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Psychosocial Aspects of Selecting Animal Species for Physical Abuse

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ABSTRACT: Identification of psychosocial factors in selecting animals for abuse is relevant to mankind's relationship to the world of animals and to the psychology of human aggression. A major study of animal abuse involving 152 male subjects resulted in the identification of 23 subjects who have histories of substantial animal abuse. In attempting to identify psychosocial factors that may affect recurrent abusers' choices of animals to mistreat, findings are presented under four thematic questions: (1) Are animals selected for abuse because they are perceived to be dangerous? (2) Is there a relationship between method of abuse and type of animal selected for cruelty? (3) Are some types of animals more likely than others to evoke predisposing attitudes and abusive behaviors? (4) What kind of relationships do abusers have with the animals they choose to mistreat?

KEYWORDS: psychiatry, animal abuse, human behavior

Psychosocial aspects of animal abuse have received little scientific inquiry. Childhood cruelty to animals has been suggested as a behavioral prodrome of violence against people, either as a single behavior [1] or as part of a triad, the other elements being persistent enuresis and firesetting [2-6]. Despite the burgeoning literature on childhood cruelty to animals as a signal of poorly controlled aggression, repeated literature searches by the authors failed to produce any articles on psychological factors involved in selecting particular kinds of animals for physical abuse. Yet the identification of such factors is relevant to mankind's relationship to the world of animals and to the psychology of human aggression. The purpose of this inquiry is to discuss findings from a major study of animal abuse that suggest psychosocial factors operative in selecting what types of animals individuals choose to mistreat physically.

Golden-haired marmosets are not likely to be targeted for abuse, simply because they do not exist in the United States except in zoos. A species that is well populated, lives in close proximity to people, and is easily subdued and captured will be more vulnerable to abuse than a species that is not so available to human hands and weapons. Differential availability, then, accounts for some of the variability in rates of abuse for different species.

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Social attitudes about various species may also influence an individual's choice of an animal to abuse. Kellert and Berry proffered the following as factors that determine to what extent an animal is valued: aesthetic appeal of the animal; intelligence of the animal; phylogenetic relatedness to humans; size of the animal; economic value of the animal; perceived dangerousness to humans; likelihood of causing property damage; cultural and historical importance; relationship to human society (for example, pet, farm animal, game, pest); predatory tendencies; skin texture and morphological structure; and means of locomotion (for example, swimming, flying, walking, crawling) [7].

In a literature review and discussion of social attitudes toward different animals, Kellert postulated five factors that may influence valuation of an animal when socioeconomic interests compete with interests in animal preservation: (1) aesthetic value (for example, butterfly versus slug); (2) phylogenetic closeness to humans (for example, bear versus jelly fish); (3) presumed threat of the animal to human health and productivity (for example, cricket versus cockroach); (4) cultural and historical importance of the animal (for example, American bald eagle versus vulture); and (5) political and actual economic value of the species (for example, oysters versus starfish) [8].

Although an individual may be influenced by cultural attitudes to select a particular animal for abuse, he might just as well be directed by more idiosyncratic factors such as symbolic significance of the animal which is peculiar to him.

The present discussion is based largely on findings from a study of prisoners and nonprisoners, particularly findings of those subjects who gave histories of a pattern of substantial animal abuse in childhood and who were typically impulsively and recurrently aggressive to people [9,10]. One should not generalize and conclude that all abusers are inclined to select animal victims in the same way as these subjects. For example, different psychological mechanisms are operative in psychotically disturbed abusers [11]. Neither should one assume that attitudes of these abusers toward particular animals necessarily correspond to predominant cultural attitudes toward these same animals. Nonetheless, mention will be made where cultural attitudes and perceptions appear to be congruent with those of abusers.

After briefly describing the original study of animal abuse, we will organize this discussion around four unifying themes with the objective of identifying psychosocial factors that may influence an individual's choice of animal to abuse:

- Are animals selected for abuse or killing because they are a menace to people or because they have harmed or threatened the individual abuser?
- Is there a relationship between method of cruelty and type of animal chosen to abuse, and is an animal abused because of attributes that render it especially suitable to the type of abuse that the individual wants to perpetrate?
- Are some types of animals more likely than others to evoke predisposing attitudes and abusive behaviors?
- What kind of relationships do substantial abusers have with the animals they abuse?

Some overlap in observations and inferences made within the context of each thematic inquiry is unavoidable.

Method of Study

Since methodology was presented fully in an earlier report [9], it is merely summarized here. To obtain an ample sample of diffusely, recurrently aggressive subjects, the populations of two prisons were selected for study: The U.S. Penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut, and the U.S. Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. Thirty-two aggressive prisoners, eighteen moderately aggressive prisoners, and fifty-two nonaggressive prisoners were included. In addition, fifty nonprisoner men were randomly selected in New Haven, Connecticut, and Topeka, Kansas [9].

Prison subjects, aggressive, moderately aggressive, and nonaggressive, tended to be in their 30s and most were of urban origin. All inmates were men. The nonprisoner subjects were randomly selected in urban, small town, and suburban areas in or near New Haven, Connecticut, and Topeka, Kansas. Adult males were selected to ensure a comparable nonprisoner sample [9].

A standardized interview schedule with over 440 closed and openended questions was administered to each subject. Subjects were asked about 16 specific types of animal cruelties in childhood and adolescence. Other activities inquired about were involvements with family pets, training animals, raising livestock, trapping, hunting, attending dog, cock or bull fights, and miscellaneous activities such as horseback riding. Subjects were asked about sexual play with animals, injury to the subject by an animal, and psychotic perceptions of animals. Subjects who acknowledged abusive behaviors were further asked what type or types of animals were abused, how old the subject was, how often he abused, what his motivation was, what the animal's resulting condition was, what his feelings about it afterwards were, if other people were involved, and over how many years he abused animals.

Levels of aggressiveness were based on scores on a ten-point scale that rated frequency and severity of aggressive physical behaviors and threats made by the subject while incarcerated. Ratings were done by prison counselors who knew and followed inmates. These ratings were not shared with interviewers until interviews were finished, and they were never shared with the subjects. In addition to ratings of observed and reported violent behaviors, self-reports of violent behaviors were included in the final assignment of level of aggressiveness.

The first report of this study demonstrated a statistically significant association between the recurrently aggressive prisoners and frequency of reported abuses in comparison with all other groups, prisoners and nonprisoners [9]. A second report, which presented descriptive accounts of the extent and quality of abusive behaviors, suggested an association between a prevalent pattern of abuse and the group of aggressive prisoners [10].

Twenty-three subjects gave histories of "substantial cruelty to animals" which was defined as a pattern of deliberately, repeatedly, and unnecessarily hurting vertebrate animals in a manner likely to cause serious injury. Sixteen of these belonged to the aggressive prisoner group, four to the nonaggressive prisoner sample, and three to the nonprisoner sample. Most of the nonaggressive prisoner subjects with a history of substantial abuse in childhood were also violent as adults, although not sufficiently violent to be so classified. Similarly the three nonprisoner subjects also had histories of dangerous assaults or fights. In comparison with nonaggressive prisoners and nonprisoner subjects, abusive aggressive subjects abused more animal species, typically including cats or dogs, and perpetrated a greater variety of cruel acts [10].

Dangerous Qualities of Animals

One might think that those animals that are manifestly harmful or dangerous to people would be singled out for abuse or extermination. A national attitudinal survey by Kellert and Berry found that the six most disliked animals are associated with injury or death [7]. Data from the present study indicated that men with a pattern of abusing animals in childhood did not preferentially select dangerous species. Even when subjects hated or despised a particular type of animal, dangerousness of the animal was not offered as a reason for their prejudice. Though one subject victimized water moccasins, the other two who killed snakes did not target venomous species. Horses, cows, pigs, rats, birds, small game, fish, frogs, salamanders, dogs, cats, lizards, snakes, and turtles were all abused, and these animals are not generally known for being dangerous to people.

A few of the many reported abusive acts were in response to an attack by the animal. Several subjects who were bitten by a dog struck the animal in swift retaliation. But these cases constituted only a tiny minority of abusive acts, and even these subjects did not develop

a prejudice against dogs. Curiously, most subjects who acknowledged some fear of dogs in early childhood belonged to the aggressive group, whereas most subjects who had been bitten by a dog were nonaggressive prisoners or nonprisoners. Fear of dogs was not associated with having been bitten.

Even harmless creatures can be maligned. Features of the animal's behavior and anatomy can invite projections of malicious feelings onto the animal-victim [12]. The point to be made here is that animals were not selected for abuse simply because they were *known* to be dangerous to people or to the individual abuser.

Harmless vertebrate animals are handier, safer, and more plentiful than dangerous vertebrates. Differential opportunity is presumably an important factor. Most predators, for example, are by nature reclusive, solitary, and uncommon. More pertinent to the psychological understanding of victimizing nondangerous animals, we identified nine motivations for abuse, based largely on expressed statements of abusers: (1) to control an animal; (2) to retaliate against an animal; (3) to satisfy a prejudice against a species or breed; (4) to express aggression through an animal; (5) to enhance one's own aggressiveness; (6) to shock people for amusement; (7) to retaliate against another person; (8) to displace hostility from a person to an animal; and (9) nonspecific sadism. Each of these motivations was previously defined and illustrated with examples [9]. The point to be made here is that dangerousness of the animal was not needed for a subject to act on most of these motivations. For the recurrently aggressive subjects of this study, the objective of cruelty and gratuitous killing was not to create a safer world for people.

Methods of Abuse

Physical or behavioral attributes may lend an animal to a particular method of abuse. Sociocultural attitudes may also suggest suitability of an animal to a certain type of abuse. Considering the act together with the animal may help to identify psychosocial factors in the selection of animal victims.

Table 1 illustrates differential patterns of abuse for various animals. The table lists only those specific abuses that were reported by more than three subjects. Types of abuses re-

TABLE 1—*Animal abuse, category and method.*^a

| Method of Abuse | Category of Animal Abused | | | | | | Total |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------|------|------------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| | Large Farm Animals | Dogs | Cats | Small Pets | Small Wild Animals | Other | |
| 1. Dismembered | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| 2. Exploded | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 3. Cut or stabbed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 4. Burned or electrocuted | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 9 |
| 5. Shot | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 2 | 14 |
| 6. Broke bones | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| 7. Thrown from height | 0 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| 8. Beat | 3 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 18 |
| 9. Stoned | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 11 |
| 10. Entered into fights | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 11. Other abuses | 0 | 6 | 11 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 29 |
| Total | 4 | 27 | 33 | 4 | 45 | 7 | |

^aThis table illustrates that the vertebrates which were abused by the greatest variety of methods of cruelties were cats, dogs, and small, wild animals. Though numbers are too small for statistical analysis, the table suggests differential patterns of abuse for various classes of animals.

ported less frequently are aggregated under "other abuses." Likewise, only those classes of animals that were abused by more than one method and by more than two subjects are specified in the table. Animals not abused by more than one method and by more than two subjects are included collectively under "other." Figures under each category of animal represent the number of subjects who abused animals of this class by the methods indicated. In some cases a single subject contributed to several entries. The table does not reflect the numerous isolated acts done by subjects who did not report a pattern of recurrent, substantial abuse.

More subjects reported *beating*, *stoning*, and *shooting* than any other method of abuse. Cats, dogs, and small wild animals were abused by more subjects and in more ways in comparison with small pets and large farm animals. In the discussion that follows, a relationship is suggested between methods of abuse and types of animals selected for abuse.

Dismemberment involved only small animals with parts or extremities that could be easily removed: wings from birds, legs from rodents and amphibians, tails from lizards and snakes, heads from turtles, and testes from a raccoon. One subject excised hearts from tadpoles. The many subjects, aggressive and nonaggressive, who tore wings from insects are not included in the table of abuses to vertebrates. It is easier to dismember small animals in comparison with larger creatures such as dogs or horses.

All animals abused by dismemberment were wild. No subject admitted dismembering goldfish, gerbils, parakeets, or other small animals that are domesticated. Since dismemberment is one of the more severe cruelties, categorical selection of wild animals is remarkable.

Animals that were *exploded* were also small and wild: rodents, small game, and amphibians. Two subjects "caught" fish by detonating explosives in ponds. One subject put a cat in a microwave oven, but it was unclear whether he knew the result would be explosion of the animal. This abuse, therefore, was classified as "burning." Small, wild animals were also preferentially targeted for *indiscriminate shooting*.

Several factors may be operative in the selection of small, wild animals for dismemberment, explosion, and purposeless killing. Small, wild animals are not highly valued by society, they are owned by no one, and social prohibitions against their abuse are weak to nonexistent. The ability to empathize with animals that seem far removed from the world of people is not great, especially for individuals whose capacity to empathize is limited. This limited capacity to empathize with such animals may allow the expression of sadistic impulses among violence prone individuals.

Kellert previously proffered an explanation for the lack of moral consideration that is generally paid to invertebrates. This explanation may pertain to small, wild animals that are perceived to be useless:

For most people, moral worth is based on presumptions regarding the animal's capacity for experiencing pain or thought . . . i.e., the animal as an individual capable of eliciting empathy. A moral perspective of animals is, thus, related to a concern for the creature's presumed ability to suffer. If the animal is not perceived as an experiencing being, most people feel little or no obligation to safeguard the welfare of these animals.³

Cruelty to small animals may represent an attempt to master feelings by an active, externalizing process. Small animals seem safe because their ability to counterattack is nil. By contrast, attempting to dismember an alligator would prove technically difficult and dangerous.

The small size of an animal may predispose it to differential treatment, because a small animal can creep, slither, crawl, or fly into a person's space without his awareness. A mouse

³S. R. Kellert, "Social and Perceptual Factors in Species Preservation," unpublished manuscript.

that skitters under doors and furniture, darting in and out of awareness, is more disarming than the same animal well illuminated and contained in a glass terrarium.

Animals that were *set on fire* were cats and small wild animals, including rodents. One subject burned snakes with an accelerant, but with this exception, animals that were set aflame were furry. The flammable nature of fur renders these animals physically suitable for burning. Fire is a weapon of destruction which has been used in the expression of prejudicial hatred, and cats and rodents were common objects of prejudice.

Breaking bones was another form of abuse whereby some animals were victimized more than others. One half of the subjects who fractured bones selected cats for this cruelty (three out of six). Cat bones are of an easily breakable size, not too small and not too large. One subject broke a dog's leg bone, presumably without foreknowledge that this would be the specific injury resulting from throwing a brick at the dog. Another subject "snapp(ed)" chickens' necks, not to leave them with broken or dislocated vertebrae, but to kill them. Conversely, broken bones were the end result intended for cats that were abused in this manner. Though numbers were small, cats seem to have been singled out for this cruelty.

Most of the animals *thrown from high elevations* were cats (70%; seven out of ten). Cats are small enough to be carried and thrown, but it is curious that no one admitted throwing a smaller species of animal from heights. Cats are known for their ability to reposition themselves in midair and land safely from a fall of a few yards. But dropping cats from water towers, bridges, and high buildings is tantamount to killing them. By now it should be appreciated that cats were disproportionately selected for several of the more extreme methods of cruelty. More will be said later of cruelty to cats.

In contrast to dismemberment, explosion, and burning involving predominantly wild animals, *beatings* were more commonly inflicted on domestic animals that were to some measure already under the subject's control. In the case of dogs, livestock, and equids, beatings served to gain more control over the animal. Dogs were beaten as an adjunct in training to exact obedience or to promote aggressiveness. Two bludgeoned snakes to death. Several beat cats, not to train or control, but to kill them.

Only three subjects *applied chemical irritants* to animals. One put dry ice on live fish to cause them to suffer. Two rubbed irritants on dogs' anuses to punish the animals for offensive behaviors. Together with the subject who repeatedly kicked his dog in the testicles, these subjects directed hurtful acts to "sexual" parts. Although the expressed motive was to punish their dog, the animal's misbehavior may also have provided an excuse for acting upon a sadistic impulse to hurt the dog's perineal area.

All four subjects who repeatedly entered animals in *fight*s used their pet dogs for this form of entertainment. A few subjects tied cats' tails together, but there was a striking difference in the quality of the subjects' interest in dog fights compared with cat fights. Subjects who staged cat fights wanted to see the cats destroy one another. They did not hope for one cat to emerge the victor. Those who entered pet dogs in fights wanted very much to see their own dog win. They experienced vicarious pleasure and pride in their dog's aggressiveness and ultimate victory.

Attitudes Toward Particular Species

All 16 aggressive criminals who had histories of substantial animal cruelties in childhood abused cats or dogs. There were enough acts of cruelties against cats and dogs to permit some observations and inferences about attitudes toward these two species in particular. Cruelties to invertebrates, specifically plucking wings off insects, were even more common, reported by about one third of all 152 subjects interviewed. Many people do not regard invertebrates as sentient creatures, so they do not regard pulling off their wings to be nearly as cruel as dismembering vertebrates.

Cats

A greater variety of cruelties involved feline victims in comparison with all other types of animals. Fifteen different types of cruelties inflicted on cats were acknowledged by subjects who abused animals substantially. Most subjects who abused cats used several different methods. The number of different cruelties to cats by different subjects totalled thirty-three. Cats, more than any other species, were thrown from high places (70%). Cats comprised one third of the furry animals that were burned or electrocuted.

Breaking bones involved cats more than any other type of animal. One half of the subjects (50%) who reported breaking an animal's bones selected cats for this cruelty. The only animals to have their tails tied together were cats. Injuries inflicted upon cats were often severe and many cruelties resulted in death: beating, exploding in microwave oven, shooting for target practice, drowning, throwing into an incinerator. Other acts were likely lethal, although death was not explicitly mentioned as the animal's known resulting condition: setting on fire with an accelerant, running over with a car, throwing in front of moving cars, and throwing from bridges and high buildings. Merely totalling all types of cruelties perpetrated by all subjects would not provide the total number of cats that were severely abused or killed, because some subjects had abused cats by a specific method numerous times. A few estimated having killed about 50 cats.

The high incidence of cat abuse in the present study compares with results of an earlier study of 346 male patients admitted to an inpatient psychiatric service of a naval hospital [13]. All but 1 of the 18 subjects who had repeatedly tortured cats or dogs abused cats, and the number who had tortured cats was nearly triple the number who had tortured dogs. Although most studies of animal abuse in the literature involve small samples and do not systematically identify the types of animals victimized, the impression is that cat abuse is recorded more often than the abuse of any other species.

As was suggested above, physical features of cats render them suitable for some specific methods of abuse. Cats have long flexible tails that can be joined together. Fur burns. Their bones are easily broken. Cats are small enough to be carried about and dropped from heights. But physical features alone do not adequately explain the high incidence and severity of cat abuse or the considerable prejudice that abusers harbor against cats.

Cultural prejudice against cats appears to be prevalent. In a national survey, Kellert and Berry demonstrated that despite their commonality and affiliation with people, cats are not as widely appreciated as dogs, horses, robins, and other animals [7]. The marketability of books on black humor pertaining to cats would further suggest a cultural anti-cat prejudice. Popular superstitions regarding cats identify these creatures as having evil influences. Numerous phrases attest to negative attitudes against cats (for example, "cat o' nine tails," "there is more than one way to skin a cat," "enough room to swing a cat," "fighting like Kilkenny cats"). Our country's European heritage recalls an era when cats were burned by the thousands because they were believed to be witches' familiars and vessels of the devil [14,15].

The authors do not suggest that cats are loathed universally, or predominantly in the United States. Ancient Egyptians deified cats [14]. Today in the United States, cats are one of the commonest of indoor and outdoor pets. The bonding of many adults and children to domesticated felines is well known.

Despite the popularity of cats among many people, others hold an identifiable prejudice against cats. Presumably most people who dislike these animals do not act on their prejudice by deliberately injuring and killing cats. Results of the present study indicated that impulsively aggressive men disproportionately acknowledged cat hatred and cat cruelty.

Subjects who abused and killed cats typically admitted prejudice against these animals. They described cats as spooky or eerie. Indeed, cats, even though domesticated, seem inscrutable and are therefore suitable for projection of unacceptable feelings [13]. One subject

likened his cat hatred to his prejudice against people of another race. Several subjects had mothers who hated cats and identified them as repositories for negative projections.

Although none of the subjects identified cats as symbolic of evil women, a "bad mother," or the female genitalia, the possibility of consciously or unconsciously associating cats with women ought to be considered in aggressive men whose sexual and aggressive impulses may be fused at a primitive level, poorly differentiated, and poorly modulated (see, for example, Ref 16). Although empirical evidence is scant, Revitch suggested that cat hatred and abuse are associated with compulsive sexually motivated murderous attacks against women [17,18]. In the present study, the number of men who admitted rape was small, so an association between sexual assault and cat abuse was not established.

Finally, it should be noted that none of the 32 aggressive prisoners and none of the 23 subjects who substantially abused animals admitted having owned pet cats. Aggressive subjects in particular expressed no present or past positive emotional attachment to cats.

Dogs

Second only to cats, dogs were abused by more subjects, in more ways, and with greater frequency than any other vertebrate species. Like cats, dogs are rather commonplace and available, but here the comparison ends. Cruelties against dogs were not associated with prejudicial feelings against dogs. None of the subjects admitted a categorical hatred of dogs.

Stoning, beating, and entering in dog fights comprised most of the abuses to dogs. Injuries from stonings and beatings were seldom severe, and dogs entered into fights had a fair chance of prevailing. In comparison with dismemberments and explosions of small, wild animals and in comparison with the various abuses of cats, cruelties to dogs were less severe. Unlike cats, dogs were not beaten to death. Some dogs were killed in retaliation for an act that offended the subject, but none were killed because of a hatred or disdain for dogs in general.

Dogs were often abused in order to influence or control the pet's behavior. Dogs were beaten to shape their behavior and to maintain dominance. They were beaten and punished to extinguish undesirable behavior. Pet dogs were also beaten to foster an aggressive disposition, so they would attack people on command or ferociously battle other dogs. A few subjects beat equidae and livestock, expressly to control their behavior, but with these exceptions, dogs were the only animals for which abuse was intended to control or train.

Dogs that were beaten, starved, or entered into dog fights were the subjects' own pets. Subjects identified with their pet dogs, especially the aggressive, vicious, and powerful qualities of their dogs. Several subjects used their dogs as instruments of aggression against people and other dogs. Thus, pet dogs often represented extensions of themselves. Subjects took pride in their dogs' triumphs in animal combat which enhanced the subjects' esteem in the eyes of peers. Even though they mistreated their dogs, they felt attached to them. They described their relationship with their dogs as special and exclusive. The loss of a pet dog in childhood was impactful, more upsetting for some subjects than the disruption of any human relationship.

Nature of Relationship with Abused Animals

Subjects who substantially abused animals regarded their animal victims as worthless objects, hated objects, or narcissistic objects. Interestingly, these attitudes towards animals compare with the relationships with people which have been described in individuals with an Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD). Although this study did not attempt to establish psychiatric diagnoses, many of the subjects probably had an APD, a disorder of character that is disproportionately represented in prison populations. In response to questions in inter-

views, subjects typically acknowledged extensive histories of antisocial and aggressive behaviors listed as criteria for APD in DSM III [19].

Animals regarded as worthless by abusive subjects included invertebrates, amphibians, and other small, wild animals. Such animals are commonly perceived as having little aesthetic appeal and no appreciable intelligence or sentience; they are popularly regarded as phylogenetically, morphologically, and affiliatively distant from humans. In other words, small, wild animals are perceived to have a number of the negative attributes offered by Kellert and Berry [7]. Several of the species or groups of animals tend to be devalued by many people. Some degree of childhood cruelty to invertebrates, for example, plucking insects' wings, may eventually prove to be common among children who do not progress to substantial abuse of higher forms of animal life. However, in the present study, abuses perpetrated on amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds, and small wild mammals were typically severe and motivated by nonspecific sadism [9]. These animals were callously abused solely for sadistic pleasure derived from the act.

Hated animal victims were objects of focused prejudice. Cats were disproportionately represented as hated objects, but a few subjects hated and abused snakes. One abused snapping turtles and one killed rats in order to satisfy a categorical prejudice. Abusive acts against objects of hatred, like abuses of worthless objects, tended to be brutal. Cultural attitudes may have played a role in identifying these animals as objects of prejudice. In a few cases, a parental figure, who reportedly hated the same animal, may have identified it as a repository for projection and object for abuse. Psychosocial dynamics of animal prejudice may be similar to those of racial and sexist perceptions attended by aggressive behaviors against people.

The third distinctive attitude towards animal-victims involved only subjects' pet dogs, objects of narcissistic attachment. Subjects used their dogs as weapons, instruments of aggression against people or other animals, usually other dogs. They identified with their dog's toughness and ferociousness. They took pride in their dog's aggressive behaviors. Abuses consisted of inhumane methods of fostering an aggressive disposition and entering dogs in bloody fights. Other abuses served to gain control over the pet and to shape its behavior.

Three subjects reported what appeared to have been an unstable triangular relationship between the subject, his father, and his large powerful dog. Each of these subjects enjoyed a positive attachment to his dog, but his relationship with his father was a mutually hostile one. And father was perceived to be especially hostile toward the subject's dog. Subjects deliberately promoted an aggressive disposition in their dog, so it could serve as an instrument of aggression. Eventually, the dog's aggressiveness became excessive, and father killed or got rid of the animal. The subject was left with an abiding resentment against his father for having taken away what the subject experienced to be a part of himself. A few of these subjects were emotionally moved in recalling this loss. Thus, their early bonding to a large, strong, aggressive dog was remarkable for men whose human relationships appeared to be shallow or hostile.

Conclusions

Data from a major study of childhood cruelty to animals in prisoners and nonprisoners indicate that not all species of animals are abused equally in numbers or severity. Patterns of abuse appear to bear some relationship to the type of animal. The selection of animal victims for substantial abuse is multidetermined; thus a few generalizations would not explain animal selection in every case.

Aggressive subjects who perpetrated substantial abuse did not typically select animals that are known to be harmful to people. Availability of animals and suitability for particular methods of abuse appeared to be factors in selection. Various species or groups of animals evoked different attitudes and patterns of abuse. Abused animals were regarded as worthless objects, objects of categorical, poorly explained prejudice, objects of frustration to be venge-

fully destroyed, or narcissistic objects admired for viciousness, but brutally controlled by the subject.

Subjects in this study who gave a history of substantial animal abuse in childhood and adolescence tended to show diffuse aggression, including violence towards people. Substantially abusive subjects typically abused a variety of animals, used a number of methods, and expressed different motivations. Identification of psychosocial factors that direct the vector of aggression against a particular species or group of animals can enhance dynamic understanding of aggression in recurrently, impulsively violent individuals. More speculatively, antisocial, nonpsychotic, violence prone individuals may act in part on cultural perceptions of animals. If empirical findings can substantiate this heuristic inference, the social problem of animal abuse can be regarded as both a manifestation of abnormal aggression of individuals and differential cultural attitudes toward various types of animals.

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