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Toward a Non-Speciesist Psychoethic

Speciesism is a ubiquitous ideology in which countless nonhuman beings are sacrificed to serve human ends (Singer, 1990). Moreover, the system may well be supported by a web of deleterious psychosocial processes (Arluke & Sanders, 1996) and, as such, can be detrimental to humans as well as nonhumans. Psychology, as the field that seeks to understand human motivation and defines the parameters of social values and normative behavior, is ideally positioned to challenge the speciesist status quo. However, the widespread practice of using animals other than human for psychological research (Sharpe, 1988), the failure to consider that speciesist practices may incur psychological repercussions, and the dearth of literature on the paradoxical human-nonhuman relationship demonstrate psychology's apparent sanction of speciesism.

Indeed, the received psychological view is based upon a set of implicit assumptions that shape and support anthropocentric beliefs and behaviors. Most notable is the assumption that the only psycho-emotionally and ontologically meaningful relationships are inter-human. By assuming that the nonhuman-human relationship is of little or no consequence,

psychology disregards the ways in which humanity's treatment of other species may both reflect and reinforce mental wellness and illness.

Speciesist psychological assumptions have taken shape over the years of psychology's evolution and emerged from the theoretical constructs that have guided the development of psychological thought. To date, virtually all psychological paradigms, perhaps unwittingly, have bolstered an anthropocentric ideology. Even ecopsychology (Pilisuk & Joy, 2000), with its emphasis on biocentrism, often condones speciesist practices such as carnism (Joy, 2001) and hunting.

Thus, there is a need for a new psychological paradigm in which the emancipation of all life is central to the liberation of the self. Placing the principle of unconditional non-violence within the rubric of mental health ultimately can revolutionize assumptions about psychology and its role in healing the individual and global psyche.

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Note

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