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Od redakcji

Szanowni Czytelnicy!


Oddajemy do Waszych rąk kolejny, trzynasty numer czasopisma „Zoophilologica”. Ma on wyjątkowy charakter z kilku powodów. Jest to pierwszy numer specjalny, zawierający artykuły wyłącznie w języku angielskim, poświęcony nowemu sposobowi traktowania relacji między ludźmi a zwierzętami, mianowicie weterynaryjnej pracy socjalnej, która stanowi pionierski obszar teorii i praktyki. Bezpośrednim bodźcem do powstania niniejszego zeszytu było zaproponowanie tematu przez Łucję Lange i Hannę Mamzer. Zaprosiły one do współtworzenia numeru monograficznego badaczy nie tylko z Polski, lecz także z USA, Kanady i Wielkiej Brytanii, co zaowocowało ośmioma spójnymi problemowo tekstami.

Artykuły te dotyczą weterynaryjnej pracy socjalnej jako innowacyjnego kierunku wykorzystującego pozytywne aspekty relacji międzygatunkowych, by poprawić dobrostan człowieka za pomocą działań terapeutycznych i resocjalizacyjnych. Autorki i autorzy wykazują zainteresowanie czterema głównymi obszarami: śmiercią zwierząt i żałobą, interakcjami międzyludzkimi, w których uczestniczą zwierzęta, związkiem między przemocą wobec zwierząt a przemocą wobec ludzi oraz współczuciem, zmęczeniem i zarządzaniem konfliktami w miejscu pracy. Omówione zostały takie zagadnienia, jak: problem nadpopulacji kotów w Toronto, programy szkolenia psów w zakładach poprawczych uwzględniające rehabilitację z udziałem zwierząt, relacje osób bezdomnych z psami, rola zwierząt towarzyszących jako partnerów w radzeniu sobie ze stresem, wykorzystanie koni w leczeniu urazów (relacja terapeutyczna między człowiekiem a zwierzęciem), oddziaływanie człowieka na konie i ich dobrostan, eutanazja zwierząt towarzyszących (śmierć zwierzęcia jako

trauma, pomoc ludziom w radzeniu sobie z żałobą, wsparcie dla lekarzy weterynarii i techników weterynarii).

Temat zaproponowany przez redaktorki gościnne naszego pierwszego numeru specjalnego jest wyrazem nowatorskiego podejścia do interdyscyplinarnych rozważań nad teorią i praktyką pracy socjalnej. Pierwsze publikacje z tego zakresu pojawiły się w krajach anglojęzycznych dopiero w minionym dziesięcioleciu. Żywimy nadzieję, że ten obszar relacji międzyludzkich i pozaludzkich, jeszcze dziewiczy na gruncie polskim, będzie przedmiotem coraz głębszej refleksji naukowej.

Przy okazji z radością zapowiadamy następny numer tematyczny – *Transfiguracje weganizmu* (nr 1/2024), który ukaże się pod redakcją gościnną Marzeny Kubisz i Agaty Sitko.


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Artykuły



JANET HOY-GERLACH

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OneHealth People-Animal Wellness Services (OHPAWS)

“The GRR Method”: Companion Animals as Partners in Human Stress Management Through Grounding, Relating, and Reframing Skills

«Метод GRR»: животное-компаньон как партнер в преодолении стресса с помощью навыков заземления, установления отношений и рефрейминга

Абстракт

С наступлением пандемии COVID-19 возросла потребность в навыках для поддержания психического здоровья, преодоления стресса и перенесения трудностей¹. Биопсихосоциальные преимущества взаимодействия человека с животными были признаны важными для защиты психического здоровья и противодействия стрессу во время пандемии². Благодаря включению значимых взаимодействий с животными-компаньонами в использование трех широко признанных, основанных на фактических данных навыков преодоления

“The GRR Method”: Companion Animals as Partners in Human Stress Management Through Grounding, Relating, and Reframing Skills

Abstract

With the advent of the COVID pandemic and associated stressors, there is an increased need for strategies to support mental health, stress management, and coping skills.¹ The biopsychosocial benefits of human-animal interaction have been identified as a protective factor for mental health and stress during the pandemic.² Through incorporating intentional interactions with companion animals in the use of three widely recognized evidence-based coping skills—grounding, relating, and reframing—the GRR Method is delineated as a coping strategy. The GRR Method

¹ Alison Doherty, Valerio Benedetto, Catherine Harris, Paul Boland, Danielle L. Christian, James Hill, Gita Bhutani, and Andrew J. Clegg, “The Effectiveness of Psychological Support Interventions for Those Exposed to Mass Infectious Disease Outbreaks: A Systematic Review,” *BMC Psychiatry* 21, no. 1 (2021), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=eoh&AN=58340552&site=eohost-live>.

² Xing Xin, Ling Cheng, Shufang Li, Ling Feng, Yinjuan Xin, and Shaoshuai Wang, “Improvement to the Subjective Well-being of Pet Ownership May Have Positive Psychological Influence during COVID-19 Epidemic,” *Animal Science Journal* 92, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/asj.13624>.

трудностей – заземления, установления отношений и рефрейминга (grounding, relating, and reframing, GRR) – так называемый метод GRR определяется как важная стратегия выживания. Метод GRR не является научно обоснованной практикой или клинически доказанным вмешательством. Это скорее предложение использовать существующие практические навыки перенесения трудностей, основанные на партнерстве и осознанном взаимодействии с животными-компаньонами. В статье кратко обсуждается реакция на стресс для того, чтобы предоставить контекст для использования навыков заземления, установления отношений и рефрейминга, усиленных взаимодействием с животным-компаньоном. Метод GRR был описан и объяснен как стратегия «Единое здоровье», которая может принести пользу как людям, так и животным. Кроме того, в статье были подняты вопросы оптимального содержания животных и их согласия на контакт.

Ключевые слова: животное-компаньон, домашние питомцы, стресс, психическое здоровье, перенесение трудностей

is not an evidenced-based practice or tested intervention, rather, it is a proposed application strategy for *existing evidence-based coping skills* through partnership and purposeful interaction with companion animals. Within this article, the human stress response is briefly reviewed to provide a framework in which to situate use of grounding, relating and reframing skills augmented by companion animal interaction. The GRR Method is presented and explicated as a One Health strategy that can benefit *both* people and animals; issues of animal welfare, consent, and enrichment are explicitly addressed.

Keywords: companion animals, pets, stress, mental health, coping

Introduction

Due to the emerging evidence base for the human biopsychosocial benefits associated with living with non-human companion animals³ (henceforth referred to as companion animals for brevity), companion animals are increasingly being recognized as potential partners in human health and

³ Helen Louise Brooks, Kelly Rushton, Karina Lovell, Penny Bee, Lauren Walker, Laura Grant, and Anne Rogers, “The Power of Support from Companion Animals for People Living with Mental Health Problems: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis of the Evidence,” *BMC Psychiatry* 18, no. 1 (2018): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1613-2>; Eloise Carr C. J., Jill M. Norris, K. Alix Hayden, Rianne Pater, and Jean E. Wallace, “A Scoping Review of the Health and Social Benefits of Dog Ownership for People Who Have Chronic Pain,” *Anthrozoös* 33, no. 2 (2020): 207–224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2020.1719761>; Michael J., Hughes, Martie-Louise Verreynne, Paul Harpur, and Nancy A. Pachana. “Companion Animals and Health in Older Populations: A Systematic Review,” *Clinical Gerontologist* 43, no. 4 (2020): 365–377, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317115.2019.1650863>.

well-being.⁴ For instance, walking with a dog companion—a.k.a. “dog walking”—is being explored as an explicit health promotion activity in the United Kingdom. With the advent of the COVID pandemic and associated stressors, mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety have increased world-wide.⁵ The biopsychosocial benefits conveyed by animal companionship have been documented as a protective factor against pandemic-related stress and mental health concerns.⁶ Increased self-care via use of evidence-based and evidence-based coping and stress management skills has been widely encouraged and endorsed to help protect against pandemic-related mental health issues.⁷ Through incorporating intentional interactions with companion animals in the use of three coping skills that are recognized and utilized across existing evidence-based mental health interventions—grounding, relating, and reframing—the GRR Method is proposed as a strategy for applying these skills through mutually beneficial partnership and purposeful interaction with a companion animal. The GRR Method has not been previously proposed

⁴ Komalsingh Rambaree and Stefan Sjöberg, “Companion Animals in Health-Promoting Work-Life.” *Society & Animals* 29, no. 1 (January 2021): 22–40; Carri Westgarth, Robert M. Christley, Gary Marvin, and Elizabeth Perkins, “Functional and Recreational Dog Walking Practices in the UK,” *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 1 (2021): 109–119, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa051>; Janette Young, Rhianna Pritchard, Carmel Nottle, and Helen Banwell, “Pets, Touch, and COVID-19: Health Benefits From Non-Human Touch Through Times of Stress.” *Journal of Behavioral Economics for Policy* 4 (2020): 25–33.

⁵ Damian F. Santomauro, Ana M. Mantilla Herrera, Jamileh Shadid, Peng Zheng, Charlie Ashbaugh, David M. Pigott, Cristiana Abbafati, Christopher Adolph, Joanne O. Amlag, Aleksandr Y. Aravkin, Bree L. Bang-Jensen, Gregory J. Bertolacci, Sabina S. Bloom, Rachel Castellano, Emma Castro, Suman Chakrabarti, Jhilik Chattopadhyay, Rebecca M. Cogen, James K. Collins, Xiaochen Dai, William James Dangel, Carolyn Dapper, Amanda Deen, Megan Erickson, Samuel B. Ewald, Abraham D. Flaxman, Joseph Jon Frostad, Nancy Fullman, John R. Giles, Ababi Zergaw Giref, Gaorui Guo, Jiawei He, Monika Helak, Erin N. Hulland, Bulat Idrisov, Akiaja Lindstrom, Emily Linebarger, Paulo A. Lotufo, Rafael Lozano, Beatrice Magistro, Deborah Carvalho Malta, Johan C. Månsson, Fatima Marinho, Ali H. Mokdad, Lorenzo Monasta, Paulami Naik, Shuhei Nomura, James Kevin O’Halloran, Samuel M. Ostroff, Maja Pasovic, Louise Penberthy, Robert C. Reiner Jr, Grace Reinke, Antonio Luiz P. Ribeiro, Aleksei Sholokhov, Reed J. D. Sorensen, Elena Varavikova, Anh Truc Vo, Rebecca Walcott, Stefanie Watson, Charles Shey Wiysonge, Bethany Zigler, Simon I. Hay, Theo Vos, Christopher J. L. Murray, Harvey A. Whiteford, and Alize J. Ferrari, “Global Prevalence and Burden of Depressive and Anxiety Disorders in 204 Countries and Territories in 2020 Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The Lancet* 398, no. 10312 (November 2021): 1700–1712, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)02143-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02143-7).

⁶ Emily Shoesmith, Lion Shahab, Dimitra Kale, Daniel S Mills, Catherine Reeve, Paul Toner, Luciana Santos de Assis, and Elena Ratschen, “The Influence of Human-Animal Interactions on Mental and Physical Health during the First COVID-19 Lockdown Phase in the U.K.: A Qualitative Exploration,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030976>; Xin, Cheng, Li, Feng, Xin, and Wang, “Improvement to the Subjective Well-being.”

⁷ Doherty, Benedetto, Harris, Boland, Christian Hill, Bhutani, and Clegg, “The Effectiveness of Psychological Support.”

or researched and does not entail the use of novel interventions/coping skills. Rather, the GRR Method is simply a way to proactively include companion animals in standard applications of existing human coping skills—grounding, relating, and reframing—for the purpose of enhancing *both* human and animal well-being.

Three Evidence-based Human Stress Management Skills: Grounding, Relating, and Reframing (GRR)

Grounding

Grounding is a long-standing coping skill used within numerous evidence-based mental health interventions for a wide range of adult and child populations struggling with trauma, mood, anxiety, disassociation, and other mental health symptoms.⁸ Physical/sensory grounding refers to deliberate actions that engage one's physical senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching—to help one reconnect to the physical body and the present time⁹; it is considered a crucial coping technique in trauma intervention¹⁰ and is a key skill taught within an evidence-based practice called Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.¹¹ For the purposes of the GRR Method, physical/sensory grounding will henceforth be referred to as *grounding*.

Najavits¹² describes numerous ways to apply the skill of grounding, such as a person feeling the fabric of their clothing to engage their sense of touch, or alternately, to stroke their companion animal to engage their sense of touch, and note the sensations of the animal's fur, warmth, and so forth. The GRR Method simply focuses on the activity of stroking one's companion animal, which is one of countless ways to employ standard grounding through sensory input. Researchers Oliva

⁸ Lisa Najavits, "Seeking Safety: An Evidence-Based Model for Substance Abuse and Trauma/PTSD," in *Therapist's Guide to Evidence-Based Relapse Prevention*, ed. Katie A. Witkiewitz and G. Alan Marlatt (Cambridge: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007), 141–167; Najavits, Lisa M. *Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse* (New York: Guilford Press, 2002); Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US), *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services: Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series*, No. 57. Rockville (MD), <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4816.pdf>.

⁹ Najavits, "Seeking Safety."

¹⁰ Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US), *Trauma-Informed Care*.

¹¹ Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, "T5: Grounding," <https://dialecticalbehaviortherapy.com/distress-tolerance/grounding/>.

¹² Najavits, "Seeking Safety."

and Green¹³ exemplify this through a dog-assisted mindfulness intervention for adults, in which a standard mindfulness recording was used as a self-help intervention and participants were instructed to use their respective dog's fur as their focal point as they applied the mindfulness skill (rather than having each individual participant selecting a focal point of their choosing). Participants reported increased feelings of relaxation, happiness, and engagement both during and following the intervention.¹⁴ Gandenberger et al.¹⁵ noted that students at a residential/day treatment center experienced grounding through time spent with horses.

Relating

“Relating” mentally to a previous positive association to evoke positive feelings in a stressful current situation is a second long-standing coping skill in the GRR Method. Mental imagery is typically the vehicle in which the positive association is represented and through which such relation occurs. Purposefully mentally focusing on an existing positive relationship with a person, animal, place, etc. to evoke related positive feelings exemplifies a strategic use of associations built through behavioral conditioning; conditioning is a foundational tool in behavior therapy approaches.¹⁶ Imagery and conditioning are widely used in behavior therapies to facilitate desired changes.¹⁷ Relating to positive associations embedded in mental imagery is a skill that is used in psychological interventions for adults¹⁸ and youth.¹⁹ The deliberate

¹³ Jessica Lee Oliva and Tim Robert Green, “Dog Tales: Mindful Dog Interactions Evoke Similar Experiences to Dog Assisted Mindfulness Meditations,” *Animals* 11, no. 7 (2021): 2104, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11072104>.

¹⁴ Oliva and Green, “Dog Tales,” 2104.

¹⁵ Jaci Gandenberger, Marisa Motiff, Erin Flynn, and Kevin N. Morris, “Staff Perspectives on the Targeted Incorporation of Nature-Based Interventions for Children and Youth at a Residential Treatment Facility,” *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth* 40, no 1 (2023): 67–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2022.2096169>.

¹⁶ Ralph Miller and Randolph Grace, “Conditioning and Learning,” in *Handbook of Psychology* 4, ed. Alice Healy (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2003).

¹⁷ Julie L. Ji, Stephanie Burnett Heyes, Colin MacLeod, and Emily A. Holmes, “Emotional Mental Imagery as Simulation of Reality: Fear and Beyond—A Tribute to Peter Lang,” *Behavior Therapy* 47, no. 5 (2016): 702–719, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2015.11.004>.

¹⁸ Mika Koivisto and Simone Grassini, “Mental Imagery of Nature Induces Positive Psychological Effects,” *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues* (December 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04088-6>.

¹⁹ Victoria Pile, Williamson Grace, Saunders Aleks, Holmes Emily A., and Jennifer Y.F. Lau, “Harnessing Emotional Mental Imagery to Reduce Anxiety and Depression in Young People: An Integrative Review of Progress and Promise,” *Lancet Psychiatry* 8, no. 9 (2021): 836–852, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00195-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00195-4).

evoking of positive feelings through focusing on existing positive associations is also used as a stand-alone skill in evidence-based trauma intervention.²⁰ Relating to mental representations of past positive associations to elicit positive feelings in the present will henceforth be referred to as *relating*.

Relating can entail what many anecdotally refer to as “going to my happy place,” in which a person mentally visualizes their favorite vacation spot and focuses on the feelings related to being there; relating to positive imagery is widely used as a coping skill.²¹ Alternatively, one could envision an image of cuddling with one’s companion animal and purposely evoke the associated positive feelings. The GRR Method again simply proactively proposes this companion animal-oriented application of “relating” out of one of many positive associations that a given person holds and may be able to evoke and relate positively to.

Reframing

Reframing is a simplified approach to a core technique within Cognitive Therapy (CT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) known as cognitive restructuring.²² CBT, which combines CT and behavior therapy, is considered an evidence-based practice used with adults and children for a range of mental health conditions including anxiety disorders²³ and depressive disorders.²⁴ Cognitive restructuring within CT entails systematically evaluating and challenging dysfunctional thoughts as part of a complex theoretically driven case-formulation.²⁵ When decoupled from CT and used as a stand-alone skill, cognitive restructuring has evidence of effectiveness in reducing mental health symptoms such as

²⁰ Najavits, “Seeking Safety.”

²¹ Ji, Burnett Heyes, MacLeod, and Holmes, “Emotional Mental Imagery.”

²² Judith Beck, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011); Marketa Ciharova, Toshi A. Furukawa, Orestis Efthimiou, Eirini Karyotaki, Clara Miguel, Hisashi Noma, Andrea Cipriani, Heleen Riper, and Pim Cuijpers, “Cognitive Restructuring, Behavioral Activation and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the Treatment of Adult Depression: A Network Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 89, no. 6 (2021): 563–74, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34264703/>.

²³ Jean-Daniel Carrier, Frances Gallagher, Alain Vanasse, and Pasquale Roberge, “Strategies to Improve Access to Cognitive Behavioral Therapies for Anxiety Disorders: A Scoping Review,” *PLoS ONE* 17, no. 3 (2022): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0264368>.

²⁴ José A. López-López, Sarah R. Davies, Deborah M. Caldwell, Rachel Churchill, Tim J. Peters, Deborah Tallon, Sarah Dawson, Qi Wu, Jinshuo Li, Abigail Taylor, Glyn Lewis, David S. Kessler, Nicola Wiles, and Nicky J. Welton, “The Process and Delivery of CBT for Depression in Adults: A Systematic Review and Network Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Medicine* 49, no. 12 (2019): 1937–1947, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329171900120X>.

²⁵ Beck, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*.

depression²⁶. While cognitive restructuring and reframing are used interchangeably to indicate use as a stand-alone skill, to make explicit the theoretical uncoupling from cognitive theory, term *reframing* will be used henceforth.

Reframing has been referred to as “the art of talking to oneself,”²⁷ as it involves a series of mental self-talk steps in which a person identifies a thought, evaluates the thought, and if appropriate chooses an alternate thought that is more helpful. The GRR Method proposes that this self-talk process of reframing simply be externalized and verbalized to one’s companion animal; while the animal will not understand the specific content, they will likely enjoy being talked to and provide an engaged and nonjudgmental “sounding board” for the reframing process.

A One Health approach that prioritizes both human and animal well-being is central to applying these three coping skills in partnership with a companion animal. Simply put, a One Health recognizes and builds upon the linkages between human, animals, and environmental well-being to improve outcomes that could not be achieved without such an integrative focus.²⁸ The engagement of a companion animal in applications of grounding, relating, and reframing skills can be a source of enrichment and pleasurable interaction for that respective animal. However, as living autonomous beings, companion animals may not always be ready or willing to engage in such activities; identifying and respecting an animal’s cues is a crucial part of a One Health partnership that prioritizes both human and companion animal well-being.

Companion Animal Welfare and the GRR Method

Companion Animals as Partners

Our companion animals are typically bonded to us; we are frequently their primary source of attention and affection and responsible for their well-being. They often enjoy when we talk to, touch, play with, and otherwise interact in focused mutually enjoyable ways with them. At the heart of our relationships with companion animals

²⁶ Ciharova, Furukawa, Efthimiou, Karyotaki, Miguel, Noma, Cipriani, Riper, and Cuijpers, “Cognitive Restructuring.”

²⁷ Jerry A. Schmidt, “Cognitive Restructuring: The Art of Talking to Yourself,” *Personnel & Guidance Journal* 55, no. 2 (1976): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1976.tb04618.x>.

²⁸ Karin Hediger, Andrea Meisser, and Jakob Zinsstag, “A One Health Research Framework for Animal-Assisted Interventions,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16040640>.

is the mutuality and reciprocity we share with them. They are not robots or stuffed animals; their affection and attention are given to us of their own accord, and this is generally why it is meaningful (one notable exception being when robotic “pets” are used for some individuals with neurocognitive disorders who may not be able to distinguish between the robotic animal and living animals). Forcing companion animals to interact with us (outside of safety, veterinary, and other contexts in which it may be a requirement for the animal’s well-being) when they—for whatever reason—are choosing not to do so is potentially harmful to both the animal’s well-being and the quality of our relationship with the animal. In applying grounding, relating, and reframing skills through partnership with a companion animal, it is thus necessary to consider the notion of a partner as it pertains to a non-human animal.

The term partner in the GRR Method is meant to refer to one of two *willing* members of a pair who are *mutually* engaged in a shared activity. In order to be willing, each partner—human and non-human animal—must have a voice and a choice in whether to participate.²⁹ Although the communication expressions vary by species, such as through body language, behaviors, vocalizations, etc., all companion animals do communicate to varying degrees. All companion animals are also individuals; each is a unique being with preferences, likes, dislikes, and so forth with regards to how they are petted and interacted with. For the GRR Method to afford mutual benefit to both the person *and* animal involved, it is necessary for the person to learn about and be responsive to their animal’s species-specific body language as well as their animal’s individual quirks and preferences. For instance, when my dog Henderson seeks a belly rub from a human, he sits down and lifts one of his front legs high to expose his chest and belly. Many people misunderstand and think he is attempting to “shake hands” when he is actually attempting to solicit pets.

If an animal indicates with avoidant behavior or lack of response that they are unwilling or unable to engage in a GRR Method-related interaction, a person can certainly proceed in applying the skill, *without involving their animal*. Forcing an animal—for example, pulling the animal, restraining the animal, or otherwise impeding the animal’s autonomy in the interaction—to assist with applying a coping skill violates the premise of a mutually beneficial partnership that is foundational to the GRR Method. A person experiencing a stressor and related stress reaction may not be in the best place to identify or honor an animal’s communication; if a person’s ability to do this is in question, it is best to proceed with application of the coping skills *without* companion animal involvement unless the animal explicitly engages with the person of their own volition.

²⁹ Risé VanFleet and Tracie Faa-Thompso, “Animal-Assisted Play Therapy,” in *Play Therapy: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, ed. David A. Crenshaw and Anne L. Stewart (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015), 201–214.

The GRR Method as an Animal Welfare/Enrichment Strategy

Knowledge on how human-animal relationships and interactions are experienced from the perspective of non-human animals is sparse; in part because of the cross-species data collection/comprehension barriers. Despite such barriers, to truly approach a relationship with an animal from a One Health partnership perspective—for the purpose of improving animal as well as human well-being—it is important to make efforts to understand the animal’s experiences, needs, and preferences, however imperfectly.

In their seminal paper, Rault et al.³⁰ reviewed literature for indicators of a positive human-animal relationship from the perspective of the animal. They delineated that from the perspective of non-human animals, the mechanisms entailed in a positive human-animal relationship were habituation, associative learning, and attachment/bonding. Rault et al.³¹ identified the following positive indicators from the animal pertaining to the human-animal relationship: voluntary approach; spatial proximity (seeking closeness); species-specific signs of positive anticipation, pleasure, relaxation, and/or enjoying; and other species-specific indicators of a rewarding experience from interaction with humans.

The importance of providing the animal choice and control (consistent with the elements of animal consent discussed in the previous section of this paper) over whether and how to interact with humans is underscored as an important element of positive experience from the animal’s perspective.³² Rault and colleagues concluded that “overall, there is growing evidence in the scientific literature that a positive human-animal relationship can bring intrinsic reward to the animals and thereby benefit animal welfare.”³³

In the field of animal welfare, the term enrichment is used to refer to “the addition of stimuli or provision of choice that results in the improvement of animal well-being.”³⁴ Companion animals and other domestic animals often seek out and appear to enjoy human company as a form of stimuli. Offering one’s companion

³⁰ Jean-Loup Rault, Susanne Waiblinger, Xavier Boivin, and Paul Hemsworth, “The Power of a Positive Human-Animal Relationship for Animal Welfare,” *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 7 (November 2020), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2020.590867/full>.

³¹ Rault, Waiblinger, Boivin, and Hemsworth, “The Power of a Positive Human-Animal Relationship.”

³² Rault, Waiblinger, Boivin, and Hemsworth, “The Power of a Positive Human-Animal Relationship.”

³³ Rault, Waiblinger, Boivin, and Hemsworth, “The Power of a Positive Human-Animal Relationship.”

³⁴ Cassie K. Kresnye, Chia-Fang Chung, Christopher Flynn Martin, and Patrick C. Shih. “Survey on the Past Decade of Technology in Animal Enrichment: A Scoping Review,” *Animals* 12, no. 14 (2022): 1792, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12141792>.

animal the opportunity to participate in *grounding* by petting the animal and in relating by *talking* to the animal (as explicated via the GRR Method) offer enrichment for that animal, if the animal's communication regarding whether or not the interaction is desired is recognized and heeded. "Animals may perceive interacting with humans per se as rewarding,"³⁵ however, the animal's autonomy within the interaction is a critical component.

Understanding the GRR Method Skills in the Context of Human Stress Response

Grounding, relating, and reframing skills each target aspects of human stress responses. The human Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) controls and regulates internal functions without any conscious recognition or effort, reflexively shifting states in response to stressors and safety input, without requiring conscious human awareness.³⁶ While human responses to stress are physiologically complex, for the purposes of conceptually situating the GRR Method for everyday application, a simplified breakdown of the ANS stress response can be useful.

The ANS stress response can be delineated into three components, each with a corresponding mental "state."³⁷ These three components are: the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS); the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS); and the Ventral Vagal Complex (VCC).³⁸

The PNS is referred to as the brake pedal for the ANS and is associated with the "freeze" state stress response.³⁹ The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS), in contrast, is the "fight or flight" state—associated with increased heart rate, respiration rate, and blood pressure—and helps mobilize the body's energy to react; the SNS is also referred to as the "gas pedal" for our ANS.⁴⁰ The least well-known part of the ANS is the VCC; the VCC is part of the PNS in social mammals; it is associated with a "social engagement" state; enabling humans to automatically calm in response

³⁵ Rault, Waiblinger, Boivin, and Hemsworth, "The Power of a Positive Human-Animal Relationship."

³⁶ Jeremy Woodcock, *Families and Individuals Living with Trauma* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

³⁷ Stephen W. Porges, "Polyvagal Theory: A Primer," in *Clinical Applications of the Polyvagal Theory: The Emergence of Polyvagal-Informed Therapies*, ed. Stephen W. Porges and Deb Dana (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 50–69.

³⁸ Porges, "Polyvagal Theory: A Primer."

³⁹ Porges, "Polyvagal Theory.;" Woodcock, *Families and Individuals Living with Trauma*.

⁴⁰ Porges, "Polyvagal Theory.;" Woodcock, *Families and Individuals Living with Trauma*.

to safety/soothing social cues from others (also known as co-regulation) or ourselves (self-regulation).⁴¹ As social mammals, humans have this “social engagement” stress response as a strategy for dealing with stressors.⁴²

To help facilitate adaptive stress responses when people experience stressors and mental health symptoms, numerous approaches have been developed and researched. Many of the stressors being faced in modern society, particularly those associated with the pandemic, cannot be well resolved with fight or flight stress responses. Unfortunately, the “fight or flight” response remains a default stress response for humans, and when the limbic system is activated, it is difficult to access and fully utilize the pre-frontal cortex to problem solve.⁴³ Similarly, when in the “freeze” state, it is difficult to access the pre-frontal cortex to rationally think about and problem solve an issue that is creating stress.⁴⁴ The optimal accessing of the pre-frontal cortex occurs when a human is in a calm and alert state congruent with the “social engagement” ANS response.⁴⁵ The three skills that comprise The GRR Method—grounding, relating, and reframing—have evidence of stand-alone utility in stress management.

Applying the GRR Method

Overview

To recapitulate, the GRR acronym stands for grounding, relating, and reframing. Within the GRR Method, the following definitions are used: grounding refers to actions that involving focusing one or more of our five senses in something in the immediate physical environment to help a person reengage with their physical body and the present time⁴⁶; relating entails focusing on something or someone a person has an existing positive association with, in order to elicit the associated positive feelings⁴⁷; and reframing involves identifying, evaluating, and adjusting (if necessary) one’s thoughts.⁴⁸ These three skills are focused in the GRR Method for three

⁴¹ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁴² Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁴³ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁴⁴ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁴⁵ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁴⁶ Najavits, “Seeking Safety.”

⁴⁷ Najavits, “Seeking Safety.”

⁴⁸ Ciharova, Furukawa, Efthimiou, Karyotaki, Miguel, Noma, Cipriani, Riper, and Cuijpers, “Cognitive Restructuring.”

reasons: firstly, these specific skills emerged through practice and anecdotal experiences and accounts as useful and amenable to incorporating animal participation; secondly, they each have substantive research support for use as stand-alone stress management strategies; and thirdly, each skills offers utility in addressing particular aspects of the human ANS stress response.

The Three Steps in the GRR Method

The first step in the GRR Method entails becoming explicitly aware of and acknowledging that one is experiencing a stressor in the present moment. To maximize the timing and helpfulness of a stress/coping skill, a person must be able to identify that they are currently experiencing something that is stressful. A simple mental statement to oneself that acknowledges the stressor—for example, “I’m feeling really stressed waiting for the results of my biopsy”—will suffice.

The second step in the GRR Method is to attempt to determine (to the extent possible depending on how one’s stress response is impacting one’s cognitive abilities) which of the three ANS stress response states one is currently in, for example, fight or flight, freeze, or social engagement. To recapitulate, in the fight-flight state, a person’s sympathetic nervous system “gas pedal” is pressed down and the person’s body is primed for rapid physical responses (e.g., running or physically fighting) to the stressor through heart rate acceleration and associated body reactions.⁴⁹ When in the freeze state, the parasympathetic “brake pedal” is pressed down in the freeze state, the heart rate decelerates, and a person’s bodily functions are slowed and inhibited.⁵⁰ When in the social engagement state, a person is able to calmly and cooperatively engage with others and oneself to logically problem solve to address stressors.⁵¹

The third step in the GRR Method is to select and use the GRR skill that best fits the body’s stress response, in collaboration with their companion animal (*if* the animal indicates willingness, see Companion Animals as Partners section). When in a freeze state, using the grounding skill via physical actions that engage one’s senses—seeing, hearing, seeing, tasting, and touching—is a commonly recommended strategy. In the fight-flight state, consciously mentally relating to someone or something that one holds a strong positive association toward—such as a companion animal—can help to self-soothe and calm oneself.⁵² The use of grounding and relating may help a person to shift into a social engagement state; in the social engage-

⁴⁹ Woodcock, *Families and Individuals Living with Trauma*.

⁵⁰ Woodcock, *Families and Individuals Living with Trauma*.

⁵¹ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

⁵² Najavits, “Seeking Safety.”

ment state, a person can engage with themselves more readily do the higher-level thinking entailed in reframing their thoughts.⁵³

Using the GRR Method Skills

A companion animal can help to facilitate the application of grounding, relating, and reframing skills, and simultaneously be provided a positive and enriching interaction with a human; this is the central premise of the proposed GRR Method. Again, the willingness and ability of the companion animal to participate in the GRR Method is a crucial consideration. If the human's distress/stress response is negatively impacting the animal, this is definitely a reason to discard the GRR Method and use other coping strategies.

In doing *grounding* activities, a companion animal can assist in sensory engagement in a range of ways that are helpful for the person and pleasant for the animal (assuming the animal is consenting); examples of this include but are not limited to:

- feeling the warmth of the animal's body,
- feeling the weight of the animal (if holding the animal or the animal is seated on the person),
- feeling the texture of the animal's fur (hair, scales, feathers, etc.),
- looking at the different colors on the animal's fur (hair, scales, feathers, etc.),
- watching and/or feeling and/or listening to the animal's breathing/the rise and fall of the animal's chest,
- sniffing the animal's fur,
- listening to the animal purr and feeling the purr vibrations (cats only).

Involving one's companion animal to use effectively use *relating* skills entails an assumption that one holds a strong positive attachment/association to one's animal; if this is not the case, there will not be a pre-existing positive association to the companion animal from which to positively relate to. If in a place where the animal is not present while experiencing a fight-flight response, a person can mentally evoke their relationship with their companion animal to relate to associated positive emotions. Deliberately thinking of and holding the mental image or thought of a cherished companion animal in one's mind enables one to relate to and feel the positive feelings associated with the companion animal. If a person is actually in the presence of their animal, positive associations from a mental focus on the animal may be amplified with the animal's actual physical presence and positive interactions with the animal such as petting, playing, and/or talking to them.

⁵³ Porges, "Polyvagal Theory."

Reframing has been referred to as “the art of talking to yourself”⁵⁴ and requires thinking explicitly about the content and accuracy of one’s own thoughts. When in the social engagement state, the prefrontal cortex part of the brain can be easily accessed to perform coping skills such that entail more intricate cognitive activity⁵⁵ such as reframing. Simplified basic steps of reframing are as follows:

1. Identify the thought you are having when you are distressed.
2. Assess that thought. Is it true? Is it helpful?
3. Generate alternative thoughts that are both reasonable and positive.
4. Change your self-talk to incorporate alternative thought(s).

Reframing using the GRR Method entails following the above steps, but rather than mentally dialoging with oneself or writing the steps out, the person speaks aloud to their companion animal as they talk through the steps. Reframing via the GRR Method can thus be considered the art of talking to one’s companion animal.

A GRR Method Example

I (the author of the present text) am a cancer survivor, and, with much foreboding, get scanned every six months to check for recurrence. After my most recent scan, I felt anxious and identified the following automatic thought: “She [the radiology staff] was friendly and joking when I came in but looked sad and serious when I left. She saw something bad on my scan.”

When I returned home, I sat down on my couch and my small dog Henderson voluntarily jumped on my lap and remained there (thus demonstrating affiliative behavior, proximity seeking, and consent). I stated to Henderson: “Henderson, I am kind of freaking out. Here is what I was thinking in there: She [the radiology staff] was friendly and joking when I came in but looked sad and serious when I left. She saw something bad on my scan.” In keeping with basic reframing tenets, I asked myself and Henderson aloud whether my thoughts were true and whether they were helpful. I had no way of knowing if they were true at that time, but they certainly were not helpful thoughts for me. I then asked Henderson what other thoughts might be more helpful, and answered my own question, verbalizing my thoughts: “...maybe she thought of something she had to do or forgot to do that had nothing to do with me... she could have a headache or be tired or hungry and it started to hit her during my appointment... she didn’t tell me to wait while she called the doctor, that’s what happens when it’s bad, and that didn’t happen.” Henderson tilted his head and wagged his tail, then reached up and licked my cheek. At this point, I felt much less anxious.

⁵⁴ Schmidt, “Cognitive Restructuring.”

⁵⁵ Porges, “Polyvagal Theory.”

When Henderson jumped on my lap, he provided immediate grounding for me through his weight and warmth. My positive associations with him likewise helped to keep me in a calm enough emotional state to cognitively engage in reframing via talking aloud to Henderson.

Henderson did not have any content-specific responses to my monologue, but he evidenced canine-specific signals that he enjoyed being spoken to; for instance, he leaned his body against me, wagged his tail throughout our “conversation,” and occasionally licked my arm and face. Had I not externalized my dialogue with myself, I would have been internally focused rather than having a partially externally focused interaction that included Henderson and afforded him some enrichment/attention after I had been away from home (and him!) for several hours.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In sum, the GRR Method is a One Health strategy for applying existing evidence-based human coping skills in ways that proactively incorporate the human-animal bond, for the mutual benefit of the people and animals involved. Through companion animal involvement, it is also likely that biopsychosocial benefits of human-animal interaction (HAI) may augment the actual effectiveness of the skills entailed in the GRR Method. Beetz et al.⁵⁶ proposed that the release of oxytocin mediates many of the benefits of human-animal interaction across physical, psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of human functioning, and refers to this as the stress-mediation response. Whether doing grounding skills entailing sensory engagement with one’s companion animal, mentally relating to the positive associations one has with one’s companion animal or talking aloud to one’s companion animal about one’s thoughts, it is likely that oxytocin and its associated benefits are moderating forces. The release of oxytocin (and associated benefits) can also occur in the companion animal during interactions with humans,⁵⁷ and the animal may likewise experience the benefits associated with oxytocin release.

⁵⁶ Andrea Beetz, Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg, Henri Julius, and Kurt Kotrschal. “Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (July 2012), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234>.

⁵⁷ Linda Handlin, Eva Hydbring-Sandberg, Anne Nilsson, Mikael Ejdebäck, Anna Jansson, and Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg, “Short-Term Interaction between Dogs and Their Owners: Effects on Oxytocin, Cortisol, Insulin and Heart Rate—An Exploratory Study,” *Anthrozoös* 24, no. 3 (2011): 301–315, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175303711X13045914865385>.

Future research is needed to examine how the benefits of companion animal interaction can augment evidence-based coping skills such as those in the GRR Method, as well as explore how inviting companion animals to partner with us in our mental health strategies can serve as a source of enrichment for animal welfare. When approached through a One Health lens, our relationships with companion animals offer continual opportunities to enhance both human and non-human animal well-being.

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Horse Interaction as Motivation for Development of Literacy Skills in Emergent Readers

Взаимодействие с лошадьми как
мотивация для развития навыков чтения
и письма у начинающих читателей

Аннотация

Двести детей дошкольного возраста и учеников первых классов начальной школы приняли участие в программе развития основных навыков чтения и письма посредством взаимодействия с лошадьми. Программа использует серию трех взаимодействий с лошадьми для повышения мотивации воспитанников детсадов и школьников к изучению чтения. Во время знакомства с лошадьми участники программы получают экземпляры книги, которую они будут читать на протяжении следующих шести недель. В течение этого периода дети принимают участие в занятиях, посвященных лошадям, в рамках обычных уроков, а также читают полученную книгу. В конце программы ее участники отправляются на экскурсию на ферму, где им предлагается читать вслух и взаимодействовать с лошадьми в качестве награды за помощь на ферме. Приобретение навыков чтения и письма в раннем возрасте и показатели успеха в этой области измерялись с помощью тестов в начале и в конце эксперимента, а также качественных данных, собранных среди учи-

Horse Interaction as Motivation
for Development of Literacy Skills
in Emergent Readers

Abstract

Two hundred kindergarten and first grade students participated in a program to develop early literacy skills through horse interaction. The program uses a series of three-horse interaction experiences to increase motivation to read. During the introduction to the horse, students are provided with a copy of the book they will read over the next six weeks. The students participate in horse-focused activities over the next six weeks during regular classroom instruction along with practice time reading the book. At the end of the program, students attend a field trip to a farm where they are invited to read aloud and engage in further interaction with horses as a reward for their work. Early literacy skills and literacy success indicators were measured through a pre-/post-test as well as qualitative data collected from teachers and parents. Results show statistically significant increases in literacy indicators. Students also demonstrated an increase in horse knowledge.

Keywords: horses, reading, literacy, animal-assisted, equine-assisted, miniature horses

телей и родителей. Результаты показывают статистически значимый рост показателей грамотности. Участники программы также показали увеличение знаний о лошадях.

Ключевые слова: лошади, чтение, грамотность, при участии животных, при участии лошадей, миниатюрные лошади

Introduction

In the context of literacy, when a student is encouraged to read and their early experiences with reading are positive, they will carry that attitude on and continue reading throughout their life.¹ There are numerous research articles reporting the best strategies and practices in education. Several strategies lead to success in literacy: multiple exposures to written text,² frequent opportunities that foster motivation to read for a variety of purposes,³ promoting independent reading outside the school in the home and with other community programs,⁴ making personal connections with the text,⁵ and straightforward integration of literacy and content.⁶ Including animals, such as horses, into a reading program can support each of the strategies providing motivation, positive reinforcement, and bringing the characters to life, fostering a deep connection to the story.

¹ Kate Summers, "Adult Reading Habits and Preferences in Relation to Gender Differences," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2013): 243–249.

² Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, eds., *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1998).

³ Catherine E. Snow, Susan Burns, and Oeg Griffin, eds., *Preventing Reading Difficulties*.

⁴ M. Susan Burns, Catherine E. Snow, and Peg Griffin, eds., *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1999).

⁵ Michael A. K. Halliday, "The Place of Dialogue in Children's Construction of Meaning," in *Theoretical Processes and Models of Reading*, 4th edition, ed. Robert B. Ruddel, M. R. Ruddell, and Harry Singer (Newark: International Reading Association, 1994).

⁶ Michael Pressley, Richard Allington, Lesley Morrow, Kim Baker, Eileen Nelson, Ruth Wharton-MacDonald, Cathy Collins Block, Diane Tracey, Gregory Brooks, John Cronin, and Deborah Woo, *The Nature of Effective First-Grade Literacy Instruction* (CELA-R-11007) (Washington: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1998).

Methodology

The present article attempts to answer the following research question: can the use of the enhanced program design motivate children to read? This study examines a program that incorporates miniature horse interaction to motivate emergent readers. The inclusion of the animal acted as a motivator and helped create a real-world connection to the text, which was one of the effective strategies mentioned earlier. The animals were a powerful influence on the success of the program. The original program in the study did not introduce horse interaction until a final experience. The program adapted for this study incorporated miniature horses, which were trained as visitation animals and introduced at the beginning of the program. The interaction was threaded throughout the entire experience. The thought behind the adaptation was to increase the interaction with the horses to increase initial engagement and sustain motivation throughout the entire program. The final Reading with Rosie program was built around a learning model called the Animal Assisted Learning Model created for this study. It is a framework from which interactive experiences could be created and designed for optimal motivation (see Figure 1). The methodology for this study evaluates the effectiveness of the enhanced program design targeting motivation. The evaluation piece is divided into four parts: pre-test, post-test, parent/teacher survey, focus groups, and observation. It was piloted with 200 first-grade students from the same school system. The data analysis will be strictly descriptive statistics using frequency tables and a qualitative matrix to organize the results. Certain assumptions are made regarding the students participating in this study and the teachers in each classroom. The assumptions were (1) the majority of students in IPS have not had previous experience with horses, (2) the IPS school system is looking for ways to improve reading readiness in the lower grades, (3) teachers will implement pieces of the resource guide in their classrooms, (4) all students are first graders, and (5) all students will have a basic working knowledge of the alphabet.

Animal Assisted Learning Model

The model is broken down into five components: introduction, interaction, integration, and demonstration. Each component integrates the effective strategies mentioned above: motivation, access, integration of text, reading aloud, and creating joy

and enthusiasm through demonstration and recognition. It is built along a continuum in that each component builds upon the previous and affects the following. Any phase can be revisited, sliding up and down the continuum depending on the needs of the audience. The Animal Assisted Learning model uses structured interaction with an animal to motivate students through: engagement through novelty and connecting it to prior knowledge—*Introduction*; creating a personal connection to the text—*Interaction*; integrating the subject of the text into all areas of classroom study to build upon prior knowledge—*Integration*; reinforcing new knowledge and personal connection—*Interaction*; demonstrating new knowledge and recognizing achievement—*Demonstration*.

<i>Animals/ Experience</i>	<i>Motivation</i>		↑
	Continuing learning and motivation		
	Demonstration and Celebration of Success	<i>Demonstration</i>	
	<i>Interaction</i>	Reinforcement of motivation and knowledge	
	Building on and reinforcing new knowledge	<i>Integration</i>	
	<i>Interaction</i>	Creating personal and experiential connection	
	Accessing prior knowledge and peaking curiosity	<i>Introduction</i>	

Figure 1. The Animal Assisted Learning Model

The model is flexible and designed to adapt to various situations without compromising the outcome. Each child is motivated by something different and needs varying internal and external motivation combinations to succeed. Therefore, it is essential to be purposeful and complete each model stage according to the individual student’s needs. In addition, the connection between humans and animals is constantly evolving and shifting as our understanding of animal behavior, and relational dynamics deepens. Therefore, a model designed to structure this interaction must follow the same path.

Enhanced Program Design

The Reading with Rosie program was adapted from the original Black Stallion Literacy program⁷. The Black Stallion Literacy Project was piloted the year prior to this study. It was determined that more interaction with the horses could be used to support early emergent literacy skills. The adapted version was titled Reading with Rosie, named after the miniature horse originally used in the program. The program was built around the Animal Assisted Learning Model. Before the program, both teachers and parents are informed about the program and given strategies to support continued reading and success. The first part of the program is an initial visit to the school, where the book is introduced to the students. In a large group room such as the gym, the horse is then brought in after teasing the students about meeting the main character of the book. The students are given a brief talk about energy, noise, and other aspects of horses before they are brought in. Then they are taught some basic information about horses and invited to come up in small groups. Volunteer handlers are taught how to partner with the horse to manage any signs of stress. The facilitator manages contact with the kids to minimize stress on the horse. For large groups, more than one horse could be included. It is essential to have well-qualified and trained facilitators for this type of large group interaction. It is also imperative that well-suited and trained visitation animals be included in this type of program. Poorly managed interaction with large groups can be stressful on the animals. The students are then told they get another book to read with their class and home. The lead facilitator hints at a big surprise if the students read in their classrooms and at home. After the visit, the teacher incorporates the book into their regular reading time. The equine partners maintain contact each week with the students through email Care Packages, which include horse activities, motivational messages from Rosie, and hints at a big celebration at the end of the program. Other literacy skills such as reading at home and library, discussing horses and the book characters with their parents are encouraged. At the end of the six weeks, the students are invited to the barn for a field trip. During the field trip, the barn produces some spectacle for the students. In this study, the barn staff produced a circus to match the theme of the book *Little Black Goes to the Circus*. Each class chooses students to read their favorite part of the story aloud to the rest of the group and the horses ahead of time. Students are also given a chance to interact with the horses in a structured but interactive way. At the very end of the visit, they are supplied with an additional book to take home and read. An infection protocol was created during this program to ensure that the horse brought into the

⁷ Black Stallion Literacy Project website, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://theblackstallion.com/web/tag/black-stallion-literacy-project/>.

classroom was clean, and that messes would be cleaned and sanitized while on the school property. Details on the protocol can be found in the full curriculum.

Data Analysis

After the pre and post-tests were completed and all parent and teacher evaluations were collected, they were paired with the release forms. Only those students who had a release and completed pre and post-test were counted. The parent evaluations were also paired to correlate parent involvement and motivation.

After all of the data was organized by class, school, and student, and then coded for name, ethnicity, gender, birth date, each pre/post-test answer, and whether or not the students needed a translator. The pre and post-tests were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Additional information on race and gender was also correlated with the results. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency tables focusing on the change between positive answers from pre to post-test. The short answer section of the pre-test offered insight for the descriptive statistical portion regarding patterns in their choice of reading material preference but will be entered into SPSS and analyzed according to response frequency. In addition, the pre and post-test provided information on what they identify as the most common means to obtain books.

Results

According to the analysis of the five data collection instruments used in this study, there was an overall increase in the frequency of positive answers indicating a positive impact on each area. The pre and post-test included specific questions that targeted the indicators of motivation (See Tables 1–3).

P-5 was asked only on the pre-test as an indicator of interest (see Table 4). The responses were coded into five categories: animals, horses, nature, cartoon characters, and other and then coded by the subject in the book's title or the book topic that the student recorded. While 23.0% of the students prefer books about animals, 14.7% recorded horses specifically. The highest percentage was recorded under the Cartoon Character category.

Table 1

A breakdown of questions from pre- (P) and post-test (Q) targeting motivation P-1, Q-1 and P-5

Question	Response Type	Measure	Explanation
1. Do you like to read?	“Yes” or “No”	Measures desire • Indicator of motivation	Desire is considered to be an indicator of motivation.
5. What do you like to read about?	Open ended	Measures interest • Indicator of motivation	A theoretical reason of motivation is interest.

Table 2

Response frequency of P-1 (n = 265)

Do you like to read?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	255	96.2
No	10	3.8
Total	265	100.0

Table 3

Response frequency of Q-1 (n = 265)

Do you like to read?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	259	97.7
No	6	2.3
Total	265	100.0

Table 4

Frequency breakdown of coded responses to P-5 (n = 265)

Favorite topic (P)	Frequency	Percent
Animals	61	23.0
Horses	39	14.7
Cartoon character	83	31.3
Other	58	21.9
Nature	17	6.4
Did not answer	7	2.6
Total	265	100.0

Q-5 was substituted to measure comprehension as an indicator of reading engagement and motivation on the post-test (see Table 5). The responses were coded according to the students' answers in relation to the book's distinctive situations. The student's responses were written in the same format beginning with "When." They were told not to write in complete sentences.

Table 6 indicates that 37% of the students felt that the part of the story where the horse saves the boy was their favorite fragment of the book, and 19.2% reported the part of the story where the little boy falls through the ice as their favorite episode. The perception is that they are two distinct parts of the books. This question is an indication of engagement and comprehension.

Table 5

Breakdown for Q-5 targeting motivation

Question	Response type	Measure	Explanation
5. What was your favorite part of <i>Little Black, a Pony</i> ?	Open ended	Measures Comprehension • Indicator of engagement	A theoretical basis For motivation is engagement. An engaged reader is motivated and will retain more information

Table 6

Frequency breakdown for coded responses Q-5 (n = 265)

What was your favorite part of <i>Little Black, a Pony</i> ?	Frequency	Percent
When Little Black saved the boy	98	37.0
When the little boy fell	51	19.2
When Little Black and the boy were friends	30	11.3
When Little Black ran away	22	8.3
When Little Black fell	22	8.3
When the boy rode Big Red	25	9.4
Other	10	3.8
Total	265	100.0

Teacher Surveys (TQ)

The teacher surveys were based on a five-point Likert scale with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Table 7 indicates 100% of the teachers responded strongly agree and agree on TQ-1: The Reading with Rosie program increased student’s motivation to read. In Table 8, student’s parents commented that the program is a “good way to motivate students to read.” Five respondents out of 16 recorded a strongly agree with 68% showing that parents didn’t comment on the program.

Table 7

Frequency of responses to TQ-1 (n = 16)

The program increased the student’s motivation to read.	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	11	68.8
Agree	5	31.3
Undecided	0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total	16	100.0

Table 8

Frequency of responses to TQ-2 (n = 16)

Student’s parents have commented that The Black Stallion Literacy Project™ motivated their child to read.	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	6	37.5
Agree	6	37.5
Undecided	4	25.0
Total	16	100.0

The parent surveys were distributed with approximately a 50% return rate (n = 150). Table 9 shows the parents’ responses to question one (PQ-1). Out of the total responses, 52% reported their child discussing the books and the program at home. Other responses included reading 3.3% and “other” such as art, and Spanish 6.0%.

Table 10 shows the parent’s responses to P-2 from the survey. For the question, “Did your child read this book with you?” 86.6% of the parents answered “yes.” As shown in Table 11, 87.3% of the responding parents reported their children talking about the program at home. Table 12 shows that 72.7% of the parents said that “yes,” their children have been showing more interest in reading after reading *Little Black, a Pony*.

Table 9
Parent’s responses to survey PQ-1 (n = 150)

What school programs did your child talk about most?	Frequency	Percent
The program	37	24.7
Reading	5	3.3
Other	9	6.0
Did not respond	51	34.0
Totals	150	100.0

Table 10
Parent’s responses to PQ-2 (n = 150)

Did your child read the book with you?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	130	86.7
No	20	13.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 11
Parent’s responses to survey PQ-3 (n = 150)

Did your child talk about the program?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	131	87.3
No	19	12.7
No Response	0	0.0

Table 12

Parent’s responses to survey PQ-4 (n = 150)

After reading <i>Little Black a Pony</i> , did they express interest to go read more books?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	109	72.7
No	39	26.0
No Response	2	1.3
Total	150	100.0

Parents (90.0%) also reported that their children talked at home about the horse they met, as shown in Table 13. Table 14 shows the frequency of responses to question six on the parent evaluation. The highest number of parents reported reading with their children “frequently” at home (52.7%). Only 26.7% of the parents reported reading to their children “always,” and 19% reported reading occasionally. No parents reported never reading to their children.

Table 13

Parent’s responses to survey PQ-4 (n = 150)

Did you child talk about the horse they met?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	135	90.0
No	13	8.7
No responses	2	1.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 14

Parent’s responses to survey PQ-6 (n = 150)

How often do you read with your child?	Frequency	Percent
Always	40	26.7
Frequently	79	52.7
Occasionally	29	19.3
Never	0	0.0
No response	2	1.3
Total	150	100.0

Qualitative Results

Some assertions can be made based on the comments provided by the parents in the open comment section of the survey, the narratives, and interview responses from the teachers. First, the responses indicate that this model through the program increased the motivation of their students to read—the comments made by the teachers in their survey support this assertion. A second assertion is that physical interaction with the horse provides the most significant amount of motivation in that it captivates their attention and provides that personal connection.

Data clips from teachers in the comment portion of the survey demonstrate their support for the motivational effects of the program. Teachers made no responses in opposition to the assertion. The most common theme among the respondents was increasing their student’s amount of reading. The teachers indicated that the students chose to read over other choices during their free time.

Table 15

Teacher’s responses to survey comments (n = 16)

Respondent	Response
1	Any time my students had finished their work, they would pick up one of the books.
2	Watching my student’s read sure convinced me that they enjoyed reading <i>Little Black, a Pony</i> and <i>Little Black Goes to the Circus</i> .
3	They especially wanted to read about horses and the books they received.
5	The children really loved the <i>Little Black Books</i> .
6	The students must have read the book ten times!
7	They enjoyed having their own hardback book to keep.
8	My children sat down and read both books as soon as they received them. They were enthralled with the story.
9	Students were very excited to read the next story.
15	The horse coming into the class motivated the children to read books about horses.
16	They especially wanted to read about horses and the books they received

Table 16

Parent's responses to survey narrative (n = 150)

Respondent	Parents comments
1	She really enjoyed the book. Me too. She really likes horses.
3	He did drawings of Black Stallion all the time
4	He loved it!
5	Her interest in the program was great. Any time she sees horses she talks about the program. It was very helpful.
6	I think it had my son's attention and think it was a good project for children.
9	I think it opened a new interest in him. I was amazed that he could remember the names of the horses and also the breeds.
10	I think kids in the city can learn to love some of the things that they never get to see or touch. Some of them in their lives. They learn about the animals and how to treat them and what they eat, and it is hands on. Thank you for letting my son have the opportunity to participate.
11	I think the program is wonderful! My daughter has always loved horses and really enjoyed the whole program. She loves to read to her little brother.
13	I thought it was a good project. The more the children learn about it the more they are reading.
15	I thought it was a neat way to get the kids interested in reading.
16	It was a good experience for her. She enjoyed the book plus she enjoyed the hands-on with Little Black, Big Red and Rosie. My child enjoyed getting to see all the horses at once.
17	I think it is a good program that exposes the kids to new experiences.
21	Lewis was very excited and talked about the horses for a week afterward.
26	My daughter loved it. She truly enjoyed the whole experience. It gave her something to look forward to. She wore the mask she made everywhere.
31	My daughter was very emotional at meeting the horses at the circus
32	My daughter really enjoyed meeting the horses.
35	My son loved the horse, and he loves the book, he reads it all the time to dad, brother, himself, or me.
43	My son remembered another book he had read before about horses. We found it was also by Walter Farley.
44	My son thoroughly enjoyed the program. He enjoyed meeting the pony and still talks about his field trip.
63	She also enjoyed reading the books to me. I noticed an improvement in her reading since the project. I hope the project continues.

Table 16 continued

Respondent	Parents comments
68	She loved the program. She talked about it every day!
75	The homework Travis and I read together.
82	The man down the street brought his horse down so that we could pet him. The progress that my son has shown in learning to read and loving to read now.
120	This is an interesting project; it motivates kids to read each day and makes the class fun. I'm sure the kids agree.

Each teacher was asked to write a short paragraph about his or her experience. The comments support the assertion that the students were motivated to read by the project and that the physical interaction with the horse is the main motivator. Each narrative was reviewed for common themes. Table 17 shows the comments that reflect the motivation theme and support the research question.

Table 17

Teacher's "additional comment" responses to survey PQ-6 (n = 150)

Respondent	Narrative vignette—additional comments on the Black Stallion Literacy Project™
1	The program was a good motivator for reading. The class was really excited about the one-on-one visit with Little Black in their classroom. The children thoroughly enjoyed the books especially the first one because we had read it together more times. The enthusiasm built as the field trip got closer. The children looked forward to it with great anticipation, both because they were motivated by Little Black's visit and the book but also because this was the only field trip for the year [...] It is a good motivator for reading.
2	The program was truly a motivator for my classroom. Each student takes out the hard cover books at least twice a day. They want to finish their work, so they have time to read their books. They are actually choosing to read rather than me telling them to do it. The idea of them actually meeting a horse close up put a personal touch on their concept of relating to a character in the story. [...] We were able to bring in all of the horse grooming equipment and the saddle, etc. [...] This not only gave the students a better understanding of what they were learning but also me as well. I cannot think of a better program that I have been involved in to help promote reading.
3	I thought the program was a complete success! When the first visit included the live pony, my students were in awe. I feel that the students were able to relate to everything in the books [...] I feel that the students were genuinely excited to learn. The trip was a priceless memory for our urban students in many ways.
5	Several parents mentioned their children's excitement. They were excited about reading a book that was their own. These children were thrilled with their books. I saw them reading and reading them, they were excited.

Table 17 continued

Respondent	Narrative vignette—additional comments on the Black Stallion Literacy Project™
6	The program was a great motivation for my students. The live horse coming to the room started the excitement to read more about horses. Many students would take their books out and read it during the day. Many of the students wanted to read after we ate lunch [at the field trip]. The program is a great way to encourage young students to read. It encourages lifelong readers.
8	The surprise element to the project increased the children's eagerness to participate in the activities. Seeing Little Black increased their eagerness to read the first book. They read the whole book in one period. They were reading so intently, I just let them finish.
9	The kids were very excited to read both of the books. It seemed like the level of motivation was greatly increase. I feel that it is very important for students to have real-life experiences that these students rarely have. The students still talk about their new books and love to read them.
10	The visits with the ponies gave them the desire to read the books. These students enjoyed visiting the horses and ponies. They couldn't stop talking about it.
12	The program really motivated them to read. The especially loved their books. As a teacher it is really wonderful to see them reading.
15	The program is an excellent motivator. Parents felt that this was a good chance for the children to read an entire book.

Interview and Observation

The observation and interview phase of the data both support these assertions. Figure 2 shows an Outcomes Matrix⁸ demonstrating the link of qualitative data to the theme of motivation.

During most of the interviews, teachers ($n = 6$) reported seeing an increase in enthusiasm for reading. They became more interested in it in general. The students would spend their free time reading and would use the horse analogy in other areas of study voluntarily. Each teacher felt that the introduction phase and first interaction, or First Touch, elevated the enthusiasm and motivation throughout the entire program duration. Observation of the classroom also supported this.

⁸ Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd edition (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990).

When the students were working on their horse projects, they were actively engaged and talked about the horses as they worked. The classroom would get very excited and build energy when the teacher would tell them it was time to read their books or work on a horse project. Each time they would relate to the first time they met Rosie or Little Black.

The primary goal of the model is motivation. In the pre and post-tests there was only a slight increase in positive response to the motivational indicators. This was to be expected considering there was a significantly high number of students who responded positively on the pre-test, which is important to take into account when reviewing the results. It indicates that 97.7% of the students already enjoyed reading. In related studies, students coming into the first grade generally have a positive attitude toward reading.⁹ If the students were told that we were coming to talk about reading, they might say they enjoy reading. It is important to note that of the children who responded negatively to P-1, “Do you like to read?,” there was a large percentage of students responding positively on the post-test. This indicates a change in motivation over the course of the program.

Outcomes of AAL Model			
Themes	Interaction with the horse captivated their attention	Rereading <i>Little Black, a Pony</i> repeatedly	The students were able to relate well to the book
	Students choosing to read during free time	All skill levels of readers read together as a class	Students would want to finish their work so they could read
	Integration of horses into other lessons	The second touch experience was a great reinforcement	Genuinely excited to learn

Figure 2. Outcomes matrix of qualitative data related to motivation (n = 16)

Question five on the pre-test shows the impact of popular culture on the favorite topics the students like to read. Their favorite topic indicated was most influenced by what was popular on TV at the time. The essential factor to consider is the number of students who responded with either the popular name of an animal character or a type of animal. A large portion of the students stated they like to read books that are centered around animals or nature in general. The Biophilia hypothesis supports the attraction to animal characters¹⁰ and supports reasoning

⁹ Cathy J. Kline, *Model Reading Intervention Program, Grade 4: 2001–2002* (Austin: Austin Independent School District, 2002).

¹⁰ Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

why animals may make such effective motivators and why children relate to them so well. Several of the students stated horses specifically. A Black Stallion poster was sent to each classroom before the first touch experience, influencing the answer to that question.

The strongest evidence in support of the motivating factors of this model comes from the responses of the teachers and parents. Their statements about the students' reactions are powerful and capture the true essence of this program. Several themes emerged from the teacher's responses to the evaluation survey and the narrative. The first central theme was that the students read the book entirely the day they received it and chose to reread it time after time. Teachers reported their students choosing to read their books when given the option for free time. One teacher stated they must have read it ten times the same day they got it." Another teacher stated, "My children sat down and read both books as soon as they received them." Both statements reflect similar ideas given by the teachers. Class observations on the day of the first touch confirm their ideas. This researcher observed the students sitting down with their books, flipping through the pages examining each picture, and discussing what was happening in each scene.

Another central theme was that of the motivating factor of the horse. This conclusion was supported by a review of the qualitative data. The horse visit and interaction are key to the success of the experience. The influence of the experiential horse interaction can be supported by the work of Dewey¹¹ that the physical contact with the subject being studied helps to reinforce the learning. The books being used for the program have horses as the main characters. Introducing live horses as part of the lesson creates a deeper connection to the text. Teachers report a large percentage of the students had not touched a horse before the first day of the program at their school. The school that was the site for the weekly observation has a sizeable Hispanic population who speak English as a second language. Most of the students from this school brought a unique perspective to the experience. One teacher commented on how the horse motivated them to talk about where they came from and horses they had been around before. Others were just overwhelmed by the entire experience. When the horses entered the room, the students would be amazed that a horse could fit in their classroom. Their enthusiasm would grow when they were told they could hug the miniature. One child even asked in Spanish, "Who's in there?" not knowing that the miniature was real. One of the key connections between the students and reading is through the horse. The story is brought to life by the hands-on interaction with the horse. They can then relate more to the book that is given to them after the first touch experience. Each teacher commented on the first touch experience in his or her narrative as the major motivating factor of the program.

¹¹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1938).

Conclusion

The implication for education, in general, lies in two areas: the area of motivation and the area of the integrated or thematic curriculum. The results indicate that the interaction with horses under the conditions of this program motivated these children to read. As more teachers begin to integrate animals into their classrooms, the findings can give them structure for how they incorporate animals and provide a flexible framework to develop lesson plans that use the interaction with the animal as a motivator. Integration of subject matter is becoming more and more mainstream.¹² Integrating appropriate live-animal interaction into an academic environment can create more hands-on experiential learning opportunities for the students to increase engagement in a given lesson. Those experiences can be built upon by integrating the animal-related theme into the everyday curriculum. More research is needed to determine the differences in motivation between species of animals. For example, would interaction with a horse be more motivating than interacting with dogs or cats? Ethical partnerships with animals in classroom environments also need empirical attention, including guidelines for interaction that support the safety of both the animal and humans involved. We are at a point in animal-assisted research to begin investigating cross-species comparisons in human-animal interaction. The depths of the relationship between man and animals continue to be explored and there is so much more to learn. The intention for this type of research is to bring the animal into the equation as an equal partner with an opinion that deserves honoring. Animals play a large part in the positive development of humans and should be included in the education process to provide opportunities for connection for mutual benefit. If we can help children develop compassion and empathy while developing academic skills, then we are far richer for it.

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¹² Michael Pressley, Richard Allington, Lesley Morrow, Kim Baker, Eileen Nelson, Ruth Wharton-MacDonald, Cathy Collins Block, Diane Tracey, Gregory Brooks, John Cronin, and Deborah Woo, *The Nature of Effective First-Grade Literacy Instruction* (Washington: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1998), 3.

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Blair McKissock, doktor, pełni funkcję specjalisty ds. kontaktów zewnętrznych w Military Family Research Institute na Uniwersytecie Purdue oraz dyrektora ds. edukacji i badań w Strides to Success. Po ukończeniu college'u została instruktorką jazdy konnej, rozpoczynając swoją 25-letnią karierę jako terapeutka rekreacji z wykorzystaniem koni. Uzyskała tytuł magistra edukacji, doktora ekopsychologii stosowanej, koncentrując swoje badania na wpływie interakcji z końmi na zdrowie psychiczne weteranów i osób, które przeżyły traumę. Jest certyfikowanym instruktorem jeździectwa terapeutycznego, Equine Specialist, Certified Trauma Specialist i Master HorseWork Facilitator. Jest współprzewodniczącą grupy zadaniowej ds. certyfikacji uczenia się wspomaganego przez konie dla PATH Intl opracowującej Equine Assisted Learning Certification. Pełni funkcję przewodniczącej społeczności edukacyjnej Equine-Assisted i zasiada w equine consortium dla Veterans Administration. Jako międzynarodowa mówczyni i badaczka jest zapaloną orędowniczką equine-assisted services.

Blair McKissock, PhD, serves as the Outreach Specialist for the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University and the Director of Education and Research at Strides to Success. After college, she became a therapeutic riding instructor beginning her 25 year career as a Recreation Therapist incorporating horses. She earned her Masters in Education, leading to a PhD in applied ecopsychology, focusing her research on the mental health impact of equine interaction for Veterans and trauma survivors. She is a certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor, Equine Specialist, Certified Trauma Specialist and Master HorseWork Facilitator. She is the Co-Chair of the equine-assisted learning certification task force for PATH Intl developing the new Equine Assisted Learning Certification. She serves as the Equine-Assisted learning community chair and sits on the equine consortium for the Veterans Administration. She is a passionate advocate for all equine-assisted services as an international speaker and author of research and evidence-based resources.




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Treatment of Trauma Using Horse Assisted Education in Poland

Лечение травм с использованием метода
«Horse Assisted Education» в Польше

Абстракт

Работа с травмой требует установления прочных терапевтических отношений, направленных на устранение симптомов травмы. Люди с симптомами травмы часто не могут использовать свои коммуникативные навыки, они эмоционально сломлены, что мешает им общаться с окружающими и начинать терапию, поэтому многие из них отказываются от лечения. Обучение с помощью лошадей (англ. Horse Assisted Education, HAE) использует партнерство между лошастью и человеком, что приводит к вовлечению и участию в экспериментальной и вербальной терапии

Treatment of Trauma
Using Horse Assisted Education in Poland

Abstract

Trauma-informed care requires a sound therapeutic relationship to address trauma symptoms. People with trauma symptoms often cannot use their communication skills or do not possess the emotional stability to talk with others, and many drop out of treatment. Horse Assisted Education employs a partnership of horse and humans which leads to engagement and participation in experiential and narrative trauma treatment leading to sustained change and recovery. This paper illustrates a model of Horse Assisted Education in Poland, its application in the treatment of trauma symptoms. Three case studies are used

травм. Таким образом наступает устойчивое изменение и выздоровление. Статья иллюстрирует модель обучения с помощью лошадей в Польше и ее применение в лечении симптомов травмы. Три тематических исследования используются для обсуждения того, как партнерские отношения человека и животного способствуют терапевтическому взаимодействию и облегчают эмпирическое обучение, а также понимание симптомов травмы и выздоровления.

Ключевые слова: ПТСР, Ассоциация роста и обучения с помощью лошадей (анг. EAGALA), метафора, связь человека и лошади, материал для исследования

to discuss the ways in which the human-animal partnerships foster therapeutic engagement and facilitate experiential learning and insight into trauma symptoms and recovery.

Key words: PTSD, EAGALA, metaphor, human-horse bonding, case studies

Introduction

Mental health treatment relies on the application of evidence-based practices (EBP), but research on animal assisted therapies is still scarce.¹ Animal assisted therapies are interventions well received by clients and similarly valued by therapists, but the scientific community remains skeptical, because standardized research models do not account for their efficiency.² Lacking sound evidence, these therapies do not have governmental or insurance funding.³ As a way to build an evidence base, Kieson (2018) said the most informative approach would study individual interventions using methods of comparative psychology.⁴ Accordingly, the case studies

¹ Andrea Beetz et al., "Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin," *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (2012): 234, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234>; Wiliam R. Marchand et al., "Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies for Veterans With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Current State, Challenges and Future Directions," *Chronic Stress (Thousand Oaks)* 5 (February 2021), <http://doi.org/10.1177/2470547021991556>.

² Julie L. Earles, Laura L. Vernon, and Jeanne P. Yetz, "Equine-Assisted Therapy for Anxiety and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 28, no. 2 (April 2015): 149–152, <http://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21990>; Katherine J. Kelly, Laurie A. McDuffee, and Kimberly Mears, "The Effect of Human-Horse Interactions on Equine Behaviour. Physiology, and Welfare: A Scoping Review," *Animals* 11, no. 10 (2021): 2782, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11102782>.

³ Wiliam R. Marchand et al., "Equine-Assisted Activities."

⁴ Emily Kieson. "The Importance of Comparative Psychology in Equine-Assisted Activities and Therapies." *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* 31 (2018), <https://scholarship.org/uc/item/3mj755dv>.

described here reveal the in-depth process of inter-species communication during horse assisted education (HAE).⁵

HAE uses the standardized model of the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA)⁶ to treat those who have experienced stress and trauma.⁷ Each therapy should be evaluated on the basis of clients' mental health status pre- and post-treatment. The EAGALA model is structured to meet the demands of research, but the necessity of meeting those standards often eliminates information specific to the therapist-client relationship. There is a growing awareness that this loss of specific therapist-client information is detrimental.⁸ Any application of a new therapy model assumes professionals use their best skills to develop a therapeutic relationship. Some of those skills are attained while therapists are training to apply the new treatment model. However, in animal assisted therapy, we have yet to fully understand the therapeutic dynamics, how the animal-human relationship develops, or how and why such work improves clients' mental health.

The structured EAGALA approach includes the client and therapist, typically a credentialed mental health professional, a horse (known as a horse trainer) and a horse facilitator, a human with specialized training in the health, behaviors and care of horses. Most important is the relationship between the horse and the client. A horse facilitator and a therapist are individuals with different skills. The horse is considered to be an active therapeutic agent and referred to as the horse trainer. The horse is a prey animal, mirroring human behavior and communicating with body language, a reason often cited for the effectiveness of this intervention.⁹ Horses have few defenses and their vulnerability, in light of their size and physical power, adds to their therapeutic potential for trauma treatment. However, what is happening between the horse and the client can be unclear, since there is no verbal communication. HAE is client-centered and based on non-verbal communication.¹⁰

⁵ Magdalena Wojtkowska, Magdalena Kaczmarek, and Zuzanna Gazdowska, "The Influence of Horse Assisted Education on the Perception of Self-Efficacy in People Holding Leadership Positions," *Journal of Education, Health and Sport* 9, no. 6 (2019): 456–469, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3256725>.

⁶ EAGALA: The global standard for psychotherapy and personal development incorporating horses., accessed September 15, 2021, <https://www.eagala.org/index>.

⁷ Page W. Buck, Nadine Bean, and Kristen de Marco, "Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: An Emerging Trauma-Informed Intervention," *Advances in Social Work* 18, no. 1 (2017): 387–402, <https://doi.org/10.18060/21310>; Wiliam R. Marchand et al., "Equine-Assisted Activities."

⁸ John C. Norcross and Bruce E. Wampold, "A New Therapy for Each Patient: Evidence-Based Relationships and Responsiveness," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 74, no. 11 (Nov 2018): 1889–1906, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22678>.

⁹ Wiliam R. Marchand et al., "Equine-Assisted Activities."

¹⁰ Ricarda Lietz and Ksenija Napan, "Horses and Worthwhile Causes: Exploring Equine-Assisted Learning at Dune Lakes Horse Inspired Learning Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* 32, no. 4 (2020): 40–54.

The horse's body language and behavior, along with mindfulness, leads to the client's developing awareness of the emotional state.¹¹

The focus on nonverbal communication aids people affected by trauma, whose symptoms can include isolation and avoidance of human contact. Talk therapy challenges these clients who may be hypervigilant to new situations and new people. Art therapy, music therapy and trauma informed yoga practice—additional examples of non-verbal interventions—have been useful in engaging and retaining and engaging people exposed to trauma. The evidence for the use of non-verbal therapies is more descriptive at this point than outcome-based, but points to the utility of non-verbal communication in the treatment of trauma. The communication between horses and humans is open, intimate and curious while remaining non-verbal, which can lead to a sense of safety and well-being.

The shared communication with the horse can facilitate the use of evidence-based practices to treat trauma. When clients discuss their encounters with a horse, they use metaphors and apply forms of narrative therapy.¹² During or after the interactions with the horses, clients may process their traumatic memories, using the approach of imaginary exposure therapy,¹³ which is a therapeutic modality known to be effective (EBP) in treating stress and trauma. With a therapist's help, clients can reprocess and accept their memories and reduce the intensity of their fear responses.¹⁴ Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli and altered moods and thoughts, symptoms of trauma-related disorders, often interfere with the development of a strong therapeutic bond; many people with trauma symptoms do not engage or complete treatment. Recent studies of the therapeutic relationship have reported the importance of the therapist's skills, regardless of the intervention, to a successful treatment outcome.¹⁵ Horses, with their ability to mirror human emotions and to communicate non-verbally, can deepen a cli-

¹¹ Aviva Vincent, Isabel Ballard, and Kathleen J. Farkas, "Mind Full or Mindful? A Cohort Student of Equine-Facilitated Therapy for Women Veterans," *Research Square* (23 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-18201/v1>; Arnon Shay et al., "Equine-Assisted Therapy for Veterans with PTSD: Manual Development and Preliminary Findings," *Military Medicine* 185, no. 5–6, (May–June 2020): e557–e564, <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usz444>.

¹² Patrick S. Foley, "The Metaphors They Carry: Exploring How Veterans Use Metaphor to Describe Experiences of PTSD," *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 28, no. 2 (2015): 129–146, <http://doi.org/10.1080/008893675.2015.1011375>.

¹³ Lily A. Brown, Laurie J. Zandberg, and Edna B. Foa, "Mechanisms of Change in Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD: Implications for Clinical Practice," *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 29, no. 1 (2019): 6–14, <https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000109>.

¹⁴ Elisabetta Baldi, "Oxytocin and Fear Memory Extinction: Possible Implications for the Therapy of Fear Disorders?" *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 22, no. 18 (2021): 10000, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms221810000>; Shay et al. "Equine-Assisted Therapy," e557–e564.

¹⁵ William R. Miller and Theresa B. Moyer, *Effective Psychotherapists: Clinical Skills That Improve Client Outcomes* (New York: Guilford Press, 2021).

ent's level of engagement in the therapeutic process in less time than might be with another human.

Overview of HAE in Poland

HAE offers a chance to observe the reciprocal communication between the client and the horse; client behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and body language, affect the horse, and the horse provides immediate feedback to the client. Because horses respond and interact with humans according to their status as non-predatory, fear-responsive escape animals, clients receive immediate, honest, and non-judgmental feedback facilitating space for self-analysis. HAE is used to treat anxiety disorders, stress, adaptive disorders, PTSD, addictions, and ADHD in both adults and children.¹⁶ There is no requirement for the number of sessions or the pacing of sessions in HAE; those issues are decided by the client as well as the therapist and the horse facilitator. Unlike other approaches, HAE activates not only the intellect, but also the intuition, body sensations, and emotions associated with continued trauma response. Equine-assisted therapy engages the limbic system, affecting emotions, drive, and memory.¹⁷

Peter Levine, the creator of Somatic Experiencing, an approach to healing trauma, explains the use of the horse as a symbol: "Interestingly, when Medusa was killed, from her blood arose Pegasus, the winged horse, and Chrysaor, the warrior with the golden sword [...] The winged horse and the golden sword are thus well-meaning symbols of the resources that the traumatized individual may discover in the process of overcoming his Medusa."¹⁸ HAE questions many existing paradigms concerning horses, humans, learning, and the relationship between them.¹⁹ HAE creates a space in which a client may develop and maintain a proper relationship between the symbolism of the horse and reality. Horses, which communicate through body language and are highly projective, quickly recognize the emotional state of the client and reciprocate non-verbally a sense of calm and acceptance. Metaphors reflecting trauma often arise as clients attempt to make meaning of their experiences through their interaction with the horse.²⁰

¹⁶ Wojtkowska, Kaczmarek, and Gazdowska, "The Influence of Horse," 456–469.

¹⁷ Xi Zhu et al., "Neural Changes Following Equine-Assisted Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Longitudinal Multimodal Imaging Study," *Human Brain Mapping* 42 no. 6 (April 2021): 1930–1939. <http://doi.org/10.1002/hbm.25360>.

¹⁸ Peter A. Levine, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1997), 62.

¹⁹ Agata Wiatrowska, *Koń jako trener: o facylitacji programów rozwojowych z końmi oraz lekcjach od koni-trenerów* (Warszawa: HorseSense Agata Wiatrowska, 2016), 20.

²⁰ Wiliam R. Marchand et al., "Equine-Assisted Activities."

The Therapeutic Process in HAE in Poland

Preliminary research shows HAE has the advantage of relying less on verbal processing of emotions and events and more on experience and non-verbal communication (e.g., EAGALA, 2015). The use of HAE in Poland is at an embryonic stage, and very few studies, if any at all, focus on Poland. Because the research concerning the bond between horse and human has been so limited, we offer several case studies as examples of the positive effects of HAE, in an effort to find empirical support for trauma treatment. In multisite studies on equine-assisted therapy, post-treatment evaluation showed a significant reduction in PTSD and symptoms of depression, both in self-assessment and the clinician's assessment. This reduction was sustained over the three-month follow-up period.

HAE is new in Poland, with very few practitioners.²¹ HAE in Poland employs models taken from EAGALA and EQUUSOMA (<https://equusoma.com/>)—horse-human trauma recovery. The model for HAE presented in this paper utilizes the approaches of EAGALA and elements of Somatic Experiencing. The EAGALA model is based on contact with horses through the observation of horse behavior, grooming, exercises on the ground, and riding. Our model does not involve horse-back riding at any stage of the process but, in addition to Somatic Experiencing, it does include an element of working on a specific traumatic situation through imaginal exposure.²² At this point, there is very little research describing the therapeutic process, the relationship between the client and the horse trainer, or the therapeutic changes occurring in the client in any country, and almost none in Poland.

This model requires an in-depth interaction between a client and a horse. In Poland, the horse really interacts with two people, the horse facilitator, who is also a therapist, and the client. Each has their own understanding of horse characteristics and their own relationship with the horse, a different way of trusting and communicating. When therapists facilitate clients' narratives about their interactions with a horse, therapists must be aware of their own conceptualizations of the horse-human relationship. The therapist may understand what is happening in the space of interaction between a horse and a client, but it is clear that it is the client who is in control of the narrative. The model presumes the client feels safe at every stage, comfortable next to the horse and with the facilitator. Clients must have the possibility to choose and influence their interaction with horses. Each horse trainer (horse) is treated as an active partner. Horse trainers are healthy, safe, confident, and like human contact. Most importantly, horse trainers are trained in the ability

²¹ Wojtkowska, Kaczmarek, and Gazdowska, "The Influence of Horse," 456–469.

²² Brown, Zandberg, and Foa, "Mechanisms of Change," 6–14.

to communicate “no” and to communicate boundaries. The relationship between the horse and the horse facilitator determines the sense of security and respect that enables the horse to interact with clients. Horses selected for HAE have their own relationships with each other and with the facilitator. They may interact differently with individual team members. There is no place for any demonstration or use of force through violence in the preparation of horse trainers.

The facilitator shows the horse that humans are fallible, opening the horse to self-confidence and initiative, important in later work. The facilitator takes all measures to ensure that the experiences in which the horses take part are enjoyable and offer opportunities for development and the chance to influence humans. This approach develops the horse’s ability to recognize boundaries, to approach and overcome challenges, to make conscious decisions, and to develop self-confidence. The HAE model uses a stages approach to trauma therapy, consistent with the concepts of trauma-informed care set forth by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The staged approach includes a focus on safety in relations and basic emotional regulation; processing of trauma narratives and emotions; and re-engaging in life and post-traumatic growth. Ten sessions are typically necessary to complete the work.

A focus on safety and stability is followed by the processing of trauma and then reconnecting, as the client engages in post-traumatic growth. The three stages are used to avoid re-traumatization and are not necessarily linear with all clients. As with Somatic Experiencing, the HAE method does not necessarily involve direct processing of memories and specific events. Therapy can focus on other aspects of trauma recovery, if necessary or desired, without delving into trauma narratives. This model overlaps with the principles of a trauma-informed organization.²³

During all stages of the model, the client, the horse trainer and the horse facilitator work as a team. When a client chooses a horse trainer during an initial meeting, the facilitator observes how an individual’s emotions and body sensations influence their perceptions of the actual relationship with the horse. The horse’s behavior often determines a client’s choice of horse trainer and the client’s selection of a horse ends the first session. Before the next session begins, the client is asked, “What aspects of the horse do you want to focus on today?” Clients often respond with something like, “I want to feel free.” In working with people with PTSD, this response can be interpreted as a release from the effects of traumatic events. We often hear comments such as: “She is so gentle, warm, but she also sets boundaries. Will I ever be like that?” Clients describe their internal experiences by relating them

²³ Jaroslaw R. Romaniuk and Kathleen J. Farkas, “Terapia zorientowana na traumę w placówkach ochrony zdrowia,” *Lekarz Wojskowy* 99, no. 4 (2021): 182–190, <https://doi.org/10.53301/lw.2102>; Buck, Bean, and de Marco. “Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy,” 387–402.

to what is happening externally with the herd of horses. Clients recognize the horses' behaviors and begin to superimpose their own narratives on the experience. By talking about what they metaphorically see in the herd of horses, they begin to talk about themselves. Emotions emerge that they say they have not felt before. Clients often cry and tremble. Observing horse behavior gives people the opportunity to experience a change in the feelings of anger and fear. Somatic and attachment work teaches that the "body remembers" even in the absence of a cognitive, verbal story.²⁴ The following case examples further describe the specifics of a staged process of HAE and the ways in which the relationship with the horse, assisted by the facilitator, fosters communication and engagement in healing.

Case Studies

Marta

Marta, aged 40, has experienced physical, psychological, and sexual violence from her partner and exhibits symptoms of PTSD. The first stage of Marta's therapy began in a herd of horses. Marta's body reacted, while surrounded by horses and "invited" by their acceptance to open up. Initial reactions such as tears, stomach pain, leg pain, a faster heart rate, and trembling subsided. When one of the horses allowed touching and stroking (grounding), the client responded, "I have always curled up inside myself, clenched so that my body hurt. Now I feel different." The therapist drew the client's attention to the way she touched the horse, at first fast and violent, and, then, after a few minutes, more calmly. Marta's process of taming and experiencing herself in a new situation lasted for two sessions, 90 minutes each. Exploring boundaries and safe touch with a horse is a gradual first step to feeling grounded, creating conditions for more difficult emotions to emerge and be released. Marta, with the help of the facilitator, learned to recognize the coping aspects of her emotions and bodily reactions and what emotion and bodily responses she thought arose from past experiences. "I still remember the moment when I burst into tears from helplessness, unable to complete a task, and Tiara (the horse trainer), put her muzzle on my shoulder and hugged me. It was overpowering to feel that silent, warm, gentle acceptance of my helplessness." Somatic awareness supported a more coherent, integrated, and regulated sense of self.

²⁴ Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015); Levine, *Waking the tiger*, 62.

Marta then worked on the direct processing of memories related to specific events. Marta and the horse trainer worked in a fenced area of about 12×12 m (the horse's intimate space), where Marta described the traumatic event in detail. The facilitator, working on the side, recorded the session and described the most important moments, including the horse trainer's behavior. Marta had a chair and blanket at her disposal and chose a position comfortable for her. In these situations, the facilitator may ask questions designed to help recognize the cause of anxiety. It is important that the client be accompanied throughout the process by the same horse they chose when learning the method. During the sessions the horse trainer intervenes and supports the therapeutic process through open, non-judgmental responses to emotions. Because of the work with narration and the processing of traumatic events, the client learns that memories of trauma are not the same as the trauma itself. Marta explains, "Horses do not take away my pain. They show it to me and teach me to accept it." While performing the exercises in close contact with the chosen horse trainer, Marta's visible reactions included crying and tension and muscle relaxation. She verbally confirmed that the tension disappeared when hugging and stroking the horse. Naming the emotions that arose, along with the reactions of the body, enabled her to move to the next stage, processing the trauma.

In office based therapy, a client may be overwhelmed by emotions and just leave. The uniqueness of working with horse trainers is that the client physically and emotionally engages with the horse trainer and is often able to avoid feeling overwhelmed. The processing stage starts not with the facilitator bringing the trainer horse from the pasture to the yard, but with the client bringing the horse herself and starting work from the moment of taking the rope and halter. Marta was tense, discussing a difficult week. However, bringing the horse from the pasture to the place where she was to face her trauma allowed her to immediately engage. She brought the horse, chose a place by herself, sat down, and started to talk (Figure 1). The horse came up and touched Marta with its nose. When the facilitator asked what she needed for the moment, Marta said "cuddles," and she seamlessly transitioned into cuddling the horse, while still telling the horse about what she experienced. She settled down and sat on the sand, cuddling up to the horse's leg, who stood still, allowing Marta to do her inner work (Figure 2). After about five minutes of visible tension, Marta's body relaxed, her breathing calmed down, and her tears disappeared. The session ended. When asked about the experience, Marta said she felt "exhausted and sore," like she had run a "marathon of her life," but also felt "light and accepted," which she had not felt before. She was asked to keep a daily diary of her symptoms to observe any changes. The meetings repeated, so she could discuss the traumatic events and see the changes in her speech, emotions, and body.

Marta herself acknowledged before one of the later meetings that she observed changes in daily functioning. The facilitator also noted changes in her attitude and

an improvement in her ability to handle difficult situations. *The last session is a debriefing in a horse herd, to discuss the changes and say goodbye. Marta said that the anxiety and tension disappeared, she started to sleep at night, and she was able to name her emotions and physical reactions and to manage her emotions skillfully. If there are situations in which her emotions may take control, she is able to respond with positive coping behaviors. Marta also stopped isolating herself and avoiding situations that resembled traumatic events. In her own words, “Now I have not two, but four legs,” which, as she explained, made her more aware, more confident, and less likely to repeat old patterns of escaping.

Saying goodbye to the horse trainer can sometimes be very emotional. The feelings of closeness, and horse trainer’s acceptance and boundaries help clients get to know themselves again, connecting their current state with situations and events from the past. As Marta said, “Today, when I was coming back from work, I burst into tears as I remembered lying down on Raban (one of the horse trainers). It was such a blissful feeling.”

Piotr

Piotr, aged 35, was taken from his alcohol dependent parents as a child and stayed in several foster families. Currently in a marital relationship in which he experiences physical, psychological, and economic violence, he has taken steps to free himself. He experiences difficulties in relationships and is unable to set healthy boundaries. His behavior results in health problems such as high blood pressure, hemorrhages, and digestive issues. He experiences difficulties with sleep, acts like an automaton at work, avoids coming home, and experiences suicidal thoughts.

The work began with psychoeducation about mental health symptoms and discussing the work with horses. Piotr reported high tension, though he had not previously allowed himself to pay attention to himself and his body. We ended the first meeting after noticing his current state and discussing ways to release tension. The next meeting took place in a horse herd where Piotr interacted directly with the horse he had chosen while observing the herd. The first exercise of leading the horse caused an outpouring of emotions and a need to hug the horse. Piotr said, “The moment I hugged Tarzan, I wanted to tell him everything, to convey what I feel...When I left him, I was calm, tranquil, I don’t know how else to express in words what I felt, such an incredible relief.” At the next meeting, Piotr worked with a different horse due to Tarzan’s illness. When the facilitator asked how this change was affecting him, he thought for a while and said, ‘I think this is the first time I haven’t felt that there is something wrong with me.’ Piotr moved on to the next exercise, during which he was asked to tell what he sees when observing horses,

in particular the one he was to work with. He started saying ‘she is attentive, looking for contact but at the same time keeping her distance.’ Clients often find it easier to talk about what is going on with the horses than about their own problems, but, at the same time, in their observations, they show themselves. The facilitator assumes each client has solutions to their challenges and is able to achieve their goals if given the opportunity. There is no right or wrong way to influence the horse that the facilitator can suggest to the client. Clients are encouraged to develop their own interpretations and their own problem-solving methods. This enables them to use these new skills and apply them later.

Piotr opened up in subsequent meetings, naming his emotions and needs. During the sessions he determined if the horse would allow him to cuddle and he followed the animal’s need. “In contact with Tiara, the feelings that accompanied me were more intense, because I was already prepared for these emotions.” Blood pressure and digestive problems were less frequent. In this case, the client did not talk about specific experiences but worked to accept and address blocked emotions. “There has been a transformation in me, not on the outside but on the inside. I believe that this transformation will be permanent and I will not lack the strength to come to terms with myself.” Piotr went from being the person he wanted to escape from to seeing someone completely different in himself. He felt a desire to continue self-examination and being attentive to himself. Piotr called a month after the regular meetings ended. He said that when he was having a hard time he remembered how it was when he was working with the horse and that experience helps him now.

Agnieszka

Agnieszka, aged 45, is in a relationship with a high-profile alcohol abusing husband who is mentally, physically, and sexually violent. Agnieszka and her husband have two children. She is a very attractive and professionally successful woman, but her experiences of violence, especially sexual violence, cause her many difficulties. She noticed that one of the most difficult situations often repeats in her dreams. She became nervous and intensely angry and reported panic attacks. Her friends began to notice attitude and behavior changes. She tried psychotherapy, but nothing changed.

Agnieszka decided to take part in HAE. The first meeting of psychoeducation took place on a walk with horses in the forest. Agnieszka rides horses, which allowed for this atypical introduction. During the walk, Agnieszka noticed that the horse she was leading was very nervous. The horse pushed Agnieszka, jumped up and bit her gently. “He behaves like my husband when he’s drunk, I can’t handle

him.” But she grabbed the rein harder, quickened her step, called out what the horse was doing, and after a while she and the horse ran together. Afterwards the facilitator asked Agnieszka what she felt. She answered that she felt “extremely tired but also strangely calm.” Subsequent meetings were held in the yard. Every time, Agnieszka began by saying what she was feeling and started discussing a situation from her dreams. Then, she started the session walking quickly around the yard. The horse responded by keeping distance. But when she calmed down and sat, the horse was immediately by her side. Agnieszka pointed out that it helps to accept the horse: “I guess I didn’t want to admit that I can’t handle my situation with my husband. When I do respond to this behavior with the horse, I feel accepted—she is next to me and accepts me.”

It helped that she could touch the horse. Horses always touch the place that hurts the most. They touch what is authentic in the participant—the issues in need of attention.

Coming to the fifth session, Agnieszka said, “I slept for the first time in a long time, I think I’m exhausted by these sessions, everything hurts but somehow it’s different.” Tiara, the mare working with Agnieszka, showed her that when her attitude, words, and thoughts are coherent, she is heard. Agnieszka, recognizing the need and effect of setting boundaries with the horse, started to set boundaries in her life. After her work with the horse, she filed for divorce and reported a disappearance of symptoms and improved functioning. Although there are moments when she returns to previous patterns, she can stop the old patterns. Agnieszka ended the meetings after the eighth session, asking to take a picture. “A photo with horses will remind me of the change I went through and how they helped me. Even though I ride horses, your horses are different, amazing.”

Conclusion

These three case studies illustrate the development of a therapeutic relationship between the client, the horse trainer and the facilitator in the treatment of trauma symptoms. In all three case studies, the horse trainer models the elements of a sound therapeutic relationship: trust, confidentiality, and unconditional acceptance. The horse trainer places no demands upon the client, but responds empathically, allowing the client to be in control as well as to experience the touch and physicality of the animal. While research is limited, the theory suggests that there is a neurobiological reason for this empathic response. “Horses’ brains are structured to experience emotion (amygdala body) without

judging (no prefrontal cortex). Such a structure makes up an emotive, but non-judgmental animal.”²⁵

For clients with past and/or present trauma experiences, the immediate therapeutic relationship with the animal creates possibilities for the client to move forward in telling a trauma narrative, developing insight into feeling and behaviors and ultimately, changing the ways in which the trauma is held and expressed. The case studies illustrate the similarities and unique aspects of the therapeutic relationship with the horse trainer and the horse facilitator. Marta most readily demonstrated the immediacy of the human-animal bond by initial outpouring of emotion. The physical touch of the horse provided knowledge and insight the ways she could calm herself and recognize and address difficult feelings. Piotr, who experienced both past and current trauma, realized that he could use the therapeutic relationship with the horse trainer to observe and comment on the horse’s reactions to him as a way of commenting on the role of trauma in his own life. Given the safety and acceptance of the relationship with the horse trainer, both Marta and Piotr were able to respond to the facilitator’s comments and questions as part of their process and relationship with both human and animal partners. For Agnieszka, who was familiar with horses, the therapeutic relationship allowed her to take a more active and in-charge role—one that was useful in the attitudes and behaviors related to her traumatic relationship with her husband. The horse facilitator’s responses to Agnieszka’s boundary setting allowed her to see how she had not set boundaries in her own life. Again, the therapeutic relationship with both the horse trainer and the facilitator was safe and non-judgmental, providing the client with the ability to pace and control the speed and direction of the work.

The work ahead lies in developing a stronger case for the evidence base for models such as HAE with people who experience trauma symptoms. Marchand et al. (2021) give a clear view of the roadmap for this work.²⁶ Not only behavior and social sciences will be necessary, but also neuroscience and biology, to explore the theories and mechanisms of change related to interventions. PTSD and other stress related disorders are heterogeneous disorders with many brain-body systems involved.²⁷ New research, including work on neuropharmacology and brain imaging, may help us better understand the neural processes of inter-species interactions.²⁸ One of the most promising is the recognition of the role of the hypothalamic neuropeptide oxytocin in lowering stress and fear responses in animals and humans as a result of calming interaction, thus increasing the ability to bond

²⁵ Janet L. Jones, *Horse Brain, Human Brain: The Neuroscience of Horsemanship* (North Pomfret, VT: Trafalgar Square Books, 2020), 256.

²⁶ William R. Marchand et al., “Equine-Assisted Activities.”

²⁷ Zhu et al., “Neural Changes,” 1930–1939.

²⁸ Zhu et al., “Neural Changes,” 1930–1939.

with other living creatures²⁹ and the ability to heal from trauma. In these three case studies, the clients all reported relief from trauma symptoms, opening the door for more systematic explorations of the mechanisms at play with HAE in trauma therapy.

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²⁹ Juliane C. Flanagan et al., "Enhancing Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD among Veterans with Oxytocin: Design of a Multisite Randomized Controlled Trial," *Contemporary Clinical Trials* 95 (August 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cct.2020.106074>; Baldi "Oxytocin and Fear Memory."

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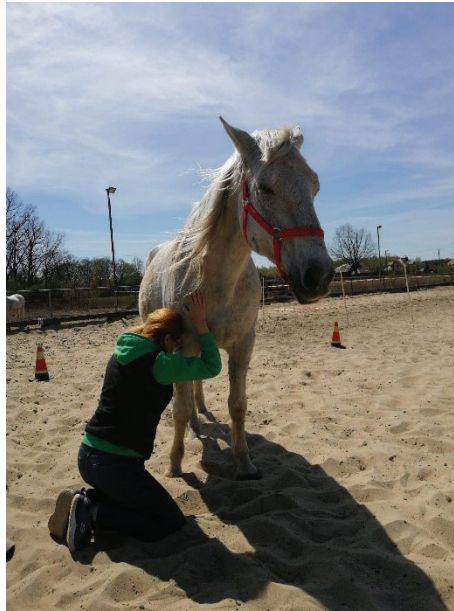


Figure 1. Marta sat down and began to tell her story to the horse Ares (own archive)



Figure 2. Marta is working on her emotions (own archive)

Karolina Czarnecka, psycholog, certyfikowany specjalista w zakresie niesienia pomocy ofiarom przemocy w rodzinie, certyfikowany specjalista w zakresie pracy ze sprawcami przemocy. Od ponad dziesięciu lat pracuje w Ogólnopolskim Pogotowiu dla Ofiar Przemocy w Rodzinie „Niebieska Linia” i Centrum Pomocy Osobom Pokrzywdzonym Przepęstwem,

gdzie pomaga ofiarom przemocy i przestępstw. Końmi zajmuje się od ponad trzydziestu lat i jest certyfikowaną facylitatorką EAHAЕ – International Association for Horse Assisted Education, dzięki czemu może połączyć pracę zawodową z miłością do koni. Połączenie to zaowocowało opracowaniem programów z udziałem koni pomagających osobom doświadczającym przemocy. W ciągu kilku lat programy pomogły zarówno grupom jak i jednostkom w radzeniu sobie z traumatycznymi doświadczeniami.

Karolina Czarnecka is a psychologist, certified specialist in helping victims of family violence, certified specialist in working with perpetrators of violence. For ten years she has been working for Polish National Care Service for Victims of Family Violence “Blue Line” and the Centre for Persons Victimized by Crime, where she works with people experiencing violence and crimes. She has been involved with horses for over thirty years and is a certified facilitator of EAHAЕ – International Association for Horse Assisted Education, thanks to which she combines her professional work with her love for horses. This combination gave rise to programs using horses' skills to support people experiencing violence. For several years the programs she has been running for both individuals and groups have helped many people to deal with traumatic experiences.

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A Competition Question: Horse Welfare, Pentathletes, and Competitive Riding

Проблемы состязаний: благополучие лошадей, пятиборцы и соревновательная верховая езда

Абстракт

Виды конного спорта различаются по степени связи и принадлежности между человеком и животным: от разовой езды до владения лошастью. Современное пятиборье не освещалось в основных СМИ до Олимпийских игр 2020 года в Токио. К сожалению, растущее количество комментариев и освещения в СМИ было вызвано низким уровнем верховой езды, негативным поведением спортсменов и агрессивной тренировкой. Соревнования по современному пятиборью 2020 года были важны, поскольку они выявили резкие различия между видами спорта, в которых отношения всадника и лошади основаны на

A Competition Question: Horse Welfare, Pentathletes, and Competitive Riding

Abstract

Equestrian sports vary in degree of human-animal bond and affiliation, from catch-ride to perceptions of ownership. The Modern Pentathlon has not garnered mainstream media coverage until the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Unfortunately, the rise in conversation and coverage was in response and reaction to poor horsemanship, negative behavior, and aggressive coaching. The events of the 2020 Modern Pentathlon were profound in that they highlighted the extreme juxtaposition of competitions that focus on bonded relationships and catch-riding experiences. The implications are far reaching with increased critique of equestrian sports, trans-

прочной связи между ними, и теми, в которых выбор всадника и лошади является делом случая. Последствия имеют особо далеко идущий характер: растущая критика конного спорта, отсутствие подготовки спортсменов к верховной езде до соревнований и игнорирование роли партнерских отношений между лошадью и всадником. Современное пятиборье рассматривается в статье в контексте связи человека и лошади. Стандарты потребностей и благополучия лошадей обсуждаются в связи с ролью всадника в поддержке лошади-партнера в соревнованиях, включая последствия эмоционального стресса в ответ на разочарование, неудачу или падение. Кроме того, обсуждается роль всадников в период, когда они не занимаются соревновательными видами спорта (например, тренировки и общий уход за лошадью-партнером). В статье представлены рекомендации относительно взаимоотношений спортсмен-лошадь и конного спорта, а также профессиональные возможности укрепления имиджа этих видов спорта.

Ключевые слова: связь человека и животного, благополучие лошадей, конный спорт, Олимпийские игры, современное пятиборье

parency about the lack of riding training athletes engaged in prior to competition, and the omission of partnership between horse and rider. The Modern Pentathlon is discussed in the context of the human-equine bond. The standards for equine welfare and wellbeing is considered in regard to the role of the rider in supporting their equine partner in the face of competition, including the implications of emotional distress in reaction to disappointment, and tragedy. Additionally, the role of riders when they are not engaged in the competitive sport (e.g., training and general care of their equine partners). Recommendations for the process and guidelines of the sport are delineated, as well as professional opportunities to strengthen the sport.

Keywords: Human-Animal Bond, equine welfare, equestrian, Olympics, Modern Pentathlon

Introduction

Horseback riding has been considered a sport and included in the Olympics in a range of events. Though the sports of three-day eventing (stadium jumping, dressage, and cross country) gained the most viewership, sponsorship, and accolades, the 2020 Olympics changed the sport by putting the focus on the Modern Pentathlon (MP). The sport became central in conversations about the Olympics, in regard to discipline-specific training, and the role of human-animal bond in competition sport.

The Pentathlon is a multi-sport competition comprising five individualized sports, stemming from the Greek term (πένταθλον) meaning five (pent-), competition (-athalon). The centurion sport's origins lie in assessing the elite tier of society in skills required by common soldiers. The events of the Pentathlon evolved over time, with the "modern" competition shifting to include: cross country running, eventing, fencing, shooting, and swimming. Based on the recent UIPM vote to re-

move the equestrian component, there will be one last round of the MP before transitioning to the next iteration of the sport.

Competing at an Olympic level requires training and skill development: there is no doubt that all pentathletes have developed some level of skill. The questions pertinent to the sport are: to what degree were they prepared to compete in competitive riding? Is it important that they were/are equestrians in addition to athletes in all other areas? Moreover, as a human-centric activity, how do we bear responsibility for the horse's needs while performing at a competitive level? And to that end, what is the relationship and responsibility between the horse and human in catch-riding and bonded-riding?

History of the Equine-Human Bond

Riding horses, physically getting on their back, goes against the very nature of their prey instinct. Horses in the range of fight-flight, tend to choose flight as they do not have the facilities required for self-defense. As herbivores, their teeth have large flat surfaces, their hooves are rounded with no claws for defense or climbing, and their eyesight has blind spots (in front, below, behind, and on their back). The horse is physically built to run from threats: with their haunches driving power from behind, their shoulder blades are not attached to the skeleton/spine, thus allowing the shoulder blades to rotate upwards making more space to increase their length of stride and give space for greater lung capacity.¹

It would be a psychological challenge for the horse to perceive humans as anything other than a threat.² However, “most horses are designed by nature to be submissive; very few are truly “alpha” animals [...] when we allow a horse to maintain his dignity, which utilizes his own code of ethics to engender mutual respect, everyone wins.”³ Perhaps this is why training methods tend to fall into the categories of *breaking* (modeling the predator-prey, power relationship) or *gentling* (becoming a horse by using play and horse language to build trust). And yet, horses and humans have found a unique way to achieve partnership and connection. In this regard, the core attributes of a successful, bi-directional interspecies relationship are trust, respect, and acceptance.

¹ Sharon Wilsie and Gretchen Vogel, *Horse Speak: An Equine-Human Translation Guide* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Books, 2016), 8–9.

² Ulrike Thiel, *Ridden: Dressage from the Horse's Point of View* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Books, 2013), 12.

³ Thiel, *Ridden*, 1

Domestication of Horses & Horses in Sport

The array of disciplines of riding far outnumber the expanse that rise to the level of Olympic sport. Olympic athletes compete within the English riding discipline. Riders access the eventing discipline from a range of showing opportunities including lesson programs, Interscholastic Equestrian Association (high school) and Intercollegiate Horse Show Association/Intercollegiate Dressage Association (college), and work-to-ride programs. In all of these modalities, riders may ride a horse that they have a minimal relationship with, referred to as catch-riding. Only if riders own or lease a horse are they privy to the time to develop a bond with a horse out of the ring, travel to shows together, compete, and continue through the process together.

Sport by Bond vs. Catch-Ride

The events of the 2020 Olympic MP were profound in that they highlighted the extreme juxtaposition of competitions that focus on bonded riding compared to catch-riding. Given the omission of a bond, or partnership, and the lack of training on behalf of the rider, there has been extreme critique and structural changes to the sport. However, those who have “drawn the short straw” at the start of an IHSA show, stayed seated with a red string in their mount’s tail, and left the ring with a smile, have experienced the athleticism of horse and rider in catch-riding.

Catch-riding requires developed skills—observe a horse in a warm-up ring, get on no more than twenty minutes before the class begins, and enter the ring with confidence. Some competitors ride in a group flat class, some jump a set course, others ride a dressage pattern. The MP is intended to take this model to a higher level of competition. If a rider has been taking lessons for an extended period of time, presumably they thrive on catch-rides, or riding different horses in lessons week to week. Based on the rulebook for conduct and sportsmanship, if a collegiate rider or their trainer acted as athletes in the MP did, the collegiate sport would have come under review too.

The Modern Pentathlon

The MP required a different type of training than most Olympic events. In 2020, seventy-two athletes from twenty-nine nations rode “unfamiliar horses” over twelve jumps up to 120 cm in height and 130 cm wide for a length of 400 meters.⁴ All athletes drew a horse at random, then were allotted twenty minutes to practice up to five jumps with the intention of familiarizing themselves with the horse. The competition consists of two rounds. Similar to stadium jumping, the competitors have a time-cap in which to complete the course. They receive a deduction of one fault for each second exceeding the time cap. Multiple refusals, falls, or jumping an obstacle in the wrong direction is cause for dismissal. A round with no faults earns the competitor 300 points.⁵

A question immediately emerged: “are there any decent pentathlon riders?” To answer the question, yes, there are accomplished equestrians who compete in the pentathlon. This question would *never* be asked in the highlighted Olympic sports, like gymnastics, ice skating, and swimming. A few athletes facing challenges has never put the entire sport at risk, but rather illuminates the challenges of the athlete or the country’s training program (e.g., NYT 2019). Video and images of the German rider Annika Schleu and equestrian coach Kim Raisner went viral for their unsportsman-like behavior before and during competition. Images capturing clear distress and asynchronicity (example above) between horse and rider were circulated in media outlets such as *Business Insider*, *The Guardian*,⁶ and Reuters,⁷ among others. The incident was upheld as abuse; Raisner was ordered to take equine welfare classes.⁸ However, the intolerance for the behavior opened dialogue within UIPM to remove the equestrian component. With the removal of this sport, catch-riding will be removed, leaving only those with access to Olympic level horses and coaching to compete at this caliber.

⁴ Olympics, “Tokyo 2020 Modern Pentathlon,” *Olympics*, 2021, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/tokyo-2020/results/modern-pentathlon>.

⁵ UIPM, “Modern Pentathlon at Rio 2016: How the Competition Will Work,” last modified August 2016, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.uipmworld.org/news/modern-pentathlon-rio-2016-how-competition-will-work>.

⁶ Beau Dure, “Cruel and Random Modern Pentathlon Should Replace Horses with Climbing,” *The Guardian*, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/aug/18/modern-pentathlon-horse-punch-olympics-changes-tokyo-2020>.

⁷ Karolos Grohmann and Steve Keating, “Germany’s Modern Pentathlon Coach Disqualified after Punching Horse,” *Reuters*, August 7, 2021, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/life-style/sports/germanys-modern-pentathlon-coach-disqualified-after-punching-horse-2021-08-07/>.

⁸ ESPN, “Olympic Pentathlon Athletes to Meet with Sport’s Governing Body about Removal of Riding Event,” *Associated Press*, accessed November 8, 2021, https://www.espn.com/olympics/story/_/id/32581990/olympic-pentathlon-athletes-meet-sport-governing-body-removal-riding-event.

Equine Welfare & Care

Care includes welfare and well-being. Care is compassion to provide for another living being. Welfare is providing food/nutrients, water, shelter, socialization, and veterinary care.⁹ Well-being is ensuring that the horse has the resources to thrive based on their health, mental capacity, interest and capability. Similar to humans horses have a hierarchy of needs, wherein safety (physical and psychological) is a precursors to being able to provide social enrichment, skill-based training, and engage in collaborative partnership. While there is no standard definition of quality of care, there is a guideline for what welfare includes and what an absence of abuse entails. Horses should never experience “[s]ocially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain and suffering, or distress to and or death of an animal.”¹⁰ The contention is in deciding what “socially unacceptable behavior” is or is not. However, as noted in the MP (2020), punching the horse in the hindquarters when the rider and horse’s body language was demonstrating distress was evidently causing unnecessary distress to the horse and the rider.¹¹

Humans have the responsibility to care for horses. Equine welfare is at the core of understanding the bond between humans and animals. In riding for sport, there is no horse to ride if the horse is not of sound mind and body. It is the responsibility of the rider to support their equine partner in the face of hardship, including the implications of emotional distress in reaction to disappointment, and tragedy. Sometimes hardship and tragedy is at a horseshow as seen in the MP. The role of riders when they are not engaged in the competitive sport (e.g., training and general care of their equine partners) is conceptually more important to establishing a bond and/or a baseline of behavior for turbulent times ahead. When the horse’s wellbeing is negatively impacted by a human’s negative internal feelings and external emotions, there is an issue worthy of discussion.

⁹ Aviva Vincent, Shelby McDonald, Bethanine Poe, and Vicki Deisner, “The Link between Interpersonal Violence and Animal Abuse,” *Society Register*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2019): 83–101.

¹⁰ Frank R. Ascione, “Children Who Are Cruel to Animals: A Review of Research and Implications for Developmental Psychopathology,” *Anthrozoös*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1993): 226–247.

¹¹ Matthew Schwartz, “German Modern Pentathlon Coach Disqualified for Punching a Horse,” *NPR*, August 7, 2021, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/to-kyo-olympics-live-updates/2021/08/07/1025814959/german-modern-pentathlon-coach-disqualified-for-punching-a-horse>.

Care Over the Horse

The responsibility of care, inclusive of welfare and wellbeing, for a horse often does not rest on the shoulders of one person, but rather a team of people who are involved in the horse's daily life to varying degrees. By virtue of being domesticated, horses require a caretaker for daily stall care (i.e., mucking), turnout, feeding, interaction/play/training, and physical needs. A caretaker knows the horse and may see them on a daily or a sporadic basis. Some caretakers provide for the horses' physical well-being: veterinarians, farriers, chiropractors, and others. Alternatively, a caretaker may see the horse on a daily basis and have in-depth knowledge of the horse: the owner, trainer, and barn staff (if the horse is boarded). Given the breadth of caretakers and their roles, it is essential to define and understand each other's responsibilities of care for the horse. Given that well-being is subjective, it is moreover important to define. Although responsibilities are not in silos (i.e., there's overlap/gray area), it is important to define the key responsibilities of each party to ensure maximum welfare and wellbeing of the horse both at home and when off-site.

Welfare Starts at Home

The primary role is as an Owner/Guardian (referred herein: owner). In this capacity, one person assumes financial, emotional, and physical responsibility for the welfare and well-being of the horse. Culturally, horses may be reliant on stall and turnout rotation, live strictly outside in herds, or any array of options in-between. The amount of turnout may be a financial decision, a restriction/asset of regional access to land, cultural habit, or a horse's unique need (e.g., stall rest for medical needs). As diverse as turnout schedules, so too is feeding and supplement care. An entire industry exists for the care of horses' medical needs (i.e., teeth, vaccines, hooves, etc.), for that too owners are responsible. At times, the responsibility for care is in the hands of the barn owner or staff. They may relay needs to an owner, however, there are situations that require immediate response (e.g., colic) and become the staff's responsibility. Horses can simultaneously be an asset and support, and a labor of love and financial burden. For this reason, some owners choose to half or quarter lease their horse to another rider.

In leasing, a second party contracts with the owner/guardian to act in the capacity of owner/guardian by providing care and activity (e.g., riding the horse) for an agreed upon number of days per week or month. A lease may be at no cost (i.e., "free-lease"), or for a specified cost. Similarly, a horse may be leased to one person, or to multiple people. There is an ethical component about ensuring the leasee

is able to care for and bond with the horse *as if* they were their own, but they are not. Some leases have the option to for “lease to own” or “buy out,” meaning that if the lessee develops a bond and wants to buy the horse, the owner/guardian may consider their offer to do so.

Horses have welcomed students into the saddle through lesson programs as a prominent equine industry. Often lessons are thirty to sixty minutes in length, with one to five people, taught by a professional or individual with extensive experience in the discipline. Those who take lessons are often referred to as students. Those who ride in lessons may ride the same horse weekly, or different horses every week. Students often pay the trainer a set fee per lesson for the service of teaching the lesson which may include using the facility and the lesson horse assigned to the student.

Rider’s Responsibility to the Horse

Classical horsemanship views the horse’s well-being as the “foundation for a successful team.”¹² Moreover, horsemanship is dedicated to the “longevity, soundness, and a good life” for the horse.¹³ Riders, therefore, have a responsibility to their horses to ensure that the work they do is harmonious, promoting physical and mental relaxation of the horse. This is achieved through trust and respect for the rider by the horse, and a rider’s attitude of an empathetic leader and partner who does not hinder the horse physically or mentally.¹⁴

A rider merely sitting on the horse’s back alters the horse’s balance.¹⁵ Being out of balance can be distressing to the horse, triggering their flight response.¹⁶ Riders therefore have the responsibility to ensure that they are not hindering, unbalancing, or restricting the movement of the horse, making it as easy as possible for the horse to carry them. Riders must learn to coordinate their own body movements and balance upon a second being whose balance and motion is constantly changing. In addition to coordinating their own body, the rider must harmonize their own movement with the horse to stay in balance, but also coordinate subtle cues to the horse about how to balance itself and execute movements in

¹² Charles De Kunffy, *The Ethics and Passions of Dressage* (Boonesboro: Half Halt Press, 1993), 64.

¹³ DeKunffy, *The Ethics and Passions of Dressage*, 63.

¹⁴ Walter Zettl, *Dressage in Harmony: From Basic to Grand Prix* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Books, 1998), 41; Thiel, *Ridden: Dressage from the Horse’s Point of View*, 16–17.

¹⁵ Simon Coccozza, *Core Conditioning for Horses: Yoga Inspired Warm-Up Techniques That Increase Suppleness, Improve Bend and Unlock Optimal Movement* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Books, 2019), 14–15.

¹⁶ Thiel, *Ridden: Dressage from the Horse’s Point of View*, 160.

the most biomechanically favorable way. Much like how weight-lifting with poor form can lead to injury, riding a horse in a suboptimal way, even if the exercise is not strenuous, can be detrimental to the horse in the long run.¹⁷ Likewise, a rider with poor equitation and biomechanics restricts the horse's movement and can lead to injury.¹⁸

Though horses typically weigh 400–550 kg, they are sensitive beings who require minimal pressure to move and respond to cues. When in harmony with the horse, an accomplished rider's single exhale can bring a horse from a canter to a halt; a gentle squeeze on the rein can spring-load the hindquarters to prepare for a jump. Part of this harmony is due to knowledge and skill both horse and rider have developed throughout training. Thus, very subtle tensions by the rider trigger the horse's flight response, even if the human is consciously unaware. Thus, riders must be cognizant of their attitude, behavior, and emotional/mental state to ensure ethical and fair treatment of the horse.

Rider Mental State

Riding is a cognitively and psychologically demanding sport as a whole. The stresses of competition can exacerbate intense emotions, and in some cases, negative behaviors.¹⁹ The desire to define emotions is intrinsically a human condition and a human social construct. The conversation (expressed and perceived emotion) between horse and human (i.e., rider) is grounded in "Kinesthetic Empathy,"²⁰ whereas the depth of a horse-human bond is grounded in emotional connection (e.g., emotional intelligence).²¹ As sentient beings, all domesticated horses perceive and react to emotion as a function of self-preservation and relational skills. Horses need the skill of understanding emotion to understand their environment, herd-mates, and human counterparts. Horse's herd dynamics may impact their internalization of internal emotions, and external gestures and actions.²²

¹⁷ Mette Uldahl, Janne W. Christensen, and Hilary M. Clayton, "Relationships between the Rider's Pelvic Mobility and Balance on a Gymnastic Ball with Equestrian Skills and Effects on Horse Welfare," *Animals*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2021): 453.

¹⁸ Jane Williams and Gillian Tabor, "Rider Impacts on Equitation," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 190 (2017): 28–42.

¹⁹ Thiel, *Ridden: Dressage from the Horse's Point of View*, 48–50.

²⁰ Kenneth J. Shapiro, "Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy, Social Construction, and History," *Anthrozoös*, vol. 3 (1990): 184–195.

²¹ Shapiro, "Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy, 184–195.

²² John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, David R. Caruso, Gill Sitarenios, "Emotional Intelligence as a Standard Intelligence," *Emotion*, vol. 1 (2001): 232–242.

Horses being intuitive for survival, their reacting quickly to human body language, emotion, and energy is commonly referred to as *mirroring*.²³ Horses perceive incongruence when the humans' external behaviors are not aligned to the humans' emotional state. The depth of the human-horse relationship may allow for nuanced communication and potentially subtle communication of emotion, however, the pre-existing relationship is not explicitly necessary for the horse to read and internalize human emotion.²⁴

To keep horses happy, riding and training are optimal in a non-confrontational approach; horses respond best to positive reinforcement. Every second a rider is in the saddle, they are teaching the horse, whether intentionally or not. A rider should therefore not be hasty to exhibit compulsory or reactionary behaviors due to misunderstanding by the horse or due to the rider's own emotional state. "The attitude that 'you will listen and obey' must never be found around horses."²⁵ Likewise, it is the rider's responsibility to recognize and respond to the horse's mental state. Experienced and attentive riders develop an acumen for assessing the horse's mental state in different situations. While long-standing partnerships increase harmony of horse and rider, experienced catch-riders are also able to quickly tune into a horse's body language to figure out the best approach to riding that horse.

Riding is not formulaic; the exact cues used on one horse may not work on another horse and require the rider to shift their approach. Or, as in the case of catch-riding, the horse's response to one rider may shift their behavior ahead of the next athlete's ride. It is the rider's responsibility to assess the best way to communicate with the horse in an empathetic way which minimizes stress to all parties. This is the act of meeting the horse where they are at, or understanding their needs in the moment. In this complex interaction, the horse "must do what the human choose, be that right or wrong for the well-being of the horse [...] some humans, guided by a kind moral compass and a true understanding of biomechanics and overall horse care, will carefully prepare the horse to withstand the stresses that riding [...] will put on the horse, so that the tradeoff is fair."²⁶

In catch-riding competitions (e.g., MP, IHSA), horses and riders are matched predominantly on skill, as the horse is drawn from a pool based on the class. A nuanced understanding of physical and mental responsibility is relevant in analyzing the performance of Saint Boy and German pentathlete Shleu, as "[a] reactive and

²³ Wilsie and Vogel, *Horse Speak*, 18.

²⁴ Paolo Baragli, Angelo Gazzano, Franco Martelli, and Claudio Sighieri, "How Do Horses Appraise Humans' Actions? A brief Note Over a Practical Way to Assess Stimulus Perception," *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, vol. 29 (2009): 739–742.

²⁵ Zettl, *Dressage in Harmony*, 10.

²⁶ Denny Emerson, *Know Better to Do Better: Mistakes I Made with Horses (So You Don't Have To)* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Books, 2018), 160–161.

emotional rider response to stimuli could result in the demonstration of unwanted behaviors.”²⁷ Before their round of showjumping, Saint Boy refused multiple jumps for the previous rider. This negative experience likely influenced the horse’s attitude and willingness to perform. The emotional distress of Shleu probably exacerbated the horse’s distress.

Responsibility of Care Throughout the Industry

Coach/Trainer

The coach (or trainer) works with the rider-horse pair to ensure progression in the sport. The trainer has the responsibility to educate and ensure that the training program is appropriate for the horse and rider, such that neither are physically or psychologically overfaced. The coach also advises on the appropriateness of shows for the rider-horse pair. In the context of catch-riding, the coach prepares the student to ride a variety of horses. A core competence of the sport is becoming comfortable with riding an unfamiliar horse. At competitions, the coach will advise on preparation strategies before the class (note: does not coach while in the ring), be knowledgeable of show policies, and coach on outcomes of the show.

Stewards/Show Grounds

Show grounds have the responsibility of ensuring a safe competition area for the horse and rider across the entirety of the property. This includes competition areas, ground surfaces, canceling events in the event of extreme weather conditions, and providing stabling that is appropriate and safe for the horses. Moreover, show grounds must enforce the horses’ general welfare, fitness to compete, health status, and be free of doping or banned medications.²⁸ Judges and stewards at shows also have a responsibility to assess the welfare of the horse. However, since they are not intimately familiar with the horse, their perspective is at a broader-level, ensuring appropriate tack and equipment in accordance with competition governance, and observing the physical wellbeing of the horse.

²⁷ Williams and Tabor, “Rider Impacts on Equitation,” 28–42.

²⁸ FEI: “FEI Code of Conduct for Equine Welfare,” accessed December 11, 2021, https://inside.fei.org/sites/default/files/Code_of_Conduct_Welfare_Horse_1Jan2013.pdf.

Though the rules and regulations on equine welfare are backed by an abundance of scientific literature,²⁹ the actualization of the rules at competitions are often generalized. Two primary sets of guidelines related to horse welfare and competing or showing have become widely accepted within the horse industry: the American Horse Council's Welfare Code of Practice,³⁰ and the Fédération Equestre Internationale Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse.³¹ The International Federation for Equestrian Sports, or FEI, which serves as the international governing body of equestrian sports has an accessible Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse which includes: general welfare, fitness of the horse to compete, events must not prejudice horse welfare, humane treatment of the horse, and education. While important, the document is only three pages in length and leaves much to be desired as all content is limited to a mere sentence of two. Nowhere in the guidelines is the rider's ability or partnerships with the horse indicated as a priority.³²

As a primary resource for youth/young adults to experience catch-riding the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA) rulebook was reviewed in full. IHSA offers one sentence in the Code of Conduct under Personal Conduct of Exhibitors, Coaches, and Show Personnel related to equine welfare: "It is the responsibility of all parties concerned to consider the welfare of the horse."³³ The rules often refer to the rider in absence of the horse (e.g., "rider shall comply with the suggested use of aids") without the context of the horse included.

In the MP rulebook, of the 176 page document welfare and well-being are not mentioned a single time. Care is referenced nine times, with only two pertaining to the horse and rider. While both references are of important value, they are fully subjective: 4.3.5 Horse Selection (68) and 4.4.1 Treatment of Horses (70).³⁴

²⁹ Melissa Voigt, Kristina Hiney, Candace Croney, Karen Waite, Abigail Borron, and Colleen Brady, "Show Horse Welfare: The Viewpoints of Judges, Stewards, and Show Managers," *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2016): 183–197.

³⁰ American Horse Council, "National Welfare Code of Practice," accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.horsecouncil.org/resources/national-welfare-code-2/#:~:text=The%20AHC%20drafted%20the%20Welfare,transport%20and%20retirement%20of%20horses.>

³¹ FEI: *FEI Code of Conduct for the Horse*, accessed December 11, 2021, https://inside.fei.org/sites/default/files/Code_of_Conduct_Welfare_Horse_1Jan2013.pdf.

³² FEI: *FEI Code of Conduct for Equine Welfare*.

³³ IHSA: *IHSA Rules 2020*, accessed December 11, 2021, https://ihsainc.com/docs/default-source/board-documents/ihsa-21-22-rulebook-clean-copy43fecbbfb4366d6da3beff000a185d7.docx?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=8c8a605_2.

³⁴ UIPM: *Modern Pentathlon at Rio 2016: How the Competition Will Work*, last modified August 2016, <https://www.uipmworld.org/news/modern-pentathlon-rio-2016-how-competition-will-work>.

Conclusions of Responsibility of Care

Equine welfare is subjective, but best assessed through a combination of moral reasoning and scientifically supported practices.³⁵ Having guidelines established by governing bodies which specifically define equine welfare and what constitutes negligence can reduce subjectivity and improve outcomes for horses. Education of individuals in all levels of equine care, from at home to the show grounds, can establish a baseline of knowledge for all. U.S. Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) has acknowledged the need for safeguarding the sport by providing a mechanism to report concerns about equine welfare specifically.³⁶ Just as SafeSport was established to prevent abuse, and facilitate education, and accountability of human athletes, a similar program could be developed for promoting the welfare, facilitating education, and accountability for their equine counterparts. With guidance, knowledge, and access to resources (see Figure 1 and the flowchart and table included therein) individuals can make informed decisions and recognize cases where welfare may be at risk.

Figure 1

Flowchart for the ethical decision making as it relates to horse competition (Helesky and Anthony, "Science Alone Is Not Always Enough," *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2012): 175); "Table 3. Questions to ask when examining the competition horse's welfare status" referred to in the flowchart Helesky and Anthony, "Science Alone Is Not Always Enough," 176).

³⁵ Camie R. Heleski and Raymond Anthony, "Science Alone Is Not Always Enough: The Importance of Ethical Assessment for a More Comprehensive View of Equine Welfare," *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2012): 170; Voigt et al., "Show Horse Welfare," 184.

³⁶ USHJA: *Safeguarding Our Sport: Reporting Horse Welfare Concerns and Other Rule Violations at Competitions*, accessed December 11, 2021, https://www.ushja.org/application/files/1715/3814/6657/HRA_July_eNews_-Safeguarding_Our_Sport.pdf.

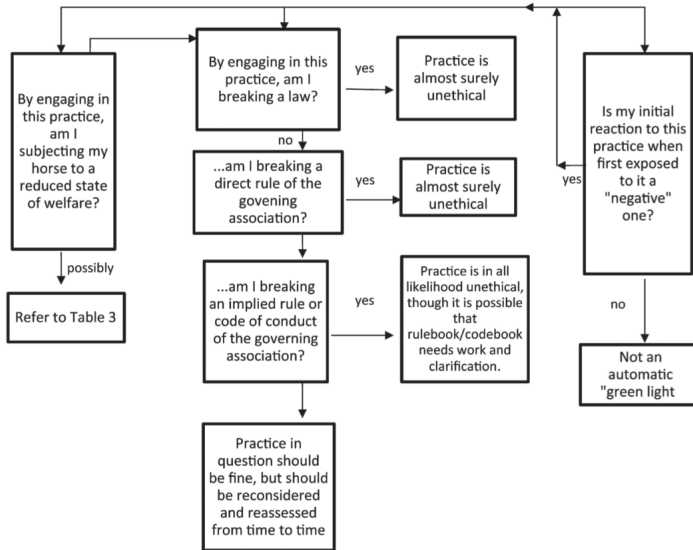


Table 3 Questions to ask when examining the competition horse's welfare status

- Does this practice cause my horse short-term pain/discomfort?
- Does this practice cause my horse long-term pain/discomfort?
- Is this practice done solely for cosmetic reasons?
- If yes, can I be competitive if I do not engage in this?
If not, how do I feel about that?
- Is there a way I can modify this practice to still be competitive but with less of a negative impact on the horse's welfare?
- Is this practice done mainly to intimidate the horse?
If yes, is there an alternative practice that can achieve approximately the same result?
If yes, should switch to it
If no, how comfortable do I feel participating in this discipline?
- Am I asking the horse to do something he is physically/mentally not capable of doing without "unfair" manipulations?
- All things considered, is the practice "fair" to my horse?
- Have I been timely (contingent) in my reinforcements?
- Does the horse have the option of making a "correct" choice?

Sports & Social Media Sites

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics was the most extensive media event in history, racking over 7,000 hours of media content on various online and cable broadcast platforms. Despite low viewership compared to previous games, the 2020 international sports event was widely viewed and almost exclusively viewed virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. The MP has not garnered mainstream media coverage until the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo (occurred in 2021). The new model of streaming different events, on-demand viewing, multiple channels, and social media made watching more events possible. Clips to the riding segments of the Pentathlon were

posted to YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, quickly making them accessible nearly worldwide. Unfortunately, the increase in coverage and sharing gave rise to social commentary with a sharp focus in response and reaction to poor horsemanship, negative behavior, and aggressive coaching.

The Olympics occurred alongside the highest numbers of global participants in social media sites (SMS). Seeing animals on screens via social media created a sense of connection, regardless of actual contact or experience with the animals. The user-generated structure of SMS creates space for those who were moved to watch, comment, and voice opinions about the sport,³⁷ despite minimal or absent interactions with the equestrian world. The media coverage from the Olympics sensationalized the performance of intense distress between the German Pentathlete, her horse, and her coach.

In contrast, the same Olympics hosted three-day eventing (a sport which includes dressage, stadium jumping, and cross country). While the Swiss team gained positive reviews for three horses competing in stadium jumping barefoot,³⁸ there was minimal media coverage for the untimely death of the Swiss horse Jet Set, who passed after suffering severe ligament damage landing a jump incorrectly.³⁹ Gabriels was the rider, not the owner of Jet Set. He had been riding, training, and working with Jet Set as an experienced and well-trained equestrian in his discipline. This is an example of a positive horse-human bond. And yet, in this example, Jet Set was euthanized for an injury, whereas Saint Boy received a punch to the haunch, which is not acceptable, but not an equivalent to death.

One result of the display of poor horsemanship is the circulation/virality of the event on SMS. Despite low viewership of the 2020 Olympics, the virality of the Pentathlete video and images reached beyond an equestrian-minded audience and as a result created both positive and negative implications for the sport and perceptions of equestrian sports by the general public.⁴⁰ One particularly useful tool for contextualizing these implications is framing theory, an idea that argues *how* information is presented influences the reception and perception of that information by, in the case of SMS, a user. Framing theory exists and functions differently based

³⁷ Hamid Khobzi and Babak Teimourpour, "How Significant Are Users' Opinions on Social media?" *International Journal of Accounting and Information Management*, Emerald Group Publishing, vol. 22 (4) (2014): 254–272.

³⁸ NBC Olympics, "Swiss Horse Euthanized after Appearing Lame on Course," *NBC Olympics*, October 8, 2021, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.nbcolympics.com/news/swiss-horse-euthanized-after-appearing-lame-course>.

³⁹ Reuters, "PETA Calls on IOC President to Remove Equestrian Events from Games," last modified August 13, 2021, accessed December 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/peta-calls-ioc-president-remove-equestrian-events-games-2021-08-13/>.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Riddle and Jill R.D. MacKay, "Social Media Contexts Moderate Perceptions of Animals," *Animals*, vol. 10, no. 5 (2020): 845.

on the objectives of those presenting the information. In early August of 2020, animal rights organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), made a passionate call for removal of the equestrian portion of the MP.⁴¹ It is ultimately unclear how framing directly impacts attitudes towards animals by users on SMS, but PETA has a long history of harnessing media platforms to incite an emotional response as a call to action.

Equestrian magazines, such as the *Horse and Hound*, discussed the UIPM's decision as harmful to global equestrianism.⁴² In a separate article, the publication raises concerns about the repercussions of removing the sport, essentially calling it a gateway decision for removing horses from all Olympic events.⁴³ Reaching past audiences directly interested in animal welfare or involved in/adjacent to an equestrian lifestyle, media outlets with significant global followings on SMS, such as *Business Insider*, Reuters, *Insider*, NPR, and *The Guardian*, fueled the viral outrage of the event (e.g., Martin 2021).⁴⁴ The general public contributed to conversations around the coverage, as well as those in the equine industry, or those living alongside horses.

Philosopher and professor Erin McKenna calls out the public's opposition to using livestock in farming. McKenna's conversation is useful in considering attitudes towards horses from a non-equestrian audience. "Those opposing the farming of animals often have little or no experience with those animals. They often have little contact with actual farmers as well. This limits their understanding of what might constitute a 'good life.'"⁴⁵ This observation provides guidance on how to weigh the opinions of both those disconnected and deeply enmeshed in the daily realities of living with, caring for, and competing with horses.

Moving images hosted on SMS like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok allow a viewer to feel connection with species with which often no realtime experiential connection exists, and sociologist Jocelyne Porcher would agree:

Our society is as populated with animals as it is with humans, even if many of those animals have no place and are made invisible. Our society is populated,

⁴¹ Reuters, "PETA Calls on IOC President to Remove Equestrian Events from Games."

⁴² Eleanor Jones, "How Pentathlon's Riding Decision Could Hit all Equestrian Sports, and Other Things the Horse World is Talking about," *Horse and Hound*, December 8, 2021, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/how-pentathlons-riding-decision-could-hit-all-equestrian-sports-and-other-things-the-horse-world-is-talking-about-771327>.

⁴³ Eleanor Jones, "Pentathletes revolt—And What Dropping Riding Means for All Horse Sport," *Horse and Hound*, December 7, 2021, accessed December 10, 2021, <https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/pentathletes-revolt-and-what-dropping-riding-means-for-all-horse-sport-771274>.

⁴⁴ Will Martin, "Uncooperative Horses Wreaked Havoc and Killed Dreams in the Weirdest Event at the Olympics," *Insider*, August 6, 2021, accessed October 22, 2021, <https://www.insider.com/misbehaving-horses-wreak-havoc-kill-dreams-at-olympic-pentathlon-2021-8>.

⁴⁵ Erin McKenna, *Livestock: Food, Fiber, and Friends* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 106.

moreover, in a more distant and selective manner, and more often by means of images than by the real presence of animals close to us, by “wild” animals that we worry about, such as bears, whales, wolves and birds of prey.⁴⁶

This false connection opens the door for individuals to make assumptions about nonhuman animals, their care, needs, thoughts and feelings. Amateurs have flooded SMS with animal-related content, often with uninformed or absent contexts. The still images of a frustrated Shleu and distressed Saint Boy quickly became “meme-ified” and were used in justifying calls for ending horse riding and equine sports altogether, as well as being humorous imagery used to comment on various non-equestrian related issues. A Google image search of “pentathlon” brings up many negative images referencing the 2020 MP, specifically of Shleu and Saint Boy. The vast majority of images are of Shleu, or other riders being unseated or mid-fall while the horse refuses a jump.

Based on Porcher’s research, Despret⁴⁷ summarizes that animal’s contribution to working and collaborative relationships often only become visible when they actively refused in partnership. “It is only during conflicts where the order is disrupted [...] in short, when they resist—that one begins to see, or rather to translate differently, these situations where everything functions.”⁴⁸ Porcher articulates the importance of the human-animal bond in making work function well. In the case of SMS and the public outcry of riding in the MP, it is clear how the refusal to cooperate in work on the part of Saint Boy created a larger platform for both equestrians and the general public to critique the structure of the Pentathlon.

Heading into Paris 2024: Recommendations

Based on the UIPM decision, changes will be made to the sport; most recent conversations indicate that the riding portion will be exchanged for a different sport. Should the riding be fully removed, there will be no opportunity for catch-riding at the Olympic level. Those in positions of authority to review and change equestrian sport are encouraged to consider the attributes of catch-ride in an effort to recognize

⁴⁶ Jocelyne Porcher, *The Ethics of Animal Labor: A Collaborative Utopia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 24.

⁴⁷ Vinciane Despret, *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 179.

⁴⁸ Vinciane Despret and Brett Buchanan, “Y for YouTube—Are Animals the New Celebrities?,” *Ctrl-Z*, accessed December 21, 2021, <http://www.ctrl-z.net.au/articles/issue-6/despret-y-for-youtube/>.

the unique skill required for competing at the Olympic level. Athletes who have trained through IEA and IHSA with aspirations of the Olympics are skilled in the ability to catch-ride — their entire experience is predicated on this unique facet of the sport. To remove riding from the MP removes catch-riding in full. Already the focus is strictly on English riding, this change limits the scope of the equestrian sport even further. The decision to remove riding was made expeditiously because of the impact of SMS (ESPN 2021). Rather than a reflective practice of reviewing the sport, athletes, and equines, a vote was made to remove the equine portion in private.⁴⁹

At the start of competitions, horses are presented in a jog to the judges and stewards. The horses are objectively measured to move forward to competition. If horses and riders are a partnership, then there should be a comparable presentation of the rider, even in catch-riding. Currently, equine competition is essentially a subjective scoring of the athlete's ability to ride. Instead, there should be an objective baseline that the athlete can perform at a specific level, then the competition is between horse and rider communication and relationship at the moment.

Across all disciplines, standards of care, inclusive of well-being and welfare are required. Organized bodies of equine sport (e.g., IEA/IHSA, FEI, Olympics) have standards for behavior at and during events; not expectations for the care of the horse at home, in training, and leading up to the event. The omission of language for the on-going care, responsibility, and expectations for the care of the horse as a partner in the sport should be explicit. Should UIPM reverse its decision to keep the equestrian sport, all other organizing agencies have a clear opportunity to update policies.

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“A Part of Me.” The Value of Dogs to Homeless Owners and the Implications for Dog Welfare

«Часть меня». Значимость собак для
бездомных владельцев и последствия для
их оптимальных условий содержания

Абстракт

Население бездомных в Великобритании растет. Владение собаками среди бездомных людей не является чем-то необычным, но положительные и отрицательные последствия этого общения как для людей, так и для животных остаются неизвестными. Авторы статьи провели частично структурированные интервью с бездомными владельцами собак, чтобы выяснить, как собака повлияла на их жизнь и как они удовлетворяют потребности собак в обеспечении их оптимальных условий содержания. Двадцать один бездомный владелец собак был выбран благотворительной организацией, занимающейся благополучием собак и сотрудничающей с бездомными и их собаками. Интервью были

“A Part of Me.” The Value of Dogs
to Homeless Owners and the Implications
for Dog Welfare

Abstract

The UK homeless population is increasing. Companion animal ownership amongst homeless people is not uncommon, but the positive and negative consequences of this association for both humans and animals are unknown. We conducted semi-structured interviews with homeless dog owners covering how their dog impacted them, and how they met the dog's welfare needs. Twenty-one homeless dog owners were recruited via a dog welfare charity that works with homeless people and their dogs. The interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically. Dogs were reported to provide similar benefits to dogs owned in households, but additionally owner believed they helped facilitate routine, assisted them through mental health issues and provid-

расшифрованы и проанализированы по тематике. Отмечено, что собаки бездомных приносят такую же пользу, как и собаки в домашних хозяйствах, но владельцы также считали, что животные-компаньоны помогают в установлении повседневного распорядка жизни, помогают с проблемами психического здоровья и обеспечивают постоянную эмоциональную поддержку. Из-за своей собаки владельцы отметили трудности с доступом к долговременному и краткосрочному жилью, а также к услугам, таким как магазины, и, в общем, они доверяли уход за собакой только в случаях крайней необходимости. Все собаки получали необходимую ветеринарную помощь, проходили лечение от паразитов и получали соответствующий корм. Главной заботой, выраженной владельцами, было обеспечение собаке достаточно теплого и просторного места для сна, но авторы статьи предполагают, что также важен доступ к безопасному месту, чтобы избежать причин для страха. Во время интервью владельцы обращались к собаке, чтобы облегчить обсуждение о себе, что позволило многим рассказать о трудностях в прошлом и потенциальном будущем. Результаты исследований могут быть использованы, чтобы показать, как благотворительные организации для бездомных могут наилучшим образом помочь владельцам собак в будущем.

Ключевые слова: бездомность, психическое здоровье, отношения с владельцами собак, социальная защита

ed continuous emotional support. Owners noted difficulties accessing long- and short-term accommodation, and services, such as shops, due to their dog, and generally only entrusted other individuals to look after their dog in urgent cases. All the dogs were reported to receive veterinary care as needed, were treated against parasites, and fed adequately. The main concern expressed by owners was providing somewhere adequately warm and large for their dog to sleep, but we suggest access to a safe place to avoid frightening stimuli may also be important. During the interviews owners used the dog to facilitate discussion about themselves, allowing many to open-up about the difficulties of their past, and potential future. Our findings can be used to help direct how homeless charities can best help dog owners in the future.

Keywords: homelessness, mental health, dog-owner relationships, welfare

Introduction

In the UK, the population of people who do not have a home (hereafter homeless people) is growing.¹ Companion animal ownership amongst homeless people is not uncommon. Dogs, and less commonly cats, live their lives alongside their owner,

¹ "About homelessness," Crisis, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness/>.

experiencing the same conditions and facing similar challenges. With the growing population of homeless people, there is a corresponding increase in the number of companion animals, predominantly dogs, being owned by homeless owners.²

There have been limited studies looking at the costs and benefits of being homeless for the dog-owner relationship, but few specifically in the UK. Most studies exploring human-companion animal relationships, and companion animal welfare focus entirely on home-owned dogs.³ Owners of home-owned dogs may benefit from dog ownership both physically and emotionally, through increased exercise time and a reduction in health problems.⁴ Dog ownership has been noted to help the homeless in a similar way.⁵

Under UK law, owners and keepers have a duty of care to their animals and must meet their five welfare needs as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act.⁶ Concerns have been voiced regarding whether the welfare needs of animals can be truly met by an owner when living on the streets.⁷ However, whether humans can ever fully meet the needs of a dog in a domestic setting has also been questioned.⁸ It is unknown whether dogs owned by homeless people experience the same challenges as housed dogs, such as obesity⁹ or whether other issues are more pertinent to this facet of the UK canine population.

Focusing on a population in contact with homeless charities, this study used structured interviews to investigate the costs and benefits of a homeless living for both the owner and the dog, and to explore each of the five welfare needs for dogs living with a homeless owner.

² “Welcome to Streetvet,” StreetVet, <https://www.streetvet.co.uk>.

³ Lynette Hart and Mariko Yamamoto, “Dogs as Helping Partners and Companions for Humans,” in *The Domestic Dog. Its Evolution, Behaviour and Interactions with People*, ed. James Serpell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 247–270.

⁴ Hart and Yamamoto, “Dogs as Helping Partners,” 247–270.

⁵ Heidi Taylor, Pauline Williams, and David Gray, “Homelessness and Dog Ownership: An Investigation Into Animal Empathy, Attachment, Crime, Drug Use, Health and Public Perception,” *Anthrozoös* 17, no. 4 (2004): 353–368, <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279304785643230>.

⁶ “Animal Welfare Act 2006, Chapter 45,” DEFRA, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf.

⁷ Leslie Irvine, Kristina N. Kahl, and Jesse M. Smith, “Confrontations and Donations: Encounters Between Homeless Pet Owners and the Public,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2012): 25–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2011.01224.x>; Louise Scanlon, Pru Hobson-West, Kate Cobb, Anne McBride, and Jenny Stavisky, “Homeless People and Their Dogs: Exploring the Nature and Impact of the Human–Companion Animal Bond,” *Anthrozoös* 34, no. 1 (2021): 77–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2021.1878683>.

⁸ Nicola Rooney and James Bradshaw, “Canine Welfare Science: An Antidote to Sentiment and Myth,” in *Domestic Dog Cognition and Behaviour: The Scientific Study of *Canis familiaris**, ed. Alexandra Horowitz (Berlin: Springer Verlag Publishing, 2014), 241–274.

⁹ “PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016,” PDSA, accessed January 21, 2017, <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/2628/pdsa-paw-report-2016-view-online.pdf>.

Materials and Methods

The study was approved by the University of Bristol Faculty of Health Sciences Faculty Research Ethics Committee (ID 43941), in December 2016.

Recruitment of Participants

We approached Dogs Trust, UK charity who support all dog owners but who also work specifically with homeless dog owners,¹⁰ and they provided contact details for dog-friendly homelessness charities (day centres to accommodation). The authors contacted sixteen charities, eight of which offered to help recruit dog owners. All charities were located in South West England. To be considered a homeless dog owner for the study, the owner did not actively have a sheltering accommodation they were linked to for any length of period, hence the term “living on the streets” and had to have the dog present with them for any length of time during this. The dog did not have to be present during the interview (some premises would not allow them) or currently alive, for the owner to take part in the study. Flyers were left at the charities’ reception desks, and placed on notice boards, advertising specific dates and times when the researcher would be on site. In addition, any individuals with dogs were asked by staff if they would like to participate.

Owners were informed via the posters/fliers/members of staff that their participation would be rewarded with a “goodie bag” for their dog. A small monetary voucher (£3) was also given on the completion of the interview; however, this was not advertised during recruitment. All recruited owners were asked to complete a consent form, and all agreed to being audio recorded to reduce the need for the researcher (CB) to write during the interview, which could limit participants freedom of speech.¹¹ Owners were informed that the aim of the study was to understand peoples’ relationship with their dog while homeless, and that the charities would receive only generalised information from the study—participant’s responses would be anonymised and any information which could lead to the identification of individuals removed from reports.

¹⁰ “Hope Project: Supporting Dog Owners Experiencing Homelessness or in Housing Crisis” Dogs Trust, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-free-dom-project/hope-project>.

¹¹ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (London: Teachers College Press, 1998).

Study Participants

Twenty-four owners volunteered, but three dropped out before interviewing took place due to trauma after losing their pet, no longer accessing the charity or being unable to attend when the researcher (CB) present. In addition, eight managers and staff, one representing each of the charities were also informally interviewed to provide contextual information.

The Interview Process

Interviews were conducted face-to-face (n=21), typically at the premises of the charities where participants had been recruited. These premises ranged from day centres to homeless support-type lodgings that dogs could be present in. Informal observations were made of the facilities and any provisions that were in place to help cater for the dogs owned by their homeless clients, and any information visible to raise awareness of places from which help with dogs could be sourced.

The interview consisted of sixty-four questions, the majority of which were open ended to elicit richer detail in participant responses. The questions covered a range of topics, including the dog's general wellbeing and how their welfare needs were met while homeless. The interviews lasted between ten and forty-six minutes, with a mean duration of twenty-three minutes.

Data Analysis

The recordings were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer (CB) and the resulting transcripts were analysed by thematic analysis allowing important relationships within the data to be noted and highlighted.¹² Key themes were identified by the interviewer in consultation with the co-authors.

¹² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Results and Discussion

Twenty-one dog owners who were either currently homeless or who had owned a dog while they were previously homeless were recruited for the study from across the Southwest of the UK (Table 1).

Table 1.
Demographics of participants and dogs

		Number of participants
Area	Cardiff	3
	Somerset	5
	Bristol	4
	Bath	5
	Exeter	4
Sex	Male	16
	Female	5
Housing status	Currently homeless	10
	Currently homeless but dog no longer with them	2
	Previously homeless	9

Many of the dogs in the study had been owned by the current owner since a puppy (9/21), or juvenile (4/21) and were acquired prior to the owner becoming homeless (13/21). Most dogs that were acquired after their owner became homeless were described as being “rescued”—from “friends not having time” or the animal being beaten in their previous home, or simply found on the street.

Participants noted that one of the main reasons for owning a dog was that they “could do with the company,” regardless of whether the dog was acquired before or after they became homeless. The main reasons owners stated for acquiring a dog

(regardless of their housing situation at the time) were for companionship (7/21), just wanting a dog (5/21), saving the animal (4/21), to help with mental/ill health (3/21), a friend not having time and the dog being given to the owner (2/21). Regardless of when or why acquired, there was a general sense that the dog had had a greater impact on the owner’s life than has been described in the homed owned population.¹³

The interviews shared common themes, regardless of whether owners were talking about their current or a previous dog. There were four main themes that emerged for owners: benefits for the mental health of the owner, the protectiveness of owners towards their dog, the challenges of having a dog and the dog’s role in their lives. It is important to note that participation in this study was voluntary and hence it is possible that the respondents represent a skewed proportion of the population. Some issues could differ or be more pronounced in the population as a whole, particularly as participants were solely recruited through dog friendly charities.

Mental Health Benefits for the Owner

Many owners mentioned benefits of dog ownership for their mental health. Some owners acquired their dog principally for this reason, stating “[I was] on a mental breakdown.” Owners noted that their day would be much more difficult to cope with without their dog, using language like “depressed,” or stating that they would be “be lost [without him],” “I would have been out on my own,” and even that they “probably wouldn’t be alive, would be so depressed.” Some participants were more explicit about the void their dog had filled; “[without her I’d] be lonelier, she’s family, I haven’t got family, they don’t talk to me. She’s the only family I got.”

During the interview, when asked about their dog, owners would often speak about themselves too. Typically, the dog was discussed first, but the owners would slip in information about themselves, potentially to make sure the researcher got the whole story. This usually related to the situation that the owner and dog were both in, but more detailed information was generally given than was needed to portray the dog’s circumstances alone. Mentioning the dog allowed the participants to open up, perhaps because they could hide behind the dog figuratively.

¹³ Carri Westgarth, Robert M. Christley, Garry Marvin, and Elizabeth Perkins, “I Walk My Dog Because It Makes Me Happy: A Qualitative Study to Understand Why Dogs Motivate Walking and Improved Health,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14 (2017): 936.

Dogs are known to facilitate improved mental health,¹⁴ and this effect has been reported for homeless dog owners in the USA.¹⁵ Previous studies have noted benefits to individuals who are around dogs, even if they have limited interactions with them, including promoting healthy development, cultivating reciprocal empathy¹⁶ and increased levels of social interaction,¹⁷ to the owner and potentially more widely. The extent to which the dog provides emotional and mental support in the homeless population has not been examined in depth but has been identified as an important role in other studies.¹⁸

Throughout the interviews, owners talked about themselves through the dog, recounting stories that happened with the dog to expand on their own life histories. Again, mentioning that removing animals from owners could lead to unhappiness. One owner within the study was persuaded to give up their dog by a charity manager. He notes “[my] second Christmas without him nearly killed me. I regret giving up my dog. Miss him so much.” Charities, and councils should be aware of how individuals feel when they are asked to give up their dog in order to access services and accommodation.¹⁹ At a more personal level, dogs may become critical confidantes for their owners, especially if they have few friends or individuals that they trust. Interviews suggest that the presence of the dog can provide an outlet for their thoughts and emotions.

Owners noted that having the dog increased their interaction with the public, commenting that people were a “lot calmer,” “cautious of their approach,” “[they] don’t shout towards me.” The dog seemed to make the interviewees more visible, not only to the public but also for some, to their family “got grandchildren and they love him to bits. It’s not where grandad, it’s where the dog?!?!?” Owners noted that often people knew the dog’s name and not theirs. The dog acted as an ice breaker, as identified by Westgarth et al.²⁰ for home-owned dogs, as a “social lubricant”²¹ and

¹⁴ Taylor, Williams and Gray, “Homelessness and Dog Ownership,” 353–368.

¹⁵ Leslie Irvine, *My Dog Always Eats First: Homeless People and Their Animals* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013).

¹⁶ Rita Thomas and Jonathan Matusitz, “Pet Therapy in Correctional Institutions: A Perspective From Relational-Cultural Theory,” *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work* 13, no. 2 (2015): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2015.1029840>.

¹⁷ Karen Thodberg, Lisbeth U. Sørensen, Poul Videbech, Pia H. Pulsen, Birthe Houbak, Vibeke Damgaard, Ingrid Keseler, David Edwards, and Janne W. Christensen, “Behavioural Responses of Nursing Home Residents to Visits From a Person with a Dog, a Robot Seal or a Toy Cat,” *Anthrozoös* 29, no. 1 (2016): 107–121, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2015.1089011>.

¹⁸ Scanlon, Hobson-West, Cobb, McBride, and Stavisky, “Homeless People and Their Dogs,” 77–92.

¹⁹ Scanlon, Hobson-West, Cobb, McBride, and Stavisky, “Homeless People and Their Dogs,” 77–92.

²⁰ Westgarth, Christley, Marvin, and Perkins, “I Walk My Dog,” 936.

²¹ Wendy J. Moody, Robert K. Maps, and Suzanne O’Rourke, “Attitudes of Paediatric Medical Ward Staff to a Dog Visitation Programme,” *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 11, no. 4 (2002): 537–544, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2702.2002.00618.x>.

a legitimate subject of sociological enquiry.²² The responsibilities of dog ownership also had an impact on owner behaviour.²³ One owner noted that the dog forced her to go out (move from where she was sleeping rough). As she was scared of going out, having the dog gave her a reason to do so and therefore facilitated some routine. Another owner mentioned that feeding the dog reminded him to eat himself, again promoting routine.

Protectiveness of Owners Towards Their Dog

Another common theme raised by dog owners was their perception that they needed to protect their dogs from potential threats, even in seemingly safe locations. Owners were wary of taking dog food offered by members of the public while they were on the street, and even wary of accepting dog food from the researcher. Participants stated that they may give some or all their donated dog food to rescue charities due to fears that the food may be poisoned, as they had heard stories of this occurring. As a thank you, the researcher offered a variety of items to owners, including wet or dry dog food. Some owners would select the wet food as it was still in its original packaging, as the other was in transparent bags (for easy carrying from a 15kg bag), and some would take none. Some owners also said that they would buy their own dog food even when they had plenty of donations to make up their dog's diet. A mistrust of people may have been the main driving factor, but factors such as wanting consistency in the dog's diet may have also contributed, although these were not explicitly discussed. Some owners wished to provide for their own dog themselves, and this was a way of making such a provision. Payne et al.²⁴ argued that a bond is formed by the provision of food, and maybe some owners felt this.

The protective attitude may reflect the owners' emotional dependence on the dog. Many referred to their dog as one of the only constants in their life stating that their dog was “always there for me” and calling their dog their “baby” or their “best friend.” Such terminology has been linked to the dog enabling the owner to survive

²² Rhoda Wilkie, “Multispecies Scholarship and Encounters: Changing Assumptions at the Human-Animal Nexus,” *Sociology* 49 (2015): 323–339, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513490356>.

²³ Lara Howe, and Matthew J. Easterbrook, “The Perceived Costs and Benefits of Pet Ownership for Homeless People in the UK: Practical Costs, Psychological Benefits and Vulnerability,” *Journal of Poverty* 22, no. 6 (2018): 486–499, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2018.1460741>.

²⁴ Elyssa Payne, Jodi DeAraugo, Pauleen Bennett, and Paul McGreevy, “Exploring the Existence and Potential Underpinnings of Dog-Human and Horse-Human Attachment Bonds,” *Behavioural Processes* 125 (2006): 114–121, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2015.10.004>.

life on the street.²⁵ Anthropomorphism of the homeless participants towards their dogs was clearly illustrated throughout the interviews, and previously described in this population by other researchers.²⁶ Such anthropomorphism is consistent with studies in the homed population but can lead to potential welfare issues.²⁷

The dogs' personalities were acknowledged throughout the interviews; they were always reported to have likes and dislikes and characteristics that made them different as individuals. Some owners spoke of their dog's intelligence, many allowing the dog to wander in front of them on roads and in public spaces, arguably showing the dog was aware of their surroundings.

With their frequently changing circumstances, fear of losing or harming this constant in their lives was likely to be a serious concern for many owners, with one owner who had relinquished their dog "Wish(ing) I'd never given her up." Other owners suggested that being told to get rid of their animal was like being told to remove "a part of me," and they'd prefer to go without accommodation than to lose their dog.

A dog could be perceived as more constant, reliable, and accessible than a public service, because the dog was always present.²⁸ Owners noted that "she eats before me," and that if the owner did receive money, or additional money from begging because of the animal was present, all of it would go on the dog. One owner would buy his dog new collars, beds and food/treats as "she had earned it."

The Challenges of Having a Dog

One of the greatest challenges for owners was accessing accommodation. Most of the owners managed to access night shelters, but not always with their dogs. The fact that animals could be kept in shelters only at the manager's discretion was perceived as unfair and made owners who were not allowed to keep their animal with them feel singled out.

The relative "dog-friendliness" of the charities visited for this study was variable. Interviews with charity staff and managers revealed that of the eight charities

²⁵ Christophe Blanchard, "Les propriétaires de chiens à la rue: Retour sur un binôme indésirable dans la ville," *Géographie et cultures* 98 (2016): 47–64, <https://doi.org/10.4000/gc.4453>.

²⁶ Howe and Easterbrook, "The Perceived Costs," 486–499.

²⁷ Elizabeth S. Paul, Anna Moore, Pippa McAinsh, Emma Symonds, Sandra McCune, and John Bradshaw, "Sociality Motivation and Anthropomorphic Thinking About Pets," *Anthrozoös* 27n no.4 (2014): 499–512, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175303714X14023922798192>.

²⁸ Blanchard, "Les propriétaires," 47–64.

visited, six did not allow the dogs inside the buildings at all (with two giving permission for the dogs to be inside specifically for the study only). The remaining two charities allowed the dogs to be with the owners at all times. It therefore seemed that “dog-friendly” simply meant that dog food would be freely offered, and visitors would be given help contacting services when needed (e.g., for veterinary care). However, the staff at the majority of these charities acknowledged the importance of the dogs to their owners. But as a consequence of not being allowed to keep their dog with them, most of the owners opted to use a day centre to access hot meals, space to meet friends and a break from the cold winter’s day (interviewing time was January/February), rather than seeking overnight accommodation. They preferred instead to sleep out with their dog. Housing and/or keeping warm was one of the main “challenges” noted, particularly if the participant had a dog at the time of the interview. Most owners never stated that these challenges were harder to face with a dog, until prompted with that question, but never blamed the dog for such issues.

Owners using services regularly left the premises to visit their dogs if they had to be left outside, thereby forfeiting time protected from the cold weather, hot food and (sometimes) the companionship of others they would meet there. Blanchard²⁹ also noted this can make owners feel guilty and saddened by their pets being left alone, and, we argue, can also have negative implications for a dog that is not habituated to being separated from its owner—cold weather may lead to distress, thermal discomfort, and potential health consequences.

The main reason given by staff for not allowing dogs in daycentres was due to food hygiene (if food was served) or space issues, but this was felt by participants to be almost given as an excuse. Charities that do offer accommodation for dog owners with their dogs, often have a limited number of spaces, as these rooms tend to have access to outside for the dog to toilet. Staff who worked at these centres had varying opinions on homeless owners; some noted the passion of the owners towards their dogs, others were more cynical saying that the owners had the dogs to increase their income. Overall, it seemed that being unable to access services, or gaining only limited access, because of their dog³⁰ can further marginalise homeless people and compound the social exclusion of these individuals from society.³¹

Owners generally found accessing services like shops very difficult when they were accompanied by their dog. They worried about leaving their dogs outside unattended and typically did not attempt to access these services if it meant that their dog was unguarded. A large proportion of owners had friends or family

²⁹ Blanchard, “Les propriétaires,” 47–64.

³⁰ Taylor, Williams, and Gray, “Homelessness and Dog Ownership,” 353–368.

³¹ Christophe Blanchard. “Les jeunes errants et leurs chiens: nouvelles figures urbaines de la précarité,” trans. Carole Fureix, *Enthozootecnie* 87 (2009): 169–170.

they could leave their dogs with, with some relying on these people for a few minutes at a time and others for days so that they could access services such as hospitals. However, cover was often very limited for non-vital services, with owners perceiving that they used up caretaking favours to meet their most important appointments.

The Dog's Role

The benefits of dogs for their owner's mental health were discussed previously. Additionally, some saw their dog as something in the world that would not walk out on them, run away, or that would not let them down. Owners did not often see having their dog as a challenge, and never blamed the dog for any difficulties endured, instead the owners often implied that what was society and the way that services were administered that were the problem. Many owners felt that they had been let down by the system to get to this point, and society does not seem to be helping them get back to a "normal life." Many of the individuals interviewed had some form of habit or addiction, or a mental health disorder. Allowing them a constant in their lives, such as a dog, seemed to help give them a sense of control. Research has indicated that owners having time to exercise dogs allows them time for reflection³² and empowerment.³³ Similarly, for homeless people the dog also provides some element of structure, purpose and routine in their day-to-day lives.

Homeless owners and many of the homeless people who were met in passing through the duration of this study mainly spent time with other homeless individuals. However, the participants typically had at least one trusted individual in some form of accommodation who would look after their dog for them on occasion. We heard of people who had "turned it around" from mental breakdowns, alcohol problems and having the strength to get out of problematic scenarios when they had the support and companionship of a dog.

³² Westgarth, Christley, Marvin, and Perkins, "I Walk My Dog," 936.

³³ Howe, and Easterbrook, "The Perceived Costs," 486–499.

The Dog’s Welfare Needs

Rooney and Bradshaw³⁴ highlighted that it can be difficult to meet all of a dogs’ needs in a domestic context, particularly given the varying environments and lifestyles dogs may cohabit with their owner. Here, we discuss the extent to which each of the five welfare needs described in the Animal Welfare Act³⁵ were met by homeless owners in our study.

Need for a Suitable Environment

Most dogs slept with their owners inside sleeping bags. Owners were concerned about the thermal comfort of their dogs, many making sure the dogs went near the “bottom of the sleeping bag” to keep warm. Dogs who were large normally stayed in a tent with an owner and/or had blankets. It is generally recommended that dogs are kept within a temperature range of 15–30°C and it is unlikely that dogs on the street achieve this throughout the year.³⁶ Owners expressed worry about their dog being comfortable during the day if they were on the streets, with many providing blankets for the dog to lie on or to “curl in my lap.” Owners seemed to worry where their dog was on a day-to-day basis, as some dogs were not sociable towards other dogs, so owners would avoid certain areas. Owners noted how if they were in a public place, for example, a high street, they did not like having to have their dog’s lead on. One owner noted how his dog was nearly stolen by someone trying to take the lead off him. Keeping the dog off lead could present a concern due to risk of road traffic accidents or aggression to other dogs or people, but no such incidents were reported.

³⁴ Rooney and Bradshaw, “Canine Welfare Science,” 241–274.

³⁵ DEFRA, “Animal Welfare Act 2006, Chapter 45.”

³⁶ Anne J. Carter, Emily J. Hall, Sophie L. Connolly, Zoe F. Russell, and Kristy Mitchell, “Drugs, Dogs, and Driving: The Potential For Year-Round Thermal Stress in UK Vehicles,” *Open Veterinary Journal* 10, no. 2 (2020): 216–225, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ovj.v10i2.11>.

Need for a Suitable diet

Owners varied in how they obtained food, using either donations from charities or the public or buying food themselves. One owner noted their dogs' diet was more consistent while they lived on the street than when they were in their own home on benefits. Overall, the dog's diet seemed highly variable, ranging from human food to dog food, however, none of the participants expressed any concerns over stomach upsets which may arise as a consequence of inconsistent feeding practices. One owner reported forgetting to feed themselves and their dog and only noticing when the dog lost weight. This is a welfare concern, but appeared rare and overall, reports and observed body condition of the dogs suggest that feeding is prioritised and the dog's need for a suitable diet are met.

Need to Exhibit Normal Behaviour

Dogs were often walked all day either off or on lead, or a combination of the two. Lead use was usually determined by the area the owners were in. Mostly owners would avoid problem areas if they could, for example, high streets, but this was not always possible. Dogs were noted to be walked longer, and usually more freely, than the average household dog.³⁷ These walks could include interactions with other dogs as well as with people.

Allowing dogs freedom to run and play is important in meeting their need to behave normally. Dogs living on the streets may be limited in this respect and interviews revealed that some owners had to keep their dogs on leads all or most of the time.

A potential risk for a homeless dog is the lack of a safe space to go to if they felt anxious or frightened. All owners had sleeping bags and blankets for the animals during the day, but they were often placed in front of the public when out. Many housed dogs have a space to go to if anxious or frightened, if not they would be more likely to have the ability to move away from people if they were motivated to do so. Of the dogs met, only one seemed fearful of the interviewer, whilst one dog showed aggression that was likely motivated by fear.³⁸ Being unable to hide can be a welfare problem for dogs as they are unable to use an effective coping mechanism,

³⁷ PDSA, "PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016."

³⁸ Karen L. Overall, *Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals* (Mosby: Missouri, 1997).

it could also potentially lead to the dog resorting to an alternative strategy of showing aggression, potentially resulting in injury.

Need to Be Housed With, or Apart From, Other Animals

Most of the dogs were with their owners throughout the day. If they were not, they usually were with someone taking care of them, or if in housing accommodation or at the shelter, they were in the owner's room. One owner noted that their dog howled if the owner was in the shower and they were locked in the room, which can be a sign of separation-related behaviour,³⁹ although this was never referred to explicitly by owners. Within the population of home-owned dogs, there has been an increase in the number of people seeking help with behavioural problems such as separation-related behaviour.⁴⁰ Dogs owned by homeless people may be at less risk of developing some of these problems, due to their near constant proximity to their owner. Consequently, it may be argued that the homeless environment may be better suited to meeting some of dogs behavioural and emotional needs than the domestic home where dogs are often left alone and confined for long periods of the day. However, when situations change or when owners are ill or need to leave their dogs for appointments, the contrast may be so marked, that problems may arise. Owners were asked about their dog's interactions with other dogs and their reactions. For some, contact with other dogs was limited, and exposure and free interaction as a puppy may have been limited due to safety concerns (if the dog was on the streets at this critical time). Two owners noted their dogs were currently aggressive, and would “no doubt go for a nip,” with two others noting their dogs were fearful. This is a potential source of stress to dogs who may regularly encounter other dogs.

Need to Be Protected from Pain, Injury, Suffering and Disease

Veterinary care seemed to be accessible to most participants. All interviews took place in homeless charities that promoted the services offered by the Dogs Trust

³⁹ Karen L. Overall, Arthur E. Dunham, and Diane Frank, “Frequency of Nonspecific Clinical Signs in Dogs With Separation Anxiety, Thunderstorm Phobia, and Noise Phobia, Alone or in Combination,” *Journal of American Veterinary Medicine Association* 219, no. 4 (2001): 467–473, <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.2001.219.467>.

⁴⁰ “Does your pet have ‘separation anxiety?’” BBC News (March 23, 2015), accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-32014047>.

Hope project,⁴¹ which provides help with vaccinations, microchipping, neutering, flea and worm prevention (as long as the dog is neutered and microchipped within the first four months of joining the scheme). Most participants seemed to be aware of this project and of how to access free or subsidised veterinary services. All dogs received prophylactic worm treatments, whether these were traditional veterinary care or other alternatives, and most were treated for fleas. The level of participation was higher in our study population than compared to the average household owned dog population, noted by PDSA study (worming: 100% vs 87% and flea treatment: 90% vs 78%).⁴² One dog once required emergency treatment, but this was accessed successfully.

In the study population, it was more common for male dogs (66%) to be neutered than females (16%); however unwanted pregnancies were not reported while the individuals were homeless. To participate in the Dog Trust Hope Project, owners are required to have or to get their dogs neutered (the charity will pay for this). Many owners did not want this as they did not feel it was needed. Some participants commented that their dog would “make a good mum” or that they were “wanting pups,” however, these comments were often quickly followed by the caveat that they would not be doing this until they were in stable housing. One participant’s bitch had puppies while he was homeless, but she was deliberately mated prior to the owner becoming homeless. While she was mothering her puppies, the owner gave the bitch to the stud owner to be looked after, as he felt unable to provide the care they needed at that point. Future initiatives to explain the potential benefits of neutering for health and behaviour may be useful, or adjustment to Dogs Trust’s Hope Project criteria of neutering may encourage more individuals to benefit from their services.

In general, interviewees thought that getting veterinary care when required was not their biggest challenge or a challenge at all. Participants however seemed unaware of how their veterinary fees in private practice was funded (normally Dogs Trust, PDSA or another local Veterinary charity will pay or help reduce costs to owners), and potentially did not always recoup the full veterinary support that they may be eligible to access. Some individuals who are homeless are known to have problems with literacy skills,⁴³ so it is important that information, for example on available veterinary services, is given in multiple media, ideally including verbal delivery.

⁴¹ Dogs Trust, “Hope Project: Supporting Dog Owners Experiencing Homelessness or in Housing Crisis,” accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-free-dom-project/hope-project>.

⁴² PDSA, “PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016.”

⁴³ “Publications and Research,” St Mungos, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.mungos.org/documents/5078/5078.pdf>; Crisis, “About Homelessness.”

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that the relationship between dog and owner is mutually beneficial in a homeless context, with the dogs providing critical support for their owners' emotional and mental health while owners strived to protect the dog and to meet their welfare needs. The study highlighted the importance of ensuring that there are sufficient services available for homeless people with animals and that allowing dogs to remain with their owners will potentially heighten engagement with charity services. Furthermore, it is important that charities inform homeless individuals with dogs about the help and support that is available to them. It should be noted that participation in these charity schemes is likely to increase if individuals do not have to neuter their dogs to be eligible, or if attitudes towards neutering dogs in the homeless population were to change. Our findings suggest that this requirement deterred participants from using this service leading to further mistrust, and potentially affecting the veterinary care that is sought for the animal in future.

Homeless dogs compared favourably to home owned dogs in many areas when considering how their welfare needs were met. They have high levels of human companionship and access to veterinary care and flea and worm prevention. However, several potential issues were identified surrounding thermal comfort, intraspecific social contact, and the ability to avoid fear-provoking stimuli, although the latter issues are likely equally prevalent in the homed dog population. Tailor-made accessible education initiatives addressing the challenges specific to this population may be valuable.

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6. Were you homeless when you got him/her?

.....
.....

7. Is she/he neutered?

.....
.....

7ii) Did you organise this yourself?

Yes No

.....
.....

8. What was your main reason for getting .. (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

9. Can you tell me a bit about your dog?

.....
.....

10. What does your dog enjoy doing the most?

.....
.....

11. What does your dog not like doing?

.....
.....

12. Is there anything he/she is scared of?

.....
.....

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13. Are there places/areas you have to avoid because of your dog?

.....

14. Where does he/she sleep usually when you are out on the street?

.....

15. How many dogs does she/he interact with daily?

.....

16. How does he/she react to other dogs?

	All	Most	Some
Hide			
Runaway			
Run towards			
Go up and play			
Bark			
Bear teeth			
Sit and wait			
Slowly approach			
Growl			
Ignore			

.....

17. How often do you play with your dog?

.....

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18. What games do you usually play? (tick option)

Fetch	Rough and tumble	Tug of war	Chase	Hide and seek	Object competition (not tug of war)	Football	Search	Tricks	Other

.....

19. How playful is ... (dogs' name)?

Scale 1 to 5? (1 being not playful) 4 5

.....

20. Who starts the play usually?

	Dog	Owner
Always		
Mostly		
Never		

.....

21. Could you describe to me what your dog does when they want to play?

.....

22. Does having (dogs' name) effect how the public approach and interact with you?

.....

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23. If you are in a public place does ... would you say what happens more...?

.....
.....

24. How many people do you say you meet on an average day because of ... being with you, physically come up to you?

.....
.....

25. ... was on a lead when he/she came into the room. Is he/she usually on a lead?

ii) On average how much time does your dog spend on the lead?

iii) In hours?

Hours:

.....
.....

26. What words or command does she/he know?

.....
.....

27. How obedient is your dog? On a scale of 1 to 5

.....
.....

28. What is the best thing about having ... (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

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29. What is the hardest thing about having ... (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

30. How did your life change when you got ... (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

31. How do you think your dog sees you?

.....
.....

32. If someone was getting a dog, what things do you think they need the most?

.....
.....

33. Have you ever struggled to look after ... (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

34. Are there any specific challenges of owning a dog for you right now?

.....
.....

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35. Have you the only carer of ... (dogs' name)? Has anyone looked minded him/her for you for any period of time?

Yes No

.....
.....

36. If yes, ii) how long did/do you leave ... (dogs' name) with them?

Often: Still do this:

.....
.....

37. If yes, iii) What do they do, the person who looks after your dog? E.g., job

.....
.....

38. iv) Where do you go when this other person/people look after ... (dogs' name)?

.....
.....

39. Can you talk me through your day yesterday? Did you do anything with your dog?

.....
.....

40. Did having (dogs' name) make your day easier or harder yesterday?

Easier Harder

.....
.....

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41. Is this your typical day you’ve described? If no, please can you describe me your typical day.

.....
.....

42. ii) In general does (dogs’ name) make your days easier or harder on a typical?

Easier Harder

.....
.....

43. If you didn’t have ... how would your day be different?

.....
.....

Now we are going to talk a little about ... Diet

44. What does your dog generally eat? *[Do not give suggestions]*

.....
.....

45. Are you ever donated food by the public?

Yes No

ii) How often?

.....
.....

46. How much of his/her dog food do you have to buy yourself, as a percentage? *If struggling how many bowls would have a week- how many of those bowls do you buy?*

.....
.....

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Dog services/health

47. Do you ever worm your dog? How often?

Yes No

Often:

.....
.....

48. Has he ... ever have a problem with fleas? How do you deal with this?

Yes No

Deal with it:

.....
.....

49. Does he/she ever have tummy problems? How often?

Yes No

Often:

.....
.....

50. Have you ever been to the vets with ... (dogs' name) since becoming homeless?

Yes No

.....
.....

51. i) if yes: How many times have you been to the vets in the last 12 months approximately?

.....
.....

52. ii) Can you tell me why you went to the vets last time?

.....
.....

53. How easy is it for you to see a vet?

.....
.....

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54. Are there any challenges for you paying veterinary fees?

Yes No

.....
.....

55. Do you know about the entailment cards given by Dogs Trust?

Yes No

.....
.....

56. Do you know about the support PDSA can provide you?

Yes No

.....
.....

57. ii) If Yes to either 55 or 56: how did you learn or hear about these services?

.....
.....

Accommodation and using public services and owner (again)

58. Have you ever been in accommodation with ... (dogs' name)?

Yes No

Dog sleeping:

ii) If yes -Where does ... (dogs' name) sleep when in accommodation?

.....
.....

59. Which services have you accessed since having ... (dogs' name)? You can be as vague as you like e.g. a hostel in Bristol, doctors in Bath.

.....
.....

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60. Have you ever been refused access to a service because of your dog, such as being turned away?

Yes No

.....
.....

61. Have you ever travelled with ... (dogs' name)?

Yes No

.....
.....

62. ii) If yes: What mode of transport did you use?

Car: Bus: Train:

.....
.....

63. Have you struggled using public transport services with having ...(dogs' name)?

No Yes:

.....
.....

You seem to have a great friend in

On a scale of 1 to 10 how attached are you to ...? 1 being not so attached, 10 being very attached

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1 to 10 how attached do you think Is to you? 1 being not so attached, 10 being very attached

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would it be ok to ask a few questions about you at all?

Owners' details

Gender of owner: Male Female Transgender Other

Age Class <25 25-39 40-59 60+

Would you consider yourself to be homeless or a sofa surfer?

Homeless Sofa surfer

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Brilliant, thank you so much. You be glad to know that's the first part done with and if you give me two moments well move onto the next part.

Time taken to complete interview:

Dogs' BS:

Dogs Ears: Up Down Med

Tail: Up Down Waggy

How close was the dog majority of the time to the DISTANCE:
Owner: Researcher:

Activity of the dog mostly:

Did the dog try and seek attention from:
Owner: Researcher:

Did the dog do:
-Vocalisation:
-Try and play:
-Show any forms of aggression:

How much time dog spent near owner (within a metre)?
25% 50% 75% 100%

Did the observer have to move away from the dog at any point?
Yes No

Dogs Ears: Up Down Med Tail: Up Down Waggy

Chelsie Bailey jest studentką ostatniego roku weterynarii i posiada licencjat w zakresie Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science. Uczestniczyła w kilku projektach studenckich i z pasją zajmuje się problematyką One Health.

Chelsie Bailey, BSc Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science, is a final year veterinary science student with a first degree Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science. She's undertaken several student research projects, and has a strong passion for One Health topics.

Jo Hockenhull, doktor, licencjat w zakresie zoologii i magister applied animal behaviour & welfare, jest pracownikiem badawczym w Bristol Veterinary School, gdzie pracuje od czasu uzyskania stopnia doktora, badając dobrostan koni rekreacyjnych w Wielkiej Brytanii. Prowadziła również badania nad innymi gatunkami, między innymi nad zwierzętami gospodarskimi i końmi pracującymi, których celem było określenie, w jaki sposób relacje między człowiekiem a zwierzęciem wpływają na dobrostan zwierząt. Ponieważ zależy on w dużej mierze od decyzji podejmowanych przez opiekunów, większa część badań Jo opiera się na rozmowach z właścicielami/farmerami, weterynarzami, przedstawicielami przemysłu i innymi interesariuszami o ich sposobach rozumienia, przekonaniach i wyborach dotyczących zwierząt pod ich opieką.

Jo Hockenhull, PhD, BSc in Zoology, MSc in Applied Animal Behaviour & Welfare is an animal behaviour and welfare research scientist at Bristol Veterinary School where she has worked since she completed her PhD investigating the welfare of UK leisure horses. In her time at Bristol, she has conducted research on a range of species, including livestock and working equines, exploring how the human-animal relationship can impact animal welfare. Jo's research focuses on the welfare of domestic animals, mainly equines and livestock. As the welfare of these animals relies so heavily on the decisions made by their human caregivers, most of Jo's research involves talking to owners/farmers, vets, industry representatives and other stakeholders about their understandings, beliefs and choices when it comes to the animals in their care.

Nicola Rooney, Senior Lecturer in Wildlife and Conservation na University of Bristol, zajmuje się badaniami na zachowaniem i dobrostanem zwierząt towarzyszących i ich interakcją z ludźmi. Szczególnie interesuje się zachowaniami podczas zabawy oraz opracowywaniem sposobów pomiaru, ustalania priorytetów i poprawy dobrostanu gatunków towarzyszących. Duża część jej pracy koncentrowała się na psach domowych, co przyniosło jej międzynarodową reputację w dziedzinie sprawności i dobrostanu psów pracujących.

Nicola Rooney is Senior Lecturer in Wildlife and Conservation at the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on the behaviour and wellbeing of companion animals and their interactions with humans. She has a particular interest in play behaviour, and in developing ways of measuring, prioritising and improving the welfare of companion species. Much of her work has focused on domestic dogs, and she has a international reputation in the field of working dog performance and welfare.



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Overview of Dogs Training Programs in Correctional Institutions

Обзор программ ресоциализации
с участием собак в пенитенциарных
учреждениях

Абстракт

Положительные мнения о влиянии присутствия животных и отношений с ними на людей стали основной причиной внедрения программ ресоциализации с участием животных. Такие программы реализуются в домах престарелых, в рамках трудотерапии для людей с инвалидностью, а также и в тюрьмах, поскольку они имеют социально-ресоциализирующий характер. Цель программ состоит в том, чтобы поддержать заключенных в развитии их социальных и психологических навыков, таких как усиление эмпатии, ответственность, эффективное общение и терпение. Участники этих программ оценивают их положительно, указывая на субъективное ощущение развития положительных эмоций. В статье автор представляет краткий исторический обзор использования отношений с животными для улучшения психосоциального состояния людей, описывает преимущества таких программ и их важность и роль в пенитенциарных учреждениях.

Ключевые слова: собаки, ресоциализация, тюрьма, пенитенциарные учреждения

Overview of Dogs
Training Programs
in Correctional Institutions

Abstract

Positive opinions about impact that relations with animals have on participating humans were the main reason for introducing animal-based resocialization programs in correctional institutions. As a form of occupational therapy, they aim at increasing and improving social and psychological skills of imprisoned individuals. They aim at creating and increasing empathy, improving communication and its effectiveness, building sense of responsibility and patience. Participants of such programs underline the positive impact on their well-being and subjective sense of wellness. In this text, I present the short history of using relations with animals in improving psychological and social competencies of humans. I also discuss the positive effects that such programs have on the effectiveness of correctional institutions.

Keywords: dogs, resocialization, prison, correctional institutions

Social Skills and Human Nature

The social nature of humans has been proven by psychological as well as biological research. This research demonstrates the strength and importance of social contacts in proper (meaning-functional) human development and in everyday life. The need for social contacts is shaped by individual subject's predispositions and it is also structured by cultural factors, but with no doubt, it requires certain level of social skills. Some of them are genetically inherited, but some are shaped by socialization processes.¹ Such skills are the repertoire of verbal and nonverbal behaviors in the context of a personal repertoire that works as a mechanism by which people affect their environment through achieving results and eliminating or avoiding undesirable outcomes in the social context.² Among those skills are: communication, listening, observation, interpretation, as well as the ability to keep a promise, liability and empathy.

The development of social skills is based on primary socialization, followed by secondary socialization at educational institutions and own activities of the person. For convicted individuals, the development of social skills has failed at some stage due to various reasons (such as early education neglect, lack of proper care and attention in childhood as well as lack of adequate role models in early childhood or strong negative impact of peer's influence in adolescence, and in some cases also health problems resulting in behavioral inadequacy). This lack of properly developed social skills leads to crime commitment and penalty, which, in severe cases, includes imprisonment.

Penitentiary Systems: Focus on Punishment and Focus on Readaptation

At the turn of 18th and 19th centuries, two parallel penitentiary systems based on European models, Auburn State Prison system (prison located in Auburn, New York) and Pennsylvania system³ were developed in the United States. Auburn model was based on silence, corporal punishment and group labor supported by pray-

¹ Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: Harper Collins, 1998).

² Owen Hargie, ed., *The Handbook of Communication Skills* (London: Routledge, 1984).

³ Judith Ryder, "Auburn State Prison," in *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*, ed. David Levinson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002), 84–86.

ers. In terms of architecture and management it became a model copied throughout the United States. It used congregated cells. Only in 1821, the idea of solitary cells was adopted from the Pennsylvania model, which promoted isolation of prisoners from the society and themselves. Both systems were widely criticized, which resulted in the formation of the progressive model of correctional institution.⁴ This model provided some form of control to prisoners themselves—those who followed the rules and adjusted their behavior to expectations and thus were able to shorten their sentences. 19th century followed the ideas of Voltaire i Cesare Beccaria, strengthening the mode of thinking, according to which correctional institutions' task was to enable prisoners' effective comeback to social life.⁵ The leaders of the reformatory movement supported different ideas of correctional institutions, promoting the classification and segregation of various types of prisoners and their individual treatment. They argued for an access to vocational education, employment, indeterminate sentences and previously mentioned rewards for good behavior, as well as conditional releases.

Correctional facilities serve the controlling function in the society and relocate problematic behaviors outside of the society. This, however, is not a satisfactory solution—the real challenge is to bring back to social life persons who are released from prison. The contrast between correctional institution's routine and everyday life outside of penitentiary system creates serious demands, therefore proper preparation should take place in advance. In order to meet this goal, resocialization programs are run in many of the facilities.

In numerous countries,⁶ penitentiary system is based on punishment, which means isolation and deprivation of social needs. The prisoners isolated in designated areas are excluded from socio-cultural environment and forced to live in artificially structured and managed institutions of totalitarian character.⁷ Such a limitation of freedom and free will is meant as a punishment. But it also creates situation of an even stronger than before punishment disability in social skills, as prisoners see neither the need for responsible behaviors nor the need to take care of themselves (the institution satisfies all their needs) or anybody else (there is nobody to take care of). Punishment by imprisonment poses a serious question as to how the

⁴ Andrew Coyle, *The Prisons We Deserve* (London: Harper Collins, 1994).

⁵ Todd R. Clear, Dina R. Rose, and Judith A. Ryder, "Incarceration and the Community: The Problem of Removing and Returning Offenders," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 47 no. 3 (2011): 335–351; Paweł Moczydłowski, "Sociologist as a Social Designer: Prison System Reform in Central Asia: Kirghizstan Pilot Project," *Prace Instytutu Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych*, no. 5 (2003): 241–270.

⁶ Paweł Moczydłowski, *The Hidden Life of Polish Prisons* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1992).

⁷ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

direct consequences of such procedures contribute to prospective “improvement” of socially adequate behaviors demonstrated by prisoner.

Punishment reflects one way of thinking about prisons.⁸ Another perspective is set by the goal which is defined as the return of the prisoner to the society. This perspective sets different types of tasks for correctional institutions: they are meant to teach their inmates how to develop socially accepted behaviors. This, however, is obviously *an aporia* in the situation of isolation from the society, meaning that it is very difficult to be able to re-educate in the area of social skills without the social context provided for training: “In fact, it was unrealistic to believe that rehabilitation was possible in an environment chock full of society’s most flagrant, violent, and repeat offenders. Prison is the worst possible environment to attempt lasting moral or social reforms.”⁹ In some countries the resocialization programs that are offered to imprisoned persons stay in obvious contradiction with their theoretically designed goals. The most dubious form of resocialization is one of the labor options offered to prisoners in Polish correctional institutions—in some prisons the inmates perform labor duties in slaughterhouses and other meat production facilities. Rabizo¹⁰ describes this type of penal work as a clear form of exploitation: not only of animals but also of humans. Involving in such types of activities should be completely prohibited, judging its possible impact on prisoners’ social skills: empathy and ethics.¹¹ The need of developing and improving social skills for those remaining in correctional institutions is important and urgent, especially because jailed persons lose contact with the reality outside of the prison.

Therapeutic Role of Human-Animal Bond

This gap between institutionalized life and life in freedom can be filled by resocialization programs using animals, especially dogs. Therefore, some of resocialization programs conducted in prisons use the presence of animals. Resocialization pro-

⁸ Andrew Coyle, *Understanding Prisons. Key Issues in Policy and Practice* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005); Michael Adler and Brian Longhurst, *Discourse, Power and Justice: Towards a New Sociology of Imprisonment* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁹ Paul J. Larkin, “Death Row Dogs, Hard Time Prisoners, and Creative Rehabilitation Strategies: Prisoner-Dog Training Programs,” *Catholic University Law Review* 66, no. 3 (2017): 549. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://scholarship.law.edu/lawreview/vol66/iss3/7>.

¹⁰ Ilona Rabizo, *W kieracie ubojni* (Poznań: Oficyna Wydawnicza Bractwa Trojka, 2018).

¹¹ Amy J. Fitzgerald, Linda Kalof, and Thomas Dietz, “Slaughterhouses and Increased Crime Rates. An Empirical Analysis of the Spillover from “The Jungle” into the Surrounding Community,” *Organization & Environment* 22, no. 2 (2009): 158–184.

grams with animals are a specific type of ecological programs which are conducted also in order to teach professional skills to the prisoners for future employment.¹² Many authors underline valuable meaning of social bonds created in relations between humans and animals.¹³ This may have a profound impact on reeducating prisoners to live in the society and prepare them to function in human social context. In such situation, the presence of animals can be used as a powerful tool.

The history of using animals in various forms of therapies providing psychological support in addition to classical medical treatment is quite long and reaches the 19th century. Out of the British mental institutions where presence of animals was introduced as supportive element in healing process, the first to be mentioned as using animals in therapies supporting classical medical treatment was William Tuke from York Retreat, to be followed by Bethlem Hospital, which followed this pattern of therapy from 1860.¹⁴ But the history of therapeutic application of animals' presence in improving human welfare has a much longer tradition, reaching ancient times. Use of animals in resocialization programs in prisons is believed to have started by an accident: a psychiatric worker at the Oakwood Forensic Center noticed improvements in inmates' behavior after they began caring for an injured bird found in the yard,¹⁵ which made the facility conduct an experiment by allowing one of the two wards to care of a pet. After a year, the officials discovered that the ward with animals saw a reduction by half in the incidence of violence and suicide attempts, as well as in the amount of medication used. This is claimed to be the first attempt of the use of animals in rehabilitation/resocialization programs in prisons.

To tackle the initial moment of recognition for human-animal emotional bond is almost impossible. Some researchers argue that domestication of the first species, the dog, started human-animal relation almost 15,000 years ago.¹⁶ Certainly, this

¹² Sander van der Linden, "Green Prisons Programmes, Recidivism and Mental Health: A Primer," *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* 25 no. 5 (2015): 338–342.

¹³ Kelyn Allen, Barbara Shykof, and Joseph L. Izzo, "Pet Ownership, But Not ACE Inhibitor Therapy, Blunts Home Blood Pressure Responses to Mental Stress," *Hypertension* 38 (2018): 815–820; Bente Berget and Camilla Ihlebæk, "Animal-Assisted Interventions; Effects on Human Mental Health—A Theoretical Framework," in *Psychiatric Disorders—Worldwide Advances*, ed. Toru Uehara (London: IntechOpen, 2011), 121–138. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/20973>; Bente Berget and Bjarne O. Braastad, "Animal-assisted therapy with farm animals for persons with psychiatric disorders," *Ann. Ist. Super. Sanità* 47, no. 4 (2011): 384–390; Froma Walsh, "Human-Animal Bonds I: The Relational Significance of Companion Animals," *Family Process* 48 (4) (2009): 462–480; Aubrey H. Fine ed., *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2010).

¹⁴ James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

¹⁵ Odean Causak, *Pets and Mental Health* (New York, London: Routledge, 1988).

¹⁶ James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Konrad Lorenz, *Men Meets Dog* (London: Routledge, 2002).

process drew human attention to some of the skills of dogs, which were used, and later intentionally strengthened in the process of conscious genetic selection for effective breeding. Based on this process, dogs which assist humans in contemporary world differ significantly from their ancestors. But due to selective process of breeding, dogs surrounding humans nowadays demonstrate high level of recognition of human emotions, they communicate with humans very well and have enormous adaptive ability, which allows them to adjust to even most difficult living conditions. Communication in dogs, both verbal and nonverbal, is an unusually complex phenomena,¹⁷ and this complexity is probably the most important aspect in creating human-dog relation. Nowadays dogs are very responsive to humans, they need human company, enjoy it and learn very quickly. Due to huge differentiation of breeds one can select a dog for every type of living conditions created by humans. Many specific breeds of dogs would not be able to survive in the wild due to physical characteristics generated during breeding process (for example brachycephalic breeds) and mental aspects as well (for example neotenic behavior of contemporary domestic dogs).

In brief, mentioned specificity of a dog as a species made it a most effective service animal, used in wide range of services for humans: support dogs (providing emotional support even in post-traumatic stress disorder—PTSD treatment), rescue dogs, special service dogs (police, customs), assisting dogs (supporting persons with disabilities and those suffering from diabetes, etc.).

Record of scientific evidence on role of human-animal bonds is most commonly rooted in three sources: works of Konrad Lorenz¹⁸ in the area of ethology (based on his discovery of imprinting mechanism, but also examination of human-dogs' relations), psychological background provided mainly by Boris Levinson¹⁹ in children psychology and Bowlby's attachment theory,²⁰ as well as the concept of the self. Third source of explanations for human-animal bonds is biophilia concept formed by Edward O. Wilson,²¹ where he states that bonds with natural environment are crucial element of human mental health. As Wilson claims in biophilia hypothesis, human's relationships with non-human animals are motivated by survival needs—as animals provide assistance in acquiring food and safety. There is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living creatures, as Wilson states, and this

¹⁷ Turid Rugaas, *On Talking Terms With Dogs: Calming Signals* (Wenatchee: Dogwise Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Konrad Lorenz, *Men Meets Dog* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁹ Boris M. Levinson, *Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd., 1969).

²⁰ John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

²¹ Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia. The Human Bond With Other Species* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

explains why random persons get involved into saving animals but also, why humans do enjoy surrounding themselves with nature.

Bowlby was focused on relations between people; however, many authors argue nowadays to expand the definition to include the relationship between human and animal as well.²² In his theory Bowlby postulated three types of attachments between caregiver and infant: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, and ambivalent attachment. An attentive and consistent caregiver is thought to convey emotional regulation and security to the infant and result in the infant's development of a healthy self. Any disruption in attention and consistency can result in avoidant or ambivalent attachment, thought to be associated with difficulties in self-regulation, in developing relationships, and in self-concept. This theory can be applied on the human-animal relations, where one of the participants of relation is an animal. This concept was developed by Sable.²³ Wider interpretation of Bowlby leads to thinking of human-animal bonds as form of social support and companionship, which are crucial in dealing with stress, critical situations management and which increase well being. This way of thinking is a base for using animals as companions is minimizing empty-nest syndrome, reducing stress in traumatic situations, and many other emotionally demanding situations in human life.²⁴

Serpell²⁵ had argued that humans develop relationships and attachments with animals similar to those with other people. He underlined the role of human-animal relations inadequate development of social skills, arguing that animals' company can replace absence of other humans. This way of thinking was adopted to create resocialization programs involving animals' presence and participation. In this way the spectrum of animals' usage was broadened and transferred from therapy (animal assisted therapies) to the area of resocialization and therapy support by animal assisted activities (AAA). From a psychological perspective animal can be treated as "self object" providing not only support, but also a sense of cohesion, self understanding and increased self-esteem (animals do not differentiate between persons with disabilities and those who do not suffer from disabilities—by fully accepting person as companion, they provide sense of acceptance).

²² Aviva Vincent and Kathleen J. Farkas, "Application of Attachment Theory to Equine-Facilitated Therapy," *Society Register* 1 (1) (2017): 7–22.

²³ Pat Sable, "The Pet Connection: An Attachment Perspective," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 41 (1) (2013): 93–99.

²⁴ Nona Kilgore Bauer, *Dog Heroes of September 11th. A Tribute to America's Search and Rescue Dogs* (Irvine: Kennel Club Books, 2011).

²⁵ Serpell, *In the Company of Animals*.

There is also extensive biological evidence of positive influence of animal presence on humans in form of releasing oxytocin.²⁶ Not only petting dogs, but also dogs gaze stimulates releasing oxytocin—the hormone responsible for bonding and affection, as well as sense of happiness.

Readaptation Programs with Animals

Using human-animal relations in improving human welfare and health is primary an American concept, also applied in the area of resocialization of prisoners: “Correctional officials have found that PDPs have reduced the number of infractions and incidences of violence within their walls, as well as the rate of recidivism for participating inmates who leave the walls behind,”²⁷ Cooke claims that up to 2019 there have been over 330 dog programs run in the USA and abroad.²⁸

In practice, prison dog programs vary in forms and methodology. There are programs where inmates stay in institutions and dogs are delivered for training sessions, or in some cases to share the cell with inmate. In the opposite form, inmates are driven to shelters and there they do train dogs, clean kennels, groom dogs and feed them as well as help in reparations in the shelter. In some of the programs inmates train homeless dogs in order to increase their chances for adoption, but there are also programs which are meant to train service dogs for persons with disabilities. In some programs inmates socialize and train only puppies and young dogs (later sent for professional training) but in some—humans work with adult dogs.²⁹

²⁶ Johannes S. J. Odendaal and Roy A. Meintjes, “Neurophysiological Correlates of Affiliative Behaviour Between Humans and Dogs,” *The Veterinary Journal*, May 2003; Maria Petersson et al., “Oxytocin and Cortisol Levels in Dog Owners and Their Dogs Are Associated With Behavioral Patterns: An Exploratory Study,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 1796; Miho Nagasawa et al., “Intranasal Oxytocin Treatment Increases Eye-Gaze Behavior Toward the Owner in Ancient Japanese Dog Breeds,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017):1624; Mary Renck Jalongo, “Making It Real: Neuroscience and the Narrative Mode in Prison Dog Programs,” in *Prison Dog Programs. Renewal and Rehabilitation in Correctional Facilities*, ed. Mary Renck Jalongo (Las Vegas: Springer, 2019), 255–274.

²⁷ Paul J. Larkin, “Death Row Dogs, Hard Time Prisoners, and Creative Rehabilitation Strategies: Prisoner-Dog Training Programs,” *Catholic University Law Review* 66, no. 3 (2017), 544. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://scholarship.law.edu/lawreview/vol66/iss3/7>.

²⁸ Barbara J. Cooke, “Exploring Types of Programs: Dog Rescue, Rehabilitation and Training,” in *Prison Dog Programs. Renewal and Rehabilitation in Correctional Facilities*, ed. Mary Renck Jalongo (Las Vegas: Springer, 2019), 37–51.

²⁹ Cooke, “Exploring Types of Programs.”

With growing popularity and value of human-animal relations, concept of resocialization programs with dogs is also used in Poland.³⁰ My initial research in Poland, shows that programs are not structured, they are not precisely defined, and no goals are set. This project is undertaken in order to improve resocialization programs and their social effects. Conclusions drawn from American structure, organization, goals, evaluation of programs can be implemented in the Polish penitentiary system resulting in social welfare growth.

There is already extensive literature covering the subject of using animals' presence in resocialization programs in correctional institutions. For instance, Jalongo³¹ in edited volume provides wide description of evidence-based research on dog training in prisons for rehabilitation, presenting animal assisted resocialization in interdisciplinary perspective. In this volume, one can find case studies and evidence-based studies. She also provides research background for further use of animal assisted programs in prisons. Aysha Akhtar in her book *Our Symphony with Animals: On Health, Empathy, and Our Shared Destinies*³² writes extensively about using animal's presence in correctional institutions. Also, Paul Larkin elaborates on this subject.³³

Process of using animals in resocialization programs in prisons also evokes moral and ethical dilemmas: who should be allowed to participate in therapies using dogs? (Public opinion is especially critical on allowing animal abusers to work with animals—on the other hand from the point of view of resocialization, controlled and supervised contact with animals may be very beneficial here). There are some other ethical questions especially from pro-animal organizations. First of all, they question the status of animals, being used as tools in such programs. Secondly—animals' welfare must be considered as well. This is related to both physical, and emotional welfare. Bonding humans and animals can be beneficial for both, but this can also be difficult in the situation of separation.

³⁰ Monika Czerw, "Animals in resocialization," in *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference. Volume III*, May 26th–27th, 2017, 149–160.

³¹ Mary Renck Jalongo, *Prison Dog Programs. Renewal and Rehabilitation in Correctional Facilities* (Las Vegas: Springer, 2019).

³² Aysha Akhtar, *Our Symphony with Animals: On Health, Empathy, and Our Shared Destinies* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2021).

³³ Paul J. Larkin, "Prisoners, Dogs, Training, and Rehabilitation," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, August 31, 2018. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3242348>.

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Trap, Snip, Repeat: Cat Overpopulation and Gendered Labour in a Feral Sterilisation Programme

Поймать, отрезать, повторить – рост
популяции кошек и гендерный труд
в программе стерилизации диких
животных

Абстракт

Рост популяции кошек в Торонто в Канаде становится проблемой. Небольшие и часто разрозненные группы волонтеров, работающие на различных должностях, предлагают помощь в борьбе с огромным количеством пометов бездомных и одичавших кошек. Одной из таких организаций является Toronto Street Cats. Эта группа волонтеров работает с помощью Общества защиты животных в Торонто (англ. Toronto Humane Society) для реализации ежемесячной программы отлова/кастрации/выпускания (англ. trap/neuter/release, TNR). Группы смотрителей ухаживают за зарегистрированными колониями диких кошек и отлавливают кошек репродуктивного возраста. Раз в месяц этих кошек стерилизуют, вакцинируют, обрабатывают от паразитов и чипируют в рамках так называемого

Trap, Snip, Repeat:
Cat Overpopulation and Gendered Labour
in a Feral Sterilisation Programme

Abstract

Cat overpopulation in Toronto, Canada, is a serious and growing problem. Small, and frequently isolated, groups of volunteers work in a variety of capacities to help mitigate the large numbers of litters produced by stray and feral cats. One such organisation is Toronto Street Cats. This volunteer group works with the help of the Toronto Humane Society to operate a monthly trap/neuter/release (TNR) programme. Groups of caretakers look after registered feral cat colonies and capture cats of breeding age. Once a month these cats are sterilised, vaccinated, treated for parasites, and microchipped in an evening-long marathon. Volunteers in veterinary medicine (registered veterinary technicians [RVTs], veterinary assistants and veterinarians) comprise the medical staff who provide treatment and perform the assembly-line surgeries. Post-surgery, the cats are taken by the volunteers to a recovery facility and

вечернего марафона. Волонтеры с ветеринарной квалификацией (зарегистрированные ветеринарные техники [англ. registered veterinary technicians, RVTs], ветеринарные ассистенты и ветеринары) – это медицинский персонал, который обеспечивает лечение и проводит множество операций, как на заводском сборочном конвейере. После операции кошки доставляются волонтерами в реабилитационный центр, а затем, после полного выздоровления, их отпускают обратно в зарегистрированные колонии. Волонтеры, входящие в группы по уходу, почти исключительно женщины, как и медицинский персонал, который проводит операции и помогает до и после операции. В статье, основанной на этнографических данных и вспомогательных источниках, дается представление о трудовой жизни женщин, которые заботятся о диких кошках, живущих среди нас в Торонто.

Ключевые слова: дикие кошки, ветеринары, женский труд, стерилизация/кастрация, отлов/кастрация/выпускание

are then released back to their registered colonies, once they have fully recuperated. The volunteers within the caretaker groups are almost exclusively women as are the medical personnel who perform surgery and assist pre- and post-operatively. Informed by ethnographic and secondary source data this article provides a glimpse into the work lives of the women who care for the feral cats living amongst us in Toronto.

Keywords: Feral cats, veterinary technicians, women's labour, spay/neuter, trap/neuter/release

Introduction

In Canada, with the exception of wildlife, most nonhuman animals are legally defined as property (livestock, test-subjects, zoo attractions, etc.). Predictably, they suffer considerably at the hands of humans. Poorly housed, fed improperly, cruelly slaughtered for food and clothing, experimented on, forced to perform or otherwise coerced into service, the commodification and victimisation of nonhuman animals to serve human needs and desires is a well-established practice,¹ Similarly, compa-

¹ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), “Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act (H.R. 2293 / S. 1831): Give Federal Law Enforcement the Ability to Prosecute Horrific ‘Crush Videos,’” accessed 2 December, 2022, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/texashumane/pages/90/attachments/original/1509945978/ASPCA_Factsheet_-_PACT_Act.pdf?1509945978; Humane Society of the United States website, “Fighting Animal Cruelty and Neglect,” accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.humanesociety.org/all-our-fights/fighting-animal-cruelty-and-neglect>; National Centre of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, “The NCJFCJ Releases Resolution Regarding Animal Cruelty and Its Link to Violence,” 9 August, 2019, <https://www.ncjfcj.org/news/the-ncjfcj-releases-resolution-regarding-animal-cruelty-and-its-link-to-violence/>; National Center for the Prosecution of Animal Cruelty, accessed 2 December 2022, <https://ncpac.ca/>; Asia for Animals,

nion animals, often thought of as special and awarded agency because they “belong to someone” are sometimes victimised to serve the most trivial of humans’ carnival desires in the tightly controlled yet highly unstable conditions of liquid modernity. There are many ways that humans relate to their animal companions. Some humans anthropomorphise the animal, but are speciesist, whilst others are not only speciesist, but also reject the sentience of the animal. It is this latter group who are most at risk of contributing to the problem of feral cats in Toronto. When domestic cats are abandoned as the detritus of consumer culture because their “owners” are either unable or unwilling to care for them they become liminal beings; no longer commodified “pets,” but neither true urban wildlife. These animals are not simply a by-product of late capitalism’s cruel indifference, but also comprise a pre-requisite for the system’s continuation. It is through them that we consider the ethic of care and gendered labour in interspecies care work.

Employing standpoint epistemology, this article explores the processes in which pink-collar labourers disproportionately share the burden of caring for animals that constitute Toronto’s feral cat population. This article utilises an analytic framework informed by critical sociology and human–animal studies and concludes with a discussion of potential administrative and legislative interventions designed to address cat overpopulation in Toronto.

Cats in Canadian Households

Cats are Canada’s most common companion animal, with an estimated 8.1 million cats living in Canadian households.² Of these cats, approximately 94% are spayed or neutered (also known as sterilised; in the cases of females, as an ovariectomy and, in males, castration, orchidectomy or orchiectomy). According to a recent report by the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS), cat and kitten admissions were twice those of dog and puppy admissions, indicating there are still plenty of unwanted litters occurring among intact cats,³ which

Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC), “SMACC Spotlight Report (November 2022), Wild animal ‘pets’ on social media: A vicious cycle of suffering,” November, 2022, <https://www.smaccoalition.com/wild-pets-report>.

² Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, “Veterinary Demographics 2021,” accessed October 2021, <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/about/statistics>.

³ Canadian Federation of Humane Societies/Fédération des sociétés canadiennes d’assistance aux animaux, “Cats in Canada 2017: A Five-Year Review of Cat Overpopulation,” accessed August 2018, https://humanecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Cats_In_Canada_ENGLISH.pdf, 5, 11–18.

may be partially explained if these “owned” cats had one or more litters prior to their sterilisations. If they are among the 6% that are still intact (not sterilised/spayed or neutered) they may escape from their homes, be abandoned or dumped by their “owners,” or allowed to roam outdoors without supervision, encountering and potentially breeding with other unsterilised cats and reproducing at impressive rates.

Reproductive Cycle of the Female

A female cat can have her first estrous (or “heat”) cycle at around six months of age and sometimes even earlier. Females are seasonally polyestrous, meaning their cycles is affected by environmental elements such as temperature and daylight. In the Northern Hemisphere they will cycle multiple times throughout a period from late winter to early autumn, but in warmer (tropical) regions they may cycle all year. Cats are also what are known as “induced ovulators,” which means that, unlike humans who ovulate at regular, cyclical intervals, it is the act of copulation itself that results in the passing of an egg, and a female can breed at any point during her heat.⁴ An intact female cat may copulate with multiple males over the course of her cycle which means that each kitten in a litter may have a different sire.⁵ Once pregnant, the gestation period is approximately sixty-three days, and a female may become pregnant again one to two weeks after giving birth,⁶ which means it is possible for female cat to still be nursing kittens and become pregnant with another litter. This means a female could conceivably give birth to two to three litters per year, with anywhere from one to five kittens per litter. Even using conservative estimates, one female over the course of her lifetime may produce a large number of offspring which, if left intact and survive long enough to reproduce on their own, may each

⁴ John A. Bukowski and Susan Aiello, “Breeding and Reproduction of Cats,” Merck Veterinary Manual, July 2011, <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/cat-owners/routine-care-and-breeding-of-cats/breeding-and-reproduction-of-cats>; Autumn A. Davidson, “Management of Reproduction of Cats,” Merck Veterinary Manual, August 2018, <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/cat-owners/reproductive-disorders-of-cats/management-of-reproduction-of-cats>.

⁵ Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart, “Normal and Problematic Reproductive Behaviour in the Domestic Cat,” in *The Domestic Cat: The Biology of its Behaviour*, 3rd ed. Dennis C. Turner and Patrick Bateson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 33–34.

⁶ Cats Protection UK, “Pregnant Cats, Birth, and Care of Young Kittens: Cats Protection Essential Guide 18,” accessed August 2018, www.cats.org.uk/uploads/documents/cat-care-leaflets-2013/EG18_Pregnant_cats_birth_and_care_of_young_kittens.pdf.

produce multiple litters of their own and so on, meaning that literally thousands of cats can be reproduced.⁷

Feral Cats in Toronto

In 2014, the city of Toronto updated its municipal animal by-law to define a “feral cat” as, [...] a cat found in the city of Toronto that has no owner, is not socialised, and is extremely fearful or resistant to humans.⁸ “Extremely fearful or resistant to humans” is key, because a feral cat is not the same as a “stray” or “homeless” roaming cat, although it is very difficult to determine at a distance which classification to use. Stray or homeless roaming cats may be owned (or previously owned) cats that have had human contact but roam outdoors for the aforementioned reasons of abandonment, purposeful dumping, escape or with the knowledge of the owners.⁹ Feral cats, on the other hand, are the result of breeding between intact roaming cats, or other feral cats, producing litters where the surviving kittens develop completely devoid of, or with minimal, human contact over the course of their lives. These feral cats are unsocialised and usually unadoptable. It is extremely difficult to quantify exact figures related to feral cat populations. In Toronto, it is estimated that there are anywhere from 20,000 to as many as 100,000 feral cats within the city.¹⁰

The Inception and Development of Toronto’s TNR Programme

A few years ago, in an attempt to decrease these numbers, a few veterinarians and one Toronto city councillor obtained funds and secured a small space to begin a spay/neuter clinic for feral cats. Initially staffed only by the three founding veteri-

⁷ Christine Budke and Margaret Slater, “Utilization of Matrix Population Models to Assess a 3-Year Single Treatment Nonsurgical Contraception Program Versus Surgical Sterilization in Feral Cat Populations,” *The Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 12, no. 4 (October 2009): 277–292, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888700903163419>.

⁸ Toronto Street Cats, *The TNR Manual*, 2018, <https://torontostreetcats.com/information/re-sources/>.

⁹ Canadian Federation of Humane Societies/Fédération des sociétés canadiennes d’assistance aux animaux, “Cats in Canada 2017,” 5, 11–18.

¹⁰ Toronto Street Cats, *The TNR Manual*.

narians, surgeries were performed on about eight cats per session;¹¹ however, word of mouth and social media led to more volunteers, more funding, and, ultimately, a permanent location at the Toronto Humane Society (THS). Eventually, a coalition which became known as the Toronto Feral Cat Coalition formed among humane organisations, rescue groups, and municipal animal services to establish a larger, more coordinated TNR programme which now receives regular municipal funding in an attempt to better address Toronto's cat overpopulation dilemma.¹² At the time of writing, TNR services in the city of Toronto are still suspended due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Toronto's TNR Programme in Action

Toronto's TNR programme is part of a population control strategy whereby feral cats living in managed, registered colonies are humanely captured by specially trained colony caretakers, transported to a dedicated spay/neuter site, sterilised, and given additional medical treatment. Then, once recovered, they are released back to their original colony locations. TNR programmes typically exist within municipal boundaries, but Toronto's TNR programme has expanded to cover colonies throughout the greater Toronto area and, since its inception, has sterilised over 5,000 cats.¹³

Before the COVID-19 pandemic caused the City of Toronto to suspend its monthly clinics, the Toronto programme was a frenetic but well-organised monthly evening of sterilisation. Colony caretakers carefully trap, register, and transport their cats to these sessions. Depending on the number of cats trapped, anywhere from thirty to fifty are sterilised during one evening's event. The volunteers consist of veterinarians, RVTs, veterinary students, veterinary assistants, colony caretakers, administrative personnel, and others who perform tasks including laundry, cleaning/sterilising instruments, and bundling/autoclaving surgical packs.

Clinics begin at 1700 hours with caretakers transporting their trapped cats to the THS' specified TNR area. Each cat receives a unique identification number and is catalogued on a caretaker sheet, which accompanies the cat throughout her/his TNR journey. The event occurs assembly-line style, within four primary rooms:

- the "waiting room" where trapped cats are held and separated into three groups: female, male, and unknown,

¹¹ Johanna Booth (DVM) in discussion with Kirsten Grieve, August, 2019.

¹² Toronto Street Cats, *The TNR Manual*.

¹³ Toronto Street Cats, *The TNR Manual*.

- the “premedication room” where cats receive their initial examination and sedative,
- the “induction room” where they receive treatment and are prepped for surgery,
- and the “surgical theatre” where the actual spays and neuters are performed.

After an initial visual examination within its trap, each cat is pre-medicated with a sedative by an RVT. After the sedative has taken effect, cats go to the induction area where they receive more thorough physical exams by a veterinarian. Any medical items of note during this exam (missing or broken teeth, skin allergies, wounds or sores, parasites, pregnancy, lactation, etc.) are logged on the caretaker sheet. Pregnancies are terminated and ovariohysterectomy will occur as long as it is not a threat to the female (i.e., if she is not too near parturition or considered a surgical risk). This occurs in other TNR programmes as well.¹⁴ Only in extremely rare cases of severe illness or disease, where it is unlikely the cat will survive a continued existence in the colony, are cats humanely euthanised. In the event a queen is lactating, indicating she has recently given birth, she is sterilized and returned to the colony to nurse. In the unlikely and rare event that she is deemed terminally ill or in such poor health that she would not survive either surgery and/or return to the colony, colony caretakers would trap kittens and either arrange a “wet nurse” (another lactating queen) or bottle feed the kittens with formula. Caretakers are always consulted by a veterinarian prior to euthanasia. The vast majority of cats receive clearance for surgery, and are placed under a general anaesthetic, where the following treatments are administered:

- vaccination against a number of contagious and dangerous infectious diseases including: Rabies, Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (a highly contagious virus which causes upper respiratory infections), Feline Calicivirus (another highly contagious virus that causes respiratory illness and oral disease, and is very common in shelters and breeding colonies), and Feline Panleukopenia Virus (also known as feline distemper, another highly contagious and often fatal disease),
- a topical anti-parasitic to kill and prevent certain types of endo- and ectoparasites,
- an injection for post-surgical pain management,
- a microchip,
- and, finally, an ear-tip (the surgical removal under anaesthetic of an approximately 0.5 cm tip from the cats’ left ears, thus identifying them to caretakers as “sterilised” in order to avoid any accidental future captures).

After the cats receive their medical treatments, they are prepped and moved to the surgical theatre where the spays/neuters are performed. In cases where a female

¹⁴ Yoonju Cho et al., “Application of a High-quality, High-Volume Trap–Neuter–Return Model of Community Cats in Seoul, Korea,” *PeerJ* 8 (5 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.8711>.

is lactating (which indicates she recently gave birth and may still be nursing), subcutaneous fluids are also administered to bolster her hydration levels, and a “flank” spay is performed along the cat’s side rather than over her abdomen so as not to interfere with the area where nursing kittens require access, and also to avoid possible difficulty in navigating around engorged mammary glands during surgery and potential complications during the recovery period. Neuters are performed much faster than spays because they are simpler procedures, and are typically performed in the induction room in order to save surgical tables for spays. Post-surgery the cats are placed back in their corresponding traps, and transported to a dedicated recovery facility where, once fully recovered (usually after a period of 24–48 hours), they are returned to the original colony site and released.

Gendered Volunteerism in Toronto’s TNR Programme

A coordinated event like this requires a large group of dedicated volunteers. Toronto’s TNR programme has a large number of volunteers, with approximately 160 listed members and 70 “regulars”; people who volunteer multiple times per year, if not nearly every month. According to Dr. Hanna Booth, one of the programme’s founding veterinarians, among the 70 regulars “we only have one male veterinarian—the rest of the volunteers are nearly all women.”¹⁵ In fact, with the exception of fewer than six men working as transportation and shelter construction volunteers, both the TNR surgical clinic volunteers and colony caretaker volunteers are comprised entirely of women.

Gendered Labour in Animal Welfare

Women typically shoulder more responsibility than men for the care of companion animals and non-farm animals in sanctuaries, shelters and other facilities.¹⁶ Within veterinary medicine, women have surpassed men both as students in North Ameri-

¹⁵ Johanna Booth (DVM), August, 2019.

¹⁶ Claire Sterling, “Is Animal Welfare ‘Women’s Work?’” American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, accessed October 2018, www.aspcapro.org/blog/2015/11/10/animal-welfare-womens-work.

can veterinary schools and in practice.¹⁷ In 2020, women represented 61% of veterinarians in Canada, an increase from 31% in 1991, and these numbers are expected to grow.¹⁸ Women also vastly outnumber men as RVTs; in Ontario, the most populous province in Canada, men account for fewer than 5% of registered members of the province's professional association, the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians.¹⁹ Across Canada, approximately 98% of technicians are women²⁰ and in the United States, approximately 78% of technicians are women.²¹ In addition, women typically outnumber men in animal welfare and animal rights organisations, with women comprising over 80% of the memberships of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and The Humane Society of the United States.²² Clearly, the presence of women in nonhuman animal care is the rule, not the exception.

The Cost of Caring

Women veterinarians are more likely to work in small animal clinics that treat mostly cats and dogs, rather than in large animal veterinary medicine, and there is a belief amongst veterinarians that companion animal work requires a greater investment in “emotional labour” than does large animal medicine. The drawback to the nurturing, caring elements of small animal medicine is that it also exacts an emotional toll due to the close interaction these (primarily women) veterinarians have with clients when relaying bad news such as the diagnosis of a terminal illness, poor prognosis for existing health concerns, discussions surrounding decreased quality of life and performing euthanasia.²³ In addition, veterinarians continually

¹⁷ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, “Veterinary Demographics 2021,” accessed October 2021, <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/about/statistics>.

¹⁸ Jean E. Wallace and Fiona M. Kay, “Supportive Relations in a Feminized Occupation: How Male and Female Veterinarians Compare,” *Canadian Review of Sociology* 1, no. 59 (February 2022): 4–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12366>.

¹⁹ Shanna Himburg, (Member Services Manager, Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians), personal email exchange with Kirsten Grieve. October, 2019.

²⁰ Payscale, “Average Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) with Medicine / Surgery Skills Hourly Pay in Canada,” accessed March, 2022, [https://www.payscale.com/research/CA/Job=Registered_Veterinary_Technician_\(RVT\)/Hourly_Rate/d466905c/Medicine-Surgery](https://www.payscale.com/research/CA/Job=Registered_Veterinary_Technician_(RVT)/Hourly_Rate/d466905c/Medicine-Surgery).

²¹ Zippia, “Veterinary Technician Demographics and Statistics in The US,” accessed March, 2022, <https://www.zippia.com/veterinary-technician-jobs/demographics/#gender-statistics>.

²² Hal Herzog, *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 134–137.

²³ Jean E. Wallace and Fiona M. Kay, “Supportive relations in a feminized occupation,” 4–22.

cite difficult discussions surrounding financial strains, treatment expense and payment with clients as one of the more onerous and stressful elements of their profession.²⁴ These pre-existing stressors were exacerbated with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and only served to increase the strain on mental health and burnout amongst those in veterinary medicine.

Veterinarians have higher rates of suicide and suicidal ideation than the general public and women veterinarians are 3.5 times more likely to commit suicide than members of the general public.²⁵ Not One More Vet, an organisation that addresses the issue of depression and suicide among veterinary professionals, reported 67% more veterinarians and 47% more veterinary support staff are “doing worse mentally this year than last.”²⁶ Dr. Elizabeth Chosa lost three members of her 87-person cohort to suicide within ten years of graduation. Upon learning of the suicides of another three veterinarians and one veterinary technician over the course of one week in March 2021, she co-founded the Veterinary Hope Foundation, an organisation providing early suicide prevention and education with a veterinary-specific curriculum.²⁷

An additional stressor is the explosion of social media outlets that allow aggrieved clients to post vitriolic complaints about clinics, veterinarians, and staff, many of whom have neither the time, patience or, in some cases, the legal resources to respond and defend themselves. With the shuttering of many clinics to members of the public during COVID-19, online platforms became the outlet of choice for

²⁴ Tony McReynolds, “Veterinarians the World Over Share Your Stress,” AAHA, April 30, 2021, <https://www.aaha.org/publications/newstat/articles/2021-04/study-veterinary-staff-the-world-over-share-your-stress/>.

²⁵ Pamela Newnham, “Vets Have Highest Suicide Risk of All Professions, Conference Told,” *The Irish Times*, August, 2008, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/vets-have-highest-suicide-risk-of-all-professions-conference-told-1.933216>; Tahlia Roy, “Veterinary Industry Grapples with High Suicide Rate Amid Staff Shortages, Inadequate Pay,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 16 May, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-17/veterinary-industry-grapples-with-high-suicide-rate/100142650>; Kathrin Angelika Schwerdtfeger et al., “Depression, Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Risk in German Veterinarians Compared with the General German Population,” *Vet Record*, 186, no. 15 (May 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1136/vr.105430>; Suzanne E. Tomasi et al., “Suicide Among Veterinarians in the United States from 1979 through 2015,” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 254, no. 1 (2019): 6, <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.254.1.104>.

²⁶ Tony McReynolds, “An empathetic ear—and more—for veterinary professionals struggling with depression,” American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), December 3, 2020, <https://www.aaha.org/publications/newstat/articles/2020-12/an-empathetic-earand-morefor-veterinary-professionals-struggling-with-depression/?fbclid=IwAR2pCEnYDXd6gt3Fozl2zEx8mzlp4pZawywi5-NLHn0WP2oPakVAzm62xYc>.

²⁷ Tony McReynolds, “‘This Doesn’t Have to Be our Story’: Nonprofit Aims to Prevent Suicide in the Veterinary Profession,” AAHA, June 10, 2021, <https://www.aaha.org/publications/newstat/articles/2021-06/this-doesnt-have-to-be-our-story-nonprofit-aims-to-prevent-suicide-in-the-veterinary-profession/>.

dissatisfied clients; however, even before the pandemic, women in veterinary medicine report experiencing stressful client interactions more often than men.²⁸ The pandemic created significant disruptions, stressors and difficulties for all members of the veterinary profession; however, women also often face the additional (and often disproportionate) burden of managing family obligations outside clinic work that already demands a great deal of their time. A survey by the North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) found 62% of respondents (both veterinarians and nurses) felt balancing work and family life was a “frequent” cause of stress.²⁹

Subordination of the Other

Historically, women and nonhuman animals were often grouped together in that neither were considered legal “persons.” Women were subordinate to men due to women’s symbolic association with nature, whereas men were associated with culture, with nature assuming a subordinate role to culture. Reproductive activities were predominately, if not completely, relegated to women, thus allowing males the freedom of movement, development and, by extension, domination.³⁰

Some cultural feminist perspectives suggest this domination of nature by men is the primary cause behind the mistreatment of nonhuman animals, and the exploitation of women and the environment.³¹ Carol Adams theorises that both animals and women are similarly positioned as objects rather than subjects under the patriarchy.³² As objects, both women and nonhuman animals experience exploita-

²⁸ Wallace and Kay, “Supportive Relations in a Feminized Occupation,” 4–22.

²⁹ Liz Bales, “Veterinary Medicine, Motherhood, and a Pandemic,” *DVM* 360, March 2021, <https://www.dvm360.com/view/veterinary-medicine-motherhood-and-a-pandemic>; Kate Boatright, “Balancing Act,” *Today’s Veterinary Practice*, May/June 2020, <https://todaysveterinarypractice.com/balancing-act/>; Carrie Peyton Dahlberg, “Work-life Balance a Tightrope for Many Veterinarians,” *Veterinary Information Network*, November 2010, <https://news.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=210&Id=4704348&uobjectypeid=10&fromVINNEWSASPX=1>.

³⁰ Salla Tuomivirra, *Animals in the Sociologies of Westermarck and Durkheim* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 186.

³¹ Bonnie Berry, “International Progress and Regress on Animal Rights,” in *Between the Species: Readings in Human-Animal Relationships*, ed. Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2009), 373; Josephine Donovan, “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory,” in *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies Reader*, ed. Clifton P. Flynn (New York: Lantern Books, 2008), 370, 375–6.

³² Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 10th Anniversary edition (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1990), 180.

tion, abuse, neglect, invisibility, and outright dismissal by their dominant groups; men and humans, respectively.

Within the division between humans and nonhuman animals, the dominant human group attempts to control its subjugated groups (for this article's purposes, domestic cats) through both language and action. Humans anthropomorphise cats as "independent, aloof, self-sufficient hunters," we selectively breed and purchase them based on desirable traits and their ability to rely on our beneficence, as beloved "members of the family"; however, we simultaneously charge them with the task of "looking after themselves" through isolation indoors, or casual release outdoors.³³ Only when these cats cause disruptions in human lives through so-called nuisance behaviours, do many humans react, and not always constructively.³⁴ Owned cats will be coddled and pampered, or neglected and discarded based on the whims of the humans.³⁵

Carol Gilligan's work on moral development led to her conceptualisation of the "ethic(s) of care," that is, a woman's "conception of morality [...] concerned with the activity of care [...] responsibility and relationships," rather than a man's conception of morality as "fairness," with a greater emphasis on the rules.³⁶ Diane Antonio further developed this idea, encouraging the utilisation of these ethics to examine not only the similarities between all animal life, but to develop ways of relating to the differences as well.³⁷ When women engage in these ethics of care, it promotes reflexivity to compare, contrast, extrapolate, and develop that sense of responsibility to, and solidarity with, nonhuman animals, which in turn can manifest in action, specifically here through volunteering.

Gendered Labour Historically and in Veterinary Medicine

Historically, women's connections with economic life and labour developed as more "production for use" rather than "production for exchange."³⁸ In other words,

³³ Adrian Franklin, *Animals and Modern Cultures: A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity* (London: Sage, 1999), 89–90, 96–98.

³⁴ Dara A. Wald and Anna L. Peterson, *Cats and Conservationists: The Debate Over Who Owns the Outdoors*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020), 84–87.

³⁵ Susan Hunter and Richard Brisbin, *Pet Politics: The Political and Legal Lives of Cats, Dogs, and Horses in Canada and the United States* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2016), 46–57.

³⁶ Rhys Mahannah, "'The Animal,' Systems, and Structures: An Ecofeminist-Posthumanist Enquiry," in *Animal Subjects 2.0*, ed. Jodey Castricano and Lauren Cormon (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2016), 128–9.

³⁷ Rhys Mahannah, "'The Animal,' Systems, and Structures," 128–9.

³⁸ Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," 370, 375–6.

women's labour was utilised for production within the household, rather than exchanged for monetary gain. Women (and their emotions) were relegated to the privacy of the home, whilst men exchanged their labour power for wages in the public sphere where the exhibition of emotion, empathy, and other so-called "feminine traits" were discouraged or denigrated.³⁹ Women's domestic work is still undervalued or dismissed, and women's paid compensation for their labour continues to lag behind men's in most realms of employment.

As in so many areas of endeavour, the gendered pay gap has afflicted veterinary medicine for decades. Women outnumber men veterinarians, but continue to earn less than them. In their study on veterinarians in Alberta, Canada, Wallace and Kay⁴⁰ determined that men earn, on average, between \$100,001 and \$125,000 per year, whilst women earn, on average, between \$50,001 and \$75,000 per year.

Low pay, frustration over lack of professional acknowledgement, and dismissive behaviours by their supervisors' plague veterinary support staff as well. In fact, women respondents in veterinary technician organisations consistently cite "poor wages" and "lack of appreciation" as top reasons for burnout and turnover within their field.⁴¹

Despite the aforementioned quantifiable discrepancies, women continue to volunteer and seek professional positions within nonhuman animal care realms. For one volunteer in Toronto's TNR programme, it is knowing that she is acting on her ethics of care to help her fellow creatures that sustains her. She stated, "I love doing it because I know I'm making a difference in these cats' lives. If we don't help them, who will? Every little bit helps."⁴² When questioned as to her opinion on why more women than men volunteer with the Toronto TNR programme, one of the veterinarians replied matter-of-factly, "Well, women care more about animals than men do."⁴³ Of course, there are many men who volunteer, advocate, crusade, and seek employment in nonhuman animal health fields, and who work tirelessly to advance the welfare and care of nonhuman animals; however, in the case of this Toronto TNR programme, it seems feral cat overpopulation management is very much "women's work."

³⁹ Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," 370, 375–6.

⁴⁰ Wallace and Kay, "Supportive Relations in a Feminized Occupation," 4–2.

⁴¹ National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, *NAVTA 2016 Demographic Survey Results*, 2016, <https://www.isvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ShouldIStayorShouldIGo.pdf>.

⁴² "JQ" (TNR volunteer) in discussion with Kirsten Grieve, August, 2019.

⁴³ "JC" (DVM) in discussion with Kirsten Grieve, August, 2019.

RVT Pandemic “Self Care” and the Effect on Volunteering

A 2020 global survey of veterinary professionals in 91 countries showed higher rates of both stress and job dissatisfaction across all the participating countries during the pandemic. The group showing the highest levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, and stress were RVTs.⁴⁴ Volunteer groups that run TNR programmes rely heavily upon skilled RVTs to not only assist in the sedation, induction, treatment, monitoring and recovery of patients, but in directing, coordinating and training veterinary students and other volunteers during the operations. RVTs and veterinarians experiencing high levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, stress and exhaustion are perhaps less likely to offer their precious and limited time away from clinic work to volunteer with animal care organisations. As such, volunteer-based activities such as TNR programmes, low cost spay/neuter clinics for economically vulnerable people, community educational events, and vaccination, sterilisation and food distribution events in rural/remote locations face a constant risk of closing.

Women far outnumber men as veterinary technicians, and there is some belief that women have more of a predilection to burnout than men,⁴⁵ which would further compromise these volunteer organizations if RVTs stopped volunteering or decreased their volunteer hours in numbers. Allowing RVTs greater autonomy over their scheduling, task load and work duties may engender a better work/life balance, particularly for female RVTs attempting to balance further work at home surrounding regular family care.⁴⁶ Furthermore, when RVTs burnout and no longer volunteer their services, the organisations suffer not only from a loss of medical knowledge and experience, but also any possible education, training and instruction for others.⁴⁷ Without the mostly women volunteers to coordinate and staff these events, nonhuman animal health would suffer.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacted a dramatic toll on the veterinary field and resulted in significant deleterious mental and physical effects on veterinary professionals.⁴⁸ As previously noted, many animal care groups depend on the skills,

⁴⁴ CM Research Ltd., “VetsSurvey 2020: Part 2,” Vetspanel, January 22, 2021., <https://www.vetspanel.com/covid-19-global-pandemic-impact-on-the-veterinary-market-vetssurvey-2020-part-2/>.

⁴⁵ Lori R. Kogan et al., “Veterinary Technicians and Occupational Burnout,” *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 7 (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2020.00328>.

⁴⁶ Lori R. Kogan et al., “Veterinary Technicians.”

⁴⁷ Melanie Greaver Cordova, “Burnout Takes a Heavy Financial Toll on Veterinary Medicine,” Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, August, 2022, <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/news/20220829/burnout-takes-heavy-financial-toll-veterinary-medicine>.

⁴⁸ Stephen L. Muzzatti and Kirsten L. Grieve, “Covid Cats and Pandemic Puppies: The Altered Realm of Veterinary Care for Companion Animals during a Global Pandemic,” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 25, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888705.2022.2038168>.

knowledge and experience of RVTs as volunteers during their events; unfortunately, this particular group of women have arguably felt the fallout of pandemic-related burnout, compassion fatigue and exhaustion most acutely. Despite attempts by multiple organisations to address increased stressors and mental health awareness during the pandemic, there appears to be marginal recognition of how it is affecting veterinary professionals, particularly RVTs, outside their own professional governing bodies.

In instances when well-being is addressed, many of the proposed solutions offer only cursory advice without critical discussion of root causes. For example, a 2021 article published in “RVT Talk,” a monthly e-newsletter for Registered Veterinary Technologists and Technicians of Canada, entitled “De-stress your day: RVT tips for saving time”⁴⁹ begins with a perfunctory paragraph about the very real and taxing stressors faced by RVTs working during the pandemic but then, rather than focussing on employee rights, compensation, and fair labour practices, the article places the onus of care directly on the employees themselves, simply telling them to prioritise their physical and mental health so that they can remain a productive part of the team. These *bon mots* illustrate how undervalued and exploited mid-level employees in veterinary medicine are, and they do absolutely nothing to address the very real structural inadequacies and power discrepancies between the corporate owners of veterinary clinics and the employees on the front lines. The fact that being part of a “team” is emphasised repeatedly in the article does little to instill any real sense of solidarity and mutual aid, but rather imposes a sense of guilt on the part of the staff member, many of whom feel overworked and in desperate need of time off. Employees are reluctant to ask for time away from work to compose themselves, recuperate physically or mentally, or engage in better “work/life balance” because of this guilt: taking time for oneself means compounding the work load of fellow employees in an already short-staffed, stressful work environment.

Volunteerism is likely far down the “to do” list for skilled veterinary professionals. Already overworked in clinic settings during the pandemic, many of these women are exhausted at the end of their extended work days and unable to muster the energy required for additional hours volunteering. The guilt these women feel for taking time off and placing a burden on coworkers is compounded when they are unable to volunteer time to organisations they know desperately need it. In the case of community cat outreach programmes and TNR events, this guilt is twofold: first, in the knowledge that the pandemic has already caused significant disruptions in the delivery of goods, treatments and services to companion animals who have access to regular veterinary care but who are perhaps not receiving the level of care

⁴⁹ Matthew Bradford, “De-stress Your Day: RVT Tips for Saving Time,” *RVT Talk*, September 10, 2021, <https://mediaedgedigital.com/supplierinsights/rvttc/de-stress-your-day-rvt-tips-for-saving-time>.

they did pre-pandemic, and second, with the suspension (now in its second year) of sterilisation and vaccination programmes in many areas, the knowledge that the time and effort devoted to mitigating overpopulation, disease transmission and suffering among feral cats has now been, at best, diminished and, at worst, negated.

Humans' Roles and Responsibilities

A TNR programme strives to provide health care for feral cats, control rampant reproduction, eliminate an unsustainable surplus, and improve the quality of outdoor cats' lives, but a TNR programme is just one approach to one problem. It does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it a panacea; it must be utilised in conjunction with other methods to effect real change.

Implementing education and awareness campaigns in primary schools would teach children the value of proper care and respect, not only for their own companion animals, but for other human and nonhuman animals. Here again, we rely on the inordinate number of women represented in early childhood education to deliver and promote these messages of empathy, responsibility, and social awareness. Education protocols for adults are understandably more complex and challenging, but could include public awareness adverts, leaflets, social media campaigns, and cooperative events hosted by a variety of organisations (including shelters, libraries, community centres, etc.) to disseminate facts and dispel myths. Members of the public are often ignorant of nonhuman animal issues, or that problems even exist, much less that solutions require public cooperation.

With the increase in precarious labour, the erosion of social and health support services, access to affordable veterinary care is increasingly unaffordable for many people. Subsidised treatments and mobile spay/neuter clinics similar to Toronto's SNYP (Spay/Neuter Your Pet) truck, are often available only to those living in major urban centres. Rural and remote communities are forced to rely on expensive mobile veterinary services (where they even exist), or travelling volunteer support. Awareness affects policies, bringing greater accessibility and funding, so advocacy on behalf of the marginalised, the working poor, and their animal companions is vital.

In Canada, legislation requires amendments to elevate the status of nonhuman animals to more than that of property. Some progress has been made, there is still a great deal to do. For example, in the summer of 2022, Toronto's city council updated its bylaws to ensure that pets who are kept outdoors have adequate shelter to keep them safe during extreme weather conditions, but rejected a provision requir-

ing that all cats be either kept indoors or kept on a leash when outdoors. The city's mayor stated, "I just don't think we need our licensing people, who are very busy dealing with genuine safety issues, running around and chasing Fluffy the cat."⁵⁰ Setting aside the presumption that harms inflicted upon free roaming cats and the potential spread of parasites and disease to other animals and humans is not a "genuine safety issue," this was an opportunity to address the problem of free roaming cats in the city of Toronto. As previously mentioned, these cats, if not sterilised, may interact with other unsterilised cats and fight, spread disease, mate uncontrollably, or fall victim to injury or trauma. Arguably a question of municipal priorities, funding, and resource allocation, adopting amendments that do place the onus of responsibility on cat owners to contain their cat(s) within their own property and updating municipal animal welfare bylaws to include the protection of domestic cats while increasing punitive measures may be a step forward in mitigating the number of free roaming cats.

Free roaming cats create a host of issues from the arguably irritating (vocalization of intact males and females during mating, urination/defecation on private property) to the more significant impact on other animals (attacking and killing of birds and other wildlife, fighting amongst other cats or wildlife leading to injury and the spread of disease, including zoonotic diseases, shedding of parasites) to the traumatic (starvation, dehydration, exposure to extreme weather conditions, acute or chronic illness, injury, parasitism, and/or disease) and harm inflicted by humans, either unintentionally or intentionally (illegal trapping, poisoning, killing). Legislation is only one step in reducing the number of free roaming and breeding cats in any region and mitigating these harms. Enforcement is also necessary. Local animal control organisations in urban centres are the likely first point of contact for citizens who wish to report a nuisance behaviour, a cat in distress, or suspicion of illegal harm against a cat by a human; however, potential issues such as underfunding, lack of trained or available staff (lack of incentives to encourage individuals to attend certification programmes or apply for positions with their municipality's animal welfare enforcement, or positions that do not offer balanced shift work, financial remuneration or benefits), and improper equipment or facilities (old buildings or vehicles, insufficient space requirements) could impact the ability of local agencies and organisations to respond quickly and effectively.

By changing the language and laws we will enact more protection, care, and funding to establish and maintain healthy companion animal populations. When

⁵⁰ "Toronto Cats Still Allowed to Roam Free, City Council Says," *Veterinary Practice News*, July 21, 2022, <https://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/toronto-cats-still-allowed-to-roam-free-city-council-says/>.

we care about nonhuman animals we care about each other and, as the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, good herd health benefits everyone.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, humans must turn a critical lens inward and assess the damage we cause to the environment and human and nonhuman animals by our unreflexive consumption habits. The pandemic has laid bare many inequalities; exacerbating extant ones and creating others anew. Perhaps we should use this frightening global event to gauge our levels of preparedness so that we can better care for each other and the animals with whom we share the world.

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Kirsten L. Grieve – B.A., RVT, is a registered veterinary technician in Toronto, Canada. In addition to her veterinary nursing degree, she holds an undergraduate degree in psychology and has completed post-graduate work in biological chemistry. She has been a member in good standing of the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT) for almost twenty years. Kirsten has special interests in zoonotic disease, parasitology and feline nutrition, and has worked in a variety of research, veterinary medicine and animal care settings, including Washington University's School of Medicine, a small-animal hospital, a feline specialty veterinary practice, a veterinary hospice service, and the surgical theatre of Toronto Street Cats' Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) programme at the Toronto Humane Society. She has also delivered presentations on human-animal relations and animal welfare at the Canadian Sociological Association, and at several other conferences including Brock University's *Rethinking Canid-Human Relations* conference and Eastern Kentucky University's *Living with Animals* conference.

Stephen L. Muzzatti – doktor, jest Associate Professor w Department of Sociology, Toronto Metropolitan University. Jego badania znajdują się na styku kulturowej i ultra-realistycznej kryminologii i skupiają się na przestępstwie, szkodzie społecznej, konsumeryzmie i relacjach między ludźmi i zwierzętami. Szczególnie interesuje go splot społecznych dynamik neoliberalizmu, brutalności i wiktyimizacji. Pisał na takie tematy jak terroryzm, przemoc wobec zwierząt, przestępstwo przeciwko państwu, przestępczość korporacyjna, przestępstwa globalizacji, narcyzm, przestrzenie i tożsamości klasy robotniczej, kultura motocyklowa, reklama i monetaryzacja przemocy. Należy do Network for Veterinary Humanities/Social Sciences i Animals in Society Research Cluster a w chwili obecnej jest przedstawicielem Canadian Sociological Association.

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Mourned Pets. About Coping with Animal Death in Veterinary Practice and Caregiver's Experience

Животные, о которых горюют.
О том, как пережить смерть животного –
опыт ветеринаров и владельцев

Абстракт

Статья написана от первого лица в рамках автоэтнографической попытки описать опыт потери животного-компаньона, кошки, когда решение об эвтаназии было оспорено и подорвано, что вызвало угрызения совести и сложные чувства по этому поводу. Автор пытается объяснить свои чувства и поведение ветеринара, в то же время представляя новый вид ветеринарных услуг на дому для паллиативной помощи и эвтаназии.

Ключевые слова: смерть животных, эвтаназия, паллиативная помощь

Mourned Pets. About Coping with Animal
Death in Veterinary Practice and Caregiver's
Experience

Abstract

The article is written from the first-person perspective as an autoethnographical attempt to describe the experience of loss of a pet companion, a cat, when the decision about euthanasia was challenged and undermined, causing regret and complex feelings about the situation. The author tries to provide explanation for her feelings and for veterinarian behavior, at the same time introducing new kind of veterinarian in-home services for palliative care and euthanasia.

Keywords: animal death, euthanasia, palliative care

Introduction

When I started writing this article, I was sure how it should go. I imagined that I would focus on good and bad veterinary practices in the animals' end-of-life span, and I would recommend some solutions—to spare caretakers' pain, animals' suffering, as well as additional stress, and eventually advise to get some psychological support to those who euthanize our beloved pets. As it became common knowledge due to social campaigns like *Not One More Vet*¹ that many of veterinary practitioners suffer from severe compassion fatigue and tend to commit suicides as well,² it was crucial for me to include that aspect too. Additionally, the research show that the death of an animal who is important for a human is a traumatic event.³ But grieving after death of animal companions still seems to be a problem in most of the cultures.⁴ Animals still do not have the status of being important enough and valued as persons who can be mourned openly, hence the term “disenfranchised grief” is used mostly in such cases.⁵ So, the problem grows—how to mourn pets? How to cope with their death, whilst taking the caretakers' and veterinarians' perspectives?

I know what the whole process looks like in Poland. In aspects of palliative care or euthanasia, caregivers are responsible for visiting the veterinary clinic to help the animal. I have suffered through numerous losses of animal companions over the years, I really am aware of the whole process. But while I was writing and planning this article, something changed drastically and rapidly. Firstly, I saw a documentary film entitled *The Hardest Day* by Ross Taylor and Luke

¹ *NOMV: Not One More Vet*, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.nomv.org/>. See also: Lauren S. Grider, “Compassion Fatigue: A Hidden Danger to Veterinary Professionals,” *NOMV: Not One More Vet*, 2022, accessed December 27, 2022, <https://www.nomv.org/2022/10/18/compassion-fatigue-a-hidden-danger-to-veterinary-professionals/>.

² Melissa Chan, “Veterinarians Face Unique Issues That Make Suicide One of the Profession's Big Worries,” *Time*, September 19, 2019, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://time.com/5670965/veterinarian-suicide-help/>.

³ Allison M. J. Reisbig, McArthur Jr. Hafen, Drake Adryanna A. Siqueira, Destiny Girard, and Zachary B. Breuning, “Companion Animal Death: A Qualitative Analysis of Relationship Quality, Loss, and Coping,” *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying* vol. 75, no. 2 (2017): 125.

⁴ Millie Cordaro, “Pet Loss and Disenfranchised Grief: Implications for Mental Health Counseling Practice,” *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* vol. 34, no. 4 (2012): 284.

⁵ Breeanna Spain, Lisel O'Dwyer, and Stephen Moston, “Pet Loss: Understanding Disenfranchised Grief, Memorial Use, and Posttraumatic Growth,” *Anthrozoös: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Interactions Between People and Other Animals* vol. 32, no. 4 (2019): 555–568, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2019.1621545>; Julie Mullins, “Disenfranchised Grief: Why Pet Owners Aren't Allowed to Mourn,” *Firstline*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2021), accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.dvm360.com/view/disenfranchised-grief-why-pet-owners-aren-t-allowed-to-mourn>.

Rafferty,⁶ and started searching whether it is possible in Poland to euthanize an animal companion at home. The film is about loss, the human bond with pets and the end-of-life veterinary community that provides in-home services in situation of palliative care. There is no such service in Poland, but as I started asking around—there can be found some veterinary practitioners who offer in-home visits also for the purpose of euthanasia. Secondly, one of my cat residents, the oldest and the sickest one, got another infection, which within few weeks became lethal and I was facing the same decision as always—keep trying and let the cat suffer even more, or let go and decide to euthanize her? I made my decision, but it was undermined and challenged unnecessarily. The whole situation reminded me of many things I wanted to forget about previous experiences with my dying animals and veterinary clinics. And that is how the article became very personal for me—immersed in my experience, autoethnographical. It became a kind of last will for my cat, and a call to all veterinary practitioners to help us—the caretakes—and to help themselves. There is a growing need for personal approach to caregivers and our expectations, as well as for individual treatment plan that will allow the patients to stay at home and be euthanized at home, while being part of the family, surrounded by people who spent all the time with them.

Palliative Care for Pets—Liliana's Case

My cat, Liliana, started losing weight some years ago. There were many veterinarians, whom we visited, but none of them really helped. Eventually, they just left me with cat who was starving to death. I came back to one of the clinics that I left many years ago because there was one practitioner, whom I did not like. He was not there anymore so as it was the nearest and quite a good veterinary clinic, I decided to give them one more chance. And I got results of the first Liliana's blood panel with information about FIV—feline immunodeficiency virus. The diagnosis was terrifying. I knew much about HIV and that FIV is treated as a model for the human virus,⁷ but still it was a lot to swallow. The one veterinary practitioner resident that day at the clinic told me that I should euthanize the cat, as she had no chances, her weight being below two kilograms (her normal weight was around seven). The sec-

⁶ *The Hardest Day* (2019), directed by Ross Tylor and Luke Rafferty, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.thehardestdayfilm.com/>.

⁷ Dorothee Bienzle, "FIV in Cats – A Useful Model of HIV in People?" *Veterinary Immunology and Immunopathology* vol. 159, no. 3–4 (June 2014): 171–179, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165242714000506>.

ond veterinarian, the co-owner of the clinic, said that we could try to help her (he was including me), but I needed to be aware that this was palliative treatment for an old cat with terminal illness (she was ten years old at that time). We could help her only by making her life easier, there was no need to introduce any procedures that could cause her pain. He also told me that in case of worse results, I would need to be prepared for the decision to euthanize her. It was not optimistic, but, at least, I knew something. And within a few days, she started eating—as the problem with starvation was temporal, which I have already noticed. She gained some kilos, and everything seemed to be well until autumn, when the problem started again, and she was once again losing weight. I came back to the clinic and asked for some additional examination and blood tests, and we learned that the FIV diagnosis was probably wrong as it can have similar symptoms⁸ to the thyroid disease which is also not so easy to diagnose.⁹ From that time, she was constantly on medication, periodic blood tests, and we managed somehow to give her few more years. It was stressful but we both got used to it. Until the beginning of April 2022, when I got sinus inflammation, and she got it too.

For the first time I saw a cat who had sinus problems. She eventually also got pneumonia. If an animal is diagnosed with disease that not possible to be cured, most veterinary specialists I have met advised to put them to sleep (euthanize). When I came with her for the first time in April 2022, she was already in the process of losing weight. We decided that she would get some antibiotics and supplements, and we would perform the blood tests later, as she got better. I was informed that there was no pneumonia, and in her condition pneumonia would be lethal. I was too ill to go to the clinic every day to check if everything was ok. Therefore, I decided she must be hospitalized for at least two nights at the clinic. She came back home feeling a bit better. I got her back from a new veterinarian who was taking care of the hospitalized animals. She was very nice and provided me with a lot of information about the treatment and Liliana's behavior.

Within the next two days she got worse and by the end of next week she could not breathe. She was suffering. Making the decision about the euthanasia was not easy. I struggled a lot all Sunday. I came with her to the clinic on Monday, 25th April, as I moved my appointment from Tuesday, due to the condition Liliana

⁸ Amy Flowers, "Cats and FIV: Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment," *Pets WebMD*, February 13, 2021, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://pets.webmd.com/cats/cat-fiv-feline-immunodeficiency-virus>.

⁹ Mark E. Peterson, "Diagnostic Testing for Feline Thyroid Disease: Hyperthyroidism," *Compendium: Continuing Education for Veterinarians*, Vetlearn.com (2013), accessed July 25, 2022, http://assets.prod.vetlearn.com.s3.amazonaws.com/02/576c80bce611e28e71005056ad4736/file/PV2013_Peterson1_FF.pdf. See also: Shea Cox and Mary Ellen Goldberg, "Nursing Care for Seriously Ill Animals—Art and Techniques," in *Hospice and Palliative Care for Companion Animals. Principles and Practice*, ed. Amir Shanan, Jessica Pierce, and Tamara Shearer (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 217.

was in. Bursting in tears, I pronounced my decision that I could not make her suffer longer only because I loved her. And I was almost certain that even though the information about the lack of threat of pneumonia in her case was given by the co-owner of this clinic, I would be supported in my decision. But I was not. There was a twenty-minute lecture about the chances and the advantages of hospitalization, advanced examination, another set of meds, and what kind of tests could be performed to help her, to be sure what was the cause of all that. The cat was sitting in the container, but while the veterinarian went to let me think—she just looked at me and lay on her side, breathing with difficulty. I managed to force myself to agree to hospitalization—for one night, to see if there would be any improvement. It was even more difficult a decision, seeing Liliana that skinny and weak. I wanted to feel relief, but I did not. I was torn between the feeling of relief due to not losing her at that moment, of being selfish for letting her suffer more—especially when I knew how much she disliked the vet clinic and blood tests, and of being selfish for not wanting to fight for her more. Was I just another caregiver who was fed up with taking care of a problematic pet, not willing to pay more to give her and the vets a chance? The veterinarian came back. I told her my new decision. She was still not happy—in her opinion one day was not sufficient to see any changes—but she started preparing documents for the hospitalization. While she was filling in my details in the forms, she looked at Liliana and in one instance the look of her face changed. She told me that she was uncertain. She saw “the real condition” of my cat and suddenly supported my decision. But which one? I was confused. I really did not need to go through this. Was I still a bad caregiver, who just acted selfishly and wanted to make the cat suffer more, but at the same time was I stingy, because I did not want to pay for more days at the hospital? I came knowing what must be done, and I was convinced by her that I was rushing with unnecessary killing of my cat, as “an owner bored and tired with an old and sick cat,” who I was not. Making me feel more guilty,¹⁰ was the second worst thing that day. Losing my beloved black cat was painful enough.

In some cases, the palliative treatment for pain is introduced to sustain the wellbeing of an animal till the moment that the suffering becomes too much and the decision about euthanasia must be made. Liliana was suffering without any pain medication. She was stressed by the visits in veterinary clinic. She was terrified of the blood testing. I did not want to do the blood tests as she was so skinny, and I imagined that it might be painful for her (it would be for me). I was trying to ease her stress, but I knew that the visits themselves were too much. She was

¹⁰ Jessica Pierce and Amir Shanan, “Ethical Decision Making in Animal Hospice and Palliative Care,” in *Hospice and Palliative Care for Companion Animals. Principles and Practice*, ed. Amir Shanan, Jessica Pierce, and Tamara Shearer (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 64.

breathing heavily lying on her side. The supported decision appeared to be the one about euthanasia.

I informed the lady who euthanized my cat that I needed to be with Liliana during the procedure. She took her for a moment to another room to put a cannula in her leg. She came back and asked me if I knew what the procedure looks like. Although I knew, she decided to tell me—first she would get something to make her sleepy so she would not feel any pain. Secondly, the final dose of the anesthetic would be given and death would occur in a couple of minutes. The bladder might empty and there could be some twitching or grasping for air noticed, as a sign of muscles relaxing. She asked me if I was ready. I was ready for an hour or so. I was trying to stop crying but it was impossible. I saw blood coming from the back leg in the place of the cannula—it was not nicely done. I was angry, that she suffered unnecessarily. Liliana was lying on her side on the table, I was petting her and whether I was calming her or myself—I do not know. I told her I loved her, and I would miss her forever. And that I was sorry that I gave up the fight. I put one hand over her heart and with the second I was stroking her nose and head, kissing her forehead. She was gone within no more than fifteen seconds. Fifteen seconds and her life was gone. Her condition was that bad. The veterinarian did not finish applying the anesthetic when the heart stopped beating. No twitching, no air grasping. Nothing. Just silence and my weeping. No more hard breathing. When I said she is gone, the practitioner checked for reflexes. She really was gone. Her bladder emptied within a minute, but the urine was light and without a smell. I took her body and put it in a shroud which I prepared for her, and I placed her back in the container, still crying. Still feeling guilty. The lady said that we did good by her, and that this kind of death is a privilege.¹¹ I was not sure why was she telling me this. She was not convinced that it was the only thing that could have been done for Liliana. She was undermining my decision, and at the same moment condoling me. I was hurting a lot. The lady by the counter gave me some tissues which I did not take, and took money for the procedure, saying “I’m sorry for your loss.” Some strangers were sitting in the waiting room, observing me crying and caring the container with my dead cat’s body.

As many pet caregivers say on this kind of an occasion—my heart broke into a million pieces. But I had to get back home and face the rest of my cats and my also sick grandmother, who went into shock and started shouting, crying, lamenting when I entered the house. My heart stopped, and I had to take care of everything else. Without support in this crucial and difficult moment. Without time to grieve,

¹¹ Rebecca E. Deacon and Paula Brough, “Companion Animal Death and Client Bereavement: A Qualitative Investigation of Veterinary Nurses’ Caregiving Experiences,” *Death Studies*, vol. 45, no. 10 (2019): 810, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1696424>.

to mourn, to properly be by myself to get a perspective. I wish it happened differently. I wish I could have asked my vet to come visit Liliana and give her the “last shot” while she was with me at home. Not stressed, not in pain. I wish my other cats could see this and be part of this event. They had only the chance to see her dead body, but not assist her in her last moments. I could have been better prepared. Maybe I would not have such a guilty conscience? I will never know. Those last moments were full of pain for her and for me. Unnecessarily.

Veterinary Medicine and Pets' Death

I was angry at the veterinarian. She made me angry. I was angry at myself. I was angry at the whole clinic and the whole world. But I knew that this was also hard moment for her. For them all. I did not want to make it all about me and my needs. I was focused on my beautiful black cat, who was suffering. I (we) gave her almost four more years. It was not enough. It was hard also for all of those who were treating Liliana over almost four years at this clinic. They knew her. They knew her case. She was staying there in the hospital, sometimes for treatment and further diagnostics. Maybe she did not like them much, as they were pricking her, giving injections, and medications, but she was their patient. My hurt was also their hurt. According to research, the euthanasia procedure, as well as assistance in the procedure, is emotionally stressful for the veterinarians and their assistants, nurses, and the rest of the clinic's personnel. In the research from 2019, there is a quote by one of the participants of the study, that illustrates how the situation of euthanasia is hard for everyone. The biggest challenge appears in the moment when caregivers say their last words to the animals. The other challenges relate to frustration and anger towards vets.¹²

In Poland, there is a common opinion which is disputed by vets,¹³ that many veterinarians are there just for the money, not for the love of animals. It is harmful and unfair and circulates mostly because the prices of veterinary services are high, and people tend to forget that if they take an animal, they are responsible for him or her also in their health aspects. It means that the caregiver must be aware of all costs connected with caring for a living creature, before taking an animal home. But this is the negative thinking perspective, and we like to see only positive sides of having/owning/taking care of an animal. In a situation of any health issues, spending

¹² Deacon and Brough, “Companion Animal Death and Client Bereavement,” 812.

¹³ Facebook Fanpage, *Egzoovet*, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/egzoovet>.

money on a pet is a problem. I know those opinions and attitudes, but I tend to be a responsible caregiver. If my cats are unwell, we go to the vet and the animal is diagnosed, treated without any comments concerning money and high prices. I sometimes ask how much it will cost me, as it is end of the month and I am not sure if I can afford it at that moment. The treatment of Liliana with the diagnosing part was very expensive and, at the beginning, unexpected. The results may not seem sufficient, but almost four more years is still an impressive achievement. And I am grateful for that. Sometimes I think it was a bit egoistic to fight for her life, but as an animal psychologist I could recognize the moments when she was suffering and when she was well, so I should not feel any regrets. But I do.¹⁴

The terminal illness or the long-term illness of an animal is hard on both the caregivers and the animals—the former feel the responsibility, the need to save the pet, the latter endure suffering. Veterinary medicine cannot help palliative patients in situations of suffering and constant pain. The chance to help a dying pet is to provide the best services possible and notice the moment when treatment is no longer fulfilling its function. Sometimes, the caregiver does not want to let go, and keeps on fighting, changing clinics only to stay longer with the beloved animal. This triggers some moral issues concerning the egoistic need to stay with suffering animal, not taking into consideration what would be best for him/her. Liliana could have died more than four years ago. It would be similarly painful for me. I would feel my failure in providing care and wellbeing for her. But I have found someone who helped her, and she had almost four more years. It is apparent that for me, as well as for the veterinarians, her needs and her welfare were the most poignant. But where do we place our need for comfort, for companionship if a loss occurs?

Veterinary (as well as human) medicine in Poland does not focus much on those who provide services and on their mental condition. Eric Richman who “is a clinical social worker at Cummings Veterinary Medical Center at Tufts University, provides counseling and support services to clients and staff at both the small and large animal hospitals.”¹⁵ He counsels clients who care for terminally ill animals, when they must make a decision that is difficult, and those who grieve over the animals they lost. In Poland, all those things are the responsibility of vets. They are to advise, to explain and to support the decisions that are made by the caregivers. Nobody is concerned about their emotions.

¹⁴ Janet Hoy-Gerlach and Scott Wehman, “Companion Animal Loss,” in *Human–Animal Interactions. Social Work Guide*, ed. Janet Hoy-Gerlach and Scott Wehman (Washington: National Association of Social Workers Press, 2017), 110.

¹⁵ Eric Richman, “A Social Worker’s Experience at a Veterinary School and Teaching Hospital,” in *Career Paths in Human–Animal Interaction for Social and Behavioral Scientists*, ed. Lori R. Kogan and Phyllis Erdman (New York: Routledge, 2021), 74.

But Richman mentions that he works also at veterinary teaching hospitals to “help students begin to explore their own grief history and how they view loss and death in their own lives.”¹⁶ He also states that “In better understanding their own history and reaction to loss, they will be more equipped at helping clients faced with end-of-life care and decisions about their companion animals.”¹⁷ Gareth Steel wrote: “In the immediate aftermath of an animal’s death, it is the vet’s job to step into the role of priest, counsellor and confidant. Something for which many young vets are woefully ill prepared; I know I was.”¹⁸ Consequently, the lack of such education in Polish veterinary teaching hospitals and universities can cause problems for veterinarians and clients/caregivers. In Polish veterinary studies, we can find only lectures and workshops on the profession and on how to start a business, but not how to deal with clients and patients.¹⁹ If we take this into consideration, we can see that the common opinions about the veterinary clinics and veterinary practitioners stem also from the way we are treated. Jessica Pierce and Amir Shanan stated that “how an animal’s end-of-life care is handled strongly influences whether a client will continue to use a veterinary practice or not.”²⁰ A few months after Liliana’s death I am still not sure whether I will come back there or find another clinic—so, something went wrong.

Compassion Fatigue and the Suicidal Span

While going to “kill my cat,” I was aware that the veterinary practitioners are one of the professional groups most exposed to depression and suicides. I was trying to be cautious not to add to their plates. I call it as it is for me—killing, but I know that there are many attitudes and opinions among veterinarians.²¹ For example, Natalia Strokowska, a Polish veterinarian, in an interview said that “killing is a very damaging term” and that she is euthanizing animals, not killing

¹⁶ Richman, “A Social Worker’s Experience,” 75.

¹⁷ Richman, “A Social Worker’s Experience,” 75.

¹⁸ Gareth Steel, *Never Work With Animals. The Unfiltered Truth About Life as a Vet* (London: Harper Element, 2022), 266.

¹⁹ Nicolaus Copernicus University, *Veterinary Medicine Program of Studies*, accessed December 27, 2022, <https://www.vet.umk.pl/panel/wp-content/uploads/program-weterynaria.pdf>; Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Science, *Faculty of Veterinary Medicine*, accessed December 27, 2022, <https://wmmw.upwr.edu.pl/en/students/studies/msc-degree-program>.

²⁰ Pierce and Shanan, “Ethical Decision Making in Animal Hospice and Palliative Care,” 58.

²¹ Patricia Morris, *Blue Juice: Euthanasia in Veterinary Medicine* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 47–48.

them.²² I have mentioned that the vet who euthanized my cat told me that this kind of death was a privilege, so it is possible she was feeling a kind of a mission. The veterinarians from the documentary *The Hardest Day* said that ending pain is not only a mission but a rescue from further suffering.²³ In this film, one of the practitioners is Jessica Pierce. She explains in detail what she also wrote in her chapter with Amir Shanan, that “animal death can be one of the most emotionally exhausting aspects of a veterinarian’s work, yet has the potential to be profoundly fulfilling, too.”²⁴

Working with people with different empathy levels and attitudes towards animal’s welfare is challenging. If a veterinarian is also empathic towards the clients and their pets, the empathy can become, as Steel called it, “an enormous burden.”²⁵ The constant tension in this work and all the situations that cause stress, including the death of a patient, can lead to compassion fatigue and lack of willingness to work as veterinarian. Undermining the knowledge and experience, all decisions made in difficult situations may lead to depression and other mental disorders. And the fact that as a veterinarian, a person is being taught to help patients, not to let go and put them to sleep, brings the feelings of failure, betrayal, and disappointment. Some authors say that bringing the subject of euthanasia is “very uncomfortable” for veterinarians,²⁶ others are aware of the stress. For example, Vanessa Rohlf and Pauleen Bennett focused their research on people who euthanize animals in different circumstances, and they noticed that there is something that can be called traumatic stress which is caused by the thought of euthanasia that needs to be performed.²⁷ Some of the participants of their research mentioned this kind of stress, which can relate to the empathy and taking care of animal welfare.

In a book by Charles R. Figley and Robert G. Roop, there is a chapter on compassion fatigue in veterinary medicine practitioners in which the authors pointed out the main sources of dissatisfaction and burnout.²⁸ The main sources of negative emotions

²² Magdalena Rigamonti, “Natalia Strokowska, lekarz weterynarii: Dokonuję eutanazji. Zabijanie to bardzo krzywdzące określenie,” *Dziennik.pl* (June 07, 2018), accessed July 25, 2022, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/575848,natalia-strokowska-weterynarz-eutanazja-zwierzeta-wywiad.html>.

²³ Lucja Lange, “Najtrudniejszy dzień: Film o eutanazji zwierząt,” *Instytut Dobrej Śmierci: Blog*, (March 4, 2022), accessed July 25, 2022, <https://instytutdobrejsmierci.pl/2022/03/04/najtrudniejszy-dzien-film-o-eutanazji-zwierzat/>.

²⁴ Pierce and Shanan, “Ethical Decision Making,” 57–58.

²⁵ Steel, *Never Work With Animals*, 273.

²⁶ Darleen Arden, *The Angell Memorial Animal Hospital. Book of Wellness and Preventive Care for Dogs* (McGraw-Hill, 2003), 215.

²⁷ Vanessa Rohlf and Pauleen Bennett “Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress in Persons Who Euthanize Nonhuman Animals in Surgeries, Animal Shelters, and Laboratories,” *Society & Animals* vol. 13, no. 3 (2005): 214–216.

²⁸ Charles R. Figley and Robert G. Roop, *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community* (Washington: The Humane Society University, 2006), 51–61.

for vets are “difficult clients,” next are mentioned “not enough time,” “disputing fees,” “problems with staff performance,” and “concern about skills/accuracy.” Technicians and assistants also mention “difficult clients” but also “problems with co-workers,” “not enough time,” performing euthanasia.” Those factors can lead to the feeling of compassion fatigue, and in consequence depression and suicide or suicide ideation if a person does not proactively deal with the tensions. This was also mentioned by Melanie Bowden in her TEDx Talk about the veterinary work.²⁹ She mentioned what her day looks like and how frustrating and overwhelming it is to do more and work more than she should for people who are just cruel and mindless, who do not listen to her advice, as they cannot afford the treatment or just do not care.

Palliative Care at Home—a New Approach to Veterinary Services

In Poland some of the veterinarians provide in-home euthanasia on demand and can visit pets at home to help in some mild situations concerning health. But it is not common practice, and many veterinarians deny this kind of help since the home surroundings are less controllable than at the clinic. This subject appeared in conversation with my veterinarian, when I mentioned that some of my cats respond badly to the visits in the clinic, they are more stressed, which affects the blood test results and this stress is potentially risky for their welfare. I was advised to give them some pills that would calm them down, and to bring them anyway. If we investigate the regulations about the veterinary practice, there is only a requirement that it should have headquarters, there is no regulation that veterinary services cannot be provided at home of the patient. On the contrary, there is a regulation according to which “on the basis of a notification by the animal owner, the animal health center may provide veterinary services outside its premises.”³⁰

The film I mentioned in the Introduction—*The Hardest Day*—was sponsored by two companies that provide services for people whose animal companions are terminally ill or of an advanced age and it is impossible for them to let the animal stay at veterinary clinic or to come every time the animal feels worse. The services are to provide help with care for the animals and for humans, who also are stressed and need to talk with someone, need advice, need someone to share their fears and

²⁹ YouTube. TEDx Talk, Melanie Bowden: What being a veterinarian really takes, (January 11, 2020), accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=objP3E625Xo>.

³⁰ *Act on Animal Health Facilities* (2014), 12, accessed December 27, 2022, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20040110095>.

comfort them. The vets from the organization called *The Lap of Love*³¹ are visiting their patients at home—all the old pets and palliative care pets can expect treatment, testing and, in the final moments, euthanasia in familiar surroundings with their caregivers and other animal companions. The veterinarians give support to caregivers and, depending on their decision, can take care of the pets' bodies. They offer paw prints, nose prints, tufts of hair and a pamphlet on the value of human-animal bond and the role of grief.³² The space given for the last goodbyes is precious. The nonjudgmental atmosphere gives comfort.

One of the veterinarians in the film said that she never imagined that she will be euthanizing animals, but now it is her mission and blessing. She was happy to be of service for those creatures that needed her help.³³ This was giving her comfort and satisfaction—therefore she did not feel the burnout, the compassion fatigue. The people who provided those services were gentle with caregivers and pets, they were tender and warm during the visits. But they also were given support, to be able to work in this kind of job.

The key to this in-home euthanasia is appropriate decision-making framework. As Jessica Pierce mentioned, there are four areas: clinical considerations, quality of life, contextual features, and patient preferences.³⁴ The first area is all about diagnosis, prognosis, conditions, and evaluation—is it critical or maybe reversible? What are the chances? The quality of life focuses on the presence of pain, suffering and possibility to any pleasurable moments. In the area of contextual features, the caregivers appear as the main persons who provide care—and questions arise: are they able to financially manage? Will they be emotionally prepared for palliative care? What other responsibilities do they have? The last area of evaluation concerns what the animal wants and needs. This knowledge is based on what caregivers say about the individual features of the pet. If the veterinarian knows the animal and how it behaves in the “natural” (home) environment, he or she can see the changes in behavior, so it seems that it is important to provide palliative care at home.

This does not mean that in-home euthanasia is devoid of guilt and regrets for the caregivers. The “responsibility grief,” as Susan Dawson calls it, appears due to the lack of evaluation that would be “one-sided,” not giving too many possibilities.³⁵ Pierce and Shanahan noticed that

³¹ *Lap of Love. Veterinary Hospice & In-home Euthanasia*, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.lapoflove.com/>.

³² *Getaway Services Inc.*, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://www.gateway-services-inc.com/>.

³³ *The Hardest Day* (2019).

³⁴ Pierce and Shanahan, “Ethical Decision Making,” 59.

³⁵ Susan Elisabeth Dawson, “Compassionate Communication: Working With Grief,” in *Handbook of Veterinary Communication Skills*, ed. Carol Gray and Jenny Moffett (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 62–99.

Many caregivers/pet owners report feeling tremendous guilt and anguish over the choices they made for an ill or aged animal companion. Often they feel that they rushed into or dragged their feet about a decision to euthanize, or gave consent to futile treatment—and in all cases are left feeling that they have failed their beloved companion. These feelings can plague people for years and cause immense suffering.³⁶

In their opinion the goal of an animal hospice and animal palliative care is to give the best conditions to make hard decisions without remorse.³⁷ Jackie Campbell, a palliative care veterinarian, explained in her TEDx Talk how to implement the palliative care ideals.³⁸ In her opinion the veterinarians should be more comprehensive in preparing for the death of a pet. It means that it is up to the practitioners to provide knowledge, ideas and help to families that are at the beginning of the bereavement process. The other thing is to be more personable, to get the information about the patients. It is more time-consuming but gives great results. She also advised to be brave and offer more mobile services if possible. She stressed that “the benefits of homecare are extensive” and, in addition, that those visits make the last moments are little easier.³⁹

Conclusions: Veterinary Services for Dying Pets and Their Caregivers

The death of an animal is a very harsh experience. Even though euthanasia is considered a blessing, it causes in caregivers the constant feeling of disappointment, failure and uncertainty concerning the decision. I felt remorse since I was not sure if there was anything more, I could do or if I was myself too ill to take care of my old, cat who required it. If the vet practitioner had not challenged my decision, I might have felt better. Instead, I felt like a traitor. Creating good conditions for making decisions is very important and can influence the future feelings of the animal caregivers, as well as their willingness to come back to the same clinic. Good services, compassionate services can really make the difference in cases like mine.

³⁶ Pierce and Shanan, “Ethical Decision Making,” 64.

³⁷ Pierce and Shanan, “Ethical Decision Making,” 64.

³⁸ YouTube. TEDx Talk, Jackie Campbell: *Our Pets: Rethinking the Way We Say Goodbye*, (26.02.2016), accessed July 25, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5aAJGN_RHs.

³⁹ Campbell, *Our Pets*.

If my veterinarian had helped in the last farewell, provided information, and euthanized Liliana at home, took her body or helped me with the burial—if I wanted to bury my cat in the garden—I would probably feel much better. I would know that I was not alone in this. It really seems that it would be a much better solution for all, if we could have home veterinary services for palliative care and dying animals. But we do not. We are all alone in this. We only hear: “sorry for your loss” in the moment of paying for the services while standing at the reception desk. This is not what this should look like.

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