

Science versus Human Welfare?

Understanding Attitudes toward Animal Use

Authors: Knight, Sarah; Vrij, Aldert¹; Bard, Kim¹; Brandon, Doug¹

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Scientists have been portrayed as having an uncaring attitude toward the use of animals and being inclined to reject the possibility of animal mind (Baldwin, 1993; Blumberg & Wasserman, 1995), yet there is little empirical research to support these claims. We examined why disparate attitudes toward animal use are held. Scientists, animal welfarists, and laypersons (N = 372) were compared on questionnaire responses that measured attitudes toward four types of animal use, and factors that might underlie these views (including belief in animal mind). As expected, scientists and animal welfarists held polarized views on all measures, whereas laypersons fell between the two. Animal welfarists were consistently opposed to all types of animal use, whereas scientists expressed support for the use of animals for medical research, but not for dissection, personal decoration, and entertainment. Animal welfarists showed high levels of belief in animal mind for 13 animal types, and scientists believed some of the 13 animals to have at least a moderate capacity for cognition and most to have at least a moderate capacity for sentience. Hence, the negative image of the science community that is often portrayed was not supported by our data. Findings were discussed in relation to external (group membership) and internal (belief systems) factors, and it is concluded that some people hold fixed attitudes toward animal use, whereas others are more influenced by context.

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Affiliations: 1: University of Portsmouth