

# Field Report: Beyond the Dog

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Nonhuman animal training (hereafter referred to simply as “animal training”) has been a mainstay of behavior analysis since the founding of the field (Skinner, 1938). While early behavior analysis focused on the use of nonhuman animals to discover behavioral mechanisms underlying environment-response relations, later applications drifted toward use-inspired basic studies using nonhuman analogs to understand issues such as pharmacological effects on behaviors (e.g., Thompson & Schuster, 1968) or intervention models (e.g., Mace et al., 2010). Of course, Karen Pryor’s seminal applications of behavioral technologies—expanding on the works of the Brelands (Skinner’s protégés; e.g., Breland & Breland, 1966)—to the training of both domestic and exotic animals gave raise to the proliferation of applied animal training methodologies (Pryor, 1984, 2009).

Today’s applied animal training has much evolved since the early days of operant conditioning. Unfortunately, television personalities such as Cesar Millan (“The Dog Whisperer”) have popularized a perception of animal training substantially deviating from the best practices in behavior-based applied animal training (see [beyondcesarmillan.weebly.com](http://beyondcesarmillan.weebly.com)). This field report, however, details the exemplary behavior analytic practices of Beyond the Dog, a Kansas City-based dog-training group exemplifying the behavior analytic approach to this ever-growing discipline.

Beyond the Dog was founded by Sean and Kristyn Savage (pictured in Fig. 1). Despite being a small enterprise (comprised of three trainers: Sean, Kristyn, and Amy Henley), this group is a major resource to the Kansas City metro area. The unique blending of talents, credentials, and experiences renders Beyond the Dog an exceptional example of behavior analysis in practice. For instance, Sean is the only Certified Dog Behavior Consultant in western Missouri and the entire state of Kansas, in addition to being a Certified Professional Dog Trainer through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. Kristyn is uniquely qualified as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst at the doctoral level, in addition to being a Certified Professional Dog Trainer. Rounding out their practice is Amy Henley, a masters-level behavior analyst with specific training in performance management and applied behavior analysis.

As Sean describes it, Beyond the Dog evolved from Sean and Kristyn’s training experiences with marine mammals and dogs:

After training marine mammals and dogs in South Florida, we moved to Kansas City to open the business. To be honest, we started by walking through local neighborhoods and putting flyers on doorsteps. We offered nearly any service related to dog training that was humanly possible. Eventually, we were able to eliminate certain services that were labor intensive on our end. Finally, Beyond the Dog blossomed into a successful business relying primarily on local veterinary and client referrals.

Today, Beyond the Dog specializes in the assessment and treatment of aggressive, anxious, and fearful behavior exhibited by dogs, in addition to providing standard services such as housebreaking and obedience. Kristyn and Sean translate principles and technologies from contemporary applied

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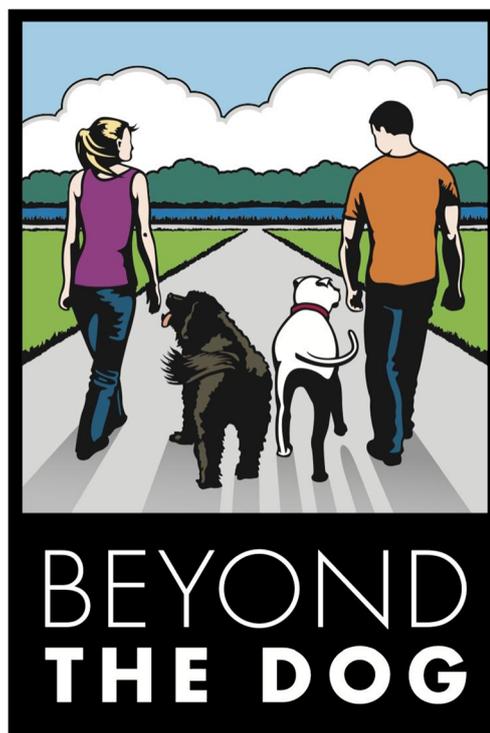


**Fig. 1** Sean (*far left*) and Kristyn (*far right*) Savage, founders of Beyond the Dog

behavior analysis while maintaining a respect for the biology and idiosyncratic needs of canine populations. On their website, [beyondthedogtraining.com](http://beyondthedogtraining.com), visitors will find myriad resources grounded in behavior analytic literature and translated to layperson language to meet the needs of common dog owners. For instance, a blog entry titled “Function, not Form,” explains the importance of assessing the environmental determinants maintaining dog behavior and de-emphasizing the topography of behavior (<http://beyondthedogtraining.com/blog/function-form/>); this message will resonate with any behavior analyst who has explained the importance of functional assessment to understand and treat human behavior problems.

Suffice it to say, Beyond the Dog provides cutting-edge applications of applied animal training and intends to remain on the forefront of the field. The Beyond the Dog team recognizes the need to size up the field at large and project where both the science and practice are heading. As Kristyn describes, she envisions the future will see “more applied research being conducted, disseminated, and embraced by companion animal trainers.” She anticipates this rapid growth will lay to rest misperceptions in the media regarding standards of applied animal training practices. She says, “More ‘traditional’ views and pseudoscience will slowly fade. In the end, owners will have a better understanding of their pet’s behavior. Hopefully, a more fulfilling relationship will evolve for both human and animal.”

Beyond serving dog owners in the Kansas City metro area, Beyond the Dog actively disseminates its success to the broader field via conference presentations (at animal training/consulting conferences, as well as behavior analysis conferences) and publications (e.g., Echterling-Savage et al. *in press*). This practice stems, in part, to a commitment to continuing research in applied animal training and publishing their findings. Kristyn says their aim is to “help disseminate the results to dog trainers who aren’t necessarily behavior analysts in the hopes that it might better inform their practice.”



**Fig. 2** Beyond the Dog logo

Central to Beyond the Dog’s success is their appreciation of the role of the dog owner in their treatment formulation. Much like Skinner’s adage, “the organism is always right,” Sean and Kristyn recognize the treatment plan will only be successful if owners implement it with integrity and fidelity. Thus, Sean and Kristyn’s approach to training is to work with both the dog and his/her owner. As described by Sean, Beyond the Dog is unique in its “ability to teach [their] clients about the environmental causes of their dog’s behavior. Clients are not only taught how to use the protocol, but understand why it’s effective.” In this respect, Beyond the Dog is a model of behavior analysis, regardless of the species or population served. The commitment to the tenets of Baer, Wolf, and Risley’s vision of applied behavior analysis (1968) is apparent in all aspects of Beyond the Dog (logo depicted in Fig. 2). It is my hope that this field report serves as an example for how other applied animal training groups approach their missions. For more information, visit [beyondthedogtraining.com](http://beyondthedogtraining.com).

## References

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