



Animals Forward: Risk, Resilience, and Remediation in Animal Maltreatment

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Consilience of Knowledge

- Interdisciplinary efforts have been undertaken to improve response to animal maltreatment at the University of Denver
- Departmental Focus:
 - **Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW):** Professional Development Coursework, Field Placements, Research
 - **Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP):** Advocacy, Community Engagement, Clinics
 - **Animal Law Program | Sturm College of Law:** Applied Research
- Primary Partnerships: Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), Kirkpatrick Foundation



Denver FIRST (Forensic Institute for Research, Service, and Training)

- Operate out of the Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP)
- Support adults and juveniles involved with the criminal justice system
- Conduct animal maltreatment evaluations
- Train the next generation of specialized evaluators and treatment providers for responding to Animal Abuse
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Getting the Framework Right

- Whenever possible, Prevention Science should be prioritized and supported by Evidence-Informed Interventions
- Intervention strategies must be individualized to match the unique circumstances, underlying causes, and needs involved in each case
- A One Health approach can be helpful to investigate the contextual, sociological, and environmental issues that an individual may be experiencing
- Strengths-based, culturally responsive approaches are most effective at building resilience and reducing overall risk





Intervention Science-Efforts to Improve Accuracy

- Persistent reliance on a graduation-oriented theory of animal abuse often conflated with the concept of the LINK predominates the animal protection literature.
- Significant concern among researchers is that the data simply cannot support the conclusion that animal abuse reliably precedes and can be regarded as predictive of future human violence/overstating empirical data does more harm than good for the movement's long-term prospects as a serious field of inquiry
- Efforts to encourage serious response to animal cruelty does not necessarily have to equate to increased punishment or carceral intervention response.
- Evidence suggests that incarceration is not effective at addressing many underlying factors of animal cruelty cases. Therefore, moving from the default of increased retributive/punishment-oriented responses to a broader spectrum of alternatives that are evidence-informed and focus on address the underlying issues and factors specific to each case is likely to improve outcomes for people and animals



Profile of the Individual Who Mistreats Animals



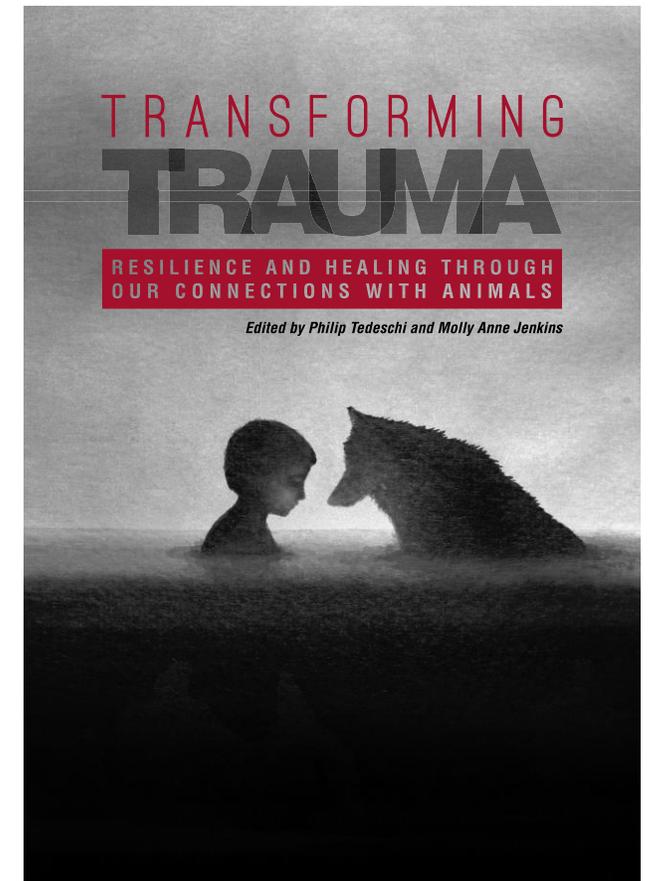
"For every problem, there is a solution which is simple, neat, and wrong."

~ H. L. Mencken



Animal Cruelty Typologies, Diagnostic Categories, and other Underlying Causes

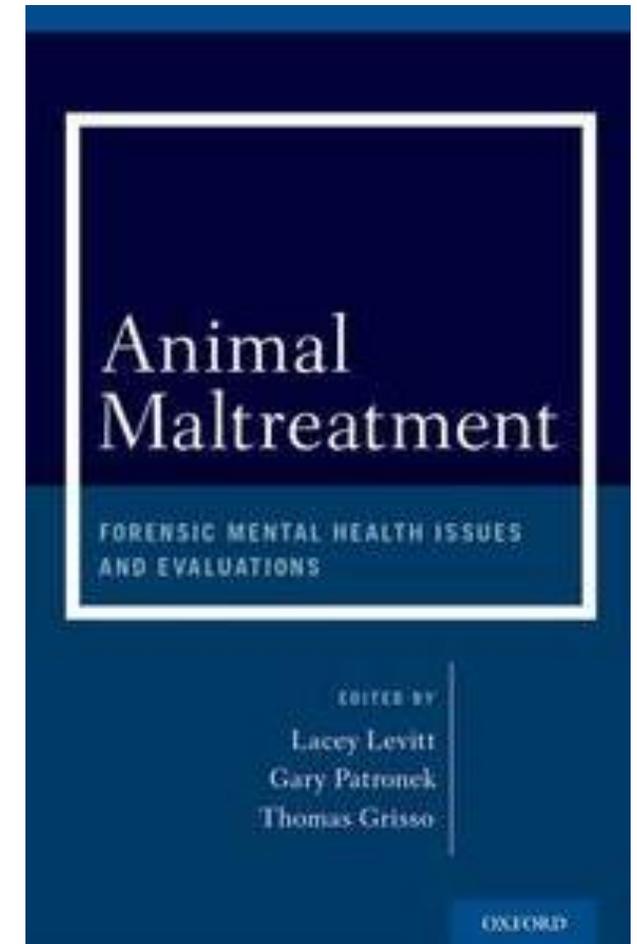
- Cases may be classified using **typologies**, such as animal collecting, sex offense, or neglect
- Cases can be classified into three major **diagnostic categories**: Psychogenic, traumagenic, and criminogenic
- It is also important to understand other **underlying causes** such as lack of education, developmental considerations, and socio-economic contributors
- It is critical to identify individual and community **risk and resiliency factors**





Individualized Assessment & Differential Response: Connection to Rehabilitative and Restorative Justice

- Individualized Assessment can be used to identify cases in which Restorative Justice is an effective intervention strategy
- Individualized Assessment can also suggest intervention strategies that may be effective to use alongside Rehabilitative and Restorative Justice





Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluation (FAME)

- Per the Colorado Revised Statute: Cruelty to Animals (§ 18-9-202 C.R.S.), (2)(a)(III): "The court shall order an evaluation to be conducted prior to sentencing to assist the court in determining an appropriate sentence"
- Primary purposes of an animal abuse-specific evaluation:
 - Identify factors relevant to the emergence of animal cruelty behavior
 - Estimate likelihood for continued abuse and community endangerment
 - Provide appropriate recommendations for response
- Sensitive, comprehensive, and standardized methods of assessment must be used





In Colorado, a FAME includes...

- Case file review
- Client interview/observation
- Clinical mental status exam
- Collateral contact family members, and other relevant persons
- Collateral review of criminal history
- Review of Academic Functioning
- Neurobehavioral Cognitive Status Exam
- Intelligence Testing
- Diagnostic Symptom Assessment
- Trauma Assessment
- Psychological Testing
- Clinical Assessment of Family
- Animal Abuse Typology Consideration
- **Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool**
- Review of veterinary and forensic veterinary reports



Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluations: Why Individuate?

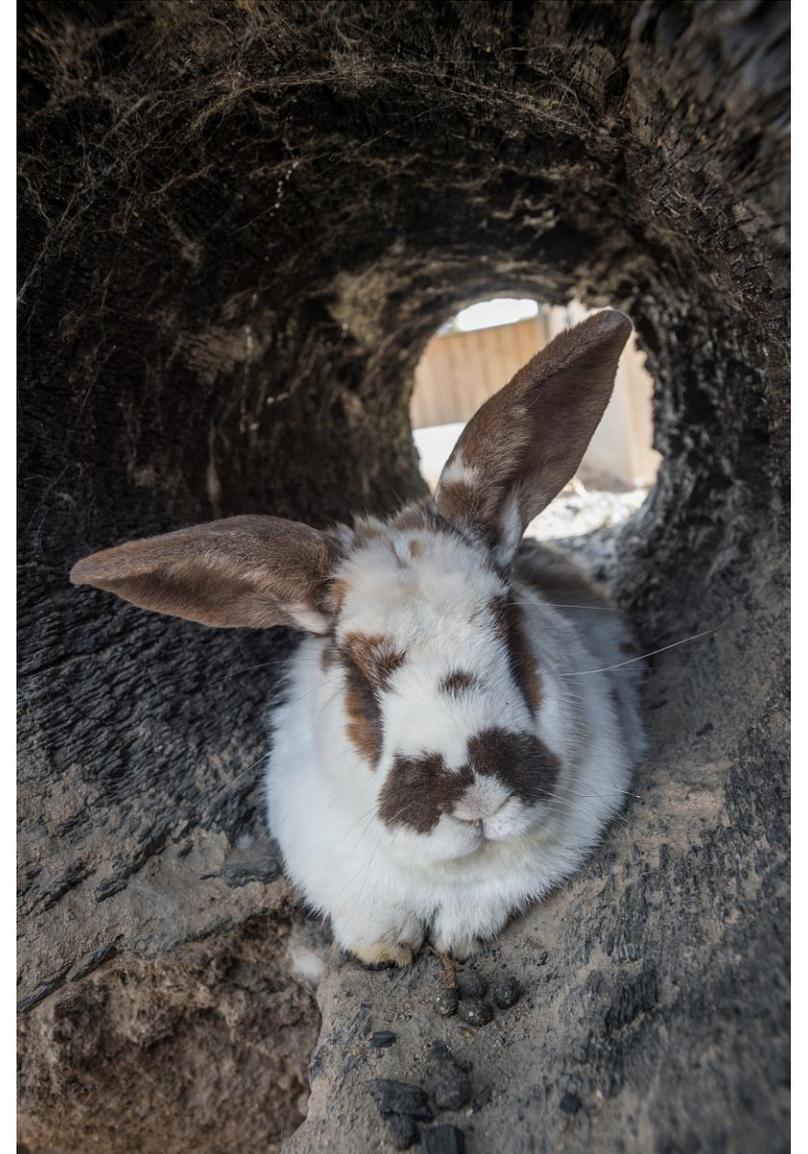
- Acute, Post Traumatic and Complex Trauma: trauma can impact all aspects of functioning, including care for self and others, self harm.
- Depression: may fail to attend to their pets' needs due to their own low energy, apathy/loss of interest, and psychomotor retardation.
- Anxiety: specific phobias/fears may lead to the abuse/neglect of a specific type of animal.
- Factitious Disorders (Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy): may deliberately harm an animal in order to play role of rescuer and/or to elicit sympathy from others.
- Seeking Drugs & Substance Abuse
- Sensory Integration Disorders: sensitivity to noise made by pets may lead to acute frustration.
- Childhood animal cruelty associated with Antisocial Personality Disorder, antisocial personality traits, and polysubstance abuse and dependence.
- Substance abuse can increase one's impulsivity and reduce one's control over aggressive behavior. Other issues of dis-regulation.....
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- **Uncontrolled anger** is not a dominant reason for animal abuse.
- How does **persistent homelessness and poverty** become relevant in an evaluation?





Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool (AARAT)

- The original version of the AARAT was created in consultation with Dr. Lockwood, inspired by his Dangerousness Factors
- The AARAT has undergone two phases of psychometric development since its inception
- The current version of the AARAT includes 73 items divided into 9 subscales. This expanded version emphasizes dynamic and protective factors
- Accuracy within risk assessment can inform differential response



How should we approach measuring risk?

- Many folks want a risk assessment to tell them who is low, medium or high risk. While this is understandable, we need to move toward **understanding what factors influence risk**.
- **Significant risk does not necessarily correlate with criminogenic factors** even though that is a common misconception. Cases with more psychogenic and traumagenic origins can be high risk while a case with criminogenic origins can be low risk. Also, risk level does not necessarily equal dangerousness as commonly conflated within the LINK framework. Ex. You can have high risk for neglect/passive cruelty and risk level doesn't indicate potential for violence.
- There is a social justice issue with risk assessments when they are used to label persons as high, medium or low risk and then influence decisions regarding sentencing/supervision/etc. **The important aspect of risk assessment is not to identify low/medium/high (this can help with some decisions like allocation of resources/level of support), but more importantly assessments identify areas of risk that can be addressed through intervention, treatment, education, supportive resources.**
- **Most importantly risk assessments can identify areas or resilience or protective factors.** Often with intervention/treatment/education, etc we are more likely to be successful in enhancing protective factors/building up resilience than we are in reducing risk factors. Building up protective factors also decreases risk overall.





Summary of Current Research

Goal: Research to inform Practice, and Practice to inform Research

- Colorado Judicial Data Analysis on Animal Cruelty Cases
- Animal Protection Officers: Professional Stressors, Mental Health Service Access, and Training Needs
- Human Services Professionals Experience with Animal Maltreatment
- Continued research on the efficacy of the Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluation (FAME) and the Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool (AARAT)



A photograph showing a person in a green uniform and a light-colored cap, likely a veterinarian or caretaker, kneeling on the ground and tending to a young elephant. The elephant is wearing a patterned blanket over its back. The person is holding the elephant's leg, possibly examining it. The background is a natural, outdoor setting with green foliage.

Sociocultural Conundrums and Interspecies Justice

- Certain animals are valued over others in our culture
- We live in a society in where large-scale, systemic forms of abuse towards animals are legal
- Systemic forms of animal cruelty intersect with systemic forms of oppression towards humans



Reflection

- How does prevention and intervention science inform opportunities for innovation in responding to animal maltreatment?
- How can we equip decision-makers with evidence-supported strategies for responding to animal cruelty cases?
- How might you incorporate individualized assessment and differential response into your restorative justice practice?
- How do we support each other and hold ourselves accountable to improving accuracy in defining and responding to animal cruelty. What might it mean to place **Animals Forward?**





Thank you!

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*Do the best you can until you know better...
Then do better.*

- Maya Angelou



Presentation images were sourced from **We Animals Media**, an organization dedicating to "telling the stories of animals in the human environment" through photojournalism