

The Rhetoric of Trophy Hunting

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Throughout the past few months, the Trump administration's recent revisions of former President Barack Obama's ban on the importation of elephant trophies into the United States has led to a wider discussion on trophy hunting in general. Two articles from *CNN* and *National Geographic* have addressed this controversy in various ways. *CNN's* article, written by conservationist Amy Dickman (2018), argues that big-game hunting funds conservation programs and prevents illegal poaching. The *National Geographic* article by Michael Paterniti (2017) explores the complexities of the issue and the perspectives of both sides of the big-game controversy. Nevertheless, both authors employ rhetorical strategies to persuade their audiences. When considering the rhetorical strategies of the Aristotelian appeals of ethos and pathos, Paterniti's (2017) article on the complexities of big-game hunting is more rhetorically persuasive than Dickman's (2018) pro-hunting opinion piece.

In *CNN's* opinion piece, "Ending Trophy Hunting Could Actually Be Worse for Endangered Species," long-time conservationist Amy Dickman (2018) claims that people tend to construct their opinions on trophy hunting from emotion and attempts to persuade readers that factually, big-game hunting actually results in positive outcomes for endangered animals. She states that trophy hunting is not responsible for the decline in animal populations and instead that habitat depletion, poaching, and problems with local peoples are the primary reasons why some animal populations have decreased so dramatically in recent years. Dickman (2018) argues that in most African nations in which trophy hunting is legal, hunting practices benefit animals because trophy hunting fees help to maintain wild habitats, deter poaching activities, and fund conservation organizations. She also claims that alternatives to trophy hunting, such as photo-tourism, are not substantial enough to be a reliable source of funds to preserve wildlife areas. Overall, her argument focuses on how the public need not base their opinion of trophy hunting on their emotions rather than on factual evidence, because if they fail to recognize the facts of the situation, it could result in the extinction of certain species (Dickman, 2018).

Both anecdotal and analytical, *National Geographic's* "Should We Kill Animals to Save Them?," by Michael Paterniti (2017), does not stem from a specific stance on the issue but rather delves into the nuances of the big-game controversy through conversations with biologists, conservationists, and hunters themselves as well as through the author's own personal experience on the hunting grounds in Namibia. Paterniti (2017) provides a plethora of pro-hunting perspectives, including how hunting provides jobs, helps local peoples, and funds conservation, helping many animal populations flourish. He also provides insight into how critics of trophy hunting claim there is not enough substantial positive evidence that fees from hunting help conservation and how sometimes hunting indirectly funds corrupt governments rather than conservation. In general, the author displays how hunters believe that big-game hunting fees help provide revenues for conservation, whereas opponents argue that the positives of hunting are overstated (Paterniti, 2017).

While not as persuasive as Paterniti's (2017) article, Dickman's (2018) pro-hunting opinion piece substantially appeals to ethos by making readers aware of her identity as well as through the reputation of *CNN* as a reliable media source. The article begins by describing the author's background, stating, "Amy Dickman is the founder and director of Tanzania's Ruaha Carnivore Project, part of Oxford University's WildCRU. She has worked in African conservation for over 20 years" (Dickman, 2018). This immediately establishes credibility and appeals to ethos because the reader instantly becomes aware that the author has experience in the field of conservation and can provide knowledgeable insights into the big-game hunting discussion. It is an effective strategy to list the author's credentials at the beginning of the article because it catches the audience's attention and influences the reader to continue reading because they believe the information is coming from a reliable source. The publication, *CNN*, also appeals to ethos because most of the public considers *CNN* to be a reliable, mainstream news source about current events.

A subtler appeal to ethos is what Dickman (2018) opens the article with, by stating her identity: "I am a lifelong animal lover and vegetarian for whom the idea of killing animals for fun is repellent, and have committed my career to African wildlife conservation." This basic fact about the author creates a situation in which readers trust her. Her pro-

hunting viewpoint seems more reliable because it is coming from an individual who isn't a hunter herself and who acknowledges the issues with hunting. This makes her seem unbiased on the topic and able to see both sides of the controversy.

This inclusion of the author's identity as a vegetarian and animal lover is also an appeal to pathos, but other than this there are no other effective appeals to emotion in Dickman's (2018) article, making it less rhetorically persuasive as she fails to acknowledge the emotional aspects of the big-game hunting issue. The idea of a pro-trophy hunting conservationist in conflict with her love for animals tugs at the reader's emotions. The reader is able to see how the author's identity clashes with her perspective on big-game hunting: she finds hunting repulsive but also recognizes how trophy funds can help endangered species in the long run. This stirs some respect or admiration for the author for how she is able to overcome her emotions and face the facts, but other than this the author doesn't employ any other rhetorical strategies that appeal to the audience's emotions. Dickman (2018) emphasizes how one shouldn't "respond emotionally" to the issue of trophy hunting, so the article isn't emotionally based, but big-game hunting is an inherently emotional topic. The big-game controversy involves the death of sentient beings and the decline of animal populations; therefore, no matter how logically based an argument is, people will still need to be convinced emotionally on arguments confronting the topic of death. Dickman (2018) could have persuaded her audience more if she had appealed to pathos by more thoroughly describing the tragic consequences the end of trophy hunting could have on animal populations. The author's dependence on ethos caused her to overlook the importance of pathos when discussing such an emotionally charged topic such as big-game hunting and ultimately resulted in a less persuasive article.

Contrasting with Dickman's (2018) piece, *National Geographic's* Michael Paterniti's (2017) combination of both anecdotal and analytical writing styles as well as his use of visuals to present his experiences in Namibia persuade his audience by appealing to both ethos and pathos. There isn't anything specific about the author's identity that makes him seem like an incredibly reliable source; he's a writer for various magazines and a published author. Nonetheless, his implementation of storytelling to describe the scenes he personally witnessed on the hunting grounds in

Namibia gains the author significant credibility. Paterniti (2017) immediately opens up the article with a moving anecdote of his experience: "Elephants kept appearing in wrinkled herds, loitering near the dusty pans, in search of water. With the September temperature pushing a hundred degrees at midday, the pachyderms were moving at the edge of the Kalahari Desert in Namibia...." The author used an anecdotal writing style to let his audience know that he has witnessed trophy hunting first hand, which makes his perspective seem remarkably credible. It informs readers that the author developed his judgments on trophy hunting from what he personally observed on the hunting grounds and from his experiences with hunters and conservationists themselves, rather than from mere hearsay. His use of analytical writing in which he quotes scientists and hunters he has interacted with also appeals to ethos because he does not focus too extensively on his own perspective, but the experiences and remarks of others as well. It shows that his article derives from the viewpoints of others, which makes him seem more reliable and effectively establishes credibility.

Paterniti (2017) employs a combination of storytelling and visuals to encapsulate the activities of the hunting grounds and evoke an emotional response from the audience, effectively appealing to pathos. The emotionally fraught, anecdotal nature of the piece alongside the images of the reservation and animals provided throughout the text allow the audience to envision the author's experiences themselves. Because the author presents the article as a narrative, the article contains vivid and emotional word choices that appeal to the audience's emotions. The visuals of dead animals alongside their hunters and images of creatures roaming the vast savannahs of Africa complement Paterniti's (2017) writing style and help him to persuade his audience emotionally. The visuals help to capture what actually occurs on the hunting grounds. Some photographs depict gruesome images of hunters posing proudly next to the game they have just caught, which show the tragedy behind trophy hunting and appeals to the anti-hunting perspective. But at the same time, Paterniti (2017) also includes images of dead game providing food and resources to the local peoples of Namibia, conveying the positive aspects of trophy hunting. Therefore, the photographs evoke both positive and negative emotions from readers and also help to inform them about both sides' perspectives through imagery. The author's inclusion of visuals

complements his article as the photographs present multiple perspectives just as his article aims at exploring the issue rather than presenting his own opinion.

While Dickman (2018) establishes a substantial amount of ethos by describing her extensive background in conservation, she relies too heavily on ethos and falls short when it comes to convincing her readers emotionally. On the other hand, Paterniti's (2017) piece effectively appeals to both ethos and pathos through the unique nature of his writing style and his use of images, which makes his piece more rhetorically persuasive. While opinion pieces such as Dickman's (2018) can be influential, they usually only present one side of the argument and ignore the complexities of issues. Paterniti's (2017) success in persuading his audience rhetorically through a more moderate article that doesn't adhere to a particular ideology or opinion goes to show that more nuanced articles can be more convincing to readers, as it displays reasonable logic that deciphers the many "gray" areas of modern controversies.

References

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