

# Behavior Traits Detected In Shelter Dogs During Interactions

An Observational Study Presented By: Diana Ramos

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## Review of Literature

- The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals estimates that 5 to 7 million pets are admitted to shelters each year, with 60% of admitted dogs euthanized (ASPCA, 2014)
- To improve the welfare of dogs, identify the need for behavior modification, and match dogs to new homes, shelter organizations first need to collect information about the dogs' behavior. This information is used to find stable behavioral tendencies to predict future behavior in similar situations (Ledger and Baxter, 1997; Svartberg, 2007; Taylor and Mills, 2006).
- Ranging from obedience training (allowing for predictable interactions) to environmental enhancement (increasing controllability of the environment), the main purpose of these behavior modification programs is to improve adoption rates and reduce re-relinquishment rates of adopted dogs because of behavior problems.
- The human-animal relationship is defined as "relatedness or distance between the animal and the human", i.e., the mutual perception which develops and expresses itself in the mutual behavior (Waiblinger, 2006).
- A positive human-animal relationship is associated with pleasant emotions and rewarding events, whereas a negative relationship is characterized by unpleasant emotions and aversive events (Waiblinger, 2006).

## Objective and Hypothesis

- It was hypothesized that with the continuation of behavior modification programs already established in shelters, adoption rates would increase because of the dogs being taught to spend more time engaging in proper behavior and less time engaging in inappropriate behavior.
- The study attempted to display a positive correlation between a dogs' understanding of the command and ability to complete the task as time passed.

## Behavior Modification Programs

- Behavior modification looks to change a dog's reaction to situation, a person, a thing, and animal,
- These taught behaviors are called on as tools in an overall program that hopes to change how the dog thinks, feels and acts.

### Benefits & Purpose

- **Obedience Training** - Training allows for predictable interactions. It is also thought to increase attractiveness for adoption.
- **Environmental Enhancement** - Increases controllability of the environment by giving the dog a chance to act upon its environment with predictable outcomes.
- **Improve Adoption Rates** - Reducing re-relinquishment of adopted dogs due to behavior problems.

## Dog Participants - Kennel Cards

<u>Amos:</u>	<u>Bella:</u>
Age: 1 and ½ years old	Age: 5-6 years old
Gender: Male (Neutered)	Gender: Female
Breed: Pointer Mix	Breed: Labrador/Beagle Mix
DOI: July 13th, 2019	DOI: July 31st, 2019
<u>Bob:</u>	
Age: 5-6 years old	
Gender: Male	
Breed: Chocolate Labrador	
DOI: June 19th, 2019	

### Exercise #1 - Sit

- Volunteer takes 5 steps forward and commands dog to sit.
- Instructed to maintain treat (hand) below waist level as it allows the dog to acknowledge that he or she does not need to jump.

### Exercise #3 - Watch

- Dog is firstly commanded into a sitting position.
- Volunteer then brings the treat near their eyes and says "watch"
- Once eye contact has been made, treat is released right away

## Methodology

### Animals Participated

- Five dogs residing at the Humane Society of Walden in Walden, NY, between September and October of 2019 were used for this study.
  - The dogs were a of various and mixed breeds and, as is typical for most animal shelters, included strays and dogs abandoned or surrendered by their owners
- ### Friday Training Sessions
- Devised to teach dogs how to behave and communicate effectively with people in everyday life.
  - Classes took place for an hour during 4 consecutive weeks, with the same dogs participating each week.
  - The classes were conducted by animal behaviorist and trainer, Anna Cilento, founder of Suruluna Animal

## Friday Training Session Exercises

<u>Luke:</u>	<u>Max:</u>
Age: 1 year old	Age: 9 years old
Gender: Male	Gender: Male
Breed: Pitbull Mix	Breed: Hound/ Collie Mix
DOI: August 18th, 2019	Original DOI: March 25, 2015
	DOI: February 20,2018
	*adopted/ returned 4 times for behavior*

### Exercise #2 - Touch

- Volunteer directs their hand sideways and waits for the dog to touch their hand with their nose.
- Initially they do not use the word "touch" until after 2 or 3 times.
- Teaches them what to do then adds the word to it\*

### Exercise #4 - Parallel Walking

- Volunteer sare instructed to walk their dogs alongside other dogs to observe how they react / behave.
- This exercise also allows the shelter to pay attention as to how the dog walks on a leash

## Discussion

- The primary aim of this study was to observe the development of a shelter dog's understanding of specific commands as they took part in training sessions.
- It was expected for a positive correlation to be present between a dog's understanding of the command and the ability to complete the task as time passed.
- There was no effective way of analyzing the data collected, as only one of the three training sessions was recorded
- Taking into account of two specific participants, Amos and Bella, there was observations to be mentioned
- Limitations included no attendance at the first of four training sessions and location.
- For future reference, a larger sample size and better recording of the training sessions would be recommended.

## Conclusions

- This study failed to demonstrate the effects of behavior modification programs.
- Although two dogs in the study experienced change in behavior, it is not significant enough to support the original hypothesis
- Practical ways of implementing a training program have to be found.
- Observing human-dog relations will enable a better understanding of a shelter dog's behavior.