

Is the Portrayal of Snakes in the Media the Cause of People's Fears?

Many people contract an irrational fear in their lives, and they are really irrational. Having the fear of balloons or stickers is truly saddening, we humans can't even go about our lives without screaming at the sight of a balloon being blown up? And we call ourselves the master race.

I've always believed that irrational fears and phobias were passed down through generations, it doesn't seem too fathomable that someone could contract a fear for something without seeing someone else react in a negative way towards the thing that is being feared. However it recently crossed my mind that it's not always down to environment and ancestry, take me for example. I own a pet snake, he's a gorgeous and long reptile who is so gentle and relaxed, in addition to be totally comfortable with being handled by people. My mother is terrified of snakes but she had never seen one in person nor held one, as were many of my other friends and peers. This got me wondering... what is the other cause of peoples irrational fears for animals that are clearly not going to harm you.

The first thing I turned to was Media, it's practically everywhere and is used by companies in order to persuade you to buy their products. This form of manipulation is used for nearly anything, including snakes. Take documentaries and films for example. Harry Potter is a film known worldwide, they portrayed the snake to be the bringer of evil, and created a really scary image of a snake. All documentaries show snakes in a scary position, a stance in which they are ready to pounce or attack, however in nature they are far from dangerous and don't show signs of attacking until after they have been unsettled and agitated by humans. Documentaries invade their homes and rustle them to a point of disturbance which cause them to get violent and hold a more violent position.

Not only from my experience are they shown to be quite passive creatures, but multiple psychology tests have been done on children to record what their natural reaction to animals are. The results showed that animals (including snakes) which showed silhouettes of circular/ rounder shapes were considered to be "nice" animals, whereas animals with a triangular silhouette made children react in fear and negatively, saying that those animals are "Mean". I found these results very interesting, it shows that the natural human reaction does not fear snakes in themselves but instead fears animals that are displaying body language that is shaped in a scarier manner. So if this is the proven case, a fear of something is developed over time. This then shows that people's exposure to the media and their traditional negative portrayal of snakes and other reptiles/ arachnids.

The fact that people are being convinced by the media also leads to people not being able to comprehend that snakes may not be as scary and dangerous as they believe. Now there is nothing wrong with fear's, it helps play a role in our survival as humans, however humans are also guilty of acting based on a fear, take the rattlesnake roundup in America. This is where many people go out and take/ kill snakes in the wild in order to see who had managed to kill the largest snake. It seems as though if people hadn't developed such irrational fears of animals, there would be less activities where animals that are beautiful and amazing are being killed for a trophy, adrenaline and a bit of cash.

I personally feel that there will always be irrational fears for snakes, and the media doesn't seem interested in the negativities of portraying animals to be scary. If they payed attention then possibly people would be more likely to be relaxed around snakes