

Linking Violence: An Interdisciplinary Conference on the Relationship between Violence against Nonhuman Animals and Humans

A conference held May 20 and 21, 2004, at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia, Canada, examined the connections between violence against humans and nonhuman animal abuse. The 2-day conference brought together academics from sociology, psychology, social work, and veterinary medicine; and professionals from social services, justice, animal protection, veterinary medicine, education, and related fields. The conference highlighted the importance of interagency collaboration and enhanced agency initiatives to combat all forms of family violence, including companion animal abuse. In addition, the Linking Violence Conference promoted the importance of interdisciplinary research.²

The conference had several goals: (a) to raise awareness of the intersection between nonhuman animal

abuse and human violence; (b) to help facilitate interdisciplinary and interagency research and collaboration on these issues; and (c) to ensure academics and practitioners recognize and treat all forms of family violence involving humans, animals, or both. The conference raised awareness in the local community of the relationship between violence against animals and humans. The conference highlighted the intersections between these two forms of violence. While offering applied recommendations for community agencies, researchers gave conference attendees direction for further research focuses. The conference also highlighted the importance of cross reporting.

In all, 80 people attended nine presentations and workshops during the 2-day conference.³ Participants and attendees came from both Canada and the United States. Clifton Flynn, University of South Carolina's Department of Sociology, was the academic keynote. Flynn examined the links between animal abuse and violence in families by first describing the relationship between violence toward children and childhood animal cruelty. He then examined pet abuse and the role of companion animals in the lives of battered women. His findings reveal the central themes of gender, power, and control in explaining the connection between male violence in families and violence toward animals. The multidimensional nature of violence against women, children,

and animals in families was considered, and implications for policy and professionals were discussed.

Ginger Beckett, Humane Society of the United States, spoke on the connection between human violence and animal abuse and provided information on her agency's First Strike Campaign and its educational and research initiatives developed to eradicate violence. As agency keynote, she addressed the expanding roles and collaboration efforts among community agencies to develop coordinated community responses to violence. Among the strategies discussed was the Safe Haven for Animals program for pets belonging to battered women, which allows women to leave abusive partners by securing safekeeping for their companion animals.

The other presentations highlighted a variety of aspects related to the intersection between human violence and animal abuse. Jessie Robertson, York University, presented the findings of her study of undergraduate university students, which demonstrates that males and females differ in the way caring value orientation, pet care experience, and pet attachment affect animal use attitudes. She found caring value orientation linked directly to animal use attitudes in females. In males, however, caring value orientation affected attachment to pets that, in turn, affected animal use attitudes.

Leanne Kline presented Alice Crook's research (Atlantic Veterinary College) on the role of veterinarians in addressing animal abuse. Crook's paper examined the role of veterinarians in providing advocacy for both abused animals and humans. Veterinarians often are the first professionals to see an abused animal. To protect the abused animal, they must report the abuse. Moreover, they must report the abuse because animal abuse may be a sentinel for other violence within that family.

The first day ended with a panel discussion composed of members from the local social service community. This session gave social service workers a chance to reflect upon the presentations of the day and make connections to the work they do in the community. The result was a committed and concrete plan for recognizing the link at the community level. The conference organizing committee was extremely pleased with the immediate responses from the local community participants and attendees—animal protection workers, transition house workers, social workers, police, and victim's service workers—who discussed their role in detecting, cross-reporting, and preventing violence against animals and humans. This committed response implemented the following initiatives:

1. using police inspectors to inform the local police community about the link between animal abuse and human violence, especially the connections between violence against women and children in the home;

2. posing questions on intake surveys at the local Transition House that address animal abuse and neglect; and
3. appointing a member of the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to the local Interagency on Family Violence.

Day 2 began with a workshop led by Phil Arkow, Latham Foundation. Arkow advocated veterinarians' playing a significant role in protecting not only animal members of families but also vulnerable human members. His research indicates that veterinarians see more human clients than animal patients and, as such, should respond to all forms of suspected family violence.

Cathy Thomas, Calgary Humane Society, presented the findings of the Calgary Humane Society's recent study of 100 women who entered 2 emergency women's shelters in Alberta. The study revealed that 25.4% of women delayed leaving their abusive situation because they feared the abuser might harm their companion animals. The study also uncovered that in 56.1% of the cases, the abusive partner either had killed, or threatened to harm, one of the pets. In 64.5% of the cases, the children in the abusive situation were aware that their animals were abused and were influenced negatively by this abuse. Pamela Carlisle-Frank and Joshua Frank, The Foundation for Interdisciplinary Research and Education Promoting Animal Welfare, discussed the role of companion animals as scapegoats, property, and victims of abuse in violent homes. Dave Rozee (Veterinarian, Kennedy Animal Hospital) ended the conference by facilitating a discussion on the responsibilities facing animal care professionals to prevent and report violence.

To facilitate changes that are more widespread, the conference proceedings were sent to Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin. In addition to the proceedings, he received the following:

1. a copy of the final event program;
2. a letter on behalf of the Linking Violence organizing committee that noted our strong support for the proposed Canadian Animal Cruelty Bill C-22; and
3. postcards created by a local high school art class depicting images of human-animal friendship and the horrors of animal cruelty.

Conference attendees signed the postcards to demonstrate their support for Bill C-22, which has gone through various amendments and name changes in the ongoing quest for approval at various levels of government. If ratified, these changes would remove animals from the property section of the Canadian Criminal Code and provide increased penalties for those who cause unnecessary pain and suffering.

When the Linking Violence Conference came to a close, people walked away feeling energized, hopeful, and connected because of the concern and commitment expressed for interdisciplinary research and interagency collaboration. The research and collaboration will lead to better detection and prevention of violent behavior toward both animals and humans. This conference provided the opportunity to offer up-to-date information to attendees on the academic research in this area and its relationship to the practical societal changes that can occur through collaborative efforts between academics and agency workers.

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Notes

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- ³ The organizing committee was unique in its composition as it included: Tracey Smith-Harris, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology & Sociology, Cape Breton University; Diane Lewis, High School Teacher, Memorial Composite High School, Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia; Stacey Byrne, Undergraduate, Department of Anthropology & Sociology, Cape Breton University; and Nita MacLean, Undergraduate, Bachelor of Technology in Environmental Health, Cape Breton University. The array of perspectives provided by the committee make up complemented the interdisciplinary and interagency focus of the conference. The conference proceedings are available for download on the conference website: <http://faculty.ucsb.ns.ca/~cdr/Conference/index.htm>