

Socio-Cultural Significance of Stuffed Animals in Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area

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ABSTRACT

SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF STUFFED ANIMALS IN WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA

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This thesis describes the significance of stuffed animals as derived from relevant areas of the socio-cultural landscape from three studies conducted in Fairfax, Virginia—one participant observational study, one non-participant-observational study and one qualitative/interview study. The three studies' results are to compare them to those derived from an examination of the “larger” picture (mass media, advertising, etc.) and determine what, if any, similarities and/or differences exist between them. A conclusion follows which summarizes and decisively identifies what significance stuffed animals have within the socio-cultural landscape of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area.

1. Introduction

Stuffed animals are an indelible part of American culture generally. Images and references to them as well as uses for/of them abound, both directly and indirectly. Based on three studies and a content analyses, the following chapters will identify who is “talking” about them, when (in what circumstances) stuffed animals are mentioned, how messages are conveyed and for what, ultimately, stuffed animals are “used”.

Chapter 2 begins with the more oblique ways stuffed animals clutter the socio-cultural milieu. In other words, casual, every-day assumptive messages offer evidence that stuffed animals are a part of people’s lives. A brief history, as obtained from Gary Cross’s book Kids’ Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood (1997), of how stuffed animals first entered the culture’s consciousness will partially explain the acceptance of them, more specifically, within the time frame of the late nineteenth century up to “today”—the start of the 21st century. Chapter 2 offers examples derived from an examination of print media and television which show just how subtle, accepted and unremarkable images of and references to stuffed animals really are. The chapter further delves into these themes in a more targeted analysis of the way stuffed animals are showcased (both covertly and overtly) in the social arena as well as within the areas of commerce, politics, and the workplace. Chapter 2 does not attempt to answer specific questions about stuffed animals, inasmuch as to what possible meanings they have for

people, but several themes do emerge as chronicled in Chapters 3 through 8. These chapters offer further analysis of the content of print media, television, and the internet along with the results of two studies, a participant and non-participant observation, respectively, and what all of them “say” about stuffed animals. Chapter 9 presents results of an in-depth qualitative study of 26 seniors (and one non-senior) conducted at four different assisted-living facilities in Northern Virginia. The goal of presenting the results of that study is to compare, using the evidence identified in Chapter 2 and the themes identified in Chapter 3 through Chapter 8, what people are “saying” about stuffed animals in the abstract to what real live people are saying about them in actuality. The conclusion of the thesis will attempt to summarize and if possible, resolve the question: *what is the significance of cloth-covered animal shapes filled with stuffing materials?*

2. Stuffed Animals in the Everyday World

A 1999 *Washington Times* article related how “Iris”, a camera device that is hooked onto the helmet of firefighters and is designed to, by heat sensitivity, locate potential fire victims in smoke-clogged rooms. The story was about a Bethesda, Maryland family, more specifically, a Bethesda, Maryland cat that owed its life to Iris. Unaided initially by Iris, the firefighter who eventually saved the cat’s life apparently had a tough time locating the cat because he kept mistaking stuffed animals for it. “Blinded by the smoke, [the firefighter] pawed the ground in search of the cat, only to pick up several stuffed animals. ‘I kept picking them up, thinking, “Are you the kitty? Is this one the kitty?”’ ‘he said with a chuckle (Tkacik, 1999).’ The firefighter donned Iris, and was able to discern the cat from “...[the family’s] sizable collection of stuffed animals (Tkacik, 1999).” The perilous Bethesda family and their cat are not unique. After all, having a collection of something else strewn about that was unusual might have garnered as much press as a gadget that helped save a cat. In other words, owning stuffed animals is seen by most as commonplace, particularly if children are involved. Evidence is seen of this in two other examples, both “helpful hints” articles. In the first, a November, 2000 *Washington Post* article about an outbreak

of head lice in Loudon County, Virginia elementary schools advises parents to "...make sure that the stuffed animals that the kids play with are bagged up for weeks (Zielinski, 2000)." In the second example, in the article "Goodbye, Freezes! Hello, Sneezes!" about reducing allergic reactions in children: "Wash stuffed animals in hot water every two weeks...Avoid stuffed toys that can't be washed (O'Neill Grace, 1996)." It is assumed by the authors of both "how to" articles that there is nothing unusual about having stuffed animals around.

History

When did this assumptive regard get its start? Have stuffed animals been a part of people's lives, underfoot, since ancient times? About the latter, not much information is available, but the former is much more readily answered. Cross (1997) examines not only the genesis of stuffed animals; he also examines the beginning of a relatively new idea of childhood as a unique time period. Without digressing too far, basically the notion of childhood as a separate time of development, one with its own set of special needs—including the need to play—is a late 19th Century/early 20th Century phenomenon. Factors such as ideological shifts and socio-economic as well as physical demographic changes helped forge the idea that kids need to play and have their own sphere of developmental time to do so. With this in mind, by the beginning of the 20th Century, toys and playthings began to be a part of the everyday, and that included stuffed animals—starting with the teddy bear. There is some jostling over who originated the teddy bear, Margarete Steiff of Germany or Morris Michtom of America. Steiff would

get the edge in an argument of who created the first modern soft-toy; in 1880 she sold an elephant that doubled as a pincushion. The folklore of the teddy bear being created as inspired by then-President Teddy Roosevelt's refrain from shooting a bear cub on a hunting trip is true. [In 1903] Michtom noticed a cartoon depicting Roosevelt sparing the bear cub (Cross, 1997, p. 94), and he asked his wife to create a doll of the bear, eventually selling the doll as "Teddy's Bear." At almost the same time, Steiff created a soft plush jointed bear which Cross (1997, p. 95) maintains was different from other animal dolls, in that it was "soft and cuddly." These traits of softness and "cuddliness" are notable in that no other dolls prior to the teddy bear had these characteristics; indeed, they were not designed to have them. Dolls were not playthings; they were tools instead to groom young girls into becoming properly dressed young ladies. Also notable, according to Cross is that the bears were marketed to both genders. Because the bear was formerly a "scary" animal, it was not overly feminine to give a boy a teddy bear. For a brief time, the teddy bear was a "must have" for any child in a prosperous middle-class family, a symbol of prestige and "keeping up with the Jones's" (or at least their children). For another brief time, adult women participated in a fad where they would dress themselves and a teddy bear up in the latest fashions and tote the dapper bears with them on carriage rides and to the theater. Both fads died after a season or two and the teddy bear then became a plain old child's toy, and according to Cross (1997, p. 97), "the teddy bear became that rarity, a fad that turned into a standard."

If print images are any evidence, Cross's assertion of teddy bears being a standard is correct.



EXHIBIT 1 (*People Magazine*, 2000), an advertisement for Scotchguard™ carpet protector, depicts a little girl feeding a baby bottle, which has unfortunately leaked, to a doll. Lying in the background is a teddy bear.



EXHIBIT 2 (*People Magazine*, 2000), an advertisement for Bounty™ paper towels shows a dismayed mother attempting to put her children to bed. The dutiful child (the one who hasn't squirted toothpaste all over the place) holds a teddy bear by the arm. And finally,



EXHIBIT 3 (*People Magazine*, 2000) concerns a girl sleeping in bed, presumably dreaming about Lifesavers™ candies, holding a teddy bear. All three advertisements work under the premise that stuffed animals (teddy bears, specifically) are at the very least, part of the overall detritus of childhood (EXHIBIT 1), at least, an object not unfamiliar at bedtime (EXHIBIT 2), and at the very most, something tucked under an arm at night during slumber (EXHIBIT 3). Upon further analysis, however, the “standard” teddy bear is anything but, and “childhood” is not the only state where stuffed animals dwell. In the next few sections, examples of other types of stuffed things will be presented, as well as evidence that stuffed animals are presumed to appeal to *adults* as well as children. Also explored, will be the notion that stuffed animals don’t always necessarily stay in the home; rather, they inhabit the spheres of commerce/marketing, social commentary, politics, and workplace.

Pandas and Prairie Dogs

One of the notable attractions of the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. was the panda exhibit, featuring the male panda Hsing-Hsing and the female Ling-Ling. When Hsing-Hsing died in 1997 (Ling-Ling had already succumbed several years earlier), the Nation’s Capitol seemed to collectively grieve. The arrival in 2001 of Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, the new female and male panda offered a renewed happiness that Washington D.C. had the black and white bears back in its possession. In conjunction with the two’s arrival, panda bear merchandise was being written about and advertised in *Time Magazine* and *The Washington Post*, including stuffed panda bears.

EXHIBIT 4 (*Time Magazine*, 2001) depicts a large stuffed panda bear being hugged by a girl with the caption, “Best Bear Souvenir”. In a *Washington Post* article, “Bull Market in Bear Goods”, the pandas are depicted as “...[members] of that most elusive species: the cash cow (McCaffrey, 2001),” indicating that the pandas’ arrival tugs not only the heartstrings, but the strings around people’s wallets as well. She (McCaffrey, 2001) states that “everything from 30-cent magnets to \$200 stuffed animals to a \$65 toaster that will leave a panda impression on your morning toast” is available for purchase. Interestingly, over half of the photographs of available merchandise that accompanied the article were of or contained stuffed animals (three out of five). The captions describing the stuffed animals were of “a cuddly toy”. Although technically not a “standard” teddy bear, the panda bears were still described as “cuddly”, and as we will see, not just children want one. Chester Freedenthal and his wife are an example of adults who want stuffed pandas (and other panda memorabilia). Also, as reported in *The Washington*

Post, Mr. Freedenthal started what has become a life-long obsession with panda collectibles when “30 years ago [he] went looking for a decorating accent. He brought home a stuffed panda (Cohn, 2001).” They have approximately 1,500 panda-related items in their Fairfax, Virginia home, and have estimated they have spent approximately \$25,000 on their hobby. “Apparently,” the article goes on to state, “they are not the only people in the Washington area with this idea. ‘I noticed this Christmas that pandas sold faster,’ said Sally Freedenthal, who manages the gift shop at Inova Fairfax Hospital (Cohn, 2001).” The Freedenthals are not the only adults preoccupied with acquiring stuffed animals, and pandas are not the only animals of reference. Philip R. Savard of Laurel, Maryland “...leveraged \$40,000 on several credit cards to start his business, Prairie Pals LLC, to make and sell plush, life-size likenesses of the burrowing creatures (Naguchi, 1999).” According to the article and Mr. Savard, “Toy stores across the country carry lions, tigers and bears, but very few have prairie dog plush toys...He and his wife--also an avid prairie dog fan--searched toy stores and zoo gift shops across the country and have found only a few unattractive plush versions of the species (Naguchi, 1999).” If the previous two examples, the buying and collecting of pandas and the investment in a line of plush prairie dogs form the embryonic idea that stuffed animals are big business in addition to being within the province of adults, the following sections will offer more concrete evidence that the idea is reality.

Commerce/Marketing

Stuffed animals are big business, and while remaining objects of childhood, they are also used directly and indirectly in the very adult world of commerce and marketing. Barring our examples from above regarding expenditures of the panda-loving Freedenthals and prairie-dog loving Savards, “Retail sales in the toy industry are growing every year, according to Diane Cardinale, a spokeswoman for Toy Manufacturers of America, a New York-based trade association. In 1998, traditional plush toys such as teddy bears and the ever-popular Beanie Babies racked up \$1.4 billion in sales (Naguchi, 1999).” Recently, on the television program *Antiques Road Show*, a Steiff teddy bear was assessed as having a value of \$30,000 (*Antiques Road Show*, 2001). In 1999, *The Washington Post* ran an article about a new type of business where customers could select plush bear, rabbit, cat, dog or monkey “skins”, add stuffing and accessorize the finished product to create his or her own stuffed animals. Charging \$10 to \$80 to “pad their own [animal] (Koncius, 1999)”, the businesses, the Gund Teddy Bear Factory in Leesburg, Virginia and Build-A-Bear in Tyson’s Corner, Virginia have proven to be popular. No sales figures were available, but in the article, the popularity was attributed to the universal appeal of making teddy bears, “...including 7-year olds throwing birthday parties, prom dates wanting souvenirs and even senior citizens commemorating 50th wedding anniversaries (Koncius, 1999).”

“‘Just about everybody loves teddy bears,’ says Maxine Clark, chief executive of Build-A-Bear Workshop, who began her retailing career as a sportswear buyer at Hecht’s and went on to become president of Payless Shoes. ‘People get attached to teddy bears.

You don't get emotionally attached to a piece of pottery.' (Koncius, 1999)," thus further explaining the store's success. The economics and money surrounding stuffed animals themselves, whether ready-made or "built", are joined by companies and non-profit organizations that use stuffed animals to market their products and services.

Joseph Heimbold Sr., according to a *Washington Post* obituary, who died December 18, 1996, was "...credited with creating Exxon's long-running 'tiger in the gas tank' marketing campaign (*The Washington Post*, 1996). In the 1960s, he "...cut a tiger tail from a stuffed animal, stuck it on his gas tank cover and drove to Exxon's corporate headquarters...The company's vice president of marketing loved the idea and gave Mr. Heimbold the right to market tiger tails throughout the United States and Australia (*Washington Post*, 1996)." This early example of using stuffed animals (albeit a stuffed animal extremity) to market or sell another product would not be the last. We have seen examples in a previous section where stuffed animals were used to sell other products, Scotchguard™, Bounty™, and Lifesavers™, respectively.

**Click and
Get It**
Crazy Critters

- One of the remote-controlled Energizer Bunnies used in TV commercials: up for bidding until Jan. 31 at LA411auctions.com
- Two mouse stunt figures used in *Stuart Little*: sold for **\$480** on Amazon.com Auctions
- The Pets.com sock puppet: up for bidding until Feb. 3 on Amazon.com Auctions






EXHIBIT 6 (*People Magazine*, 2000) shows the now defunct Pets.com mascot, the dog puppet, now available in an online auction. An American Red Cross blood drive's appeal for donors advertised on NBC's Today Show featured a woman representative talking about the benefits of donating blood; she casually held two teddy bears dressed with Red Cross tee shirts (*The Today Show*, 2001). No mention was made as to what the stuffed animals were for, she was just holding them. As we will see in subsequent chapters, stuffed animals are used in a variety of ways for "pitches" both commercial and non-commercial and those examples will be evaluated in more depth then.

Social and Political Commentary

Stuffed animals are also used to make comments on the socio-cultural state of affairs, as well as being featured and/or included in the arena of Washington, D.C. (national) politics. *Time Magazine*, in an alarmist blurb, reports that with the increase in the prevalence of technology, children are being “babysat” more and more with electronic media then ever before. The blurb, in



EXHIBIT 7 (*Time Magazine*, 2001) shows the rather ludicrous photograph of a toddler sitting in front of (presumably), his or her own laptop. Inside the crib, as if to juxtapose the obscenity of having a baby sitting there mesmerized by the evil cold eye of the computer, sits a few stuffed animals—their alert postures signaling the reader to look at

the contrast. Here stuffed animals seem to be used to represent tradition versus modernity.

From the innocuous, to the blatant, to the surreal, stuffed animals appear in the realm of politics as well. Going back to the original premise that stuffed animals hold an almost casual, unremarkable place in the socio-cultural landscape, we see that even the everyday lives of powerful political leaders are not immune. In reporting about a tight Senate race between Massachusetts Republican William Floyd Weld and Democrat John Forbes Kerry in 1996, *The Washington Post* quotes Weld as joking that "...his 13-year-old daughter support[ed] Kerry [because] 'She [didn't] want to leave her stuffed-animal collection in Cambridge' (Blumenfeld, 1996)." More recently, in 1998, a stuffed animal made an appearance on a very famous (or infamous) list—the list of gifts President Bill Clinton had given intern Monica Lewinsky. One of the many was a stuffed animal from a Martha's Vineyard shop (*The Washington Post*, 1998,). Not-so-casual e.g., more blatant references are made in the political arena about stuffed animals. In *People Magazine*, in



EXHIBIT 8 (*People Magazine*, 2000), two twin brothers who oppose each other politically (one is a Republican and one a Democrat) are shown holding stuffed representatives of the symbols for each party—an elephant and donkey respectively. On a more geographically relevant front, “Del. Michael E. Busch, from Anne Arundel County, Maryland...received two little gifts from Republican colleagues, Dels. Michael W. Burns (R-Anne Arundel) and James E. Rzepkowski (R-Anne Arundel)...He guessed that the gifts were either a small replica of a former senator or an elephant, as he tore through the wrappings. One of his guesses was correct. He received little snap-on undergarments for his daughter and a stuffed animal, a little rainbow-colored baby elephant for her crib (Perez-Rivas, 1996).” In addition, an 8-inch Inaugural Beanie Bear is available for sale to commemorate the inauguration of President George W. Bush. (*Time Magazine*, 2001). Finally, the most surreal example of a proliferation of stuffed

animals into political discourse occurred in 1998, when *The Washington Post* reported a scandal brewing in New York City, about which Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Great Britain, meeting with President Clinton, had to interrupt the meetings to make a statement. The crisis? Where the original stuffed animals Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, Eeyore, Kanga, and Piglet should reside. Housed in a bulletproof case in the New York City public library, apparently a British official visiting the library felt that the stuffed animals looked “unhappy” ensconced in glass. “Gwyneth Dunwoody, a member of Parliament, [asked] the British government to demand the release of the bear (Harden, 1998).” Dunwoody presumably felt that as the creator of the Winnie the Pooh characters, A.A. Milne, was British, the stuffed animals’ rightful place should be in England.

“British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in Washington...for meetings with President Clinton, said he believed Pooh and the others ‘will be happy enough where they are, really’ (Harden, 1998).” New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani threw himself into the fray, defending Winnie the Pooh and company’s New York domicile. “‘If you live in New York City,’ the mayor said, speaking to Pooh and smiling broadly, ‘you really are a citizen of the world’ (Harden, 1998).” What was most remarkable about the whole exchange wasn’t that Giuliani and a British parliament member got into a scrap over where to house Winnie the Pooh and his posse; what was remarkable about the whole thing was that no one seemed to notice that fairly politically powerful people (including a world leader) were discussing *stuffed animals*—famous or not. No one wondered if Mayor Giuliani should be evaluated mentally when he was quoted as saying, “‘I am sure Winnie is very, very proud of his background and heritage. But now he has found a new

land. He has made a better life for himself here,' Giuliani said, looking to the stuffed bear and asking, 'Hey, Winnie, you got a green card?' (Harden, 1998)."

Workplace

The last focus of Chapter 2 concerns how stuffed animals are a part of the workplace. Not only do stuffed animals inhabit people's private homes, stuffed animals are also taken to work and populate work spaces. In a *Time Magazine* article about the slow-down and resultant layoffs of the technology sector in the year 2000 and the beginning of 2001, one photograph shows workers trailing out of newly-lost jobs. In one of the photographs, barely discernable,



EXHIBIT 9 (*Time Magazine*, 2001) shows a man carrying in his box of possessions, a stuffed elephant. In an article profiling former President Clinton's AIDS Policy Advisor Sandy Thurman, it was revealed that she had, in her Lafayette Square office, "...a quilt on the sofa, where she [had] been known to spend the night after working late hours, and a few stuffed animals given to her by friends (Rosenfeld, 1998)." At Worldweb net in Alexandria, Virginia, a network engineer named Karl Pena comments "...My co-workers had all their own stuffed animals. I had penguins. I had 'em hanging from the ceiling, swinging from ropes (*The Washington Post*, 2000)."

Probably the most surprising statistic of how stuffed animals permeate the workplace was contained in a story in *The Washington Post*'s Business Traveler section. The article was actually about the technological gadgets business-travelers found essential to take with them when traveling on business. Courtyard by MarriottTM surveyed a group of business travelers (no sample size was available from Marriott) to determine which items they deemed necessary. The laptop, predictably, was high on the list, as were the cell phone and less frequently, pagers. But, "...according to the survey, 7 percent of business travelers also pack[ed] a teddy bear or another stuffed animal (Lee, 1996)." The author of the article attributed this fact to the business travelers, because they "...seem[ed] to be in need of something warm and fuzzy (Lee, 1996)."

In sum, Chapter 2 laid out the ways stuffed animals are part of the everyday sphere. A brief history of how stuffed animals came to be a part of the socio-cultural landscape was presented. Subtle and not-so-subtle images and references to them were made in various printed advertisements, within print media, and on television. Stuffed

animals were found, based on surrounding discourse, to occupy not only children's landscapes, but those of adults as well. The areas of commerce/marketing, social and political areas, and the workplace were identified as proof that stuffed animals reside in those public spheres. But what does the discourse actually *say* about stuffed animals? What are the messages underlying the images of, references to and uses of stuffed animals, as presented in advertising, print media, and television? The next six chapters will attempt to identify specific themes that seem to dominate the discourse on stuffed animals, and will include results from two observational studies conducted in 1998.

3. Comfort—Direct

What evidence exists that stuffed animals are important? Obviously stuffed animals are infused with meaning for people, if the following examples are any proof. In Culpeper, Virginia, a former welfare recipient and a participant in an experimental program there proudly shows off her home to an interviewer. Her home is described as having a “tidy living room, which is filled with family portraits, Christmas ornaments, stuffed animals and a 30-year-old console television (Hsu, 1998).” This woman was satisfied with an old television but found it necessary to, apparently, own stuffed animals. An even more extreme instance occurs when a homeless shelter in Southern Maryland is profiled. Peggy Redman and her family are crowded into one room, and in amongst basic hygiene products, stuffed animals are found (Allam, 1999). It is quite remarkable that this family, who essentially owns nothing, still wants stuffed animals around. What makes people want to have stuffed animals? One reason might be tactile pleasure, and hand in hand with that, comfort.

Stuffed animals are often described as “cuddly” or “huggable” [(“Teddy Bear Cuddles Up for Hugs”—an article advertising a special on the history of the teddy bear on the Discovery Channel (Zad, 1999)]; in other words, something to

hold. Cross (1997, p. 95) concurs with this description; he describes the Steiff teddy bear as “soft and cuddly.” The bears are described this way, presumably because of their stuffing and fur covering (which could, of course, describe other types of stuffed animals). One can surmise that hugging or petting a stuffed animal is pleasing. In other words, it feels good. An interesting facet of this tactile enjoyment, and a major theme, is the comfort people seem to derive from holding or hugging stuffed animals. As we remember, the business travelers who tote along their stuffed animals are hypothesized to be “...in need of something warm and fuzzy (Lee, 1996).” In times of hardship, as the following examples demonstrate, people often cuddle stuffed animals. Children and adults both follow this practice.

To alleviate the trauma of moving from place to place that foster children endure, a young girl in Bowie, Maryland conceived of an idea, which was to replace the garbage bags foster children often had to use to carry their possessions with donated luggage. This girl also took her idea one step further; “Each bag [came] with a stuffed animal and a note: ‘God told me you could use a duffle bag and a cuddly friend. So, I send this with love to you (Loose, 1999).’” A child from Norfolk, Virginia, who frequently flies alone without a parent on commercial airlines, brings along her stuffed animal “Stuffit”. “She says she always brings a stuffed animal when she flies alone ‘because it makes [her] feel better (Rauschart, 1999).’” And children are not the only ones who cuddle stuffed animals when needing reassurance. A reporter for the *Washington Post*, in a tongue-in-cheek article, describes his mild panic at having to go see a local nurse nicknamed the Shot Lady, famous for her soothing singing voice. Describing his trepidation at getting

that first stick of the needle, he writes, "...The Shot Lady got up and came around her desk. She began taking vials out of a refrigerator -- typhoid, hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, malaria, even the plague had been mentioned in the somewhat terrifying conversation we'd just had. Suddenly she turned and handed me . . . a stuffed animal. Big Bird! I clutched it to my chest (McCombs, 1998)." Less tongue-in-cheek and more serious is a recounting of the practice of a Northern Virginia rape-counseling center of keeping on hand twenty stuffed animals for those suffering and in need of something to hold. These and other "...touches [help] bring 'a little empowerment back (O'Hanlon, 2000),' " to the victims of sexual assault, according to the director.

An extremely prevalent occurrence of cuddling stuffed animals seems to be by children who are sick or ailing. In

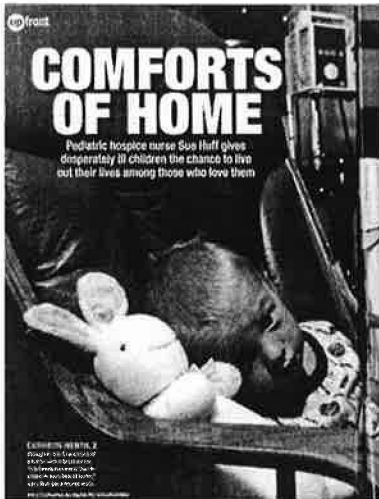


EXHIBIT 10 (*People Magazine*, 2000), we see a little boy named Cameron, who is a patient at Children's Hospice International, an organization that sends critically ill children, near their time of dying, home to be with their families. In the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area is Children's Inn in Bethesda, Maryland, a facility that enables children receiving treatment at NIH and their families to stay together. The first thing visitors of the Inn see when entering the sliding glass doors of the Inn is a "...collection of larger-than-life teddy bears and other assorted stuffed animals (Kay, 1999)."



In EXHIBIT 11 (*People Magazine*, 2000), we see Darcars Toyota, a Silver Spring dealership being recognized for its support of the Children's Inn. In the photograph of children sitting with their families, one child is holding a stuffed panda bear. While not actively cuddling stuffed animals, two Washington D.C.-area young people profiled, one, Jason Kostelnik, suffering fatal heart problems, the other, Rebecca Lilly, cancer, are both described as being near death on their hospital beds surrounded by stuffed animals. Apparently, the two had over their many hospital stays amassed quite a number of them, as the group is called respectively "...a harem of stuffed animals he [Jason] had kept through every surgery (Fountain, 1997)" and Rebecca as having a "...vast collection (Colburn, 1997)."

Another way stuffed animals seem to offer comfort to people is in the wake of a sudden tragic death. Kevin Shifflett, an 8-year old boy in Alexandria, Virginia, was randomly and senselessly stabbed to death while playing in a relative's front yard. The

whole community was shocked by his death, and a touching result of that was an outpouring of donated teddy bears and other stuffed animals given out by the Shifflett family and other community members to area children. It was reported that “some [children] have drawn comfort from the teddy bears that have been donated, by talking to them, sleeping with them or taking them along to class—even the big kids...The flood of teddy bears and other stuffed animals that have been donated by the community has provided great comfort (Davis, 2000).” In perhaps the most extreme example, the comforting presence of stuffed animals was even in evidence for someone that had already died. Joviane Waltrick, a Kensington, Maryland 16-year old, was killed when a Georgian diplomat rammed into the back of her car in Washington, D.C. During her funeral, as teachers from her high school and friends watched, her family kissed her goodbye as she lay in her coffin. “A pink rose was nestled at the teenager’s right ear, a rosary was intertwined in her right hand and an obviously well loved stuffed animal was cradled in her left arm (Levine and Castraneda, 1997).” It is notable that along with a powerful symbol of religious spirituality—a rosary, there was also a stuffed animal. And what’s more, a “well loved” one.

4. Comfort—Indirect

Stuffed animals also offer comfort in more indirect or oblique ways, and they are often used as symbols to convey this. For example, the logo for Children's Hospital is a bear—one that looks like a teddy bear. Their 1-800 customer service telephone number is advertised that it ends with “B-E-A-R”. This is perhaps to impart a comforting association between Children's Hospital and the potential patient (or patient's family). In



EXHIBIT 12 (*Time Magazine*, 2000), we see another example of a stuffed animal offering symbolic comfort. An advertisement for a Court TV “Crime Stories Original” special, “Wrestling with Death” depicts a boy in a wheelchair. As the special is

an investigation of how children mimic their professional wrestling idols, the supposition is that the child is paralyzed from attempting a wrestling stunt. Attached to his wheelchair is a stuffed donkey. The manner of the boy's position indicates that the donkey is offering comfort just by being attached to the chair—since the boy cannot move his arms to hold the stuffed animal.

A most interesting dynamic occurs, featuring implicit or symbolic comfort when we turn our attention to the phenomenon of grief sites. Grief sites are memorials that spring up, marking a place where someone has died unexpectedly, oftentimes the side of the road where a fatal car accident has occurred or a sidewalk where someone has been murdered. Stuffed animals are many times a part of these makeshift shrines. Famous people who have died, Diana, Princess of Wales or John F. Kennedy, Jr., to name two are eulogized by mounds of cards, flowers, candles and stuffed animals. But celebrities are not the only ones being memorialized this way. In the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area, over a span of four years, not less than eight separate references to similar memorial shrines containing stuffed animals were discovered in a search of *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times*. Whether it was two little girls beaten to death by their stepfather in Southeast Washington, D.C., or a teenaged boy shot in a drive by shooting in Temple Hills, Maryland, or a Kensington, Maryland teenager (Joviane Waltrick) killed in a car accident, all had a group of objects, stuffed animals included, placed in a public memorial surrounding either the exact spot where it happened, or a location nearby. Children and teenagers were the most prevalent groups that were memorialized with shrines, although adults were included. Of course these shrines are, as are most post-

death rituals, more for the living people remaining than they are for anything else. Without expounding too much upon the subject, these makeshift shrines are “...increasing in the 1990s as Americans seek new ways to express emotion and spirituality (Strauss and Horwitz, 1997),” and even though there has been a societal shift away from death rituals as a by-product of modernity, clinical psychologist at the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Loss Therese Rando tries to explain the practice. “[Even with the societal shift away from death rituals] people still have a...need to commemorate a loved one...This is why they do these impromptu memorials...It is a way for someone to participate with the global community and share the loss (Strauss and Horwitz, 1997).” In an article investigating the same topic, only this time focusing on the practice of leaving toys the article highlights Southeast Washington D.C., it mentions that the “teddy bears, dogs and elephants” are “...a shrine even neighborhood children know not to tamper with (Lengel, 1999).” These makeshift memorials are becoming more common, “...dotting the urban landscape, marking the street deaths of innocent children, adults and suspected dope dealers alike (Lengel, 1999).”

Rando’s theory of impromptu shrines aside, it is compelling that stuffed animals are used alongside other, more traditional symbols of memorial (cards, candles, flowers). It is as if the comfort derived from stuffed animals—indeed, just the very fact of their presence, is what impels mourners to leave them there. The community seems to get comfort of seeing them there, maybe reminding them of the more concrete comfort of holding a stuffed animal, as well as perhaps offering comfort to the departed figure the community is grieving over. It is next to impossible to say with certainty, although in

Chapter 3, we did see an example of attempting to offer comfort to the already departed—the “well-loved” stuffed animal placed under Joviane Waltrick’s arm while she lay in her coffin. Remarkably, regarding the shrines in Southeast Washington, D.C., the symbolism of a grouping of stuffed animals together on a sidewalk is so commonly accepted and identified within the community (oftentimes being associated with violent crime), a property manager there recounts a non-community member saying, “They have murders over there. They have all the teddy bears (Lengel, 1999).”

To summarize, comfort seems to be a major reason people want stuffed animals around. Whether to hold or cuddle something soothes a sick or scared person *instinctively* is debatable. It does, however, seem to be a culturally accepted means of achieving a level of reassurance, if the prior examples of clutching Big Bird during the administering of a shot or children sleeping with a teddy bear in the aftermath of the traumatic murder of Kevin Shifflett are considered. Tucking a “well-loved” stuffed animal under Joviane Waltrick’s unfeeling arm as she lay deceased would seem odd, if the shared acceptance of stuffed animals-as-comfort were a fallacy. The idea of stuffed animals being a soothing presence was even present in the inclusion of them in makeshift memorials gathered around accident or murder sites—whether they were put there to offer solace to those left alive or to indirectly do so for the departed victim is unclear. What is clear is that they have become a normal part of these spontaneous shrines, because groupings of them were commented upon as an indicator of the number of murders within a neighborhood. Besides to comfort, either directly or indirectly, what other ways do people “see” stuffed animals?

5. Live Animal or Pet

Within this chapter, we focus attention on the theme of people's propensity to view stuffed animals as a live animal, either represented or actual. Going back to the Freedenthals, the Washington-area couple who collected a prodigious amount of panda collectibles (profiled in Chapter 2), one of the reasons "[t]he Freedenthals say they collect panda items [including stuffed pandas is] because they love animals in general and giant pandas in particular (Cohn, 2001)." In the article, there was no mention that either husband or wife cuddles or holds any of the pandas in times of trouble; rather, they enjoy the live animal, and having a representation of it seems to bring them pleasure. Similar to the Freedenthals are the Savards, the Laurel, Maryland couple who opened a business selling prairie dogs. Writes the author about Mr. Savard, "Never mind that [prairie dogs are] technically rodents, not dogs. They're Savard's best friends because 'there's a human element to them,' he said. Like humans, they are social creatures who live in communities, have their own 'language' and greet one another with kisses, he said (Naguchi, 1999)." Stuffed animals are clinically compared to live animals in a recounting of new changes in Montgomery County, Maryland's "Head Start" program. Reviewing the program's activities, students are encouraged to learn new skills, one of those getting trained in veterinary technician

duties. “In [a] classroom, a teacher set up a mock animal hospital for students in lab coats and rubber gloves to bandage and care for stuffed animals (Beyers, 1996).”

Comparisons of stuffed animals to live ones are also used to contrast the differences of the two. The director of the National House Rabbit Society, a Maryland non-profit organization that rescues and re-places abused or unwanted rabbits, relates an incident after taking her pet rabbit, Gloria, out to community education seminars. A child reached out to pet Gloria and “she recalls how [the] child recoiled in disgust. ‘He said, “Eww it has bones,” she says, ‘I think he thought it would be just like a stuffed animal (Stout, 1999).’ ” The inferred lesson of just how different live and stuffed animals really are was also demonstrated first hand in an August, 2000 Fairfax County, Virginia animal shelter volunteer orientation attended by this author. The participants were instructed to steer uncertain or ill-equipped prospective companion animal adopters to get a stuffed animal—that stuffed animals “might be a better choice for some people: (volunteer origination lecture, 2000, Fairfax County Animal Shelter).” So through the examples of Gloria the “yucky” rabbit and our encouragement to point likely “bad” stray adopters to stuffed animals, it raises the point that not only are stuffed animals compared to live ones, they are compared to live *companion animals* or pets.

**WHAT'S AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO TREAT
YOUR NASAL ALLERGY SYMPTOMS?**

- A. Buy an artificial lawn.
- B. Buy an artificial pet.
- C. Try NASONEX®.



EXHIBIT 13 (*People Magazine*, 2001) is an advertisement for Nasonex nasal spray. In it, we see a stuffed dog on a lawn. The tagline reads, “*What’s an Effective Way to Treat Your Nasal Allergy Symptoms? A. Buy an artificial lawn. B. Buy an artificial pet. C. Try Nasonex.*” In the ad, then, the inference is that a stuffed dog would be an acceptable substitute for a live dog (although clearly with choice C., the advertiser is also hinting that having an artificial lawn or faux pet is not the best choice.). In the following example, not only can a stuffed animal be used as a representation of a live animal or even a companion animal, it can have a name also. In Baltimore, Maryland, a woman writes an article about her 5-year-old son’s new obsession with dolphins (he has already exhausted his fascination with dinosaurs, she reports), culminating in his excitement over the idea of visiting them at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. She writes, “[t]he stuffed animals were squeezed tight to make room in my 5-year-old son’s bed for a small gray dolphin [her son] appropriately named ‘Dolphiny’ (Thompson, 1996).”

Two Studies

Two studies, a Participant-Observation and Non-Participant Observation were conducted in April, 1998 and August, 1999 in Fairfax, Virginia, which reiterate the idea that stuffed animals are treated oftentimes as live animals, and frequently, treated affectionately as a pet. The Participant-Observational study took place at my job, a telecommunications firm in Chantilly, Virginia, and was extremely informal. A stuffed black-footed ferret, which I had mentioned to several of my colleagues, was, by their urgings, brought in to work. I placed the ferret on my desk, and took note of people's reactions. The reactions varied. In a time-span of approximately two hours, some people merely glanced at the ferret while passing my desk, one or two women smiled at it and made seemingly involuntary noises, "oh!", but four men in their mid to late 20s picked up the ferret, interacting with it. One man picked it up and made the ferret "run" up one arm, onto and over his head, and down the other arm. The "romp" ended with him turning the ferret onto its back, cradling the ferret as one would a baby and scratching the ferret under its chin. The scratching of the ferret under the chin action reminded me of how I have seen friends of mine pick up and pet my cat. When the man had finished scratching the ferret's chin, he turned the ferret feet-down and, still cradling it, began stroking the fur towards the grain, in other words, from the ferret's head to its tail. The man seemed to be doing this casually, as he was talking to me at the time about a completely different subject. His petting was interrupted when another of the young men standing next to me reached out and asked, "can I see him?" The first man handed him

the ferret and left the area. The other two, clustered around my desk, had been watching the previous petting by the first man and were now watching the requesting by the second as if transfixed, their mouths slightly slack and open. The second man, the one who had asked to “see him” started making growling noises, and proceeded to jut the ferret out, head first, at his other two colleagues, as if trying to make the ferret “bite” them. This seemed to amuse the other two, and they guffawed and flinched. The second man then turned the ferret completely around and made it “attack” himself in the face, as he yelled in mock terror. The other two men at this point started, still laughing, to grab at the ferret, and the “self-attacked” man attempted to keep it away from them, his hand around the ferret’s middle. The resulting commotion of all this caused the ferret to drop to the floor. Almost reflexively, we all four looked at it down on the floor. “Sorry buddy!” the third man said—to the ferret—as he picked it up off the floor and brushed its synthetic fur with his fingertips, as if removing dirt. He then put the ferret back on my desk, as he bent over and put the ferret’s face eye-level to his own, and patted the ferret’s head with his palm. After this mayhem, I put the ferret out of sight. What I noted after this mini-experiment was that the four most reactive participants treated the ferret as an animate object, having live animal characteristics (“running” “growling”) as well as feelings (“sorry buddy!”). In August, 1999, I conducted a Non-Participant Observational study, to see if people’s reactions to stuffed animals when they weren’t aware of being watched, differed. I surmised that the attention given to my stuffed ferret in 1998 might have been prompted by my co-workers’ friendly affection for me, perhaps a kind way to offer acceptance and elicit my enjoyment.

The Non-Participant Observation took place at *Animal Gallery*, a retail store in Tysons Corner, Virginia that sells all manner of animal-related merchandise, including a large selection of stuffed animals of differing sizes, species, and price ranges. For three hours, I stood adjacent to the display cubicles of stuffed animals, holding a spiral-bound notebook, feigning a role as an inventory-checker, surreptitiously watching the way people acted with the stuffed animals. I do not have an accurate count of the number of people who frequented the store, but the day was a mild Saturday weather-wise, and the store cash register area did a brisk business. The stuffed animal display was towards the back of the store, and it was done in blocks of plexiglass stackable cubicles. The total number of people I observed was 14. I only included people who stopped and looked at the stuffed animal display, no matter how briefly. More than 14 people walked by the stuffed animal display, but those people only gave the display a cursory glance (as did they all other displays). 4 of the 14 people were a combination of older woman/man and child (the child's ages ranged from what looked like toddler to 14). One combination was with a 10-11 year old boy; the rest were with girls ranging from toddler age to adolescent. The majority of the rest of the participants (9) were either solitary or pairs of women ranging from what looked like 20s to 70s, or pairs of girls, ranging from adolescent to mid-teens. I observed one man, aged what looked like to be 40-50. Half (7) of those who stopped and looked at the stuffed animal display merely looked at all the animals, but they also seemed to look at them very methodically, e.g., into multiple cubicles. One of the 7 was a female (parent?) carrying a toddler and the two appeared to

enjoy looking at all the varieties of stuffed animals, with the animals' different textures and colors of fur. Two, the man and one of the solitary women, actually pulled a few selections out and examined them. They both clasped the stuffed animal in the vicinity of what would be a live animal's armpits. In other words, I saw neither of the two pull out a stuffed animal by its ear, tail or leg. Furthermore, neither held the stuffed animal dangling down. Both assessed the animal with its face square with their face; the man pulled his neck back, causing his chin to wrinkle down, as if trying to assess the stuffed animal's face with a wider view. Both also (separately), then turned the stuffed animal at different angles, and both (oddly) squeezed the paws of the stuffed animal rhythmically before setting it down again. The remaining 5 had the more extreme reactions. Not only did they pull out the stuffed animal similarly, e.g., around the middle, and look at the stuffed animal face to face, as did the man and the woman, some also vocalized about/to the stuffed animal and/or brought the face of the stuffed animal up to the crook of their chin and neck for a brief hug. The first strong reaction came from a pair of women (aged probably 50 to 70), one of whom picked up several stuffed cats. Not only did she hold the cat around its middle, upright and peer into its face, she stroked the sides of its face and showed it to her friend. "Oh look at this!" Isn't she precious?" She asked her friend. "Oh look at this one!" she said, picking up another one. "You are just darling!" she cooed to the stuffed cat. She then started relaying a (judging from her friend's reaction a familiar and well loved) story about her Siamese cat. They left the area still laughing at her pet cat's antics. The second strong reaction came from a little boy who was pleading with his mother to buy him a stuffed animal (I only knew it was his mother because the

boisterous refrain of “Mo-ooooom!” “Mom!” “Mom!” kept following her if she started looking at any of the neighboring displays of other products). The boy was probably aged around 10-11, and his age struck me in that he didn’t seem to be a clingy less secure younger child; in addition to that, his mother didn’t seem overly worried about him not being right next to her at all times. His enthusiasm for the stuffed animals extended to different ones, and he rapidly took out various types—an alligator, an elephant, and a wolf, among others, one at a time. “Mom look at this one; it’s COOL!” he would say, showing her the animal. If she told him that they “weren’t getting one today”, he would put it back, get one of the remaining ones and try again. Every time he put one back, he would discover a different type and exclaim over it enthusiastically; when he saw the wolf, he said, “Aw COOL! A WOLF!” Remembering my own maniacal and indiscriminate love of animals when I was a kid but also remembering my impartial detachment as a researcher, I had to stifle a smile. The third strong reaction came from two little girls (age range appeared to be 5 to 7) who also seemed overcome with excitement and grabbed whatever they could on the lower shelves. Giggling and shrieking, they picked up their animal of choice (the type didn’t seem to be important), tucked it under their arm, and started chasing each other and darting around the stuffed animal display. The stuffed animal seemed incidental to their play; they tucked it under their arms very comfortably, as if mimicking what they merely do habitually, perhaps with their own stuffed animals, not even realizing it. They did seem upset when their older male caretaker gently disengaged the stuffed animals from the their under-arm grips and took the little girls elsewhere in the store. The next strong reaction was from a pair

of Asian pre-teenaged girls, who traveled the stuffed animal display case together, staying very close to one another. They gasped and chatted in an Asian language and picked up any animal with white or longer fur; sometimes they would individually pick up an animal and look at it and show each other, but more often, one would pick it up, and they would both exclaim and laugh together over it. The one not holding the animal would lightly hold onto a paw or stroke its fur. The shared experience of examining, laughing over and talking about the stuffed animal seemed to be more important to them than actually selecting a stuffed animal to purchase, and after looking at a few bears, a stuffed Maltese looking dog and a white tiger cub, they left the area. Probably the most interesting strong reaction I witnessed was also the quietest. A woman who appeared to be in her 40s stood and examined the display as if deep in thought. She picked up a couple bears, one a black bear and she also picked up a floppy donkey or horse (I couldn't tell even when I looked at it later). She examined the animals, looked them in the face, and I was about to relegate her to the "just picking up and looking" category when I saw her raise the donkey/horse to under her chin and give it a squeeze against her face for a split second. She did this very briefly and just as quickly, she gave the stuffed animal a small, fast peck on its head. She didn't look around as if she had done anything particularly remarkable and went on to pick up a few other stuffed animals afterwards (but didn't kiss any of them). The observation surprised me. While I had five examples of people strongly reacting to stuffed animals, it was the last woman that I found most interesting. Perhaps it is because the other four had had people with them and had made the stuffed animals a shared experience. The last reaction was by someone who was

alone and who did not look to gauge anyone else's reaction. I felt as if I had observed something very private in a public space. The store was soon less busy as early afternoon arrived and I also was starting to feel a little conspicuous so I ended my study.

In conclusion, stuffed animals were shown in popular media and advertising as well as in two studies to be viewed by some people as a live animal or pet. Chapter 6 examines the "pet" theme a bit further, into the practice of considering stuffed animals "friends" or "companions".

6. Friend or Companion

From the early beginnings of marketing teddy bears as a commodity, Cross (1997, p. 97) writes that teddy bears “remained both children’s companions and amulets; they were advertised as ‘real pals’ that will ‘scare all gloom away’.” This concept of stuffed animals being a “pal” is reflected in modern discourse on stuffed animals. Russ, Incorporated™ is an extremely visible advertising presence, and uses the theme of stuffed animals as a friend quite frequently, as we see in EXHIBIT 14, EXHIBIT 15, and EXHIBIT 16.

GOOD LISTENERS



RUSS
IS GOOD

EXHIBIT 14 (Postcard, 1998, George Mason University coffee shop, Fairfax, Virginia) shows a young boy (girl?) in overalls playing a saxophone to a stuffed frog, dog and bear; the tagline is *Good Listeners*. The inference is that three stuffed animals are listening to the music, as well as perhaps being good listeners overall, a quality that is popularly held as being valuable in a person's friend.



EXHIBIT 15 (*People Magazine*, 2000) hints that these cats are friends, rather than realistic-looking stuffed animals or pets. In the ad, the animals are very anthropomorphic, e.g., they are sitting upright peering out at the reader, and Kittra has on a dress, which, for anyone who has owned a cat knows, is a very unlikely scenario. Russ™ blatantly advertises its stuffed animals as “friends” in



EXHIBIT 16 (*People Magazine*, 2000). The advertisement depicts three teddy bears “looking” out a paned window. The tagline is *Friends From the Bears From the Past Collection, 2000*. So the stuffed animals in this particular endorsement are not merely hinted at as being a good friend (e.g., they are “good listeners” or dressed like we are); rather, they are touted as actually being “friends”.

The esteemed qualities of a good human friend are taken completely out of the subtle realm even further when examining the newest type of stuffed animals, which are the ones with computer chips inside of them. In February 2001, on the FX™ channel in Fairfax, Virginia, an advertisement was shown for “Love to Hug” Winnie the Pooh™, Tigger™ and Piglet™. The three characters (dissimilar to the embattled-over ones in New York), made popular by Disney™, have voices in them that sound like their animated counterparts in the films. The stuffed versions are contact-activated; in other words, if

anyone hugs or kisses one of them, they talk in mechanical voices. The commercial shows them “asking” for hugs and then “commenting” positively on the hug. Winnie also coos that “*your kisses are as sweet as honey*”. The tagline of the commercial says, *It’s so much friendlier with Pooh!*

These direct examples are supplemented possibly by those presented in Chapter 3, the chapter on comfort. While the intrinsic tactile comfort of stuffed animals and their use to appease suffering are primarily the dominant features of hugging or holding them, it is conceivable that they are also viewed as a friendly, or at the very least, benevolent object. And while no one said that they have stuffed animals around because they consider them chums in the stuffed animals’ use in everyday life as examined in Chapter 2, it is also possible that a positive happy ideology surrounds them.

7. Love Gift

Stuffed animals are also used to represent a loving or romantic/courting gesture.

In



EXHIBIT 18 (*People Magazine*, 2000), in yet another Russ™ print advertisement, the message states ...*another way to say I love you* and shows “Claudette”, a bear in a white Valentine’s Day-themed dress. The idea is that buying “Claudette” for someone you love is a way to express that love—the bear is, as advertised, another way to say you love someone without saying the actual sentence. Another example of this stuffed animal-is-love idea was in a February, 2001 television commercial sponsored by Hallmark™. It was televised on Channel 7 WJLA in Washington D.C., and it depicts two African-

American men trying to woo the same woman for Valentine's Day. One man offers her a large stuffed bear. The other man offers the Hallmark "Kissing Bears"™, a pair of bears which have some kind of magnet in their snouts which causes the two to lock snouts when their faces are pressed together. Pressing their snouts together gives the illusion of the bears "kissing". Of course, the girl chooses the man with the "kissing" bears over the man who presented her with just a plain old bear. The idea is that not only do the bears have a pseudo-human trait, that of kissing, they are also a superior object to convey feelings of love or courting. Valentine's Day, in fact, is a holiday where purchasing a stuffed animal for a loved one is common. An article in *The Washington Times* reported "...that consumers - especially those waiting until the last minute - are spending more money than ever to buy the perfect gift (DeMarco, 2001)." Within the article, quoting figures supplied by the International Mass Retail Association, the most popular things bought for Valentine's Day are cards (65%). 21% was the figure of how popular stuffed animals are, and they were fifth on the list, in front of perfume/cologne, and jewelry (DeMarco, 2001).

Romantic love and courtship are not the only types of love the gift of a stuffed animal connotes. A common thing shown on televised professional figure skating is the practice of throwing bouquets of flowers and stuffed animals into the ice rink following a skater's performance from adoring fans. No research was discovered as to what the purpose of including stuffed animals into the ritual of throwing flowers to a performer in adulation, but the "love" and appreciation of the spectator is a likely reason. The other type of love represented by the gifting of a stuffed animal is familial, if the following

article is any proof. A woman's 14 year old son was gunned down in Southeast Washington D.C. in 1996, and according to the article, "[t]he mother gripped a stuffed animal that her son had been making for her and said, 'I am going to keep this (Brown and Kyriakos, 1996).' " Not only was the mother possibly attempting to alleviate some of her pain by hugging the stuffed animal, but the stuffed animal had had special meaning because her son had been in the process of making it for her. Given the symbolism of presenting stuffed animals as gifts representing love, demonstrated within this chapter, her son's making her a stuffed animal was, perhaps, a way to say he loved her.

8. Deviant Uses

Uses and images of stuffed animals that could be considered deviant also exist. In a 2001 article in *Vanity Fair* (Gurley, 2001, p. 175), a subculture is profiled that takes the comfort offered by stuffed animals, and the viewing of them as live animal, pet, love gift or friend to a much more serious level. Members of the subculture are called “Plushophiles” or “Furries”, and they represent those that have an erotic attachment to their stuffed animals. This subset of adults combines love and lust for stuffed animals (nicknamed “plushes”), which manifests itself sometimes in them dressing up in a stuffed animal suit and (or in lieu of that), using stuffed animals for sexual gratification.

Some participants dress in full animal suits, in order to celebrate their inner animal personas; some merely have a furry tail hanging outside their normal street clothes. One of the participants of “Furfest” enthuses about furri-ness, “ ‘When I was very, very young, I knew I wanted to be some type of animal...I didn’t necessarily want to *be* the animal, but I wanted to have the animal shape, as far back as I can remember. It’s that way for a lot of people (Gurley, 2001, p. 176).’ ” This same man, “...was a plushie, which is a word for a person who has a strong—usually erotic—attachment to stuffed animals (Gurley, 2001, p. 176).” He also concedes that nowadays, he just likes having “the stuffed animals around (Gurley, 2001, p. 176),” rather than being a full-fledged plushie (e.g.,

dressing in a suit). By and large, the “furries” seem to be overwhelmingly white gay men (or those who engage in homosexual activities with fellow furries) who abhor the human form, much preferring the animal one. The theory behind furries is that they at some point in their childhood had an erotic fascination or experience sexually to a cartoon character.

These conventions of furries, such as one in San Jose, California and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania have attracted as many as 1,000 participants each. Furries have their own language—(for example, “yiffy” which is synonymous with “sexy”; stuffed foxes seem to be the animal with most “yiff”-appeal)—within their hobby as well as their own literature at these conventions, and much of the paraphernalia centers around erotica depicting adult art featuring animal-human amalgams. Convention-goers also practice ritualized acts of sexual gratification. An example of one such ritual is nicknamed a “fur pile”, whereby a number of fur-suited men pile on top of each other, squirm around and enjoy the “furry” sensations.

One featured member of the furries (some enthusiasts acknowledge him as the originator of the movement) lives in Pennsylvania in a room filled with more than a thousand stuffed animals. Not only does he don a variety of fur suits, he also gratifies himself sexually with several “favorite” stuffed animals, either inside them or externally against the fur. Katharine Gates, a sex researcher interviewed for the article has her own ideas about furries: “ ‘They may think about sex as often as we do, which is often, and they may think of stuffed animals instead of Pamela Anderson, but they’re very ordinary people...Everything is fetish fodder. I can’t think of anything in this world that couldn’t

be sexualized by somebody (Gurley, 2001, p. 186).’ ” The article also describes the furies’ enjoyment of the “power” of being an animal alter-ego—again emphasizing the general disdain furies have for the human form. “ ‘Being human, first of all, [says one furry], we’re not all that cute. In fact, we’re butt-ass ugly...Being furry...is a solution to life (Gurley, 2001, p. 196).’ ”

“ ‘It gives me thunder,’ ” waxes another furry, “ ‘I can walk into any situation and go, ‘I am the dude! It’s like having a switch...you can tap into and turn something on (Gurley, 2001, p. 196).’ ” Ultimately, every furry’s desire is reflected by one of the convention members: “ ‘Obviously, I’d like to re-work my body to make my physical body conform more to my body image...I’d want a tail, I’d want some fur, and basically, some cute cartoon eyes and stuff (Gurley, 2001, p. 196).’ ”

The following two examples are other ways stuffed animals have been used in ways outside what could be considered the norm. In *The Washington Times*, it was reported that a stuffed animal was used to smuggle drug paraphernalia. “A 15-year-old girl found a hypodermic needle in a stuffed animal she won from a store vending-machine game (*The Washington Times*, 2000).” She had been playing the game in Colonial Heights, Maryland, and it was the type of game players attempt to grasp a prize using a mechanized claw. She won a stuffed panda bear. “When the girl, who was spending the night at her friend’s house, hugged the bear at bedtime, she was stuck in the thumb by a sharp object, which drew a small amount of blood (*The Washington Times*, 2000).” The practice of hugging stuffed bears wouldn’t be considered out of the ordinary, if previous chapters attest, but hiding hypodermic needles in them is. Also in

The Washington Times was a report about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and some recent questionable displays being financed by them, according to GOP senators (not the first time this has happened, of course). It seems that one of the art works was at the Whitney Museum in New York City and featured "...chocolate-smeared characters molesting stuffed animals...Set in a room marked for adults only, the main characters cover themselves with chocolate sauce [and perform] lewd acts with stuffed animals (Duin, 1997)."

In sum, there does exist a minority grouping of outside-the-norm uses and images of stuffed animals, if only that none of the people mentioned in the previous discussions on other themes expressed an interest in having sex with or dressing up as their stuffed animals. In addition, none of the content analysis of mainstream media advertised the handy use of stuffed animals for smuggling contraband. Finally, the critical uproar over chocolate-covered stuffed animal molesters merely highlights how stuffed animals are used and imagined—if a similar display had been created featuring chocolate-dipped mashers of glassware, it may have still produced a brouhaha but perhaps not such an intense one. How stuffed animals are significant, as defined by the themes of comfort, live animal representation, "friend", or as a love gift is clear. But what do people actually "say" about stuffed animals? Content analyses and observations of person-stuffed animal interactions are useful, but are they accurate? Do they tell the whole story? In the remaining chapters, results from a qualitative study will be presented, which will attempt to answer; are stuffed animals significant to you? If so, how? Do the "how's" match themes identified earlier?

9. Nursing Home Study

From September to December 2000, a qualitative study was conducted at four separate nursing home facilities in the Northern Virginia area. 26 residents agreed to participate, and with the exception of one man who used one of the facilities for the medical services offered there, all the interviewees could be considered senior citizens. Nursing home residents were chosen for the study primarily because they were an easily accessed population and one that would not change residences frequently. The secondary reason they were chosen was a result of a personal experience I had had earlier in the year with my grandmother, who lives in an assisted-living institution in North Carolina. The experience concerned her intensely positive reaction to a stuffed dog I presented her with as a gift, and I surmised that nursing home residents might similarly positively benefit from a stuffed animal gift, even if the study did not yield any meaningful results. In fact, the study did yield results, ones that echoed earlier themes about stuffed animals.

The methodology of the interviews was this: stuffed animals were purchased at thrift stores, washed, and disseminated to those residents who had previously given their consent to participate in the qualitative study. The resident was permitted to stop the interview at any time, and if he or she elected to not participate at all was still permitted to keep the stuffed animal as a gift. In 3 out of 4 facilities, dissemination of the stuffed

animals was handled jointly by the residents themselves and the appropriate activities coordinator. The residents chose a stuffed animal from the available sample, and those who were unable to choose (due to mental or physical inability), the activities coordinator chose for them. A week to two weeks were allowed after the resident chose his or her stuffed animal for the resident to grow accustomed to having it.

Due to various stages of mental acumen, the methods of interviewing were flexible to allow for lapses in memory. It is important to stress that in some cases (5 out of 26), only observation of the resident's reaction could be conducted, because the resident was unable to speak or formulate cogent sentences. This fact did not, however, limit the ability to gauge whether themes of stuffed animal imagery/use examined earlier were supported; rather, it became vital to be aware of non-verbal cues.

The resident's freedom, if able, to choose the stuffed animal he or she would keep most certainly influenced responses, although to be fair, the choices were not limitless. The choices depended mostly on availability of second-hand stuffed animals, and although a variety of different types of animals were bought, the bulk of the purchases were of bears. Stuffed animals with identifying clothing or logos were avoided, e.g., recognizable stuffed animals representing cartoon characters or company mascots, because I was interested in keeping the responses limited to what the resident thought about the stuffed animal itself, not necessarily what it symbolized for a company or television program. Each theme of significance identified earlier after analyzing content—comfort, viewing the stuffed animal as live animal or pet, as a friend, or love gift will be examined within the context of what was heard and/or observed in the 26

interviews. Not every resident fell under any theme; indeed a few did not seem to be affected much at all, gauging their responses, but more did. The only theme that did not get any representation after results of the study were analyzed, would be deviant uses and imagery of stuffed animals. None of the interviewees expressed ideas that his or her stuffed animal was particularly sexy, and I did not return to conduct any interviews where the resident had set them up in a titillating display. Finally, none of them revealed using the stuffed animal to hide anything.

Comfort Direct/Indirect Revisited

In Chapters 3 and 4, evidence of stuffed animals offering comfort was presented. Ailing or traumatized people, from sick children to a man nervous about getting a shot to kids both young and old grief-stricken about a slain classmate seemed to derive comfort from cuddling or hugging stuffed animals. Stuffed animals were included as comforting symbols in the Children's Hospital's logo, in the decoration of NIH's Children's Inn, and in the counseling rooms of a rape counseling center. They obliquely offered comfort, to both the living and the dead, when placed in makeshift shrines.

Stuffed animals also offered comfort to 10 of the 26 respondents, either directly or indirectly, based on their answers or reactions. In order to identify which facility and which interviewee the responses are based on, the facility will be identified as Facility 1, Facility 2, Facility 3 or Facility 4. The interviews/observations are numbered separately and include the age (if available), race and gender of the resident. Facility 1 was in McLean, Virginia and had a 49-bed capacity. Facility 2 was in Fairfax, Virginia and had

a 200-bed capacity. Facility 3 was also in Fairfax and had a 150-bed capacity and finally, Facility 4 was in Falls Church, Virginia and had a 65-bed capacity. All four facilities had a separate Alzheimer's or memory-impaired unit. Male to female ratio is under-represented in this study (2 out of 26—8 to 92%), as the ratio to all residents was closer to 24 to 76% overall. This over-representation of women was possibly due to the women either being more comfortable expressing an interest in having a stuffed animal or being interviewed or both; however, this is speculation as no questions or responses reflected that directly. Dissemination of the stuffed animals only differed in Facility 3 in that they were given out by the researcher and not the activities coordinator. Note: to read the interviews/observations in their entirety, please refer to Appendix 1.

Observation 2 Facility 1 was a 96-year old white female who had extremely limited verbal skills. She was observed in the hallway, sitting in a device which let her use her feet to push herself along. Her responses to stimuli were extreme, and the activities coordinator indicated that she was subject to emotional outbursts. In a more lucid occasion, she had chosen a brown teddy bear and named it "Buddy". She did seem in distress while sitting there, and she had an agitated-appearing facial expression. When handed Buddy, her demeanor changed; she was observed hugging, kissing, and talking to the bear. She cradled the bear, and at one point turned the bear facing outward, sitting in her lap, and bounced a strap to her walking device as if to entertain the bear. It was determined that she did derive comfort from both observing the interaction with the bear as well as possibly the tactile stimulation. She caressed the bear numerous times and clutched it to her as she was wheeled away to another part of the hallway by an orderly

(she was back to being agitated at this point and did not interact with the bear any further).

Interview 2 Facility 1 was a 76-year old white female who had chosen a yellow chick she named “Al”, after a friend she had in another unit. She expressed that she picked out Al because “He’s so cute!”, that she “love[d] the chick” and “[held] him every day.” She also said that she talked to him. She kept Al on a shelf next to her bed, and also mentioned that “I sleep with him too!”. She repeated that she liked to pet and hold Al as well. Interviews 4 and 5, Facilities 1 and 2 respectively, represented the extreme ends of the spectrum as far as the love and comfort they felt/got from their stuffed animals. Interview 4 was a 76-year old white female, and she chose a sheep with curly horns she named “Prissy”. Interview 4 was in a wheelchair, and she held Prissy on her lap. When asked why she liked Prissy, she answered “She’s pretty...soft...cuddly.” She mentioned that she talked to [Prissy] and that “[Prissy] can talk back at me.” She said she pet Prissy as well as used her for an armrest (she demonstrated resting a forearm on the sheep’s back). When I asked her “What else do you like to do with Prissy?” Interview 4 answered, “Well, she hasn’t performed any magic yet, I can’t walk yet. But at least I have something to keep me company...like last night. I talked to Prissy about it.” Throughout the interview, she petted Prissy as she talked. Interview 5 was a 79-year old white female who chose a long-haired teddy bear she named “Honey Bear”, nicknamed “Dax” after a character in a book she was reading. She said Dax was “so cute and that [you] can take a bear, [you] can hug him.” She admitted that although she liked to take Dax with her everywhere with her in her wheelchair that she was afraid to for fear of

dropping and losing him. “What I own is a lot more precious now.” She stroked Dax’s fur frequently throughout the interview. When I asked her “anything else?” about Dax, she replied, “Just that I pet him, hug him and everything else.” She gazed down at the teddy bear, cradled on its back in her arms. “I love his long hair,” she said. “I love him SO MUCH!” she said, hugging the bear to her.

Interview 12 Facility 2 was a 79-year old African-American male who was bed-ridden and had difficulty speaking, instead using his hand to squeeze responses in affirmative or negative. When the koala bear the staff had helped him pick out was brought over to him, he squeezed its white fluffy ears. He indicated that he did not sleep with the bear, but squeezed in the affirmative to the activities coordinator’s statement that the bear “was just comforting.” It is perhaps suspect to give too much weight to hand squeezes as responses; however, Interview 12 did make efforts to reach up and pet the stuffed koala as well as squeeze its body and ears. Interview 13 was an 80-year old white female who had chosen a stuffed cocker spaniel puppy (she named her puppy “Buddy”). She said “he’s little and cute...I don’t like big animals; they’re too clumsy. I like the little ones because you can hold them and keep them close to you. Big ones are hard to keep close.” And “I like him cuz (sic) I can hold him.” Interview 15 at Facility 3 chose a white bear wearing an Air Force jersey. She called him “so soft” and “awfully cute” adding that she “want[ed] to hug him all the time” and that “he [was] nice and spongy.” She mentioned how huggable the bear was as well as how pudgy he was several times. Similar to Interview 12 in Facility 2, Interview 14 in Facility 3 was bed-ridden and had a hard time responding; she was a white female of unknown age. She did respond that she

“liked” the fur of the polar bear she had selected. She said “I like to look at him. Pet him. He’s soft.” She said she was “glad to have him.” Similar to Interview 14, Interview 19 was a bed-ridden white female, except her age was known to be 88. She had picked out a white bear with a plaid tie. She said she “loved the bear” as it was held up to her face and seemed to enjoy the sensation of feeling it next to her. .

Probably the most dramatic cases of stuffed animals offering comfort came from these last two examples, Observation 5 and Interview 21, mainly because *physical* relief was observed. Observation 2, Facility 1, mentioned earlier, the woman who entertained her bear with the strap of her walking device also had a dramatic reaction to her teddy bear Buddy, but the comfort was mercurial and seemed fleeting. Observation 5 was a white female of undetermined age whom I observed in the hall at Facility 3. She was extremely distressed-sounding, and just moaned and cried, sitting in a walking device. She was complaining about past injustices done to her, or so it seemed, and the staff seemed accustomed to her constant keening, as no one reacted to her. This was the second time I had been to the facility, and she had indeed been in the same exact place in the hall doing the same exact thing the last time I was there. In the practice of carrying extra stuffed animals in case those not participating in the study got upset and wanted one, I pulled out a very soft camel and showed it to her. She was unable to lift her hands to grasp the camel, but lowered her voice (although still talking) momentarily when I placed it in front of her face. She started moaning again, loudly, and I this time leaned the camel against her face. The transformation was extremely noticeable. She quieted completely, closed her eyes and rested her face against the camel’s fur. Every time I

moved the camel away, she would start up again, and every time I rested it back, she ceased. Since she was unable to hold the camel and there wasn't a place to safely leave it (I was concerned it might fall and she would walk over it and hurt her ankle), I couldn't leave the camel with her. As I was leaving, however, I brushed the nose of the camel against her cheek, in a facsimile of making the camel "kiss" her, and in a moment of seeming lucidity, she looked up at me and groaned, "Thank youuuu... Thank youuu..."

While it was a "side" observation, I found it very telling. Interview 21, an 85-year old white female in Facility 4 chose a teddy bear, and I interviewed her as she sat in her wheelchair in the hallway. Interview 21 was rubbing her head, complaining of a headache when I started the interview, but when the teddy bear she had selected was given to her, she hugged it and rested her face on it, smiling. "Hello..Hello.." she said to the bear, looking down at its face. She then laughed and cuddled the bear to her. "It cheers me up!" she said. "Does it make you feel better?" the activities coordinator asked her. "Yes," Interview 21 said, stroking the ears and nose of the bear. At the end of the interview, when asked if she wanted the bear to be taken back to her room, she said "No I want to keep it." Noticeably absent during the interview, after taking possession of the bear, was any subsequent mention of her headache. In fact, she smiled and seemed more relaxed. The activities coordinator, after we walked away from the area confided, "She hasn't smiled all day before this."

Live Animal or Pet Revisited

Those interviewees and those observed also displayed words and actions which bespoke thinking of their stuffed animals as either live animals, pets, or both. Interview 4 in Facility 1, the woman with the sheep “Prissy” didn’t just derive comfort from having and holding Prissy, she also talked about Prissy as if it were a live sheep and a pet. She emphasized that Prissy was her first choice because she had always liked lambs. “We used to have billy goats,” she explained, “not in the house, but you could go up to them and play with them.” She said “I’m the only one here with a lamb, she follows me and if she gets lost, I know this one is mine,” although she added that “she [meaning the lamb] hasn’t gotten lost, because she’s a smart little rascal.” Not just thinking of Prissy as a lamb, she also said she wanted to get her “...a scarf to put around Prissy’s neck. An animal print scarf would look nice.” When I nodded, she added, “all pets should have them.” She decided later in the interview that “a string of pearls would look better on this white fleece with an ID chain.”

There were varying degrees of responsiveness to the stuffed animals. Observation 1, in Facility 1 was a 97-year old white female. She was pretty unresponsive to the golden retriever stuffed puppy she was shown as she sat in her room in a wheelchair. She did, however, raise her hand to stroke its ears and pat its head. Her reaction was not discernable, however, as to whether or not this action brought her comfort. She merely seemed to be responding to it and petting the areas one would a live puppy. Interview 3 Facility 1 was a 90-year old white female. She chose a small brown monkey she named

“Arley”. While she admitted that she didn’t cuddle or pet Arley all that much, she did emphasize that she picked the monkey out specifically, saying it was “much better than a duck or a seal.” And she did admit that she “liked his ears.” She also confided that it “was nice to have company, because [she couldn’t] get out,” although she seemed scornful of the question, “so the monkey keeps you company?” “No...I don’t go that far,” she said. The next two respondents, Interviews 9 and 10 at Facility 2 were both fans of big cats, and chose a stuffed lion and a stuffed white tiger respectively. Interview 9 was a 69 year old white female who picked out her lion because it reminded her of the protagonist Simba from the movie *The Lion King*. She also said, “he’s very pretty,” and “he’s very ferocious!” She added, “he’s so pretty, look at his hair, look how pretty it is; after all he’s king, king of the jungle.” She named him Leo (“of course!”) and admitted that she petted him and held him frequently. She also confided that she “just wish[ed] he didn’t roar so much!” When I asked “he roars?” She answered, “Oh yesss...He’s a roaring lion. But look at that tail!” She cautioned, “Yeah, it’s pretty [the tail] but I bet he could beat you to death with it, swinging it around!” Here she started making the lion’s tail lash around. She mentioned that “he’s still king of the hill, and if you don’t believe it, don’t stand too close!” “Yes,” she said, looking down at the lion, “he’s very proud.” Interview 10 was a 29-year old white male, and was housed at the facility presumably for the long-term care offered there. He was in a wheelchair and communicated by typing on an electronic keypad that had a voice synthesizer. When asked what stuffed animal he picked out, he typed, with great care, “white Bengal tiger.” When asked what made him select that one, he typed, “I love brown tigers.” Interview 8, Facility 2 chose a cow. She

was an 82-year old white female. When asked what she liked about the cow, before the laughing general response, “all of it!” she specifically mentioned “I like his nose, eyes and ears—they’re small and special!” She patted the cow. “So good to me,” she said. She liked the cow’s colors and the fact that “he [sat] nice.” Interview 18 from Facility 4 was a 90-year old white female who chose a stuffed raccoon; she also liked the raccoon’s features. She was sitting up in her room at a tray, enjoying a nutrient milkshake. “I like the tail,” she answered when asked what she liked about the raccoon. She bounced the tail against the tray. She called the raccoon “good” and “fat” and said she liked his colors and pointed to his eyes. “[Raccoons] are always the same,” she said, “they’re dark brown and white. It’s a good size and the white helps.” She chided the raccoon like he was a naughty pet frequently, when the raccoon would lose its balance and fall over on her tray. “Yes, tell her how important you are,” she crooned to the raccoon. “I just don’t know what to do with him!” she confided in me, in a mock exasperated tone. Scolding the raccoon she said, “Now what’s the matter? You can’t sit up?!” “That tail was helping him before,” to me. “Well aren’t you something!” she said to the raccoon, laughing. She picked up the raccoon and wiped it, as if the tray made it dirty, and with one last mocking scold, she said “I told you, sit up!” as she laughed and wagged a forefinger in the raccoon’s face. Interviews 11 and 17 from Facility 2 and Facility 3 respectively both had definitive reactions to their stuffed animals as a live animal, and in the case of Interview 17, a pet. Interview 11 was a 59-year old white female who chose a white harp seal stuffed animal. “I saw him looking so adorable, look at that face!” she answered when asked why she chose that one. She liked to look at the seal, particularly mentioning “his”

eyes. She said she picked a harp seal because she “[didn’t] like the fact that baby seals get killed [in the fur industry].” She also said, “It spoke to me; he looked so helpless, like ‘Oh...give me love! Give me health!’” Throughout the interview, she cuddled the seal, particularly putting her face against the animal’s fur. She squeezed the seal’s flipper frequently. She also picked up something off the seal’s fur. “He’s shedding,” she said about that action. Interview 17 was a white female who did not know her age. She had chosen a white dog with a red collar. She volunteered right away in the interview that “Snoopy is his name; thank you for giving him to me. I had a real dog named Snoopy but he died.” Snoopy had been a black dog. She pulled the stuffed dog to her, “I will keep him right here, if you don’t mind miss. Snoopy has been a very nice dog but he doesn’t have anything to eat; I can’t feed him.” When asked what she liked about Snoopy, she said, “I like his nose; it’s a black nose—he can nuzzle you.” She said “he has a pretty red collar on, Snoopy.” She talked to Snoopy, “Hi Snoopy, you look so cute Snoopy, next time I get a dog I’ll get him a red collar just like yours.” She thanked me repeatedly throughout the interview for giving her Snoopy. She told Snoopy he “was very handsome” and that her pet dog Snoopy “[had been] a little dog.” Probably the strongest indicator that the respondent thought of her stuffed animal as a live one was that she mentioned her live dog had been a black dog. Stuffed Snoopy was a white dog that sat upright like a teddy bear and had long shaggy fur. So strong was the dog representation for Interview 17 that the mere fact of it seemed to evoke feelings of affection for a cherished live dog.

Friend/Companion Revisited

Apart from stuffed animals offering comfort or seeming like animals and/or pets, respondents also talked about their stuffed animals as being friends or companions. This occasionally was discernable because while they didn't identify characteristics about the stuffed animal as being particularly animal-like, they did give the stuffed animal person-like character. These characteristics were less like pets than they were a buddy or pal. In addition, one new way of looking at/talking about stuffed animals was found which was somewhere between a friend and a pet, and one that none of the content analysis in previous chapters discovered—which was considering the stuffed animal to be much like a human baby. I witnessed this in Observation 2's treatment of her bear Buddy, the way she cradled and looked at it, and also the way she bounced the strap of her walker for its enjoyment. I have seen people jingle objects in front of an infant's face the same way. Also, Interview 21, the woman who had been suffering a headache, mentioned that she liked her bear for the "face and mouth...like a baby." Feelings of protection seemed to motivate some of the respondents (such as Interview 11, whose harp seal's eyes "spoke to [her]"). Interview 6, Facility 2, was a 93-year old white female, who chose a brown buffalo, and she definitely empathized with her stuffed animal. When asked why she picked that one, she said, "Oh, I don't know. He was a little softie, you know? And I thought he looked a little sad." Interview 5, the woman who had Dax the teddy bear, asked how to keep Dax clean, and I told her I had washed him in a machine and dried him in the dryer. She seemed playfully distressed about that, saying "I wouldn't want him to go in the dryer with that heat! It's too hot!" The impression left was not that it

would be too hot for her to touch the bear; the inference was that the bear would have difficulty withstanding the heat. Interview 7, Facility 2 was an 82-year old white female who had chosen a white bear that had plaid ear liners, paw pads and a plaid bow tie. She named the bear "Wee Willie Winkle". She said "I love his ears! They add a little to him, like he's a man about town." The plaid accents on the bear figured prominently in her answers. She noted that they gave him the appearance of being "dressed for going out to a formal evening in his bow tie." She said that "he has good stuffing, nice strong legs, all dressed up for the party; he's going to the dance." Although she also did mention that the bear was "soft and cuddly", she mainly talked about him being dressed up in his plaid.

Interview 16, Facility 3 was extremely empathetic about a small teddy bear that she selected, including viewing it as a baby, and also because of the way she selected the bear. Interview 16 was a 90-year old white female. When asked what she thought of the bear, she responded, "well honey, I love him." About what she loved, she said, "I think it's his little face; it's infantile. But it's not ugly." When given the bear, she exclaimed, looking at it "Oh you sweet little thing!" "I've always had a special thing in my miserable heart for these little things...I don't think I'm that much different from other people, loving little teddy bears." She talked much about always having teddy bears growing up, and her children always having them also. During one of her stories, she suddenly exclaimed, gasping, "Did I have him [down] on his face?" before picking the bear back upright. Her initial questions to me during the dissemination of the stuffed animals were entirely unique. Rather than looking through the bag to see which one to pick, she asked me if there was one that "someone else might not want." She expressed concern that if

there was an animal that “looked funny” or “different”, that was the one she wanted. She seemed concerned that a less-attractive stuffed animal might not get picked, and she seemed to want to “protect” the vulnerable “ugly” stuffed animal. The desire to protect ugly stuffed animals was not a surprising concept to this researcher, whose own mother has a famous childhood story concerning that very topic. Apparently the day after Easter shopping after church, my mother, who was probably 12 or so at the time, brought—in near tears—a single surviving stuffed rabbit from the drugstore shelf to my grandmother. The rabbit’s eyes were sewn on extremely badly; one was almost a full inch above the other so it gave the rabbit an appearance of a Picasso painting. “Look Mom, can we get this one? No one wanted him!” my mother said, choked up, adding, “because his eyes are funny.” My grandmother, also in a fit of pity for the poorly sewn rabbit, said, “of course we’ll get him!” The story was added with more poignancy at the end, because the store clerk tossed off, “Oh I’ll give him to you for 10 cents (a price less than half-off),” when asked about the cost. I didn’t mention that story to Interview 16 and soon concluded the interview. When asked “anything else about the bear?” to Interview 16, she replied “Just tell him to be loyal to me.” She then patted the bear’s back and wiped its front and said, “God love him!”

Love Gift Revisited

Stuffed animals being seen by the respondents as love gifts also occurred. Interview 10, the man who had carefully typed “white Bengal tiger” on his keypad didn’t have his white tiger at the time of our interview. He had given it away as a gift to his mother. None of the other interviewees/those observed had given their stuffed animals

away, indeed, Interview 7, the woman who named her plaid-accented bear Wee Willie Winkle joked that when she showed her bear to her great-grandson that "...he want[ed] to take him home. I told him 'No, this is grandma's; you get your own'." If a love gift could be considered this, almost every resident thanked me for giving him or her a stuffed animal. Interview 10 said about his tiger, "it felt great to get it." Interview 5, with Dax the teddy bear thanked me profusely throughout the interview and at the end when the interview was finished. She said she was "so grateful." Interview 17, the woman who had named her dog Snoopy, like her real dog, was similarly appreciative, "Snoopy is his name, thank you for giving him to me." Interview 16, the empathetic teddy bear selector, when asked what she loved the bear said also, "...[M]ostly, it may surprise you, but I like that you gave it to me. I like that you gave him to me very very much."

One aspect of love gifts that could be a derivative of the concept is naming a stuffed animal in tribute to someone else, as a sign of affection or remembrance. Interview 2 had named her yellow chick "Al" after a friend she knew in another building, and Interview 17 named her stuffed dog Snoopy seemingly as a tribute to her dearly departed live one. Interview 20, Facility 4, was a white female aged 91. She selected a brown bear. When asked if the bear had a name, she named it William on the spot. She said she named it after her brother William. When asked if the bear reminded her of William, she replied, "No, it's just after him." She said that doing so was a way of remembering him, and fondly told some stories about him growing up.

No Theme

Three residents didn't fit into any theme. Observation 3, Facility 1 was an 88-year old white female for whom the staff had chosen a stuffed Rottweiler puppy. When presented with the puppy in front of her, she distractedly hugged it but seemed unaware of it overall. Perhaps the reflexive hugging of the stuffed puppy brought her a measure of comfort, but judging from her facial expression and overall disinterest in it, it would be a difficult assessment. Observation 4, Facility 1 was a 73-year old white female who was given a brown bear with a ribbon by the staff. The bear was sitting in a basket across the room from her bed, and when she was shown the bear, she was unresponsive and did not appear to notice the bear at all. Interview 1, Facility 1 was a 96-year old white female who seemed fond of the stuffed lamb she had chosen. When asked what she thought of the lamb, she replied, "Aww...he's a cute fella...cute to look at." She did concede that "his head [was] cute", but when pressed for anything else, she replied, "I don't know, it's just cute!" She admitted that she "...just liked to look at him."

10. Conclusion

Do stuffed animals have significance for people in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area? After all, they are a part of the socio-cultural landscape. They decorate people's homes, their workspaces, and occupy the realms of commerce and politics. Adults and children alike were found to have stuffed animals, and even homeless families with very few material possessions owned stuffed animals. The history of just how stuffed animals came about in modern society was examined including how stuffed animals became a staple after formerly being a fad. Upon closer examination of the significance of stuffed animals via content analyses of popular magazines, newspapers, television advertisements as well as three studies, it can be inferred that stuffed animals do indeed have meaning in people's lives. It is important to note, however, that even though examples of how stuffed animals are significant exist, the scope of this study was relatively limited. The small sample sizes of the three studies, in addition to the restricted content analysis certainly prevent a blanket assessment of stuffed animals' significance; nevertheless, certain implications can be drawn.

Comfort, both explicit and implicit, was one identified way stuffed animals are significant. Comparing what was "said" about stuffed animals in the larger context versus what actual people said about them in interviews and by observation found

similarities. An ailing little boy named Cameron rested his head on his stuffed bunny in an article about hospice care, and an 85-year old woman suffering from a headache rested hers on her stuffed bear. While it was not overtly stated in the article on Cameron that the bunny brought him relief, the woman admitted that, “yes,” the bear made her feel better. For feeling a stuffed camel’s fur next to her face, a delusional woman reverted back to a moment of lucidity, quieted, closed her eyes and said “thank you.” A 76-year old woman confided in her stuffed sheep Prissy about her legs not being what they used to.

The *idea* of stuffed animals also held comforting power, apart from actually touching them, for some people. Examples of this were seen in makeshift memorials left for victims of violence, as well as with the imaginary comfort a “well-loved” stuffed animal tucked under her arm offered a dead teenaged girl. A 79-year old African-American man squeezed a hand in affirmation when asked if he just “liked to look at” his stuffed koala bear, as well as when he was presented with the statement that his stuffed koala bear “was just comforting.”

Stuffed animals were also seen as live animals either as a reminder or as a pet. A little boy in Baltimore, Maryland, enthused by dolphins, named a stuffed one “Dolphiny”, and two adult couples spent thousands of dollars based on their love of pandas and prairie dogs. A young boy in a Tyson’s Corner, Virginia store was observed exclaiming how “cool” was a stuffed wolf, alligator and elephant. Grown men were observed playing with a stuffed ferret, making it come alive by causing it to run, growl and attack. In an interview, a 29-year old man with extremely limited motor skills admitted he chose a

stuffed white Bengal tiger because “[he] loves brown tigers.” Stuffed animals-as-live animals were also treated with affection, as would a companion animal. The same boisterous group of men who played with the ferret contained a member who apologized to the ferret after dropping it to the floor; “sorry buddy.” And a woman in the *Animal Gallery* store, unaware of being watched, gave a stuffed equine a quick peck on the head. The woman with Prissy the stuffed sheep said in her interview, “all pets should have” an ID chain, and a woman who had named her dog Snoopy, after a cherished pet told the stuffed version, “Hi Snoopy, you look so cute Snoopy, next time I get a dog I’ll get him a red collar just like yours.”

People also viewed stuffed animals as friends or companions. A child in an advertisement was shown playing a saxophone for his stuffed “friends”, and the stuffed friends were supposedly good listeners. A corollary to the idea of stuffed animals as friends was revealed during interviews and observations of the nursing home residents, and that was the idea that the stuffed animals were like babies. The stuffed animals were cradled by a 96-year old woman who also played with her bear like it was an infant, and a 90-year old woman expressed extreme empathy for a stuffed bear “underdog” that might not get chosen because of its less-than-cute looks.

Stuffed animals were also significant for their meaning as a gift to someone to show love and affection. In statistics about the commerce of Valentine’s Day, stuffed animals were shown to be a more popular gift than both perfume/cologne and jewelry. Less romantic a symbol of love but still a symbol was the stuffed animal a woman’s slain 14-year old son had been making her prior to his death. “I am going to keep this,” the

woman said in the article, clutching the stuffed animal. The same young man whom, when interviewed, typed “I love brown tigers,” had given his mother his new stuffed white tiger as a gift. Another way stuffed animals were used to show love and affection, as revealed by the interviews of nursing home residents, was by naming the stuffed animal after a loved one or friend. Thus, a 76-year old woman named her chick “Al” after a friend and a 91-year old woman named her stuffed bear “William” in honor of her brother.

Stuffed animals also had deviant uses as well. Fetishists in an adult sub-culture found stuffed animals to be erotic. Stuffed animals were also used to mock convention in an explicit art display much to the hand wringing of the NEA in the Nation’s capitol. Finally, stuffed animals were reportedly used as a potential hiding place for contraband. Besides these few examples of the ways stuffed animals were viewed outside the norm, the previous themes of comfort, animal and/or pet, friend, and love gift hold fast. In conclusion, although we have identified that stuffed animals do indeed have significance in the socio-cultural landscape of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area, and the ways they do, perhaps we’ll never truly know why. Perhaps the final word on the subject should be spoken by a 96-year old woman, who when asked why she liked her stuffed animal admitted, “I don’t know; it’s just cute!”

APPENDIX 1

Facility 1 McLean, Virginia

INTERVIEW #1

White Female

Age 96

#I1 was lying in bed when interviewed. The animal researcher had left last week (she chose) was a white lamb with brown hooves sitting upright. The lamb was sitting next to the bed on a dresser/nightstand.

Researcher: *"What do you think of the lamb?"*

#I1: *"Aww..he's a cute fella...cute to look at."*

Researcher: *"Did you pick him out?"*

#I1: *"Yes"*

Researcher: *"Why this one?"*

#I1: *"He looked cute! His head is cute."*

She gazes at the lamb, holding him by the hooves with it sitting upright looking at her in the face. Throughout interview, she periodically stroked the fur away from the lamb's face.

Researcher: *"What is cute about it?"*

#I1: *"I don't know; it's just cute!"*

Researcher: *"So this is a boy?"*

#I1: *"Yes."*

Researcher: *"Does he have a name?"*

#I1: *"No..no name."*

Researcher: *"Do you ever hold or sleep with it?"*

#I1: *"No I just like to look at him."*

She mentions that the sticker, sic (a plastic hanging tag) was removed, that she had requested someone to remove it. She didn't specify why she wanted it removed, it just seemed to bother her judging by her facial expression (frown) when she mentioned the "sticker".

Researcher: *"Anything else about the lamb?"*

#11: *"He's just real cute to look at."*

Asked her about any stuffed animals growing up; she said she never had any (that she can remember).

She emphasized that she likes to look over at the lamb on her dresser, and she also had other animals. One was a talking ghost (the interview time was around Halloween) and two others were a bird hanging up and a dog. These animals were further away from her bedside than the lamb was; however, she was firm in her insistence that she liked to "look at" the animals more than anything. When researcher stated, "they're for decoration," she nodded "yes."

OBSERVATION #1

White female

Age 97

The subject was upright in her room, sitting in a wheelchair. When shown the stuffed golden retriever puppy that was chosen by her (according to staff, indicated by pointing), she was not very responsive. She was not "doing well" that day according to the staff social director, and was very unresponsive to any stimuli. One thing was noted by researcher; she DID stroke the animals' ears, and pat the head. In her room there were other stuffed animals that her family had bought her. The staff social director did note that she has observed #O1 with the animal in the past--she has observed her looking at the animal, hugging it, and talking to it. A companion who works for #O1 has also told the social director that #O1 "really likes it [the puppy]." As #O1 was only observable and these second (even third!) hand responses are open to interpretation, the opinions of those who work with her day in and day out must suffice.

As pure observation on that day, however, the reaction was only slightly positive and more neutral.

OBSERVATION #2

white female

Age 96

#O2 was in the hallway in a Merry-Walker, which is a hybrid device of a wheelchair and walker. It allows the resident to sit up and enjoy foot mobility, but confines the resident across the chest area with a harness. #O2 is subject to what are described by the staff as "anxious moments", whereby she is agitated, very mobile with her legs and feet, and rather emotional. The staff in the past has given #O2 a doll which has seemed to settle her outbursts down a bit. When presented with the doll, #O2 will talk to it and hold it. The doll belongs to the whole residence, however, and thus one of the animals the researcher dropped off was selected specifically for her as "her own". The animal was a

brown very soft teddy bear. #O2's regular wheelchair was sitting in a common room, and the teddy bear was tucked into the back pocket of the wheelchair.

When presented with the bear in front of her, #O2's demeanor changed quite drastically. A look which can only be described as delight appeared on her face, as if delightfully surprised, and she pursed her lips and blew, jutting her head forward to touch the bear's with her lips, as if kissing its face. According to the staff social director, #O2 did name the bear in one of her more lucid moments; the bear's name was "Buddy". While #O2 was not able to be interviewed, the default gender of "Buddy" does seem to be male. Her first interaction with the bear reminded the researcher of an infant's response to a stimulus, e.g., pure undiluted rapture and tactile manipulation of the bear with both hands and mouth.

After about 1 minute, her hand movements appeared to become more controlled, and she started to cradle "Buddy" and kiss its face repeatedly, as if the bear represented an infant. She started to talk to the bear (the words were unintelligible), and holding the bear on her lap, *facing outward*, she began bouncing the strap in front of the bear, as if to entertain it. The motions reminded the researcher of the way someone will dangle something in front of an infant to occupy it. Throughout the "play" session (the duration was about 3-4 minutes), #O2 would periodically scratch the bear's ears. The session ended when an aide came to wheel #O2 back to her regular wheelchair for an afternoon meal. Even though she seemed distraught (any stimulus seemed to provoke a reactionary response--positive or negative) and beginning to cry, the researcher noted with interest that #O2 still held onto the bear, holding it upright in her lap as she was wheeled past the researcher down the corridor.

INTERVIEW #2

White female

Age 76

Interviewed #I2 in her room. She was very aware of her surroundings and could walk unassisted. She showed the researcher the animal she had chosen, which was a bright yellow chick that sat upright (e.g., had arms and legs). She was in seemingly good spirits to talk about the chick, and she grinned and giggled much throughout the interview. It is the resident's custom to give the resident the animal so the researcher can observe their non-verbal reactions, and she patted the chick's head numerous times throughout the interview. Held upright

She told the researcher she "loves" the chick, that she "holds him every day," and "[I] talk to him." (out of respect for privacy, the researcher never asks what exactly any resident "talks" about with his or her animal). This could be the researcher's bias, that the assumption is that it may be intimate, private subjects, e.g., concerns.

Researcher: "*What made you pick that one?*"

#I2: "*He's so cute!*"

Researcher: *"What makes him cute?"*

#I2: *"I picked him out because of his eyes. They look like they're starin' right at you!"*

She grinned and shrugged; *"He's just cute!"*

Researcher: *"What do you do with him?"*

#I2: *"I put him up there [indicated a shelf adjacent to her bed], and I sleep with him too!"*

Researcher: *"Did you give him a name?"*

She patted his head,

#I2: *"No name...Actually, Al is his name."*

Researcher: *"You're naming him on the spot. Al. Is that short for Albert?"*

#I2: *"No, Al for Alan; he's a friend of mine in the other building."*

Researcher: *"Does he remind you of Al?"*

#I2: *"No, I just like Al for a name; because he's [looks down at chick] a boy not a girl."*

Researcher: *"Anything else about... Al?"* Researcher indicated the chick with her chin

#I2: *"I love his nose and little mouth...He's just so cute! I just like to sleep with him!"*

She didn't remember having stuffed animals growing up, but she did take down a stuffed dog to show the researcher, one that a friend had given her. She told the researcher that she "pets and holds" both of them, although the chick "is her favorite right now."

OBSERVATION #3

White female

Age 88

#O3 was in a wheelchair in her bedroom when researcher observed her. She had numerous other animals in her room; her granddaughter selected a stuffed Rottweiler puppy (e.g., juvenile-appearing features) from the bunch the researcher had left. According to staff, #O3 suffers from severe memory loss, and when presented with the stuffed puppy, she only hugged it distractedly. She cuddled it and once or twice seemingly made an indication to touch her face with its face. All in all, however, she did not seem engaged by it--she didn't look at it in the face or stroke it as one would a live animal (as researcher has seen others do). She still held the dog upright.

OBSERVATION #4

White female

Age 73

Given a brown bear with ribbon. The bear was sitting in a basket across the room from her bed--it was not near the bed and when shown the bear, the resident was unresponsive--did not respond to bear at all.

INTERVIEW #3

White female

\Age 90

Given a small brown monkey.

Researcher: *"so what do you think of the monkey?"*

#I3: *"He's awfully cute!"*

Researcher: *"Uh huh."* When asked what specifically about him was cute, responded,

#I3: *"He has cute ears! I like him more and more.. he's cute when you look at him--I think he's a boy [sounds a bit uncertain]."*

She emphasized that she specifically picked out the monkey, that she liked him "much better than a duck or a seal" (she sounded a bit scornful of the other varieties). She said there wasn't initially "anything specific" about him that she liked but that she really liked his ears, and she kept repeating that "As I look at him, he keeps getting cuter and cuter!"

When asked his name, she promptly replied his name as "Arley", that "you can't name him Mary or Jane because he's a boy!" There wasn't a significance in the name "arley" just that she "just thought it up" and that it was Gender-neutral e.g., "Arley can be either a boy or a girl, like Ashley." So she was not firmly committed to naming him a definitive "male" name (like Buddy or Al) even though she did refer to the monkey as "him" throughout the interview.

She repeated that "now I have him, I think he's cute."

She responded that she does not hold or pet him; she responded "Yeah, but not much, I just get him and put him up there (indicates a shelf on the wall)." And "I don't pay much attention to him," but stated, "as I look at him he gets cuter and cuter!" She may have been doing this so as not to hurt the researcher's feelings. It is the researcher's opinion that it is true that she leaves the monkey mostly up on the shelf.

When asked if she had stuffed animals growing up, she said, "Yes, I had dolls" but reported that her brothers would "operate" on the dolls.

She really stressed the gender aspect of the name Arley. She mentioned it numerous times in the interview that Arley could "be a boy or a girl."

She was also seemingly a bit ambiguous about the role the monkey took in her life; when asked "anything else about Arley?" she mentioned that it was "nice to have company, because I can't get out." When asked, "Does the monkey keep you company?" She laughed and said "No...I don't go that far. It doesn't fill anyplace in my life. Nothing that my eyes would fill (sic)." So even though her opinions were strong about the monkey, e.g., it "wasn't a duck or a seal"; it had "cute ears"; the name "Arley" could be "either a boy or a girl" (even though she referred to the toy as "him" throughout the interview) and that "she enjoyed company", she was reluctant to ascribe too much emotion to it when asked directly. Thus, she said that she didn't "hold or pet" the monkey often, that the monkey didn't "fill any place in [her] life" and that she kept it "up there" on

a shelf. Verbal statements aside, she didn't manipulate the monkey in her hands much when given it to her, which lent credibility, in this researcher's opinion, to the fact that the monkey was merely decoration and that she seemed to just enjoy the fact of it in her room as a pleasant knick-knack.

INTERVIEW #4

White female

Age 76

She was on the far end of the scale. Very engaged about her animal, very willing and eager to talk about it, to it. Picked out a ram with curly horns. She was in a wheelchair, holding the lamb (named Prissy) in her lap. Researcher noted that when she caught sight of #I4 approximately an hour later on the way out of the building, she was sitting in a different area, this time in a gathering of other wheelchair-bound residents. She was holding Prissy on her lap. She smiled and gave the researcher a friendly wave.

Researcher: *"I see you picked out the ram."*

#I4: *"I thought it was a lamb"* (her expression could only be described as "crestfallen").

Researcher: *"Oh a lamb.. of course!"*

She said that she thought it was a lamb when she first picked it out, and that she wanted the lamb immediately. She said "I thought, what nice brown boots! That lamb has nice brown boots on." (Note: The "lamb" is standing upright on all fours and has brown hooves). She saw another animal (a rabbit) that she picked first, but then she "saw its little face first" before pulling the rest of it out of the bag. She looked down at it a lot while relating this piece.

She named the "lamb" "Prissy", and was adamant that the lamb was a "girl"

Researcher: *"What do you like about Prissy?"*

#I4: *"She's pretty...soft...cuddly."*

#I4 told researcher that she talks to "it and it can talk back at me." Here she reduced the gender to "it".

She added, "I'm the only one here with a lamb, she follows me and if she gets lost, I know this one is mine." Here and there she went into imaginary scenes where the lamb figured prominently, e.g., stories that involved the lamb.

Researcher: *"What made you name the lamb Prissy?"*

#I4: *"I just thought it looked Prissy; all little girls are prissy."* (she was stroking the wool while talking).

Researcher: *"What do you like to do with Prissy?"*

#I4: *"I pet it...she makes a good arm rest too sometimes, a soft place to put my arm."*

Here she demonstrated by resting a forearm on the lamb's back.

She did not remember having stuffed animals when younger, although she currently had others besides Prissy. She had a Dalmation named Bobby, a teddy bear, and "Jeremiah" bullfrog. Her daughter "named the poor little things."

The lamb was "larger than the other ones" but she didn't have a favorite.

She did mention, as she went on that "she [meaning the lamb] hasn't gotten lost" because "she's a smart little rascal" that "she has good taste, with those brown boots on."

She mentioned that she "called [my] daughter to bring me a scarf to put around Prissy's neck. An animal print scarf would look nice."

She told me that she wants "Prissy to have a name tag so she doesn't get lost" [NOTE; THIS WAS A COMMON CONCERN AMONG THE RESIDENTS INTERVIEWED-- THAT THE ANIMAL WOULD BE LOST OR STOLEN. APPARENTLY, THIS IS A COMMON CONCERN WITH MANY RESIDENTS ABOUT ALL THEIR POSSESSIONS.]

When researcher nodded, she added, "All pets should have them."

Later, she said, as she looked down into the lamb's face, "A string of pearls would look better on this white fleece with an ID chain."

#14 said: "this [lamb] was my first choice." She has always liked lambs.

And "We used to have billy goats," she explained, "not in the house, but you could go up to them and play with them." She did indeed have stuffed animals; a relative bought her "a koala bear from Australia" that she remembered with seeming fondness. "My mom used to get rid of the animals when we moved--she would tell us 'the box got lost'. But we would re-collect those quickly."

Researcher: *"What else do you like to do with Prissy?"*

#14: *"Well, she hasn't performed any magic yet; I can't walk yet. But at least I have something to keep me company...like last night. I talked to Prissy about it."* She seemed deep in thought and was petting the lamb as she was talking.

She ended our interview (actually the researcher had to end it due to time) by asking if the researcher had "come back to see 'are they being taken care of?'" which presumably meant all the stuffed animals the researcher had dropped off.

Facility 2 Fairfax, Virginia

INTERVIEW #5

White female

Age 79

Chose a light tan teddy bear with long fur. She named it "Honey Bear" as a formal name, but "Dax" as a nickname, after a male character in a book she was currently reading.

Researcher: *"So what do you think about the bear?"*

#15: *"I've taken such good care of him. I think he's darling!"*

Researcher: *"It seems that way [taken good care of him]."*

#15: *"He's like my childhood teddy; he reminded me of Winnie the Poo."*

She elaborated on her childhood teddy later:

"The bear was always my favorite" and "I kept him until I moved here" her husband got rid of the teddy bear, and she "thought of him [the bear] often and was sad he was gone."

She added "That's why I'm so glad he came along!"

Researcher: *"Does he have a name?"*

#15: *"His real name, his formal name is 'Honey Bear', but his nickname is Dax. It's easier to remember."*

#15: *"I'm taking good care of him! I didn't want to lose him!"*

She was very grateful that "[the researcher] gave it to her" (NOTE A COMMON THEME--SEVERAL RESIDENTS EXPRESSED GRATITUDE THAT THE RESEARCHER HAD GIVEN THEM AN ANIMAL)

#15: *"He's so cute" and that "[you] can take a bear, [you] can hug him."*

She takes him with her in her wheelchair, although she's afraid sometimes that he'll fall out of the chair.

She keeps him in the center of her bed "right on the bed" and sometimes "in the closet". When asked why in the closet, she replied that she "hopes anyone doesn't take him" She said "What I own is a lot more precious now." And that she can't hold the teddy all the time, so he "is in [her] room most of the time."

Researcher: *"Anything else about Dax?"*

#15: *"He's just a cute fella! He looks just like a bear looks. He looks like he could talk but doesn't!"* (laughs)

"I just like the way he looks"

She doesn't "carry him around all the time, but [I] would if I could, but I can't" (because of the fact of having to maneuver her wheelchair).

She asked how to keep him clean, and the researcher told her the bear was washed in a machine and dried in the dryer. She seemed playfully distressed when told about that, saying "I wouldn't want him to go in the dryer with that heat! It's too hot!" Presumably for the bear to withstand.

Researcher: *"Anything else?"*

#15: *"Just that I pet him, hug him and everything else."*

She held the teddy bear like a baby, gazing down at it.

#15: *"I love his long hair" She strokes the bear.*

"I love him SO MUCH!" (hugs it to her).

The researcher had to complete the interview (for time reasons), and upon leaving, #15 offered repeated thanks and made the teddy bear "wave" goodbye. When the researcher left, #15 was observed still cradling the bear, and when the researcher saw her in another part of the building, sitting in her wheelchair, "Dax" was sitting on her lap.

INTERVIEW #6

White female

Age 93

Chose a brown buffalo with silky fur. Conducted interview at a table, the buffalo stood between us on top of the table.

She picked him out. "I picked him out," she indicated him on the table. "I said, 'gee I think I'll pick *him* out'."

Researcher: "*So he's a male*"

#16: "*Yes*".

Researcher: "*Why did you pick him?*"

#16: "*Oh..I don't know. He was a little softie, you know? And I thought he looked a little sad.*"

Researcher: "*Sad?*"

#16: "*A little.*"

#16: "*He's sort of soft... cute, you know?*"

Researcher: "*Does he have a name?*"

#16: "*No, no name. Nope, nope nope.*"

The buffalo stays primarily in her room, she reported, primarily because he goes along with the décor so well (being brown).

She doesn't pick him up that much, she said, "not much picking up, just looking." But answered, "Yes every so often," when asked if she ever picked it up.

She said, "it wouldn't bother me to do that [hug or pet the buffalo], so occasionally, yes, I'll do that, sure."

She said "Oh yes, I think so. I must have." When asked her if she remembered having any stuffed animals growing up.

She didn't have much else to say about it. She gave the impression that she liked the animal well enough, enough to ascribe human qualities ("a little sad"), but that it was mainly just a nice thing to have in her room.

INTERVIEW #7

White female

Age 82

She picked out a white bear that had plaid ear liners, paw pads and a plaid ribbon. She named it "Wee Willie Winkle" upon picking it out.

Researcher: *"So what do you think of the teddy bear?"*

#17: *"I love his ears! They add a little to him, like he's a man about town."*

She proclaimed him "Soft" and "Cuddly". She seemed especially interested in his ears; "His ears are bent like he's listening to noises all around." And she liked the plaid accents, noting that it gave him the appearance of being "Dressed for going out to a formal evening in his bow tie."

#17: *"He has good stuffing, nice strong legs; all dressed up for the party; he's going to the dance. I like to dance, so..."*

Similar to other residents, she was fearful that he would be stolen, and thus kept him in a closet.

She took the bear out recently to show her great grandson, and "now he wants to take him home. "I told him, 'No, this is grandma's; you get your own [laughs]"."

She kept repeating that he was "so nice and cuddly." and she looked down at him and said, "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." With a happy-looking expression.

She picked him because she likes teddy bears.

Researcher: *"Have any other stuffed animals growing up?"*

#17: *"Yes growing up; we had dolls mostly, but teddy bears, lots of toys..." She stroked Wee Willie Winkle's belly while she was talking and was careful to keep the bear upright*

INTERVIEW #8

White female

Age 87

She picked out a black and white cow, sitting upright like a teddy bear. When asked what she thought of, or liked about the cow, she said the following:

"I like his nose, eyes, and ears--they're small and special! Look at that, isn't that nice?" she tilted the head to make it look up at her as she looked down at the cow.

Researcher *"Anything else you like?"*

#18: *"[laughs] All of it!"*

Researcher: *"Does the cow have a name?"*

#18: *"No, not yet, no name yet."*

Researcher: *"But it's a he."*

#18: *"He's a boy cow, he looks like.. I don't know." During this she pets and holds the cow, and pats it, saying, "so good to me."*

Researcher: *"Did you have any stuffed animals growing up?"*

#18: *"Yes, but not good. Not like this. Not this nice with nice colors; I like the colors."*

Researcher: *"Anything else you like to do with the cow?"*

#18: *"I just make him look nice, [I] look at him. He's so cute, you know? [He] sits nice." She positions the cow so it is sitting with its legs out front.*

She kept him in a cupboard, as she was worried about stealing.

She said she can't take the cow too many places with her, because she must use her hands to steer her wheelchair.

INTERVIEW #9

White female

Age 69

She picked out a stuffed lion with a mane. She said, "Oh yes, here he is." When researcher went to her room to interview her. "He looks like you; she said, one eye open/one eye closed." (researcher was unclear what that meant). Throughout interview, she manipulated the lion in her hands, stroking it, petting it.

Yes, she picked it out, because it reminded her of the Lion King (A Walt Disney animated film) and its protagonist Simba.

"I think he's pretty," she said. And "He's very ferocious!"

"He's so pretty, look at his hair, look how pretty it is," here she stroked his mane.

"After all, he is king, king of the jungle."

When asked if the lion had a name, she said, "Leo, of course."

When asked if she pet or held him, she replied that she did pet and hold him because "just look at him!" as if that was explanation enough.

She was worried that if her grandchildren visited, they would want to take Leo home and sleep with him because, "See, he's soft." But she was opposed to the idea, wondering if she could let him go.

She said she doesn't sleep with him; rather she puts him on a table near her bed.

Researcher *"Did you have stuffed animals growing up?"*

#19: *"Yes, sure did," [said very enthusiastically]. "I had some positive favorites; I had a bunny that was white...well, it started out white, boy, I took him everywhere like another Harvey [fictional rabbit in a James Stewart movie]! He'd get so dirty my mother would have a fit [laughs]."*

Researcher: *"Did the bunny have a name?"*

#19: *"Peter, naturally...my bunny in the bucket, yes, for heaven's sake."* She seemed to scoff that a rabbit should not have any name, and any other name besides Peter.

Researcher: *"Anything else about Leo?"*

#I9: *"I think he's gorgeous! Look at how pretty he is," (brushes mane).*

"I just wish he wouldn't roar so much!"

Researcher: *"He roars?"*

#I9: *"Oh yeeesss....He's a roaring lion. But look at that tail!"*

Researcher: *"Tail?"*

#I9: *"Yeah, it's pretty, but I bet he could beat you to death with it, swinging it around!"*
Here she started making the lion's tail lash around.

Researcher: *"Anything else about Leo?"*

#I9: *"I love him"*

Researcher: *"love him?"*

#I9: *"I sure do! He's a precious old thing. I'm sure he's younger than you. I think lions get old then, but he's still king of the hill, and if you don't believe it, don't stand too close!" [She looks down with a look that can be described as affectionate, and says],*
"Yes...he's very proud."

INTERVIEW #10

White male

Age 29*

*He was in a wheelchair and communicated by typing on an electronic keypad which had a voice synthesizer. He was at the facility presumably to get medical care not offered at any other type of long-term facility. He picked out a stuffed tiger, but the researcher discovered that he had given the tiger to his mother as a gift.

"I gave it to my mom." He typed.

When the researcher asked him specifically what type of animal he had chosen, he carefully and with deliberation typed,

"White Bengal tiger." He wanted to emphasize that it was a *white Bengal* tiger, rather than just typing plain old "tiger".

Researcher: *"What made you select that one?"*

#I10: *"I love brown tigers."*

He typed that he "loved" the tiger, that he had it for six days before giving it to his mother. He had no other stuffed animals; the tiger was "his first".

Researcher: *"Anything else?"*

#I10: *"It felt great to get it."*

Researcher: *"Did the tiger have a name?"*

#I10: *"Yes. Winter." ("Winter" may have been what the name was on the tag attached to the tiger)*

Researcher: "*Was it a boy tiger?*"

#I10: "*Yes.*"

The researcher had to avoid too many open-ended questions, as it was hard for him to communicate quickly, and in addition, he had a guest to meet with. Thus the interview was very short.

INTERVIEW #11

White female

Age 59

She chose a stuffed white harp seal, reclining on its side. The interview was in her room, where the researcher observed that she had a lot of stuffed animals up on a shelf. The researcher commented on one (can't remember which one), and #I11 replied, "Isn't she cute?". The seal was sitting on a lower table, closer to her bed.

She told the story of how she picked it out:

"I saw him looking so adorable. Look at that face!"

She said she saw "a cow first" but "when I saw the face on the seal, I liked him better."

She mentioned that she picked a harp seal because she doesn't like the fact that baby seals get killed [in the fur industry] and the seal reminded her of those seals. She also said, "It spoke to me; he looked so helpless, like 'oh...give me love! Give me health!'"

She said that the seal "talks to me" and "just look at him! He's so cute!"

"I love him!" she repeated.

Although the seal was identified as "a boy", he didn't have a name.

She said he is "soft and cuddly" and responded in the positive that "[I] hug him."

She "like[d] to look at him", and especially mentioned his eyes as needing affection

She said she "has always liked stuffed animals" and that when she lived at home she had "collections of bears and bunnies." Although she did admit that she never had a favorite when she was little.

Throughout the interview, subject cuddled the seal frequently, particularly putting her face against the animal's fur, as if the texture of it pleased her. She squeezed the seal's flipper frequently. She also picked a piece of dirt off the seal's fur. "He's shedding," she said about that action.

The seal's place close to the bed would eventually be moved, she admitted, to go up with the other ones.

Researcher: "*Anything else about the seal?*"

#I11: "*All I know is that I love him.*"

She looked down at the seal with what can only be described as amazing tenderness.

#I11: "*Cute!*" she said, with a wrinkled nose

INTERVIEW #12

African American male

Age 79

#I12 was bed-ridden and had difficulty speaking. The social director asked #I12 questions, and the researcher observed his behavior towards a stuffed koala bear that the staff had helped him to pick out. Non-verbal cues were very important in this interview. #I12 would squeeze the researcher's hand in response to an affirmative answer. His responses are suspect, if only because he may have answered "yes" to other, different questions from these. What researcher was able to ascertain, however, was that he seemed to like the texture of the animal, and he reached up to squeeze the koala bear's ears, the plushiest area of the bear. He had not named the bear; he did not sleep with it, and indicated with an affirmative squeeze when asked if he liked to simply look at it.

He did squeeze yes when the social director stated that the bear "was just comforting." and the researcher interpreted that to mean that it was more comforting than a plate or some other object someone he never met brought him. It's difficult to say with certainty, however.

He squeezed affirmative also when asked "is the koala bear your favorite?", also a suspect answer.

He did, as mentioned above, seem to respond favorably to the fur, and raised his other hand to pet and squeeze the stuffed animal's body as well as its ears. The effort did not seem just to be polite; his expression got slightly happier-looking when he gazed at the animal.

Facility 3, Fairfax, VA

Note: The dissemination of stuffed animals occurred differently at this facility than from the others. The Activities Coordinator was extremely busy at this facility (a very large one), and left the dissemination to me. She provided me with a list, and I went to the people and gave out the animals myself, returning a week later to conduct the interviews.

INTERVIEW #13

White female

Age 80

Gave a cocker spaniel puppy.

Researcher: "*What do you think of the puppy? Do you like it?*"

I13: *"Yes, I like him. He's nice."*

Researcher: *"What do you like about him?"*

I13: *"He's little and cute. I don't like big animals; they're too clumsy. I like the little ones because you can hold them and keep close to you. Big ones are too hard to keep close. I like little ones; and you can set them in different places. Big ones are a pain [laughs]!"*

Researcher: *"What else?"*

I13: *"I like cuz I can hold him. He's cute. You can pack him up and take him with you."*

Researcher: *"Does he have a name?"*

I13: *"No name. I'll name him when the kids [volunteer visitors] come." I'm going to name him Buddy!"*

Researcher: *"Did you have stuffed animals growing up?"*

I13: *"I don't remember. We played with baby dolls and things like that. My mom used to make clothes for them & dress them all up. She'd make them outfits from tv."*

Interviewee recounted that her old neighbor used to dress up a goose in the yard for occasions (a stuffed one)

I13: *"She had so much pride in that—she was so proud of it. She made such cute outfits."*

Researcher *"Wow...that's pretty cool."*

"Anything else about Buddy?"

I13: *"I picked it up and held it and showed it to all my friends, saying 'look what someone left!' Everyone fussed over it—'how cute! How nice!—and the kids of course all held it and loved it! The girls from church who visit me took to it. They were kids, the oldest was probably 12, the youngest one probably 9. They passed it around the 3 of them!"*

"I was glad I had something for the kids."

She keeps it up on the television set, she said to

I13: *"Show him off—people notice him right away!"*

INTERVIEW #14

Age?

White female

Polar bear

Interviewee was in bed; tired.

Researcher: *"Do you like the bear?"*

I14: *"Yes. I like its fur."*

No name. Pets polar bear

I14: *"I like to look at him. I like to look at him, Pet him. He's soft."*

She likes to look at the polar bear on top of the dresser.

Researcher *"So you like him?"*

I14: *"Yes, I'm glad I have him".*

INTERVIEW #15

Age?

White female

Teddy bear: air force jersey

Researcher: *"So what do you think of the bear?"*

I15: *"So cute! So cute! 'You ARE, that's right!"*

"I put him in different places."

No Name

At beginning of interview she said

I15: *"He was waiting for you. He's so soft; he's awfully cute. I want to hug him all the time."*

"He's... nice and spongy, 'Yes you are!'"

"The children go crazy when they see him—I don't have a name for him yet!"

"I look at him & howl! I just think he's so cute!"

"You want to hug him—he's so cute!"

"I guess I'll have to be [sic] give him a name!"

"I almost think he could see out of those eyes!"

"Pudgy!" Squeezes paw

INTERVIEW #16

Age 90

White female

Tan bear

Researcher: *"What do you think about the bear?"*

I16: *"Well honey, I love him."*

Researcher: *"What do you love?"*

I16: *"I think it's his little face; it's infantile. But it's not ugly. And he got a little bitty pair of feet and shoes. And I just like him." But mostly, it may surprise you, but I like that you gave it to me. I like that you gave him to me very very much. He was up on that shelf Points to shelf*

When give the animal,

"Oh you sweet little thing!"

"I was thinking that in my mind we were growing up I got a teddy bear from my older brother (manipulates bear as speaking) and I lost it. After days and weeks I found him. Water had gotten in. And he got thrown away. Someone was jealous I guess [laughs]. But I never forgot him."

As the years went by, my brother went to war ... he saw one and bought it to give away (to me). He was finally stolen and I never got that."

"I always had a special thing in my miserable heart for these little things."

"I was glad when I got ones and sorry when I lost them. I don't think I'm that much different from other people, loving little teddy bears."

Name?

I16: *"Never have (named teddy bears). But they have come and gone until my kids got them and outgrew, but they weren't theirs, they were ours (laughs)!"*

At one point, she picked TB off lap and sounding distressed, asked,

"Did I have him on his face?"

Researcher: *"Anything else about the bears?"*

I16: *"Just tell him to be loyal. All I expect is his loyalty to me."*

Respondent pats his back, wipes his front

I16: *"God love him!"*

Respondent was extremely engaged about stuffed animal, and in the initial contact at dissemination, had asked me if there was one of the offerings that "someone else might not want". It was an extremely empathetic question, because she expressed concern that if there was an animal that "looked funny" or "different" might be rejected. It was almost as if she wanted to "protect" the vulnerable stuffed animal, definitely ascribing live characteristics to it, that it would be abandoned, that its feelings would be hurt.

INTERVIEW #17

Age ?

White female

White dog with red collar

Interviewee lying in bed watching tv. Has a lot stuffed animals. When asked specifically about the white dog, responded:

I17: *"Snoopy is his name, thank you for giving him to me. I had a real dog named Snoopy but he died".*

Researcher: *"Snoopy?"*

I17: *"He was black. Respondent pulls dog against her, back to her; "I will keep him right here, if you don't mind miss. Snoopy has been a very nice dog, but he doesn't have anything to eat; I can't feed him".*

Researcher: *"Uh-huh...what else about Snoopy?"*

I17: *"I like his nose, it's a black nose—he can nuzzle you."*

"That's important that Snoopy has friends ..Has a pretty red collar on Snoopy (sic)."

When learning my name, she thanked me over and over again.

Talking "to" Snoopy:

I17: *"Hi Snoopy, you look so cute Snoopy, next time I get a dog I'll get him a red collar just like yours".*

Interviewee mentioned her live dog Snoopy many times in the interview, and emphasized how much she had loved it (unclear as to exactly when she had had the dog, but it had been before moving to the nursing home). Her dog had died.

I17: *"Yes, he's a cute little dog.. 'Hi Snoopy!' I wish my dog was alive, nice red collar (Strokes collar), red collar, red collar— 'Very handsome; you're very handsome Snoopy'. Snoopy was a little dog."*

She was very tactile with the dog. The dog was smallish, and she mainly manipulated it in her hand, snuggling it up near her collarbone area, under her chin.

When talking to Snoopy, respondent turned the dog's face TOWARDS her and looked down at the dog in a way that can only be described as tender or affectionate. Interesting point: She described her dog Snoopy as having been a black dog, but still named the stuffed animal "Snoopy" even though it was white and had body composition similar more to a teddy bear than a "realistic" looking dog, e.g., sitting upright. Since she mentioned her dog Snoopy very early initially and then consistently throughout the interview, it is conceivable that the stuffed dog evokes feelings of affection as one would have for a companion animal, a cherished "Pet".

OBSERVATION #5 "Thank you lady"
Age?

This is an interesting case; it wasn't in the "official" study, but it was telling. Both times I was at Manor Care, the first time to give out the animals and the second to interview/observe the residents, I noticed a woman in the hall in a Merry-Walker. She constantly moaned and complained about past injustices done to her, either imagined or remembered. As I believe this behavior was just recognized by the staff as an uncontrollable behavior, no one seemed to express any concern for her. Her lowing was constant and didn't seem to be about any specific discomfort, e.g., anything remediable such as physical discomfort. Indeed, when I approached her, her litany didn't abate, and she just turned a sad eye to me, as she complained about unintelligible things. I got an idea and pulled a spare camel from my bag of animals. I would always bring an extra number of stuffed animals than were in the sample size, as was suggested to me by one of the Activities Coordinators. I did this in case anyone who wasn't in the study got hurt feelings. The camel's fur was very plush, and as the woman repeated her groans, I rested the camel against her face. She immediately ceased vocalizing, and with eyes closed, rested her face against the camel. When I pulled the camel away, and propped it on the bar of her Merry Walker, she started up again, but the speech was noticeably quieter. Whenever I placed the camel against her cheek, she would stop again. There wasn't a place on her walker I could safely leave the camel, and she wasn't physically able to hold anything in her hands; her arms hung limp. So I briefly touched the camel to her cheek once more, as if it was kissing her cheek, and put it back in the bag. Remarkably, she raised her eyes to me, and seeming to focus clearly, she repeatedly moaned, "Thank youuuuu...Thank youuuuu..."

Facility 4, Falls Church, VA

This was the final facility I was able to study. The participation rate at this one was very low, mainly because a majority of residents were in more advanced stages of care, and not too many families granted permission to observe them, for various reasons.

INTERVIEW #18

Age 90

White female

Raccoon

Resident sitting up at a tray, having a nutrient milkshake. Seemed only semi-aware of her surroundings. I put the raccoon next to her on the tray, and she focused on it, smiling.

Researcher: "Hi ..., I'm here to talk t you about your new raccoon."

I18: "I'm not sure where it came from."

I reminded her that she got it last week and was going to be in my study, if it was still all right.

She gave her assent, and I asked her what she thought of the raccoon.

I18: "*I like the tail.*" (She bounced the tail on the tray. Note: the tail was featured prominently in the interview, she was very aware of the tail).

I18: "*Good, fat stomach.*" Here she patted the raccoon. Crooned "to" the raccoon.

I18: "*Yes, you tell her how important you are!*" as the raccoon tips over, she rights it again

Researcher: "*Does it have a name?*"

I18: "*I don't know, does he have a name?*" Respondent grabs the tag with her fingers. The tag indicates that the raccoon's "name" is Macaroon

I18: "*I just don't know what to do with him (laughs).*" Chides raccoon: "*Now what's the matter?*" *You can't sit up! That tail was helping him before.*"

When asked about other animals,

I18: "*No, this is my only one. No other stuffed animals.*"

The raccoon was "good" and "fat"

She liked his brown and white color, and pointed to his eyes.

I18: "*Also, he has that brown and white tail,*" looks at him "yessss"

"The tail is what holds him up. I don't know what he's talking about over there; I don't know what he's saying (laughs)." Respondent's face can be described as "happy"/smiling

I18: "*I picked him out.*"

Researcher: "*Why that one?*"

I18: "*They're always the same, they're dark brown and white. It's a good size and the white helps. See the back of his ears [sic, she was pointing to the front]? It's not white; it has velvet in there.*"

"Well, aren't you something!" To the bear [laughs]

Respondent picked up the raccoon and wiped underneath him and set him back down on the tray, as if wanting to avoid it from getting dirty. She sat the raccoon back down on the tray with great care. Mockingly chastises it, "*I told you, sit up* (laughing, wagging a forefinger at the raccoon's face)!"

INTERVIEW #19

White female

Age 88

White bear, plaid tie

Respondent was lying in a stretcher in the hallway. The bear was brought out to her. She was very sleepy and claimed to the Activities Director that she wasn't feeling too well, and was feeling sad. The Activities Director helped ask the questions.

Activities Coordinator: "*Do you like the bear?*"

I19: "*I love him!*" Cuddles bear, strokes fur, puts against face.

When asked why she liked it, she mentioned that she liked white.

I19: "*He was white, that's what I like.*"

INTERVIEW #20

White female

Age 91

Brown bear

Respondent chose bear herself. When asked why that one,

I20: "*I just liked it.*"

Researcher: "*What do you like about it?*"

I20: "*Everything; he's so nice and soft.*" She mentioned keeping him down on the side of her bed, concerned that he might be stolen.

No name yet, but then on the spot, named it William, after her brother.

Researcher: "*Does he remind you of William your brother?*"

I20: "*No, it's just after him.*" She spoke fondly of her brother, and naming the bear was to her, a tribute to him, a way of "remembering him."

When asked what she liked to do with the bear, she said she really didn't pet or cuddle the bear.

She had "no animals growing up. I had dolls. But I don't think stuffed animals were as popular then."

Respondent was decisive about the fact that the stuffed animal was really more for decoration than any “comfort”. But still named bear—interesting.

Researcher: *“Anything else?”*

I20: *“He’s so nice and soft.”*

INTERVIEW #21

White female

Age 85

White bear

Respondent was sitting in a wheelchair in the hall, and was distressed-sounding when asked how she was by the Activities Coordinator. She complained of a headache, and had her head in her hands. When presented with the bear, her demeanor changed. She smiled.

She hugged the bear to her, rested her face on it.

“Hello! Hello!” She said to the bear, looking down at its face in a tender manner.

Activities Director: *“Does it make you feel better?”*

I21: *“Yes”* she strokes ear and nose.

No name. When asked why she liked the bear,

I21: *“Face and mouth...like a baby.”*

Strokes face frequently

Laughs and cuddles it to her.

I21: *“It cheers me up.”*

She didn’t want the bear taken back to her room

I21: *“No..I want to keep it.”*

Respondent seemed more contented; she didn’t mention her headache the whole time we talked about the bear.

When the Activities Coordinator and I were walking away, she confided to me that “She (the respondent) hasn’t smiled all day before this.”

The bear definitely provoked a strong, happy reaction.

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