

ANIMALS AND SOCIETY

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Help Build Our Potential New ASA Section

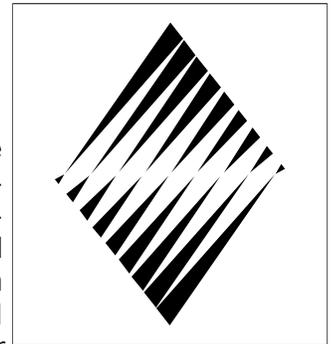
David Nibert

The Animals & Society section-in-formation is a diverse group of scholars, ranging from liberation activists to sociological ethologists, all interested in studying the relationships between humans and other animals. Our proposed new section has excited many sociologists and has drawn national and international attention. It has been reported on in publications ranging from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to the *Dallas Morning News*.

We are one of the fastest growing new areas of sociological inquiry, but we still need more members to achieve the 300 necessary to become an official section of the ASA. If you are not a member of the section, we invite you to join us and to participate in the development and expansion of this once neglected area of social scientific inquiry. If you have joined us, please tell your ASA friends about us and invite them to join. Membership dues for a section-in-formation are only \$5.00 per year. Join Us!

American Sociological Association
 1307 New York Avenue NW, Suite 700
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ATTN: Section Dues



ANIMALS IN THE FUTURE OF SOCIOLOGY

Janet M. Alger

Steve Alger and I organized a thematic session for the recently held annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society in Boston on "Animals in the Future of Sociology." We had four speakers (Arnie Arluke, Cliff Flynn, David Nibert, and Clint Sanders), who addressed a broad range of issues from the difficulty of establishing college-level courses on animal issues to the important theoretical contributions the study of animals and society will make to sociology.

Section members will have an opportunity to read about the views of some of these participants in a special issue of the International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy on human-animal interaction that I will edit for next year. In fact I still need another paper focusing on the theme of "Animals in the Future of Sociology" if anyone is interested in inclusion in the special issue. If so, contact me soon. My e-mail address is janet.alger@verison.net.

There is much that we in sociology can do both to ensure the future of animals in sociology and to ensure a better future for animals. Any of us who lived through the civil rights and women's rights movements are aware of the role sociologist/activists played in providing the evidence of oppression needed to create policy change and in actively trying to bring about that change through their participation in the movements. Thus, we can help by doing sociological research in this field, by teaching about human-animal interaction, and by participating in change-producing activities.

Sociological research on human-animal interaction is increasing rapidly and covers a broad range of issues. For instance, a perusal of the contents of the journal *Society and Animals* reveals articles on such topics as the social construction of animals and our treatment of them, the animal rights movement, animal abuse and human abuse, and species boundaries. Other research focuses on theoretical issues such as animals and symbolic interaction. All of this work has practical implications as well as implications for the development of sociological theory. I would like to see the initiation of even more work with practical implications for the emergence of new policies that would improve the lives of animals. For instance, existing municipal policies and attitudes regarding animals make it very difficult for people to care for their animals in times of emergency, such as the aftermath of hurricanes or the 9/11 disaster. Most communities will not allow owners to return to disaster areas to take their animals to safety even if they sign waivers freeing the city from responsibility for the outcome, and most communities have no facilities where people with animals can go. It seems to me there is a real need for research into particular disasters to chronicle what happens to animals and their human companions at such times. Such research would reveal the level of hardship encountered and aid in posing solutions. This is just one of many examples one could give of the research with practical implications for animal lives that needs to be done.

As educators, we need more college-level sociology courses and sections of courses that focus on animals and society or human-animal interaction. If you go to the website of The Humane Society of the United States, you will find a list of college-level courses in all fields that deal with important animal issues. Four such courses are listed in sociology departments whereas there are 21 listed in philosophy departments. It is important that we transmit the growing body of work in sociology to our students in courses in Animals and Society or, at least, in sections of courses such as Social Issues, Introductory Sociology, etc.

As activists we need to use the growing body of evidence we have and will collect to improve the lives of animals as we did when we became parts of the civil rights and women's rights movements. We must seek to inform policy on the municipal, state, and national levels as it addresses animal issues. Again, The Humane Society of the United States keeps track of national legislation as it comes up, and this material is available on that organization's web site. It is also a source of important ideas about the research that needs to be done in various aspects of animal welfare and rights.

"As activists we need to use the growing body of evidence we have and will collect to improve the lives of animals as we did when we became parts of the civil rights and women's rights movements."

In sum, I see a three-part agenda for us to pursue as the future unfolds, one that involves research, education, and direct action.

ANIMAL RIGHTS IN A TIME OF TERROR

Bonnie Berry

The attacks of September 11, and the response of the White House to those attacks, have redefined the meaning of terrorism. The boundary between social activism and terrorism has become quite porous (Cowell 2002; Barcott 2002), with a broadening of the definition of terrorists to include those who disagree with the current administration's policies. Additionally, there has also been a widened monitoring and punishment net, embodied in the Attorney General's admonishments to not even speak against the Right and dire warnings of incarceration. This cautionary note is leveled at more than al Qaeda and their sympathizers; it is also applied to progressive activists who are being watched more closely and who are at greater risk of criminal penalties.

Soon after 9/11, the President told the nation that everyone in the world is either with us or against us, with "us" actually not referring to the US populace but to the limited circle of the elite Right. Those who question the war, as well as those who have a different view of how the planet should operate and those who adhere to principles of equality between humans and between humans and nonhumans, are against "us." To engage in any activity not in line with "us" is to invite the label "terrorist."

Thus, after the events of 9/11, "terrorism" has become the magic word to stifle dissent. The focus on terrorism is also a distraction from other, more intractable social problems, as often happens when repressors want to divert public attention away from destructive social policies and to target their equality-minded enemies (Berry 1999).

Besides serving as a diversion, a re-construction of animal rights activists as terrorists serves the purposes of legitimizing social control and legitimizing capitalism. If environmental and animal rights activists can be frightened into not protesting harmful-to-earth-and-animals policies, then drilling in ANWR can occur, factory farming can continue unabated, ranchers can legally murder coyotes and wolves to protect their own exploited animals (cattle, sheep), snowmobiles in national parks will disrupt wildlife, and fur salons and pet stores earn profits.

However, the immediate and long-term future of animals-and-society studies and the animal rights movement may well be unaffected by this attempt at silencing science and activism. Indeed, this is precisely the time for both. Sociological explorations of collective action refer to a phenomenon called the J-curve theory of revolution (Davies 1962), in which rising expectations for progress, followed by attempts at repression, often result in increased and successful social movement activity. In animal-and-society studies and animal rights movements, progress has been made over

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the past couple of centuries (especially in the last few decades) toward a better scientific understanding of human-nonhuman relationships and toward equal treatment of nonhuman and human animals. Paradoxically for those re-defining us as terrorists, now that the movement is suffering a political reversal, social movement activity may become more radical because progress is suddenly threatened. Based on Goldstone and Tilly's (2001) address of threats (to social movement activity), risks (of engaging in social movement activity), and opportunities (to have an impact via social movement activity), we can conclude that risks, such as being labeled a terrorist and punished accordingly, can be outweighed by opportunity to progress our science and animal equality, which will not be threatened into inactivity.

Reality is not subject to re-construction by those who do not agree with or understand our work. If our job is to engage in activism or science, we do. We are not terrorists, we are socially conscientious scientists.

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"To me, issues of animal rights, women's rights, civil rights are totally woven together ... and they all have to do with the sustainability of current political and cultural and economic institutions."

THE PETTING ORDER: SOCIOLOGISTS LOOK AT ROLES HUMANS ASSIGN ANIMALS (Dallas Morning News, 4/13/02)

Karen Patterson (Reprinted with permission of the Dallas Morning News)

Fido and Fluffy, this is your socially constructed reality.

It's a reality that humans and their society have built, one that puts you at the top of the American animal heap. Being curled up on the hearth surely beats being raised on a fur farm—or served with a baked potato on the side.

But why our dogs aren't dinner, and our cats aren't coats, fascinates some sociologists. These scientists are tracing the threads of reasoning behind such discrimination between animals. They are also trying to grasp animals' impact on humans, humans' impact on animals, and the effects of these relationships on all of society.

To that end, members of the American Sociological Association are working to form a new "section" - a disciplinary subdivision, of sorts - called Animals and Society. Section members can compare research, swap ideas and connect some sociological dots between society's function, or dysfunction, and the roles of animals.

"As we look at it much more closely, we begin to see that there are deep and profound social, political and economic ramifications for our treatment of other animals," says David Nibert, a sociologist at Wittenberg University in Ohio. "And our treatment of other animals is deeply entangled with how we treat each other."

These entanglements extend far beyond Fido and Fluffy to classic realms of sociological study - such as health care, the environment, violence and oppression, says Dr. Nibert, chair of the section-in-formation.

For instance, members of the Animals and Society section might cast their gaze on how meat-eating affects disease rates. Or how animal abuse can signal child or spouse abuse. Cruelty to animals and to humans "is the same constellation of behaviors," notes Carol Thompson, chair of the sociology and criminal justice department at Texas Christian University.

Dr. Thompson, who has signed up for the new section, is a criminologist and sociologist of deviance. She'll study anything from serial killers to vegetarians. And she has a deep intellectual curiosity about the many roles humans have assigned animals: They're pets; they're zoo entertainment; they're meat; they're therapy; they're transportation; they're research subjects; they're a potential source for transplant organs; they're co-workers such as herders.

Dogs, for instance, are such pals that we consider them "virtual humans," Dr. Thompson says. But not so for cows. "Because we use them, and we have a vested interest in not seeing them as human ... then we can behave toward them inhumanely," she says.

Or consider bonobos, a type of chimpanzee and thus a close genetic relative to humans. "We know a lot about them; they're capable of a wide range of thought and emotional response," she says. "They feel pain and loss and great affection. They're political in their own troops in the wild; they have division of labor." Yet they are caged in zoos and primate laboratories.

"We literally construct the meaning of animals and their utility for us," Dr. Thompson says. "It's not based on any absolute level of animal intelligence or feeling."

Seen in a new light

But scientific thinking about animal intelligence and emotion is evolving. Animal behaviorists are "seeing that other animals are much more close to us than we've been willing to concede that we are to them," Dr. Nibert says. And anthropologists, psychologists and philosophers are looking more closely at how animals are treated. Medical researchers, meanwhile, have learned that animals can be therapeutic, even having physiological effects such as lowering a person's blood pressure. This new understanding of animals gives sociologists a plum opportunity to watch some of society's power brokers clash, says Richard Hawkins, a criminologist at Southern Methodist University. "The issue is, how will people using their power carve out niches to protect certain animals, and what will be the conditions under which those protections are set forth?"

Among the power brokers are pet advocates, meat producers, animal rights activists ... even restaurants that serve veal. "You have those political and economic groups going at each other," he says, "and the arena is animals."

Developments in neuroscience, biology and chemistry are also helping scientists understand how animals think and react.

"This ball got rolling because of strides in science," Dr. Thompson says. "And the interesting thing is, the more we learn about animals, the more precarious it is for scientists to use them."

Using animals in research poses particularly difficult questions for society, Dr. Nibert says. It's harder to find a research substitute for animals than it is to find, say, a food substitute. In addition, medical research's potential benefits for society are great.

Still, some experts argue that animals aren't needed in many of the studies they're used in. And there's an ethical dilemma: Medical science might learn from such research, Dr. Nibert says, "but at what cost to the other animals and to our own ideologies and other oppressions?"

Cruelty to humans

Schooled in the study of race and ethnic relations, Dr. Nibert sees links between ill treatment of animals and ill treatment of oppressed groups. For instance, he cites work suggesting that the status of prehistoric women declined as men began organized hunting. Women were left with more work to do, while men were in control of a new resource, meat. Later, as animals became domesticated - and hence, property - women, too, began being treated as property, he says. "Women have never quite really recovered from that to this day," he adds, noting the high rates of violence they face at the hands of intimate partners.

Dr. Nibert has also applied sociological theory from race and ethnic relations to the treatment of animals. "It's absolutely amazing how our treatment of other animals parallels ... our oppression of other groups."

Treatment of animals can also influence relationships with developing nations - especially as the world population grows to a projected 9 billion over the next 50 years, Dr. Nibert says. Crops used to feed meat animals could instead help feed the more than 800 million people that the United Nations estimates are currently malnourished or starving.

"To me, issues of animal rights, women's rights, civil rights are totally woven together," Dr. Nibert says. "And they all have to do with the sustainability of current political and cultural and economic institutions."

Progressions in thought

Research on animals and society could perhaps someday change such institutions, says Dr. Thompson. Social scientists document society and its contradictions, she says—and society will eventually abandon the contradictions that it is uncomfortable with. "That is the way social movements occur."

While animals certainly wouldn't achieve full legal status, Dr. Hawkins expects that in the coming decades, society will take for granted an animal's right to live in a humane, protected environment. "I do think we need some kind of basic bill of rights for animals," he says.

Dr. Thompson acknowledges, however, that many people might find such discourse radical.

"I think a few years ago people thought, 'Those animal activists have penetrated the American Sociological Association,'" she says, adding that in her classroom she addresses animal issues neutrally as social movements, not as moral positions. "Whether or not one believes those things is a whole different issue. It's as if saying you can't study religion if you're religious."

As it happens, "Sociology of Religion" is among the 41 existing sections in the sociological association. There are also such titles as "Aging and the Life Course," "International Migration" and "Medical Sociology."

"Sections are like smaller homes within the large association," explains Phoebe Stevenson, deputy executive officer of the 12,500-member group.

They organize sessions at the annual convention, and use list serves, Web pages and newsletters to keep academic discussion going.

SMU's Dr. Hawkins hadn't heard about the section-in-formation, but he finds the idea intriguing—and relevant to his field.

"In criminology there's clearly a concern, in the case of serial murderers especially, that they start abusing animals and then move to small children and the [other] vulnerable people like prostitutes," Dr. Hawkins says. "That seems to be a fairly routine pattern." Animal issues come up in other criminal cases as well—such as cockfighting, and the recent mauling-by-dog case in San Francisco.

Animals and Society

The Animals and Society section needs to enlist 300 members by the end of September in order to achieve full section status, Ms. Stevenson says. So far, it's about halfway to its goal.

"We'll do it," Dr. Nibert says.

The topic has momentum, Dr. Thompson agrees. Ultimately, she wouldn't be surprised if such research elevated their status, and that research on basic human needs and on prisons has elevated society's treatment of prisoners.

"You see a movement of sort in this elevation of what it means to be alive," she says. "Certainly the controversy over stem-cell research, all those sorts of things, really reflect a greater sensitivity toward what it means to be alive and what it means to be human.

"Those are very sophisticated discussions," she adds, "and animals will be part of the discussion."

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Animal Law on the Web:

<http://www.animallaw.com>

This site is of use to all those interested in laws pertaining to animals. A product of the International Institute for Animal Law, it "provides access to legislation and legal matters pertaining to the rights and welfare of animals."

Animal Concerns:

<http://animalconcerns.netforchange.com/>

This site is "a collaboration between the EnviroLink Network, the Animal Concerns Community, the Sustainable Business Network and GreenMarketplace.com" and is aimed at those interested in social end environmental change.

Legislative Efforts for Animal Protection:

<http://www.leap-mn.org>

A local (Minnesota) organization that is working for the interests of animals. A recent publication, "Animal Cruelty in Minnesota: A Guide for Minnesota Judges, Prosecutors, and other Legal Professionals," is available online.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals:

<http://www.peta-online.org>

This is the website of the largest animal rights organization in the United States. From here you can access a variety of information.

Animal Underworld

<http://www.animalunderworld.com/behindthescenes.htm>

This is the website for a book that examines the trade in animals in the United States. A must-read for anyone who has ever driven by a "roadside zoo" while on vacation.

Animal Ingredients

<http://animal-ingredients.hypermart.net/index.htm>

This is an absolute must for vegans (and vegetarians). Yes, I command you all to write to the Guinness people and tell them to stop using isinglass as a fining agent (or, better, yet, brew your own beer)!

Humane Society of the United States

<http://www.hsus.org>

Yes, some animal rights activists refer to this group as "H. S. Useless," but the website still provides valuable information about nation-wide campaigns involving animals.

Center for Animals in Society

http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/animals_in_society/main.htm

This is a research institution at the University of California, Davis. The institute authors a research newsletter that may be of interest to researchers and practitioners.

**In every issue of
the Newsletter
we will highlight
websites of
potential
interest to
sections
members.**

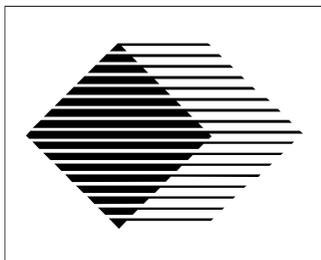
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AN AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION SECTION- INFORMATION

We're on the Web!
asanel.org/sectionanimals/



Animals
and
Society



A conference titled "Animal Arenas: Spaces, Performances and Exhibitions," sponsored by the International Society for Anthropology, will take place on August 20-21, 2002 at University College London.

For more information on how to participate contact:
Garry Marvin at
G.Marvin@roehampton.ac.uk
or
gmarvin@aol.com

Congratulations to Clif Flynn, professor of sociology at the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg, for winning the 2001 New Animals & Society Course Award by the Humane Society of the United States!

HSUS offer awards for "academic excellence in the design and instruction of the design and instruction of Animals & Society courses that address issues of animal ethics, rights, and/or welfare." Awards are offered for both newly scheduled and established courses. To nominate a course for one of the awards, send a letter of recommendation from the chairperson of the department, the course syllabus, a cover letter by the instructor, student evaluations for the past two years the course was offered (if it is an established course), and a short description of how the \$1,500 award will be used -- by **September 1, 2002** -- to:

HSUS Animals & Society Award
The Humane Society of the United States
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

e-mail: ari@hsus.org

ASA AND SPSS ANNUAL MEETINGS IN CHICAGO AUGUST 15-19, 2002

ASA Session Title:

Animals & Society: Causes and Consequences of Socially Constructed Positions for Other Animals

Session Organizer: David Nibert, Wittenberg University

Presentations:

Bonnie Berry, Social Problems Research Group
Cumulative Constructions of Animal Rights: Different Routes to Equality

Janet Alger, Siena College
Steven Alger, College of St. Rose
The Social Construction of Animals in Introductory Textbooks: Have We Moved Beyond Mead?

Leslie Irvine, University of Colorado at Boulder
Rethinking the Human/Animal Boundary: The Historical Role of Pets in the Construction of Social Class

Shawn McEntee, Salisbury University
The Equine-Human Partnership in Dressage: Horses, Dressage and Identity

Gene Burd, University of Texas
Pets as Urban Communication Partners, Touch as Tactile 'Talk' in Cities

Bonnie Berry, Social Problems Research Group
Cumulative Constructions of Animal Rights: Different Routes to Equality

SSSP Session Title:

Exploring Irrationalities in Human-Nonhuman Animal Relationships

Session Organizer: Lisa Anne Zilney, University of Tennessee

Papers:

"Toward Cat Phenomenology: A Search for Animal Being," Jeffrey Bussolini, City University of New York, Graduate Center and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales

"Animal Themes in U.S. Children's School Readers, 1880-1970," Gail F. Melson, Purdue University

"An Empirical Study of the Effectiveness of Humane Organizations in Ontario," Laura Joan Zilney, Independent Scholar

"(Ir)rationality in Human/Animal Interaction: Re-Reading Weber and Mead," Lisa Sarmicanic, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

"Ideology, Community, and Demography: Explaining the Link of Violence Against Human and Nonhuman Animals," Lisa Anne Zilney, University of Tennessee