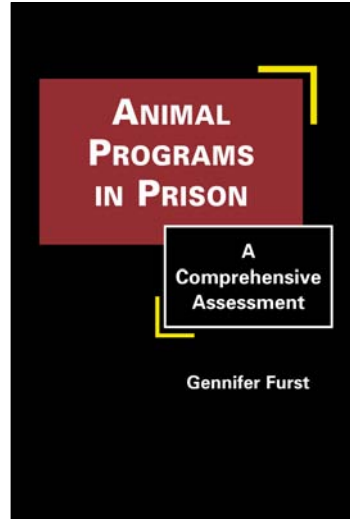


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Animal Programs in Prison: A Comprehensive Assessment

Gennifer Furst



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1

Introduction

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.”

—Immanuel Kant

“Man is the cruelest animal.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche

What happens when human and non-human animals interact? What lessons can be drawn by criminal justice scholars and practitioners? In this book I explore what social science has demonstrated about human-animal relationships, specifically the value of establishing these relations within the confines of the criminal justice system. I argue that criminal justice scholars should consider what we have learned about a topic seemingly unrelated to their own field: how people can benefit from interacting with non-humans. While the so-called “touchy feely” topic of cute, fuzzy animals may seem anathema to the traditional, male-dominated field of criminology/criminal justice, it is no longer possible to dismiss the potential in connecting people and animals.

Animals are increasingly being incorporated into programs inside prisons across the United States and abroad. The programs are appealing on an intuitive level and are consistently regarded as successful according to ample amounts of anecdotal information. However,

criminal justice researchers have largely ignored the trend. The logic of prison animal programs is rooted in a developed therapeutic literature regarding human-animal interactions. Physicians and psychologists have recommended companion animals for a variety of illnesses including blindness, deafness, recuperation from surgery, high blood pressure, chemical addiction and a range of disorders associated with aging (Arkow, 1998; Beck & Katcher, 1996). Animal-assisted therapy has been used as an effective intervention with the elderly, those who have been physically or sexually abused, and people with chronic mental illness (*ibid*). The relaxing effect of animals has long been recognized by dentists and doctors who have fish tanks in their offices. Companion animals offer a unique bonding experience for humans. In fact, more people in the United States have pets than children (Shepherd, 2008).

Some people may wonder what animals can offer prison inmates and the criminal justice system. At the same time, more and more non-humans are spending time behind prison walls. The animals are being incorporated into programs that promise positive outcomes at a number of levels. In this book, I seek to understand the potential of these programs to benefit not only the program participants, and animals, but also both the prison and outside communities. In order to understand current prison-based animal programs (PAPs) it is necessary to consider them through the lens of the United States history of correctional programming. How do these programs fit within the country's current policies regarding punishment? Do inmates who participate in PAPs demonstrate changes that are different from or more significant than inmates who participate in other programs—or no programs which is the usual—administered inside prison facilities? I also explore why these programs are proliferating—why are they so appealing, not just nationally but around the world? Given this, why haven't they been more widely studied by academics and researchers?

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I explain the traditional goal of having inmates participate in programs in order to reduce recidivism, or return to prison. I introduce the idea of personal transformation, or internal change within an individual, as another way of measuring program "success." I also describe the ever increasing consensus among academics, researchers, and now even politicians that our current policies that are punitive and revenge-oriented are just ineffective. We are currently witnessing an era of punishment that some regard as neither purely punitive nor purely rehabilitative. Therefore the place of PAPs within the current paradigm of U.S. punishment is discussed.

In chapter 2, I introduce the logic of human-animal interactions (HAI), specifically prison inmates and animals. Shelter animals and

prison inmates share a number of qualities that make them well-suited to create a symbiotic relationship. I examine the findings that the impact of these relationships has social implications beyond those received by the participants. The work being done by incarcerated people provides restitution and much-needed work for the community. Once released, former convicts will be living in society among fellow human beings but they often go unprepared for reintegration. We have seen that contact with animals can positively impact this transition. Here I review the vast evidence we have about the social, psychological, and physical benefits of HAI.

In chapter 3, I examine the history of United States correctional programming. In doing so it is necessary to understand the rise of the prison as the country's favored form of punishment. The story is sordid and has roots in the practice of enslaving Africans—the effects of which we still see when we look at the vast racial disparity of who is incarcerated today. The end of slavery did not mean the end of indentured servitude; black people continued to be exploited for their work when went from plantations to prisons and their farms. Prison farms are the first examples of inmates working with animals but given the policies that made these farms de-facto slave plantations, coupled with the inevitable slaughter of the farm animals, they are not the therapeutic animal programs I define as PAPs. But given the work with animals and the idea of work as rehabilitative—present throughout the history of prison programming and continuing to this day—it is necessary to follow the development of the farm programs. Further, I examine how both the use of prisons and work programs have consistently been driven by the desire for economic profit.

Having established the definition of a true PAP, in chapter 4 I explore the evolution of the programs. I review how they began and the history of how they came to be so common inside prisons. After examining the past, I present data from my own national survey of programs currently being administered throughout the United States. I provide a snapshot of today's PAPs—including what models are most common and the animals participants are working with, as well as program characteristics such as their size and policies for choosing participants.

Largely missing from the limited research that has been conducted on PAPs are theoretical explanations for why the programs produce effects. In chapter 5, I present an in-depth analysis of two such programs—one with male participants and the other female. Using these programs as prototypes I suggest desistance from crime, first demonstrated inside prison by the program participants' efforts to

remain free from infractions, as an alternative to measuring a program's worth solely on official rates of recidivism. A person's internal transformation, which can be inspired by participation in a PAP, lends itself to an alternative paradigm of viewing program effects. Building on prior theoretical work by researchers in the field I present preliminary ideas about why prison-based animal programs produce the outcomes we repeatedly see.

Current economic conditions have permitted a dialogue to begin regarding the usefulness of the country's reliance on prisons. Rather than being labeled soft on crime, politicians have started to listen to the decades old message from researchers that prisons do not work. It is unfortunate that it has taken such dire national economic conditions to listen to reason, but reformers have to be thankful for the opportunity. Evidence of this change can be found in the National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2009, sponsored by Senator Jim Webb (D-Virginia), and passed in July 2010, that calls for a thorough evaluation and is assigned to develop recommendations for improvement at each stage of the criminal justice system. In chapter 6 I examine a number of emerging ideas in punishment, so-called alternative programs that build on this momentum for change. The programs discussed in this chapter demonstrate the duality of our current model of punishment that seeks to both punish and reform.

Finally, I conclude with a broad discussion of how animals can help prison inmates in their quest for personal change, while creating an opportunity for incarcerated people to give back to the community. I also examine the expanding future roles for animals in prison. I close by asserting that we should critically reconsider our ideas about non-human animals and their place in our society. Not only may we be on the brink of major criminal justice policy reform but also significant modification in our recognition of the sentience of beings other than humans.

The interview data referred to in chapter 5 were collected at two prison animal programs and chosen for a variety of reasons. The programs differ on a number of criteria which allowed for comparison. One program is in a male facility while the other is in a female facility. They both utilize dogs but have different designs: the male program socializes rescued adult greyhounds, while the female program socializes puppies to go on to specialized service training. The programs are administered by different non-profit organizations and have different staff. While the prisons are different security levels, the male prison is medium-security and the female facility is maximum-security, their location in the same state means they abide, in general, by the same overall security guidelines and are governed by the same commissioner.

In addition, the program in the female facility is part of a firmly established network administered by the affiliated non-profit organization while the program in the male facility is the only one administered by that other non-profit organization. Applying to one state department of correction for access to its facilities was also a practical consideration.

How I Became Aware of Animals Inside Prisons

It was fall 2000 when I first read a New York State Department of Correctional Services newsletter describing the puppy program that had been in place at one of the state's maximum-security women's facilities for over a year. Initially I thought it was a cute idea, certainly novel. The story was accompanied by a picture of a group of smiling women and young Labradors. The photo struck me—I could never recall ever seeing smiling inmates pictured in this newsletter. My next thought was that while women might be entrusted with dogs, there would never be a program like this in a men's facility.

The idea stuck with me. I began thinking about how animals had positively influenced my life and the lives of others I knew. Whether walking or driving by I would always look at dogs I passed and feel myself smile. I knew dogs could be therapeutic for people—older people and people who needed encouragement to get out and walk for exercise. Shortly after reading about New York's first program in the women's facility I learned the state had instituted a similar program at a medium-security men's facility. I was pleasantly surprised I had been wrong about dogs and male inmates, and impressed with the state for taking such a step.

I became more interested in visiting a dog program first-hand. In spring 2001 my job with a nonprofit prison watchdog agency brought me to a medium-security male facility with a dog program. I knew I had to make sure a stop at the program made it on to the day's agenda. It was cold, raining and dreary on the day of the visit. We were told we would not see the program until the end of the day and only if time permitted. When the time came my colleagues and I were driven in a prison van with metal mesh on the windows to the stand-alone building where the program was housed, near the perimeter of the facility compound. The one-story structure looked like a military barrack—long and narrow. There was a small fenced-in yard behind the drab one story beige building.

Walking into the “puppy unit” was like walking into another dimension—it was like no other prison unit I had ever experienced,

especially in generally tense male facilities. It did not take my two degrees in psychology to recognize the men here were different from others I had met behind prison walls. Inside this building there was kindness and hope; inmates were smiling. These men had pride in their work and they were eager to show us what they and the dogs had accomplished. I will never forget the satisfaction one man had in introducing me to his bilingual dog—he had taught her commands in both English and Spanish. Something special was going on and I left that day knowing I had to explore this phenomenon further.

I must also make a note about the scope of this work. The book is not simply about animal programs in prison—it could not be. The topic is too complex and part of a much larger landscape. Non-human animals, prison inmates and incarceration are intertwined in ways I was not even aware of when I began. I see each topic as a string—each with its own forward trajectory that intersects the other strings. In telling the story of where we are I found I had to explore where we were and how we got here. Nothing is as simple as we think (and hope) it will be.

Penology

In the mid 1970's the sociologist Robert Martinson and his colleagues infamously reported that efforts at offender rehabilitation had failed and declared that when it comes to prison programming nothing works (Lipton, Martinson, & Wilks, 1975; Martinson, 1974). While criminal justice policy turned more punitive and largely based on politics of fear in the ensuing years (see Beckett, 1997) researchers of correctional treatment have devoted significant energy toward discovering what programs are more or less effective at reducing recidivism for different offenders (see, for example, Harland, 1996; Lipsey, 1992, 1995; McGuire, 1995, 2002; Ross, Antonowicz, & Dhaliwal, 1995). Today, there is agreement that “the view that ‘nothing works’ is simply wrong: some rehabilitation programs can have a positive effect in reducing recidivism. The effect is not always large, although sometimes it is; nor is it always present, although on average it is. However, it is there and that cannot be ignored” (McMurrin & Hollin, 1995, p. ix). Our current paradigm of punishment has been described as “braided” (Hutchinson, 2006, p. 443) or “hybrid” (Hannah-Moffat, 2005, p. 29) as there is growing evidence of the blurring of lines between the punishment-rehabilitation duality. In fact some have gone even further and called for a revolution in penology that recognizes “the transformative possibilities of the human subject” (Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009, p. 6).

Recidivism, defined simplistically as a return to prison, is actually a complex phenomenon based on a number of factors and can be the result of any of several actions on the part of the offender or parole officer. The limits of the treatment-punishment dichotomy are increasingly being recognized by researchers who acknowledge “there is non consensus” regarding what works in corrections (Visher, 2006). Therefore rather than recidivism researchers are increasingly framing the discussion of desistance from crime in terms of transformation or self-change within offenders and former offenders (e.g., Maruna, 2001; Veysey, 2008; Visher & Travis, 2003; Ward & Maruna, 2007). People who adopt “valued social roles” have been found to experience transformation (Veysey, 2008, p. 3). People who “learned new, or organized existing skills to support the new role, surrounded themselves with people who reinforced the new role, and rewrote their life narrative to tell a story of strength and resilience instead of hopeless victimization” are able to more successfully desist from crime (Veysey, 2008, p. 3).

Participating in prison programming is believed to have the potential to achieve a number of positive outcomes. At a most basic level programs can improve the safety and control of the prison environment. A number of researchers (e.g., Lawrence, Mears, Dubin, & Travis, 2002; Mears, Lawrence, Solomon, & Waul, 2002; Travis & Petersilia, 2001) recommend utilizing a broader definition of benefits that includes not only reduced recidivism, but more long-term goals including improved health and family relationships that can also lead to public safety. When programs are “held to the sole criterion of reduced recidivism, many programs, in fact, may not be effective. Other measures...may be more appropriate for assessing their effectiveness” (Mears et al., 2002, p. 68). Reliance on decreased levels of criminality may “substantially understate the range of outcomes and goals that prison [programs] may yield and that are frequently included to justify them.....Indeed, the ability of many programs to exert a strong and direct effect on recidivism may be relatively nominal, especially given the range of factors that can contribute to criminal behavior” (ibid). It is the nature and scope of the changes, or transformation in program participants, therefore, that needs to be documented (Lawrence et al., 2002).

One type of prison programming that appears to influence transformation is based on the principles of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) or animal-assisted activities (AAA) which have been incorporated into an increasing range of programs (Arлуke, 2008). People with various physical and emotional needs interact with (e.g.,

train, groom, pet) an assortment of animals (e.g., dogs, horses, llamas) in many different settings (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, schools). While there is mounting evidence of the effectiveness of AAA and AAT (see Becker, 2002; Fine, 2000; Wilson & Turner, 1998), “studies so far have only provided solid statistical proof of the benefit, not an explanation for it” (Franklin, Emmison, Haraway, & Travers, 2007, p. 44). Within the field of criminal justice the trend has gone largely ignored. Could it be that criminologists are hesitant to consider the distinct contributions of a non-human animal in creating a relationship formed with a prison inmate? Perhaps it is due to the paradoxical nature of the programs which have been implemented not to treat inmates but to provide a service to the community. The benefits to the participants and the positive press the facility inevitably receives are considered collateral. Some may argue the intention of the programs is irrelevant—positive outcomes are positive outcomes—but others could argue that if not specifically designed to benefit inmates, they are just another example of ill-conceived prison programming. So while PAPs positively affect inmates, the benefits to participants may be viewed as almost accidental, dismissing the programs as evidence of the coming of a new era of enlightened prison practices—practices that recognize the possibility of “recovering, reclaiming, and transforming one’s sense of self, of expanding the capabilities to affect others, to be affected, and to experience a continual metamorphosis” as a human being (Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009, p. 6).

Terminology

It is worthwhile to note language and terminology here. In previously published work on this topic I have referred to prison-based animal programs as PAPs. I received feedback from a few female scholars who associated the acronym with a yearly gynecological procedure they do not look forward to. I thought a catchy acronym might be useful to gain wider acceptance and recognition of the programs but was unable to come up with anything that would spell out something more likeable such as “dog” or “pet.” Going along with the idea of catchy acronyms, many times these programs have cute names such as Program Pooch or Pound Puppies; the sweet names, ironically, make it easier dismiss the important work being done (Gromstein, 2008). Charming names are not congruent with the paramilitary nature of prisons and jail—they imply fun and games and some people believe punishment should not involve the pleasure of having a dog.

Continuing with names and labels, some make distinct distinctions between animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapies (AAT); activities may be therapeutic but they need not be. Animals, usually dogs, have been utilized in activities ranging from being present to help ease anxiety in children learning to read aloud to accompanying nervous victims testifying in court to visiting nursing home residents. At a broader level, the program participants are taking part in what has been termed human-animal interaction (HAI). In this work the terms will be used interchangeably.

Another classification of animals are those animals regarded as working, such as those involved with law enforcement agencies trained to detect explosives, illicit substances, and counterfeit DVDs, as well as those trained to assist in the daily activities of people with differing abilities. Officially, distinctions are also made between assistance or comfort animals and service animals which are specifically trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability according to the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (see www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm). Comfort animals can be found in hospitals and nursing homes. “Psychiatric service animals” are increasingly being recognized; these animals retrieve pills, work with autistic children, and warn of oncoming panic attacks. Moving beyond service dogs for the blind, “monkeys for quadriplegia and agoraphobia, guide miniature horses, a goat for muscular dystrophy, a parrot for psychosis and any number of animals for anxiety, including cats, ferrets, pigs, at least one iguana and a duck” have been documented (Skloot, 2009). The distinction between assistance and work animals is significant as service animals cannot be denied access to a business or other place animals are not commonly permitted. A lack of clear guidelines leads to difficulties for those needing the animals, such as having to fight or sue a co-op or condo board in order to be able to keep the animal in a building with a rule prohibiting dogs (Raftery, 2010). The controversy surrounding these issues is beyond the scope of this work.

There are also differing names given to the larger philosophical or academic area of study. Sociobiology, once used to refer to the study of gender differences between male and female humans, was then applied to the study of interactions between humans and other animals. The term human-animal relations is more frequently being replaced by human-animal studies, while there has also developed an interdisciplinary study of non-human animals as cognizant and having emotional lives similar to humans. Some argue about the very label applied to animals; the term “companion animal” is preferred to “pet.” Companion animals are not owned and are more equitable to their human counterparts—their

individual sentience is acknowledged. Since we are all animals, some insist on distinguishing between human and non-human animals rather than between humans and animals or non-humans. The division is meant to point out the tendency toward anthropocentrism, or using humans as the measuring rod to which all other beings are compared and therefore regarded as inferior. Some prefer to refer to all of us as creatures.

Some researchers and academics debate whether the term rehabilitation should be used as “there is something vaguely preachy and evangelical” about the term (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 2). Then there is re-entry, a hot topic in the United States (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2000; Travis, 2005), or resettlement in the United Kingdom (Ward & Maruna, 2007) which can be substituted with reintegration, coined by Australian John Braithwaite over 20 years ago (1989). Desistance from crime has become widely used for its lack of the prefix “re-” but has been described as an awkward way of “describing the process of ‘going straight’ or self-reform” (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 4). So, rather than “rebranding” (p. 6) terms and the distraction it brings with it, it has been suggested rehabilitation’s “long, well-known and well-documented history...[while] not always pretty” (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 7) offers a more stable basis for moving forward with the topic. If rehabilitation, transformation, and desistance are troublesome terms, so too is the debate about “what works.” Given the lack of consensus regarding much of this area of study, maybe “what helps” should be considered (Ward & Maruna, 2007).

In this work, the terms rehabilitation and transformation will both be used. Despite the limits of the word rehabilitation the programs are rehabilitative in the sense that participants do experience a change, or are affected by, their interactions with animals; the programs are therapeutic. While the term transformation is preferable to rehabilitation when one considers the semantics of the words, both are used in this work. While I often question tradition, the term rehabilitate is more well-known and accessible to readers. The debate over the most appropriate term is beyond the scope of this work and will continue to be argued by academics for years to come. A typology of PAPs based on that proposed by Hines (n.d.) appears in Table 1.1.

Whatever terminology is used, there is an undeniable trend of a growing number of PAPs; the programs are alluring on a number of levels. The flexibility of the program models, their relatively low cost to implement, and the continually growing, even if largely anecdotal, evidence of their success make them a good bet. Given all that is wrong with prisons, the possibility of finding and implementing reliable and effective treatment programs is appealing. Not only can some of the

more than two million incarcerated people benefit, but programs that pair inmates with homeless animals make it possible to help an inordinate number of animals as well. Participants of PAPs make a contribution to a larger social issue when the program is designed to rescue unwanted animals that would otherwise be destroyed (Lai, 1998). Most recently, the great demand for work and service dogs has created a market where the large blocks of time had by prison inmates makes them ideal candidates to conduct the intensive and time-consuming training required for animals to go on to specialized service work. Inmates can be viewed as engaging in noble work that also serves the community and fills a need. Having inmates and animals help each other

Table 1.1: Prison Animal Program Typology

PROGRAM TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Visitation Programs	Companion animals brought to facility by humane society or nonprofit organization at specified times
Wildlife Rehabilitation Programs	Participants care for injured wildlife which are then released
Livestock Care Programs	Farm animal care including milking and calf raising; fish breeding
Pet Adoption Programs	Animals are adopted and cared for by individual inmates
Service Animal Socialization Programs	Assistance/work puppies or dogs are raised and taught basic commands; dog goes on to specialized training
Vocational Programs	Participants are trained/certified in animal grooming/handling/care
Community Service Programs	Participants train and care for animals (including dogs and wild horses) which are then adopted out to the community
Multi-Modal Programs	Usually vocational program component and community service program component

in a symbiotic relationship, regardless of the motivation for establishing such a program, makes it possible to achieve a win-win-win situation.

Some could argue there is a certain irony that is created when a program pairs those who society has judged as “bad” with others viewed as vulnerable or even helpless. So then are PAP participants valiant or do they remain villainous? Prison inmates who work with animals represent a group with a uniquely contradictory status. Adding to the social duality of PAP participants is how the work tends to violate traditional gender norms. Engaging in what is frequently nurturing work stands in stark contrast to the big, mean outlaws sitting in cages—how the general public often characterizes prison inmates. In fact, most PAP participants, like most prison inmates, are male.

Apart from unwanted animals there are few groups less revered than prison inmates. In the eyes of the law, both inmates and animals are property, albeit of little value. Both have been caged, experimented on, and their work poorly rewarded. Significantly, since help generally comes from above (i.e., we give to those less fortunate than ourselves), there are not many opportunities for inmates to help those worse off than themselves. But when given the opportunity, the results have been shown to be powerful—as will be explored in the rest of this book.