

## **Government animal experimenters need to have their heads examined**

By Dr. Jenn Berman

As a psychotherapist and the host of VH1's *Couples Therapy*, I've counseled a wide range of personalities—this season's show includes former adult film actor Jenna Jameson, hip-hop star Treach, and *Big Brother* winner Dick Donato—and I've witnessed more than my fair share of the darker side of the human psyche. Jealousy, anger, tantrums, revenge, rejection, depression, hostility, and aggression—I've seen it all. Or so I thought, until I saw [disturbing videos](#) and photos recently released by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) of psychological experiments on baby monkeys at a [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) laboratory](#) in Maryland.

The video footage revealed a troubling depth of cruelty, depravity and callousness that I had not previously encountered.

As many Washington commuters have learned from [hundreds of ads](#) currently running throughout the Metro system, at a large facility in Poolesville, Md., government experimenters breed hundreds of baby monkeys so that they will suffer from depression and other mental illness, take them from their mothers at birth and subject them to years of scary and painful procedures designed to make them depressed and anxious—even addicting them to alcohol—before finally killing them.

As a marriage, family, and child therapist, I was struck by how absolutely irrelevant these cruel experiments are to human children and adults. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that maternal deprivation produces depression, anxiety, and attachment issues among other psychological problems. Furthermore, these studies have never led to the development of or improvement in treatments for people suffering from mental illness, despite having been conducted for 30 years and having received tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. I have joined [experts](#) including Dr. Jane Goodall in calling for them to be halted.

And as a mother of two, I can easily imagine how profoundly agonizing it would be for these mother monkeys to have baby after baby permanently torn from their arms hours after birth and the sheer terror and loneliness that their infants experience for years on end as they're locked all alone inside tiny cages and tormented with things such as loud noises and fake snakes.

As I watched the video footage of these experiments, the question that kept running through my mind was, "What kind of person does things like this?" And I knew the answer.

The intentional, organized and long-term abuse of animals by NIH researchers is a troubling sign that the people conducting these experiments are potentially suffering from a serious psychological disorder. Indeed, one of NIH's own surveys assessing symptoms of antisocial personality disorder includes the question "In your ENTIRE life, did you

EVER hurt or be cruel to an animal or pet on purpose?" Certainly, NIH experimenters would have to check this box.

Other signs of antisocial personality disorder include a lack of empathy and a lack of remorse about abusive behavior, both of which are exhibited by NIH staff as well.

In one video clip released by PETA, NIH staff members can be heard laughing while a mother monkey they sedated struggles to stay awake to comfort her increasingly frantic baby in an experiment designed to scare the infant and measure anxiety.

Similarly, during a lecture at the University of Notre Dame, Stephen Suomi—the NIH experimenter who leads the studies on baby monkeys—commented, "When these monkeys get to be juvenile ... adolescents and young adults, some of my colleagues at the Alcohol Institute get their hands on them, and run them through the monkey version of a happy hour." Disturbingly, Suomi was joking about the fact that the mentally ill monkeys he breeds are sometimes transferred to another NIH laboratory and forcibly addicted to alcohol, which exacerbates their symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Such callous attitudes and behavior are tremendously unsettling—particularly in light of a growing body of research that identifies the association between cruelty to animals and mental illness as well as the link between a history of animal abuse and concurrent or subsequent human-directed violence. Just because this abusive behavior is occurring in a laboratory and cloaked in "science" is no reason to discount its gravity.

NIH experimenters say that they are studying psychopathic behavior in monkeys, but it's clear that they—and the people who keep giving them millions to do it—are the ones who need to have their heads examined.

*Dr. Berman is a mother of twins and a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles. She is the host of VHI's Couple's Therapy and the nightly Dr. Jenn Show on Oprah Radio. A well known parenting expert, she is the author of the best selling books SuperBaby: 12 Ways to Give Your Child a Head Start in the first 3 Years and The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids. Follow her on Twitter at @DrJennBerman.*