
The mouse multiple: Intersections of welfare practices and experimental practices in the animal neuroscience laboratory

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Abstract

Session: Working in biology: how lab and field practices shape biological knowledge (Wylie, Nelson, Olzynko-Gryn, Whitney) The regulation of animal work in the laboratory has undergone dramatic changes in the past fifty years. What impact, if any, has this growing ecology of animal welfare practices had on scientific work in the animal laboratory? Certainly, the regulation of animal research has placed limitations on the ways in which scientists can permissibly use animals in their laboratories, and has created a venue in which they must account for and justify their practices. But once inside the boundaries created by animal welfare regulations, the divisions of space, labor, and expertise between animal care workers and scientists makes it seem as though experimental work can proceed with relatively little friction. This paper draws on ethnographic research in animal behavioral neuroscience laboratories to challenge the implicit division between the "ethical" mouse enacted by welfare regulations and animal care workers, and the "experimental" mouse enacted by neuroscientists. I argue that increasing prominence of animal welfare concerns both supports and creates problems for how practitioners understand the relationship of animal behavioral models to the laboratory environment. Behavioral techniques for controlling animal stress or studying the effect of housing environments have been widely diffused in the scientific community by the welfare professionals as tools for ensuring general animal well-being, but the growing association of these spaces and practices with welfare makes it difficult for scientific practitioners to retain control over these concepts, their affective associations, and their meanings.

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