Animal Behavior: Making (and Breaking) the Human-Animal Bond

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Learning Outcomes

Be able to list positive outcomes of the human-animal bond, on both dogs and people

Be able to understand the interrelationships between individual dogs, their owners, and their environment

Be able to identify basic risks and welfare issues associated with owning a dog with problem behaviors
Human-Animal Bond...What is it?

“The mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, animals, and the environment.” AVMA
History of the Human-Animal Bond

- Human-canine bond is one of the oldest relationships
- Evidence of human-feline bonds 9,500 years ago
- Farm animal domestication 10,000 years ago
Positive Effects on Humans

Social Benefits:
- Help increase ability to interact with others

Behavioral Benefits:
- Introduce responsibility and a nurturing behavior into our lives

Emotional Effects:
- Decrease social loneliness
- Help ameliorate depression
Social Benefits

- Provide companionship and support during bereavement
- Increase levels of activity
- Improve person-to-person interactions
- Ease loss in natural disasters
A Reason to Eat Chocolate!

- Pet owners have:
  - Lower blood pressure, triglycerides, and cholesterol
  - Increased survival after heart attack
  - Stress reduction
  - Weight control
  - Fewer minor health problems
Pets and Disasters

Pet owners significantly less likely to evacuate if cannot take pet

- More pets = less likely to leave

Hurricane Katrina

- Estimated 250,000 pets died or left behind
- People stayed behind
Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act

Requires emergency preparedness operational plans take into account the needs of individuals with pets and service animals before, during and after a disaster.
Death of a Pet

- Reflects the relationship
- Attachment
  - Based on specific familiarity
  - Grows with time
Grief Following Death of a Companion Animal

Messam, Zasloff, Mader-Weidner, Hendrie, Hart

Current Issues and Research in Veterinary Behavioral Medicine, 2002

82 persons: 73 women, 9 men

57 dogs, 25 cats (euthanized)

Duration with pet 1-18 years (mean = 11)
Grief Following Death of a Pet

Rapid Recovery
- Education helps recovery (increase 1.3/year of education)
- Except for 4 outliers
- Taking animal to vet while ill helps recovery (5x)

Delayed Recovery
- Extensive hours caring for ill animal (12% increase/hr/day)
Grief Following Death of a Pet

- 25% recovered by 12 months
- 50% by 19 months
- 75% by 6 years
- For very upset people, grieving > 1 year expected
- Some will not recover
Roles and Tasks of Dogs in Society

All Dogs:
- Roles:
  - Improve Mood/Comfort
  - Relieve Depression
  - Cause Calming Effect
  - Relieve Stigma
  - Motivate

Therapy Dogs*
- Roles:
  - Visit Nursing Home
  - Be Reading Partner
  - Motivate Rehab
  - Relieve Loneliness
  - Assist Professionals (medical, education, courthouse)

Facility Dogs+

Service Dogs***
- Tasks:
  - Pull Wheelchair
  - Alert on Seizures
  - Alert on Glucose
  - Guide Blind
  - Retrieve Blind
  - Alert to Sounds
  - Ameliorate Stress

Companion*

Emotional Support**

* No handler disability: No Special Access
** Handler disability: Housing, public transport access
*** Handler disability & dog tasks: Full public access

U.S. Legal/Regulatory Status
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Companion animals</th>
<th>Therapy animals</th>
<th>Facility Dogs</th>
<th>Emotional Support Animals</th>
<th>Assistance Dogs*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handler</strong></td>
<td>Multiple persons in the family</td>
<td>Usually one person</td>
<td>One main handler°</td>
<td>One person with disabilities</td>
<td>One person with disabilities**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main beneficiary</strong></td>
<td>Caregivers of the animal</td>
<td>Various people receiving AAI</td>
<td>Various people receiving AAI</td>
<td>Handler</td>
<td>Handler**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training requirements in U.S. laws</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. public access (U.S. DOJ 2010, 2011)</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td><strong>U.S. transportation access (U.S. DOT 2008)</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. housing access (U.S. HUD 2008)</strong></td>
<td>No***</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</table>
Service Dogs

“Equal/reasonable accommodation” for disability
Full public access
Requirements by USDOJ 2011
  Verified disability
  Specially trained tasks
  Reasonable obedience/control
Americans with Disabilities Act

Person who has a disability can have service dog (miniature horse) with public access

You can ask:
- “Is this a service dog?”
- “What tasks does it perform?”

You cannot ask:
- “What is the disability?”
Positive Effects on Animals

- Closer bonded pets:
  - Improved veterinary care
- No evidence
Owners, guardians, and owner-guardians: Differing relationships with pets


Randomly selected households mailed surveys

Asked if they thought of themselves as:

- Owner
- Guardian
- Owner-guardian

Treatment/care/attachment to pet
Results

- Differences in care
  - Registration
  - Spay/neuter
  - Indoor vs. outdoor
  - Other

- Differences in attachment behaviors
  - Difference if owner vs. other 2 categories
Results and Conflict of Interest?

- Looked at what owners believed, not law
- Sponsored by *In Defense of Animals* and the *Guardian Campaign*
Evaluation of owner attachment to dogs on the basis of whether owners are legally considered guardians of their pets

- Helms T, Bain MJ. *JAVMA*, 2009

Surveys of dog owners at
- High-income veterinary practices
- Low-income veterinary practices
- Vaccine-only clinics

- Berkeley: Owner-guardian city
- Hayward: Owner city
Results

Berkeley dog owners were no more attached to their dog than those living in Hayward.

The use of “guardian” was not associated with an enhanced bond between owner and dog.
Comments/Questions?
When the Human-Animal Bond is Broken...
Why Should We Care?

- Risk of euthanasia
- Break of HAB
- Safety
- Liability
- Other?
It’s Not Easy, Though...
Risk Analysis

- Animal factors
- Owner factors
- Environmental factors
All are Related!
Animal Factors?

- Size
- Breed
- Age of onset
- Diagnosis/motivation
- Severity
- Intensity
- Frequency
Owner Factors?

- Ability and willingness to take risks
- Time
- Expertise
- Previous experiences
Environmental Factors?

- Trigger predictability
- Trigger avoidability
- People and other pets in home
- Location of home
- Type of home/yard
Prevention is the Key to Retention

- Ask, at EVERY INTERACTION, about behavior
- Need to know all aspects, not just about dog
- Prevention and/or interventional strategies
- Refer early!
  - Dogs don’t grow out of aggression/fear
Four Options

- Do nothing (not an option)
- Fairy godmother/‘farm’/shelter
  - Will they treat?
  - Will they prevent injuries?
  - Will they sue?
- Do something
  
  - Euthanize

No matter decision, someone will be upset
Emotional Blackmail

“If this doesn’t get better in 2 weeks…”

“If you loved animals…”

Often comes from grief/frustration
“Convenience” Euthanasia

- Physically healthy animals
- May not be psychologically healthy
- Ask owners in-depth questions

Remember, we don’t live in their homes with these pets
Legal vs. Ethical Obligations

- Full disclosure...I don’t have all the answers
- But let’s have a discussion
Happy

- 10 y.o. MC Golden Retriever
- Presents to veterinarian for euthanasia for “aggression”
  - Bit daughter in the face
Happy

Important first questions:

- Age of daughter?
- Inciting incident?
- Severity of bite?
- Other history of aggression?
- Goals?
Happy

- 14 y.o. daughter
- Laid her head on his hips
  - Oh, BTW, severe hip osteoarthritis
- Bite to face, 1 suture
- Very, very friendly dog
- Goals:
  - To not bite again
Happy – Prognosis?

Very good

Influences on my prognosis
- If bite severe
- If bite unprovoked
- If history of other aggression
- If larger dog
- If younger child
Happy – Treatment?

- Don’t lay on hips!
- Better pain management
- “Cured”
Questions?
Dude

- 5 y.o. MC large mixed breed
- Family: 2 adults and 10 month old baby
- Small townhouse
- Husband works mid afternoon to evening
- Wife home with dog and baby
Dude

- Barks at people and sounds
  - Wakes baby up
- Fearful of visitors (barks and escapes)
- And...
  - Bit baby on back of head
  - As she crawled into his bed
Dude

Wife:
- End of her rope
- Scared for daughter’s safety
- +/- euthanize

Husband
- Loves Dude
- Not as scared for safety
- Wants to do everything
What About Dude?

- MUCH time in another room
- Yelled at by owner
- Not walked, little interaction and play
Dude

- Wife is VERY concerned
  - Husband not so much
- Fearful of baby
  - Moves away, tail tucked, worried facial expression
- Diagnosis: Fear-related aggression
Dude

- Validated BOTH owners’ emotional states
- Gave concrete, specific instructions

SAFETY!
- Directed to husband
- Increased interaction
  -Directed to wife
Rechecks

- Wife more relaxed
- Husband more aware
- Less barking
- Expanded behavior modification
- Anti-anxiety medications
And Now: Not Perfect, But...
Questions?
Uzi

8 month old MC Pit Bull-type dog

Owner: single woman

- NICU nurse
- Animal shelter volunteer

- Actual owner is son (in jail)
Uzi

- Bitten multiple people
- Owner relinquished to shelter
  - Took him out 2 days later

Currently deemed “Vicious and Dangerous”
- Owner appealed
Appointment

- Owner, 2 ACO’s, ex-husband, and lawyer
- Lunged at ACO and lawyer “unprovoked” in room
- Owner dropped leash at least 4 times
Uzi – Evaluation

Animal
- Very confidently aggressive dog
- Highly arousable

Owner
- Unsure of ability or comprehension

Environment
- Very busy urban street
Uzi – Recommendations

- Would include flawless safety and management
  - Padlocked kennel (welfare?)
  - Muzzled at all times off property
- Unsure of owner ability or comprehension
- Animal control required euthanasia
Questions?
Relationship Challenges

- Family disagreements
- Differences in attachment
- Differences in ability to take risks
Phillip

- 2 y.o. MC Bull Terrier
- Referred from Neurology Service
  - Severe aggression toward owner
  - Fixated on owner, stalking
  - Neuro exam normal
Phillip

- Presented by wife
  - Husband not present
- Severe bites to upper and lower arms
  - “Unprovoked”/unable to determine trigger

- Lengthy discussion about euthanasia
  - To return following week
Meanwhile...

Husband calls and is verbally abusive

  “How dare you say this!”
  “You know nothing.”
  “These bites are not bad.”
  “My friend said to test for Thyroid disease.”
Phillip

- Euthanasia appointment canceled
- RDVM apprised of situation
- Had bloodwork performed
  - All WNL
- Euthanasia rescheduled...
Questions?
Anxieties

- Animal is suffering
- Many methods of ameliorating anxiety
  - Behavior modification
  - MEDICATIONS
- Often prolonged and slow progress

If animal is suffering...what are your options?
Apple

- 5 y.o. FS Golden Retriever X
- Diagnosed with separation anxiety
- Two owners, newlyweds
Apple

- Urinates, destroys windowsills and doorways, and howls/screams when left alone
- Police called for noise and escaped dog
- Postponed honeymoon to care for dog
Apple

- Welfare problem
  - Dog is suffering

- Breaking Human-Animal Bond
  - Guilt
  - Anger
  - Resentment
Apple – Treatment

- Behavior modification
- Medication
  - Many, many permutations
  - Wait...wean...wait again
Apple – Treatment

- Very dedicated owners
- Long-treatment plan
- Good outcome
Shelters and Rescue Organizations

- Different layer of complexity
- What is their mission and vision?
- Municipal or private?
- Who makes the decisions?
- Effects of and on the public and other stakeholders?
Sheltered Animals

- Open-door or limited intake?
- What are ordinances in municipality?
  - Some cities are “no kill” for adoptable animals
  - What is unadoptable?
Four Options

- Do nothing
  - “Sanctuary”
  - Warehouse
- Find the perfect home/other shelter/rescue
  - Potential liability
Four Options

- Do something
  - Behavior mod in shelter/foster
  - Adopt out
    - Transferability?
- Euthanize
Josie

- 4 y.o. FS Lab X
- Presented for unfamiliar people
- Owners: 2 adults, 1 pre-teen daughter
- Could not keep her
  - Time to work on behavior modification
  - Rehome to responsible owner
Josie

- Diagnosed with:
  - Fear-related aggression
  - Territorial aggression

- Dedicated owners worked as much as possible
- Adopted to single man who lived in the woods
Josie – Outcome

- Bit someone within a month while fishing
  - In the relatively isolated woods

- Owners took Josie back and had euthanized
Ripped From the Headlines: Gus
Gus

- Pitbull-type dog relinquished by owner
- Foster owner mauled by dog
  - Taser and 3 adult men to separate him from person
- Texas judge ordered euthanized
Gus

- Massive social media campaign to “Save Gus”
- Sent to training facility in California
  - Not allowed back into Texas
  - Bit another dog
- Released when “owner” couldn’t pay bills
Gus

- Bit visitor to owner’s house
  - Broken bone
- Owner and training facility sued

'Dog Whisperer' Cesar Millan sued by woman claiming she was attacked by pit bull trained at his center

Alison Bitney is claiming she suffered 'disfiguring open wounds, deep muscle and tendon lacerations' and bone fractures after being attacked by the dog. The director of Millan's center said the dog was removed 'against the strong advice and objection of his trainer.'

BY ZAYDA RIVERA / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Published: Thursday, February 5, 2015, 1:00 PM
Collateral Damage

- Individual dog ("sanctuary")
- Recently bitten person
- Original bitten person
- Other dog(s) at facility
- The breed
- Rescue organizations
- Judge
Questions?
However...End on Teddy

- 5 y.o. MC Lab mix
- Relinquished to open-door shelter
  - “Too much to handle”
- Behavior evaluation
  - Aggressive over food bowl
  - Little ability to work with him
  - “Puppy season”
Teddy

- Rescue organization took him
  - Knew full history
  - Had ability to work with him
- Dedicated, trained staff
- Discreet, measurable milestones
  - If didn’t meet, to be euthanized
Teddy – Outcome

- Drastically improved
- Adopted to family with pre-teen kids
- Follow-up...😊
Questions?
In Conclusion

- There are positive outcomes of the human-animal bond on both dogs and people.
- Many interrelationships between individual dogs, owners, and environment.
- There are many risks and welfare issues associated with owning a dog with problem behaviors.
Thank you