

As an example of that deployment, Dr. Saks describes a legal case in which key evidence hinged on the analysis of a “handwriting examiner” (p 52). While working on the case, he discovered that there was no evidence to suggest one could be an expert at identifying handwriting in the first place. To wit, Dr. Saks helped reveal “the larger problem of a forensic science that had no science and no data undergirding it ...” (p 52). He cites the advent of DNA typing, and *Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 509 U.S. 579 (1993), which raised the barrier of admissibility of expert evidence from consensus within a field to demonstrated validity, as key developments in the scientific reformation of forensic science. The scholarly momentum that drove such developments was due in no small part to researchers like Dr. Saks and the rest of the chapter authors.

In sum, *The Roots of Modern Psychology and Law* offers a novel approach to modern psycholegal history. It situates the reader in many contexts (social, moral, personal) without sacrificing readability. It is erudite but also heartfelt. It makes a powerful case for the narrative history model, and it is a must-read for those interested in the sample intersection of psychology and law.

Disclosures of financial or other potential conflicts of interest: None.

Tiger King: When the Fascination Fades, What Can We Learn from Joe Exotic et al?

Directed by Eric Goode and Rebecca Chaiklin. Original Release Date: March 20, 2020.

Reviewed by Chandler Hicks, DO and Cathleen Cerny-Suelzer, MD

DOI:10.29158/JAAPL.210093-21

Key words: cyberbully; toxic masculinity; murder for hire

Directed by Eric Goode and Rebecca Chaiklin and released March 20, 2020, on Netflix, the seven-part series *Tiger King* details the niche community of big cat collectors and conservationists by focusing on four individuals: Joe Exotic, Carole Baskin, Bhagavan “Doc” Antle, and Jeff Lowe. The notoriety of the show led to many proposed spin-offs, including the

planned CBS adaptation starring Nicolas Cage as Joe Exotic. Why did *Tiger King* capture the fascination of a nation in lockdown? In addition to its colorful personalities, perhaps it is the extreme measures big cat enthusiasts will take to protect their livelihood, including stalking, cyberbullying, and murder for hire. *Tiger King* is toxic masculinity in tiger’s stripes.

The titular star of the series is the Tiger King himself, Joe Maldonado-Passage (née Schreibvogel), aka Joe Exotic. Mr. Exotic is the former owner of G.W. Zoo in Wynnewood, Oklahoma, which at one point housed over 227 big cats and 50 species of animals. Joe captures the audience with his polarizing personality. Dressed in flamboyant sequined button-ups, Joe is not your typical conservative Oklahoman. He is a homosexual, polygamist, former presidential and gubernatorial candidate who uses his grandiose persona to blur the lines between reality and absurdism. Known for breeding big cats and hosting cub petting events, Joe draws the attention of animal rights activists, who view his activities as animal exploitation.

One of Joe’s harshest critics is Carole Baskin, owner of Big Cat Rescue in Tampa Bay, Florida. Dressed in leopard print and flower crowns, Carole draws in viewers with her unassuming yet superficial kindness and the dark mystery of her second husband’s disappearance. Did Carole Baskin kill her husband and feed him to her tigers? We may never know, but a spirited debate about it rages online. While Carole and Joe denigrate each other, viewers are introduced to a third, equally enticing big cat collector, Bhagavan “Doc” Antle, owner of Myrtle Beach Safari. When he is not wrangling exotic animals for the likes of Britney Spears, Doc is using big cats to lure young women to his “harem” where they take care of the animals’ needs and allegedly, some of Doc’s other needs. Finally, there is the would-be-savior of G.W. Zoo, biker-jacket-loving, alleged ex-wife abuser Jeff Lowe. Mr. Lowe makes no apologies for living life to the fullest or for wanting an attractive nanny for his newborn. His involvement with the zoo leads to Joe Exotic’s eventual undoing on many levels. Most significantly, Mr. Lowe helps bring to light Joe’s plan to have Carole Baskin murdered.

Viewers watch as Carole wages a war against Joe’s breeding and cub petting activities through her social media platforms. He responds as a quintessential internet troll by using his own web series to increasingly cyberbully Carole, leaving a trail of hate that helped bring about his eventual demise. Joe’s efforts to bully Carole include verbal threats of violence, music

videos featuring Carole look-alikes engaged in questionable activities, and perhaps most condemning of all, a video of Joe shooting the head off a “Carole” blowup doll.

The courts have recently addressed cyberbullying, as it has become a more prevalent problem in the digital age. In *U.S. v. Sayer*, 748 F.3d 425 (1st Cir. 2014) and *Elonis v. U.S.*, 135 S. Ct. 2001 (2015),¹ the central question became delineating between free speech, “true threats,” and intent. In Joe’s case he was not formally charged with cyberbullying, however, his online persona became a prominent factor in his eventual conviction for the murder for hire of Carole. Joe Exotic’s behaviors, and the behaviors of many other male characters in *Tiger King*, are reminiscent of Incel and similar online communities where large cohorts of males use the internet as a sounding board for their misogynistic views and inciting (intentionally or not) violent outbursts. Incel stands for “involuntary celibates” and the most infamous incel was likely Elliot Rodger. In 2014, Mr. Rodger killed six people and injured several more in Isla Vista, California. The motive for Mr. Rodger’s attack was retribution for rejection by women.² A recent linguistic analysis concluded approximately 30 percent of online Incel threads contained misogynistic verbiage.³ Although Joe Exotic’s anger toward Carole was not based on sexual rejection by women, his tirades against her certainly echo the type of misogyny Incels and similar groups post online. Several other male *Tiger King* cast members also appear to hold misogynistic views toward women, contributing to an unchecked negative valence system. These communities breed negativity, which causes an echo chamber of anger, escalating to online threats of violence, and eventually may move beyond the keyboard as in the cases of Joe Exotic, Elliot Rodger, and others.

For the forensic psychiatrist, *Tiger King* can serve as a study in toxic masculinity. As demonstrated above, the male characters from the docuseries exhibit personality traits representative of other harmful subcultures, such as the Incels. Through their grandiose schemes, these individuals manipulate and hurt the people around them. Big cats are used as bait to draw in susceptible and easily controlled younger individuals. For Joe, this meant using big cats, money, drugs, and other superficial objects to attract younger men. For Bhagavan, this meant using big cats as a pretext to draw in young females whom he “mentors” over many years and makes dependent

on him for food, clothing, and shelter. Similarly, Jeff uses the flashy intoxicating power of big cats to engage in dubious business ventures and attract desirable women. The perspective of these men can be summed up with a quote from the series by Doc Antle, “men are pigs and women are sheep.”

What should not be lost in this cult of personalities is the exploitation of big cats and the saddening fact that more tigers exist in captivity in the United States (5,000–10,000) than in their natural habitat (4,000). What begins as a selfless motive to help big cats turns into a vicious power-hungry struggle. Big cats become the conduit for these toxic males to feed their egos. Over time, this subculture moves beyond a hobby or altruistic endeavor and into a world of obsession. The audience observes changes in behavior, increased tolerance, cravings, and withdrawal symptoms, similar to addiction, eventually leading to criminal behavior. As a result, the male characters’ identities appear strongly affiliated with this niche culture of big cat ownership. When Carole challenges their masculinity, we see an outcry of aggression and attempts to reassert dominance, consistent with the behavior of young boys and Incels.⁴ Forensic psychiatrists may benefit from the series by expanding their working knowledge of toxic masculinity and its various forms of expression given its propensity to incite violence. What is becoming clear in popular media is that the internet has become one of the largest and easiest realms in which to express toxic masculinity. Thus, psychiatrists may be increasingly tasked with completing violence risk assessments related to cyberbullying or online stalking or be asked to opine on the manner in which cyber activities may constitute or contribute to criminal behavior.

References

1. Choi K, Nair M: Cyberstalking and the Internet age. *Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry* 65:675–80, 2017
2. Duke A: Timeline to “Retribution”: Isla Vista attacks planned over years. CNN, March 27, 2014. Available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/26/justice/california-elliott-rodger-timeline/index.html>. Accessed May 15, 2020
3. Jaki S, De Smedt T, Gwó d M, *et al*: Online hatred of women in the Incel.me forum: linguistic analysis and automatic detection. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 7:240–68, 2019
4. Pellegrini AD, Bartini M: Dominance in early adolescent boys: affiliative and aggressive dimensions and possible functions. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 47:142–63, 2001

Disclosures of financial or other potential conflicts of interest: None.