

Building an Inner Sanctuary: Complex PTSD in Chimpanzees

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Executive Summary

The use of great apes, in particular chimpanzees, as experimental subjects has been built on two opposing assumptions: one, that they are sufficiently similar to humans to be used as human substitutes, and two, that they are sufficiently different from humans to justify ethically using them as human substitutes.

Greater awareness of this contradiction was brought in 2004, when the journal *Science* published *Psychiatric treatment for great apes?* The authors suggested that apes used in laboratories and other industries are clinically appropriate subjects for psychiatric treatment and that such treatment was morally compelled – an unsurprising conclusion since abnormal behavior observed in animals held in captivity has been noted for decades. The present paper *Building an Inner Sanctuary: Complex PTSD in Chimpanzees* operationalizes their proposition – psychiatric diagnosis and treatment of apes in captivity -- through a concrete clinical study of chimpanzees. It represents the first psychiatric assessment of a nonhuman animal using the same conventions employed for the evaluation and diagnosis of humans.

The study focused on symptoms of Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) exhibited by two chimpanzees in sanctuary who had previously sustained prolonged stress and trauma as laboratory subjects in biomedical research and testing. The subjects of the study resided at Fauna Foundation, a Canadian sanctuary that rescued 15 chimpanzees from a U.S. laboratory. These individuals are representative of other chimpanzees rescued or retired from research who are now in sanctuary throughout North America and Europe. While in the laboratory, they experienced a series of traumatic events: conditions of captivity, use in experimental protocols, coercive control, sensory-motor deprivation, painful and terrifying "knockdowns" (anaesthetizations with dart guns) and multiple relational disruptions (e.g., mother-infant separation, sensory-motor deprivation, social isolation). All of these experiences are considered key factors leading to persistent psychological compromise in humans.

The study found that a diagnosis of Complex PTSD in chimpanzees is consistent with descriptions of trauma-induced symptoms as described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) published by the American Psychiatric Association and other studies of human trauma research. The authors note:

Given what we know about human trauma, depression, anxiety and other emotional disorders, and given that chimpanzees share most of our cognitive, emotional and social needs, then chimpanzees' ability to suffer as the result of their institutionalized use in biomedical research and testing is likely to lead to myriad symptoms which in humans would warrant psychiatric diagnosis and intervention.

Other published studies on such experimentation have reported on the effects of stress on animals and how they compromise scientific inference. The present analysis also calls into question both the scientific validity and the humaneness and ethical soundness of research on chimpanzees in captivity.

The study concluded that it is necessary to desist "... from using apes as biomedical subjects in lieu of humans... if trauma is not to be perpetuated. Costs accrued from their trauma in laboratory are immeasurable in their life-long psychological impact on, and consequent suffering of, chimpanzees."