

Preface

There have been dramatic increases in the emotional, psychological, and financial investment of animal companions over the past four decades in the United States and abroad. It is estimated that more than 63% of homes in the United States own a pet, usually a cat or dog. Worldwide, the pet-related industry is predicted to top \$65 billion in the coming year. North America, Western Europe, Asia Pacific, and Latin America lead the way in pet-related expenditures. The growing importance of animal companions in people's lives has resulted in an emergent number of investigations within academic literature; a rising number of books and scholarly articles published in recent years attempt to explain the bond from various vantage points, within mental health fields and beyond. One way to integrate the diverse number of perspectives within academia involves the use of *context*.

From a psychological perspective, *context* has become an ever-increasing salient consideration among both practitioners and researchers. Context provides clarification of the meaning of a variable or theme by providing a nuanced understanding of how other factors converge and interact with the factor one wishes to explore. Contextual factors include but are not limited to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, individual differences related to developmental issues across the life span, and unique dynamics within and across cultures.

In an attempt to provide a contextual foundation for readers interested in the human–animal bond, this book introduces students and professionals in mental health and related fields to the manner in which the bond is studied among multiple disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literature, religion, and veterinary medicine. Although this anthology uses psychology as the focal point, assimilating perspectives from other fields will enhance readers' conceptual appreciation of the bond in new and important ways. In addition to the contextual elements noted above, the way we perceive nonhuman animals, the meaning we attribute to our relationships with them, and the ways we respond to their loss are potentially influenced by factors such as our own history of relationships, support resources, cultural and religious beliefs, values, and worldview. When we can successfully integrate these various perspectives in a thoughtful way, we achieve a unique view of the bond, and how it acts as a mirror, reflecting back our own struggles and triumphs concerning work and love on the individual, familial, and cultural levels.

Contemplating the significance of the human–animal bond is a complex endeavor. We argue that there are distinct benefits for doing so. Ultimately, *The Psychology of the Human–Animal Bond* strives for three goals: (1) raise awareness regarding the myriad influences that shape the experience of the human–animal bond, and how they may be studied, (2) enhance the explanatory power of clinicians, researchers, and clients regarding the meaning of the bond, and (3) increase agency among clinicians, researchers, and clients when acting upon the meaning of the bond. *The Psychology of the Human–Animal Bond* encourages the reader to appreciate the various ways the bond is formed, adds meaning, and ultimately can add to the unique mosaic of our understanding. We hope you find it useful in your work.

Editors' note: The black and white photographs that appear with each section preface are provided by photographer Sharon Lee Hart. Sharon made portraits of the various residents of farm animal sanctuaries across the United States. Farm animal sanctuaries provide life-long shelter for those who have been rescued from situations in which they have been abused, neglected, or otherwise mistreated. We include these photographs as a stimulus for reader; one of the many complex manifestations of the human-animal bond.

The Psychology of the Human-Animal Bond
A Resource for Clinicians and Researchers
Blazina, C.; Boyraz, G.; Shen-Miller, D. (Eds.)
2011, XXII, 421 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-1-4419-9760-9