



Exploring Sexual Attraction to Animals: A Qualitative Analysis of Zoophile Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the psychological dimensions of sexual attraction to non-human animals through qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses from individuals with zoophilic interests ($N = 960$). Using inductive thematic analysis, we identified three interconnected themes: Parallels with Sexual Attraction to Humans, Animal Welfare Ethics, and Species-Specific Appeal, with a subtheme of Anatomical Attraction. Participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.05$ years [$SD = 9.75$], 67% men) described attraction mechanisms that both mirrored human relationship dynamics and diverged into uniquely animal-specific domains. Many participants emphasized ethical frameworks centered on perceived consent and animal welfare while displaying limited understanding of species-specific behavioral indicators. Species-specific attractions were frequently characterized by preferences for wolf-like features, intelligence, and anatomical uniqueness. These results have implications for clinical approaches to individuals with zoophilic attractions, animal welfare practices, and theoretical frameworks of human sexuality. Future research should employ longitudinal methods to investigate the development and stability of these attractions and interdisciplinary approaches to address complex questions regarding consent and animal welfare.

Zoophilia refers to a sexual attraction to animals and is distinct from bestiality, which is sexual contact with animals for the gratification of the human participant (Beetz, 2008; Krause, 2022). The etiology of the word zoophilia refers specifically to “a love” (i.e., the Greek word *philia*) of animals (i.e., *zoion*) and typically involves an emotional connection beyond simple sexual desire (Beetz, 2008; Krause, 2022; Miletski, 2005). Indeed, research has demonstrated that there are individuals who are not necessarily attracted to animals, but who would have sexual relations with an animal were the opportunity to present itself (Zidenberg & Olver, 2022). Additionally, women have been shown to exhibit some vaginal lubrication to videos of non-human animals copulating while not necessarily being attracted to animals (Chivers & Bailey, 2005), demonstrating that sexual arousal alone may be too simplistic to explain why some individuals may report sexual attraction to animals.

Zoophilia, in general, is an under-researched topic and much of the research that does exist has focused on sexual contact, to the exclusion of research exploring sexual attraction (Beetz, 2004). Another issue hampering research into zoophilia is that the literature focuses primarily on bestiality (sexual contact with animals) and conflates it with zoophilia (the attraction or orientation toward animals). This conflation creates fuzzy distinctions between attraction and behavior, leading to an overemphasis on contact rather than orientation (Beetz, 2004; Miletski, 2017; Navarro & Tewksbury, 2015). It is also important to note that some have argued that zoophilia is not a concern on its own without accompanying distress or sexual contact (Beetz, 2005; Cerrone, 1991). Early sex research

suggested that attraction to animals was not an important factor in acts of bestiality as they were crimes motivated by neuroses and committed by mentally unstable individuals seeking a sexual substitute for a human or by individuals in rural communities who lacked opportunity for human companionship (Fehlow, 1985; Grassberger, 1968; Holmes, 1991; Kinsey et al., 1948; Schmidt, 1969). While some early studies, notably Wilson (1987), did acknowledge that attraction to animals may be an important motivator for sexual contact with animals, the majority of early sexology research blamed mental health or personality for the acts (Beetz, 2004). More contemporary research does not fully support this assertion, and authors have indicated that attraction is an important aspect of the individuals who have (or desire to have) sexual contact with animals (Beetz, 2002; Donofrio, 1996; Miletski, 2002), going so far as to suggest that attraction to animals may be a unique sexual orientation. There are additional anecdotal reports of individuals describing their attraction to animals in the literature (i.e., Matthews, 1994), indicating that attraction to animals cannot be fully discarded as a motivator for contact.

What Makes an Animal Attractive?

Very few studies have explored what makes a non-human animal attractive or why certain non-human animals are more attractive than others. It is important to note that some individuals report an attraction to anthropomorphized animals (i.e., furies) but recent research by Zidenberg and Olver (2022) demonstrated that, while some zoophiles were

furries, most furries were not zoophiles – providing some evidence that sexual interest in furry culture seems to be a distinct phenomenon. Therefore, this paper examines sexual attraction to non-human animals and not anthropomorphized animals or human roleplay of animals such as pup play (Wignall & McCormack, 2017).

When examining humans, attractiveness has been posited as an indicator of good genetics and potential reproductive success (Luxen & Van De Vijver, 2006). As an ultimately non-reproductive act (Garrard, 2017), sexual attraction to animals becomes more difficult to explain. One potential avenue of exploration involves “cuteness” which has been shown to correlate with ratings of attractiveness among human women (Kuraguchi et al., 2015). This overlap was explored by Zidenberg and Olver (2022), who found that ratings of sexual attractiveness, romantic attraction, and cuteness of animal stimuli were moderately intercorrelated yet represented distinct phenomena. Critically, while ratings of sexual and romantic attraction successfully discriminated between individuals with and without zoophilia, cuteness ratings did not. This suggests that although cuteness may contribute to judgments of animal attractiveness, it is neither sufficient, nor primary, in determining sexual or romantic interest. Zoophiles consider their attraction to animals to be a natural variation in attraction comparable to human-human attraction that is brought on by evolution and the expression of the variability of genes related to sexual attraction (Sendler, 2018).¹

Researchers have reported that sexual attraction (along with other motivations such as curiosity, identification with the animal, and expressions of love/affection) was a common reason reported for sexual contact with animals, further highlighting the importance of this aspect (Allard, 2020; Miletski, 2002). Research seems to indicate that sexual attraction develops around the age of puberty and can co-exist with attraction to humans (Allard, 2020; Beetz, 2002; Miletski, 2002). In the few studies that have explored what contributes to attractiveness, species and sex appeared to be important aspects for attraction, with the majority of men (87.2%) reporting being attracted to canines (19.1% to female, 39.7% to male canines, and 41.2% to both males and female) and 80% being attracted to equines (17.5% to female and 22.2% to male equines, and 60.3% to both males and females; Miletski, 2002). Many participants in this study were attracted to multiple species and reported having sexual contact concordant with their attractions. Dogs and horses were also reported as the most sexually and romantically attractive animals by Zidenberg and Olver (2022) and this was confirmed, with the addition of cats, by Emmett et al. (2021). Emmett et al. (2021) also found the

primary interest reported was towards male animals (46.5%), followed by female animals (33.6%), and fewer individuals having reported an attraction to both (19.8%).

Beyond species and sex, physical features of the animal, experiencing romantic moments and feelings of love with the animal, the personality of the animal, and non-sexual interactions were also indicated as being important aspects of attraction (Sendler, 2019). Along with the specific physical features of the animal reported by Sendler (2019), the animality of the scent of non-human animals was also mentioned as an important feature (Miletski, 2017). Taken together, these features may indicate that the animality itself is an attractive feature as it presents novel stimuli not possible with a human partner (Miletski, 2017). This is further supported by Emmett et al. (2021) who found that larger and more feral-looking animals (e.g., wolves) were viewed as being more attractive. For horses, gracefulness, and temperament were mentioned as being attractive as well, pointing to a mix of non-human- and human-like characteristics that are desired. While not specifically looking at non-human animals themselves, research on sex toys modeled after non-human animals also supports the idea that the novelty of the stimulation and the animalistic features were important motivators for their use (Zidenberg & Runyon, 2025).

The Current Study

Overall, there is a lack of research examining the factors contributing to attractiveness among non-human animals. Of the sparse extant literature, the majority is quite dated and based on quantitative survey results. While survey data can be extremely helpful, given that attraction is an extremely complex topic, qualitative approaches to this stream of research may provide a deeper understanding of the topic (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore sexual attraction to non-human animals qualitatively in order to answer the research question: What makes a non-human animal sexually attractive? While this paper draws on the same data collection procedure and participant pool as Zidenberg and Olver (2022), the previous article from this dataset focused on quantitative findings and did not include any qualitative findings. The current article uses responses to open-ended questions and qualitative analyses to further explore the phenomenon of attraction to non-human animals.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger project on zoophilia (Zidenberg & Olver, 2022), participants were recruited through social media platforms such as Twitter (now referred to as X) and Facebook, as well as from students who received course credit for their participation through an undergraduate university-based research portal. To reach the study's target population, additional posts were made on forums frequented by individuals with a sexual interest in animals, including specific subreddits and Zooville.org. Initially,

¹It has recently been uncovered that Sendler has made fraudulent statements about his credentials and ethical approvals resulting in several of his papers being retracted (see Brown, 2019; Marcus, 2022, for more details). It is unclear whether this paper (or any of Sendler's research on zoophilia) is based in fact, so any results reported by Sendler need to be interpreted with caution. It is also important to note that the zoophile research committee who reviewed this paper are doubtful that many of Sendler's studies were in fact conducted. Due to the severe lack of research in the area, we have made a measured decision to include this research in the introduction of the paper with the caveat that we did not heavily rely on these findings in our interpretation of the current results and we were extremely open to contradictory results.

Table 1. Demographics.

Variable	Category	<i>n</i> (%)
Age	Mean (SD)	25.05 (9.75)
Zoophile Identity*	Yes	861 (71.6%)
	No	342 (28.4%)
Gender	Man	805 (66.9%)
	Woman	275 (22.9%)
	Non-binary	45 (3.7%)
	Transgender	49 (4.1%)
Sexual Orientation	Other	28 (2.3%)
	Heterosexual	466 (38.7%)
	Homosexual	128 (10.6%)
	Bisexual	340 (28.3%)
	Asexual	19 (1.6%)
	Pansexual	124 (10.3%)
Race/Ethnicity	Other	123 (10.2%)
	Caucasian	916 (76.1%)
	Black	21 (1.7%)
	East Asian	11 (0.9%)
	South Asian	38 (3.2%)
	South East Asian	36 (3.0%)
	Middle Eastern	21 (1.7%)
	West Indian	3 (0.2%)
	Hispanic/Latino	61 (5.1%)
Highest Level of Education	Native/Aboriginal/Indigenous	26 (2.2%)
	Other	49 (4.1%)
	No Schooling	2 (0.2%)
	Completed Elementary School	3 (0.2%)
	High School	249 (20.7%)
	Community college/vocational/trade school	266 (22.1%)
	Bachelor's Degree	564 (46.9%)
Country	Graduate/Professional Degree	105 (8.7%)
	Canada	217 (18.0%)
	USA	603 (50.1%)
	Other	217 (18.0%)

*Note. There are individuals who report an attraction to animals but who do not identify with the zoophile label.

2,028 individuals responded to the survey and all qualitative responses (between 960 and 906 depending on the question) were retained for analysis. As seen in Table 1, the mean age of participants was 25.05 years (SD = 9.75), with the majority being men (67%), non-heterosexual (bisexual: 28.3%; homosexual: 10.7%; pansexual: 10.1%; other orientation: 10.3%; asexual: 1.6%), Caucasian (77.5%), having completed at least some university education (47.4%), living in an urban area (72.4%), and identifying as liberal (48.5%; see Zidenberg & Olver, 2022 for full demographics). In the course of the analysis, 97 responses were excluded from the analysis for being too short to analyze or lacking sense.

Procedure

This study received approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Review Board (Beh-REB #1669). The survey was open to all individuals over the age of 18 with targeted recruitment in communities of individuals who reported attraction to animals. Participants were recruited through social media posts and targeted outreach on forums frequented by the target demographic (e.g., specific subreddits and zooville.org). The study was advertised as examining “interest in animals.” Two survey versions were developed: one for the general public and one tailored for an online community of individuals who identify as zoophilic. The latter version was refined through consultation with Zooville.org forum moderators to ensure the survey and stimuli were appropriate for the zoophilia community. Qualitative questions remained consistent across both versions. All participants received definitions of key terms used in the survey (e.g., romantic attraction). To ensure data quality, the survey incorporated three attention checks throughout that automatically excluded participants who failed them (i.e., questions requiring selection of a specific response). Additional quality control measures were implemented during quantitative data cleaning, including identifying outliers, verifying that all participants met inclusion/exclusion criteria (i.e., minimum age), and flagging cases with substantial missing data.

The qualitative portion of the survey included four open-ended questions relating to interest in animals; one was related to what makes an animal cute and three were concerning sexual attraction and attitudes toward animals (i.e., what types of animals do you find romantically attractive?; What types of animals do you find sexually attractive?; Would you attempt to have sexual relations with an animal too small for penetrative intercourse? If not, why not?; What sexual interactions would be attempted if penetrative intercourse is not possible?). These questions were developed based on feedback from experts with knowledge in forensic psychology and human sexuality, as well as from the zoophile community. Separate questions regarding romantic and sexual attraction were chosen to reflect the split-attraction model, which posits that attraction to a partner can manifest in different forms, such as romantic, platonic, sexual, or intellectual attraction (Antonsen et al., 2020; Fisher, 1998; Fisher et al., 2005, 2006; Przybylo, 20198). Additionally, cuteness was queried as it has been shown to correlate with ratings of attractiveness among human women (e.g., Kuraguchi et al., 2015). For the purpose of this article, only the responses regarding sexual attraction are reported ($n = 960$, see Zidenberg & Olver, 2022, for the responses to the quantitative portion of the survey). Participants were offered a \$5 CAD gift card for their participation in the overall survey. After providing consent, participants completed the study measures and were then thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). This method

involved systematically identifying recurring themes and patterns in the responses, which become apparent when similar words or content were expressed across posts. The analysis followed the stages set out by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), which included familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes within those codes, reviewing the themes, and then defining and naming them. One author began by reading through the qualitative responses to become familiar with the data and then individually coded each post. By examining the commonalities and differences between the codes, similar codes were grouped into categories to develop overarching themes. Another author acted as a “critical friend” (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith & Sparkes, 2006), providing alternative interpretations and challenging the initial coding and theme groupings. The themes were then reviewed and revised by the research team to ensure they were comprehensive, coherent, and distinct. Similar themes were merged, while those lacking sufficient supporting data were discarded. A draft of the manuscript containing the most updated version of the themes was provided to a small group of zoophiles from the large online community that was used to recruit participants as a form of member checking to ensure trustworthiness and rigor of the results and to incorporate a measure of participatory research (Kullman & Chudyk, 2025; Motulsky, 2021; Stephens et al., 2020). An inductive thematic analysis approach was used in this study due to its exploratory nature, allowing patterns to appear organically from the data rather than from predefined categories. Instead of frequency counts, qualitative descriptors (e.g., many, some, few) were used to convey the prevalence of each theme, aligning with best practices in qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Buetow, 2010; Pyett, 2003; Wainright, 1997). This approach prioritized a detailed description of the data over statistical generalization, focusing on whether the identified patterns provided significant insights relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Overall, there were no identifiable trends in the types of animals mentioned in the responses; if an animal exists, it was most likely mentioned by participants. Three distinct, but overlapping, themes were identified by the research team: a) *Parallels with Sexual Attraction to Humans*; b) *Animal Welfare Ethics*; c) *Species-Specific Appeal* with a subtheme of *Anatomical Attraction*. The identified themes are described below, including excerpts from selected responses (taken verbatim from the responses) to illustrate the rich essence of each theme. The median response length for the question analyzed was 522 words. Responses ranged from 1 to 948 words.

Theme 1: *Parallels with Sexual Attraction to Humans*

The first theme illustrates the responses from participants who described their sexual attraction to animals as being similar to that of human-human relations. Although research is limited, extant literature has found that zoophiles may describe attraction to animals using characteristics that are similar to what would be considered in human relationships, such as sex (Emmett et al.,

2020), personality, and feelings of romantic connection (Sandler, 2019). These ideas were mirrored within the responses of the present study. In addition, participants also described factors such as age/sexual maturity, health, cleanliness, masculinity/femininity, and loyalty as contributors to sexual attraction.

Moreover, although participants commonly cited sex as an important factor in what makes an animal attractive, this distinction was often fluid across species. In other words, while a certain sex was desirable for one species, the opposite was commonly found to be true for another species. As an example, one participant noted, “*I am mostly attracted to male animals, particularly dogs (large breeds such as Great Dane, Rottweiler, Great Pyrenees, and Saint Bernard), stallions (especially ministallions), and boars. I am also attracted to female dogs, horses and sows*” (P#90). Furthermore, responses often described attraction to animals based on sex in comparison to their sexual preference in human-human sexual behavior. In some cases, sexual preference for humans differed from that for animals. For example:

As for gender, it’s a bit more complicated. I don’t consider myself “bi” in the form of human on human attraction. But when it comes to gender of an attractive animal that falls within my narrow categories, gender seems to be irrelevant (P#242)

Other responses reflected this idea, with participants noting, “*... I’m attracted to both male and female animals, but primarily male animals despite being attracted to only human females*” (P#363) and “*with humans im fully bisexual but with animals im only interested in the males*” (P#4). Although previous researchers have found a small relationship between sexual orientation and sexual preference among animals (Williams & Weinberg, 2003), other research argues that zoophilia may present as a distinct sexual orientation in itself (Miletski, 2005, 2017) which may explain why sexual preference with humans may differ from that of animals.

Additionally, an interesting finding within the responses involved some participants’ denial of interest in engaging in sexual gratification with an animal, but instead, a desire to observe another individual engage in these behaviors. Some participants cited a desire to watch male animals engage in sexual gratification with a female adult. As participant #628 explained, “*I enjoy watching male canines and equines mate with human women, my interest in personally mating with male canines is moderate, and my interest in mating with female animals as mentioned at the top is low, albeit not nonexistent.*”

In a similar vein, the consumption of animal-based pornography was reported by participants, reflecting that of human behavior where pornography is often used as an avenue to explore sexual desires, fantasies, fetishes, and kinks without directly engaging in these behaviors (Attwood et al., 2018). One participant noted,

[I] prefer 3d models of animals in porn to actual animals because the porn can build tension, the animal can have more human-like reactions during sex, etc. If you watch a [real] dog fuck a person they sort of become consumed by the sex and are paying no attention at all. (P#485)

It was also noted that animal-based pornography allowed participants to explore their sexual desires without crossing legal boundaries (depending on jurisdiction):

I don't practice bestiality due to laws in my place of residence, but I do enjoy watching it online, and to prevent me from breaking said laws, I have purchased some animal-like sex toys from an online toy company to keep me busy (P#36).

Altogether, it was evident that attraction to animals presented parallels to that of attraction between humans. While common characteristics such as health, cleanliness, and masculinity/femininity were noted, more nuanced concepts such as pornography usage and sexual preference for animals were also presented within the responses.

Theme 2: Animal Welfare Ethics

The second theme, *Animal Welfare Ethics*, described instances where participants displayed some level of caution in regard to an animal's safety and autonomy concerning sexual activity. Participants in this theme often described pleasure for the animal, willingness and interest of the animal, feasibility of penetration, and consent as being important predictors of their described sexual attraction and their corresponding actions.

Broadly, participants described sexual attraction as being contingent on whether the animal experiences pleasure, with one participant stating, "I am very uncomfortable with the idea of an animal not receiving mutual pleasure or being in distress from the situation" (P#453). Another participant wrote, "As a baseline rule, how sexually attracted I am to an animal is directly proportional to their propensity to mutually enjoy the matter" (P#493). Responses within this theme suggested that participants often consider the animals' welfare and desires, rather than pursuing sexual gratification with only their human sexual desires in mind. It was also suggested that the size of an animal can create a fine line between whether an animal is large enough to enjoy sexual gratification through penetration and being too large where safety becomes an issue. The quote below illustrates this idea:

You ask about size of animal. It has to be big enough to have sex with without causing it any harm, yet small enough not to cause me harm. For example, I find elephants very sexy. I love their genitals, however I fear great harm would come to me if I tried to have sex with one (P#727)

In a similar vein, responses detailed the importance of the animal indicating their willingness and interest to engage in sexual activity. Similar to the above where participants described the importance of pleasure for the animal, participants also indicated that the animal must be willing and interested in sexual gratification to be seen as sexually attractive. The quote below illustrates one participant's explanation of how to determine willingness and interest in sexual activity with an animal:

Even though animals can't speak to us directly, I do think they have ways to demonstrate their "desires." I think it's so much better if the animal WANTS to have sex with you (evident by a growing erection if they see you and or active efforts to mount you without outside involvement for example) as opposed to the animal simply being "used" (having to rub the sheath of a dog to initiate an erection and/or holding them against your body until they engage in intercourse are examples that come to mind) (P#389)

While this desire demonstrates clear interest in the well-being of the animal, mating behaviors vary widely and are not consistent across species (Dougherty, 2021), thus creating difficulties in interpreting these signals.

Finally, this theme encapsulated responses which described consent as being a critical factor of sexual attraction. One participant noted, "pseudo consent is required; meaning the animal is allowed to cease relations if it so chooses. ex. not held down, restrained, or drugged" (P#374). Another participant wrote, "I view my sexual and romantic relationships with animals as no different from that with any human girlfriend that I have, and currently do have. The sex is consensual and clearly enjoyable for both parties" (P#760). This quote, as well as the idea of consent being a critical factor in animal attractiveness, tie into the above theme given the importance of consent in human-human sexual activity. Furthermore, few participants described the importance of receiving consent from the animal's owner, rather than from the animal itself. The quote below demonstrates this:

Another limitation would be the consent of the human 'owner' as well. I'd never engage in 'fence-hopping' practices, referring to going behind the human owner's back to engage in sexual activity with a non-human animal (P#899)

However, it was evident from the responses that the idea of consent must be altered when considering animals. For instance, one participant explained that because male horses can mount a human, that behavior can act as a form of consent, whereas female horses cannot give consent because they are the ones being penetrated. In addition, responses failed to explain what consent looks like among animals, which suggests that consent and signals of arousal (i.e., exposure of genitals, baring teeth, etc.) may be one and the same for individuals who identify as zoophiles.²

Altogether, the present theme encapsulates ideas from participants which describe their sexual attraction to animals as being contingent on the animal's welfare and enjoyment of the encounters. These findings are in line with Williams and Weinberg (2003) who found that zoophiles, within their study, described themselves as having a concern for animal welfare and pleasure, and the importance of consent in the pursuit of sexual gratification. The participants from Williams and Weinberg's (2003) study indicated that without such considerations, an individual is considered a bestialist – an extremely pejorative term among the zoophile community.

Theme 3: Species-Specific Appeal

The third theme developed by the research team involved animal-specific attributes that influence attraction. This theme allowed for a broad understanding of why animals, in comparison to humans, may be seen as sexually attractive to individuals who identify as zoophiles. In this theme, specific attributes such as being domesticated or wild, appearing wolf-like, as well as having anthropomorphic features and high intelligence were commonly cited.

²It is important to note that the question did not explicitly ask about how consent was perceived or negotiated which may have impacted the content and depth of these responses.

Responses were mixed in regard to whether the domesticity of the animal contributes to their attraction. While some participants indicated being more attracted to domestic pets, others were more sexually interested in primitive, wild, and untrained animals. Despite these mixed responses, it was evident that attraction toward wild animals and domestic animals did not exist on a spectrum. In other words, when participants chose to discuss domesticity, participants appeared only to be attracted to one or the other; not both (i.e., only wild animals, etc.). For those attracted to domestic animals, reasonings included their familiarity with the species and size. In contrast, participant #235 wrote the following to describe their attraction to non-domesticated animals,

I find wild canids more sexually attractive than domestic dogs possibly because they are self sufficient - they hunt their own food, they take care of themselves, they do everything for themselves. This is admirable to me and sexy. Dogs don't have this, dogs rely on humans to be fed, let outside, bathed, brushed, and so on. This makes dogs less attractive to me than wild canids.

The collected responses also alluded to the attractiveness of wolf-like characteristics. Many participants described attraction to four-legged animals with pointed ears and elongated snouts, who possess dominance, strength, and self-sufficiency. To illustrate, participants shared the following, *“the more wolf like in shape the dog is, the sexier it is”* (P#472) and *“the breeds that still have similarities in appearance to their wolf ancestors are the only ones sexually attractive”* (P#633). Previous research reflects this finding, highlighting high attraction levels toward wolf-like dogs and other animals (Emmett et al., 2021)

In addition, the concept of anthropomorphism emerged as an intriguing code. Some participants indicated that they were attracted to an animal when they can project human-like feelings, emotions, and reflect similarities to that of humans. It was evident from these responses that participants were attracted to animals that provided familiar behaviors and emotions that could allow participants to feel as though the animal was more sapient. The following quote captures this idea: *“A sexually attractive animal is one that I can anthropomorphize about and give them humanlike characteristics such as facial expressions, body language, even staring in their eyes”* (P#266). Further, a branch of anthropomorphism may be understood through intelligence, as well. Many participants indicated that they are attracted to intelligent animals that have the capacity to feel, think, understand, and make decisions. For some, intelligence was an important consideration given that intelligence allows for communication and mutual understanding, as exemplified in the following quote,

i want to be able to communicate a little. it is easier to communicate with horses and dogs than other animals. I can understand them from their sounds and expressions. And it's much harder to do that with (for example) a pig, so I'm much less interested (P#694)

In contrast, others described intelligence and mental awareness as being critical for navigating sexual gratification. Many participants indicated that if an animal is incapable of understanding what is happening and why, it acts as a turn off. Participant #364 stated, *“[I am attracted to] usually female animals (straight male) That can easily show emotion so*

I know when to stop” and another participant wrote, *“the fact that a horse is intelligent enough to want sex from a human being (however this depends on the horse) is attractive for me”* (P#483).

Overall, in contrast to the first theme, this third theme described instances where participants described animal-specific characteristics which influence their attraction. Previous research has suggested that the animality of non-human animals contributes to their attractiveness (Emmett, 2020; Miletski, 2017), and the present theme mirrors these findings.

Subtheme: Anatomical Attraction

Many participants described how the anatomical characteristics of animals directly contribute to their attractiveness. Within this theme, characteristics such as ejaculation, genital size, uniqueness of sexual organs, and other sexual considerations specific to animals were commonly described. Largely, the genital appearance, function, size, and uniqueness compared to humans were commonly noted as an enticing attraction factor for participants. It appeared as though participants were specifically attracted to the genitals of animals given that they differed from that of humans. For instance,

... I love the shape of their vaginas. The spade shape is naturally sexier to me than female humans. For me, a human vagina looks like sliced turkey with a gaping hole in the center. But a swollen canine vagina has shape and texture that is so much more inviting than a human female (P#472)

Further, responses described enlarged penises, “meaty” testicles, “puffy” and multicolored labia, knots, and the texture of non-human animal genitalia. It was also noted that some female animals, such as kangaroos and other marsupials, have more than one vagina which contributes to their attractiveness. Ejaculation was also indicated to be a factor of attraction for participants. Broadly, the ability of large animals to produce greater amounts of semen compared to humans directly influenced their attractiveness. Describing in detail the uniqueness of non-human animal genitalia, participant #389 noted,

I think a dog's penis is very sexually arousing due to the bulbous glandis (knot). I like the thought of the penis itself being designed in a way to ensure the best odds of copulation. There's something really special about the principle of being tied to your partner until he's done emptying his semen into you. Another example is a boar. Although I don't generally see boars as “cute” or “romantically attractive,” i do think the shape of their penis combined with their massive testicles is a really appealing feature and I wouldn't be opposed to allowing one to unload their sperm filled testes into me if I had a chance. (and they were in the “mood”)

Finally, several other intriguing sexual considerations were mentioned by participants concerning their sexual attraction to animals that directly differs from that of human-human sexual activity. Notably, although attraction between humans has been suggested to be influenced by strong genetics and reproductive success (Luxen & Van De Vijver, 2006), participants in the present study noted that non-human animals' inability to reproduce influences their attraction to the animals. One participant wrote, *“An additional bonus for me is*

that nobody gets pregnant in this scenario and our bond deepens” (P#760), suggesting that the common influences of human-human sexual attraction may be less relevant among sexual behaviors between human and non-human animals. However, in contrast, several participants also described the sexual maturity of the animal as being a critical consideration toward their attraction, which is interesting given that reproduction is less of a consideration for zoophiles. While some participants did not expand on their reasoning for the importance of an animal reaching sexual maturity, a few participants did with one stating, “the animals I find to be the most sexually attractive are female canines, all of which need to be in Heat, if she is not in heat, she will just automatically a friend or simply someone I know” (P#245). Another participant mirrored this idea saying, “[I] say this for many of my fellow zoos that a girl in heat is the most sexually attracting and alluring sight and smell any of us men will come across” (P#266).

Altogether, this subtheme encapsulates the idea that the specific anatomical considerations that are unique to non-human animals contribute to sexual attraction among the surveyed participants who identify as zoophiles. Beyond these attributes, the inability to reproduce was also a prevalent factor; however, several participants also described being attracted to sexually mature animals.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored sexual attraction to non-human animals through a thematic analysis of open-ended survey responses. Three distinct but interconnected themes emerged from our analysis: *Parallels with Sexual Attraction to Humans*, *Animal Welfare Ethics*, and *Species-Specific Appeal*, with a notable subtheme of *Anatomical Attraction*. Collectively, these findings provide insight into the multifaceted nature of zoophilic attraction and contribute to our understanding of this understudied phenomenon.

Our findings both confirm and extend previous quantitative research on zoophilia. Consistent with Miletski (2002) and Emmett et al. (2020), we found that dogs, horses, and other large mammals were frequently mentioned as sexually attractive, with participants often expressing preferences for specific sexes within each species – although a very wide variety of animals were mentioned in the responses overall. However, the qualitative approach used within the present study revealed nuances not captured in previous survey-based studies, particularly regarding the complex interplay between animal welfare concerns, consent constructions, and attraction mechanisms.

Participants in this study indicated that they consumed bestiality pornography to satisfy their attraction to animals. Previous research has found that self-reported zoophiles may be exposed to sex with animals for the first time through observing another individual engage in these behaviors (Sendler, 2019), which may tie into why this is of interest to some individuals within this population. It is important to note that many individuals in the zoophile community do not support the production of bestiality pornography and view it as exploitative and harmful to the animals involved (Kulick, 2017). In addition, there are sub-groups of individuals who are aroused by watching human-human sexual activity in which

they are not directly participating, and therefore this idea expressed by participants may reflect what is already known about some human-human sexual attraction. Given that zoophilia encompasses a love for animals and a sexual attraction (rather than a sole desire for sexual gratification; Beetz, 2008; Krause, 2022; Miletski, 2005), consuming animal-based pornography rather than engaging in sexual activity may highlight the distinction from bestiality. Consumption of bestiality content could also indicate a potential overlap between desire and illegal behavior or could stem from an incongruence between perceived welfare and actual welfare as seen in the consumption of child sexual exploitation materials (Bailey, 2007; Ciardha et al., 2025).

Williams and Weinberg (2003) previously identified animal welfare concerns among self-identified zoophiles, and our theme of *Animal Welfare Ethics* elaborates on this finding by revealing how participants conceptualize animal welfare in relation to their sexual attractions. The emphasis participants placed on mutual pleasure and enthusiastic participation suggests that zoophiles may construct ethical frameworks in an attempt to reconcile their sexual desires with concerns for animal wellbeing, even if these constructions sometimes rest on questionable interpretations of animal behavior.

Although the ethical frameworks used by zoophiles are severely understudied, there are key guidelines that seem to be accepted and followed within zoophile communities (Margeotes et al., 2025). One notable framework is the Zoophilies Engagement für Tolleranz und Aufklärung/ Zoophiles for Ethical Treatment of Animals (ZETA) Principles (Zeta Verein, 2022). The ZETA Principles, originally developed in the 1990s by the American zoophile community and later adopted in Europe, particularly Germany, provide an ethical framework for the treatment of animals within zoophile communities. These seven core principles emphasize prioritizing animal welfare above human desires, treating animals with kindness, discouraging exploitation, condemning abuse, and educating others about zoophilia without promoting it. Following the establishment of these principles, the ZETA association was formed and named after the preexisting ethical guidelines that had become considered “common sense” within certain communities (Zeta Verein, 2022).

A significant theoretical challenge emerged in the *Animal Welfare Ethics* theme, wherein participants emphasized the importance of animal consent while sometimes demonstrating limited understanding of species-specific behaviors. Participants’ interpretations of animal behaviors as being indicators of consent reflect a projection of human communication patterns onto species with fundamentally different behavioral signals. Indeed, participants’ descriptions of animal behaviors which they interpreted as consent may represent instinctual responses rather than the informed, autonomous decision-making implied by human conceptions of consent. For example, many of the signals participants described as being indicators of interest and willingness to engage in sexual behavior were not necessarily indicative of signals of arousal and interest in sexual gratification in the same way that would be interpretable for humans. For instance, grunting, panting, genital exposure, baring teeth,

and flushing of skin were commonly cited by participants as being indicators of sexual interest among animals, despite these behaviors often being performed for reasons other than sexual interest (de Waal & Luttrell, 1985; Gähwiler et al., 2020; Hohmann & Fruth, 2000; Rendall et al., 1999; Robertshaw, 2006; Simpkins, 1984). Additionally, for animals, many mating behaviors are instinctual and dictated by factors such as hormonal cycles and pheromones (Beach, 1947; Fisher, 2000) which puts into question whether these behaviors are instinctual responses or *desire* as would be defined for humans. From this, although participants indicated a desire to engage in sexual activity only if an animal maintains the same desire, it was evident that participants held limited knowledge and understanding of true indicators of arousal based on their responses to the questions posed. This finding potentially highlights a disconnect between participants' ethical concerns and their ability to accurately interpret animal communication and the implications for how that consent is communicated across species.

The results related to animal welfare further reveal the inherent difficulties in applying human-centric consent frameworks to interspecies sexual interactions. Consent, even between humans, is extremely complex and extends beyond the simplistic yes/no dichotomy often presented in popular discourse (Wright, 2022). Andrianova's (2021) examination of animal consent in the context of human-animal sexual relations presents a critical challenge to logocentrism in Western philosophical traditions where there are paradoxical societal attitudes that scrutinize consent in zoophilia, while routinely ignoring it in animal agriculture, experimentation, and entertainment. Further, Andrianova (2021) proposed reconceptualizing animal consent beyond verbal communication, advocating for recognition of non-verbal behavioral cues and body language as legitimate expressions of agency. This approach aligns with Weil's (2012) notion of "critical anthropomorphism," which encourages empathic recognition of animal subjectivity without presuming complete knowledge of their experiences. Ultimately, Andrianova (2021) suggested that human-animal ethics requires moving beyond asking "Can the animal speak?" to developing more attentive practices of listening to animals' multifaceted expressions of consent and refusal.

Moreover, our findings on anatomical attraction support Miletski's (2017) and Emmett et al.'s (2020) observations that the 'animality' of non-human genitalia contribute significantly to zoophilic attraction. Participants' detailed descriptions of their fascination with species-specific anatomical features – knots, unique textures, and physiological responses not found in humans – suggest that novelty may be a driving factor in zoophilic attraction. These findings are also congruent with previous literature which explored individuals' interest in non-human animal sex toys as well (Zidenberg, 2025; Zidenberg & Runyon, 2025), lending further support to their importance.

Additionally, the role of anthropomorphism was identified as a significant factor in zoophilic attraction. Participants frequently described attributing human-like qualities, emotions, and communication capabilities to animals they found sexually attractive. This anthropomorphizing tendency appeared to serve multiple psychological functions: it allowed participants

to bridge the species gap, facilitated perceptions of mutual understanding, and enabled the construction of reciprocal relationship frameworks. The finding that intelligence was particularly valued may suggest that participants seek animals capable of being anthropomorphized to a greater degree, as intelligence allows for the projection of more complex human-like attributes. This tension between valuing animals for their "animality" while simultaneously anthropomorphizing them reflects a complex psychological negotiation. Participants seemed to be attracted to the animal as simultaneously "other" (with novel and exciting non-human features) and "same" (possessing human-like emotions and communication). This duality may help explain why certain animals – particularly domesticated species that have evolved to respond to human social cues – featured prominently in participants' responses. While some of these findings may be applicable to individuals who identify as belonging to the furry fandom, it is important to note that the questions in this study asked about attraction to animals. While some overlap has been found between furies and zoophiles by virtue of zoophiles also belonging to the furry fandom, these labels do seem to represent distinct phenomena, groups, and underlying motivations (Brooks et al., 2024; Zidenberg & Olver, 2022)

While it is impossible to fully assert based on one qualitative study, our findings seem to offer support for conceptualizing zoophilia as a distinct sexual orientation, as previously suggested by Miletski (2005, 2017). Participants frequently described their attraction to animals as enduring and intrinsic, often noting interesting disconnects between their human-directed and animal-directed attractions. The fluidity described by participants – being exclusively attracted to one sex in humans but the opposite or both sexes in animals – may suggest that zoophilia could operate independently from human attraction. This independence aligns with Miletski's (2017) assertion that zoophilia may constitute its own orientation category. Further research into this topic must be done to fully support this assertion. The parallels participants drew between human attraction mechanisms and animal attraction further complicate our understanding of sexual attraction. Participants described seeking qualities in animals that mirror desirable human traits (loyalty, intelligence, cleanliness), while simultaneously being drawn to uniquely animal characteristics (animality, feral features, and species-specific anatomy). This complex interplay between human-familiar and animal-specific attraction factors suggests that zoophilia cannot be readily classified within existing theoretical frameworks that primarily address human-human attraction.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study had several notable strengths. First, the large sample of self-identified zoophiles represents one of the most substantial community-based samples in the zoophilia literature. Second, the anonymous survey design and direct recruitment from online zoophilia communities likely enhanced the validity of self-identification and candor in responses. Third, the collaborative approach to instrument development – including consultation with community moderators and member review of survey

materials – strengthened ecological validity and ensured the research reflected participants’ lived experiences. Finally, community members’ verification of the qualitative themes further bolstered the authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings.

Despite these strengths, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting our findings. First, as with all research on stigmatized sexual interests, self-selection bias likely influenced our sample composition. Individuals willing to discuss their zoophilic attractions may differ systematically from those who decline to participate in research. Second, the anonymous online nature of data collection, while ethically necessary, prevents verification of participants’ identities and experiences. While this approach facilitates disclosure of stigmatized attractions, it also introduces potential concerns as zoophilia was not officially diagnosed for these individuals. Furthermore, distress about their sexual attraction, or whether their attraction causes harm to others – an essential criterion for a diagnosis of “Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder” – was also not assessed in this study. Indeed, the main forum we recruited zoophiles from focuses on what they describe as “ethical zoophilia” where they attempt to minimize harm to animals and further research with this forum shows that many individuals are not particularly distressed by their attractions (Zidenberg et al., 2025). Additionally, our analyses were constrained by the brevity of some responses, which limited the depth of thematic development possible for certain participants. The survey format, though allowing for larger sample sizes than typically achieved in qualitative research on sensitive topics, precluded the follow-up questioning that might have clarified ambiguous statements or explored emerging ideas more thoroughly.

This study highlights several promising avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies exploring the development and stability of zoophilic attractions could help clarify whether zoophilia follows developmental patterns similar to those observed in human-directed sexual orientations. More focused research on the distinctions between zoophilia (attraction) and bestiality (behavior) would help refine theoretical models and potentially inform legal and ethical frameworks. Comparative research examining similarities and differences between zoophilia and other non-normative attractions might also yield insights into broader questions about the formation and structure of human sexuality. Similarly, further research on the potential for those with attractions to animals to commit animal sexual abuse should also be explored to identify which characteristics may lead to offending and which may be protective. Additionally, research incorporating more direct observational methods, rather than relying solely on self-report, could address some of the methodological limitations identified in this study. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration between sexologists, animal behaviorists, and ethicists could help address the complex questions surrounding consent and animal welfare raised by our findings. Such collaboration might produce more nuanced theoretical frameworks for understanding interspecies sexual attractions that neither pathologize individuals nor dismiss legitimate animal welfare concerns.

Conclusion

This qualitative analysis of zoophilic attraction revealed a complex psychological phenomenon characterized by parallels to human attraction mechanisms, ethical concerns regarding animal welfare, and specific appeal factors unique to non-human animals. The tension between participants’ ethical concerns, their potentially limited understanding of animal behavior, and the limits of cross-species communication of consent highlight the challenges inherent in constructing ethical frameworks for interspecies sexual interactions. Future research should continue to explore these tensions while developing more sophisticated theoretical models that account for the unique features of zoophilic attraction. By advancing our understanding of this understudied phenomenon, we hope to contribute to more informed clinical approaches, more effective educational initiatives, and more nuanced ethical frameworks surrounding human-animal relationships. These findings have important implications for mental health professionals working with individuals experiencing zoophilic attractions. The emergence of zoophilia as potentially representing a distinct sexual orientation rather than simply a paraphilia suggests that therapeutic approaches focusing solely on “correcting” or eliminating these attractions may be ineffective and potentially harmful. Instead, clinicians might consider helping clients navigate the profound social stigma associated with these attractions while developing ethical frameworks that prioritize both human wellbeing and animal welfare. The consent paradox identified in our analysis highlights the need for education about animal behavior and communication within clinical contexts. Individuals with zoophilic attractions may benefit from accurate information about species-specific behaviors to help them distinguish between instinctual responses and actual indicators of comfort or distress. For veterinary and animal welfare professionals, our findings underscore the importance of recognizing potential sexual motivations behind certain human-animal interactions. Educational initiatives might address the misinterpretation of animal behaviors as sexual cues, emphasizing the fundamental differences between human and animal communication systems.

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Data Availability Statement

The data/coding that supports the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author.

Ethics Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB #1669).

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