

Framing animal rights

Change in people's attitude toward the treatment of animals

Ako Kasuga

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Abstract

Animals have been used for experiments that benefit scientific advancement. However, from the 19th century, there have been changes in people's attitudes towards the treatment of animals. The conventional idea that animal sacrifices are necessary for scientific advancement is now criticized, and the new concept such as "animal rights" and "animal welfare" has become prevalent. Many animal rights organizations have emerged, and laws to restrict/ban cruelty to animals have been enforced. At the same time, such radical animal protection movements incited public fear and some counter-attitudes. This paper aims to explore the shifts in people's attitudes reflected on the media by looking at the strings of newspapers of the New York Times from 1980 to 2015. The four frames I found are moralistic, humanistic, utilitarian, and terrorist. I then focused on the terrorist frame as an anti-frame against animal rights and found the factors that have caused its conspicuousness.

Keywords: animal welfare, animal rights, speciesism, cruelty to animals, animal research, experiment on animals, humanistic, moralistic, utilitarian, terrorist

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Introduction

Animals and humans have built an intimate relationship over time. People have used them for a collection of purposes: a food source, labor in agriculture, a tool of transportation, subjects of experiments, a prey of hunting, entertainment, and life companions that give them comfort. Historically the common conception of animals has been that they are lower in status than human beings; they are not capable of thinking and reasoning though not all animals are considered equally inferior. Some of the most prominent philosophers in human history, such as Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Carruthers, hold "indirect theories," which argues that animals lack consciousness, reason, or autonomy. Thus, they do not share the same morals and considerations as humans (Loughnan, Halloran, & Beatson, 2009).

However, society has experienced changes in people's attitudes toward animals. The word "animal rights" or "animal welfare" has gain prominence in the United States, and cruelty to animals has become an urgent concern. Companies sell animal-friendly products to attract customers with shared values, the number of animal rights organizations and activists has increased, and more people have converted themselves into vegans/vegetarians for empathy for animals. A survey by Packaged Facts found that 58 % of American consumers are concerned about the treatment of animals raised for food¹ when making choices of purchase (PRNewswire, 2017).

As well as the pro-animal rights attitudes, there exist opposite stands. For example, some claim extreme animal rights activism is a threat, which prevents the advancement and welfare of human beings. Moreover, some activists have been considered terrorists for their radical

¹. For example, the quality of food given to animals, whether the animals have had the freedom to move around, and whether the welfare of animals has been considered in general or not

behaviors. Now, how have those shifts taken place? What has changed public opinion about animal rights? To find out, I focus on the arguments about research involving animals. By examining the change in the amount of specific language related to animal testing, I aim to trace the shifts in people's attitudes and identify the factors that caused them. This primary focus on animal research was determined following the results of the survey by Plous (1991), where animals used in studies were found to be the highest priority to tackle by the most significant number of animal rights activists.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section gives background on the issue based on historical evidence and discusses previous studies of the topic. The following part develops a set of quantitative indicators of how the media has reflected the shift of people's opinions on the matter by suggesting four frames: moralistic, humanistic, utilitarian, and terrorist frame. It explains in detail the methodology chosen and discusses its likely accuracy. The following presents the results and their analysis. In conclusion, I demonstrate what the outcome of the research indicates by turning to psychology literature to analyze the prominence of the terrorist frame.

Background

Previous literature has focused on discovering whether there is a significant difference in groups of people by age, gender, and educational background on the attitude towards how to treat animals. Kellert (1985) detected ten different attitudes towards animals based on a national survey of 3,107 randomly selected Americans in the 48 contiguous states and Alaska. The ten attitudes are as follows:

- 1) **Naturalistic**- Primary interest in and affection for wildlife and the outdoors.

- 2) **Ecologicistic**- Primary concern for the environment as a system, for interrelationships between wildlife species and natural habitats.
- 3) **Humanistic**- Primary interest in and strong affection for individual animals, principally pets.
- 4) **Moralistic**- Primary concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals, with strong opposition to the exploitation of and cruelty toward animals.
- 5) **Scientistic**- Primary interest in the physical attributes and biological functioning of animals.
- 6) **Aesthetic**- Primary interest in the artistic and symbolic characteristics of animals.
- 7) **Utilitarian**- Primary concern for the practical and material value of animals.
- 8) **Dominionistic**- Primary satisfactions derived from mastery and control over animals, typically in sporting situations.
- 9) **Negativistic**- Primary orientation an active avoidance of animals due to dislike or fear.
- 10) **Neutralistic**- Primary orientation a passive avoidance of animals due to indifference and lack of interest.

He then found the most common attitude of contemporary US citizens towards animals is the humanistic, moralistic, utilitarian, and negativistic attitudes. Although these common conceptions conflict with each other, for example, the moralistic and utilitarian in terms of the exploitation of animals, he argues the diverse dynamic of attitudes reflects the conflicts existing today's society over problems about people and animals. His further research includes the difference of public positions depending on species preferences, which reveals the dog and the

horse were the most preferred. On the contrary, animals such as the cockroach, the rat, and the rattlesnake were suggested as the least liked animals, possibly for the reason that they can be harmful to human beings. Another research by Nibert (1994) shows that women were more likely to support animal rights than men, younger people than older people, city residents than those living in more rural areas, Catholics than protestants. He also finds that income, education, and race seem to be unrelated to support for animals.

While those studies were primarily focused on the distributions of public attitudes at the time, I could barely find reviews about changes in public attitudes over time. As I mentioned, people's perception regarding the treatment and rights of animals has undoubtedly changed over the past decades, and it is essential to investigate the change-inducing factors. I look at media coverage, which reflects the general attitude of people as well as how the common argument has shifted. I explain in the following section the data collection and measurement I employed for my research.

Data Collection and Measurement

Firstly, I examined articles that include stories about research involving animals. The terms associated with research on animals are animal testing, animal experiment, and lab animals, etc. I used these terms interactively to search the related articles and to pay attention to the validity of the terms in different historical contexts. The word search is:

("research on animals" OR "animal research" OR "animal testing" OR "testing on animals" OR "lab animals" OR "animals in the lab" OR "experiment on animals" OR "animal experiment").

I employed the ProQuest newspaper search engine to find related articles. I compared the result of several newspaper companies' coverage that I could find in the ProQuest historical

newspaper search. I chose The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune to include the diversity of location and in bias.

Figure 1.

Attention to Animal Research in Four US Newspapers.

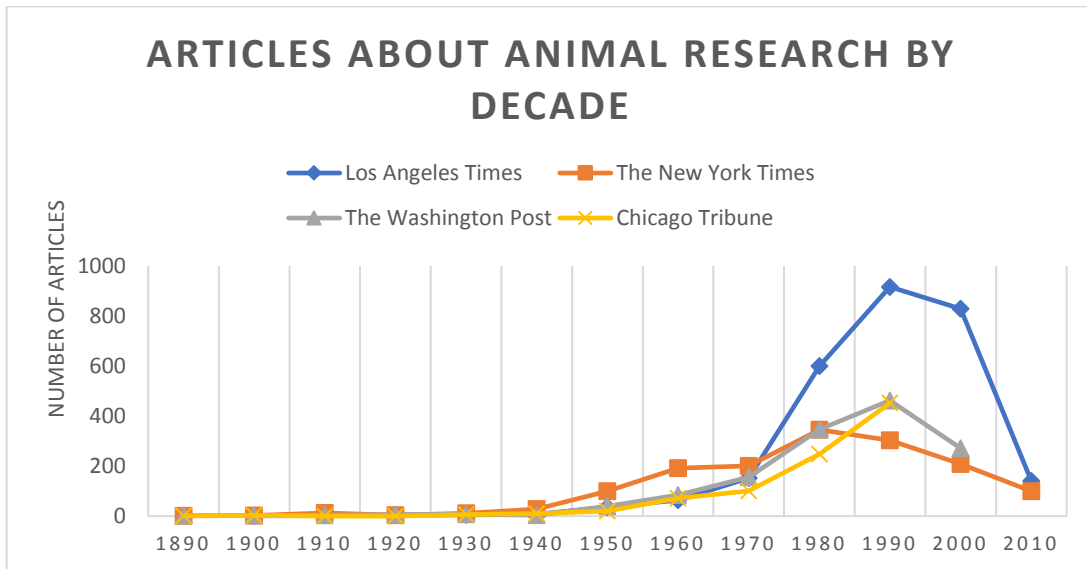


Figure 1 shows the results of searching according to the terms laid out above for the four different newspapers. Notably, Los Angeles Times, in the blue line, rises from the mid-1970 and peaks with almost 1000 articles in the 1990s. Other publications show practically the same trend though in small numbers of items, suggesting the entire media attention to animal research grew around the 1980s.

Four Frames

By reading some articles that resulted from my search, I was able to see the distinct frames about research involving animals. I turned to the most common attitudes towards animals discovered by previous research by Kellert (1984) and named three frames added with another new frame that I also found in the keyword search.

- **The moralistic frame:** Animals were entitled to rights to some extent from a moral point of view, and they should not be forced to suffer from cruelty.
- **The humanistic frame:** animals are endowed with equal rights as human beings. Arguments were formed to abolish any research that involves animals.
- **The utilitarian frame:** animals do not have the ability to feel pain, and they are to serve humans. In this frame, animals are objectified and exploited for benefits for humans.
- **The terrorist frame:** extreme animal activists are called terrorists after several events where some of the activists commit attacks targeting facilities that employ animal experiments.

The moralistic frame includes articles mentioning concerns about the suffering of animals used in research and demands the improvement in conditions for animals born to be subjects. While the moralistic frame is more concerned about the treatment of animals in animal research fields and states that animals should be freed from cruelty and pain as much as possible, the humanistic frame takes the position to abolish animal experiments altogether. This is because the humanistic frame believes animals are endowed with the equal rights as human beings. The utilitarian framework includes articles that accept animals used in research for human use of cosmetics and medicine, or any scientific experimentation. The terrorist frame is applied in articles where animal advocates are criticized for being too extreme and radical, to the point where they become threats to society. The last two frames accord in that they affirm the necessities of animal research thus could be considered as counter-frames to pro-animal rights movements. Now, I looked for articles in each of the four frames in the Nexis Uni. I chose *the New York Times*'s media coverage due to its least limited availability of materials. Considering the ubiquity of the topic among the newspaper companies, the articles of *the New York Times*

should reflect the common trends about lab animals. Table 1 shows how I used some specific terms to identify the frames.

Table 1.
Identifying Three Frames of Research Involving Animals

Frame	Search Terms
<p>The Moralistic Frame</p>	<p>("research on animals" OR "animal research" OR "animal testing" OR "testing on animals" OR "lab animals" OR "animals in lab" OR "experiment on animals" OR "animal experiment" OR "in vivo" OR "non-human primate" OR xenotransplantation OR "gene pharming" OR "Draize test" OR ethology) AND (moral OR ethical OR cruel OR "cruel-free" OR "cruelty-free" OR compassion OR "cage-free" OR euthanasia OR humane OR suffering)</p>
<p>The Humanistic Frame</p>	<p>("research on animals" OR "animal research" OR "animal testing" OR "testing on animals" OR "lab animals" OR "animals in lab" OR "experiment on animals" OR "animal experiment" OR "in vivo" OR "non-human primate" OR xenotransplantation OR "gene pharming" OR "Draize test" OR ethology) AND (abolition OR "legal person" OR "property status of animals" OR sentience OR liberation OR freedom OR "animal rights" OR "animal welfare" OR autonomous OR anthropomorphism OR anthropocentric OR speciesism OR "animal advocacy")</p>
<p>The Utilitarian Frame</p>	<p>("research on animals" OR "animal research" OR "animal testing" OR "testing on animals" OR "lab animals" OR "animals in lab" OR "experiment on animals" OR "animal experiment" OR "in vivo" OR "non-human primate" OR xenotransplantation OR "gene pharming" OR "Draize test" OR ethology) AND (discovery OR drug OR medicine OR breakthrough OR finding) AND NOT (moral OR ethical OR cruel OR "cruel-free" OR "cruelty-free" OR compassion OR "cage-free" OR euthanasia OR humane OR suffering abolition OR "legal person" OR "property status of animals" OR sentience OR liberation OR freedom OR "animal rights" OR "animal welfare" OR autonomous OR anthropomorphism OR anthropocentric OR speciesism OR "animal advocacy")</p>
<p>The Terrorist Frame</p>	<p>("research on animals" OR "animal research" OR "animal testing" OR "testing on animals" OR "lab animals" OR "animals in lab" OR "experiment on animals" OR "animal experiment" OR "in vivo" OR "non-human primate" OR xenotransplantation OR "gene pharming" OR "Draize test" OR ethology OR "animal rights" OR "animal welfare") AND (fanatic OR extreme OR terrorist OR terrorism OR radical)</p>

I determined the terms related to animal research and employed them in each frame. The moralistic frame primarily aims to detect the articles concerned about the cruelty in the

experimental procedures on animals with words such as “moral,” “cruel-free,” or “humane.” The humanistic frame uses a collection of words that reflect the idea of animals being equal to human beings. “Sentience” or “autonomous” are the terms that oppose the treatment of animals as inferior species to humans, and the frame also includes keywords utilized to criticize human-centric attitudes. For the terrorist frame, I added such terms as “animal rights,” “animal welfare” to the vocabulary related to animal research. This is because the added terms are often used in the context of blaming extreme animal advocates, and the original set of terms is not sufficient to cover the criticism. Exclusion is only applied in the utilitarian frame, where I get rid of any articles that include the keywords used in the moralistic and the humanistic frames. Therefore, the frame should only consist of pieces that praise scientific findings and improvement without concerns about animal welfare.

Analysis

Figure 2 shows the trends for *the New York Times* in how many times each frame is found over time. I specified the search from 1980, as it was when the media attention on the treatment of animals rose significantly, to 2015.

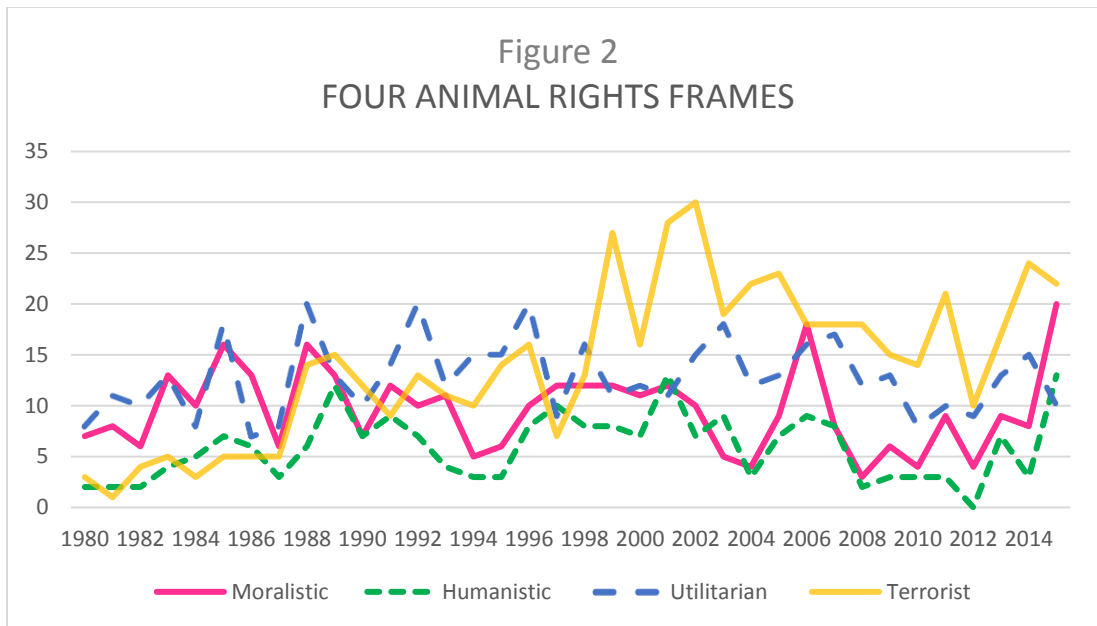


Figure 2 demonstrates the shifts of the four frames. In general, the two counter-frames: the utilitarian and terrorist frames remain higher than pro-animal rights frames — the moralistic frame first peaks in 1985 and 1988, and later in 2006 and 2015. The humanistic frame shows similar movements to the moralistic frame though in a smaller number. This fact illustrates evidently that around the periods, there should have been some factor(s) that contributed to the rise in awareness regarding the treatment of animals in the research field. What stands out in the figure is the sudden surge of the terrorist frame around 1998 and 2002. To explain the spikes of the terrorist frame, I read strings of articles around the period and found some cases where animal rights activists were considered threatening to society. For example, three attacks on facilities implementing animal research took place in 2001—a firebombing at a federal corral for wild horses in California, a fire at a primate research center in New Mexico, and back-to-back break-ins in Iowa, one at a fur farm to release more than 1,000 mink, the other to free pigeons raised for research (Howe Verhovek, 2001). The Animal Liberation Front, an animal rights activist group that was once declared a terrorist group by the Federal Bureau Investigation

(Bishop, 1989), was claimed to be responsible for these cases. Although the number of articles detected as pro-animal rights framed is not very outstanding in my research method, the upturn of the terrorist frame could be the evidence of the emerging attention to animal rights movements. The utilitarian frame remains stable though the line seems to decline over time in contrast to those pro-frames. Also note that before 2000, there are some spikes every three to four years. It may suggest the possibilities that in the periods, there were some scientific advancements thanks to experiments involving animals. The important actors in the utilitarian frame are the supporters of scientific advancements, such as scientists. In those articles framed as utilitarian, they do not mention the cruelty to animals used in the experiment. The importance tends to be put on the excellence of the discovery or the invention of a new drug, etc. Overall, with the stable support for science over animal sacrifices, it is safe to assume that public opinion is more inclined to think the animal experiment is needed for human welfare.

How animal rights got framed

I have shown the shifts in people's attitudes towards animals over time. Focusing on research on animals, I employed quantitative data analysis to examine the four frames: moralistic, humanitarian, utilitarian, and terrorist frames. I collected the data on the number of articles about animal testing and determined in which category those articles fall. Though this research merely demonstrates one aspect of people's attitudes reflected on media, I could see the overall shifts in the topic; the most prominent finding from the study is the spikes of the terrorist frame around 2000. This could confirm the "Bad is stronger than good" theory (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), which found out that negative events or impressions get stronger responses of the brain and last longer in memory than positives ones. Additionally, they found in a survey that when people with positive traits show bad behaviors, the fact sticks in

your mind more than the counterpart. This could explain why the terrorist frame became that conspicuous after the terrifying events caused by animal rights activists. In people's eyes, those who try to protect animals and improve animal welfare should have appeared affirmative originally. Thus, the negative information could have affected dramatically to such an extent the terrorist frame has grown into a considerable frame. Moreover, bad reputation and stereotypes are harder to cast off despite their easiness to gain. In the theory, it was also pointed out that in the media industry, adverse events are considered more newsworthy and sell more papers, which could partly contribute to the larger number of articles found in the research.

Though this paper does not cover all the fields involving animals, it is evident that any activity that exploits animals has been going through the question; is it ethical to use animals for human egoistic purposes? Livestock, captive animals at zoos, circus animals, working dogs, and even domestic pets are taken for granted in our lives; the question remains unanswered and hard to discuss. With the steady upsurge of awareness in public, it may not be long before a further extension of rights entitled to animals will spring.

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