Peterson, 2007). This is true for all apex predators. We may not like them, but we do need them.

Understanding and accepting that a shark attacks either to feed or out of curiosity, and not out of vengeance or malice, is the biggest step involved in improving their public relations. Their rare attacks on humans "can occasionally help to generate significant resistance to carnivore conservation efforts" (Löe & Röskoft, 2004, p.283). "An important criterion for the success of large carnivore protection and re-introduction is to maintain a low level of conflict with humans" (Löe & Röskoft, 2004, p.283) If sharks could understand this they would stop attacking humans. Their species are in danger and require protection. By informing the public of the conservation issues surrounding predators and increasing general public awareness, public support for such species should increase (Murdock 2000).

5.2 Comparing Fears

As stated in Chapter 2, twenty-two percent of people in the U.S. claimed to have an extreme fear of animals (Antony, Craske, & Barlow, 2006). Animals are not the only things people fear. Another fear common among people is the fear of flying, affecting 25 million adult Americans (Dean & Whitaker, 1982). Their fear is a result of either being afraid of heights or afraid of dying. This section will demonstrate the efforts airlines went through to help their clients and if those same efforts can be used to support predators.

In the 1970's and 1980's airlines were concerned for the future of the travel industry because one out of ten air travelers were afraid of the flight they were on. In 1978 it was estimated that the fear of flying cost the travel industry 21.3 million trips in domestic flights as well as 6 million business trips and 15.2 million personal trips (Dean & Whitaker, 1982). Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) was one of the first airlines to host fearful flyer programs. By offering these programs they believed they could facilitate a potential air travel gain of nine percent, if the fear could be alleviated (Dean & Whitaker, 1982). Travelers sat through simulations, were offered on board therapy, and Q&A sessions with pilots. Most people wanted to alleviate their fear and they saw the apparent benefits (Dean & Whitaker, 1982). These programs still continue today, but are run by private companies more often than airlines and the cost can be quite high depending on how many sessions are required.

Not being afraid of flying allows one to travel, visit family and friends, decrease travel time, and expand job and living options. The benefit of not being afraid of sharks is being able to go swimming in the sea – an activity for which there is an easy substitute in terms of locations, i.e. swimming pool. The payoff is not as vast and there is no one losing money by not having people in the water. People will still pay for beachside hotels just to lie on the sand and not swim in the water. Since the 1970's a lot of effort has gone into assisting people in overcoming their flying fears, but as of 2007 there is still a high degree of anxiety

affecting up to 40 percent of flyers (Murphy, 2007). The fear of flying is an individual fear but also a societal one due to bad publicity and sensationalized reports of crashed planes. After a plane has crashed the atmosphere changes within the airport and flyers behavior changes in response to the news reports of the event. This change in atmosphere and behavior could linger far beyond the first few days of the report if the news decides to make a trend out of the event. Flying is a very safe mode of transportation, if you are an American the chance of being killed in a plane crash is 1 in 11 million (unlike the chances of being killed in a car crash: 1 in 5,000) (Ropeik, 2006). If you are not an American, consider this statistic: death in an air crash is a rarity, there are only 1.9 deaths per 100 million aircraft miles (Ropeik, 2006). A plane crash is very similar to a shark attack in the attention it receives and the consequent perception of its frequency.

There are no specific courses offered by aquariums or shark researchers that help to alleviate the public's fear toward sharks, but like any fear there are general ways to assist in overcoming the fear. There are several steps to overcoming an animal based fear, such as; identifying the specifics of the fear, understanding the behavior of the animal, avoidance of the animal, changing thought processes, and easing slowly into exposure to the animal in question. Finding items with which to start the exposure can be challenging. It is recommended that people start with pictures and move onto films. With a fear of spiders you might watch *Charlotte's Web*; with dogs you could watch *101 Dalmations*; with cats the *Adventures of Milo and Otis* could provide a starting point. But what would you watch for sharks (Antony, Craske, & Barlow, 2006)? It is a rarity to find a film that gives a realistic, not-so-terrifying view of sharks. You would be hard pressed to find a film where a shark is not attacking an animal. That would not be a good starting point when trying to overcome a fear of sharks. Instead one would need to read articles or watch programs with accurate

information to help gain knowledge of sharks that was not sensationalized, such information is unfortunately not commonly available.

5.3 Overcoming the Bad Publicity

One way that has been shown to overcome the negativity of shark PR is knowledge. Knowledge could be a solution to overcoming a fear of sharks or a general dislike of them. Take for example a study including 229 students from 15 different classes at 4 different schools. Students were asked to describe sharks. They came up with 1,128 words, 407 of them were negative (scary, killer) and 405 were stereotype (big, sharp teeth). After this initial listing of words the students were then asked to sit once a week for six weeks in a classroom with scientists to learn about sharks. After their last session they were asked again to describe sharks, they returned with 939 words. There were 201 negative words and 274 stereotype. The positive words went from 98 to 139 (cool, intelligent) and science content from 82 to 201 (counter shading, ampullae). After the students received scientific knowledge there was a “significant decrease in negative words ($p=.002$) as well as significant increases in positive words ($p=.023$) and science content words ($p<.0001$)” (Seraphin, 2010, p.208). This research shows that the misconceptions of sharks can be corrected by exposing people to a variety of sharks and giving accurate information about them.

The term ‘attack’ should be reconsidered as well. Sharks attack seals, their prey source, and their intent is very clear. Attacks on humans are not an act of predation. It should be considered as an encounter; it is a shark bite incident or a shark accident. “Historically, the language has been less emotive. Cases of “shark bite” were noted by doctors in 1899 and “shark accident” was an accepted term until the 1930s, even if it was fatal” (Neff, 2011, p.28). This changed in 1933, Surgeon Victor Coppleson in the *Medical Journal of Australia* stated that sharks will attack man and in 1958 at the Shark Symposium the scientific

community adapted the use of the term ‘attack’ (Neff, 2011). It would be understandable to use this term if there was an actual attack, but the term ‘attack’ gets used even if there is no contact, if the skin gets scraped, or if it is a minor bite as opposed to a fatal one (Neff, 2011). “In Australia, 13 per cent of all “attacks” come from small wobbegong sharks, which bite when stepped on” (Neff, 2011, p.29). This is not an attack, but an accident. This terminology is incorrect and sensationalizes the event. Sharks do on rare occasions mistake a human for a prey item. This is unfortunate, and the media needs to understand that it is a rare event and protect people, but not harm the shark in the process. This is the biggest hurdle conservationist and the media face.

The use of proper terminology may seem minor, but words and how they are associated can be quite damaging if that association is incorrect (it would be like sitting through a psychological association test where every time shark came up the response was attack). Reports and headlines do use the term shark attack, which can prompt strong ‘word imageability’. Word imageability is the mental image that gets evoked when a word is mentioned (de Groot, 1989). Shark attack might evoke an image of blood in the water, surfboard bitten, or a swimmer bleeding from a missing leg. This is not an appropriate response if the shark “attack” was actually just a scrape on the leg. The word shark according to one study had a mean associative reaction time of 1,397 milliseconds (de Groot, 1989). Other predators also shared a quick association reaction time such as bear (1,721 milliseconds) and tiger (1,379 milliseconds). They were not the fastest reaction times, but did have quicker times than non predators such as calf (1,089 milliseconds), zebra (1,290 milliseconds), and dolphin (1,438 milliseconds). “[W]ord imageability exerts a strong influence on word association...” (de Groot, 1989, p.836) so by using a more appropriate term, such as accident instead of attack, the images associated will be corrected as well.

Anchormen and journalists want to put out a story they can be proud of, but they also want the public to read or see it and currently it is believed that the public is only interested in sensationalized stories, regardless of whether the public or the media were the first to start this trend. The media benefit the most from fear-based news because if you are afraid of going outside your house you will read more newspapers and watch more news reports (Altheide, 1997). We as viewers and readers need to start taking a stand and fulfilling our interest in high excitement stories through fictional films and not through the news. If this can be accomplished sensationalized stories regarding predators will decrease, improving their conservation prospects and helping those that have a fear related to predators. Ending their exploitation for media sales and promoting factual information is the only way to achieve this.

Conclusion

“Predators make it much more difficult to find consensus. It's a lot easier to agree about birds and plants than about animals that endanger people and livestock.” - Gale Norton

There is no doubt that the public has an interest in sharks. In 2008 more than 29 million viewers tuned in to Discovery Channel's Shark Week (Strauss, 2009). But was the attention positive or negative? During that same year only 59 shark attacks were reported and only four deaths, which was a decrease from 2007 (Strauss, 2009). By watching and reading news reports you would not have thought that to be the case. Shark attacks are increasing due to the high volume of people in the water, but fatalities are decreasing (Florida Museum of Natural History, 2010). Either people's awareness of the potential dangers involved in water activities has increased or the larger sharks are becoming scarce. Unfortunately, the latter is probably the more accurate with media reports inhibiting shark conservation through sensationalized reports.

6.1 2001

Despite the rarity of fatalities caused by sharks the fear that people have of sharks has not decreased. The year 2001 perhaps provides the best example of how the media can react to incidents involving sharks. In 2001 the “fear of sharks reached an all-time high as a direct result of a media feeding frenzy that has not been seen before or since” (Carwardine, 2004, p.95). In the month of May stories of alligator attacks started out on local media outlets, but then went national. It started with a fatal attack on a seventy year old man and quickly escalated to involve accounts of vicious crocodiles, caimans, and alligators. There was very little information about the attacks, but there were stories of these animals being captured or

sighted making it seem that around every corner a toothed reptile was waiting (Coleman, 2004). This continued until July, when a larger predator took over the headlines and alligator attacks and sightings apparently ceased.

July 6th of this same year the media's attention turned to sharks. An eight year old lost his arm and part of his thigh to a 2.1-meter shark (Carwardine, 2004). Before the month ended *Time* magazine proclaimed it to be the 'Summer of the Shark' (Carwardine, 2004). "There was even a story claiming that Fidel Castro had concocted a scheme to breed dangerous sharks and unleash them on an unsuspecting American public..." (Carwardine, 2004, p.95). Every attack anywhere in the world was given front-page coverage, self-proclaimed experts presented their various theories to the media as facts, suggesting ways the "problem" might be solved (Carwardine, 2004). By August, reporters ignoring the fact that it was the annual shark migration season used helicopters to film hundreds of sharks and suggested "they were gathered to attack humans" (Coleman, 2004, p.10). As abruptly as the alligator headlines disappeared so did the shark headlines. The attacks and sightings seemed to come to an abrupt end. Media's focus on the beaches came to an end as the attention moved to New York City (Coleman, 2004). The World Trade Center Towers were destroyed due to a terrorist attack.

2001 was an average year in the US for recorded shark attacks (53, one less than in 2000) and by international standards it dropped to 72 (it was 85 in 2000). There were only 5 fatalities (in 2000 there was 13) (Carwardine, 2004). The immediate end to shark news is easily understood as "[a]pparently, after the terrorist attacks, sharks were fearful of coming near the shore..." (Glassner, 2004, p.825). This is obviously not the truth and instead topics like shark attacks will "receded from public view if they do not fit into the prevailing narrative" (Glassner, 2004, p.824). Terrorism was the story of interest so sharks disappeared from news programs, but when terrorism is not making headlines, stories of sharks will.

2001 clearly indicated how a rare occurrence can become a trend, how the media will manipulate the way they frame stories, how certain trend stories get to dominate the headlines, and how facts provided by un-reliable experts or sources are not checked. A few short months of headlines and news reports aptly illustrated the weaknesses inherent in the media's current approach to news. The media chose the fear agenda when choosing which stories to focus upon and sensationalized the rare event that is an animal attack.

6.2 Take Action

By focusing stories on violence, danger, and death the viewer is continuously encouraged to be fearful. If these stories contained detailed information (a factual frame) and a resolution then that fear would be alleviated by the end of the program. Realistically, stories that are presented may not be at that point yet and the solution will develop over time. This keeps the viewer involved with the broadcaster or newspaper. However, as new information comes out there needs to be this move towards a conclusion. The information provided needs to have the sensationalism removed, especially after the initial hook has performed its task of attracting attention. Images need to be portrayed in a context they were taken in and stories delivered with correct facts. Watching or reading a story about someone in a dangerous situation hooks a viewer and invites their emotional involvement without there being any need to sensationalize the information and amplify the fear that is naturally there. Given a humans' need for resolution, not providing a resolution results in no relief of the fear engendered and encourages an irrational response to the information or situation. These issues can be easily resolved if the media takes the initiative and if the viewers do not accept the information delivered passively.

As viewers we need to find our excitement, our adrenaline, and rush through films, books, and fictional media, not through the news. We need our facts from newspapers and

news anchors. We need to be able to trust the information we are being delivered and we need to accept it as accurate. As viewers and readers we need to do the extra work and get our information from more than one source. The sensationalism of news is a hard pattern to break. It is a 300-year-old tradition that only seems to get stronger and stronger with each passing year, but hopefully it will not take 300 years for the newspapers to return to their original calling of accurate reporting.

The public will never look at sharks the way our ancestors did. We no longer live in a society where behavior is significantly influenced by myth and legend. Our understanding of the world is now more scientific in nature. At least with that progression of understanding we should be better able to understand the sharks that inhabit our waters. By better understanding these fish and becoming more knowledgeable about them our conservation efforts on their behalf will increase and there should be an improvement in the general feelings we have towards them. The negative feeling that the residents of Dunedin, New Zealand have toward sharks will hopefully be replaced with a better understanding after viewing the short film *Tangled Waters* – the creative component of this thesis.

6.3 *Tangled Waters*

The film that was produced in conjunction with this written thesis hopes to recognize the negative opinion towards sharks and confront those opinions with rational information. The film explains the origin of the negative opinions due to the shark attacks in the 1960s and 1970s and the community's reaction to those attacks. Though the reaction was understandable at the time, forty years later new information has shown the use of shark nets to be archaic. The film logically and rationally challenges the practice of shark netting and endeavors to show the sharks in a different light.

Tangled Waters presented both sides of the shark netting issue. Dunedin city councilors both pro and anti anti-shark net were interviewed. Their interviews were delivered in a factual frame without any manipulative editing. Parties that were involved historically and those currently involved shared their stories and opinions. The film also identified the development of new attitudes toward sharks by speaking with a commercial fisherman who now is a shark conservationist and by filming aquarium visitors who attended a shark dissection.

The film is presented in a current affairs documentary style as you follow our host around Dunedin. The presenter, however, uses a comedic approach to the delivery of the information, the debunking of myths, and basic information about sharks. The film starts with a typical media shark attack hook, but that is the extent of the sensationalism. Instead of sensationalizing the information, it was delivered with comedy, which test screenings have shown to be successful. It is a film that could be used to initiate some basic exposure to sharks and gently ease those wishing to overcome their fear of sharks into a different response pattern. There is no kill scene in this film, this film illustrates sharks for what they are, a big fish.

My film partner and I agreed at the start of filming to avoid what previous shark films and news stories did to address the stories of shark attacks and sharks. We wanted to be fair and accurate when it came to telling the story of shark nets in Dunedin. Our purpose behind the film was to alter Dunedin's opinions toward sharks. The city had suffered three losses during the 1960s and 1970s. We wanted to respect their loss and their decisions at that time, but also wanted to show the change in opinions and information since those events forty years ago. We wanted the information to be accessible to the general public and since the film was made for Dunedin and could not have been made without Dunedin residents we wanted them to be proud of this film and see how their participation made a difference.

Looking at the research I collected for my academic component I discovered the methods that the media was using to portray sharks as killers, so we knew what to avoid. The introduction of our film or hook is the only portion that is sensationalized, but it was still done in a manner where the viewer's imagination may have led them to believe the shark was the culprit, but we did not place a shark there. We used a factual frame for our story, did not dramatize the shark attack background information, and at no point tried to arouse a fearful response in our audience. Our comedic delivery was employed to avoid that. We fact checked all of the information and trying to find a way to present probability neglect we filmed a whole section on statistics using a pie as a means of visually representing the issue. We prevented media loops by using images that we filmed within our production schedule and not recycling images that were not associated with our topic. The money shot differs from the typical money shot by simply being a close up of a shark, we did not have a kill scene or blood. Our delivery was based on comedy, not sensationalism, and with a resolution that provided the viewers with the outcome to the council vote; the nets were being decommissioned. The academic component affected the creative component by motivating it to go in an opposite direction from the typical documentaries that portray sharks. No one should leave this film thinking sharks are cold-blooded killers, but instead an animal that should be respected and protected by the community with whom they share their waters.

During the production of *Tangled Waters* the *Otago Daily Times* (ODT) reported on the shark netting issue on a regular basis. They were also the paper reporting on the shark attacks and netting during the 1960s and 1970s. Looking at the articles in the 2011 paper, I appreciated their trend towards accurate reporting on the shark issues. Their headlines were catchy and hooked the reader, but in general their story content was factual and on more than one occasion argued against the practice of shark netting. An understanding newspaper

editor, perhaps concerned about the environment, may have assisted the anti-shark netting cause.

The editor does not need to have an interest in the topic, but ideally should have a good understanding of it. As a person involved in media I understand the need for a hook and the importance of making the story catchy in order to get readers or viewers attention, but this can be done with minimal sensationalism, truthful information, correct facts, and appropriate images, not misleading ones. Thanks to the ODT's non-sensationalized framing and delivery of facts the campaign associated with the film received tremendous support. Eight hours of street campaigning led to over 400 petition signatures being collected in support of Dunedin sharks and the removal of shark nets from Dunedin beaches. By explaining to people the information in a rational way and debunking the myths sensationalized media reports had led them to believe, the campaign and the film gained support immediately.

Ratings are important and they keep the paper or broadcaster in business, but there needs to be accuracy in reporting and a move away from framing manipulation. It will take time, but by increasing knowledge and understanding the media and the viewer can better understand predators and make them an animal to be appreciated and respected, not feared. This will help promote the conservation of predators that are so important to our ecosystem, but are so often overlooked. When donating to an animal's cause, give the panda and the horse consideration, but do not disregard the shark or the bear. We need our predators.

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