

Animal Human Interaction: Research & Practice Newsletter

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The Potential Utility of Using Human Attachment Constructs to Investigate Animal-Human Interaction

by Larissa Maley

Research in the area of human attachment theory has offered a plethora of insight into the important role that relationships and social interactions play in human development and mental health. As research in the field of attachment theory has expanded over the years, from child and caregiver to romantic partnerships, so should the investigation of another significant relationship in people's lives; the relationship they have with their pets.

The Humane Society of the United States reports that as of 2009, there were approximately 77.5 million dogs and 93.6 million cats residing as pets in American homes ("U.S. Pet Ownership", 2009). According to the American Pet Products

Association, Americans are not only spending more money on their pets than ever before, but pet products are one of the only industries to show a growth in profit during this latest recession ("For Owners", 2010). With the growing number of people living and caring for animals in a manner that implies attachment, the question becomes: Can investigations on animal-human interaction be studied using the same constructs and measurements that have been used for studying human attachment? If so, what does this imply about the animal-human bond?

One of the earliest studies to use human attachment measures with pets and their human care-



givers focused on the potential benefit that attachment to an animal may provide to a human during a time of profound loss (Adkins & Rajecki, 1999). The study examined families that had recently lost a child and they found that the individuals who reported being strongly attached to the family pet also reported experiencing a buffering effect from that relationship during the time of their loss (Adkins & Rajecki, 1999). (continued on page 3)

Giving a Leg-Up: Efficacy of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy in Children

by Toni Welsh

This article presents the results of a recent study examining the efficacy of equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) with children experiencing issues of complicated loss and bereavement.

Losing someone by means of death, incarceration or abandonment, is difficult and emotionally draining. One population that often faces many losses is inner city children. One way

of dealing with grief, which has been shown to be effective in children, is Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and specifically Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). EAP is a type of therapy, involving horses that is experiential in nature. The horse may be used as a metaphor and serve as a vehicle for effective therapy. (cont. on page 2)



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Giving a Leg-Up, *cont.*

This type of psychotherapy is usually facilitated by a licensed mental health professional along with a credentialed equine professional who work with the clients and horses to target treatment goals (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, 2009).

In EAP, clients learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with horses and then processing their feelings, behaviors, and patterns. Animals have been shown to be a catalyst for social interaction, not only reducing the threat of the therapist during the intervention, but also easing peer interaction. In addition, the animal can provide a sense of safety and acceptance in the therapy session, as well as feelings of self-esteem, capability, and reducing anxiety (Parish-Plass, 2008).

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the effects of EAP on grade school children dealing with issues of complicated bereavement and loss. Specifically, the investigators targeted self-esteem, sense of shared loss and support, academic self-efficacy, locus of control, grief symptoms, and affective regulation and explored whether these variables improve with an intervention of EAP. Participants included three third-grade boys, identified by the school social worker and Child Study Team, who had recently experienced a death or loss. Loss was defined to include the death of a caregiver, or significant relative, incarceration of a parent, relinquishment of parental rights, etc. The children attended five sessions of EAP, which included art therapy, play therapy, observations of the horses' behavior, symbolic discussions, and projection activities.

Outcomes were measured with three self-report inventories. Results indicated that EAP contributed to a significant increase in the children's overall self-esteem. While there were other positive trends seen in the variables, these trends might be better captured with a larger sample size and longer intervention. The mechanism of these changes may be related directly to the child-horse interaction, the social nature of the camp, the removal from a stressful environment, or a combination of these factors.

Although this was a small pilot study, results provide a future direction for measuring change among such variables in bereaved children. Children experiencing the adverse effects of losing someone who is close to them have many issues to deal with before they are able to appropriately function and achieve in school. EAP provides a comfortable and supportive medium to alleviate these adverse effects. It is an exciting prospect to know that studies in this area are increasing in prevalence and will continue to grow in future directions.

"Horses lend us the wings we lack."-

Unknown

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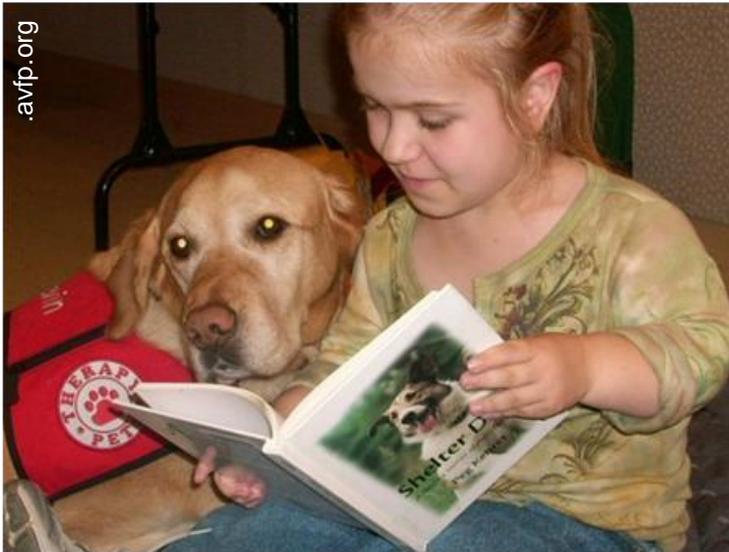
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Toni Welsh is a 3rd year Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology at Seton Hall University and is Chair-Elect of the New Jersey Psychological Association of Graduate Students (NJPAGS). Her primary interest is in pediatric neuropsychology, an area in which she has obtained various externships. Toni has experienced first hand the benefits of the therapeutic effects of horses, as she has been riding horses competitively for 18 years.



The Potential Utility, *cont.*



The people who reported no significant feelings of attachment to their pet conversely reported lower levels of support and comfort during the time of their loss (Adkins & Rajecki, 1999). This suggests that there is potential benefit to having a strong relationship with a companion animal during a significantly stressful event, and that the level of attachment to the companion animal may be as important as the interaction (Adkins & Rajecki, 1999).

One study that sought to investigate if human attachment measures could be applied in parity to animal-human attachment utilized the foundational strange situation with dogs and their owners (Palmer & Custance, 2007). The study found that just like infants, the dogs reacted in predictable attachment categories when placed in the strange situation (Palmer & Custance, 2007). The findings of the study suggested to the investigators that human-dog bonds may in fact replicate infant-like attachment (Palmer & Custance, 2007). This provides strong evidence to not only support the use of human attachment measures in future investigations of human-animal bonds, but also the primacy of animal-human relationships in the lives of many pet owners.

An investigation in 2008 looked at the attachment of people to their romantic partners as well as their pets (Beck & Madresh). The study found that people in both secure and insecurely attached romantic partnerships rated their relationships with pets as more secure on every dimension (Beck & Madresh, 2008). This finding suggests that companion

animals may act as a consistent source of attachment security; similar to what has been found with securely attached infant and caregiver dyads (Beck & Madresh, 2008). Research that uses the construct of human attachment to examine animal-human interactions is still in its early stages. However, what research has been conducted supports the use of human attachment constructs to conceptualize the relationship between pet owners and their animals. There is also evidence to suggest that pets may buffer negative social interactions for their owners, as well as act as a protective factor during times of stress (Beck & Madresh, 2008). Future studies should expand on this research and continue to determine the most efficacious way to utilize attachment measures with the human-animal bond. Investigations that focus on the mediating variables within the human-animal relationship also hold enormous potential for future research.

As counseling psychologists, we are in a prime position to design and implement investigations on the human-animal bond and the interventions that create or alter that relationship. Our field should continue to investigate this important interaction so that we can better understand how the animal-human bond can be used to improve the lives of the people we serve, as well as the lives of their animals.

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Larissa Maley is a second year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Doctoral program at Seton Hall University. She is currently in the process of conducting a study on AHI and attachment and hopes to continue with that area of investigation for her dissertation.



Juno, Gretchen and Larissa

A RAT, STAT !

by Cindy Stuart and Philip Stuart

The Stuart critters have always been integral participants in our family life. Our five rodents, which include year-old rattie brothers Edmar and Ratticus, have always been the source of laughs, love, cuddles and comfort for my husband Philip and myself. Since Philip retired in the summer of 2008, they have also been great company for him, as I work long hours outside the home. In July of 2009 however, they were called upon to perform their most important service ever, adjunct oncology therapists. It was in that month that Philip was diagnosed with stage three pancreatic cancer.

As grim as this diagnosis is, this jointly authored article is, in fact, of an optimistic nature. While pancreatic cancer is almost always terminal, Philip has been advised that he is one of only about 10% of the population with this diagnosis who has, in the words of his pancreatic surgeon, “a great, great, great chance of beating this.” While there are likely a number of biological explanations for his prognosis, we are of the opinion that two important variables has been at work in setting Philip up for successful treatment: Edmar and Ratticus.

From my perspective as a psychologist, as well as having conducted an initial review of the scientific literature, the salience of the mind-body connection to health outcomes is difficult to dispute. Later in this article I will discuss from both a scientific and personal perspective my observations on how this has worked with Phil, but I would like Phil to have the first word on how Edmar and Ratticus have contributed to his quality of life this past



year.

“As a cancer patient, I feel a lack of control over my life. My own self-worth is battered by the sometimes cold, occasionally demeaning nature of my experiences within the overworked, oncological branch of the medical profession.”

“But it’s not that way when I’m with my rats. They love and respect me unconditionally. They don’t know I’m sick. They would care for me more if they knew. When I’m in the room, my dear rodents follow my every move with great interest and intense excitement as if I were the most important creature in the world. With what I’m going through, I’m afraid I need a little of this kind of attention. All they want is to share their day and share their love. At that moment, this is all I want as well! When I’m with my bonded animal friends, I don’t think about my life threatening disease.”

“What’s driving me is to give back some of the affection that they’ve always given to me in full measure. My special rat companions are a tremendous comfort to me. I love them to death, pun intended!”

Fortunately, Phil has responded to chemotherapy and radiation in a manner that few pancreatic cancer patients have. He is beginning to regain lost weight, is increasing his level of activity, and as of his most recent assessment by his oncologist, is in remission and, at least for the time being, requires no chemotherapy. Both of us are convinced that his positive state of mind, in which our rats have had a huge influence, has not only helped to bolster his biological responses, but has enabled him to thus far lead a more full and normal life given the circumstances. Rather than just make this assumption based on a “hunch”, I conducted a review of the literature that, while by no means exhaustive, provides an indication that Philip does indeed have a solid four legged oncology team in his corner.



Perhaps Florence Nightingale, in her 1860 publication *Notes of Nursing*, said it best when she wrote, “A small pet animal is often an excellent companion for the sick” (Beck & Katcher, 2003). Related to Philip’s case, his use of pets is not unique in terms of cancer support. At the Ocean Medical Center in Brick, NJ, their Healing Paws Pet Therapy Program had been proposed by the facility’s Oncology Growth Team to promote the Cancer Rehabilitation Program for patients. The groups identified research that was showing the benefits of pets in the hospital setting. Phyllis Begyn, RN, BSN, OCN, nurse manager of oncology at Ocean Medical Center and chair of the Cancer Clinical Service Team stated that, “It is a wonderful program that benefits patients with cancer of all ages and their families” (Lally, 2007). In yet other hospital settings in the United Kingdom, the Star Wards project has demonstrated that having access to a variety of pets – including rats – reduces stress levels among patients (Nursing Standard, 2008). Furthermore, Edward Creagan, MD, an oncologist at the Mayo Clinic has noted that, “Many times, the family pet can motivate a patient to give her best effort to deal with a serious illness such as cancer.” (Moore, 2002). (cont. on page 5)

A RAT, STAT !, cont.

While it is true that a large part of my husband's outcome thus far is due to his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer being determined before it had spread to Stage 4 and the tumor remained localized, from the perspective of a medical layperson such as myself, his slow but steady recovery has been inexplicable given that pancreatic cancer is almost always fatal with many victims dying within a year of diagnosis. Philip has passed the year marker (!), and his surgeon and oncologist are using him as an example of one of their rare cases of pancreatic cancer with a favorable prognosis. The efforts of his medical team and Philip's stubborn refusal to give up and to utilize any and all treatment protocols proffered are of course major variables. Nevertheless, Philip gives enormous acknowledgement to his entire home care medical team comprised of rodentia. I do feel that Phil's frequent calls to me asking for, "A Rat – STAT!" is a major reason why he remains an active member of the Stuart mischief.

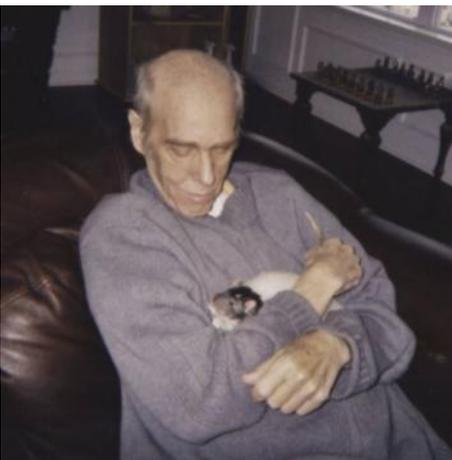
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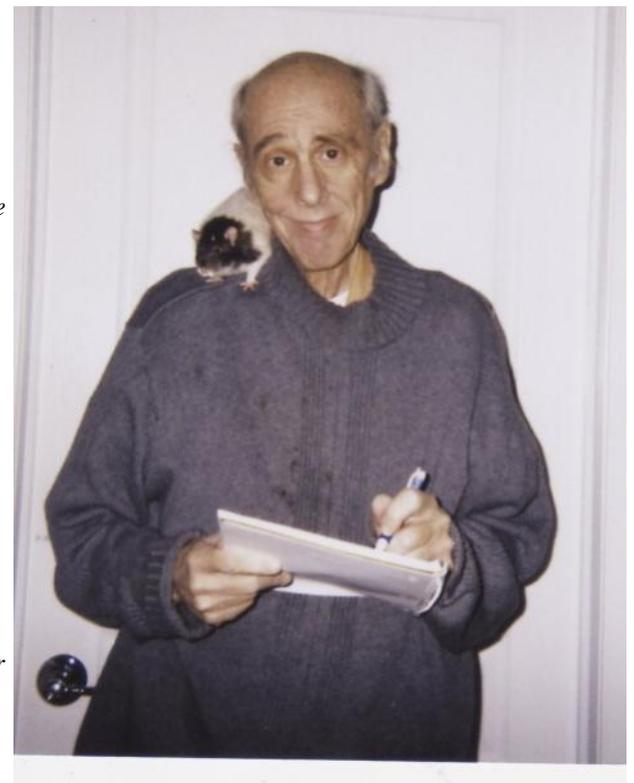
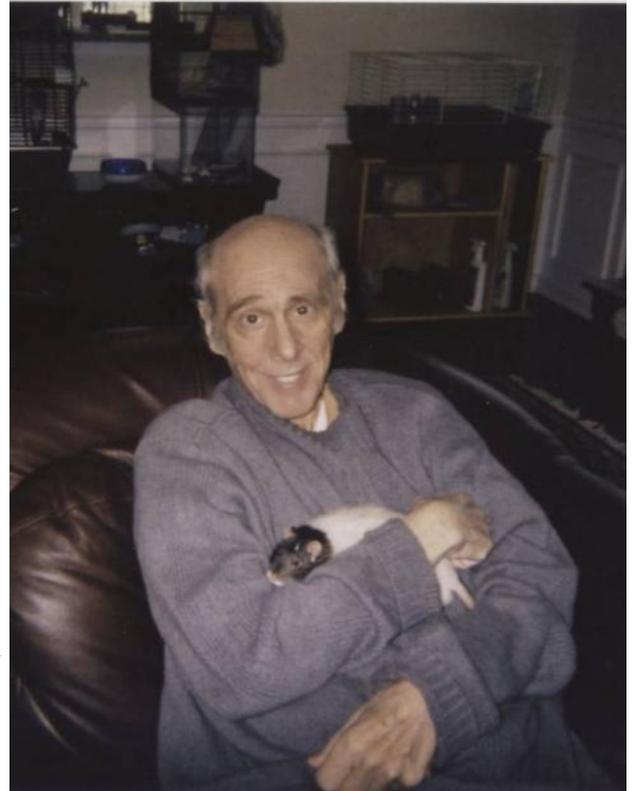
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Cynthia Stuart is a professor of psychology and medical law and ethics who teaches at a junior college and an online four year college in New York. Her special interests are in the areas of adaptation of psychoanalytic theory to multicultural contexts as well as application of psychoanalysis to work with the human-animal bond. She is the extremely proud mother of a fancy rat named Ratmir, two guinea pigs, Hypatia and Athena and a degu, Don Diego del Degu. Cynthia would enjoy hearing from others interested in the human-animal bond.

Philip Stuart worked as an elementary school teacher/administrator with a specialization in gifted education for 40 years. He first became involved with rodents when his wife Cindy rescued what she believed was a small, male rat named Nibbles from being fed to a snake at a local environmental center. Shortly thereafter, Cindy left town to visit her mother. During this period, much to his surprise, Philip approached the cage one morning and discovered a new "mischief" of squirming, just born babies crawling around a befuddled rat mother. Mr. Stuart rolled up his sleeves and a second career as a rattie caregiver began. Happy ending!



Pawsitive Connection

by Alison Leslie and Chuck Thompson



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“This experience meant a lot to me because I enjoy training dogs and I enjoy being around them to. I have learned how to be patient and how to control my frustration. This program is amazing and I wish I could do it again.” (16 year old youth)

The program this youth is referring to is *Pawsitive Connection*, part of the Human Animal Connection Project of CBR Youthconnect (CBRYC). Incorporated over 50 years ago, CBR Youthconnect (formerly Colorado Boys Ranch) has evolved into a modern, highly accredited youth organization providing residential and in-home treatment and education services to at-risk children in child welfare, mental health, education, and juvenile justice systems. Throughout its history, CBRYC has involved animals in accomplishing its mission “to achieve excellence in providing troubled youth with the means to become hopeful and productive citizens” see site: www.cyouthconnect.org.

In 2007, CBRYC extended its nationally recognized *New Leash on Life* dog training program to the Denver area via collaboration with Freedom Service Dogs to create *Pawsitive Connection*. Teaming together, CBRYC provides expertise integrating animal related interventions with children’s mental health and Freedom Service Dogs provides expertise

in rescuing and training dogs and connecting them to adopters and disabled recipients. The result is *Pawsitive Connection*, a program that incorporates emerging science behind the public health approach to children’s mental health and the role of community based programs to prevent and treat youth mental health problems. As *Pawsitive Connection* has evolved, connections were built with Denver University Graduate School of Social Work and its Human Animal Connection Institute.

As defined by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in its publication *Promotion and Prevention in Mental Health: Strengthening Parenting and Enhancing Child Resilience* (2007), mental health is “a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity” (p.6). The goal of *Pawsitive Connection* is to help create a therapeutic environment where youth are able to learn and practice healthy relationships and regulate emotions while also developing character skills including respect, responsibility, and empathy while working with a canine.

Youth from community organizations in the Denver area, including day treatment, residential treatment centers, alternative schools, and after school programs attend *Pawsitive Connection* roughly one time per week for eight to twelve consecutive weeks. Youth practice life skills through learning to train animals who are being screened for training as service dogs. All the training is done using positive reinforcement clicker training, which for many of the youth is the first time they have interacted with a living being using only rewards, encouragement, and love. *Pawsitive Connection* is fundamentally a “Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)” experience. It is a process for helping children develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. Youth learn the skills to recognize and manage their emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively and ethically. *Pawsitive Connection* utilizes the SEL framework because of its proven effectiveness in reducing negative behavior, including violence and bullying, and enhancing positive behavior. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, www.casel.org). (cont on pg 7)



www.decipheringlife.com

Pawsitive Connection

cont.

Over the past three years, 300 youth have participated in *Pawsitive Connection*. Its success is amazing. Agency representatives, including teachers, therapists, and milieu staff, report youth progress while participating in the program. They give examples of normally volatile youth who learn to manage emotions, show concern for others, and stay on task. One youth, who had been involved in and witnessed domestic violence, regularly punched walls when angry and frustrated at his home site. The staff and peers of this youth had commented on how well he managed his frustrations and showed positive emotions of caring and smiling while working with the dogs each week. This youth's empathy score increased by nine points from the beginning of our program to the end, using the valid and reliable Bryant Scale of Empathy.

Currently *Pawsitive Connection* is collecting data including pre-and-post information from participating youth and agency representatives. Additional organizations such as Canine Companions are becoming involved. The next HAI newsletter will include an overview of this data collection and include empirical evidence of the power of *Pawsitive Connection* and the human-animal bond.

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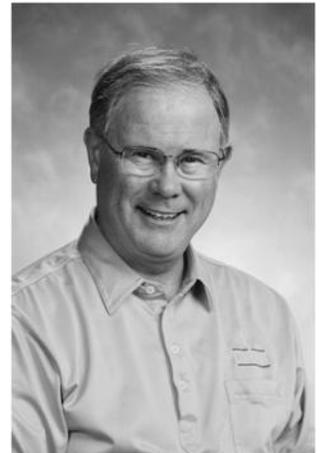
Alison Levy Leslie, MSW, LCSW moved to Colorado in 2003 and received her Master's in Social Work with a certificate in Animal Assisted Social Work from the University of Denver in 2007. Before joining the CBR Youthconnect Family, Alison had been working with at-risk youth in many capacities and provided individual animal assisted

interventions for youth in the foster care system with her personal therapy dog, Marley. Marley and Alison were profiled in the book New Lives: Stories of Rescued Dogs Helping, Healing, and Giving Hope and taught Integration of Animals into Therapeutic Settings through the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work.



Alison and Marley

Chuck Thompson, LCSW, is President/CEO of CBR YouthConnect and a champion for social emotional learning via human interaction with nature.



It Takes A Big Dog to Help Your Child Stand Up To Bullying

by James Feinberg

To the trained nose or eye, it's no mystery why some children are bullied. Basically, these children behave differently than their peers. However, children who are bullied are actually as different from each other as are the reasons they are bullied. For example, some of these children are shy and timid, others are impulsive and jump in feet first without first thinking, and still others are out of sync and act oddly. What these children have in common is that none of them know what to do to stop the bullying and be accepted by their peers. Over time, many of these children will develop low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and increasing despair about their inability to connect with others.

Even though bullied children are a diverse group, adults frequently tell all of them to seek assistance from their teachers when they are being mistreated. Although we need to protect children, this overly simplistic approach only perpetuates the problem because it essentially disempowers these children by not teaching them anything about themselves, their behavior, nor why they are being mistreated by their peers.

You can't fix it (i.e. bullying), if you don't know what's broken. For this reason, a thorough evaluation is indicated and should always precede any type of intervention. This entails interviewing and observing parents and their children as well as obtaining teacher feedback on peer interactions. Sometimes, actually observing the bullied child in the classroom is warranted as well. Only by gathering data can one determine what a child is and isn't doing that makes him/her vulnerable to bullying.

It takes an expert with specialized education and training as well as extensive experience to interview/observe children and then determine what the problem(s) is. Dude is the man - I mean the therapy dog - for the job! He is a wise German Shep-

herd who puts kids at ease by his loving and gentle presence. However, he's much more than just another pretty face. The way in which bullied children interact with him and his feedback to them verbally mediated by myself, provide ample and repetitive opportunities for these distressed children to figure out what to do differently in social situations and thereby improve their self-esteem, social awareness, social judgment, social skills, and social confidence as well as impulse control.



Advocacy.britannica.com

Dude and Dr. James Feinberg, Child Clinical Psychologist, are located at 10900 Manchester Road, Suite 201, Kirkwood, Missouri 63122. They can be reached at 314-966-0880.



Dude

Treating Abuse with the Help of a Horse

by Marilyn Sokolof

INTRODUCTION

Individuals who have suffered through experiences of abuse may find themselves seeking therapy to help revoke the damages. These damages include patterns of behavior and emotions that are hurtful in their relationships to others, and to themselves. As a licensed psychologist and a certified therapeutic riding instructor, my goal is to provide these clients an opportunity to work through their issues in an experiential format, including horses as facilitators. Issues of abuse get provoked, processed and transformed.

In equine facilitated psychotherapy (EFP), the therapeutic triad is defined as the client, me, and the horse. Therapeutic interventions are designed to be relationship-based, sometimes planned ahead of time, and sometimes generated spontaneously based on what the clients bring for that day. We dialogue in the barn, before, during and after the interactions with the horse.

ISSUES OF ABUSE ADDRESSED WITH THE HELP OF THE HORSE

Some issues of abuse addressed through EFP are:

Fear/Safety

Horses, because of their size, power and reputation, can create fear. In persons who have been abused, triggering that fear, and teaching how to manage fear while experiencing it, can



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provide skills for coping. For example, a teenage boy, with emotional and behavior problems related to an abuse history, typically acted out when experiencing strong emotions. When asked to approach a horse standing in its stall, he stopped in his tracks and said, "I'm really terrified." This defining therapeutic moment helped him speak his fear, a significant step in his recovery. He really wanted to get to know this horse, a common factor that motivates participation in the process.

I encouraged him to approach the horse in small steps and according to his comfort level, joined him in deep breathing to counteract the physiology of fear, and provided support and assistance ("Let me go first, and you follow me").

Control issues/ Empowerment
Abuse victims have been in situations where they did not have control and the

lack of control was dangerous and damaging. Later in life, various behavioral reactions to exercising control can be impulsive, compulsive, and inappropriate. In EFP, clients can learn appropriate ways to assert themselves. For example, how clients ask a horse to take a step, (i.e., is it with firm hand pressure and clear intention or are they too timid to be effective), can be diagnostic. Further encouragement may result in client resistance (projection of "I don't want to force the horse to do anything he doesn't want") or panic ("what if the horse retaliates when I try to assert myself?"). As you can see, the potential for deep discussion rises to the surface. Through processing, support, and recognition of the actual positive response from the horse in the face of appropriate assertiveness, clients are able to address anxiety about control and replace it with empowerment.

Poor self-esteem/Confidence through mastery
Victims of abuse often suffer with poor self-esteem. Sometimes they hold beliefs that they "deserved" to be beaten, or that the yelling and accusations from the abuser about them must be true. The opportunity to develop a positive sense of self is thwarted. For both youth and adults, the confidence achieved through mastery of horsemanship skills, as well as mastery of emotional responsiveness, can enhance self-worth enormously. (cont on pg. 10)



Treating Abuse with the Help of a Horse, *cont.*



Marilyn

Marilyn Sokolof, PhD, is a licensed psychologist with private practices in Gainesville and Ocala, Fl. Additionally, she has provided equine facilitated psychotherapy for over ten years, and is Clinical Director of HorseMpower, Inc. She is past president of the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association, and is a co-teacher for the NARHA Equine Specialist Training Workshop. She has authored articles and book chapters and presented at professional psychology and equine conferences.

Dr. Sokolof is available for training and consultation. She can be reached at: msokolof@aol.com.

Detachment/Connection

In order to survive in the presence of abuse, individuals often manifest a defense mechanism of detachment, a disconnect from the present while undergoing the abuse. The good news is that the unbearable pain of the experience becomes blunted. The bad news is that this can become an unhealthy pattern of disconnection from emotional feelings and/or physical sensation that continues through their lives. Activities in the barn, with the horses, awaken the client in a gentle and non-threatening way. A teen-age girl standing next to a horse, instructed to witness the horse through her senses (sight, touch, hearing, smelling) began crying, stating "That's the first time I've felt my body since I was raped, and it feels so good!" Emotional connection to the horses, who do not judge, criticize, or beat the client, can be an important step in establishing satisfying connections.

Trauma/Healing

Contact with animals has shown to have physiological and psychological benefits. Horses' reliance on the herd for safety makes them interdependent, social creatures. They rely on, and are open to, attachment. This honest, affectionate relationship between horse and client is the foundation for emotional healing. A recent description by one client of her horse's gentle nature described it perfectly. "Lucy is like comfort food."

CLOSING

Those of us fortunate enough to have horses in our lives know the deep emotional support and fulfillment that comes from having a horse wrap its neck around you, snuffle in your ear, or just "be with" you. Like many other therapeutic animals, their soft, solid presence is strong medicine.



Marilyn



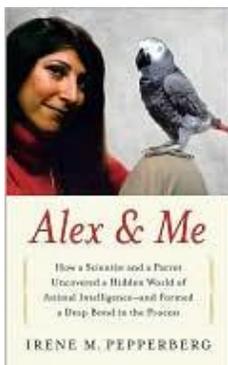
Animals in Print

A book review column centered
on Animal-Human relationships

by Arieahn Matamonasa Bennett, Ph.D.

Shifting Paradigms – Pioneers in the Science of Animal-human Relationships

Alex & Me: How a scientist and a parrot discovered a hidden world of animal intelligence – and formed a deep bond in the process by Irene M. Pepperberg Harper Publishing (2008)



In this moving book, research scientist Irene Pepperberg chronicles the account of her 30-year relationship with Alex - an African Grey parrot. In *The Alex Studies: Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots* (1999), Pepperberg's work with Alex disproved the widely accepted idea that

birds possess no potential for language or anything remotely related to human intelligence. *Alex & Me* continues this work and details the evolution of Pepperberg's long-term collaboration with Alex that began as a researcher-subject relationship and ended as an intimate friendship. Pepperberg does her best to approach her work with Alex in the most objective and scientific way, yet her research and his communication lead her to develop a deep bond with him.

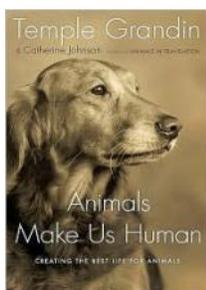
This book provides a rare inside glimpse into the highs and lows of doing groundbreaking research in this area along with a personal look into the way Pepperberg's life was impacted by her relationship with Alex. What is clear throughout the book are the career-long struggles Pepperberg has faced as a scientist in academia who has challenged accepted theories on animal language and intelligence.

Pepperberg's bravery is evident not only because she has weathered a difficult research path, but in that she allowed herself to love Alex – and ultimately, grieve his passing.

Animals make us human: Creating the best life for animals by Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2009)

"Being a pioneer is hard..." Temple Grandin p.251

This book follows *Animals in Translation*:



Using the mysteries of autism to decode animal behavior. In *Animals make us human*, the authors challenge current paradigms and assumptions regarding animal behaviors, social structures and emotions and the impact of re-thinking these concepts on animal-human relationships

with a variety of animals including domestic animals, farm animals, wildlife and zoo animals. Based on the work of Jaak Panksepp (*Affective neuroscience: the foundation of human and animal emotion*, 1998), the authors assert that everyone who is responsible for animals - including farmers, ranchers, zookeepers and pet owners - need a set of simple, reliable guidelines for creating adequate animal mental welfare. The authors utilize animals' core emotions as a guide and recom-

mend avoiding stimulating rage, fear or panic and instead, creating situations that stimulate play and seeking emotions. Additionally, they recommend providing environments that will keep animals occupied and prevent the development of stereotypes.

Temple Grandin discusses the difficulties in being a pioneer and challenging currently accepted paradigms. She discussed the clashes that exist between those in the field versus bench/lab scientists and academia. She emphasizes the qualities that each discipline can contribute and the need for these two groups to work together to advance our understanding of animal intelligence, emotion and behavior, and ultimately animal welfare. She concludes the book with a section on why she continues to work for the slaughter industry.

Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett, Ph.D. is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and a certified EAGALA practitioner. She is part of the treatment staff at Reins of Change and is an Assistant Professor at DePaul University in Chicago.



Horse and Human Interaction: Current Psychosocial Research and Future Directions

by Tira Stebbins



In the Animal Human Interaction: Research & Practice Newsletter (January 2010), “Horse and Human Interaction: Therapeutic Intervention and Education” explored the history of how horse-human interaction has become a well-defined and strongly-supported therapeutic and educational intervention. Over the last 15 years or so the field of psychology has emphasized the importance of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP), or integrating the best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values in promoting effective psychological practice and enhancing public health (APA, 2006). Presently there exists strong anecdotal evidence that Equine Assisted Activities (EAA) is effective in addressing a variety of physical and emotional problems in humans; however, there is little scholarly research to support these findings. The majority of existing empirical research in the field of EAA has focused on the impact of therapeutic riding on physical and neuromuscular issues, rather than the psychosocial effects of participation (Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne, & Vanden Bosch, 2004).

The majority of psychosocial EAA scholarly research has been qualitative, with results indicating positive effects associated with participation in EAA programs (Kaiser, et al., 2004). Quantitative research has been scant, with mixed results and methodological problems. Researchers across studies have called for the need to increase empirical research, particularly quantitative research, in

the area of EAA (e.g., Kaiser, et al., 2004; Miller & Alston, 2004).

A number of qualitative research studies have investigated therapeutic effects of the horse-human relationship. Yorke, Adams, and Coady (2008) found that in a group of adults who had experienced significant trauma (e.g., traumatic brain injury, diagnosis of a serious disease), participants’ relationships with their horses contributed significantly to their healing from trauma. The researchers suggested parallels between good

equine-human relationships and good psychotherapist-client relationships, in terms of the nature of the bonds and their therapeutic effects (Yorke, et al., 2008). Burgon (2003) examined the psychotherapeutic effect of a therapeutic riding program on six Caucasian women in the United Kingdom receiving mental health social services for mental health disorders including depression and schizophrenia. Results indicated the largest effect in confidence; the horses themselves provided motivation for the participants to try and commit to a new experience, participants perceived that the horses related to humans in a non-judgmental way, they perceived the barn milieu to be non-judgmental and safe, and the opportunity to master a new skill led to confidence in other social situations (Burgon, 2003, p. 273).

Along with qualitative studies, there have been mixed methods and quantitative studies investigating the therapeutic effects of EAA; however, many of these studies have included design flaws such as a small sample size or the absence of a control group. Hakanson, Moller, Lindstrom, and Mattsson (2009) used a mixed methods design to investigate the effects of an Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) program on 24 patients with chronic back pain in Sweden. Results indicated patients reported improvements in self-confidence, body control, and sleep, as well as some pain relief; however, due to drop-out rates there were not enough participants to provide credible statistical analysis of quantitative measures. (Hakanson, et al., 2009, p. 49). (cont on pg. 13)



Welcome new section members!!

Allison Powers
Nancy Johnson
Heather Lum
Patricia Pendry
Katherine Alexander
Jay Hoots
Melanie Daye
Anne Kraft
Maria Webb
Kirby Wycoff
David Anderson
Barbara Wolf-Dorlester
Carl Bello
Elizabeth Seward
Nuria Querol Vinas
Lyn Goya
Shawn Marsh
Amanda Williams

Horse and Human Interaction, *cont.*

One example of quantitative methodology involved a pilot study evaluating the effects of a five-day EAA program on measures of children's anger, quality of life, and perceived self-competence (Kaiser, et al., 2004, p. 65). Results indicated that, although the sample collectively had anger scores within the normal range at pre-test, the total score on the anger measure decreased significantly by the end of day five. Additionally, scores of physical aggression, peer relationships, and authority relations also decreased significantly between pre- and post-tests. In another quantitative study, Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, and Klontz (2007) investigated the effects of EAA on adults from a residential program who participated in 28 total hours of Equine-Assisted Experiential Therapy (EAET) sessions in a group therapy format. Results indicated that significant and stable reductions in overall psychological distress and improvements in psychological well being.

Finally, Bass, Duchowny, and Llabre (2009) conducted a quantitative study investigating the effect of a therapeutic horseback riding program on social functioning of 34 children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Results indicated that, compared to wait-listed participants, children in the experimental group improved in critical areas such as sensory integration and directed attention, as well as improved social motivation and sensory sensitivity, and decreased inattention and distractibility.

Initial studies, such as those described above, contribute to the ever-growing body of



scholarly research on the effects of EAA on psychosocial factors. As would be expected, conducting EAA research can be costly and resources in the form of grants are needed. One exciting source of research funding is that Horses and Humans Research Foundation (HHRF). Founded in 2002, HHRF's primary goal is to "support, promote and fund scientific research that explores the claimed, yet unsubstantiated benefits of equine-assisted activities and therapies, leading to the discovery of the most effective methods and techniques for conducting thousands of existing and future programs" (HHRF, 2007). Foundations such as HHRF, and others who support and promote EAA research, provide essential means for building the body of scholarly research and exploring EAA as an Evidence-Based Practice for various populations.

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Tira is a 4th year doctoral student at Cleveland State University in Counseling Psychology. She earned her MA in clinical psychology from East Carolina University in 1999. She currently works as a psychotherapist at Bellefaire JCB in Shaker Heights, OH -- a non-profit agency that provides residential treatment, foster care and adoption, and other community mental health services. Tira has owned horses all her life and plans to do her dissertation on therapeutic riding.



PATH...To Success: An equine assisted growth and learning program by Phyllis Erdman, Sue Jacobson, Patricia Pendry

PATH...to Success is an equine assisted growth and learning program that is directed at healthy youth development. It was developed at Washington State University (WSU) by Sue Jacobson (Director of the People Pet Partnership program in the College of Veterinary Medicine) and Phyllis Erdman in the fall of 2008. It began as an extension of the Palouse Area Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) program at WSU, which is a Premier Accredited Center of the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA). PATH was established in 1979 to provide recreational, therapeutic horseback riding lessons for youth and adults with disabilities.

The goal of PATH...to Success is to enhance children's social competency and well-being. The program consists of weekly after-school sessions in which activities involving

PATH horses are used to help children develop better communication and leadership skills, greater self-awareness and esteem, and positive approaches to cope with life stress. PATH...to Success is currently the focus of a comprehensive study to examine its effects on children and youth.

When Sue and I first conceptualized the program, we made a good team, as she has extensive horsemanship experience and is a



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NARHA certified instructor, and I have a mental health/family therapy background that includes animal-assisted work with dogs and children. I remembered fondly the impact the dogs had on helping children build communication skills and developing empathy. After realizing there was very little research that documents the impact of equine interventions, and with some start up funds from the College of Education, we launched the program in October of 2008.

Concurrently, we also started an evaluation of its effects. We began with four children who were referred

through school counselors, and four experienced therapeutic horses from our PATH program. Children in our program were referred for various reasons that included experiencing challenges at school and/or home, struggling with externalizing behavior, social competence and establishing positive peer relationships. Although our participants experience various challenges, an important characteristic of our perspective and program is that we strongly discourage the labeling of our participants as 'at risk children.'

After studying numerous assessments to determine how we could best measure changes in behaviors, we decided to include a pre- and post- behavioral checklist and use the Harter Self Perception Profile for Children. We ran a 10-week program in the fall of 2008 and again in the spring, and ran a second program in the fall and spring of 2009. Needless to say, that first pilot program taught us many lessons. (cont. on page 15).

PATH...To Success: An equine assisted growth and learning program, *cont.*

We will be offering the program this fall for the third year, and have just been joined by a third team member, Patricia Pendry, who is a faculty member from the Department of Human Development at WSU. Patricia will be conducting an extensive, 2-year study on the effects of our program on various aspects of child development. Funded by NIH, the study will measure effects on the social competence of 5th through 8th grade children, as well as on children's physiological markers of stress-system activity – salivary cortisol levels - to determine whether effects of the intervention can be explained by changes in basal activity of the Hypothalamic Pituitary Adrenal Axis, one of the main systems regulating physiological and behavioral responses to psychological stress.

With the two previous years of experience now behind us, the three of us recently completed an outstanding week of curriculum development and equine training with Priscilla Marden with the Horse Warriors program in Jackson, WY, where we were mentored by nationally known specialists in the field of equine mental health and learning programs, including Priscilla, Martha McNeil with Dream Power Horsemanship in San Martin, CA, and Barbara Rector with Adventures in Awareness in Tucson, AZ. Although it has taken us two years to develop our program, refine our curriculum, and clearly identify the goals of our program, we think we are now



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positioned to become a well-known equine facilitated learning program targeted for elementary and middle school children to help them enhance their social emotional development and build relationship skills, hence contributing to their success in school. Our long-term goal is to serve as a preventive, school- and community-based program for all children, to allow for the prevention and early detection of various mental health challenges. One of the most exciting components of our program is we will soon have experimentally-based results to help measure the impact of equine interventions observed and accomplished by many experienced practitioners in the field. We are excited about our progress and hope to share our findings with many of you who are thinking about such a program or have already started one.

Phyllis Erdman, Ph.D. in Family Therapy, is the Interim Dean for the College of Education at Washington State University. Phyllis is a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and has done clinical work and research on attachment theory and its impact on family/child relationships and couples. She has always had an interest in the animal/human bond and worked with elementary children and therapy dogs during her doctoral internship.



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Phyllis and Beau

One Step Leads to Another by Barbara Wolf-Dorlester



Barbara and Moxie

I didn't plan it that way, I had no idea it would happen, it took me by surprise because I had never thought of having a relationship with a dog. (I considered writing 'owning a dog,' but I now know that this is not an apt description). My children were the ones who clamored for a dog to add to our menagerie of fish, cats and hamsters. My response was, "Sure, when the hamsters die," which inevitably they did. So, our first dog, a Kerry Blue Terrier named Tess, became a member of our family.

Tess was a family pet, and because she was our first dog, we knew very little about training. Despite our lack of knowledge, Tess managed to become a reasonably obedient, kind and friendly companion. As my elderly mother aged and entered an assisted living facility, Tess became a frequent visitor at the facility, bringing joy not only to her, but to all the residents who asked to "pet the dog." After watching this exchange of affection, I vowed to certify my next dog as a therapy dog so that we could legitimately volunteer as a therapy team in various institutions. And I did.

While I easily figured out the logistics of becoming a therapy team with my new Kerry Blue Terrier puppy, Moxie, I was completely unprepared for the emotional, psychological and professional transformation that I am now

undergoing. Basic puppy obedience training started my education into how dogs learn, think and communicate although I had thought that I just wanted to learn how to make Moxie listen to me. As I became more attuned to Moxie's communications, our relationship deepened and I realized that she could participate in deciding what kind of professional life we could share. She was intuitively attracted to children as I discovered by her constantly approaching any child on the street while ignoring the adults. She relished playing with any toy that was presented to her. Her eyes lit up and her tail wagged with anticipation when she was asked to "walk Daisy," her cat pull toy, or take a turn pulling out a puzzle piece from a child's puzzle. She eagerly helped a child learn to read by "touching" the phonemic cards that had to be decoded and she encouraged an impulsive child to learn self-control by "going" or "stopping" when he held up the "go" and "stop" traffic signs. We are beginning to work with children on the autism spectrum and I would love to hear from other people who are working with this population.

I realize that Moxie and I are just beginning to explore the possibilities out there. I know that our experience of growing together is not

unique and that everyone has a personal story about why and how they began to work with their dog. However, I am astonished by the passion that I feel for our work together. I have always loved being a psychologist and felt tremendous gratification from helping people feel better and improve their life, but working with Moxie is different. For me, I think the difference comes from seeing and feeling the immediate pleasure that Moxie gives to people - it's those mirror neurons at work.

Barbara Wolf-Dorlester, Ph.D. is a N.Y.S. licensed psychologist who has been in private practice for 30 years. For many of those years, she has worked with children and adults with special needs. As Program Director of the Social Skills Enrichment Program at Churchill School and Center in New York City, she developed and ran an after-school social skills program for children with special needs. For the past twelve years, she has been the part-time psychologist in the Lower School of Trevor Day School. In her private practice, she performs neuropsychological evaluations and psychotherapy, and consults with multiple schools. She is the Executive Director of Puppies For Emotive Therapy (P.E.T.), PLLC. (www.puppiesforemotivetherapy.com) She and Moxie, her three year old Kerry Blue Terrier, derive great joy from working with people with special needs.



Barbara and Moxie



Section News

Business Meeting

Thursday, August 12, 4:00 - 4:50 PM
SCP Hospitality Suite

Conversation Hour

Friday, August 13, 10 - 12 AM
SCP Hospitality Suite

Symposium

Assessment of Animal Abuse in the Context of Interpersonal Violence
Sat Aug 14 11:00-11:50 AM
Room 29C San Diego Convention Center
Maya Gupta, PhD
Frank Ascione, PhD
Michael Vaughn, PhD

Maya Gupta, Ph.D. is Executive Director of Ahimsa House, Georgia's only nonprofit organization dedicated to helping human and animal victims of domestic violence statewide reach safety together. Her research has focused on applying batterer typologies to the exploration of links between animal abuse and intimate partner violence. She also serves on the Animal Cruelty Advisory Council of the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, the Steering Committee of the National Link Coalition, and the Board of Directors of the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Pursuing another aspect of the connections between animals and interpersonal violence, she is currently leading an evaluation of the HSUS's End Dogfighting Campaign in Chicago and Atlanta. Dr. Gupta is the Chair-elect of the Section.



Frank Ascione

Professor Frank R. Ascione's recent research examines the common roots of violence toward people and animals and is directed at identifying an early indicator of at-risk status in children. He has collaborated with human services, social work and child development staff working with abused children, with youth corrections personnel and with state shelters for women who are battered. His recent work has been supported by the American Humane Association, the Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

Dr. Ascione has provided information or testimony for the state legislatures of Utah, Ohio, Colorado, Tennessee, and Washington, regarding cruelty to animals legislation. He has appeared on CNN's "Live from the Headlines" and the Oprah Winfrey Show, had his research cited in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and Oprah Winfrey's magazine, *O*, and has been a guest on numerous local, national, and international television and radio programs.



Michael Vaughn is a nationally recognized scholar in the areas of adolescent antisocial behavior, substance abuse, violence, delinquency, and juvenile psychopathy. Several past projects have also examined problems faced by juvenile offenders and transition issues of foster youth. Another area of focus involves developing and testing a transdisciplinary biosocial public health model for research and intervention applications using twin samples and large national data sets.



Michael Vaughn

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ANIMAL/HUMAN INTERACTION: RESEARCH AND PRACTICE SECTION

Society of Counseling Psychology, Division 17

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2010 p. 2

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- ____ Cross-cultural aspects of animal/human interactions
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