Attitudes to Animals within the animal protection community compared to a normative community sample

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Attitudes towards the treatment of animals within the animal protection community remains largely under researched. In an attempt to begin to rectify this 407 members of the animal protection community were surveyed using the Animal Attitude Scale (AAS). Participants were also asked to indicate whether they identified more with animal rights or animal welfare perspectives, and a direct action or indirect action approach to securing animal protection. Results of the current study indicate that, regardless of philosophical or practical beliefs, those within the animal protection community were significantly more pro-animal welfare (as measured by the AAS) than members of the general community. This disparity was even greater between the current participants and those of a previous study who identified as being currently employed in the Primary Industry sector. Implications of this, as well as respondents' philosophical and practical views are discussed.

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There has been recent renewed academic interest in animal rights, animal welfare, their respective proponents and attitudes towards animals more generally (e.g. Matthews & Herzog, 1997; Taylor & Signal, 2005). Within this field of interest there has been much debate concerning the distinction between animal *rights* and animal *welfare* whereby many within the animal rights movement are critical of a welfare oriented option, believing its relatively conformist/mainstream approach to be a 'softer' option (Garner, 1995; Taylor, 1999, 2005). The animal 'rights' movement is predicated on the belief that non-human animals have basic, irrefutable rights such as the right to life and bodily integrity whereas animal 'welfare' assumes the acceptability of humans 'using' non-human animals as long as their health and welfare is considered (e.g. the Five Freedoms; e.g. Appleby, 1999). These different ideological standpoints have often resulted in different tactics. Thus the animal rights movement has become symbolically linked (at least in the media) with radicalism and direct action whilst animal welfare and its assumed concomitant constitutional approach is often seen as an anthropocentric philosophy which re-affirms the status of animals as 'commodities' (Taylor, 2005).

Given that working within the primary industry sector, and thus working with animals as 'commodities', has been found to have an impact upon individuals' attitudes to the use of animals (e.g., Kellert, 1980; Signal & Taylor, 2006), the question arises as to what effect membership of the animal protection community, where animals presumably are not seen as commodities, would have. Kellert (1980) in one of the few comprehensive investigations of attitudes to animals within America reported that farmers, livestock producers, meat hunters and fishermen [sic] displayed a strong utilitarian orientation towards animals. That is, they showed primary concern for the practical and material value of animals in conjunction with a lack of concern for animal welfare and cruelty issues. In contrast he found that members of humane, wildlife and environmental protection organizations had either a more humanistic attitude (i.e., primary interest in, and strong affection for, individual animals) or a moralistic attitude (i.e., primary concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals).

As awareness increases concerning the links between attitudes to humans and non-human animals there is a need to quantify such relationships and determine which variables (demographic and personality), if any, are associated with attitudes towards the treatment of animals. Existing research in this area has tended to be conducted with limited samples and/or narrow populations, usually college students (e.g., Matthews & Herzog, 1997; Taylor & Signal, 2005).

In a recent, community based investigation, utilizing the Attitude to Animals Scale (AAS; Herzog, Betchart & Pittman, 1991), several demographic variables were found to be associated with attitudes towards the treatment of animals within a large Australian community sample (Signal & Taylor, 2006). As mentioned earlier, one of the key, statistically significant, variables was that of occupation, in that those currently employed within the Primary Industry sector (e.g., farmers, abattoir workers etc.) were found to have demonstrably lower scores on the AAS, i.e., a less positive attitude towards animal welfare. Similarly, in this study and others (e.g., Herzog, Betchart & Pittman, 1991; Matthews & Herzog, 1997) females have been found to consistently score higher on various measures of attitudes towards animals. Given that working within the primary industry sector, and thus working with animals as ‘commodities’, has been found to have an impact upon individuals’ attitudes to the use of animals, the question arises as to what effect membership of the animal protection community, where animals presumably are not seen as commodities, would have.

Overall however, there is a general lack of investigation into the possible variables which may affect the attitudes of those who work primarily to promote the welfare, and/or the rights of nonhuman animals. It should be noted that the diversity of those working to improve the lives of nonhuman animals is such that it is misleading to talk about an animal rights ‘movement’ and, indeed, many authors have suggested the idea of a ‘continuum’ ranging from welfare through to rights positions to be more useful (e.g. Garner, 1993, 1995; Taylor, 1999). Therefore within the current study participants were asked to rate their own philosophical beliefs on a 5 point Likert scale which ranged from being pro animal *welfare* through to pro animal *rights* to reflect this level of diversity. Additionally respondents were asked to rate on a similar (5 point) scale the activities which they regularly performed in order to promote their philosophical belief (e.g. from letter writing campaigns to taking direct action).

The aims of this investigation were threefold;

- To quantitatively assess attitudes towards the treatment of animals within the animal protection community
- To compare such attitudes to those within a general community sample, and to specifically contrast with those identified as working within the Primary Industry sector.
- To assess any differences in attitude towards the treatment of animals between those who identify as welfare oriented and those who identify as rights proponents.
- Additionally it was anticipated that the consistently observed gender effect in attitude towards the treatment of animals would hold within the current sample.

Method

Study One: Animal Protection Community

Participants

Given that the current study aimed to collect data from the animal ‘protection’ community generally the researchers contacted 18 animal protection (including both ‘rights’ and ‘welfare’) groups who had a significant presence on the internet. These ranged from large groups with memberships upwards of 5000 (e.g. PETA, Department of Primary Industries) to smaller, more locally based groups (e.g. Animal Liberation Sydney). The groups were predominantly Australian, British, American and Asian, although many had off-shoot groups world-wide (e.g. Greenpeace), in which case the Headquarters for that group were contacted. The animal protection groups were asked to email the survey to their members who were then able to choose to opt in to the research. Due to restrictions which included data protection issues and the inability of listservs to support attachments, 13 groups mailed the current survey to their members.

The Survey

The survey for this current research was deliberately short and accessible to increase the chances of dissemination, completion and return. Basic demographic data were collected including whether the participant currently lived with companion animals, the participants' age, gender, and what role they played in animal protection. Respondents were also asked to complete the Animal Attitude Scale (AAS) (Herzog, Betchart & Pittman, 1991), a 20 item, 5 point Likert based scale with respondents indicating answers from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree to statements regarding attitudes to the treatment of animals. Sample items include "Wild animals should not be trapped and their skins made into fur coats," "Basically humans have the right to use animals as they see fit," and, "The use of animals in rodeos and circuses is cruel." The scale has been found to have high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$; Mathews & Herzog, 1997) and has previously been used successfully (e.g., Herzog et al., 1991; Taylor & Signal, 2005; Signal & Taylor, 2006). A high score on this scale indicates pro-welfare attitudes (Herzog, 2004 pers. comm.). Respondents were then asked to indicate their 'philosophical' beliefs about animal welfare/rights on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being a belief in animal welfare (e.g., improving the lives of farm animals) through to 5 being a belief in animal rights (e.g., humans do not have the right to use animals at all). Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the level of 'practical' action they undertook for animal protection, again on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being a low level of activity (e.g., occasional letter writing) through to 5 being a belief in the need for direct action to liberate animals.

Study Two: Normative Community Sample

Participants

As part of a larger study which aimed to assess links between empathy, aggression and attitudes to animals within a large community sample, questionnaires were administered by telephone to a random sample of approximately 600 adults throughout Australia. This resulted in a total of 550 complete responses.

The Survey

The questionnaire included the following demographic questions; gender, age, education level, income, current occupation, presence of a companion animal in the home (now and as a child) and presence of children within current dwelling. Additionally, respondents were also asked to complete a range of psychometric scales including the AAS. Data were analysed using *SPSS* v.12.0.

Results

Raw data from 407 participants in the animal protection community, and 612 participants in the community sample were entered into *SPSS* v12.0. Negatively worded items in the AAS were recoded before the following analyses were conducted. Missing data resulted in 396 valid entries respectively for the AAS and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Presented in Table One are the average AAS scores across two samples (animal protection and general community), a further subgroup of the community sample, namely those working within the Primary Industry sector, and two of these groups further broken down by gender. No further analysis by gender was conducted on those within the primary industry subgroup due to insufficient numbers.

Insert Table One here

As can be seen in the table those within the animal protection community (regardless of gender) scored much higher on the AAS than either of the other two groups. This difference was found to be significant (compared with; Community, $t[396]=32.280, p=0.000$, Cohen's $d = 0.851$; Primary Industry, $t[396]=51.012, p=0.000$, Cohen's $d = 0.932$). A t -test was conducted to examine the effect of gender on AAS scores within the animal protection community which found that females scored significantly higher than males ($t[394]= 3.934, p=0.000$).

One of the aims of this study was the investigation of potential differences between those that self identified as either animal 'rights' or animal 'welfare' proponents, i.e. the two 'extremes' of the animal protection continuum. In order to facilitate this part of the analysis

answers regarding the respondents philosophical stance were collapsed into three categories; category one, ‘animal welfare’ (score of 1 or 2), category two, ‘neutral’ (score of 3), and, category three ‘animal rights’ (score of 4 or 5). Categories one and three (i.e. ‘animal welfare’ and ‘animal rights’) were used in subsequent analyses. Similarly data regarding respondents level of practical action were condensed into three categories and again the two extremes, being category one ‘non-direct action’ (score of 1 or 2) and category three, ‘direct action’ (score of 4 or 5) were used in further analyses with the ‘middle-of-the-road’ category not being included.

Presented in Table Two are the average AAS scores for those in categories one and two, i.e. the two extremes, on both the ‘philosophical belief’ and ‘practical action’ questions. As can be seen in the table, those that identify more with the second categories for both questions (i.e. the animal rights and/or the direct action categories) score higher on the AAS, subsequent analyses show these differences to be significant (Philosophy, $t[304]=-14.057$, $p=0.000$; Practical, $t[283]=-9.401$, $p=0.000$).

Insert Table Two here

Further analyses were conducted to investigate the potential gender effects within the philosophical beliefs and practical action categories. These analyses found a significant interaction effect between gender and philosophical belief (ANOVA, $F(2,373)=4.366$, $p=0.013$). However, there was no such interaction between gender and the practical action category (ANOVA, $F(2,373)=1.179$, $p=0.309$). Further analyses showed that overall the correlation between AAS scores and both ‘philosophical’ and ‘practical’ beliefs were stronger for males ($r = 0.810$; 0.602 respectively) than females ($r = 0.592$; 0.452 respectively).

Discussion

The first aim of this investigation was to assess, within the animal protection community, attitudes towards animals as measured by the AAS and contrast these with a normative community sample. From these results it is clear that those within the animal protection community, regardless of philosophical alignment, have significantly higher attitudes towards the treatment of animals. This disparity is even more apparent when

compared with those within the general community who work within primary industries. This supports Kellert's (1980) suggestion that those from a primary industry background adopt a more utilitarian attitude towards the use of animals, and this appears to be reflected in their lower average AAS scores. Another finding often reported in the literature is that of a gender bias whereby women score more highly than men on measures such as the AAS (e.g. Herzog et al., 1991). As was expected such a bias was found within the animal protection community.

Whilst these differences between the community and animal protection sample may not be surprising (Garner, 1995; Taylor, 1999) a further aim of this study was to assess any potential differences between animal 'rights' and animal 'welfare' proponents. Within the current data those who are of a more animal rights perspective have significantly higher AAS scores than those who identify with a welfare perspective. However it must be noted that that all participants, whether self-identified as more welfare or more rights oriented, have significantly higher scores on the AAS, and thus more positive attitudes towards animal welfare, than members of the general community.

From a practical action perspective the current data show that those who are prepared to take direct action on behalf of animals also have higher AAS scores than those who are more likely to utilize non-direct action techniques to secure animal protection. Again, it must be noted, however, that both groups' AAS scores are significantly higher than the general community average score. Interestingly, when the interaction between gender and either philosophical or practical action beliefs were examined only that between gender and philosophical belief was significant. This suggests that, despite the well documented fact that women are over-represented in the animal protection movement (e.g., Garner, 1993), this gender bias will only impact philosophical belief and not the propensity nor the type of action undertaken, to secure animal protection.

Approximately four times as many respondents identified with the animal rights end of the scale (i.e. either 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5). In contrast the number of those identifying with direct action philosophy (i.e. scoring 4 or 5) is nearly equal to those identifying with non-direct action philosophy (i.e. scoring 1 or 2). This supports the theories of those who point out that the animal protection movement is diverse in both ideology and tactics (e.g., Garner, 1996) by showing that there are many within the rights category who appear not to support the use of direct action. Additionally it may go some way to dispelling

the idea that animal welfare is a 'softer' option, certainly in terms of action taken by those who identify more with the philosophies of welfare as opposed to rights. However, it must be noted that this was a self report scale with the attendant possibility of social desirability bias, moreover, the sample was elective and snowball in design and this might infer another potential source of bias (McBurney & White, 2004). Additionally the questions designed to elicit both philosophical and practical action beliefs were deliberately simplistic (in order to encourage higher response rates) and therefore unable to elicit any further information. It may be that future research wishes to utilize a less subjective instrument to measure these aspects of animal protection community members' personality.

In conclusion, attitudes within the animal protection community have hitherto been largely undocumented (Matthews & Herzog, 1997) and this study goes some way to remedying this oversight. Overall, the current study indicates that those within the animal protection community have significantly more pro-animal welfare attitudes, as measured by the AAS, than members of the general community, and that this trend is even more apparent when contrasted with those working within the primary industry sector. Whilst the interaction between attitude to the treatment of animal and philosophical and practical action beliefs was shown to be significant, the limitations noted above flag this as an area for future research.

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Table One *Average AAS score as a function of sample and gender*

	<i>Sample drawn from</i>						
	Animal Protectionists			General Community			General Community: Primary Industry Sector
	Overall	Male	Female	Overall	Male	Female	Overall
	N=396	N=65	N=331	N=550	N=186	N=364	N=29
AAS Score	84.7	78.4	85.9	67.6	63.8	69.5	57.7
SD	(10.5)	(14.8)	(9.0)	(9.3)	(8.7)	(9.1)	(10.2)

Table Two *Average AAS score as a function of Philosophical and Practical beliefs*

	Philosophical belief		Practical belief	
	Welfare orientation	Rights orientation	Non-direct action	Direct action
	N = 62	N = 241	N = 113	N = 168
AAS Score	72.5	89.9	79.1	89.9
SD	12.2	7.3	11.2	7.4