

Effective Animal Activism

Humane Education

Results from First Humane Education Survey Spring Semester 2013

Recently Effective Animal Activism was invited by [Justice for Animals \(http://justiceforanimals.net/\)](http://justiceforanimals.net/) to help analyze data they had collected from a post-lecture survey. Business cards with a link to an online survey, and a promise of a chance at a prize, had been distributed after humane education lectures in several states. Roughly 2200 of these business cards were distributed and in total 114 surveys were completed. While this isn't a particularly large amount of data, it was still enough to make some interesting observations.

EAA will be conducting a follow-up study during the Fall Semester of 2013 to improve on the issues noted below.

What can we learn from this data?

The survey does suffer from bias due to both a skewed sample (the people who were willing to go online and complete the survey) and social desirability (as the survey clearly came from a pro-animal source). However, there are still some interesting results to be seen in the data. We will focus below on three questions that the survey sheds light on:

- How do humans rank different animal's abilities to experience emotions?
- What material in the lecture was considered the most interesting? Most influential?
- What were the main reasons people gave for not going vegan?

A note on the sample population

The percentage of respondents which listed themselves as vegetarian/vegan before the lecture was 9%, and the percent that said that they had become vegetarian/vegan after the lecture was 14% (16 respondents). If this number could be believed, then clearly humane education lectures would be amazingly effective! However, as noted above the survey suffers from a biased sample. Nevertheless, 16 new vegetarians out of 2200 students (who received a business card) is still an impressive rate of $16/2200=0.5\%$. But social desirability bias means that this number may still be inflated.

The following results are purely for the non-vegetarian portion of the sample (88 respondents). The respondents were mostly 15-19 year old high school and college students.

How do humans rank animals?

The survey respondents were asked to answer on a scale from 1-5 (with 1 being "strongly disagree", and 5 being "strongly agree") how much they agree with the statements that cows, pigs, chickens, and fish have "As rich an emotional life as companion dogs". There was greatest agreement with the statement for pigs, and lowest agreement for fish. The ranking was Pigs(88%) > Cows(85%) > Chickens(77%) > Fish(62%).

What was most interesting to the audience? Most influential?

The survey asked respondents to select what they thought were the most interesting and most influential materials from a list of subjects covered in each lecture (multiple selections were allowed).

The big winners in the most interesting category were "The lack of laws to protect farm animals" and "Videos of undercover investigations". These were selected by 75% and 69% of respondents, respectively. (They were the only materials selected by more than 50% of respondents.)

When it came to what people considered to be the most influential, "Videos of undercover investigations" was the clear winner with 68%. However,

“Lack of laws” dropped away into insignificance, and the only other material to be selected by more than 50% of respondents was “The health benefits of a plant-based diet”.

What reasons did people give for not changing their diet?

The survey asked respondents to select what they thought were the reasons that best described why they were not vegetarian from a list of common reasons (multiple selections were allowed).

The dominant answers to this question were “I just like the taste of meat, and don’t want to give that up” and “I never really thought about it”. Investigating this a little more, we found that “the taste of meat” was massively important to males with a score of 71% (the only option with more than 50%). However, when you look at just the female responses you see a third option join the mix: 46% of women selected both “the taste of meat” option and “being vegetarian is too expensive”.

Conclusions

The answers to the three questions above suggest the following key takeaways:

- **Videos of undercover investigations are the most influential.** Perhaps the strongest result of this survey is that “Videos of undercover investigations” was viewed by the audience as being both highly interesting and highly influential. This suggests that these videos are an important tool that animal activists should look to include in their campaigns. Exactly how much more effective undercover videos are than other materials should be investigated in more depth (e.g., with studies of the effectiveness of online videos).
- **The health benefits, and the cost, of a plant-based diet are more important to people’s dietary decisions than farm animal law.** It is notable that while the “lack of laws to protect farm animals” was found to be very interesting, it wasn’t viewed as having an influence on diet. Instead the respondents viewed the health benefits of a plant-based diet as more influential. This may be due to a kind of “what’s in it for me?” attitude on the part of the respondents. It suggests that in terms of influencing people to change their diets, animal activists may want to focus on potential health-benefits rather than discussing farm animal law, although it is important not to overstate health claims. It could also be very helpful to provide clear information on the cost of a plant-based diet, as this was a concern for a significant percentage of the female sample.
- **People emotionally rank animals as Dogs > Pigs > Cows > Chickens > Fish.** While perhaps intuitive, the survey results here provide a preliminary quantitative verification of this ranking. It can be used to guide animal activists in the ways that they feature different animals in their materials. However, the order of the animals presented was not randomized and there is the possibility of unintentional priming from both the phrasing of the question and the content of the lectures, so it is as yet unclear whether these results will hold in future studies.

EAA is non-profit organization based in the United States. Site built by Tom Ash and designed by Richard Batty.