

Book Review / Compte rendu

Julius, H., Beetz, A., Kotrschal, K., Turner, D., & Uvnäs-Moberg, K. (2013). *Attachment to Pets: An Integrative View of Human-Animal Relationships with Implications for Therapeutic Practice*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe. ISBN: 978-0-88937-442-3, 191 pages.

Reviewed by / Compte rendu par : Robin R. Norris

ABSTRACT

Attachment to Pets presents an interdisciplinary view of the concept of attachment that is crucial to the understanding of human-animal interactions in the therapeutic milieu. The authors incorporate evolutionary biology, ontogeny, psychology, and psychophysiology to engage the reader in a cross-disciplinary journey into the history of attachment and caregiving, the role of the oxytocinergic system, and the dynamics that can be revealed in the interactions between humans and animals in therapy. Overall, *Attachment to Pets* provides a foundational basis for further research in this area.

RÉSUMÉ

Attachment to Pets présente un point de vue interdisciplinaire du concept d'attachement, qui est crucial à la compréhension des interactions entre l'humain et l'animal en situation de thérapie. Les auteurs réfèrent à la biologie évolutionniste, l'ontogenèse, la psychologie, et la psychophysiologie pour engager le lecteur dans un parcours interdisciplinaire de l'histoire de l'attachement et de la prestation de soins, du rôle du système oxytocinergique, et de la dynamique qui peut se révéler dans les interactions entre les humains et les animaux en situation de thérapie. On peut considérer que, globalement, *Attachment to Pets* constitue une assise de départ pour la poursuite de la recherche en ce domaine.

Attachment to Pets offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary examination of the function of the human-animal connection or cross species companionship and the interplay between attachment, caregiving, and oxytocin. The authors are Henri Julius, PhD, professor (Faculty of Special Education, University of Rostock, Germany), Andrea Beetz, PhD, psychologist and professor (Faculty of Special Education, University of Rostock, Germany and Faculty of Behavioral Biology, University of Vienna, Austria), Kurt Kotrschal, PhD, professor (Faculty of Behavioral Biology, University of Vienna) and Director of the Konrad Lorenz Research Station in Gruenau, Austria, Dennis Turner, PhD, Co-founder of the International Society for Animal-Assisted Therapy (ISAAT), and Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg, MD, PhD, professor (Faculty of Physiology, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Skara, and University of Skövde).

The book comprises 9 chapters and an extensive 34-page reference list with very relevant and up-to-date sources. The concepts in Chapters 1–8 are woven together and build upon one another. Chapters 1 and 2 feature the relationship

between humans and animals and an evolutionary biology perspective of the human-animal relationship. Chapter 3 reviews the possible positive effects of the human-animal relationship on humans, such as a reduction of depression, a reduction of anxiety, an increase in cardiovascular health, and a mechanism to help facilitate pain management. Chapters 4–7 offer an intricate overview of the physiological mechanisms involved in the acute stress response, the function of the oxytocinergic system in calming—especially when pain may be present, the idea of attachment and caregiving in interpersonal human relationships, and then attachment and caregiving in the human-animal relationship.

The proposed model, where oxytocin is considered an important element in attachment, is well defined by the authors and is supported by the comprehensive literature search. Chapter 8 is a brief but clearly written chapter to support the overall hypothesis regarding the role of oxytocin and the various types of attachments in humans as related to human-animal relationships. The final chapter begins to open a doorway into the discussion about the practical implications for therapy and might be considered a solid foundation for future research to occur based on the hypotheses presented throughout the book.

This book not only provided support to the model in which oxytocin is so critical; it also lent scientific credence to the trail that Olmert (2009) so badly wanted to support through research in her book a few years before. *Attachment to Pets* is the missing book that needed to be written about the topic of the importance of the oxytocinergic system in the attachment that humans may have with animals. The authors are excellent in pointing out where there are limitations in the research and carefully employ the words “probably” and “may” when necessary. Throughout the book, multiple holes in the world of anthrozoology are plugged with this writing.

Some might grumble that an index is absent. However, the table of contents is so thorough that an index isn't a critical component. The only possible limitation to this work is that the friendly cover and title do not fully capture the detailed nature of the biological and psychological theories that were discussed. This is not a book intended for lay readers, though the photo of the smiling child and dog on the front may lead one to think otherwise. An advanced reader needs to take time and care when examining this book and treat it as a wonderful piece of scientific writing, not a cursory overview of the subject presented in a compact amount of pages.

I discovered this book to be a much needed treasure that brings together prior ideas of the therapeutic aspects of human-animal interactions with relevant physiological ideas about the elements that support the importance of this form of relationship. The book is a helpful read for clinicians and an imperative read for researchers, especially students interested in the field of anthrozoology. It is a fantastically optimistic step in an attempt to continue to quantify the results of pairing humans and animals together in therapeutic settings.

Reference

Olmert, M. D. (2009). *Made for each other: The biology of the human-animal bond*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

About the Author

Robin R. Norris has a Ph.D. in counselor education/supervision. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist in clinical practice, and serves as the chair of student development for the Northern Virginia Licensed Professional Counselors (NVLPC). Her main research interests are animal assisted therapy, pet loss, Asperger's syndrome and giftedness, the psychology of eating, and bariatric psychology.

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