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Ethical and Welfare Considerations for Animals in Therapeutic Settings

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Institute for
Human • Animal
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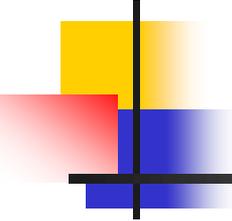
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Animal-Assisted Interventions

- AAIs are defined as “any therapeutic intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals as part of the therapeutic process or milieu”
- Current ethical standards in AAIs have not undergone systemic review, and are not supported by empirical evidence that has evaluated the potential for harm to the animal participants

(Serpell, Coppinger, Fine, & Peralta, 2010, p. 481)

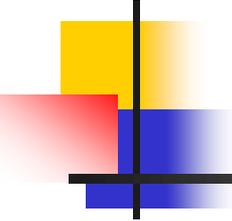




Animal-Assisted Interventions

- **78.2M dogs and 86.4M cats in the US¹**
- **60-70% of US homes have at least one pet¹** with a majority viewing companion animals as “members of the family”
- **Pet Partners:** 11,000 teams serving *over one million people* each year²
- **Therapy Dogs International:** 24,000 dog/handler teams in 2011³
- **Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International:** 800 member centers, 6300 individuals serving 42,000 clients each year⁴

¹(ASPCA, 2012) ²(Pet Partners, 2012) ³(TDI, 2012) ⁴(PATH Int’l, 2012)



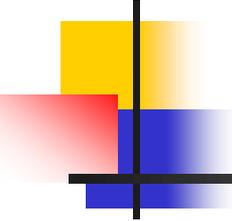
Animal-Assisted Interventions

- “...while the benefits to the humans... may be obvious, the benefits to the animals are by no means always self-evident... the use of animals for animal-assisted activities and therapy imposes a **unique set of stresses and strains** on them that the ‘industry’ has only recently begun to acknowledge”¹
- If it’s not beneficial to the animal involved, it is unlikely to be therapeutic for the human²
- “Halo Effect” – intensely positive social perception of service and/or therapy animals³

¹(Serpell et al, 2010, p. 497)

²(Trujillo, Tedeschi & Williams, 2011)

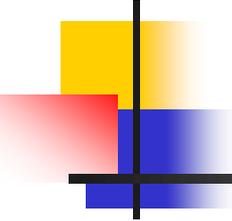
³(Burrows et al, 2008)



Animal Welfare in AAls

Areas of Concern:

- **Lack of research into the physiological, psychological impacts of therapeutic and/or service work *on the animals***
- **Lack of industry-accepted code of ethics, standards of training and practice, welfare guidelines**
- **Untested models and applications with ever-increasing populations**
- **No standardized temperament or training qualifications**
- **No standardized training requirements for handlers, practitioners**
- **No regulations regarding working conditions (hours, breaks, age/health restrictions)**
- **Issues surrounding retirement**



Utilitarianism – Animal Welfare

“The question is not, *Can they reason?*
nor *Can they talk?* but,

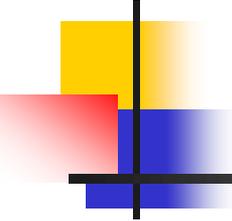
Can they suffer?”



~ **Jeremy Bentham**

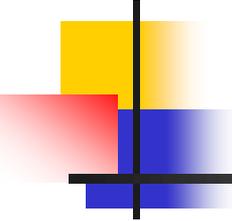
An Introduction to the Principles of

Morals and Legislation (1789)



Utilitarianism

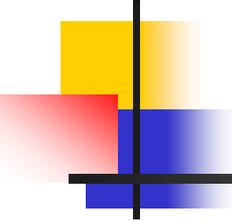
- Developed by Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill
- Ethical approach based on pleasure/pain summations
- “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few”
- Animal ethicist Peter Singer’s ‘speciesism’



Utilitarianism

Strengths:

- Greatly reduced animal suffering on a global scale
- Allows for reasoned decision-making processes with regards to animal use for human benefit
- Intuitive and useful across personal, academic, political and social domains



Utilitarianism

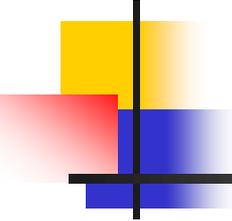
Challenges:

- Subjective and ephemeral calculus
- Biases likely with regards to speciesism, anthropocentrism
- Difficulties with quantifiable pain assessments in animals
- Lack of focus at an individual level

The Capabilities Approach

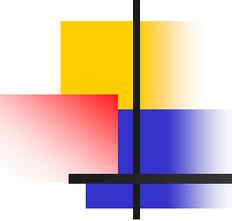
“Animals are entitled to a wide range of capabilities to function, those that are most essential to a flourishing life, a life worthy of the dignity of each creature. Animals have entitlements based upon justice.” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 392)





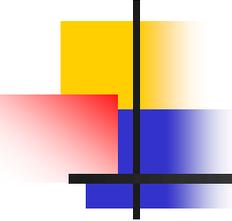
The Capabilities Approach

- Developed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum and Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen
- Utilized by international organizations such as the United Nations and by countries to determine a more holistic assessment of quality of life than GDP



The Capabilities Approach

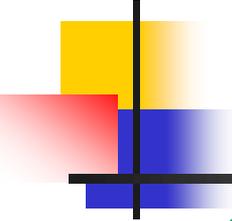
- Life
- Bodily Health
- Bodily Integrity
- Senses,
Imagination,
Thought
- Emotions
- Practical Reason*
- Affiliation
- Other Species
- Play
- Control Over One's
Environment



The Five Freedoms

- Freedom from hunger, thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury, disease
- Freedom from fear
- Freedom to perform natural behaviors

(FAWC, 2009)



The Five Freedoms

Ideal Welfare State, “Natural”
environment (species-specific)

Mutually beneficial interactions
and cohabitation

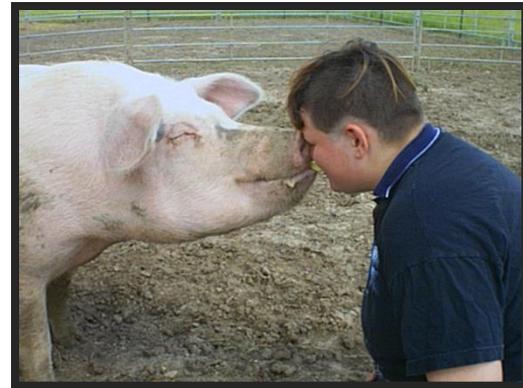
The Five Freedoms

Animal abuse, cruelty,
maltreatment, neglect

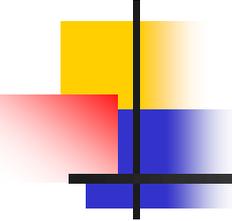


Ethics Study

- To assess the state of ethics in AAls with regards to animal use...
- To determine: gaps in knowledge and applications in AAls, crucial next steps that can promote best practice...

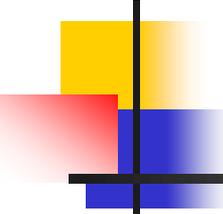


Where have we come from? Where are we now?
And where do we need to go?



Ethics Study

- THEME: “an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection” (Saldana, 2009, p. 139, emphasis original)
- Included categories *related, cohesive, and necessarily sequential* if the ultimate goal of AAls is to increase human well-being
- ‘*Roadmap*’ term selected to reflect the hierarchical nature of the categories when considered as a collective whole



Ethics Study



Human Health

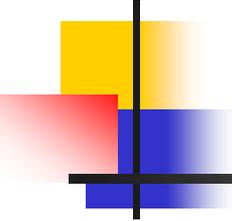
Ethical Use of Animals

Educating Practitioners

Actions Needed

Guiding Principles

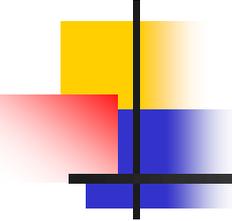
Human-Animal Relationships



Ethics Study - Findings

Human-Animal Relationships

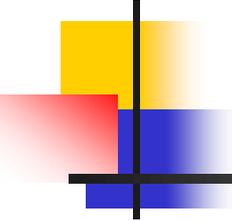
- Animals are sentient actors, not just to be acted upon
- Active and equal participants in therapeutic interactions
- More research needed into interspecies communication, stress levels and psychological impact on the animals in AAls



Ethics Study - Findings

Guiding Principles

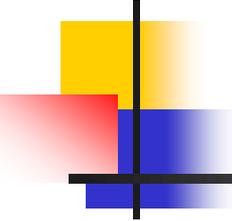
- Animal welfare deserving of equal consideration to human welfare/benefits
- Animals should *enjoy* the work, not just *tolerate* it
- These are working animals that require limitations on number of hours worked per day, breaks, retirement
- Suitability assessments must be CONTINUOUS, ON-GOING *throughout the working life of the animal*
- Practitioners must be able to objectively assess animals' suitability/ willingness to participate both in the moment and across time and settings



Ethics Study – Findings

Actions Needed

- Collaborative, multidisciplinary approach
- Modern standards of practice need to be initialized, updated
- More extensive training to be required before qualification



Ethics Study - Findings

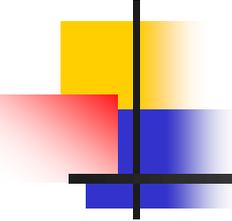
“Hopefully [research can be done] not just on how contact with animals helps humans,
but the impact of it on animals.

That we actually do some studies... that will help us demonstrate that this truly is mutually beneficial and that animals can function very happily in these interactions,

or possibly not so much.

We have to be open to that...”

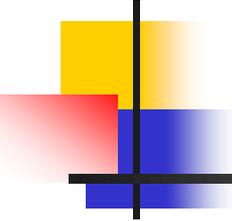
~ Participant



Ethics Study - Findings

Ethical Use of Animals

- Selection criteria based on individual suitability, *including* enjoyment of interaction
- Clinicians should be trained in animal ethology
- Practitioners engage in on-going assessment of the animals in their AAIs for signs of acute, chronic stress
- Practitioners do not allow self-identity or professional/personal gain to bias assessments
- Sick, injured or infirmed animals are not appropriate
- Species-specific measures of welfare must be utilized

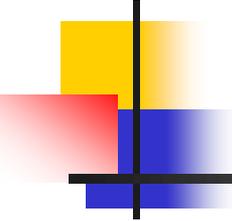


Ethics Study - Findings

“There is a tremendous void in practitioners really understanding their ethical responsibilities to therapy animals to safeguard their quality of life in the working environment.”

“Far too many of the animals who are currently working in AAIs don’t want to do that work. And the people who are handling them are unaware, or don’t want to see that that’s true.”

~ Participants



Ethics Study - Findings

Educating Practitioners

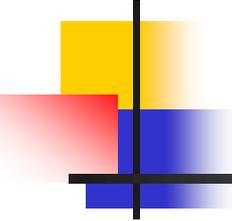
- Multi-disciplinary approach, including material from: ethology, animal behavior and handling, veterinary medicine, animal selection techniques
- Education must be *substantial*; workshops, webinars are inadequate preparation for practice
- Continuing education requirements, national governing body and credentials

Ethics Study - Findings

Human Health

- It can be truly therapeutic for the human **ONLY IF** the animal also experiences the interaction as beneficial

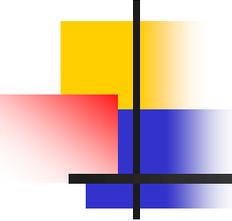




On an individual level...

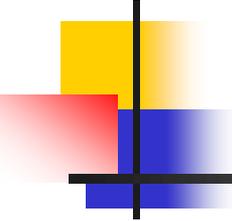
Techniques YOU can use... today!

- Construct your own ethical ‘roadmap’ for your AAI practice
- What role does your pet play in your life, e.g. “fur baby,” worker? How might this impact *your* perspective on ethics?
- Are there gaps in your knowledge base? In what area(s) may you and your partner benefit from more education or training?



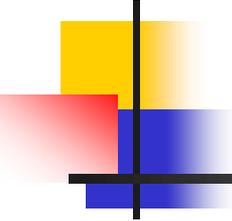
On an individual level...

- Consider the *'umwelt'* of your therapy animal partner
- UMWELT: (German, ethology) the world as it is experienced by a particular organism
- Sights, sounds, smells, interactions; the physical, social and psychological environments *as your animal perceives them*



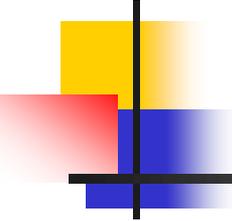
On an individual level...

- Utilize the ‘Consent Test’ with your own animals to learn your pets’ signals and take off those anthropocentric blinders we all have!
- Run at least 3 trials, at different times of day. Pet your dog as you normally would, then stop.
- Observe the behaviors that follow...
- **“Does your dog really want to be petted?”**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cGDYI-s-cQ>



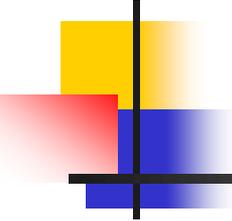
On an individual level...

- Recognize that ‘stress’ hormones are released from both *positive* AND *negative* stimuli
- Stress responses do not immediately diminish, and you may need to allow your animal more time to recover than normal if multiple stressors have occurred within a short time (trigger stacking)



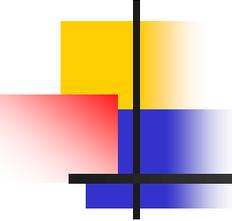
On an individual level...

- “Spoon Theory”
- Developed by Christine Miserandino (www.butyoudontlooksick.com)
- Reduction of resilience, heightened stress response, trigger stacking
- Example: news reporter Kyle Dyer’s bite



On an individual level...

- Acknowledging our human biases, and our passionate desire to share our amazing pets with others may cause us to need outside perspectives with regards to ethics and welfare... **USE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM!**
- Remember that they may already be ‘working’ for you in addition to their DPP hours
- **YOU** are your animal’s advocate – the only voice they have... *speak thoughtfully*



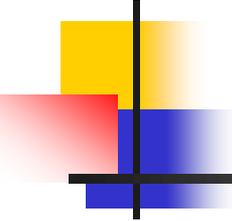
In closing...

“Ethics involving animals in AAls really can’t be separated from the great ethical struggle society as a whole has in continually redefining and shaping who ‘animals’ are in relation to us...

Every single controversial ethical animal issue is at its root a human problem, linked to economics, poverty, social custom and belief...

This makes ethical issues about animals very complex and multi-layered and connected.”

~ Participant



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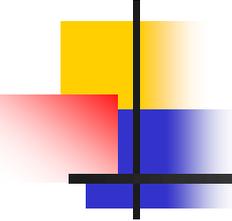
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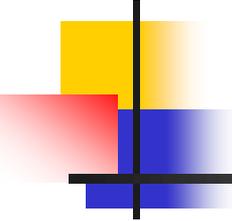


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