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Perceptions and Punishment of Human-Animal Altercations

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PERCEPTIONS AND PUNISHMENT OF
HUMAN-ANIMAL ALTERCATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Valerie Sims

ABSTRACT

Humans and animals have a widely varying relationship which has been studied at length. Examining our interactions with animals in negative contexts can help us further understand the factors that influence the nature of the human-animal relationship, particularly with our most popular companion animals. This study continues the use of a jury design, previously used in studies regarding animal abuse, to examine responses to a scenario of an altercation resulting in a dog biting a person. In this study, 243 undergraduate students read the scenario presented to them and completed a survey examining their judgements of blame and punishment for the incident. In the interest of examining the effects of different variables, participants were randomly presented with 1 of 18 potential scenarios in which the role of the human in potentially provoking the dog, the breed of the dog involved, and the degree of damage inflicted were manipulated. Results showed an avoidance toward making any judgements on the dog's disposition, neither positively nor negatively. Additionally, some gender differences were discovered in responses related to euthanasia, blame on the owner, and the promotion of an obedience training program. Surprisingly, degree of damage did not have significant effects on responses, while dog breed differences revealed that participants placed greater blame and responsibility on owners of Pit bulls rather than the dog itself, which is potentially explained by the sample's age demographics. The manipulation of human provocation of the incident proved to have the most significant effect of participant responses of blame and punishment, affecting perceptions of blame attributed to the dog and the victim, as well as the punishments and protections deemed appropriate. The results suggest an emphasis on human component in the perceptions of the human-animal relationship and provide insight on the variables relevant to the relationship.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The human-animal relationship is an ever-changing, deeply complex connection that differs dramatically from case to case. The content and tone of a human-animal interaction depends on the individuals in question (both person and animal) and their experiences, as well as the specific circumstances of the setting. In addition to its intricacies and complexities, this relationship has real-world consequences on the lives of people and animals alike. Especially in the case of companion animals, and even more particularly with dogs, understanding the human-animal relationship proves a difficult but valuable undertaking in improving the welfare of all.

Literature Review

Past research looking at the human-animal relationship tells us that people generally have positive views of animals. Despite the general approval of the use of animals in various fields, namely science and nutrition, a large majority of people also support animal rights and welfare. One study by Bennet-Wimbush and Willoughby (2015) examined student perceptions of animals on a composite scale ranging from animal rights to animal use values (20 to 100, respectively). Participants' composite scores ranged from 54.8 to 81, suggesting that values lean slightly toward animal use, but are balanced overall. Expectedly, certain demographics can affect where each individual lies on that range. In this sample of college students, majors such as livestock science and career objectives related to animal production scored higher. The ownership of commercial livestock and residence in more urban population also increased the prominence of animal use values. For the general population, this may translate to differences in values based on interests, occupations, locality, and experience. Additionally, a 2009 study by Eckardt found that high levels of empathy are correlated with more positive attitudes toward animals and more negative views of animal cruelty.

Our general perceptions and attitudes towards animals, as well as other factors, inform our perceptions of negative human-animal interactions. One of these interactions, animal abuse, has been studied extensively in experiments that asked participants to rate punishments for hypothetical animal abuse scenarios. The first study (Sims, Chin, & Yordon, 2007) presented participants with a scenario depicting a case of animal abuse and asked them to rate the appropriateness of different punishments as if they were on a jury making decisions on the case. Researchers found two primary predictors for ratings of the suitability of the punishments presented, sex of participant and animal type (puppies or chickens). Additionally, their analysis found that the experience of living on a farm magnified gender differences. Ultimately, the researchers concluded that people place more emphasis on the victim rather than the perpetrator or the crime and use their beliefs to judge the appropriateness of the punishments. Participants also placed an emphasis on restrictive punishments rather than rehabilitative measures for the perpetrator. The second study (Bailey, Sims, & Chin, 2016) recreated and modified an actual case of animal abuse with similar methods. Their results found that perpetrator age, location of crime, and participant femininity all correlated with responses on whether the perpetrator should be around children and the fine they should be sentenced. Specifically, responses that the perpetrator should not be alone with children were stronger for older perpetrators, fines for suffering were larger when animal cruelty occurred at a pet kennel compared to an animal shelter, and participant femininity was associated with greater punishment for animal cruelty. These studies illuminate some of the things we focus on as “judges” of a crime, and what we place importance on when deciding on appropriate punishments.

The present study aims to further examine the nature of the human-animal relationship, especially in negative contexts. As exemplified in the studies discussed, a jury-like design is

helpful in examining the perception of the event and the punishment assigned. However, it may be helpful to take examine the opposite negative interaction between humans and animals in which an animal attacks someone. While the studies mentioned have examined the appropriate punishment for those who harm animals, it is important to also consider the punishments for animals that harm humans, as they may have very different, but related, considerations for decision-making.

Three studies can give us an initial look at the way that people perceive animal attacks. The general focus of the research discussed, as well as the present study, will be on dog attacks as dogs have a long-standing relationship with humans, making dogs a familiar and common topic of study. The first study to consider examined the impressions of mental and motivation bases of a good behaviors (playing) and bad behavior (biting) performed by a dog or matched actions by a boy. In their first experiment, Sanders et al. (1999) examined these attributions of a dog's behavior in comparison to a boy's behavior. They found that while dogs' good behavior was just as likely to be attributed to dispositional, internal factors, the bad behavior (i.e. biting) was more likely to be attributed to external, situational factors for the dog than for the boy. The second experiment aimed to further examine this finding to break down the attributional process for dog's bad behavior. Results from this experiment revealed that there were correlations between pairs of responses, such that if there was a higher rating of the dog as a cause of the victim's distress, then the dog was more seen as more guilty. Additionally, a higher rating that the dog's behavior was justified (by the dog thinking its toy would be taken) led to recommendations that warrant forgiveness rather than punishment. Finally, perceptions of the dog as a "good dog" predicted forgiving attitudes in punishment and severity responses.

A second study (Westgarth & Watkins, 2015) further investigated perceptions of dog bites of female victims through in-depth, one-on-one interviews about their experiences. They found that in regard to blame for the incident, participants were more likely to place the responsibility on themselves or on the dog's owner, rather than placing the blame on the dog itself. The final study by Rajecki et al. (1998), similar to the first study by Sanders et al. (1999), compared responses for perceptions and attributions of interactions in which either a dog or a boy bites or plays with a child. For the positive behavior (playing with the child) the dog's behavior was viewed more positively and warranting praise when compared to the boy's behavior. Moreover, in the biting outcome, the dog was rated less negatively than the boy. This suggests, that despite the behavior (positive or negative), the dog was viewed more positively or less negatively than the boy. Because of this, for negative outcomes, the dog was given more leniency and generosity and was given lower rating of intent, volition, blame, and feelings of shame. It seemed that participants, when judging the dog's bad behavior, minimized or completely ruled out dispositional influences on behavior. Instead, the dog's behavior was perceived more mechanically, leading to lower ratings of awareness, intent, and shame in addition to the more outright increased generosity.

We have established the importance of studying animal attacks in addition to animal abuse can help us further understand the human-animal relationship, but the literature highlights another factor that could play a role in people's responses to animal attacks – dog bites in particular. While the previous studies have provided data that suggests a positive bias towards animals in perceiving negative behaviors like bites, this benefit may not be equally afforded to all dogs. While many dog breeds have very innocent, friendly, and loving reputations (e.g. Labradors, Golden Retrievers, etc.), some breeds have been assigned the opposite reputation of

aggression, violence, and danger (e.g. Pit Bulls). A study by Wright et al. (2007) examined whether brief exposure to a video of a dog behaving either poorly or friendly affected their perceptions of adoptability of the same and different dogs. The results revealed that when shown the aggressive dog, the adoptability ratings were significantly lower for the dog in question and these effects were extended to another dog of the same breed. Adoptability ratings were found to have been based on approachability, friendliness, intelligence, dangerousness, and aggression which means that dogs perceived to be similar to the aggressive target dog were, by association, seen less friendly, more aggressive, and more dangerous.

Another study on the effect of priming on perceptions of dog breeds (Wells, Morrison, & Hepper, 2012) presented participants with positive or negative media of a German shepherd dog (GSH). Participants in the negative media conditions perceived the breed as less approachable, more dangerous, and more aggressive. The researchers concluded that both visual and verbal negative representations can influence perceptions of certain dog breeds. This finding may be especially relevant for a breed such as Pit Bulls, which have often been featured in the media for reports of aggression (Gunter, Barber, & Wynne, 2015). In addition to laws banning the breed, media and popular opinion can have a great effect on the expectations and preconceptions people have about pit bulls.

A final study by Gunter, Barber, & Wynne (2015) examined Pit bulls in particular, finding that Pit bulls had the least desirable ratings compared to those of Labrador Retrievers and Border Collies and were perceived as less approachable, intelligent, friendly, and adoptable as well as more aggressive and difficult to train. Studied in a real-life shelter setting, when dogs were labeled as Pit bulls in their photographs, they stayed in the shelter three times as long as if they were not labeled as Pit bulls, despite no difference in rating of the photographs without

labels. The results suggest that the Pit bull label had a negative influence on the dog's perceived adoptability and length of stay in a shelter. The negative impact of the pit bull label remained present when the researchers used videos of the dogs rather than just pictures. This study explicitly illustrates the negative impact of the reputation of the pit bull breed. As they are often seen as more aggressive and less approachable, it is likely that the label may also affect the way people perceive a Pitbull attack compared to an unidentified breed or a breed with a positive reputation such as a Labrador.

Statement of Purpose

Considering the implications of the literature, the purpose of the present study is to examine the factors that play into the human perception of blame and punishment in the case of a human-animal altercation (i.e. dog attack/bite). We will do this by taking into account the factors that research suggests may affect people's perceptions of dogs, dog breeds, and dog bites, as well as factors taken into consideration in a jury-like setting. To do so, we will manipulate the breed of the dog, the degree of damage to the victim, and the victim's role in potentially causing the attack. Our hypotheses about the effect of the different manipulations are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Women will respond with more leniency for the animals and less leniency for the humans than men due to greater responses of empathy and forgiveness.

Hypothesis 2: Scenarios with permanent damage will receive greater punishment ratings than scenarios with non-permanent damage as a result of an increase in the perceived severity of the attack.

Hypothesis 3: Participants in the pit bull mix group will assign greater punishment to the dog and assign lesser punishment to the human than those in the Labrador mix interaction group.

This was expected as an extension of previous research revealing perceptions of Pit bulls as

being less friendly and approachable as well as more aggressive and difficult to train (Gunter, Barber, & Wynne, 2015).

Hypothesis 4: Participants in the physical or verbal human provocation groups will assign greater punishment to the human and lesser punishment to the dog than those in the no human provocation group. Given that the conditions involving provocation by the victim provide contextual reason for the attack, this shift in blame from animal to human was expected to appear.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Participants

The population of interest for this study encompasses adults in Florida, and even the United States as a whole, with the ability to vote and/or pass decisions on cases of animal attacks. Participants included 243 undergraduate students at a major university who were recruited through the university's student research participation system, SONA. The sample consisted of 134 females, 106 males, and 3 who identified as other. Participants were between 18 and 58 years old, with a median age of 19. Participant-reported ethnicity was 65% White, 11.1% Black, 7.4% Asian, 0.8% Native American or Pacific Islander, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 15.2% Other. Beyond ethnicity, 63 of the 243 participants identified themselves as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, making up 25.9% of the sample.

Design

This study employed a 3 (Human Provocation x 3 (Dog Breed) x 2 (Degree of Damage) between-subjects design in which each participant was randomly presented one of 18 scenarios. This research examines only a subset of potential factors in determining the severity of an event in helping reveal some insight into the significant variables in the mind of the jury.

First, we examined the effect of the victim's role in the altercation. While animal attacks may be unprovoked and caused by the erratic nature of a specific dog, it is often the case that the dog is responding to some kind of threat they perceive to come from the victim. It is safe to assume, as a result of the responsibility attributed to the victim, that the behavior leading up to the attack affects the perception of the blame for an attack. This potential factor was manipulated to create 3 conditions with the intention of varying severity of the perceived threat. The first condition states that there was no prior behavior to prompt the attack. The second condition

presents the event in which the victim may have verbally provoked the dog through yelling or taunting. The final condition, meant to be the most severe, presents a situation in which the victim seemed to physically provoke the attack by pushing or poking at the dog. By giving the dog a just reason for attacking and suggesting the possibility that the attack was, in fact, a defense, we expect that participants will employ leniency in the punishment and restrictions placed on the dog.

Next, we examined the effect of the degree of damage inflicted by the dog by creating a manipulation with two conditions. The first condition states that the victim had some scratches and required stitches for their hand. In this condition, there was no permanent damage. In the second condition, the hand injury required surgery and caused permanent damage in the form of some loss of function in two fingers of the dominant hand. It is reasonable to expect that a more severe outcome and injury would warrant more severe blame and punishment allocations by the participants.

Finally, we expect that preconceptions of certain dog breeds may have an effect on how responsible or dangerous the participants judge the dog to be. For example, Labradors are a popular breed who have a friendly, loving reputation. On the other hand, Pit bulls are much less popular and somewhat infamous for their violent and aggressive reputation. For this reason, dog breed was manipulated to create three conditions for the information provided about the dog involved. One set of scenarios involved a Labrador mix, the second set involves a Pitbull mix, and the final set of scenarios do not provide any breed information.

For the analysis, an ANOVA was conducted to identify between-group differences. This study aims to examine the factors that play into human perception of blame and punishment in a

case of a human-animal altercation (i.e. animal attack). Each of our manipulations was created to investigate some of these potential factors.

Materials and Procedures

This study consisted only of one survey completed online by each individual. The survey began with a statement of informed consent and was followed by a short outline of the Florida statutes on dangerous dogs and damage by dogs. Participants were encouraged to use this information in their consideration of the appropriate punishments and consequences based on the scenario. They were then presented with a scenario of a random combination of the manipulated variables mentioned (provocation, degree of injury, and dog breed). That is to say, there were 18 possible scenarios, to which the participants were randomly assigned.

The scenarios were presented as follows:

Last month, humane officers and law enforcement agencies were notified of an altercation in a local neighborhood. An unleashed dog in the front yard of a home was reported to have injured an unfamiliar individual.

Witnesses report that the victim [did not exhibit any behaviors that would have incited the incident/ exhibited verbal aggression (yelling, taunting) toward the dog prior to the incident/ exhibited physical aggression (poking, pushing) toward the dog that may have incited the incident/ prior to the incident]. The dog [, a Labrador mix./, a Pitbull mix./ N/A] was said to have lunged at the victim, leaving scratches on their torso and legs. The individual's right hand was bitten, [requiring several stitches and weeks of recovery, although there was no lasting damage/ requiring surgery and causing permanent loss of function in two fingers].

You are a member of the jury that must review and respond to this case. assess the appropriate response to this incident. The following questionnaire is to be answered as though you were designating the appropriate actions to be taken in response to the incident.

The scenarios were carefully written to remain as neutral as possible while at the same time accomplishing the intention of each statement in order to ensure that the factors are being properly manipulated. Language with strong negative biases were avoided (e.g. “attacked”), while suggestions of possible blame (i.e. “incited the incident”) remained for participants to consider the role of the victim when answering questions.

Immediately following the scenario, participants were presented with questions regarding the situation. Questions in this section were based on previous research which examined punishments for a case of animal abuse (Sims, Chin, & Yordon, 2007; Bailey, Sims, & Chin, 2016). Participants responded to each question with their agreement or disagreement of the statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). While this study examines the case of an animal attack, many of the questions were relevant when altered to refer to the animal. The questions asked the participant about their beliefs of the disposition of the dog, the restrictions that should be placed on it, and its level of dangerousness. The questionnaire then follows up with questions regarding responsibility and restrictions on the owner. The final questions were in regard to the degree of blame attributed to the victim.

Participants then responded to 2 questions regarding the breed of the dog and the degree of damage described in order to ensure that had read and understood the scenario presented to them. The survey concluded with the Animal History Questionnaire and a demographic questionnaire. The Animal History Questionnaire examines the participants’ previous

experiences with other animals, specifically dogs, as pets as well as any negative experiences with dogs in general. However, the responses to this questionnaire were not explored in this study. The demographic questionnaire consists of questions regarding gender, ethnicity and year in college for the students. Previous research has also revealed gender effects of living on a farm on punishment assigned in an animal abuse case, suggesting that individuals who have lived on a farm may have a unique relationship with animals. As this may also affect a case of an animal attack, we included this in the demographic questionnaire.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

For the analysis, there were 25 dependent variables corresponding to the 25 questions in the scenario questionnaire based on questions from the literature (Sims, Chin, & Yordon, 2007; Bailey, Sims, & Chin, 2016). Therefore, a series of 25 analyses were conducted using a 3x3x2x2 between-subjects ANOVA with human provocation, dog breed, degree of damage, and gender as the fixed variables, respectively. As this was an exploratory study, a p-value of 0.05 was used as the cut-off to determine the significance of each effect. The analysis revealed that 19 of the 25 criterion variables were significantly affected by one or more of the manipulated variables. It should be noted that criterion variables that were not significantly affected included judgements about the friendliness ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.30$), aggressiveness ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.61$) of the dog and the household proximity of children and elderly people.

Gender

Gender had a significant impact on various responses such as the decision to euthanize the dog ($F(2,205) = 3.29$, $p = .039$), where women disagreed more strongly with euthanasia ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 1.24$) than men ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.80$). Additionally, the requirement of an obedience training program was modulated by gender ($F(2,205) = 3.72$, $p = .026$), revealing that women were more likely to suggest obedience training ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.23$) than men ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.43$). Finally, men blamed the owner slightly more ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.54$) than women ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(2,206) = 3.20$, $p = .043$).

Degree of Damage

The degree of damage suffered by the victim had minimal effects on participant responses. One analysis revealed that victims who suffered permanent damage were seen as

slightly more to blame ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.58$) than those who suffered temporary damage ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.65$; $F(1,205) = 4.11$, $p = .044$).

Dog Breed

Dog breed, surprisingly, only revealed individual significant effects for responses assigning blame to the owner of the dog ($F(2,206) = 4.96$, $p = .008$) such that participants in the Pitbull condition blamed the owner more for the incident ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.47$) than those in the Labrador ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.57$) or No Information ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.56$) conditions.

Human Provocation

Among the effects on participant responses, the most common significant manipulation was that of human provocation, which affected the responses of 14 variables. It affected judgements relating to the dog's blame ($F(2,206) = 17.76$, $p < .001$) and adoptability ($F(4,206) = 2.67$, $p = .033$). Specifically, participants who were told there was no provocation were less likely to agree ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.50$) that the dog was not at fault than those who were given information about physical ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.42$) or verbal ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.44$) provocation. Additionally, they were less likely to agree that the dog should be adoptable ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.44$) than those in the physical ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.42$) and verbal ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.41$) conditions. Human provocation also had a significant effect on responses regarding the victim's culpability ($F(2,205) = 28.50$, $p < .001$), such that participants were more likely to blame the victim if they exhibited physical ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.53$) or verbal ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.52$) provocation than if they did not ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.32$). Participants in conditions without provocation were also less generous with monetary awards ($M = 1283.84$, $SD = 677.74$) to cover pain and suffering than those in conditions with physical ($M = 655.69$, $SD = 707.92$) or verbal provocation ($M = 716.98$, $SD = 727.471$; $F(2,156) = 9.45$, $p < .001$).

The most prominent effects by the manipulation of the victim's provocation prior to the event was on the perceptions of the dangerousness of the dog and the appropriate steps needed to minimize future danger. Among the results, participants considering a scenario with physical ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.60$) or verbal ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.56$) provocation were less likely to classify the dog as potentially dangerous than those considering a scenario with no provocation ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.20$; $F(2,206) = 4.71$, $p = .010$). They were less likely to recommend the use of strong restraints when the dog was unsupervised ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.51$) than participants in scenarios with physical ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.87$) or verbal ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.75$) provocation ($F(2,206) = 4.64$, $p = .011$). Additionally, when there was no provocation, participants were less likely to suggest a "Dangerous Dog" sign ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.42$) than when there was physical provocation ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.86$) or verbal provocation ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.70$; $F(2,206) = 6.61$, $p = .002$). When responding to the requirement of the use of a leash when outside of an enclosure, participants considering scenarios with no provocation were more in supportive ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.92$) than those considering scenarios with physical ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.44$) or verbal provocation ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.18$; $F(2,206) = 3.88$, $p = .022$). Similarly, when considering a muzzle requirement, those presented with physical provocation ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.68$) or verbal provocation ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.76$) were less supportive than those presented with a scenario describing no provocation ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.44$; $F(2,206) = 4.65$, $p = .011$). Additionally, conditions with no provocation were more supportive of the requirement of an obedience training program ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.03$) than conditions with physical provocation ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.36$) or verbal provocation ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.54$; $F(2,205) = 5.07$, $p = .007$). Consequently, lack of provocation warranted longer suggestions for the months required of the weekly obedience training program for scenarios with no provocation ($M = 9.69$, $SD = 6.30$).

than with physical provocation ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 4.92$) or verbal provocation ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 4.98$; $F(2,195) = 8.06$, $p < .001$)

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

Taking a close look at these results, we hope to reveal insights about the processes involved in the judgement of human-animal altercations and highlight the considerations that should be taken when these perceptions are at play. Naturally, we will discuss the implications and causes of the effects of gender, degree of damage, dog breed, and human provocation. Before that, however, it is important to understand which criteria were completely unaffected by our manipulations. Responses to questions assessing the dog's disposition, such as friendliness or aggressiveness, were not affected or informed by the conditions and did not differ between men and women. We propose that participants essentially separated the event in question from the dog's nature, whether friendly or aggressive. Along the lines of the study by Sanders et al. (1999), which highlighted the tendency to attribute dogs' bad behaviors to external factors, participants explained away the causes of the altercation using the conditions of the event rather than through the natural disposition of the dog. Essentially, we tend to give dogs the benefit of the doubt and would rather conclude that the dog behaved the way it did because of the circumstances of the event, rather than because the dog naturally behaves in this way. Furthermore, this disconnect between the event and the dog's natural qualities would suggest that participants were not necessarily worried about the dog's behavior with more vulnerable populations and likely explains why the event did not warrant limitations with children and elderly people. This assumes a moderate perspective in which dogs are both capable of friendliness and aggression, but this capacity generally leans towards friendliness with the right circumstances. Therefore, we conclude that the event is not reflective of the dog and the specifics of the event do not dictate whether they should be around children or the elderly.

Gender

It was hypothesized that women would be more lenient with the dog and less lenient with the humans than men would be. The results revealed that women did, in fact, exhibit more leniency with the dog than men, wherein they were more opposed to euthanasia than men. Furthermore, they were more supportive of an obedience training program, emphasizing mercy and positive, corrective punishment in comparison to the men. However, in contrast with our hypothesis, women were more lenient in their blame attributed toward the owner. From these results, we conclude that women respond with more leniency overall, whether it is toward the dog or the person potentially seen as responsible (the owner). Men's perceptions were less forgiving, while women were more likely to support a reparative and preventative solution. We suggest that this is a result of greater expression of empathy and mercy present in women compared to men. This tendency may have evolutionary or social origins such that women are inclined or conditioned to be more sympathetic or nurturing, which in turn minimizes punishment and increases alternate forms of penalty.

Degree of Damage

Out of the three manipulations, degree of damage only had one notable effect in that those in the permanent damage conditions blamed the victim more than those in the temporary damage conditions. This is a moderate effect and difficult to understand. We suggest that this moderate effect also occurs as a result of our hesitation to blame the dog for the specific consequences of the event. Blame attributed toward the victim may therefore come as a result of a need to attribute blame for more severe damage. Overall, degree of damage had minimal impact and was likely overlooked in consideration of conditions that were more telling and intentional in regard to either the dog or the people involved. Unlike the other variables, namely

provocation by the victim and gender, permanent damage was not seen as an indicator of perceptions of the event.

Dog Breed

Dog breed, similarly, was largely insignificant, only affecting the blame attributed to the owner of the dog. Pitbull owners were viewed as more to blame than Labrador owners. This may have to do with the familiar social perceptions of Pit bulls as an aggressive breed. Interestingly, responses did not reflect a prejudice or bias toward Pit bulls in criterion of blame and punishment, but potential emphasis that the owner of the dog is responsible for the dog's behavior, especially in the case of what might be considered an aggressive dog. These results differ dramatically from our expectations that the Pit bull breed would lead to greater punishment for the dog and lesser punishment for the people. We believe this difference may be reflective of our limited sample. We believe that younger, college-age students might be less likely to view Pit bulls as inherently aggressive dogs and may instead view their behavior as a reflection of their owner. Younger generations may have a more modern view that dogs are not inherently good or bad but are rather are a subject of their environment and upbringing. Therefore, the altercation may have been perceived as a result of carelessness at best and inadequate care overall rather than an aggressive dog with violent tendencies. We had assumed that they would have the beliefs and preconceptions as many older adults, and their distinction may have caused the different result. It may also be important to note that the scenarios described the dog as either a Labrador mix or a Pit bull mix, rather than purebred dogs. Although the results suggest that dog breed was not often significant, it is possible that the wording affected responses in the case that Pit bulls are viewed as inherently aggressive and the lack of purebred genetics implies a dilution of aggressive genes.

Human Provocation

Of all the manipulated variables, human provocation was the clear stand-out, affecting the responses to over half of all the questions and nearly three quarters of the questions with significant effects from any variable. Human provocation was used to inform the responses related to the perceptions and blame of both the dog and the victim. It also had sweeping implications on the perceptions of dangerousness and the additional measures needed to be taken to prevent future altercations. As discussed, the literature in the area (Westgarth & Watkins, 2015; Sanders et al, 1999; Rajecski et al, 1998) suggests that we have an inclination to redirect blame and excuse a dog's behavior in order to maintain positive perceptions of "man's best friend". Our results support this, revealing that participants looked to any indication that the dog was provoked in forming their perceptions and opinions. We suggest that participants looked to the victim for an explanation of the dog's aggressive behavior and when they found it, they used it in excusing the dog and emphasizing the role of the victim. In this way, participants may be placing the responsibility on the people involved in taking steps to prevent the altercation. When it comes to perceptions of dogs, even in negative contexts, people may view behavior as largely influenced by the environment in which the dog is raised or of the incident in question rather than by genetic or inherent tendencies toward aggression. These results therefore suggest that the presence of provocation on behalf of the victim plays a large role in our perceptions and punishments of a negative human-animal interaction and that there is a positive bias toward the dog in the perceptions of these events.

Conclusions

In conclusion, our results yielded interesting deviations from our initial hypotheses of the impact of gender, degree of damage, dog breed, and provocation. Gender analyses revealed that

women were in fact more forgiving and lenient than men. Women were more lenient with blame and punishment for both the dog and the people involved. This response may be a result of evolutionary tendencies or social conditioning for women to employ greater empathy and leniency overall, not particularly in the case of animals or dogs but rather in all interactions. However, degree of damage and dog breed did not have the anticipated effects and were generally overlooked. This may have been a result of our positive perceptions of dogs and a lack of prejudice toward dog breeds with aggressive reputations. However, provocation, whether physical or verbal, revealed widespread effects on responses, regarding perceptions of various parties involved and appropriate punishments. This suggests that in forming our opinions or beliefs about human-animal relationship we seem to have a positive bias for the animal and may be easily swayed toward lenience if reason presents itself. These results also suggest that animals are seen as a result of their environment over time and surrounding an incident, and therefore not seen as intrinsically good or bad.

Applications

These effects may have some significant implications on processes related to dog attacks, particularly dog bites. Following an attack, a dog has a serious possibility of being declared dangerous and even euthanized, depending on the injury and the applicable legislation. In making the decision to euthanize, it can be vital to provide context around the bite, especially in regard to any form of provocation. The information detailing the circumstances of the event can affect critical decisions such as these. Even when not penalized to the furthest degree, this information is important for people to consider when adopting dogs from shelters or rescue organizations that may have a history of threatening or aggressive behavior. Our results suggest

that people may be inclined to forgive or further consider these situations of bad or aggressive behavior when given context and cause.

Recommendations for Future Research

Unfortunately, this sample and study were limited in their ability to explore and represent the full scope perceptions of the human-animal relationship. In seeking to expand the present findings regarding the influence of human provocation on perceptions, future research should seek to establish additional factors that are impactful in perceptions of a human-animal interaction. Additionally, further exploration of the gender differences and impact of provocation on perception and responses would further illuminate the true causes of these tendencies. Particularly, although this study and past literature suggest a positive bias and attitude towards animals, and dogs in particular, millions of animals face severe punishment for events similar to the ones featured in the scenario, and this discrepancy may be caused by a factor which has not been explored such as previous history with animals, perceptions of the roles and qualities of animals, and culture of the area or society. Furthermore, this study explores the perceptions of dogs in human-animal altercations, which arguably have a glorified reputation compared to other animals. These results are certainly not generalizable to other household pets like cats and may not even be comparable to non-household animals such as farm animals or wildlife. Further research should examine responses regarding less familiar animals with differing roles and reputations, as well as in a variety of scenarios, both positive and negative. Finally, similar and additional research should seek to expand the sample toward greater variety in different age groups, locations, and occupations.

APPENDIX A: FLORIDA STATUTES

In order to properly respond to the survey, it is helpful to know Florida's Statutes for Damage by Dogs and Dangerous Dogs. Below is a summary of relevant statutes that you may consider during the next parts of the study.

Damage by Dogs

- Owners of dogs are liable for damage done by their dog to others, including when the dog bites someone.
- However, any negligence on the part of the person bitten that is the cause of the biting reduces the owner's liability.

Dangerous Dogs

- Dangerous dog means any dog that has (1) aggressively bitten, attacked, or endangered or has inflicted severe injury on a human or (2) has, unprovoked, approached a person in an apparent attitude of attack.
- A dog may not be declared dangerous if the victim was tormenting, abusing, or assaulting the dog, its owner, or a family member.
- The owner of a dangerous dog shall: (1) update rabies vaccinations, (2) have a proper enclosure and visible warning signs, (3) have permanent identification for the dog.

APPENDIX B: SCENARIO QUESTIONNAIRE

1. The dog is NOT to blame for the altercation.
2. The dog should be adoptable.
3. The dog is naturally aggressive.
4. The dog is naturally friendly.
5. The dog should be classified as potentially dangerous.
6. What level of potentially dangerous would you classify the dog?
7. The dog should be limited by strong restraints when not supervised.
8. The dog should NOT be allowed to live in a household with children.
9. The dog should be allowed to live in a household with elderly people.
10. The dog should NOT be allowed to live in a household with other pets.
11. The dog should be euthanized.
12. The dog should be required to complete an obedience training program.
13. How long would you require the dog to attend training sessions once a week? (0-24 months)
14. You may also award up to \$2,000 in pain and suffering to individual involved in this case.
15. The owner must post a "Dangerous Dog" warning sign.
16. The dog must be leashed when outside of an enclosure.
17. The dog must be muzzled when outside of an enclosure.
18. The owner must purchase liability insurance.
19. The dog must be tattooed, micro-chipped, or wear a special collar.
20. The dog must have current rabies vaccinations.

21. The dog must be kept in a kennel of appropriate strength when unsupervised.
22. The victim is to blame for the altercation.
23. The owner is to blame for the altercation.
24. The owner should not be allowed to keep this dog.
25. The owner should no longer be allowed to adopt dogs.

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