CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Media, Mental Health and Man’s Best Friend

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Social Work

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In collaboration with Jessica Kite

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Abstract

Media, Mental Health and Man’s Best Friend

By

Suzanne Spinosa

Master of Social Work

Using two media newspaper publications as a means of archival data, this paper proposed that the shift in perception of animals in mental health setting has changed over time. There is now data examining the role of animals in a human’s well-being and the increased importance of an animal's positive presence across various populations. This paper examined the past twenty years of newspaper articles relevant to the human animal bond. Discussion considered the implications of one’s quality of life and how much and how often this is being reported in the media. This study examined the evermore-present roles of an animal’s importance in society across all measure of companionship, mental health, and healing. In order to increase awareness and decrease resistance to the vital role of animals, in particular dogs, in mental health settings, this research project examined the shift in perception through media sources.
Introduction

It seems you can’t turn on the television, read an newspaper or magazine article or listen to the radio these days without a seeing a segment about how much or why we humans seem to be more in love with our dogs than ever before. If we were to look at the headlines, we would find the following: “Scientists have found that the connections between humans and their dogs have the same biochemical basis as the mother-child bond…” (CBS News, 2015). “Science proves the bond between dogs and their owners can be as emotionally strong as the connection between mothers and their children…” (The Today Show, 2016).” “This study is the first to show this hormonal bonding effect between humans and another specie – and may help explain how dogs became our companions thousands of years ago…” (Science Mag, 2015). The list of stories, and recent studies, go on and on.

It is well known that the longest recognized domesticated animal, the dog or the canine, has provided humans with assistance in hunting, security and companionship throughout history (Rubenstein, 2012). However, over the course of human evolution, this bond between animals and humans has only continued to prove more necessary and beneficial to the overall well-being of the human psyche and there are several theories that may feed into this evolution. Humans have longed for love and attention since the dawn of their existence. As socially-active and socially-minded beings, humans need interpersonal contact in which dogs have always played an important role. Dogs have become emotional companions and human substitutes for people living in solitude and given new meaning to people’s lives (Scheibeck et al., 2011). If we were to then fast forward several millennia into our evolution, we would begin to see accounts and stories
of this bond. Dating as far back as the Civil War, heralded lieutenants, captains and generals of war began to chronicle their stories of animal mascots being an integral part of their combat units - offering pride, stress relief and a sense of humility during challenging periods (Shannon, 2003). And then, as we entered the latter part of the last century in the 1960’s, a psychiatrist named Boris Levinson introduced the idea of dogs or other animals as co-therapists, with the role of emotional mediator and catalyst of a social process (Psychogeriatrics, 2011).

So, is the media trying to tell us something? Or, is all this mounting evidence making its way into the media? In the last three decades, studies across a wide range of disciplines have provided evidence that the human-animal bond can contribute to good health, psychosocial well-being and recovery from serious medical conditions (Perry, Rebenstein & Austin, 2012). Furthermore, the potential psychological benefits of including animals across many therapeutic settings have shown to increase empathy, relaxation, improved self-esteem and acceptance, stress and anxiety reduction, reality orientation, nurturing skills, mental stimulation, decreased loneliness and increased positive affect (Souter & Miller, 2007).

Indeed, it would seem that our animals are contributing to our quality of life as we understand it – promoting physical, emotional and mental health. With so much mounting evidence of the benefits and profundity of the human-animal bond, medical establishments, institutions, military hospitals and schools for the young and disabled seem to be listening…but is the media? Is the shift in how dogs are utilized in relation to mental health in society being portrayed in the media?
Literature review

The Human-Animal Bond

To begin to understand the human-animal bond, we must first begin to look at the human need for attachment. Attachment theory is based on two primary premises, (1) that the attachment process lies at the center of all human and emotional functions and (2), humans, like many animals, are biologically predisposed to seek out and sustain physical contact and emotional connection (Scheibeck et al., 2011).

The human-animal relationship, and in particular, the human-dog relationship, has proven effective in reducing loneliness, anxiety and depression. In more recent times, dogs have become emotional companions and human substitutes for people living in solitude (Sable, 2013). In fact, the human-pet bond concept has emerged so strongly in veterinary medicine over the last few decades that it has caused the companion animal industry to explode (States News Service, 2011).

There is now more and more scientific evidence that companion animals have a positive effect on psychological and physical well-being, as well as shaping how people regulate their emotions, deal with stress or trauma and relate to others (Sable, 2013). These are all important components of how animals may not just be utilized as a simple solution for companionship, but how animals have now begun to integrate into our healing and treatment plans across many populations to benefit one's quality of life. This is evidenced by the increasing use of animals across several different mental health settings, and in particular, working with vulnerable populations. Some of these vulnerable populations include, but are not limited to, veterans, children, those with disabilities, the elderly and prisoners. We will take a look at how animals are being used with these
Children and Animals

The bond between a child and their family pet is undoubtedly an important relationship of support and companionship. However, when a dog is placed in a therapeutic setting to work with children who have experienced trauma, that bond can not only promote support and companionship, but also healing and recovery. A study by Balluaerka (2013) evaluated the influence of the animal and human bond in relation to children’s attachments styles in a residential setting who have experienced trauma. The children who participated in the study had “a better security with respect to attachment. Moreover, compared to the youths who hadn't received the treatment, they scored better in the dimension of attachment security” (Balluerka, 2014). This therapeutic bond is vital because it elicits an emotional, nonthreatening, and nonjudgmental space where children can feel comfortable and safe.

One of the first animal assisted therapy programs, Green Chimney, works with children and adolescents who have “not had the proper role models and have had limited direction” (Ross, 2011). The original goal of the program was to benefit both the animals who needed the care and the children who were taught responsibility. However, the importance of the connection between the care for the animal and the healing the child became evident as explained by Ross, “the animal can serve as an object for love. When a child craves a close, cuddly, affectionate relationship, companion animals can provide this in a non-judgmental relationship on call twenty-four hours a day if necessary. Animals will respond with love if they are well treated”. The physical care for an animal
can serve an emotional support purpose for a child in need.

**People with disabilities and Animals**

Animals and people with disabilities first began their relationship with the service dog rules, regulations, and definition added to the Americans with Disabilities Act. According to the ADA, service animals are “any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability” (ADA National Network, 2016). Dogs can have many different jobs and titles dependent on the need of an individual. Guide dogs are trained to help those who are blind or those who have visual disabilities. Hearing dogs help those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Lastly, services dogs have the task to assisting those who have mobility and/or balance issues, alert an individual regarding medical needs (i.e seizures, and with psychiatric barriers. Overall, when a dog works with any person with a disability, the essential function is to assist that individual with ADL’s (activities of daily living), keep them safe, and help them gain independence ( Crowe, 2014).

Along with independence, there is a need for social-emotional support that is just as important in the healing process. Dogs increase independence in people with physical disabilities which then in turn increases the confidence and self-esteem. “These support animals provide companionship, relieve loneliness, and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias” (ADA National Network, 2016). Service animals promote social interactions between people and can break down a barrier in communication. A study done by Winkle exploring the satisfaction of service animals resulted in all participants rating “much high satisfaction with social interactions when the services
dogs were present. In every instance when the dog was not present, each participant thought her satisfaction level would have been different if the dog had been present.” Service dogs may contribute to increasing a sense of independence and a decrease in reliance on others for people with disabilities (Winkle, 2012).

**Military and Animals**

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been a recognized disorder in the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) for more than thirty years. PTSD is a trauma- and stressor-related disorder defined by criteria listed in the fifth edition DSM, the DSM-5. The diagnostic criteria for PTSD include past exposure to a traumatic event (that is, actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence), “intrusion” symptoms such as recurrent distressing memories, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, negative alterations in cognition or mood associated with the traumatic event, and marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event (Fisher, 2014).

According to The Journal for Nurse Practitioners (2014), “one third or more of service members returning from Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) or Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) suffer psychological problems (ie. PTSD, depression and alcohol abuse) resulting from their war exposures. Months after combat deployments, a large percentage of troops (20% - 30.5%) continue to experience moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD” (Gibbons, et al., 2014, pg. 366).

While animals have played a significant role in assisting the military during times of war throughout mankind, their contributions to the military have shifted and expanded over the decades. Historically, their roles included official capacities such as cavalry
horses, sentry dogs, carrier pigeons, and unit mascots, but in recent decades, more and
more research is being conducted supporting the important role animals play in the
healing and treatment of PTSD as well as other physical and mental ailments. Dating as
far back as 1919, the US military promoted the use of dogs as a therapeutic intervention
with psychiatric patients at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, DC (Chumley, 2012).
Today, canines are the most common species of assistance animals working well as guide
dogs, hearing dogs, service dogs as well as being an integral part of animal-assisted
therapy (Mills & Yeager, 2012).

**Prisoners and Animals**

These days, animals are increasingly being used within the prison system despite
opposition from those who believe prisons should only be used to punish. Some
anecdotal evidence has shown that not only do animals aid in psychological
rehabilitation, but inmates are also able to receive vocational training through Prison-
based Animal Programs (PAPs). These programs train an inmate to conduct intensive and
time-consuming training required for animals to go on to specialized service work.
Research of these kinds of programs has found that inmates who participated in such
programs reported significant reductions in feelings of isolation and frustration as well as
a “considerable change in their outlook toward others and their sense of self-worth”
(Furst, 2006).

Furthermore, there are several ways in which professionals are using animals to
address the mental health needs within the prison inmate populations as well. Animal-
assisted therapy (AAT) is a goal directed intervention in which an animal is a primary
element of the treatment process. It is an interaction between patients and a trained
animal and human handler, with a therapeutic objective. Again, anecdotally, AAT seems to be well received by this population, with those involved reporting a large decrease in anxiety and depressive symptoms (Jasperson, 2012). More research with this population, especially, is still needed.

**Elderly and Animals**

The favorable role of pet therapy has been observed over many populations, particularly among the elderly. The frequent co-occurrence of cognitive and mood disorders, psychotic and anxiety symptoms make elderly persons especially suitable for treatments based on affective-emotional motivation and psychological stimulation (Psychogeriatrics, 2011). While many studies have shown that there is evidence to support using animals is indeed a beneficial addition to cognitive behavioral therapy, most of this evidence has been qualitative or observatory at best. For example, nurses working in care facilities have written their personal, qualitative observations that animals relieve loneliness and boredom, foster social interaction, and add variety to the lives of such persons, indirectly suggesting other possible advantages to human interactions with animals not thus far documented in clinical trials (Cherniack, 2014).

There is also evidence to support the effects of animals on the physical health of elderly individuals. Studies suggest that presence of animals may cause improved blood pressure and greater physical activity. In an epidemiological survey of more than one thousand elderly person at least 65 years old in Canada, the loss of ability to perform activities of daily living of persons who did not own pets progressed at a greater rate than for pet owners (Cherniack, 2014). New uses of animals as it pertains to the well-being of the elderly are continually being piloted as well, such as dogs being trained to detect
human melanomas by smell.

**Media’s Role in Social Awareness**

The media is one of the most powerful instruments of communication and has a huge impact on society in shaping the public opinion of the masses (Mughal, 2014). Media fulfills several roles in our culture, including entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination, educating and informing, serving as a public forum for important issues and acting as a watchdog for government and business (Lule, 2011). It is important to emphasize the vital role media plays in molding public opinion as well as identifying the correlations between media and society when it comes to exposing us to what is happening around us, convey messages to build awareness and sharing information about the past, present and future (Dwivedi & Pandey, 2013).

With media’s important role in our social awareness and the mounting evidence of animals important role across mental health care within these populations mentioned, the research question for this study is: Is the shift in how dogs are utilized in relation to mental health in society being portrayed in the media? More specifically, what is the frequency of these reports and in which capacity are the animals being used?
Method

Research design

This research project is a qualitative exploratory study using archival data to examine whether the use of animals in mental health settings shifted throughout time. We looked at this shift through the perspective of the media. Data for the study was collected from two media sources: New York Times and Los Angeles Times. As a result of using only media sources, there are no participants in this study. We chose to use both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times because they are well known media sources and have credibility for being long standing newspapers in society.

Measures

The data was collected and compiled into an excel spreadsheet that was divided by five year increments and by certain publications (New York Times or Los Angeles times). The search terms, “animal and humans and bonds” was chosen after attempting the following possibilities: animals and humans and bonds and therapy, animals and humans and mental health, animals and humans and quality of life. Animals and humans and bonds elicited the highest number of articles and also a wider range of discussions surrounding animals which is why we decided upon this matchup of words over the other possibilities. Each five year increment was then analyzed the following ways: frequency (by counting the number of articles published), population interacting with the animal (children, veterans, elderly, etc.), capacity (the way the animals were portrayed), and the type of animal.

The “frequency of articles” was captured by counting the number of articles that met the search terms. The definition of “capacity” and “population” were altered after
beginning our research. Originally, we defined capacity by the use of the particular animal: service, therapy, companion, and pet. Ultimately, we then specified service to job specifics for animals: search and rescue, drug sniffing, bomb sniffing, and Police K9’s. “Population” was originally defined similar to the categories that were identified in the literature review: children, elderly, veterans, disabled, prisoners, etc). However, after an initial search and analysis of “population” articles, a pattern emerged of several articles that discussed animals interacting with multiple populations and families. We then added an additional subject as “companion” in the population category when the articles discussed the animal touching multiple people in a family or multiple populations. In summary, the variables of “population” were ultimately defined as: at-risk youth, children, companion, disabled, elderly homeless, police, prisoners, and veterans.

**Procedure**

The process for data collection from both the New York Times and Los Angeles Times were identical. One of the researchers collected data from Los Angeles Times and the second researcher collected data from New York Times. The first step in the process was to access the CSUN library with the following link: http://library.csun.edu. Then we selected the link on the left titled “databases by subject”. The next link on the left side under General Information Sources clicked was: “news and current issues”. The selection under news and current issues selected was: “Proquest Newsstand”. The advanced search page was presented and using the drop down menu, we selected select the seventh option down the list, Publication title- PUB. A hyperlink appeared under the selection that says, “Look up publication”. The researchers typed in Los Angeles Times or New York Times depending on the newspaper they were accessing.
After choosing the certain publication, the following key terms were entered into the second line for both New York Times and Los Angeles Times: “animals and humans and bonds”. These terms were entered in the plural form in hopes to elicit more sources. We decided the search would span over a 20-year period with five-year increments: 1998-2002; 2003-2007; 2008-2012; 2013-2017. The date range was entered in the left hand side of the page with specific year ranges listed. All articles that were generated from this search were counted under frequency. Additionally, the articles out of that frequency that mentioned animals in a “capacity” of: pet, therapy, and service were then counted and analyzed further.
Results

The following section reports on the findings from the search generated with the key terms: “animals and humans and bonds”. The results are then broken up into four different subject: frequency, population, capacity, and type. Table 1 summarizes the number of articles that generated from the search of the key terms.

Frequency of articles

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Los Angeles Times</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2002</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2012</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>1069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collectively, we examined 1,069 articles from both Los Angeles Times and New York Times that were a result from using the following key terms: “animals and humans and bonds”. These 1,069 articles combined the 20-year period of 1997-2017 in 5 year increments. There were 658 articles examined from the New York Times and the remaining 411 from Los Angeles Times. Out of the 1,069, only ~9% or 92 of those articles from both publications pertain to animals being used in the following capacities: companion, pet, therapy, emotional support, or service (bomb dogs, K9, drug dogs, search and rescue). In regards to the twenty-year increment time span, out of the 1,069 articles, the highest number of articles found in a specific five-year increment was 344.
articles in 1997-2002. The least amount of articles found in a specific five-year increment was 207 in 2013-2017.

Table 2 shows the frequency of the articles that pertain to animals being mentioned in a “capacity” that is considered to be a more therapeutic lens such as an article speaking about a service animal or the importance of a pet in a family.

Table 2

Frequency of articles directly pertaining to the research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Los Angeles Times</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2002</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2012</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the New York Times produced more articles than the Los Angeles Times, the Los Angeles Times had more than twice the number of articles directly pertaining to the use of animals and the study. In fact, the Los Angeles made up 73% of the total 92 articles.

Populations effected by animals

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the populations mentioned in the articles that are being effected by animals in some therapeutic form.

Table 3

“Population” mentioned in both the New York Times and Los Angeles Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Risk Youth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companion</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>344</strong></td>
<td><strong>285</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regards to population, out of the 92 articles, 66 or 72% of them were under “Companion”. The second population with the most articles was “Veterans” with 10 and following them was “Children” with 5 articles. Los Angeles Times had the highest population type of “Veteran” making up 8 of the total 10 for both publications. New York Times population type with the most articles was tied between “Elderly” and “Children” with 3 each. For Los Angeles Times, the “Veteran” population increased throughout the 20-year time span and the New York Times had a steady increase in “Children” and “Elderly”.

*Capacity of animal*
Table 4 shows the results of what type of “capacity” is discussed in the articles and how the animals were utilized by the populations.

Table 4

“Capacity” mentioned in both New York Times and Los Angeles Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pet</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Therapy</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2002</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2012</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>1069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The capacity column for both publications, from highest to lowest number of articles was: pet, service, and therapy. The same pattern was found in both New York Times and Los Angeles Times separately. “Service” capacity were defined as: search and rescue, police canine, bomb sniffing, etc. Under capacity, “pet” had most articles each five year increment over the 20-year period. Service and therapy had similar steady numbers for articles in the New York Times while for the Los Angeles Times, services increased on the last five-year increments and therapy was only discussed twice in the first five-year increment between 1997-2003 and then not discussed again. In both publications, the “companion” category had the highest number of articles in each five year increment.

**Type of animal**

Table 5 shows results of the “type” or species of animal discussed in the articles.

Table 5
“Type” of animal mentioned in both: New York Times and Los Angeles Times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cat</th>
<th>Dog</th>
<th>Horse</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Various</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-2002</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2012</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>1069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, the “type” of animal used/discussed was overwhelmingly canines. In fact, dogs contributed to 63 out of the 92 articles that spoke about animals in a more therapeutic role. The second highest amount mentioned was “Various” meaning more than one type of animal in one article. For example, farm animals, shelters with both cats and dogs, or multiple pets in one household. “Other” was also considered a type, including a wide range of animals; dolphins, hamsters, ferrets, or birds. Only one article from the Los Angeles times out of the 92 talked about horses. Out of the 5 articles about cats, New York Times published 4 of them. Ultimately, dogs were the most utilized animals with mental health.
Discussion

This study found that while several populations across the mental health setting do get limited mention in the media, the primary number of articles in relation to an animal’s impact on one’s quality of life only surrounds the “companion” factor of the human-animal bond. While there is now convincing scientific evidence that companion animals have positive effects on psychological and physical well-being, helping to shape how people regulate their emotions, deal with stress or trauma and relate to others (Sable, 2013), there seems to be limited empirical evidence on some of the more vulnerable populations using animals in conjunction with traditional mental health treatments. As the media seems to report more often where this empirical evidence is present, additional research may be needed in these areas to either prove or disprove these theories so that they may be reported on with integrity by the media. The researchers would have liked to see more significant information reported through the media in regards to animals or dogs use in the mental health setting so that these settings could possibly use this information to support funding and expand services in these areas.

This study found that there was not an increase in articles in relation to “humans and animals and bonds” in the newspaper publications of The New York Times or The Los Angeles Times over the 20 year span that we examined. In fact, the number of articles in relation to our target subjects of children, people with disabilities, military personnel, prisoners and the elderly seemed to peak from 1997 - 2002 with 344 total articles that matched the search criteria. This study found that as far as these two newspaper publications, there was more media attention given to companion animals and service animals as they pertain to veterans and active K-9 units than to the other
populations of the elderly, children, persons with disabilities and prisoners. Out of the total 1,069 articles generated from the search of “humans and animals and bonds”, the New York Times resulted in approximately 250 more articles than the Los Angeles Times. However, it is of significance to note that the Los Angeles Times published nearly three times the amount of articles pertaining to the use of these animals than the New York Times.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations of this research study. First, the researchers did not search *all* media sources; other newspapers, radio, print, etc., and in particular television, due to the enormity of that medium. While television can and does reach the largest and most wide-spread audience, researching all of television’s public interest stories as well as news outlets was too broad of a research spectrum. Second, much of the literature review in regards to the populations the researchers were looking to explore in the media stated that much of the research done was anecdotal and that more empirical evidence was needed. Third, after searching several different combinations of key terms for data collection, the combination of “humans and animals and bonds” seemed to peripherally garner the most articles that would pertain to the study. However, other possibilities or combinations of terms that would have populated more results in which to collect data. Another limitation of this study was searching the 5 year period of 2013 - 2017 because as of the time the study was conducted, approximated only one fourth of 2017 had occurred and the researchers were unable to conduct a study of that entire year.

In conclusion, this study has implicated that the human-animal bond is a topic that has been and remains in the media fairly consistently. The practice of social work can
look to this source as supportive data for other studies that include the use of animals in alternative therapies. Also, because the researchers discovered a lack of empirical data when it comes to animals and specific populations, these may be strong areas to focus on in future studies. Agencies that are looking to use animals as a conjunct treatment to traditional therapies may be interested in working with students and researchers to gather this information for their benefit as well. Finally, the practice of social work can look to findings and readings of the human-animal bond and continually work to incorporate, learn about and teach these theories as an exciting, progressive and beneficial tool in their own practices and agencies going forward.
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