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## ATTITUDES TOWARD ANIMAL RESEARCH AMONG CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGISTS

*Carla A. Huskey*

Ethical considerations in the use of animals in biomedical and psychological research has become an increasingly controversial topic of debate. The recent broad media coverage over animal use in experimentation is unmatched and has brought the controversy to the attention of a greater number of people (Dewsbury, 1990). On June 10, 1990 nearly 50,000 people from across the United States participated in a rally in Washington, D.C. to promote the humane treatment of animals, including research animals (Gainesville Sun). Critics of animal research have charged that much research is unnecessary and viable alternatives do exist. They have asserted that research inflicts needless pain and suffering and that scientists involved are concerned more with monetary and professional advantages at the expense of the animals involved (Dewsbury, 1990).

Graham Mitchell, in *Current Contents* (1990), has divided arguments concerning animal research into two clearcut views. Holders of the first view believe in most cases, that animal lives have no moral significance. Once minimal standards have been met such as the avoidance of willful cruelty, or legal requirements to perform experiments have been met, then no further issues are relevant. Basically, proponents of this view hold that humans are unique and have a "moral authority" to use animals as equipment in research. The second view Mitchell presents is that of the "informed antagonist". This view questions the ethics of using animals in experiments and knowingly subjecting them to pain, distress and suffering, in the pursuit of knowledge. Some advocates of this view hold to the Kantian idea that using animals as objects results in a hardness and insensitivity to suffering which could ultimately lead to a cheapening of life and abuse of people. Mitchell also noted that there is a major communications deficit between the research community and the animal-rights community, and a "middle ground" must be reached so that both humans and animals are protected.

Harold Herzog (1990) identified two philosophical positions held by those who question the ethics of using animals in research. The first position was presented by Peter Singer in his publication *Animal Liberation* (1975). Singer argued for the "principle of equality" or "equal consideration of interests". This principle professes that all sentient creatures have equal stakes in their own existence. Further, there is no reason to promote the interests of one species over another, a phenomena he terms "speciesism". Singer asserted that differences such as intelligence, race and gender are not valid reasons for exploiting humans, and thus differences in species is an equally irrelevant reason for exploiting animals. He further argued that the only relevant criterion for discriminating between species is the capacity to suffer. Singer indicated research with animals is permissible only if it was so important that human subjects would also be used.

The second philosophical position identified by Herzog (1990) is the principle of equal rights. The rights position has been argued most notably by Regan (1983, 1985). Typically, this position holds that some creatures have certain fundamental rights such as the right to moral consideration and the right not to be harmed. Animal rights theorists include animals as rights holders. Regan argues that the fundamental criterion for having rights is "inherent value". He claims that sentient creatures, including humans, all have equal inherent value and so are entitled to fundamental rights such as respect and the right not to be harmed. Regan believes there is no justification for animal research even if it would benefit a majority of humans. His foremost reason for abolishing animal research is that scientists treat animals as "renewable resources", not as creatures with "inherent value", so thus are violating the "respect principle".

Herzog (1990) claimed that few psychologists are informed about the intellectual foundations of the animal rights movement. He noted the scientific community often dismisses animal rights activists as "intellectual lightweights". However, Dewsbury (1990) noted that the controversy over animal rights is nearly as old as the field of psychology as a whole, and both sides of the issue have been responsibly debated by psychologists throughout its history. For example, prototypical psychologist William James was very concerned about questions of ethics and openly condemned some reported animal uses as "revolting excesses" (p. 318). T. Wesley Mills, founder of the first Association for the Study of Comparative Psychology, is an example at the opposite end of the debate. In an address to the American Humane Association in 1892, Mills proposed that "it will be wise for all societies with a humane object to think well before interfering with scientific investigation of any kind" (p. 319).

Little research has addressed the attitudes of contemporary psychologists on issues related to the animal rights controversy. Gallup and Beckstead (1988) surveyed undergraduates' attitudes about animal rights. They concluded their results indicated that opposition to animal research had not yet reached substantial proportions among most college students at the State University of New York at Albany. However, a majority of their subjects were concerned about pain and suffering in research animals (76%), and most believed that more regulations were needed governing the use of animals in research (57%).

The present research examined the attitudes of a national sample of contemporary professional psychologists concerning the use of animals in research. A survey was developed similar to that used by Gallup and Beckstead (1988). Additionally, psychologists were asked about their agreement with the two fundamental philosophical positions outlined by Herzog (1990): the principle of equality and the principle of specific rights.

## **Method**

### **Subjects**

Psychologists holding non-student, full-membership status in the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Psychological Society (APS) were surveyed by mail. Because of the probability that the APA would have a larger percentage of its members in the human service fields, psychologists from both the APA and APS were surveyed. The initial sample consisted of 800 members of APA and 100 members of APS randomly selected from the most current membership directories for each organization, the Directory of the American Psychological Association (1989) and the Membership Directory of the American Psychological Society (1990). Sixty-four surveys were returned from APA members due to incorrect addresses and two from APS members. It was possible to remail eleven surveys with corrected addresses to APA members. The final sample consisted of 354 returned APA surveys and 55 APS surveys.

### **Materials and Procedure**

An anonymous questionnaire was used to maximize the return rate and the chances that subjects would be comfortable expressing their true opinions. Thus, specific information regarding geographic area, sex of subject, education, etc., was not available. However, subjects were asked to voluntarily indicate their area of specialization.

A questionnaire modeled after Gallup and Beckstead's (1988) questionnaire was developed (see Appendix A). Subjects indicated their extent of agreement, using a 1 to 5 rating scale, with questions asking about issues related to the use of animals in research. On this scale, a rating of 1 indicated "strongly agree," 2 indicated "agree," 3 reflected "neither agree nor disagree," 4 indicated "disagree," and 5 reflected "strongly disagree." Since Gallup and Beckstead made no distinction between attitudes toward use of animals in biomedical and

psychological research, the present questionnaire was divided into three sections: general issues, issues related to biomedical, and issues related to psychological research. A section was also added asking about the extent to which subjects agreed with two fundamental philosophical positions: the principle of equality, defined as "From an ethical point of view, all species should be treated equally;" and the principle of specific rights, defined as "All species have the right to be treated with respect and the right not to be harmed."

Numerous other modifications were made in Gallup and Beckstead's questionnaire to make the items either more objective and/or more clearly referring to either psychological or biomedical research. An item asking about the extent of agreement with the statement "I would rather see humans die or suffer from disease than to see animals used in research" was restated in more positive terms and included as a separate item under both the biomedical and the psychological research sections (i.e., "I think biomedical research with animals is justified if it reduces human death and suffering from accidents and/or diseases;" "I think psychological research with animals is justified if it reduces human suffering from accidents and/or diseases"). The statement "Animal research cannot be justified and should be stopped" was restated as "some...is unjustified and should be curtailed" and was also included under both the biomedical and psychological research sections. Similarly, the statement "There are plenty of viable alternatives to the use of animals in biomedical and behavioral research" was changed into two items, one asking about psychological and one asking about biomedical research, and restated as "There are viable alternatives..." Two questions were dropped. One asked whether the subject had seriously considered becoming a vegetarian to save animal lives and the other asked about the extent of agreement with the statement that most laboratory animals were treated better than many humans. Also, the word "very" was deleted from an item asking about concern "about pain and suffering in animals." Moreover, the item indicating "animals should be granted the same rights as humans" was dropped since it was felt that the two philosophical questions included in the present study more adequately assessed this issue. Finally, a question asking about the "need for more regulations governing the use of animals in research" was left unchanged, but an additional item was added asking about the need for "more effective enforcement" of these regulations.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Nature of Samples**

The return rate for both professional organizations was noteworthy. Forty-eight percent of APA members and 55 percent of APS members returned questionnaires within two months.

Although the total number of returned questionnaires was 409, 20 of the subjects did not indicate a specialty area. Subjects indicating an area of specialization were classified into one of four categories: basic experimental, which included the areas of sensation and perception, animal learning, comparative, physiological, and experimental psychology, and behavioral pharmacology; human services, which included the areas of clinical, counseling and school psychology; other research, which included personality, developmental, cognitive and social psychology; and other applied, which included industrial, organizational, consumer and environmental psychologists. The percentages of professionals representing these different areas in the two professional organizations are presented in Table 1. It is apparent that the APA sample was dominated by human service psychologists (69%) and that the APS sample had larger percentages of both basic experimental (19% vs. 7%) and other research psychologists (44% vs. 13%). In general, it was hypothesized that since basic experimental psychologists were the most likely to have actually used, or worked with colleagues who have used animals in research, they will have the most positive attitudes about animal research.

## Questionnaire Results

All 19 items on the questionnaire were analyzed with 2 x 4 analyses of variance (APA vs. APS x Area of Specialization). There were no significant interactions, but significant main effects were found for both APA versus APS and area of specialization.

Table 1. Specialty Areas in APA and APS.

	APA (n=337)	APS (n=52)
Basic Experimental	25/7%	10/19%
Human Services	234/69%	13/25%
Other Research	43/13%	23/44%
Other Applied	35/10%	6/12%

Table 2 shows the average ratings for all items given by members of APA versus APS. Overall, there were more instances of agreement than disagreement between the two groups of professional psychologists (i.e., similar ratings on 13 of the 19 items). However, as expected the APS, with its larger percentage of basic experimental and smaller percentage of human service psychologists, showed the most pro-animal research attitudes. For example, APA members were neutral with regard to the need for more regulations and agreed that more enforcement of regulations governing the use of animals in research was needed, while APS members disagreed that more regulations are needed and were neutral with regard to the need for more enforcement of regulations. Additionally, APA members were neutral on the existence of viable alternatives to biomedical animal research, while APS members disagreed that there are viable alternatives to biomedical animal research. It is also noteworthy that APA members agreed with the principle of specific rights while APS members were neutral. APA members also agreed that some biomedical animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed while APS members gave this item a more neutral rating.

Significant main effects for area of specialization occurred on 10 of the 19 items. Table 3 shows the average ratings by these different groups of psychologists on all items. As expected, in every instance, the basic experimental psychologists had the most positive attitudes toward animal research. Also, in general, the human service psychologists appeared to have the most questions concerning the use of animals in research. For example, basic experimental psychologists agreed most strongly with the value of basic animal research and with the possibility that many important questions cannot be answered by doing experiments on people. They also disagreed with the need for more regulations while the other areas were more neutral regarding this issue. However, the human service psychologists agreed that more enforcement of the regulations was needed. Additionally, basic experimental psychologists disagreed that viable alternatives exist to using animals in biomedical research, while the other areas were essentially neutral about this issue. The experimental research psychologists were also neutral regarding the possibility that some biomedical animal research may be unjustified while the psychologists in the other areas agreed with this statement. Similarly, the basic experimental psychologists disagreed that viable alternatives exist with regard to the use of animals in psychological research while all other areas gave essentially neutral ratings to this item. However, it is noteworthy that none of the psychologists disagreed with the statement that some psychological research is unjustified and should be curtailed. In fact, the basic experimentalists were neutral on this issue and the other three areas actually agreed with it.

**Table 2. Average Ratings APA Versus APS Members.**

<u>Items</u>	<u>APA</u>	<u>APS</u>	<u>F Value</u>	<u>P Level</u>
<u>General</u>				
1. Animal research has no bearing on peoples' problems.	4.39	4.64	2.27	.08
2. Intrinsic interest is sufficient justification.	2.54	2.04	3.36	.07
3. Concern about pain and suffering in animals.	1.67	1.64	.25	.62
4. More regulations needed.	2.85	3.58	9.62	.002**
5. More enforcement needed.	2.40	3.00	7.55	.006**
<u>Biomedical Research</u>				
1. Animal research justified in reduced suffering.	1.60	1.39	.00	.99
2. New surgical procedures and drugs first tested on animals.	1.77	1.60	.00	.96
3. Important breakthroughs are from animal research.	1.64	1.42	.03	.87
4. Viable alternatives exist.	3.14	3.68	9.45	.002**
5. Most biomedical research is necessary and valid.	2.45	2.27	.05	.83
6. Some biomedical animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed.	2.23	2.51	4.20	.04*
<u>Psychological Research</u>				
1. Animal research justified if reduces suffering.	1.78	1.52	.03	.86
2. No alternative to animal research since many questions not answerable with research of people.	2.34	2.10	.08	.78
3. Important breakthroughs are from animal research.	2.13	1.87	.52	.47
4. Viable alternatives exist.	2.88	3.35	8.65	.004**
5. Most psychological research is necessary and valid.	2.67	2.65	.06	.81
6. Some psychological animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed.	2.27	2.39	.85	.36
<u>Philosophical Positions</u>				
1. All species should be treated equally.	3.38	4.02	3.11	.08
2. Rights to respect and not be harmed.	2.44	3.30	11.32	.0008***

Note: All ratings made using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) rating scale.

Lastly, the ratings with regard to the philosophical issues showed similar patterns. All areas disagreed with the principle of equality except for the human service psychologists who gave this item a neutral rating. Not surprisingly, the basic experimental psychologists most strongly disagreed with this position. On the other hand, with regard to the principle of specific rights, the human service psychologists agreed with it while the other three groups gave it a more neutral rating.

Although there were more areas of disagreement than agreement among the psychologists in different specialties, there were also numerous instances of clear agreement: all disagreed that research on animals has no bearing on problems confronting people, all were concerned about pain and suffering in animals, and all agreed that both biomedical and psychological research with animals is justified if it reduces human suffering. Both groups also agreed that important biomedical and psychological breakthroughs have occurred as a consequence of animal research. Additionally, all clearly agreed that new surgical procedures and drugs should be tested on animals before they are used with people.

**Table 3. Average Ratings by Psychologists with Different Areas of Specialization.**

<u>Items</u>	<u>Basic Exp.</u>	<u>Human Serv.</u>	<u>Other Res.</u>	<u>Other Appl.</u>	<u>F Value</u>	<u>P Value</u>
<u>General</u>						
1. Animal research has no bearing on people's problems.	4.80	4.40	4.30	4.41	1.75	.19
2. Intrinsic interest is sufficient justification.	1.80	2.58	2.44	2.49	3.32	.02*
3. Concern about pain and suffering in animals.	1.63	1.63	1.53	2.07	.63	.60
4. More regulations needed.	3.74	2.76	3.12	3.13	3.22	.02*
5. More enforcement needed.	3.14	2.35	2.52	2.64	2.63	.04*
<u>Biomedical Research</u>						
1. Animal research justified if reduces suffering.	1.20	1.66	1.46	1.56	1.70	.17
2. New surgical procedures and drugs first tested on animals.	1.29	1.85	1.70	1.66	1.58	.19
3. Important breakthroughs are from animal research.	1.26	1.66	1.55	1.70	1.62	.18
4. Viable alternatives exist.	3.74	3.13	3.19	3.30	3.08	.03*
5. Most biomedical research is necessary and valid.	2.12	2.48	2.39	2.40	.78	.50
6. Some biomedical animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed.	2.67	2.24	2.14	2.39	3.20	.02*
<u>Psychological Research</u>						
1. Animal research justified if reduces suffering.	1.31	1.87	1.55	1.71	1.55	.20
2. No alternative to animal research since many questions not answerable with research on people.	1.46	2.43	2.20	2.48	5.21	.001***
3. Important breakthroughs are from animal research.	1.54	2.16	2.15	2.12	2.42	.07
4. Viable alternatives exist.	3.60	2.85	2.88	3.03	4.92	.002***
5. Most psychological research is necessary and valid.	2.17	2.70	2.77	2.70	2.42	.07
6. Some psychological animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed.	2.69	2.25	2.17	2.34	3.33	.02*
<u>Philosophical Positions</u>						
1. All species should be treated equally.	4.30	3.25	3.72	3.65	3.30	.02*
2. Rights to respect and not be harmed.	3.47	2.36	2.63	2.87	5.24	.001***

Note: All ratings made using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) rating scale; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Comparison with Gallup and Beckstead's Results

A comparison of ratings of psychologists with Gallup and Beckstead's (1988) undergraduate students on the six overlapping items is presented in Table 4. Not surprisingly, it appeared the psychologists disagreed more than the students with the statement that animal research has no bearing on problems confronting people, and agreed more strongly with the statement on the value of basic animal research. It is noteworthy that all psychologists seemed to be as concerned as students about pain and suffering in animals. On the other hand, students appeared to support more regulations governing the use of animals in research, while members of APA were neutral and APS members disagreed with this statement. Psychologists also agreed more strongly with the value of trying out surgical procedures and drugs on animals than did the students. All students and psychologists, however, agreed with the statement that some animal research is necessary since many important questions cannot be answered by doing experiments on people.

**Table 4. Comparison of Average Ratings of Present Results With Gallup and Beckstead's (1988) Results.**

	<u>Gallup and Beckstead</u>	<u>APA</u>	<u>APS</u>
Research on animals has little to no bearing on problems confronting people.*	3.81	4.39	4.64
An intrinsic interest in the animal for its own sake is ample justification for doing animal research.*	2.99	2.54	2.04
+I am concerned about pain and suffering in animals.	1.98	1.67	1.64
We need more regulations governing the use of animals in research.*	2.30	2.85	3.58
New surgical procedures and experimental drugs should be tested on animals before they are used on people.	2.22	1.77	1.60
Since many important questions cannot be answered by doing experiments on people, we are left with no alternative but to do animal research.	2.43	2.34	2.10

\*Significant differences APA versus APS  
+word "very" deleted in present survey

#### **Subjective Comments**

A wide range of comments were made on the questionnaires (total = 52). They ran the gamut from clearly supporting animal research (23%), to supporting animal research within ethical limits (56%), to neutral opinions (6%), to being clearly against animal research (15%). The majority of psychologists making a comment supported animal research, but with ethical limits. Many of these psychologists emphasized the necessity and appropriateness of animal research, but stressed the importance of weighing the costs in terms of animal pain and suffering. Some noted that in many cases, research is trivial and is cruel and destructive. Those clearly in support of animal research noted the superiority of the human race and several commented on the "fanaticism" and misguided ways of the animal rights groups. Psychologists clearly against animal research expressed the importance of all species in the preservation of our natural world and emphasized that human beings do not have any ethical right to harm non-human animals to benefit the human species.

#### **Conclusions**

The results of this survey demonstrated that most psychologists do not see the issues related to the use of animals in biomedical or psychological research as representing a simple, "all animal research is good" or "all animal research is bad" issue. All psychologists across all areas agreed that there are justifiable uses of animals in biomedical and psychological research. However, all were also concerned about pain and suffering in research animals and the vast majority of psychologists agreed that some biomedical and psychological animal research is unjustified and should be curtailed. Moreover, there was a large number of psychologists, especially in the human service fields, who were also concerned about animals' right not to be harmed and agreed that more effective enforcement of regulations governing the use of animals in research is needed. Thus, it appears that many psychologists, in the tradition of William James, continue to remain concerned about the use of animals in research and to raise ethical questions. Moreover, for a small sub-group of psychologists to dismiss everyone who raises questions about the use of animals in research as misguided extremists is for them to



dismiss the views of a majority of their colleagues in psychology and to perhaps also show the very irrationality that they accuse their opponents of displaying.

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