

## Book Review: “When Man Meets Dog: What a difference a dog makes”

Chris Blazina (2016) Hubble & Hattie, Veloce Publishing, Ltd.

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Poet Robert Frost is quoted as saying, “No tears for the writer, no tears for the reader (Hopkins, 1960).” The emotional stories of canine-human relationships shared by Chris Blazina in “When Man Meets Dog” provide *ample* evidence of this concept in tears shared by *both*. In previous book reviews in this journal, I have often written about the power of story to inspire dialogue as well as action in readers. We are hard wired for story (Cron, 2012), and from the standpoint of evolution and psychology, this is the most powerful way that we, as humans, learn. This book impacted me personally and professionally in a number of ways, and while reading in public spaces, there were several sections (notably the end of Chapter 5 and Postscript p.144) where I found myself over-come with emotion —crying.

Upon reflection and writing this review, I believe that this emotional reaction was not just grieving along with the author as he shared the story of a 14-year relationship with his dog Kelsey and the ending of his companion’s life, but perhaps more importantly, the grief of living in masculine norms that must be psychologically oppressive and at times unbearable. His focus on men and gender issues in relationships as they relate to the canine-human bond opened up an inner emotional male realm that I have sensed as a psychologist, but as a woman, have never entered. What makes this book powerful and important is Blazina’s in-depth look at men’s attachment styles, the myth of ‘masculine exceptionalism,’ and the ‘American Adam,’ and grief in the masculine world. This helped me to re-think and re-

consider the relationships between men and their dogs that I have observed in my family and social circles as well as with my male clients. Perhaps due to social norms and conscriptions, the bond between men and their canine companions can often be even more essential to emotional well-being than we are currently aware. Because this book does such a great job of describing these issues, I have already recommended it to many of my current and former male graduate and undergraduate students in our Human Animal Interaction courses.

The book is divided into three main sections: Section 1 is attachment, section 2 is loss and grief in the masculine world, and section 3 is on the continuing bond (and lasting impact of the human-canine relationship). While this is not a traditional academic book, per se, the author weaves complex psychological constructs of bonding, attachment, belonging (and being a ‘misfit’), wildness, grief, and loss all through the lens of gender and masculinity. The literature is sound and the explanations take what could be dry and abstract constructs (in a more traditional psychology text) and make these constructs *breathe* by the living color he artfully weaves through the context of his story. As I have asserted in previous reviews, story *is* the most powerful way to teach. This work is an enjoyable read for non-psychologists, yet sophisticated and fresh enough for those of us with years in the field.

In the final section, “A dog of a different color,” Blazina explores the ongoing growth and continued bond he has with Kelsey - years after she has passed from physical life.

*I see these various insights about attachment, loss and continued bonds at work in me. I am a different companion (with people and animals) and no doubt a different man because of them. What I have learned compels me forward. Perhaps I have also become a dog of a different color one whose tracks now move in a new and different way (p.143).*

This work contributes to our understanding of the impact of gender as a social construction on our attachment and bond to animals. The hope is that it may

inspire continued exploration and compel all of us forward.

### References

- Cron, L (2012). *Wired for Story: The writer's guide to using brain science to hook readers from the very first sentence*. New York, NY: Ten Speed Press.
- Hopkins, V. C. "Robert Frost: Out Far and in Deep" *Western Humanities Review*, 14 (Jan 1, 1960): 247-263. Accessed 6/2016 <http://search.proquest.com/openview/848d24f4d323f2779d7f97e333e7919c/1?q-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1820945>