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Anything is Pawsable: The Connection Between Breed and People's Perception of Service Dogs

Francesca Holborn

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The Connection Between Breed and People's Perception of Service Dogs

By
Francesca Holborn

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Requirements for Graduation from the
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Dr. Deborah Brannan,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

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Abstract

Compared to other animals, dogs appear to have the most excellent ability to understand humans' nonverbal communication and social cues (Lucidi, Bernabo, Panunz, Villa, & Mattiolo, 2005). Service dogs provide a variety of different services and emotional support to their handlers. Additionally, specific breeds of service dogs must have distinct qualities, be particular sizes, and have specific temperaments to do their jobs adequately. Service dogs are defined in the ADA as 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. To most of the population, basic knowledge about service dogs is not well known, and few researchers have focused on service dogs regarding the knowledge individuals have and the specific types of service dogs used by people with disabilities. Without this basic knowledge, people are unsure of the proper ways to interact with service dogs. My goal was to survey a sample of the population to examine their prior knowledge about service dogs, and then ask them to rate three different breeds of dogs (Yorkshire Terrier, Golden Retriever, and Pitbull) on their ability to be a service dog. With the hope to bridge the gap between the increasing number of service dogs being used and the knowledge that comes along with interactions between individuals with and without service dogs. There were significant differences between each dog breeds.

Keywords: service dog, Pitbull, disability

Anything is Pawsable

Compared to all other animals, dogs seem to have the ability to understand humans' nonverbal communication and social cues (Lucidi, Bernabo, Panunz, Villa, & Mattiolo, 2005). Therefore, they are best suited for service work for individuals with disabilities. Research has demonstrated positive and negative effects service dogs have on their handlers, positive on average outweighing the negative (e.g., Hall, MacMicheal, Turner, & Mills, 2017). Researchers have also found methods for training shelter dogs into suitable dogs often used for therapy, and other types of service dogs (Lucidi et al., 2005). However, little research has examined the perspective of non-traditional service dog breeds (e.g., Boxer, Pitbull) or smaller breeds of dogs (i.e., Yorkshire terriers) compared to the more traditional service dogs (e.g., Golden Retriever, Labradors). The current study aimed to investigate individuals' views of a nontraditional service dog (i.e., Pitbull, and Yorkshire Terrier) as having equal ability and handler approachability compared to a traditional service dog (i.e., Golden Retriever).

Hall, MacMicheal, Turner, and Mills (2017) were interested in researching the quality of life for individuals with hearing and physical impairments who own and use service dogs compared to individuals who are on the waiting list and have not yet received a service dog. Researchers were explicitly interested in an individual's quality of life. Specifically, they predicted that there would be a large margin of deviation in the results of individuals who have a service dog compared to those individuals who were still waiting to receive their service dog.

Hall, MacMicheal, Turner, and Mills (2017) narrowed down their search to two databases. Those databases were the Dogs for Good Database and the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People Database. The researchers recruited 72 individuals with a physical disability, and a service dog, and 24 were on the waitlist. Then 111 deaf individuals with a service dog, and 30 on the waitlist (Hall, et al., 2017). Data were collected by using an extended 16 items of the 15 items Flanagan Quality of Life Scale (QOLS; Flanagan, 1978, Flanagan, 1982). Researchers added an item which measured independence. Then the researchers used a seven-point scale for the individuals to rate each item (1= Terrible to 7 =Delighted).

The results not only supported the hypothesis, but also demonstrated that the only significant improvements to the individuals with service dogs on social interaction, self-esteem, and independence. Also, participants with service dogs expressed more personal fulfillment in daily life (Hall, et al., 2017). Service dogs are not only used as a physical tool for individuals but also as an emotional tool as well, based on their own individual testimony about their service dogs.

In other research, Lucidi, Bernabo, Panunz, Villa, and Mattiolo (2005) were interested in researching a way to turn shelter dogs into service dogs, or adoptable pets for individuals. Through their research they created a selection model that quickly assess a dog's temperament, aptitude, and trainability. The researchers predicted that using their assessment, they could select dogs from shelters with unknown histories into dogs that are suitable for AAA/AAT and adoption.

The researchers choose two different shelters managed by Institute Zooprofilattico Sperimentale Abruzzo-Molise (IZSAM). All 23 dogs were over the age of one. There were 15 females, and all were spayed. Of the eight males,6 of them were neutered. Of all 23 dogs, 19 of them were crossbreeds (Lucidi et al., 2005). The researchers collected data by creating three tests. After each test, dogs passed and move on to the next test, or they did not pass and returned to the shelter. Test A examined the dog's aggressiveness. Test B was examining how the dog reacted to strangers. Lastly, test C examined the dog's ability to follow simple commands.

The results of the researcher's assessment revealed that some dogs could become AAA/AAT, while others were not suited for the role of becoming a service dog. Their hypothesis was partially supported. Some dogs to pass all three tests, and made eligible for adoption, and AAA/AAT services, but not all. Dogs were terminated from the study were either too aggressive, not people friendly, or could not follow simple commands. Out of the 23 dogs that were chosen to partake in the study, only 11 of them passed all three tests. In addition to the 11 that passed, one dog was adopted right out of the study. (Lucidi et al., 2005). Their research contributed to field by showing that there can be more diversity in the field of AAA/AAT, and by bringing more loving dogs into people's homes by using shelter dogs without pedigrees.

Finally, Schoenfeld- Tacher, Hellyer, Cheung, and Kogan (2017) were interested in the increased use and prevalence of assistant (Service, Emotional Support, and Therapy) dogs in the United States, and the issues surrounding their legitimacy. Their study aimed at evaluating participants knowledge of assistance dogs as well as the

legitimacy of these types of dogs. They predicted that along with the little legislation surrounding these dogs' individual participants knowledge about these types of dogs is not well known and, that then affects their perception of assistant dogs used by others.

The researchers designed a survey with the help and input of individuals that have and use assistance dogs. Their survey had multiple parts it began by asking the participants to rate their ability to define what each type of assistance dogs, then they were asked questions to establish their values and perspective of these types of dogs, and lastly the survey asked questions to establish an understanding of the regulations that surround each type of assistance dog. Participants were split almost evenly, 47.5 % were male, and 52.5% were female. There were 505 participants recruited online. The 505 participant's responses 284 were considered useable. The other responses were deemed unusable because they either were respondents who had an assistant dog or did not follow the directions.

The results of the study revealed that 52.5 percent of the participants felt very or somewhat comfortable being able to define the different types of assistant dogs. The most confusion happened when it came to the participants' knowledge of what questions can legally be asked to an individual using an assistant dog. Fifty-seven-point four percent of participants knew that it was illegal for individuals to provide proof of their disability. 48.6 percent of participants could correctly state that individuals cannot ask handlers what their disability is. Fifty-six percent of participants were able to correctly state that individuals are allowed to ask handlers what tasks the assistant dog

performs. Overall, at the end of the study, 21.1 percent were still not confident with their knowledge about the different types of assistant dogs.

The results supported the researcher's hypothesis, because despite the participants' confidence in their knowledge about assistance dogs and their jobs they still were unable to apply the definitions and legally acceptable questions to ask handles using these dogs. Assistance dogs are becoming more prevalent and more common in society today. The parallel needs to be happening with the education and expansion of knowledge about the jobs and benefits of assistance dogs for their handlers.

After examining the research, I hypothesize that the participants that participate in my study will face the same misunderstanding of service dogs that the other participants in recent studies have. Part of the solution to this reoccurring pattern is to continue putting out research on service dogs, but also offer ways the researchers believe could educate the population on the proper ways to interact with service dogs while they are working. In the summary of my research, I will provide my own opinions on how I believe I could educate the population.

Method

Participants

Participants were a sample from Western Oregon University, a mid-sized university in Oregon, and some participants were recruited online (N=78). All responses were recorded through Qualtrics. Of the 78 participants, there were ten males (M=24.47 years old, SD= 9.03). Sixty-two of them identified as white, nine as Hispanic, three as

Hawaiian, two as Middle Eastern, one as African American, and one as Asian. Twenty-six were Juniors, nineteen were Seniors, sixteen were Freshman, eight were Sophomores, six were not in school, two were Post- Baccalaureate, and one stated other. As compensation for participating in this study, participants who are enrolled at Western were given extra credit through SONA for a psychology class they were enrolled in. For the participants who were not from Western, it was assumed they participated because they were interested in furthering their knowledge on this topic and the results.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via SONA through the Psychology Department and online through the link that was provided to them. Once they signed up for a time, participants could take the survey right away. They started by reading and signing the informed consent (See Appendix A). Then the participants proceeded to the demographics page of the survey (See Appendix B). Attached to the demographics page, additional questions then asked about year in school or gender the participant identified with, then moved to questions specifically about dogs (i.e. Do you like dogs?). These answers gave insight as to why the participant may have answered the way they had to the three main questions.

The next section consisted of the modified survey. The survey was purposely split into two sections. The first started with a regular picture of a dog with a neutral background, and the question, how appropriate do you believe this dog to be as a service dog, repeating the question for each breed. Then the second section of the survey included the two questions: how approachable they perceived the service dog

owner to be, and how capable they believed the service dog was at performing their

tasks. These questions were then repeated for each dog breed. The three breeds the

participant saw were a Pitbull, Golden Retriever, and a Yorkshire Terrier (See Appendix C

for photos). The one change from the photos in the previous question was that the dogs

were now wearing service vests (See Appendix D). Once participants completed the

survey, if they were enrolled through Western, they received credit through SONA.

Measure

Participants evaluated a variety of images of different dog breeds on a modified

four-point Likert scale (1932; see Appendix D). Each point was ranked from 1 (*not at all*),

to 4 (*extremely*). They received a modified questionnaire to provide more information

about themselves (Schoenfeld- Tacher, et al., 2017; see Appendix C).

Results

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if

differences in Appropriability, Approachability of handler, and Capability scores were

based on the different dog breeds presented. The mean score for appropriability of the

Retriever was *M*=3.4872 *(SD*=.65947*)*, the Yorkshire Terrier was *M*=2.2179 *(SD*=.97564*)*,

and the Pitbull was *M*=3.0784 *(SD*= .75681). The mean score for the approachability of

the handler the Retriever was *M*=3.5641 *(SD*=.59412*)*, the Yorkshire Terrier was

M=3.5641 *(SD*=.59412*)*, and the Pitbull was *M*=3.0261 *(SD*= .73402*)*. The mean score for

the capability of the Retriever was *M*=3.0256 *(SD*= .73810*)*, the Yorkshire Terrier was

M=3.0256 *(SD*= .73571), and the Pitbull was *M*= 3.2484 *(SD*= .68134*)*. The ANOVA

indicated there was a significant difference in the breeds scores based on , $F(2,231)=$ 50.246, p<.001 for appropriability, $F(2,231)=18.081$, p<.001 for approachability of the handler, and $F(2,231)=10.637$, p=.000 for capability

Discussion

The present study partially supported the hypothesis. For all three of the questions regarding appropriability, approachability, and dog's ability to do their job, varied between the breed of dogs. All the differences found were significant. The Golden Retriever and Pitbull were found by the participants to be more appropriate as service dogs than the Yorkshire Terrier. Then when examining the approachability of the handler, participants thought the Yorkshire Terrier and Golden Retriever were more approachable than the Pitbull. Lastly, participants shared that the Pitbull was more capable of being a service dog compared to the Golden Retriever and Yorkshire Terrier. Even though previous research has provided significant understanding of the effects service dogs have on their handlers, this study has expanded on not just the effects on the handler but expanded on individual's knowledge of particular dog breeds and how they could be perceived as potential service dogs. I believe the results were unexpected and interesting because the Pitbull -- traditionally the more scary, threatening dog -- was evaluated as the dog more capable of doing their job as a service dog than the more traditional breed, the Golden Retriever.

One limitation in this study consisted of the pool of participants. The sample size was small, with 78 participants of a campus and community full of people. Of those 78

participants, over half of them were women. To get a response representing the larger general population, further research could be done with a larger population of participants. Future research can consist of more men, larger ethnic background, and incorporate a wider range of ages for the sample. For example, the pool of younger people, and their perceived stereotypes of dog breeds, will be different when compared to the pool of older participants and their respective dog breed stereotypes.
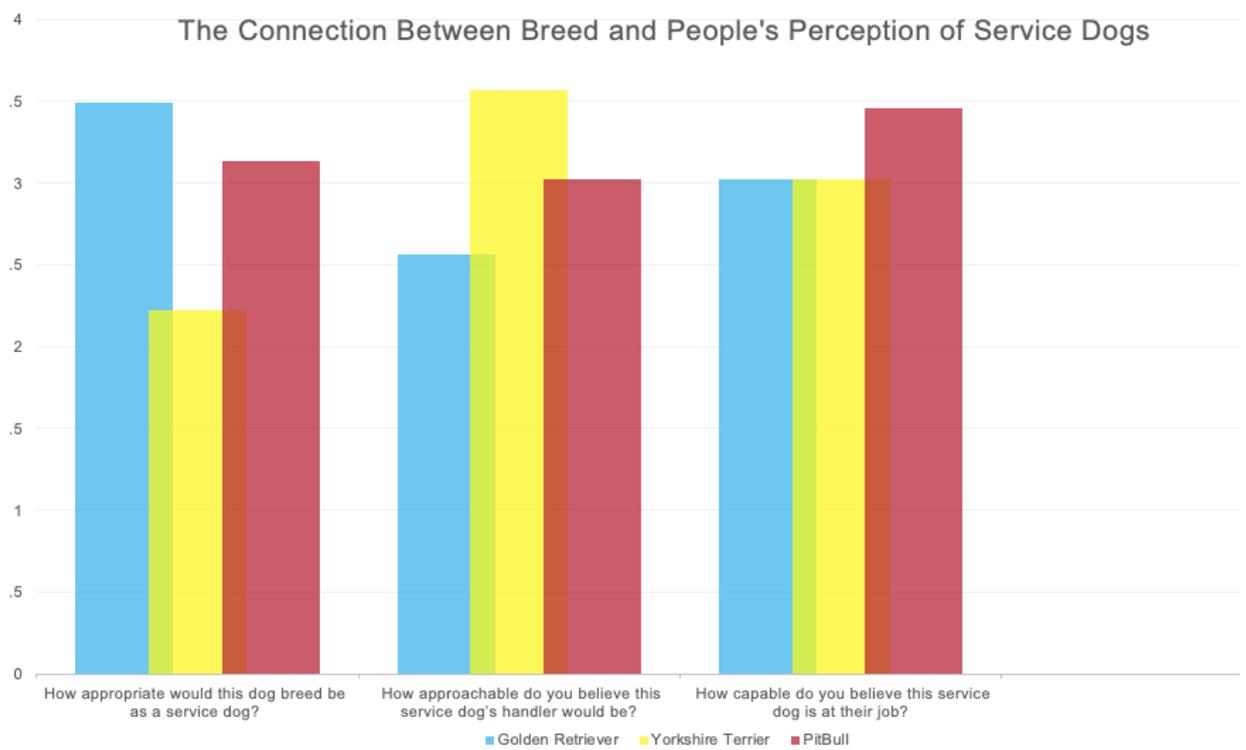
Another limitation in this study consisted of participants only receiving a snapshot of the breed of service dog, and not taking the service dog team as unit. Along with dog breed stereotypes, there are disability stereotypes regarding invisible and physical disabilities. Future research could be done to take a look at how participants perceive those stereotypes, by providing questions where there are pictures of a service dog next to a person with a physical limitation, and a photo of a "normal" looking person who might have an invisible disability.

Service animals and service dogs particularly are becoming more common amongst individuals with disabilities. Increasing research on this topic will not only benefit individuals using the service dog, but it will also help the general public to understand how important the canine's jobs are and the proper ways to interact with them.

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Appendix A

The Connection Between Breed and People's Perception of Service Dogs

Appendix B

Demographics

What is your major? _____

Not in School: _____

What category best describes you?
□ 1. Freshman   □ 2. Sophmore   □ 3. Junior   □ 4. Senior
□ 5. Post-Baccalaureate   □ 6. Other (Please specify) _____

What is your age in years? _____

How do you currently describe your gender identity?
_____ man, or male or masculine
_____transgender man, male, or masculine;
_____transgender woman, female, or feminine;
_____woman, female, or feminine;
_____gender nonconforming, genderqueer, or gender questioning
_____ intersex, disorders of sex development, two-spirit, or other related terms
_____no response
_____prefer not to answer.

Which categories describe you? Select all that apply to you:
_____American Indian or Alaska Native—For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe,

Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo

Community

_____Asian—For example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese

_____Black or African American—For example, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian,

Somalian

_____Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin—For example, Mexican or Mexican American,

Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Columbian

_____Middle Eastern or North African—For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian,

Moroccan, Algerian

_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander—For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan,

Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese

_____White—For example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French

_____Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, please specify: _____

Do you personally have a pet dog?
_____ Yes
_____ No

Please indicate your views of dogs.
_____ I love dogs
_____ I like dogs
_____ I feel neutral about dogs
_____ I am not very fond of dogs
_____ I do not like dogs at all

Do you personally have a Service Dog?
_____ Yes
_____ No

Do your Friends or Family Members Own a Service Dog?
_____ Yes

_____ No

How many times have you seen or interacted with a service dog?
_____None
_____Minimal (1-3)
_____Some (5-10)
_____Quite a bit (11-20)
_____A great deal (more then 20)
Please indicate the best description of your experiences with service dogs?

_____ Nearly all experiences were positive

_____Most experiences were positive

_____Mixed- some experiences were positive, some negative

_____ Most experiences were negative

_____ Nearly all experiences were negative

_____ I have had no experiences with service dogs

Do you believe you have perceived ideas of specific types of dog breeds?

_____ Yes

_____ No

Appendix C

1. How appropriate do you believe this dog would be as a service dog?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

1. How appropriate do you believe this dog would be as a service dog?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

1. How appropriate do you believe this dog would be as a service dog?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

Appendix D

2. How approachable do you believe this service dog's handler would be?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

3. How capable do you believe this service dog is at their job?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
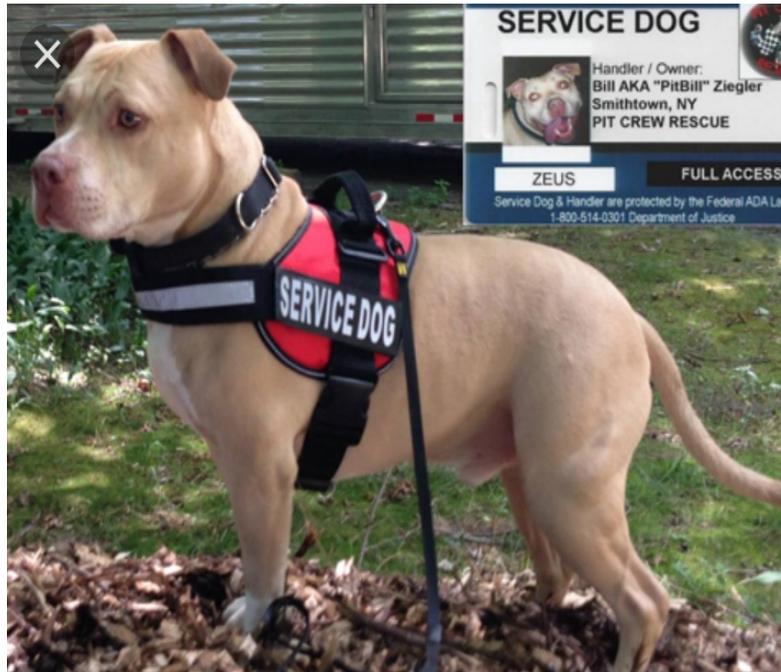
1. How approachable do you believe this service dog's handler would be?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

2. How capable do you believe this service dog is at their job?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

1. How approachable do you believe this service dog's handler would be?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

1. How capable do you believe this service dog is at their job?

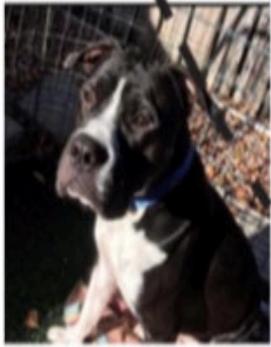| 1	2	3	4
Not at all	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

My Journey to Finding my Service Dog Ringo
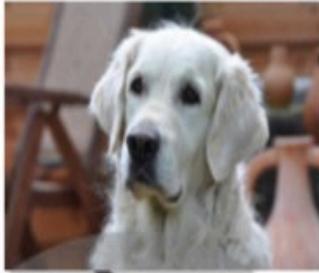
The Search Began....

The original thought of what I thought my service dog should look like.

One day thirteen shelters what felt like one hundred dogs later...

I saw his photo!
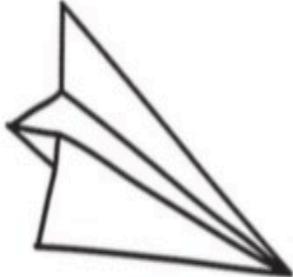
From the moment I got to meet him in person, and you put your head in my lap. You chose me and I chose you. Since that day we have been inseparable.

Words from Other's on Our Journey

You are each other's security blanket
- Airplane passenger

He is your service dog and you are his service person
- Dog Trainer

When I needed a hand, I found your paw
-Unknown

He looks scary, but I bet he is great at his job.
- Ross Customer

Its calming to know Ringo is in class with me
- WOU Student

I want a dog exactly like Ringo can I clone him?
-WOU Student

He is my favorite student
-Dr. Brannan

And so many more....

Photos of Our Adventures at WOU

Loving everyone he meets
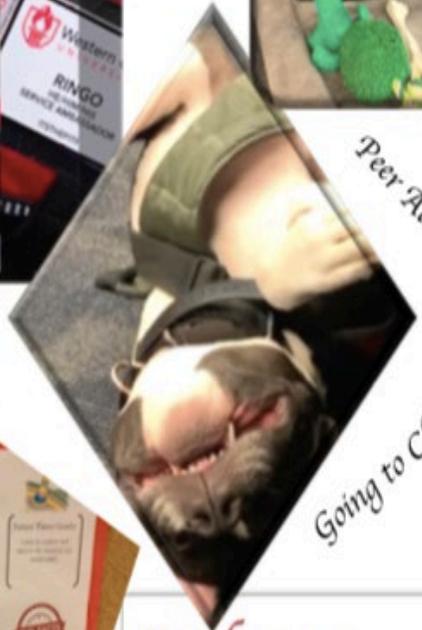

Ambassador

Peer Advocate

Being Goofy

Peer Advisor

Going to Class

Visiting Professors

Helping Students

And to so many more that were not photographed...

I did not know what to expect going into getting a service dog. I thought I was prepared, and did my research. The research did not prepare me for what it would be like to have a dog with me twenty- four seven. Knowing what I know now and going through the experiences I have with my non-traditional service dog., I would not change a thing. Having my best friend by my side every moment brings me confidence and because of his stability I have not fallen over since he has been by my side.