

# Violence Against Animals and People: Is Aggression Against Living Creatures Generalized?

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An association between childhood cruelty to animals and dangerous aggression against people at a later age could have important implications regarding early detection and treatment, preventive psychiatry, and a social ethic that encourages positive attitudes toward living creatures in general. Research reports in the literature are inconsistent and inconclusive regarding a possible relationship between animal cruelty and aggression against people. Although a single act is not predictive of another act, a pattern of substantial animal abuse may conceivably be associated with a pattern of recurrent violence directed against people. In the present study, extensive interview schedules were administered to aggressive criminals, nonaggressive criminals, and noncriminals. The nature of abuse was described for each subject who gave a history of substantial abuse. A clear relationship was found between early substantial abuse and recurrent violence against people. Possible explanations for conflicting results in the literature are discussed.

The relationship between childhood cruelty to animals and later dangerous assaults to people is far from settled. In a literature review on the neurologic aspects of violent behavior, Goldstein,<sup>1</sup> in 1974, listed childhood "violence towards animals" as one of the several already

agreed upon predictive factors of future murderous aggression. Diamond<sup>2</sup> countered that he had evaluated nonviolent individuals who had all of the historical items listed by Goldstein<sup>1</sup> and violent individuals with none of them. Twelve years later, significance of cruelty to animals in childhood remains questionable.

It is generally agreed that no specialized field has knowledge and methods for predicting future violent behavior accurately. Often called upon to anticipate future behavior for clinical and legal purposes, psychiatrists in particular are singled out as lacking predictive skills. If the triad of enuresis, fire setting, and cruelty to animals in childhood was prematurely oversold as predictive of fu-

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ture violence, today most authorities would argue against its predictive value.

A number of authors advised clinicians to inquire about cruelty to animals when assessing dangerousness.<sup>3-5</sup> Lion<sup>6</sup> included harming animals, along with setting fires and temper tantrums, as part of a symptomatic constellation in childhood associated with uncontrollable outbursts of anger. Revitch and Schlesinger<sup>7</sup> listed "hatred for and violence against cats" as one of several conditions that appears to be predictive of sexual assault or sex murder. In the evaluation of rapists, Groth<sup>8</sup> advised inquiry about preadolescent delinquent behaviors including cruelty to animals and children. The sadistic rapist in particular may have a history of impulsive aggressive behaviors, "not explicitly sexual, such as cruelty to animals and fighting". Nonetheless, cruelty to animals is not listed in DSM-III as one of the several childhood behaviors required to establish a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. And, this behavior is not mentioned in discussions of any of the DSM-III conduct disorders of childhood.<sup>9</sup>

The literature is inconsistent about whether empirical evidence supports an association between childhood violence against animals and later violence against people. Some studies<sup>10-19</sup> suggested a positive association. Some did not find animal abuse to be associated with later violence.<sup>20-25</sup> Still others were equivocal about a possible association.<sup>26,27</sup> Thus, the need is evident for research to help establish whether individuals who are repeatedly violent against people have a greater incidence

of animal abuse in childhood in comparison to less violent or nonviolent individuals.

A previous report by us<sup>28</sup> noted that aggressive criminal subjects had a statistically significant higher incidence of childhood cruelty to animals in comparison to less aggressive criminal or noncriminal subjects. Table 1, from the first report, presents figures and statistical analysis that supported this association. Specifically, the first report noted that 25 percent of aggressive criminals had abused animals five or more times in childhood. For nonaggressive criminals, the figure was less than 6 percent and for noncriminals, 0 percent.

In addition to reporting a greater number of abusive acts, aggressive criminals scored significantly higher than nonaggressive criminal and noncriminal subjects on a scale that measured childhood aggressiveness toward animals. With 40 examples of extreme cruelties and ample descriptive information, we were able to proffer tentatively a preliminary classification of motivations for animal abuse. Aggressive criminal subjects typically came from families marked by paternal alcoholism and physical abuse.

Although this first report noted that aggressive criminals admitted to a greater number of cruelties than nonaggressive criminals and noncriminals, the question remained whether individuals with a history of substantial animal abuse in childhood tended to be the most aggressive. The purpose of the present inquiry is to address this latter question. For purposes of this inquiry, "sub-

**Table 1**  
**Frequency of Childhood Animal Cruelties among Criminals and Noncriminals in Kansas and Connecticut**

		No. of Animal Cruelties				
		0	1-2	3-4	5+	
Aggressive criminal sample	N	10	9	5	8	32
	%	31.2	28.1	15.6	25.0	
	$\chi^2$	0.63	1.26	0.56	11.83	
Moderately aggressive criminal sample†	N	10	5	2	1	18
	%	55.6	27.7	11.1	5.6	
	$\chi^2$	1.07	0.75	0.00	0.12	
Nonaggressive criminal sample	N	27	20	2	3	52
	%	51.9	38.5	3.8	5.8	
	$\chi^2$	1.8	0.07	2.5	0.30	
Noncriminal sample	N	14	28	8	0	50
	%	28	56	16	0.0	
	$\chi^2$	1.84	2.84	1.04	3.95	
Totals	N	61	62	17	12	152
	%	40.1	40.8	11.2	7.9	

From Kellert and Felthous.<sup>28</sup> © 1985 by Plenum Publishing Corp. Reproduced with permission.

\*  $\chi^2 = 30.56$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p = < 0.005$ .

† This category includes inmates at Leavenworth Prison only.

stantial cruelty to animals” is defined as a pattern of deliberately, repeatedly, and unnecessarily hurting vertebrate animals in a manner likely to cause serious injury. Entering dogs in dog fights and dropping cats from heights were included in this definition because of the risk of injury or death. As in the first report, the type of aggressiveness considered was that which is recurrent, impulsive, and injurious to people.

Review of the literature failed to identify any systematic attempt to describe the nature of various childhood cruelties, aside from isolated case reports. Only cases of substantial cruelty are included here, but detailed information is provided for each case that met the threshold of substantiality.

After describing the nature, scope, and methods of this study, results are presented in the form of vignettes of all cases of substantial abuse. Vignettes are categorized according to sample assign-

ment. Sixteen cases belong to the aggressive criminal sample (ACS); four to the nonaggressive criminal sample (NACS); and three to the noncriminal sample (NS). Unlike ACS subjects, NACS and NS subjects were not selected on the basis of high aggressiveness. Therefore, aggressive acts of NACS and NS subjects are included in their vignettes. Significance of the findings are discussed.

### Method

The methodology of this study was described in a previous report<sup>28</sup> and will be mentioned only briefly here. In order to obtain a high yield of recurrently aggressive subjects, populations in two prisons were selected for study: U.S. Penitentiary in Danbury, CT, and U.S. Penitentiary in Leavenworth, KS. Another advantage of prison populations is that subjects' behaviors are observed over time by prison staff.

Prison staff rated each subject's level

of aggressiveness on a prepared scale of 1 to 10, and those subjects whose ratings were extremely low or high were asked to participate in the study. Aggressive criminal subjects, those with high scores, were observed by prison staff to manifest aggressive threatening speech, aggressive preparatory behaviors, and aggressive acts, with three or more violent acts in a year. Nonaggressive criminal subjects showed few if any of these behaviors. Ratings on aggressiveness were not shared with interviewers until after the interviews and ratings were never shared with subjects. In addition to high ratings by staff, aggressive subjects themselves confirmed that they had been extremely violent against others. Subjects who were not classified at either extreme on most parameters were designated moderately aggressive. This method allowed comparisons of samples of different levels of aggressiveness with criminality held constant.

Also interviewed were noncriminal subjects, selected randomly from low-middle class neighborhoods in Topeka, KS, and New Haven, CT. This sample consisted of young adult men who were not pre-labeled as criminal or antisocial.

One hundred and fifty-two males participated in this study: 32 aggressive criminals, 18 moderately aggressive criminals, 52 nonaggressive criminals, and 50 noncriminals. All subjects provided written informed consent to participate. A standardized interview schedule with more than 440 closed and open-ended questions was administered. Items pertained to many aspects of animal involvements, antisocial behaviors, and environmental factors. In addition,

a close-ended survey on attitudes toward animals and human aggression was administered. When permission was granted, an attempt was made to contact and interview a parent or family member who would have been familiar with the subject during his childhood.

The advantage of interviewing the subject directly is that the interviewer obtains a clearer and more complete account through the subject's own words than is possible if information is sought from intermediate sources. Chart reviews would not have educated the information needed for this inquiry.

From the 152 subjects interviewed, only those who gave histories of substantial animal abuse were included in this series. Since this report deals only with subjects whose abuse was substantial, many of the 373 abusive acts toward animals reported by other subjects were not considered here. Although 40 of the 152 subjects reported at least one instance of extreme cruelty, this series includes only subjects who had repeatedly abused animals. Where the substantiality of abuse was at all questionable, the tendency was to err in the direction of underinclusion of ACS subjects and overinclusion of NACS and NS subjects.

## Results

*ACS* Cruelty to cats was well established for ACS-1, who reported throwing a cat into an incinerator when he was about 8 years old. His mother said in a telephone interview that at about 8 years, ACS-1 beat to death three or four cats with a clothesline pole. ACS-1 mentioned several acts of cruelty to dogs including stoning, beating, and on one

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occasion throwing a dog from a height to a body of water below.

Killing animals was a prominent theme in the history of ACS-1. Throughout his childhood, the subject joined other family members in slaughtering farm animals with hammers, guns, and electric knives. Along with his father and brother, he trapped skunks, coyotes, and foxes for the pleasure of killing them. He and his brother hunted sparrows and frogs for the sole purpose of killing them. In describing his motivation, he used the term "viciousness." He caught fish by the use of explosives.

ACS-1 punished pet and livestock animals excessively. In addition to beating his dogs, he beat hogs in the head with a board and struck cows with an electric prod to gain compliance. In the attitudinal survey, he strongly agreed with, "Firmly disciplining a dog so that it will obey every command."

Some cruelties lacked an utilitarian motivation and were perpetrated merely to satisfy sadistic yearnings. Applying dry ice to live fish and pulling wings off sparrows exemplified this motivation. On the attitudinal survey, he strongly agreed that he would enjoy seeing rats or rattlesnakes suffer before they are killed.

ACS-2 identified with his pet bulldog which he entered in numerous dog fights. He related numerous examples of sadistic cruelties in childhood that lacked any semblance of sport or social value: stretching out frogs to die slowly in the hot sun, splitting open bellies of lizards and salamanders, burning a live opossum with a liquid accelerant after

running over it with a car and dropping a large rock on it, cutting tails off snakes and lizards, throwing cats from roof tops, and exploding live trout with M-80 firecrackers.

ACS-3 trained his pet German shepherd to attack people. He fostered an aggressive disposition in his dog by painfully squeezing its nose and by striking the animal in the head hard enough to induce "dizzy spells."

Even more notable was his prejudice against cats, which he described as "sneaky, creepy, and useless." He admitted to multiple cruelties to cats including: throwing them from bridges and high buildings, kicking them, deliberately running over them with a car, and breaking their bones. One Halloween evening, he and some friends collected several cats, poured lighter fluid on them, set them afire, and watched them run through the neighborhood. On another occasion, he placed several cats in a pillowcase, soaked them with lighter fluid, set them afire, and then released the flaming animals in a tavern.

In adolescence, the subject abused a neighbor's beagle by abrading the dog's anus with sandpaper and rubbing alcohol into it. Eventually he killed this dog by tethering it to a heavy block and throwing the dog and weight into a lake. He felt good about this afterward.

As a child, ACS-4 snapped chickens' necks, shot birds, and trapped small game. He reported disliking livestock. He threw rocks at cats and dogs. His worse cruelty to an animal was putting his girlfriend's cat into a microwave oven where it exploded. He attributed

this act to a state of intoxication from drug abuse.

As a child, ACS-5 participated in a variety of cruelties against animals: attending cock fights, hunting and shooting animals indiscriminately, and killing cats for target practice. His mother hated cats and violently kicked them. ACS-5 agreed with 10 items on the attitudinal survey that indicated aggressive feelings and insensitivity toward animals.

In childhood, ACS-6 disliked and abused family pets. He beat, suffocated, and repeatedly withheld food from his pet dogs. He killed a pet bird. He threw cats up in the air and down from high places. He threw one cat onto a busy expressway. He disliked pets, wildlife, and livestock and feared birds and snakes. He described his motivation for cruelties as "pleasure at striking out (and) hurting something," and as "revenge, getting even for my hurt." Even in adulthood, the subject threw about his cats and dogs to discharge rage. Some were killed as a result of abusive treatment.

ACS-7 trained his pet dogs for fighting and entered them in fights over the course of 8 years. He proudly offered that one of his dogs was "the baddest." He fed his dog gunpowder in raw steak "to toughen him up." He attended rodeos occasionally and cock fights about once a week. He often trapped and hunted animals, including the endangered Florida panther. The subject wounded a panther and did not attempt to catch or kill it. He intimidated having had sexual contact with animals.

As a child, ACS-8 abused the family dog by kicking it in the testicles whenever the animal bothered him at mealtime. Once he kicked and beat a dog that bit him. He disliked wildlife and livestock. He and his friends hunted small game in the spirit of "having a party."

In childhood, ACS-9 participated in multiple cruelties to animals including: burning insects, tying cats' tails together, and breaking bones of turtles. He said that his father hated and killed dogs.

ACS-10 raised and trained dogs for fighting, which he experienced as exciting. Other cruelties included stoning rats and stabbing fish.

As a youth, ACS-11 put a cat in a paper bag and threw it in front of a car. When asked how he felt about this, he said, "I enjoyed it." Other abuses of cats included tying cats' tails together, hanging, breaking their bones, beating, stoning, drowning, and throwing them off buildings. He estimates that he abused cats violently between 40 and 50 times, primarily "for fun and excitement (and because he) enjoyed it."

In childhood, ACS-12 trained his pet boxers to attack people and other dogs. He identified with one pet boxer in particular which was a ferocious fighter like himself.

Despite affection for his favorite dog, he could be mean to other dogs. Numerous times, he rubbed dogs' anuses with turpentine after they barged into the chicken coop. He threw rocks and bricks at other dogs; and, on one occasion, he broke a dog's leg by throwing a

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brick at it. In addition to his boxers, he owned a pitbull terrier, but it did not grow large enough for fighting.

Sadistic gratification was suggested by his interest in dog fights and bantam rooster fights, and by his practice, shared with a cousin, of capturing water moccasins, presenting the live snakes to a caged king snake, and watching the king snake kill the moccasins.

Modeling or identification with the aggressor was evidenced by his explanation of why he regularly beat mules in the head with a stick. He said he beat mules repeatedly in imitation of his grandfather who did the same and once enucleated a mule's eye by beating it in the head. "Like when fighting (people), I beat on animals to get back for the beatings I got."

Once, ACS-12 perpetrated animal cruelty in order to retaliate against a neighbor woman. He and his cousin put her cats in a gunny sack, bludgeoned them with a club, and threw the sack full of cats into a river.

In childhood, ACS-13 collected stray cats and dogs in his basement, even though he realized that he could have been adopting other peoples' pets. He attempted to train these animals, even the cats, to attack people and other animals. The subject's stepfather, whom the subject hated, beat the subject's dogs and injured them. ACS-13 trained his dogs to fight back in self-defense, and once one of his dogs bit and injured his step-grandfather.

The subject was mean and vengeful toward other dogs. Though he denied intent to kill, he fatally shot a dog that

tried to mate with his female dog. He stoned dogs and once injured a dog by throwing a brick at it.

ACS-13 at least witnessed, if he did not actively perpetrate, extreme cruelties to cats, including burying cats up to their necks and running over them with a lawn mower, tying two cats together by their tails and hanging them over a clothesline to fight, and tying cats to the backs of dogs. The dogs would then run desperately under a car to knock the cats off their backs, thereby injuring the cats.

Although ACS-14 loved his pet dog of 9 years, he disliked and abused cats. He broke their bones, beat them, stoned them, and threw them from high places. According to the subject, he mistreated cats simply because he did not like them. As a youth, ACS-14 used physical abuse and pain to train animals, usually horses.

From 6 to 9 years of age, ACS-15 was afraid of many animals, but he was not frightened of cats. Yet he was especially mean to both his family's cats and other cats. He swung cats by their tails, threw them from a third story building, and beat them. He nearly killed a neighbor's cat, in part, to retaliate against the neighbor.

As a youth he threw rocks and potatoes at horses. He stoned dogs, but to his knowledge he never injured a dog. Once a dog bit him in the face after he teased it. He smacked and tossed about his sister's gerbils, and if they scratched him in the process, he killed them. He exploded bullfrogs with firecrackers. He stoned fish. He indicated that he tickled blowfish until they exploded. Finally, he

reported having filled milk crates with pigeons and letting them loose in a restaurant. He said he did this for revenge and amusement.

Subject ACS-16 beat his pet dog in order to train it. He disliked wildlife and livestock. As a child, he frequently threw cats from heights.

**NACS** NACS-1 was atypical among subjects of the less aggressive criminal sample because of the rich variety of reported animal cruelties in his childhood. He was also atypical in that he took lithium carbonate to control symptoms of major mental illness.

In childhood, the subject's fascination with the life/death boundary involved animals. For example, the process of killing was integral to his pleasure in shooting wild birds. He compared his curiosity about killing chickens with Leonardo Da Vinci's interest in watching humans being guillotined. Chicken brains, like humans', he reasoned, must be aware momentarily after the head is severed.

Other signs of fascination with death were his early experimentations with novel ways of killing animals. One example was hanging a cat by its neck and attaching a weight to the cat to facilitate strangulation. When the animal did not die immediately, he released it. Despite his present preference for mice, in childhood he was not loath to feeding live mice to his pet owl. In adolescence he and a friend hunted deer with the thought of eating a deer's uncooked heart in order to achieve a sense of identification with wild animals. Their hunt was not successful. On the attitudinal

survey, he admitted a desire to see a lion kill an antelope.

In childhood, NACS-1 tied up a raccoon and threw knives at it for target practice. He castrated the animal and hung its testicles in a sack on the front door of a woman's home whom he disliked, presumably to horrify her. He regularly mutilated large polliwogs by cutting out their hearts. He trapped and caged a stray cat to observe it become "insane." He seemed to identify with his animal victims.

As an adult, NACS-1 did not have a history of violence against people.

The social learning of aggressive behavior toward animals from a parent is well illustrated by NACS-2. Mother, who hated snakes, led the family in killing them with sticks and stones. All in the family joined in these forays. Whoever killed a snake was acclaimed as a hero by other family members. Snakes were frightening to the subject. Mother apparently instilled fear and aggression by her impulsive physical punishments, and she identified a suitable repository animal for projection. Moreover, she served as a model as to how to deal with snakes and provided reinforcing encouragement.

In addition to the subject's active participation in killing snakes in his preadolescent years, he shot birds with a sling shot. After he stole a 12-gauge shotgun at 12 years, he shot birds, rabbits, and "anything that moved," primarily for the pleasure of shooting his firearm.

NACS-2 had an uncontrollable, violent temper throughout his childhood. He had frequent, injurious fights with



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his sister and brother. A father figure was absent from his family. Destructive behaviors included window breaking and repetitive fire setting. At 15, he set fire to a tavern.

In adult years, he participated in numerous fights, both on an individual basis and as a member of a gang. He carried a pistol, but usually knocked out opponents with a baseball bat. Curiously, he was never arrested for assault and battery. Most of his arrests were for burglaries. While in prison, this subject did not behave aggressively; hence, his classification as nonaggressive despite his history of past violence.

As a youth, NACS-3 owned a dog and a bird. Although he disliked his pets, he did not abuse them. He cut legs off frogs and rodents, burned and electrocuted rodents, cut, stabbed, and stoned frogs and reptiles, and exploded rodents and muskrats with cherry bombs. Once he set a chipmunk on fire.

As an adult, the subject was involved in several serious fights described as "business disagreements." One adversary had to be hospitalized. Like NACS-2, NACS-3 was unlike most NACS subjects because of his considerable history of aggression against others. For both NACS 2 and 3, nonaggressive classifications should be regarded as borderline.

In childhood, NACS-4 had many pets. He frequently hunted and trapped animals and experienced these activities as "exhilarating." He cut or stabbed fish "for kicks" and tore wings off bugs.

NACS-4 came from a close-knit family. He fought in school, but not frequently. Destructive behaviors included

burning fields and breaking windows. He killed a man when he was in the U.S. Navy, reportedly provoked by the other man's bullying behavior.

*NS* Of the 50 randomly selected noncriminal subjects in Connecticut and Kansas, only three gave histories of substantial animal cruelties in childhood.

In childhood, NS-1 trained his pet dog by striking it and throwing it against the wall. Although he disliked his sister's cats, he did not mistreat them. He killed a number of snakes because of his fear of them. When he was between 9 and 13 years old, he expressed his hatred of snapping turtles by cutting off their heads. The subject agreed with five items on the attitudinal survey that indicated insensitivity toward animals.

NS-1 gave a history of aggressive behaviors against people. In high school, he was involved in fist fights and chain fights with peers. He did not assault people as an adult.

Like NS-1, NS-2 disliked cats. Several times he attached a self-made parachute to his sisters' cat and threw the animal from an upper story window. Once he shot a stray cat with a pellet gun for "target practice." He felt proud afterward for hitting the cat and fracturing its tail. Frightened of some dogs, he struck one in the head after it bit him. On the opinion survey, NS-2 agreed with 15 items that suggested hostility, meanness, or insensitivity toward various animals.

This subject frequently fought with peers in grade school and high school. Some fights were racially motivated.

Others were related to his reputation as a fighter. Punishments for fighting at school included paddlings, expulsion from a club, and eventual expulsion from school.

He fought occasionally in adulthood as well. Injuries included cut faces and bloody noses. Once he smashed large home appliances, washers and dryers, with a forklift "for the fun of it." He was arrested for public intoxication and charges related to drug abuse.

From 8 to 12 years old, NS-3 pulled wings off flies. From 10 to 18 he caught fish, about four times per year, for the specific purpose of beating them. He exploded frogs with firecrackers for "thrills." Other aggressive behaviors in childhood included frequent fighting at school, breaking windows, and destroying an old barn.

**Discussion**

These descriptive accounts further support an association between childhood cruelty to animals and later aggressive behaviors against people that was previously demonstrated by statistical analysis.<sup>28</sup> Half (50.0 percent) of the ACS subjects (16:32) gave histories of substantial animal cruelties warranting inclusion in the present series (Figure 1). Higher than expected, this percentage contrasts with 8.0% of the NACS subjects with substantial abuse and 6.0% of the NS subjects. Curiously, none of the moderately aggressive criminals had a history of substantial abuse (Table 2).

Statistical analysis established a significant association between a pattern of substantial abuse of vertebrate animals

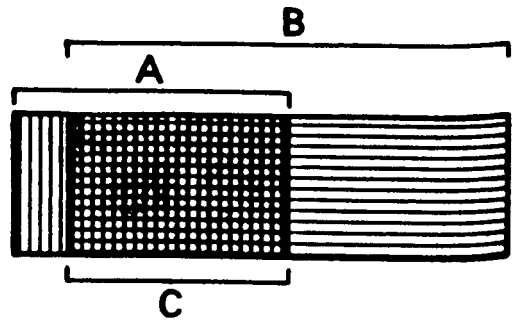


Figure 1. A represents the 20 prisoners who gave histories of substantial animal cruelty in childhood. B represents the 32 prisoners who were classified as recurrently and impulsively aggressive. C represents the 16 prisoners who were chronically aggressive and had histories of substantial animal abuse.

**Table 2**  
**Number and Percentage of Subjects in Each Sample Who Reported a History of Substantial Cruelty to Vertebrate Animals\***

	N	No. with Substantial Animal Abuse	% with Substantial Animal Abuse
Aggressive criminal sample	32	16	50
Moderately aggressive sample	18	0	0
Nonaggressive criminal sample	52	4	8
Noncriminal sample	50	3	6

\*  $\chi^2 = 37.2, df = 3, p < 0.005.$

in childhood and later recurrent, pro-  
 tean personal violence in adulthood ( $\chi^2 = 37.2, df = 3, p = 0.005$ ). Hence, the hypothesis that recurrent, serious animal abuse in childhood is related to a chronic violent disposition toward people was supported by results of the present study.

To describe aggressive behaviors, beyond animal cruelties, for each of the 16 ACS subjects with a history of substantial animal abuse would have expanded

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their descriptive accounts excessively. Therefore, some of the more salient aggressive behaviors are summarized for the entire group in Table 3. Destructiveness, window smashing, and fire setting in childhood were common findings. All 16 subjects fought in childhood. Ten of 14 (71.4 percent) admitted fighting as adults. Seven (50.0 percent) admitted inflicting serious injuries to others. Three subjects were self-acknowledged multiple murderers. Had two subjects (ACS-2 and ACS-3) not withdrawn before completing the portion of the interview on adult behaviors, figures for aggressive acts may have been higher. On the 10-point scale for observed aggressive behaviors during incarceration,

these two subjects were rated 8 and 9, respectively.

Even though classified as less violent than the ACS subjects, most of the NACS subjects with a history of substantial animal abuse in childhood also gave histories of violence as adults. An interesting exception, NACS-1, was also atypical in that he suffered from a long-standing, manifest psychotic disturbance.

One of the NACS subjects provided a classic counterpoint to the vignettes of subjects who had been cruel to animals. He came from a close family completely devoid of domestic violence. His father and a brother were ministers. He was incarcerated for white collar, nonviolent

**Table 3**  
**Aggressive Behaviors in Childhood and Adulthood\***

ACS	Aggressive Behaviors in Childhood					Aggressive Behaviors in Adulthood			
	Fights	Fights with Injury	Fire Setting	Window Smashing	Destructiveness	Fights and Assaults	Serious Injury	Murder	Multiple Murders
1	X†	0	X	X	X	0	X	0	0
2	X	X	0	0	X				
3	X	X★	X	X	X				
4	X	0	X	X	X	X	X	?	?
5	X	X★	0	0	0	X	0	X	X
6	X	X	X	X	0	0	0	0	0
7	X	X★	0	0	0	X	X	0	0
8	X	X	0	0	0	X	X	?	?
9	X	X★	X	X	0	X	0	X	X
10	X	0	0	0	X	0	0	?	?
11	X	0	X	0	0	X	0	0	0
12	X	X★	0	X	X	X	X	X	X
13	X	X	0	X	X	X	X	0	0
14	X	X★	X	X	X	X	0	0	0
15	X	?	X	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	0	0

\* Selected aggressive behaviors in childhood and adulthood are tabulated for each of the sixteen aggressive criminal subjects who reported substantial, severe, and repeated animal cruelties in childhood. Subjects 2 and 3 did not provide information on aggressive behaviors in adulthood. Both, however, were rated as extremely aggressive by their respective prison counselors.

† X = Behavior present; X★ = injuries were very serious; 0 = behavior not present; ? = equivocal, tentative, or partial response.

criminal activities. Once he threw a rock at a porcupine after his dog's snout was peppered with quills. He felt that this was the "worst experience" in his life, because he thought he had killed the porcupine.

In general, noncriminal subjects reported little or no abusive behavior toward animals. The few who offered histories of repetitive, substantial abuse had not been as violent as the criminal subjects who abused animals, but neither were their histories devoid of dangerous assaults or fights. Selection of noncriminal subjects in the community was done randomly, so there was no attempt to exclude men who had committed crimes earlier in life. Even though some had engaged in criminal conduct, all were classified as noncriminals because they were not preselected as imprisoned felons.

Results of this study are in substantial conformity with findings of other studies that suggest an association between childhood animal abuse and violence directed against people. But how does one account for discrepancies with those studies that did not support this association? Differences in definitions of animal abuse, definitions of aggression, methods of sample selection, and methods of data collection likely contributed to dissimilar results.

In the present study, aggressiveness was not established by a single act, regardless of how violent and destructive. The nature of aggressiveness considered here is chronic, recurrent, diffuse, impulsive, and seriously injurious to other people. McGargee's<sup>29</sup> overcontrolled ag-

gressor does not correspond to the type of aggressive subjects identified in this study. Aggressive subjects in the present study were both undercontrolled and extremely violent.

A perfunctorily raised question in an interview or an item on an outline for data retrieval from hospital or prison charts is, in our opinion, inadequate for educating information on prior cruelties to animals. Before this history can be ruled out, a number of discrete but direct questions should be asked of the subject and descriptive information should be recorded. The foregoing descriptive accounts of animal cruelties illustrate the importance of content for both investigative and clinical purposes. If cruelty has occurred, its extent and psychological significance will be little appreciated without an adequate history.

In the present study, subjects were asked about 16 specific types of animal cruelty. In addition, a number of activities involving animals were inquired about: owning family pets, raising livestock, training animals, trapping, hunting, attending dog, cock, or bull fights, and miscellaneous activities such as horseback riding. If subjects acknowledged any of these involvements, they were asked for more specific information about the activity. Experiences with animals, including sex play, injury by an animal, and psychotic perceptions of animals, were also inquired about. Specific questions about cruelties pertained to type(s) of animals abused, age of subject when abuse occurred, frequency of abuse, motivation, animal's resulting condition, consequences for the subject,

his feelings afterward, involvements of others, and number of years over which abuse persisted. Subjects were allowed to elaborate and add relevant information.

Most studies on antecedents of aggression do not define cruelty to animals. Differences in definitions of abuse and thoroughness of history result in discrepant findings. To what extent is the abuse socially approved? Are the abused animals socially valued or devalued? Did the subject act on his own initiative or as a member of a group? Did he only witness cruelties without perpetrating them himself? Or, did he claim that he only observed in order to deny responsibility for direct involvement? Without an adequate history, conclusory judgments about animal abuse are not data based. Histories in this study were purposefully widely inclusive, encompassing many aspects of animal involvements, various antisocial behaviors, environmental factors, and so on.

Even a comprehensive history obtained by thoroughly and systematically questioning the subject may be questioned for its reliability. There is the possibility that some subjects from prison populations will exaggerate or fabricate in order to impress the interviewer with the subject's "toughness." This tendency should be considered on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Interviewing relatives was not a consistently reliable method of confirming historical data. With few exceptions, relatives of prisoners tended to deny or minimize the subject's early antisocial behaviors, including animal abuse.

There is reason to believe that in many cases parents were simply unaware of cruelties done alone or only among peers. Hence, the importance of an adequate history from subjects themselves.

### Conclusion

The above cameos illustrate a wide range of behaviors involving hurting, injuring, or killing animals. Many of the behaviors are clearly cruel or abusive. Others are arguable. When only the clearest examples of abusive behaviors toward animals are considered, several observations can be made about abusive ACS subjects in comparison to abusive NACS and NS subjects: (1) Abusive ACS subjects tended to engage in a greater variety of abusive acts. (2) Abusive ACS subjects tended to abuse a greater number of animal species. (3) All of the abusive ACS subjects had been cruel to cats or dogs, some numerous times. In contrast with ACS abusers, some NACS subjects showed more restraint during the act and remorse afterward.

These findings suggest that certain features of childhood cruelty to animals may be more meaningful in evaluating aggressive individuals than mere presence or absence of cruelty. Some of these features might include direct involvement, lack of self-restraint, lack of remorse, variety of cruel acts, variety of species victimized, and inclusion of socially valued species (e.g., pets). Motivation should also be considered as a significant aspect of abuse, but space does not permit an adequate discussion of this aspect of cruelty.

It cannot be concluded from this study that childhood cruelty to animals is an accurate predictor of future recurrent impulsive aggression against people. But, neither do these findings support the notion that cruelty to animals bears no relationship to aggression against people. Substantial cruelty to animals appears to be one of several behaviors (e.g., injurious assaults, window smashing, fire setting) that can represent a pattern of impulsive, diffuse aggression in childhood or adolescence. The pattern may or may not subside with nominal attainment of adulthood.

Future research should endeavor to study the phenomenon of animal cruelty among noninstitutional populations and across diverse demographic and cultural groups. Though less informative about epidemiologic patterns, longitudinal studies involving children who have demonstrated cruelty should provide useful information about the evolution of this behavior with aging, changes in social environment, and within various psychopathologic contexts. Prospective studies can be useful in testing hypotheses of etiology. A more indepth study of animal cruelty and its possible causal linkage with other forms of aggressive and antisocial behavior may produce useful findings. We recommend that future research on animal cruelty involve direct interviews with subjects rather than chart reviews. Interview schedules pertaining to animal cruelty must be comprehensive. And, finally, the chronic pattern of personal violence must be adequately defined and identified. Research that defines personal vi-

olence by a single act is unlikely to establish an association with cruelty.

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