

An investigation of human-animal interactions and empathy as related to pet preference, ownership, attachment, and attitudes in children.

Daly & Morton (Anthrozoos. 2006)

A group of elementary students (n=155) were surveyed with respect to four aspects of relationships with pets - preference, ownership, attachment, and attitude - in order to further explore the connection that appears to exist between human-animal interactions and empathy. The investigation was initiated, in part, in order to elaborate upon findings from an earlier study (Daly and Morton 2003) and focused mainly on the relationships between children and dogs and cats, although horses, birds, and fish were also included. Some of the general findings related to dogs and cats are: (1) children who preferred (Pet Preference Inventory) both dogs and cats were more empathic than those who preferred cats or dogs only; (2) those who owned both dogs and cats were more empathic than those who owned only a dog, owned only a cat, or who owned neither; (3) those who were highly attached to their pets (Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale) were more empathic than those who were less attached; and (4) empathy and positive attitude (Pet Attitude Scale) revealed a significant positive correlation. As expected, girls were significantly more empathic than boys. Moreover, while cell sizes were low with respect to pet preference and ownership, empathy was also higher for individuals who expressed a preference for birds and horses. While the earlier study (Daly and Morton 2003) indicated that higher empathy was associated with dog ownership more so than other pets, including cats, a notable finding of the present study is that empathy appears to be positively associated with individuals who prefer, and/or who own, both a dog and a cat. The implications extend to the need: (1) for continued empirical research investigating the relationship between human-animal interactions and empathy; and (2) to refine the questions that lead to a clearer explanation of this relationship.

Can Pets Function as Family Members?

Cohen S (W. J. N. R, 2002)

This exploratory study investigated how clients of a large urban veterinary center viewed the role of their pet in the family and how they compared this role to that of humans. In Phase 1, randomly selected clients (N = 201) completed a questionnaire containing scales delineating family relationships and pet attachment. Being either a man or a college graduate was associated with lesser feelings of psychological kinship and intimacy, both with pets and people. Neither living with a partner nor having a child affected the strength of pet relationships. In Phase 2, 16 participants from Phase 1 completed a social network instrument and answered questions about family roles and boundaries. Thirteen of the 16 respondents said that there were circumstances in which they would give a scarce drug to their pet in preference to a person outside the family.

Attitudes toward animals among Norwegian children and adolescents: species preferences

Bjerke, Odegardstuen & Kaltenborn (Athrozoos, 1998)

562 children and adolescents (9 and 15 years), from one urban and 3 rural areas in southern Norway, completed a questionnaire on their degree of preference for various animal species. The dog, cat, horse, and rabbit were the favourite species, while the crow, worm, bee, and spider were the least liked. Girls were more positive toward horses, and were more pet-orientated than boys, while more boys than girls preferred wild animals. Younger respondents liked animals more than did 15-year-olds, with a few exceptions: the wolf, bear, and whale. Urban respondents liked animals more than rural respondents, a finding which applied to the large carnivores in particular. Interests in wildlife decreased with age, and few respondents wished to save ecologically-significant species (ants, bees, ladybirds) from extinction

Social acknowledgments for children with disabilities: effects of service dogs

Mader, Hart, et al. (Child Development, 1989).

While service dogs are known to perform important tasks for people using wheelchairs, such as retrieving dropped items or pulling a wheelchair, they may also serve as an antidote for social ostracism. Adults in wheelchairs have been found to receive many more social acknowledgements when a service dog is

present than when not. This study examined whether disabled children in wheelchairs with service dogs receive more frequent social acknowledgment than when no dog is present. Behaviors of passersby in response to children in wheelchairs were recorded in shopping malls and on school playgrounds. In both settings, social acknowledgments (e.g., friendly glances, smiles, and conversations) were substantially more frequent when a service dog was present. Social effects of the dog were more pronounced in shopping malls, typical of unfamiliar settings where the child would be likely to experience being ignored or overlooked. Service dogs may assist in normalizing the social interactions for children with disabilities producing social isolation.

Pet care: A vehicle for learning

Law & Scott (J/Focus Autistic Beh, 1995).

Educational programming for individuals with pervasive developmental delay (PDD)/autism is comprehensive in nature. In utilizing the ARCH model (Law & Scott, 1989), educators design and implement myriad activities that comprise academics and recreational and community and home skills. A purposeful activity that integrates the home/community elements of this model involves the care and handling of domestic animals within the confines of the classroom. Pet care routines can effectively operate in both mainstream and self-contained settings, proving to be beneficial for all learners. The rationale for instituting this innovative endeavor is multifaceted. The authors have observed that some children with PDD/autism exhibit anxiety or excessive fear when in contact with animals.

Slovakian Pupils' Knowledge of, and Attitudes toward, Birds

Prokop, Kubiak & Fančovičová (Anthrozoos, 2008)

As the world's biodiversity is being destroyed, costs for nature protection activities increase. One proposed way to increase people's pro-environmental attitudes is to increase their knowledge base. It has been suggested that knowledge and attitudes are related, but no consensus in this field yet exists. Thus, the investigation of the relationship between attitudes and knowledge has valuable implications for nature protection programs. In this paper, we investigated relationships between Slovakian grammar school pupils' attitudes to, and knowledge of, birds ($n = 402$ participants aged 10-19 years). We found that factual knowledge about birds was positively related to pupils' attitudes toward birds. Interestingly, younger pupils had better knowledge of birds than older pupils. Regarding attitudes, higher scores were registered for the Concern for Birds and Avoidance of Birds dimensions than the Interest in Birds dimension. Females showed more positive attitudes in the Avoidance of Birds dimension compared with males, and bird owners scored higher in the Interest in Birds dimension and lower in the Concern for Birds dimension compared with non-bird owners. Implications for nature protection programs are discussed.

Comparison of Children's Behavior toward Sony's Robotic Dog AIBO and a Real Dog: A Pilot Study

Ribi, Yokoyama & Turner (Anthrozoos, 2008)

A comparison of children's behavior toward Sony's robotic dog AIBO™ (ERS-210) and a similar sized live dog was made over time. Fourteen children between three and six years of age from a kindergarten and a pre-school play group in Zurich, Switzerland, were visited once a week for eleven weeks with the live dog and subsequently for eleven weeks with AIBO. We investigated the children's spatial proximity toward AIBO and the live dog, and the rate of stroking and touching, the overall rate of interactions, and the rate of laughing in the presence of AIBO and the live dog. The children refused to participate in 18.2% of the sessions with the live dog and in 30.5% of the sessions with AIBO. Children who participated initiated approaches to AIBO significantly more often than to the live dog over the observation period. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the live dog and AIBO initiating the very first contact, even though the live dog approached the children 24 times in 126 sessions, while AIBO approached the children only ten times in 107 sessions. The children tended to interact more with AIBO than with the dog. For example, AIBO was touched more often than the dog and there was also less laughter with the dog than with AIBO, but these differences were not significant. In contrast, the dog was stroked significantly

more often than AIBO. AIBO started to play ball 44 times whereas the dog only started to play once. That the dog did not often play with a ball, whereas AIBO did, may have played an important role because the children liked this characteristic. That children touched and interacted more with AIBO could be because dogs are widespread in their society and therefore sometimes taken for granted. Nevertheless, 10 out of 14 children said they preferred the dog, three said both, and only one preferred AIBO. Because of the small sample size, strong conclusions can not be drawn from this study, but it may open the door for further research on human-pet and human-robot social interactions.