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Gender Differences on Zoophobia: Fear towards Disgust-relevant Animals

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Evergreen Valley College Abstract

I conducted a survey research on gender differences in response to people's fear of animals (zoophobia), but directed primarily towards fear of disgust-relevant animals. The sample was comprised of 20 adult participants (10 males and 10 females) at Evergreen Valley College campus. Subjects were asked to participate and complete a survey. Results supported the alternative hypothesis that adult males and females did not express the same intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals.

Introduction

Animal phobias are among the most common and persistent of all phobias. According to Seligman's hypothesis of preparedness (1971), there is a genetically based or prepared tendency to associate fear and aversion with a certain set of animals. That fear of such animals (e.g. snakes, spiders) has been of great importance to the survival of the human species. In a study conducted by Bennet-Levy and J., Marteau, T. (1984), it was found that fear rating was significantly correlated with animals' characteristic ratings. It was suggested that preparedness to fear certain animals is not a function of the animals, but of their fear-evoking perceptual properties and their discrepancy from the human form. While the question of whether the fears affecting the amount of dislike or appreciation of animals are innate, it is important to recognize possible causes of fear.

Biophilia would seem to mean something like "love of nature." In a research by Kahn, the idea of biophilia was used to explain human relationship with nature. "There exists a fundamental, genetically based human need and propensity to affiliate with life (Kahn, 1997)." It is the biophilia hypothesis that led to this survey research because I think people enjoy nature, but at times finds nature unlikable and unfriendly.

Davey et al. (1998) carried out a cross-cultural study of animal fears in which college students from seven Western and Asian countries were asked to rate their fears of animals which fell into a fear-irrelevant (cute, harmless), fear-relevant (attacks, fierce), or disgust-relevant category (slimy, nasty). In all countries, the combined fear score for the disgust-relevant category of animals was significantly greater than the fear score for the fear-irrelevant animals. Comparisons between the sexes revealed that the disgust-relevant animals were feared significantly more by females than by males. Not one

country showed a sex difference in fear ratings on fierce animals.

Though research concerning various phobias is abundant, the relationship between phobias of and within nature is very limited. This survey research aimed to see whether there is a difference between males' and females' intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals. A null and alternative hypothesis was set forth:

H_0 : Adult males and females expressed the same intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals

H_a : Adult males and females did not express the same intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals

Methods

Participants

A total of 20 adults (10 males and 10 females) took part in the survey research.

Procedure

I obtained informed consent prior to the survey. Participants completed a survey anonymously at different locations at Evergreen Valley College campus. Afterwards, I debriefed each of the participants after they had completed the survey.

The survey listed questions about their age, gender, type of environment they grew up in, amount of time spent outdoors, and length of observation outside during a typical day. The last question of the survey asked the participants to rate their level of fear towards 26 various kinds of animals on a simple 6 point scale: 0 = not frightened at all, 1 = mild dislike, 2 = dislike and anxious, 3 = anxious and nervous, 4 = mild fear, and 5 = very frightened, avoid at all costs. Of the 26 animals listed, only 10 belonged in the disgust-relevant category selected from those included in animal phobia studies conducted by Ware et al. (1994) to provide a representative sample of animals

characterizing fierce animals (bears, wolves), fear-irrelevant animals (rabbits, chickens), and disgust-relevant animals: lizards, snails, maggots, cockroach, rats, worms, slugs, frogs, moths, and spiders.

Only two sets of data were crucial to the survey research: participant's gender and their intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals.

Results

The null hypothesis was rejected, so I accepted the alternative hypothesis that adult males and females did not express the same intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals.

Table 1: Statistical Measures

	Males	Females
Mean	6	22
Median	5	21.5
Range	14	21
St. Dev.	4.944	6.599
Mann-Whitney U	2	98

The fear of disgust-relevant animals' scores for males and females were allocated points when they were exceeded by or equalled scores in the other group. The lower points total was taken as a Mann-Whitney U value for N = 10 and N = 10. Lower fear of disgust-relevant animals' scores were found in males but the difference was significant with $U = 2$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Points for the females were 98 and for the males were 2.

Discussion

Results supported the alternative hypothesis that adult males and females did not express the same intensity of fear towards disgust-relevant animals. My results supported previous findings of Davey et al. (1998) of a cross-cultural study. With their findings in different countries and my findings at Evergreen Valley College, comparisons between

the sexes revealed that the disgust-relevant animals were feared significantly more by females than by males. This outcome could be explained by the notion that males, in general, growing up tend to exhibit less disgust sensitivity and are taught to be tough.

Aside from that notion, it was suggested the findings of Bennet-Levy, J. and Marteau, T. (1984) that preparedness to fear certain animals is not a function of the animals, but of their fear-evoking perceptual properties and their discrepancy from the human form. My findings supported this suggestion. The highest rated scores of intensity of fear were among the fierce-relevant animals, those certainly with fear-evoking perceptual properties (snakes, wolves, alligators). It is also interesting to note with my data collection that every female participant expressed their intensity of fear towards maggots with the rating of 5. On the other hand, all the male participants expressed their intensity of fear towards maggots with the rating of 0. It was apparent that maggots were the only type of animal with this rating of discrepancy in the survey. This disparity between the sexes and fear of maggots is an issue that deserves further research.

References

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- Davey, G. C. L., Hirisave, U., McDonald, A. (1998). A Cross-cultural Study of Animal Fears. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 36 (7-8), 735-750.
- Kahn, P. (1997). Developmental Psychology and the Biophilia Hypothesis: Children's Affiliation with Nature. *Developmental Review*, 17 (1), 1-61
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1971). Phobias and Preparedness. *Behavior Therapy*, 2, 307-320.
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Survey Introduction

Title: Outdoor Experience and Preference

Description: I am a student at Evergreen Valley College. I am currently taking a course in psychology called PSYCH018, Introduction to Research Methods. I am currently conducting a study and your participation would be well appreciated.

You will be presented with a survey that should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. You will be asked to answer questions about your outdoor preferences in relation to a natural environmental setting.

Confidentiality: This research is strictly anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name and your data will be kept confidential.

Risks and Benefits: There are no inherent risks or benefits to participating in this study beyond the contribution you would be making to cumulative psychological science.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research is absolutely voluntary. You are free to walk away from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will have no penalty to you. However, if you leave before completing the survey, your data will not be included in the study.

Researcher: R.C., rc@example.com

This study has been approved by the instructor for Psychology 018 at Evergreen Valley College. Contact: J. David Eisenberg david.eisenberg@evc.edu

If you agree to these conditions and you are at least 18 years old, please proceed with the survey.

Survey Questions

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your gender? Only select one of the two choices provided. (Please circle)
 Male Female
3. What type of environment did you grow up in? (Please circle)
 - a. City
 - b. Suburbs
 - c. Country
4. On a weekly basis, how much time do you spend outside your home? (Please circle)
 - a. During the summer

0-5 hrs	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16 or more hrs
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 - b. During the fall

0-5 hrs	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16 or more hrs
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 - c. During the winter

0-5 hrs	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16 or more hrs
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 - d. During the spring

0-5 hrs	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16 or more hrs
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5. How likely are you to observe the following on a typical day? (Please circle)
 - a. Weather

Very Likely	0	1	2	3	4	5	Not likely at all
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 - b. Animals

Very Likely	0	1	2	3	4	5	Not likely at all
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 - c. People

Very Likely	0	1	2	3	4	5	Not likely at all
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7. How would you rate your level of fear when these creatures are in your plain sight? (Please circle)
 0 = not frightened at all
 1 = mild dislike
 2 = dislike and anxious
 3 = anxious and nervous
 4 = mild fear
 5 = very frightened, avoid at all costs
 - a. Dogs

(not frightened at all)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
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 - b. Cats

(not frightened at all)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
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 - c. Lizards

(not frightened at all)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
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<i>d. Mice</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>e. Snails</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>f. Coyotes</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>g. Wolves</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>h. Bears</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>i. Raccoon</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>j. Maggots</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>k. Snakes</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>l. Rats</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>m. Fish</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>n. Birds</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>o. Flies</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>p. Toads</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>q. Slugs</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>r. Butterflies</i> (not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>s. Mosquitoes</i>							

(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>t. Frogs</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>u. Bees</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>v. Spiders</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>w. Yellow Jackets</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>x. Daddy Long Legs</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>y. Wasps</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)
<i>z. Centipedes</i>							
(not frightened at all costs)	0	1	2	3	4	5	(very frightened, avoid at all costs)

Survey Exit Page

Thank you for completing the survey!

You were asked to evaluate your outdoor experiences and preferences. I am conducting research on whether adult males and females at Evergreen Valley College expressed the same level of fear of animals (zoophobia) when viewing a disgust-relevant animal. This study was inspired by the work at: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6V5W-3TGNG7S-7&_user=10&_coverDate=07%2F08%2F1998&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=f04c42309e2f57f8d0cb950931fecfa4

Thank you for your participation! If you would like to see the result of this survey, please email rc@example.com after December 21, 2007.