It is well known that humans have brain capabilities and cognitive abilities that are far more advanced than that of other animals. But considering that we have evolved from animals, wouldn’t be only natural to believe that they have similar or primitive versions of our minds and therefore are capable of some of the intricate cognitive abilities that we possess?

Human cognition vs. animal cognition: how much of a difference is there?

Take the example of emotion. Humans have a wide range of feelings that we express all stemming from four basic emotions: anger, happiness, confusion, and sadness. We’ve all seen the Disney movies that portray animals as having these human emotions and we understand that they actually don’t have those capabilities, but isn’t there SOME truth in this? Don’t some animals show signs of happiness, and even love? Motherly instincts in almost all animals: is this solely instinctive? Or is there emotion behind it? And if it solely instinctual than what differentiates humans?

The basis of my research comes from the study of the famous gorilla, Koko. Koko is an example of how our cognitive abilities have transferred through species. Koko was taught and can use American Sign Language. She is able to communicate with humans conversationally. Koko is also limited though. There are many facilities that humans cannot transfer, but the advancement of Koko has broken many boundaries.

Through my research I want to understand to what degree humans are cognitively different than other animals and how animals can also display many characteristics that would typically seem to be only human characteristics.