

## Book Review:

### *“Clinician’s Guide to Treating Companion Animal Issues”*

Edited by Lori Kogan and Christopher Blazina

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*“As practicing therapists, are we aware of the potential impact of a companion animal for our clients?”*

The Clinician’s Guide is a watershed work in the field of HAI. It is an edited collection of academic scholarship which fills an important void for mental health clinicians. As stated in the introduction to the volume, companion animals play ever increasing roles as friends and family members in contemporary society, yet there is currently a lack of research literature and resources to assist mental health practitioners with understanding and navigating these complex relationships in the lives of our clients.

The resources and literature in the relatively new field of Animal Assisted Interventions/ Animal Assisted Therapies are increasing (many of this literature has been reviewed here in the HAI Bulletin). Animal Assisted interventions are those that incorporate animals into psychotherapy towards a specific therapeutic goal. The editors rightfully acknowledge that this is not the only way to bring animals into the therapeutic arena. The editors and chapter authors make the case that practitioners have unique opportunities to (and a responsibility as well) incorporate client’s experiences and relationships with their companion animals into the therapy session. They point out that while practitioners are trained to address issues and topics regarding human significant others, most therapists have not been trained to address issues specifically related to the

complexities of the human-animal bond and relationships between our clients and the animals in their lives. This volume seeks to address exactly that.

This volume is both broad in scope and diverse, representing the expertise of many authors and multiple perspectives. There are readings, exercises and case studies to help clinicians work with the many scenarios they might encounter with clients and their companion animals. The content is accessible and appropriate for the graduate student as well as the seasoned professional seeking knowledge of HAI in the therapy setting.

Most therapists are not trained to screen or probe for the HAI issues that might prove very helpful to our clients in therapy. Blazina (Ed) mentioned that he has expanded his practice by marketing himself as someone who understands respects human-animal relationships (with dogs specifically) and is competent and compassionate in addressing various issues with clients. This reviewer has also had similar experiences of clients who find my practice through my AAT website – and do not necessarily want animal-assisted therapy- but rather, want to see a therapist who is an “animal person.” These clients often seek a therapist who can help them address the disenfranchised grief over the loss of an animal companion, guilt over the decision to euthanize an animal companion

and relationships issues between the other humans and animals they share their lives with. Many of these issues are addressed with detail in this volume.

This work is delineated and organized into 1) the ways in which human-animal relationships might be viewed as the primary focus in treatment and 2) the secondary issues in relationships with animals that might be overlooked in therapy, but could provide valuable insights and therapeutic material to further therapy with the clients we serve. In primary clinical focus, pet-related issues can be the focus in their own right and would include issues such as; separation anxiety, animal behavioral challenges, anticipating the loss or death of a companion animal and the subsequent grief and bereavement that follows. With the issues of loss and grief they emphasize the need for clinicians to offer empirically supported guidance tailored for the unique aspects and often clinically complex aspects of pet loss and grief especially including the issue of disenfranchised grief and the use of compassion in animal euthanasia.

As secondary focus issues, relationships with companion animals are vital to understanding client issues in other relationships but are often overlooked. This is particularly true in understanding attachment issues with children, adolescents, adults and seniors and the importance of attachment and HAI at *each stage of the lifespan*. Volsche's chapter 8, examines and makes the case for "pets as children" a phenomenon widely recognized in the popular culture and among marketers of pet products and services – but *not* formally addressed from the standpoint of clinical therapy. Chapter 21, by Goldberg addresses serious illness in pets and veterinary end-of-life care which in light of the miraculous

advances in veterinary medicine, clients today are currently faced with unprecedented ethical dilemmas when their companion animals are ill. Additionally, issues with blended families, the impact of animal relationships on other intimate relationships and the "darker side" of animal companion relationships in families where there is neglect, domestic violence or abuse. These issues are covered specifically Arkow's Chapter 17 "The "Dark Side" of the Human-Animal bond" Gupta's chapter 18, "Animal Abuse issues in Psychotherapy."

This volume emphasizes the role that companion animals offer in midlife and in later life for social support and a relied upon constant presence. In this way, animal companions meet a number of psychological needs for people across the lifespan and the HAI bond plays a vital role in emotional regulation and managing stress. These may be unspoken, unexplored themes in most therapeutic settings because clinicians simply might not know or think to engage in HAI relationships as a part of treatment. In chapter 6, Chandler offers eight domains of pet-owner wellness and the implications this has for counselors and counselor training.

In addition to addressing HAI as both a possible primary a secondary focus in treatment settings, the editors also propose a *transtheoretical* framework <sup>1</sup>based on Prochaska and DiClementes Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, for offering integrative HAI approaches at different levels of clinical intervention to form a holistic approach to HAI themes as both primary and secondary focus in practice. The chapters in this volume represent multiple theoretical orientations. Additionally there are two chapters addressing cultural differences, chapter 24, Schoenfeld-Tacher & Kogan's "The human-animal Bond and Hispanic

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<sup>1</sup> The Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992)

clients in the United States” and Smith’s chapter 25, “Pets and human diversity: Toward a culturally competence culturally humble psychotherapy.” These are important additions to the volume since there is a paucity of literature on cultural diversity and HAI.

Chapter one “The Human-animal Bond over the lifespan: A primer for Mental Health Professionals is written by Aubrey Fine, a well-known author in the field of AAT. This is an excellent introduction to animal-human bond and would serve graduates students entering the profession well as critical background reading for introducing clinicians to HAI in general. The same could be said for Langston’s Chapter 7, which examines “Pets and the therapeutic process” including the issues of trauma, persistent mental illness and alliance and attachment. Case examples prove especially helpful. Moga’s chapter 14, “Integrating clients’ animals in clinical practice: Insights from an animal-informed therapist “flips” the model of animal assisted interventions and frames animal-informed clinical practice including two detailed case studies and discussion questions. De Prekel & Runge’s chapter 20, “The impact of equine ownership also ‘flips’ the concept of equine assisted therapies and examines the possible therapeutic and healing value of the relationship that clients have with their horses. Johnson & Bruneau’s chapter 11 “Pets and relationships: How animals help us understand ourselves and our connections with others” draws on attachment theory, family systems therapy and John Gottman’s couple’s therapy. Chapter 12 is a related chapter (Schaefer) that examines the ways in which companion animals impact intimate relationships.

For those clinicians working with children and adolescents, chapter 2, by Melson “Animals and children’s development: Expanding the circle for psychotherapy” and Piper & Uttley’s chapter 4, “Adolescents and pets” provide essential readings for these specific life stages. Chapter 3, by Boat, Explores the challenges of the trauma and serious issue of dog bites and children. For those working with older populations, Fields and Kogan’s chapter on pets and older adults examines the benefits and risks of pet-ownership as well as the perspective of ‘occupational therapy in action.’ Chapter 9, by Bibbo, explores caregiving and adult pet owners and provides guidelines for caregivers, case examples and suggested further readings. In a related topic, chapter 10, Brooks & Rogers address the role of pets and people living with long-term conditions. Chapter 19, by Hae Young Kim addresses homelessness and animal companionship.

The complicated psychological issues of veterinarians and other animal caring professionals (such as compassion fatigue) are addressed in chapter 22 and 27. The volume concludes most appropriately with Buck and Rauscher’s chapter 28 on the ethics of competency in human-animal relationships.

This volume is the first of its kind, addressing the complex and varied ways that human-animal bond, interactions and relationships can provide a primary or secondary focus in the therapy session, and the ways in which clinicians can begin to assess and bring these aspects into their work with clients in various potentially fruitful ways.