

Public Attitudes Toward Fur

An HRC Research Primer



Report in Brief

This primer summarizes recent research findings regarding attitudes toward the use of animal fur for clothing and other purposes. Studies included in the primer address the size of the fur industry and public attitudes toward fur in the U.S. and other countries.

The Bottom Line

The fur industry is known for the cruel methods used in fur production. Anti-fur campaigns in the 1990s achieved some success in drawing public attention to the issues surrounding fur. U.S. opinions on buying and wearing fur remain divided and fairly unchanged over the last decade, with the slight majority believing that buying and wearing fur is morally acceptable. It has been suggested that the acceptability of fur may be on the increase due to the marketing of fur as a sustainable option.

Fur farming has been banned in a number of countries and restrictions have been placed on the trade of fur. For example, in 2009, the European Union (EU) implemented a ban on the sale of commercial seal products. The U.S. recently passed the Truth in Fur Labeling Act requiring all fur to be labeled as real or fake, and West Hollywood, California in the U.S. has banned the sale of fur. However, the production of fur is growing in countries such as China that have little or no welfare regulations regarding fur production.

How to Use this Information

Understanding the current state of the fur industry, public attitudes toward fur, and the effectiveness of prior anti-fur campaigns will enable animal advocates to develop more effective and persuasive campaigns.

HRC Information

The Humane Research Council (HRC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to maximizing the effectiveness of animal advocates using professional, efficient, and informative consumer and market research methods.

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Introduction and Overview

Throughout history, the fur industry has been associated with numerous inhumane practices. Methods for obtaining fur from farmed animals often involve shockingly cruel practices such as gassing, electrocution, and even skinning animals while they are still alive.¹ Fur producing animals are often raised in cramped, confined conditions that cause widespread suffering. Animals such as foxes and mink clearly demonstrate signs of mental distress when kept in such confined conditions.²

Trapping wild animals is also a large part of the fur industry. Some traps have been designed to catch and hold the wild animal while preventing damage to their fur, and these traps are widely agreed to be cruel and unnecessary. For more information on the trapping of wild animals for fur, see the HRC research primer, *Trapping in the United States*. Another cruel method of obtaining fur from wild animals is the clubbing to death of seals. In 2009, the European Union (EU) banned the trade of commercial seal products, following the recommendations of the European Food Safety Authority, which found that there is no humane way to hunt seals for fur.^{3, 4}

The extreme cruelty involved in fur production makes this an important issue for animal advocates. Anti-fur campaigns achieved some success in raising the issue of fur in the late 1980s and 1990s, and may be associated with an increase in legislative restrictions on the production and sale of fur. However, it has been suggested that the popularity of fur is on the rise due to new design approaches to fur clothing and the marketing of fur as sustainable and environmentally friendly.^{5, 6} It is vital that animal advocates continue developing effective campaigns against the cruelty involved in fur production.

The Fur Industry

Worldwide, 85% percent of all fur sold is produced on fur farms, while an estimated 15-20% of fur comes from wild animals.⁷ In 2011, over 54 million mink were killed for their fur.^{8, 9} The biggest suppliers of mink fur are Denmark (27.7%), China (24.9%), Netherlands (9.0%), and Poland (9.0%).¹⁰ Demand for fur appears to be on the increase. The International Fur Trade Federation reported that global fur sales rose from \$14.05 billion to \$15 billion in 2011, an increase of 7% from the previous year.

The Fur Industry in the US

In the United States, fur is a multi-million dollar industry. For example, in 2009 the income for the U.S. fur industry reached a record high of \$185.9 million.¹¹ The U.S. fur industry also predicts that demand for fur will increase in the future. However, public sentiment against fur has resulted in some legislative progress in restricting fur production and sales. For example, in 2011 West Hollywood, California became the first city in the country to completely ban the sale of fur.

Faux Fur

The faux fur industry is a rapidly growing industry. A recent report in the *Los Angeles Times* declared that the faux fur industry was worth \$250 million in 2010, and is predicted to grow by 30% in the next two years.¹² Real fur is sometimes marketed as faux fur, and it can be difficult for consumers to tell the

difference between real fur and faux fur. In 2010, the U.S. government addressed this issue by passing the Truth in Fur Labeling Act. This act requires that all fur be labeled as real or faux fur.¹³

International Legislation Concerning the Production and Sale of Fur

Several countries around the world have banned fur farming, and some cities have banned the sale of fur.¹⁴ However, it has been argued that as legislative restrictions decrease fur production in some countries, other countries that have fewer regulations increase fur production.¹⁵ For example, according to Fur Commission USA, China produced 3.3 million fur pelts in the year 2000; by 2007, fur production in China had increased to 18 million pelts.¹⁶ China is now one of the world's largest producers of fur, but the country currently has no regulations regarding the treatment of animals raised for fur. An investigation by Swiss Animal Protection and East International in 2004 found that most fur farms in China would not meet the welfare standards recommended by the EU.¹⁷ In 2009, a new animal welfare bill was proposed by China that would regulate the practices involved in fur farming, though this is yet to be implemented.¹⁸

FUR INDUSTRY STATISTICS

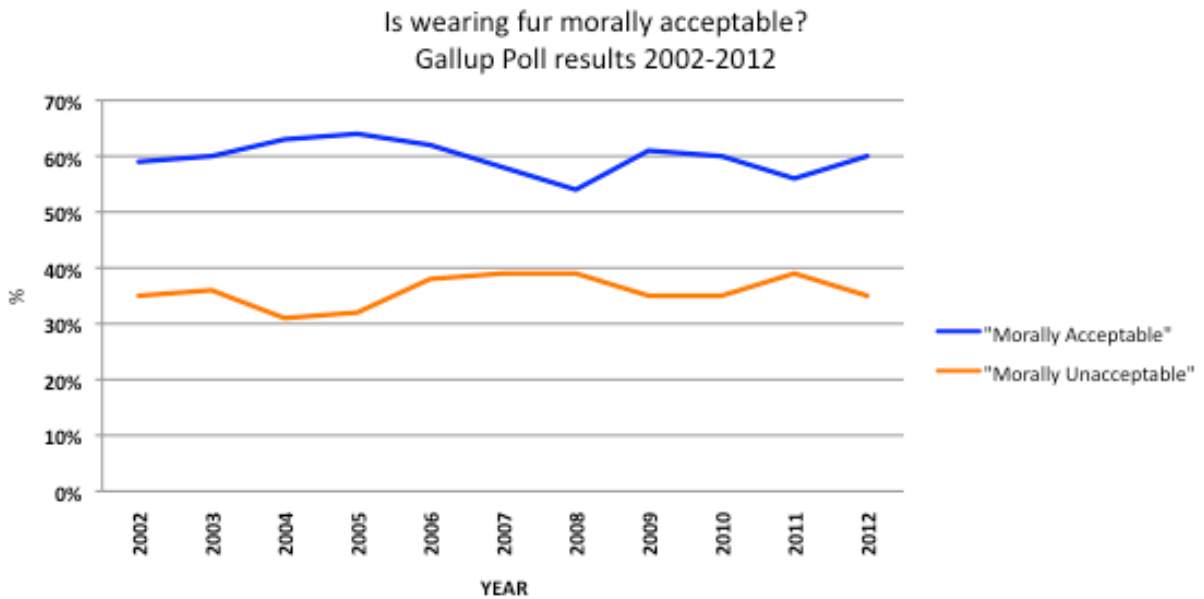
Year	Source	Region	Findings
2011	International Fur Trade Federation ¹⁹	International	54.13 million mink killed in 2011 7% increase in the number of pelts from 2010 Global fur industry now worth \$15 billion
2011	United States Department of Agriculture ²⁰	United States	3.09 million minks killed for their fur in the US 9% increase in number of pelts produced 25% increase in the value of mink pelts
2010	International Fur Trade Federation ²¹	International	5.4% increase in fur sales from 2009 (from \$13.334 billion to \$14.053 billion)
2010	Fur Commission USA ²²	United States	50.48 million mink killed for fur globally in 2010 8.5% increase in fur sales from 2009 Fur production is predicted to rise 21.4%
2009	Humane Society of the United States ²³	United States	Global fur sales decreased by 13% in 2009, resulting in an estimated 10million animals being saved
2007	Swiss Animal Protection; East International ²⁴	China	70-75% of fur comes from captive animals 25-30% of fur comes from wild animals 95% of fur produced in China is sold overseas 80% of fur exports from Hong Kong go to Europe, the U.S. and Japan

Public Attitudes Toward Fur

In the United States, the proportion of people who find fur “morally acceptable” appears to have held relatively constant for the past decade (see chart below). As can be seen in the following table, there are some differences in results between the findings of the Gallup polls and the findings of HRC’s Animal Tracker surveys. This is due to differences in survey methodology and question language (see the original studies for details). However, both sources found that the proportion of U.S. adults who think buying and wearing fur morally acceptable was lowest in 2008.

PROPORTION OF US ADULTS WHO THINK BUYING AND WEARING FUR IS MORALLY ACCEPTABLE

Year	Source	% “Morally acceptable”	% “Morally unacceptable”	% “Other”
2010	HRC Animal Tracker ²⁵	28%	41%	23% have no opinion 8% do not know
2010	Gallup ²⁶	60%	35%	2% “depends on the situation” 1% “not a moral issue” 2% “no opinion”
2008	HRC Animal Tracker ²⁷	23%	44%	27% have no opinion 6% do not know
2008	Gallup ²⁸	54%	39%	3% “depends on the situation” 1% “not a moral issue” 2% “no opinion”



Attitudes towards Fur across Different Demographics

A 2006 study by Kendall Belton and Bridgett Clinton found that young people who tend to be easily influenced by society are less likely to wear fur, whereas young people who are not influenced by society are more likely to have positive attitudes towards fur.^{29,30}

Attitudes toward fur are fairly similar across age groups. A Gallup study in 2010 found that fur is seen as morally acceptable by 55% of people aged 18-34 years, 57% of people aged 35-54 years, and 56% of people aged 55+ years. In general, Republicans tend to find buying and wearing fur more morally acceptable than Democrats. In 2010, 67% of Republicans, 61% of Independents and 54% of Democrats found buying and wearing fur morally acceptable.³¹

Attitudes toward fur vary greatly between genders. In 2011, Gallup found that 73% of men found fur morally acceptable, while only 48% of women agreed that fur was morally acceptable.³² Although more women than men find wearing fur morally unacceptable, a survey conducted in Canada finds that women are more likely than men to own an item of fur clothing.³³

PROPORTION OF PEOPLE WHO OWN FUR

Year	Source	Region	Findings
2004	Fur Council of Canada ³⁴	Canada	19% of women own a fur coat 7% of men wear fur
2004	Fund For Animals ³⁵	Washington D.C. & New York City	19 of 46 said that they own a real fur garment 25 of 46 said they own a faux fur garment

Global Attitudes Toward Fur

The social acceptability of fur varies across countries. An Angus Reid survey conducted in 2010 asked whether or not “killing animals for their fur amounts to cruelty to animals” and found that 79% of Britons, 64% of U.S. adults, and 55% of Canadians agreed.³⁶ In many countries, the vast majority of the population is opposed to fur farming and the use of fur for clothing. For example, in Britain, 95% of adults report that they would refuse to wear fur.³⁷ In other countries, the majority views fur as morally acceptable, or supports the right to wear fur as a “personal choice.”

GLOBAL ATTITUDES TOWARD BUYING AND WEARING FUR *

Year	Source	Region	Findings
2011	RSPCA ³⁸	United Kingdom	95% of British adults would refuse to wear real fur Nearly as many people believe fur should be labeled as real or fake
2009	International Anti-Fur Coalition ³⁹	Israel	“86% of Israelis believe killing animals for fur is immoral and nearly 80% would support a bill calling for the ban of the fur trade in Israel” “In other findings, among Israel's generally Jewish population, 92% consider the killing of animals for fur to be immoral, while 85% of new immigrants, 54% of Arab-Israelis, and 61% of ultra-Orthodox Jews also oppose this activity.

2009	University of Chester ⁴⁰	China	71% agree that wild animals should not be made into fur coats (24% undecided, 2% disagree) 11% agree that breeding animals for fur is legitimate (45% undecided, 44% disagree)
2009	Angus Reid Strategies ⁴¹	Canada	31% are opposed to wearing fur
2007	RSPCA ⁴²	United Kingdom	93% of British adults would refuse to wear real fur 43% check labels to see if the fur is real or fake 92% believe fur should be labeled as real or fake 91% would not buy fur even if it was cheap 61% think celebrities should not wear real fur 61% think there is a moral difference between animals farmed for meat and animals raised for fur
2006	Animal Friends Croatia ⁴³	Croatia	74% of Croatians believe fur farming in Croatia should be banned
2003	Bont Voor Dieren and Respect for Animals ⁴⁴	Germany	15% of households own fur 69% think fur farming should be banned (30% disagree, 1% don't know) 77% have a problem with fur farming (22% have no problem, 1% don't know)
2003	Bont Voor Dieren and Respect for Animals ⁴⁵	Denmark	18% of households own fur 47% think fur farming should be banned (50% disagree, 3% don't know) 41% have a problem with fur farming (57% have no problem, 1% don't know)
2003	Bont Voor Dieren and Respect for Animals ⁴⁶	Finland	21% of households own fur 20% think fur farming should be banned (78% disagree, 3% don't know) 50% have a problem with fur farming (46% have no problem, 4% don't know)
2003	Bont Voor Dieren and Respect for Animals ⁴⁷	France	9% of households own fur 74% think fur farming should be banned (21% disagree, 2% don't know) 79% have a problem with fur farming (20% have no problem, 1% don't know)

Anti-Fur Campaigns

In 2004, the Fund For Animals conducted a study involving focus group to investigate the effectiveness of their recent anti-fur campaigns.⁴⁸ Findings regarding the effectiveness of certain advertising materials were mixed. Print advertisements were generally rated as more effective than multimedia-based advertisements. However, some participants favored television over other media forms. Animation was not seen as effective as other types of advertising. The most effective campaign materials were print advertisements with graphic imagery and materials that evoked feelings of sympathy.

The Fund For Animals study also found that sympathy levels in response to campaign materials differed depending on the type of animal portrayed. Participants had more empathetic reactions to coyotes and bobcats (i.e., animals that resembled common companion animals) than chinchillas and rabbits. The study's authors concluded that anti-fur campaigns should be targeted towards the niche audiences who are most likely to buy fur, which may include young women and African Americans.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Buying and wearing fur for fashion was a major focus of animal protection efforts during the 1990s. However, by 2010 many of those anti-fur efforts have waned, which has been accompanied by a consistently high level of support for buying and wearing fur, with between 54% and 63% of U.S. adults finding it “morally acceptable” in the years 2002-2012.

The animal protection movement needs to continue to put pressure on the public to change perceptions about buying and wearing fur. Importantly, campaigns should be targeted to specific demographic groups. While age makes little difference in attitudes toward fur, gender has a large impact. Women are likely a more productive target for fur-free outreach efforts as men are more likely to support buying and wearing fur than are women, but women are more likely to own a fur item.

The fur industry has been able to spin their products to meet consumer concerns—marketing their products as environmentally “green” and suggesting that the animals used for fur are raised and/or killed humanely. However, the truth remains that fur trapping and farming practices are cruel, with most fur-bearing animals suffering both mentally and physically.

More Information

RELATED STUDIES AND FINDINGS

Year	Source	Region	Findings
2010	Finnish Broadcasting Company ⁵¹	Finland	Over half of Finns have opposing or negative attitudes toward video footage secretly obtained by animal advocates on fur farms.
2009	Big Cat Rescue ⁵²	United States	Based on an online poll of visitors to the Big Cat Rescue website, 79% believe it should be illegal to make exotic cats into coats, while 21% feel it should be legal.
2003	The Fund For Animals ⁵³	New York City	21% have heard about the fur debate in the last 6 months. Of those who saw ads, 47% said it had “some” or a “strong” impact on them. Older women (40-50), those with college degrees, and wealthier women were less likely to have heard about the fur issue.
2001	The Fund For Animals ⁵⁴	Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington DC	54% of consumers consider the selling of fur to be “socially irresponsible,” preferring to shop at fur free stores. 47% of shoppers disapproved of stores selling fur, while 35% approve.

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