Most readers of *Society & Animals* probably will not know that among the multi-disciplinary practitioners of criminology there is longstanding and, at times, quite heated disagreement about its proper objects of study. As a sociologist, I understand criminology to be a discourse that investigates the whys, the hows, and the whens of the generation and control of the many aspects of social harm—including abuse, exclusion, pain, injury, and suffering. In this harm-based discourse, categories such as “crime,” “criminal,” and “deviance” have no ontological reality. Rather, they are social constructions that are selectively applied by a network of state and other social control apparatuses to the actions of some members of society and not to those of others. In other words, criminology tries to uncover the sources and forms of power and social inequality and their ill effects.

Criminology is an interdisciplinary field whose chief perspectives are supplied, at least in the Anglophone world, by sociology. But because it is often comprised of scholars who do not identify themselves as criminologists, as such, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between scholarly labors that are...
self-consciously criminological and those that are devoted to appropriating and reworking for criminological purposes raw materials that were originally generated in other intellectual and social contexts. (The writings of certain moral philosophers and feminists on animal rights, for example, are of the latter sort and should be of great importance to criminologists interested in the study of animal abuse.)

Images of Animals in Criminology

Mindful of these prefatory comments, I suspect that since approximately 1970 the visibility of animals other than humans (animals) has increased markedly in criminology. This increase largely reflects a coincidence in the domain concerns of two intellectual tendencies. Of these tendencies, one is the labors of natural scientists keen to apply principles of ethology and ecology to the study of human societies. The other is the desire of some social scientists to abandon Durkheim’s imperialistic declaration in *The rules of sociological method* (1982) that the social and cultural realms of human life are autonomous from the biological. The result of the confluence of these tendencies is that claims about the nature of animal bodies, of animal behavior, and of human-animal interaction have been inserted into a surprising diversity of debates in criminology. These include, *inter alia*, the configuration of urban class relations in early nineteenth-century England; the alleged links between crime and human nature; the behavioral manifestations of children who are likely to mature into violent adults; and the prior histories of adults who engage in interhuman violence.

In criminology, animals nowadays most frequently appear in the area of family violence. Schematically, it has been shown that companion animal abuse often occurs disproportionately in a variety of family violence contexts: heterosexual partner abuse; lesbian partner abuse; child physical abuse; child sexual abuse—both at home and in day care centers—and sibling abuse. One of the undoubted strengths of the empirical finding that animal abuse frequently exists with other forms of family violence is the diversity of its data sources. These latter have been gleaned not only from structured interviews with battered women and abused children but also from reports of animal abuse to veterinarians, animal control officers, animal shelters, women’s shelters, and police.