

Bridging the Gap between Personality-Social Psychology and Human-Animal Interaction Research

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Personality and social psychology are two of the broadest subfields within psychology. Social psychology extends into areas such as perception and cognition while providing more unique contributions in specific domains such as close relationships and aggression. Personality cuts across all areas of psychology to provide a stronger understanding of individual differences within each. Although a few leading researchers in these areas have explored elements of human-animal interactions, many researchers continue to overlook and undervalue what is a common source of social interaction present in the vast majority of households – animals and pets (The American Pet Products Association, 2016). Indeed, a review of the programs for the SPSP Annual Convention dating back to 2015 found only 20 presentations that were specific to human-animal interactions (The Society for Personality and Social Psychology, 2019). Likewise, research in this area is equally sparse in the major social and personality journals during the same timeframe.

There is still much to understand regarding the ways we interact with animals and many existing theories in personality-

social psychology could be extended to the non-human animal realm. Likewise, human-animal interactions may provide an opportunity to test the generalizability of theories and phenomena. The papers offered in this special issue each demonstrate these qualities. Gravrok and colleagues (2020) discussion of integrating thriving through relationships into HAIs extends a unique and recent theoretical perspective began in research on close and romantic relationships. Likewise, Highfill and Davis (2020) offer an extension of prosocial behaviors that is deeply entrenched in social psychology. Leete and colleagues (2020) examined how cats make attributions. And although Ryan and colleagues (2020) examined the well-entrenched notion of personality matching between humans and dogs, they raise questions about the cross-cultural nature of these effects. In a similar vein, Canelo investigated the role dogs might play in reading programs. In short, each paper highlights a unique area to which personality and social psychology may contribute. It is our hope that this special issue will help foster these connections and inspire new lines of basic personality and social psychological research in the field of human-animal

interaction. Further, we hope that this issues offers human-animal interaction researchers with a starting point for continuing to explore the breadth and depth of these areas of psychology for novel ideas and perspectives.

References

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