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A Comparison of Empathy for Humans and Empathy for Animals

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Abstract:

Although there is a substantial body of research on inter-human empathy and inter-animal empathy, there is a dearth of research comparing humans' empathic reactions to humans and animals. To address this issue, three experiments were conducted in which participants read a scenario about a human or animal abuse victim in need of medical attention, and indicated the degree of empathy they had on an emotional response scale. In Experiment 1, women had significantly more empathy for animals than for humans, whereas men tended to express more empathy for humans than for animals. In Experiment 2, adult women expressed the same degree of empathy for a child as for a puppy. Similarly, in Experiment 3, adult men and women expressed the same degree of empathy for a baby as for a puppy. Overall, results indicated that people feel at least as much empathy for animals as for humans. We suggest that an animal target elicits a great deal of empathy partly because it is perceived as not being responsible for having caused the need situation. Future research will show whether empathy for animals translates to prosocial behavior toward them as well.

Keywords: [ANIMALS](#); [COMPASSION](#); [DOGS](#); [EMPATHY](#); [GENDER DIFFERENCES](#)

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