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Animal Cruelty by Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

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## Part One

After reading over all sixteen topics in my sociology textbook, chapter 8, social structure and social stratification, calls out to me the most. I am absolutely outraged by the inequality within gender, race, religion, and age. I, myself, am a woman and Hispanic, thus, making me a part of the minority. It is absurd to understand that the color of my skin, age, and what may be between my legs, is what determines my social status and classification. I, as a woman, would make less money than a man even if he and I have the same exact educational background and qualifications. Men till this day remain in higher power over women. A black man and a white man could commit the same crime, yet only the black man would be given a sentence, while the white man goes free. It is ridiculous for a black man to experience a different kind of fear when being pulled over by the police. It is insulting for young kids to be stared down when they walk into a store and be accused of stealing, whereas an older man can simply take something off a rack and no one would ever notice. It is ignorant for every Muslim to be seen as a terrorist and outcasted by their own country. These are all real events that are current occurrences in the world that needs immediate attention.

As an American, I know, without having to read this chapter, that power is at play in the world. Social class is determined by wealth, occupation, income, and education. I know that people are categorized into a class system consisting of the upper, middle, and lower classes. I am aware that the poor are seen as an inconvenience, ignored, and blamed for their homelessness, when in reality we know nothing about those people or the life that they have lived. They could have lived a very luxury life until the market crashed and they lost everything including the roof over their heads. They could have kids who are starving and can't find a job

willing to hire them. No matter how hard they try, every day goes on and things only seem to get worse for these poor people. I also know that poverty has a correlation with race. Blacks hold the highest percentage of poverty in the US. I can tell you that white households have 10 times the wealth of black households and remain as the majority of the upper class. The amount of inequality among social structure is mind-blowing.

My life has shaped my perception of this topic because I have lived and seen it happen all throughout my life. I've seen Hispanic moms at my elementary school get kicked out and refused the ability to volunteer at their child's school for not being able to speak English. I've seen videos of black men being shot down by police just for moving a muscle. I've sat in classrooms where the history of the United States is taught from the beginning of inequality and social class. We are taught that white men once used blacks as their slaves for their own personal use and abuse, and that women had no rights, were to be housewives and an object of pleasure. Till this day we see issues of inequality within the social structure and how social stratification is still at work. Sources as far as history, dating back to slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Holocaust. Current sources such as social media and news reports on shootings like the one at Orlando's Night Club "Pulse" and police discrimination. We see famous people and celebrities take matter into their own hands and make the issue well know. Rappers such as Kendrick Lamar and Lil Wayne sing about issues within the social class and inequality. This issue is worldwide and can not be escaped.

## **Part Two**

Animal cruelty is a serious act that can lead to the identification of mental health issues and domestic violence. The American Psychiatric Association has listed animal cruelty as a symptom of conduct disorder in the early stages of life. Other studies have found a correlation

between animal cruelty and violence in teen years and adulthood. This may be a result of violence or abuse within the family environment of the child, but this link yet to be fully examined. However, it was found, in a key study documented by DeViney, that 1/3 of animal abuse in homes had reports of physical child abuse and violence. This research concluded that the power and control exercised on animals were learned from inside the household. In addition, Ascione, Fredrich, Heath, and Hayashi found that children who experienced physical abuse were more likely to be cruel towards animals. It should also be noted that these research studies have not determined an age range for which animal cruelty appears in children.

Previous research is important for the author to know because it helps them gain knowledge on the important aspects of the topic, find relationships between concepts, and use ideas for further consideration, such as age and gender within animal cruelty. It also allows them to avoid certain mistakes and gain ideas in order to conduct a more efficient and informative study.

Cheryl L. Currie recruited mothers with two children, who were attending school in Canada using posters, flyers, and newspapers. The children were required to be between 5 and 17 years old with a history of exposure to domestic violence between a man and a woman. In order to participate, mothers were required to have gone to counseling over domestic violence. Currie was able to recruit 47 mothers and 94 children to be the experimental sample. Women with children between the ages of 5 and 17 without a history of domestic violence were also recruited. For this group, 45 mothers and 90 children were found and they were to be the control group. Informed consent was received from all the participants and data was gathered on 92 families between the months of September and February from 1996 and 2000. There were four charts of

data collected from this study. The first being information on details of domestic violence exposure. Children were divided by their ages based on the number of years the child was exposed to violence. This chart showed that on average, children who were exposed to domestic violence were exposed for almost half of their lifetime. Data chart two collected information on the mother-child demographics for each sample. Control group two, consisting of the mothers with children without a history of domestic violence, were selected to match the experimental sample based on demographic variables. The other two data charts will be discussed in the findings of this study later.

The procedure went as follows, the mothers gave information in an interview, where a Child Behavior Checklist was implemented for each child participant. Number 15 asked if the children had been cruel to animals. Mothers were asked to rate their children on a scale from 0-3. 0 being "Never True," 1 being "sometimes or somewhat true," and 3 being "very often or often true." Currie used this method to divide the children by their ages, gender, exploitation to domestic violence, and aggressive behavior towards animals. This separation will allow a clearer analysis of the studies findings.

### **Part Three**

There were two findings in this study. The first being that domestic violence between a man and a woman in a household was correlated with animal cruelty in children. In addition, data chart three showed that when children exposed to domestic violence were compared with the items on the Child Behavior Checklist, there were many problems, which included a fear of animals and places, associated with animal cruelty. The second finding was that children who were exposed to violence and were violent with animals tended to be older than the kids who

were not exposed to violence and showed cruelty towards animals. Data chart four explains that children who were violent towards animals did not have any significant differ in age from those children who weren't in both the experimental sample and control group.

The author's assumptions about the correlation between domestic violence exposure and animal cruelty was found to be true. However, Currie's assumptions about gender was found to not be significant in the experimental sample tested although boys were exposed to domestic violence for a longer period of time in their lives than girls were. Data chart 4 also shows that genders were nearly equal when it came to acting upon animal cruelty.

As stated before the study proved that animal cruelty in children is correlated with the exposure of domestic violence. Age was also a factor in correlation and children placed into the first category, "exploratory/curious animal abuse," were in preschool or early elementary age so they were concluded to have the lack of proper training in physical care and treatment of animals. Children in the second category, "pathological animal abuse," were concluded to be older with experience in animal abuse. They were considered to have psychological disturbances related to abuse.

This research provides light for more insight on animal cruelty among children. In future research, the fact that violent households teach violence, power, and control will be tested, but for right now there is just a correlation. It must be noted that correlation does not mean causation.

This research is important to me because I have seen and met many people who have be in a home where domestic violence takes place between not only parents, but between the parents and child as well. Personally, I have always been curious as to whether or not the

children grow to be just as violent towards others as their parents were to them. There have been many different occasions of where i've heard of animal cruelty and truly it breaks my heart, yet it's mainly in reference to dog fighting or animal malnutrition. I have never heard of animals being abused by children who may be being abused at home themselves, but I have seen TV shows were criminals, specially serial killers, begin with killing animals before they move on to humans. Thus, when I came by the topic, I was intrigued to see what the reasoning or ideas behind animal cruelty in children were. In my opinion based off this research, it has more to do with children using the animals as an outlet, mirroring the violence that is being used on them, on the animals. Locke himself says, "... the pleasure [children] take to put anything in pain that is capable of it, I cannot persuade myself to be any other than a foreign and introduced disposition, a habit borrowed from custom and conversation. People teach children to strike, and laugh when they hurt, or see harm come to others; and they have the examples of most about them to confirm them in it."

## Works Cited

1. Currie, Cheryl L. "Animal Cruelty by Children Exposed to Domestic Violence."  
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