Addressing the human-animal bond in therapy: Theory, foundation and application

Chair: Lori Kogan, PhD
Amy Johnson, MA
Clarissa Uttley, PhD
Jessica Bibbo, PhD
Molly DePrekel, MA
Yvonne Smith, PhD
Angela Fournier, PhD
Katherine Goldberg, DVM, LMSW
Discussant: Phyllis Erdman, PhD

Clinician’s Guide to Treating Companion Animal Issues
Addressing Human-Animal Interaction

Lori Kogan
Christopher Blazina
Addressing companion animal issues within therapy

• Impetus for book
Addressing Companion Animal issues within therapy

• Presentations are based on chapters from treatment guide published in 2018

• Short presentations - offering a brief overview of just some of the important topics within the book

• Book give-away
Pets and Relationships: How Animals Help us Understand Ourselves and Our Connections With Others (Ch. 11)

Amy R. Johnson, MA, MAT, LPC, CPDT-KA, UW-AAB
Laura Bruneau, PhD, LPC, LSC
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Relationships with Animals

“I like pondering our relationships with animals because they tell a lot about who we are.”

- Marc Bekhoff
Emotional Distress

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Source: Amy Johnson
“All dogs have read Carl Rogers...”
Bringing “Pets” into Practice

- Assessment tool
- Demonstrate behaviors objectively
- Help nurture a relationship
- Learn to have one
- Highlight values or needs

Source: Amy Johnson
Attachment Theory

“If we are genetically predisposed to becoming attached to other people, particularly children, and if animals exhibit many of the same characteristics that cause our attachment to people; it is easy to see why people become attached to pets”

(Katz, 2004, p. 101)
Family Systems Theory

• Exploring unique relationships with pets provides a better assessment of family dynamics
• Can identify potential areas for growth
• Genograms
• Pets are sensitive to the emotional climate
• Useful elements about potential DV
You enter into a certain amount of madness when you marry a person with pets.

-Nora Ephron
Gottman’s Couple Therapy

• Respecting the bonds

• Males / females view their connections with pets differently

• Understand values of your patients and their partners
If you’re interested in learning more….

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Pets and adolescents: What clinicians should know
From the ages of 10–25, adolescents and the role that their pets play in each other’s lives change dramatically.

Early adolescents 10–14 years of age
Late adolescents 15 and 17 years of age
Emerging adulthood 18–25 years of age

Knowledge and understanding of the adolescents’ developmental stage
Provide assistance to the particular adolescent
Varying styles of thinking, engagement with others, perceptions, and emotional reactions
Physical changes and how HAI impacts

- Physical changes include outwardly visible growth as well as internal changes.
- Therapy dogs can:
  - Mitigate signs of stress such as increased heart rate and blood pressure.
  - Increase level of physical activity.
  - Lower body weights.
- Adolescents and chronic illnesses, such as asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, developmental delays, etc.
  - Cuddle with and stroke their pet.
  - Increased physical activity.
- Therapy pets can be a distraction, a companion, have a calming influence, and may encourage patients to be more open to discuss their experiences with clinicians.

Clinician’s Guide to Treating Companion Animal Issues
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Social changes and how HAI impacts

Social changes may include:
- Developing a larger social network
- Negotiating peer and biological family values
- Independence vs. dependence
- Building autonomy, identity, self-expression, coping, trust, and empathy
- Intimate relationships
- Financial independence
- Social skills, compassion, and empathy

This is also important when we look at who the adolescent turns to for emotional support.
- Early adolescents might look toward a large group of peers for support
- Emerging adulthood adolescents might turn to a significant other or a close friend.
- This difference could be critical when assessing possible interventions or supports for individuals.
Cognitive/Mental Health changes and how HAI impacts

- Cognitive changes may include:
  - Language acquisition
  - Enhanced verbal skills
  - Memory
  - Perception

- Including therapy animals in clinical settings can elicit instant positive responses in testing situations of memory, classification, and attention.

- Counselors can engage adolescents with their pet’s or therapy animals to:
  - Benefit the adolescent’s mental well-being
  - Aid communication with others
  - Diminish a sense of loneliness in the adolescent
  - Build confidence in talking through troubles/difficult issues/grief
How to include HAI with adolescents

- Classroom involvement
- Clinical settings
  - Office
  - Testing
  - Residential
- College/University environments

Assess challenges and barriers and continually evaluate impact of including a therapy pet

- Allergies, fears, attachment issues, pet health
- Developmental growth/stage of adolescent
References


Older Adults as Pet Caretakers

Jessica Bibbo, PhD
Research Scientist, Center for Research and Education
Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging
Cleveland, Ohio
The Human-Animal Bond

• Companionship
  (e.g., emotional/social support and engagement)
• Opportunity for nurturance
• Motivator for health behaviors

Top image retrieved from: https://akiko-dupont.com/portfolios/jiji-and-kinako/
Family Caregivers

The Instrumental Experience
• Time
• Number of tasks

The Emotional Experience
• Caregiver:
  • Burden
  • Satisfaction
  • Mastery
• Mutuality
The Instrumental Experience
- Time
- Number of tasks

The Emotional Experience
- Caregiver:
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Family Caregivers for Pet Owners

Three Interwoven Relationships

- Older adult and their pet
- Caregiver and the older adult’s pet
- Caregiver and the older adult
  - Mutuality
The Instrumental Experience

• Care recipients’ pets added to the time and number of tasks performed by family caregivers.

• *The time and the number of tasks performed for the pet were both significantly correlated with the older adults’ level of impairment.*
Three Interwoven Relationships

- All three relationships moderated the impact of the pet on the emotional experience.
- Pet care may be perceived as an indirect provision of care.

Family Caregivers for Pet Owners
Important Issues

Housing Transitions
• Long-term care

Pet Relinquishment
• Health
• Safety
• Pet’s welfare

Pet Illness or Death
• Grieving process
• Anticipatory grief

Death of Older Adult
• Grieving process
• Ambivalence

Need for communication
The Impact of Equine Ownership in Psychotherapy
Chapter 20
Molly DePrekel and Natalie Runge
A more recent survey administered in 2015 by American Horse Publications to over 11,000 individuals included a question regarding the complex relationship between humans and equines.

Over 10,000 individuals responded and found that 67.4% of owners viewed their equine as family members, 62.7% as companion animals, 57.6% as performance partners, and 55.9% as their best friend (more than one answer was permitted).

In addition, 22.4% of respondents viewed their equines as an investment, 21.1% as a livestock animal, and 7.8% as an employee.

Inquiring about client relationships with their equines

- Bringing in pet ownership and asking about animals in clinical sessions can enhance therapy work
- Can give assessment information
- Assist the clinician in getting to know a client and build relationship.
- Inform treatment goals and interventions
- Teach clients to use their relationships with their equines as a resource in their healing
- Clients relationships with their equines help build a sense of mastery and competence
Other ways in which equine work can be incorporated to help clients grow and heal include using the barn as a social setting; barns often provide opportunities for social engagement and support. We have found that many clients who struggle with social connections at school or work and other environments often report the barn is the one place they feel happy, welcomed, and connected with both their equines and other people at the barn.

Clients have repeatedly reported physical changes as they approach the barn, including slower more regulated breathing and decreased body tension. As they report these moments, they often smile, and show decreased arousal and an increased feeling of calmness.

This is their ‘happy place’, and clinicians can ask them to talk about this experience, thereby bringing it into the therapy session as a resource for healing.
Clinical Case study examples

- One client reported that the barn wood sign she painted with a soothing word on it, along with a picture of her therapy horse, hangs above her bed to help with nightmares.
The following three comments are from informal client questionnaires regarding what the clients would like clinicians to know about their personal relationship with their equines:

- That they have a profound impact on humans. Given their intuitive nature and keen senses, they remind us to live in the present moment. They teach us to be alive and alert to life. They awaken us to all of our senses and in doing so we feel free of our daily burdens. (anonymous).

- Not sure I am comfortable with ownership. Prefer stewardship to convey mindful heart based relationship with another sentient being who is not of human species. My sense is the focus is on the sentient nature of the animal and the human – compassion and non-judgment for vast possibilities inherent in deep intimate relationship development. (anonymous).

- Probably that the equine is like any other person/family animal. They are part of the family even though they do not live in the house. I would also like to educate the clinicians on the power of interactions with the equine. (anonymous)
Contact information for Cairns Psychological Services

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• Offering Consultation and Training in Animal Assisted Interventions and Nature Based Healing

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Culturally Humble, Culturally Competent Practice and Human/Animal Interaction

Yvonne Smith, Ph.D.
Syracuse University
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APA 2019
Cultural Variation in Pet-Keeping

Pet-keeping may be universal, but...

Beliefs and practices of pet-keeping vary historically and by culture

- Roles: food, friend, family, pest, beast of burden
- Distinctions between human/non-human animals
- Care, breeding, and permanency expectations

Ethnocentricity in pet-related research

- North American upper/middle class practices assumed to be best, “healthy”
- “pets are family”

Madrigal, 2017
Ethical Imperatives for Psychotherapists

• Cultural competence (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue, et al., 2009)
  • “process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, spiritual traditions, immigration status, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each” (NASW, 2015, p. 13).

• Cultural humility (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998)
  • Client as expert, mastery of cultural knowledge
  • Psychotherapist as engaged, curious learner
4 Strategies for Culturally Competent, Humble Practice

1. When relevant, invite client-directed exploration of family and cultural beliefs about human/animal interaction
   - Pet-keeping history
   - Cultural models, e.g., for understanding animal behavior, mourning pets

2. Reflect on your own cultural beliefs and their effects on treatment
   - How did you develop these beliefs? Who did you learn from?
   - How does your social location affect your beliefs about “good” pet-keeping?
   - What are your “hot button” issues in regard to pets? How can you empathize with those who activate them?
3. Consider your reasoning for pet-related self-disclosure
   - e.g., office photos
   - What do these disclosures communicate about what you can and cannot understand or accept from clients?

4. Make your practice accommodating to those who do not wish to encounter animals
   - Culture shapes beliefs about the appropriateness, cleanliness, and safety of certain species for human interaction
   - e.g., some (not all!) Muslims believe dogs are not appropriate indoor pets; people who have encountered rodents as pests may not be receptive to finding them caged in your office
   - Keeping animals in the consulting room for use with certain clients may make your services inaccessible to others (including people who use service animals)
Get in touch!

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Caring for Animal Advocates: Treatment Considerations for Animal-Welfare Agents

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Brandon Mustful, MBA
Director, Great River Rescue

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Animal-Welfare Agents (AWA)

Animal Control, Sheltering, & Rescue

Animal Welfare

Animal Rights
Work Challenges

Animal Illness, Injury, & Death
  • Euthanasia
  • Caring-Killing Paradox (Arluke, 1994)

Animal Abuse, Neglect, & Oppression

Dirty Work (Simpson, Slutskaya, Lewis, & Hopfl, 2012)

Limited Resources and Support

Compassion Fatigue (Figley & Roop, 2006)
Clinical Implications

Identity & Self-Discovery (Fakkema, 2001)

Grief

Stress & Emotion Management

Coping Skills
Healthy Boundaries

Containment Cleansing

(Rothschild, 2006)
Considerations in Counseling Veterinarians:
Addressing suffering in those who care for animals

Katherine Goldberg, DVM, LMSW
Who is the patient?

- Veterinarians occupy a unique ethical space
- Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR)
  - Patient = sick/injured animal
  - Client = "owner" of patient
  - Care system = fee for service, out of pocket
Intro to Veterinary Education...

30 schools in US; DVM/VMD in 4 years
National Board Exam covers all species of animals
Internship/Residency optional

Average debt $147,000
Starting salary $73,000

No uniform curriculum regarding human support, grief, bereavement, conflict management, other...

Early articulation of professional interest
41% “as long as I can remember”
63% by age 15
Perception vs. reality
**Veterinarian Wellbeing**

**“HISTORIC” CONCERNS**

- Identified as high risk population for several negative mental health outcomes*
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Psychological distress
  - Suicidality
- Multifactorial
  - Personality traits, work demands, veterinary learning environment

**MERCK STUDY 2018**

- Financial stress
- Wellbeing > mental illness
- Very limited treatment when indicated
- Significant variation among different segments of profession
- Young veterinarians are suffering significantly
- Attitude toward profession

*16 studies 2008-2018*
Veterinarian Wellbeing

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MERCK STUDY

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Are veterinary students worse off on entry to veterinary school?

*16 studies 2008-2018
Adverse childhood experiences

• Are increased numbers of ACEs contributing to poor mental health outcomes in veterinarians?

• Hypothesized that vet students would have higher number of ACEs\(^1\)

• Not supported

• Veterinary students are not, on entry to the profession, more predisposed to poor mental health outcomes

1. Strand et al 2017
Veterinarian wellbeing

Mental illness among veterinarians similar to that found in the general population
Many not receiving treatment

Overall, wellbeing is slightly lower than in the general population

Significant variation by segment of the profession

Special Report

Executive summary of the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study

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Moral Distress
Suffering in Veterinarians: Summary

• Wherever there are animals, there are veterinarians
• As human-animal relationships change, expectations of veterinarians change
• Intensity of human-animal relationships are altering the job description of veterinarians and contributing to moral distress
• Mental health professionals have an important role to play in supporting this population