

Jurors' Perceptions of Animal Abuse

Sankhya Amaravadi, Kelly Burke, and Tayler Jones

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Bette L. Bottoms

Animal abuse is so linked to both domestic violence and child abuse that intentional cruelty towards animals is considered by social services, police, and veterinary professionals as a potential indicator of domestic violence. In the past decade, there has been growing concern with animal welfare in the United States, which has led to an increase in laws aimed at punishing perpetrators of animal abuse, due in part to the link between animal and child abuse and domestic violence. The burden of prosecuting animal abuse cases falls to courts and the legal system. However, with no rigorous scientific studies, neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys have anything more than intuition to guide them as they empanel juries and prepare cases for trial. Studying jurors' reactions to animal abuse is therefore practically important and needed in both the psychological and legal fields. The purpose of the current study is to provide insight into how jurors approach animal abuse cases, and the factors that influence their perceptions, attitudes, and judgments. In this study, I examine whether mock jurors' gender and their identification with gender roles influence their judgments and perceptions of guilt when presented with cases of animal abuse (a man beating a cat). I hypothesize that, compared to men mock jurors, women will be more likely to want to convict the perpetrator and to consider the act more morally wrong. This will parallel findings in research on jurors' perceptions of child abuse, where there are consistent differences between men and women..