

Introduction to Special Section on Human-Animal Studies: Humanistic Psychology Contributions of Team Woof

Harris L. Friedman^{1, 2}, Tina Bloom³, and
Melissa Trevathan-Minnis⁴

¹ Department of Psychology and Counseling, Naropa University

² Department of Psychology and Counseling, Harvard University

³ Department of Psychology and Counseling, Floraglaces Foundation, Fort Myers, Florida,
United States

⁴ Department of Psychology and Counseling, Goddard College

When Tina Bloom wanted to do her doctoral dissertation under Harris Friedman’s supervision within a clinical psychology department on humans’ ability to recognize facial emotions in dogs, she received considerable opposition. Several administrators and faculty peers pushed back by asking, what does this topic have to do with clinical psychology? Bloom and Friedman’s retort involved mentioning how many people develop fear of dogs, including occasionally rising to the level of phobia, after getting bitten, coupled with the speculation that this could sometimes possibly be due to confusing a dog’s angry baring of its teeth with a dog’s happy smiling. They argued that training dog-bite victims who were traumatized to differentiate between these two emotional presentations could possibly both desensitize and cognitively empower them with the skills to overcome their fear—and perhaps even appreciate dogs, and this required foundational-scientific work on humans’ ability to recognize facial emotions in dogs. Their argument worked, and Bloom (2011) not only completed her dissertation but, when published as an article (Bloom & Friedman, 2013) and later a chapter (Bloom & Friedman, 2014), it went viral, being widely covered by national (Boyle, 2013) and even international (Lusher, 2013) media. Due to this unexpected recognition, Bloom and Friedman informally created “Team Woof” to pursue this line of research, which included obtaining grant funding used to successfully replicate and extend the initial study (Bloom et al., 2021), something especially pleasing in light of psychology’s current crisis in which many headline-grabbing findings fail to replicate (e.g., Friedman et al., 2020). Melissa Trevathan-Minnis later joined Team Woof, and a number of other collaborations have ensued, including several international ones. Accordingly, we showcase some of our recent work in the area of human-animal studies from the tradition of humanistic psychology.

Editor's Note. This is an introduction to the special section “Human-Animal Interaction: Implications for Humanistic Psychology.” Please see the Table of Contents here: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/hum/49/4/>.—SDC

Melissa Trevathan-Minnis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4430-9400>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Harris L. Friedman, 14691 Drawdy Road, Ft. Myers, FL 33905, United States. Email: harrisfriedman@hotmail.com

In “Dogma and Catma,” David Paxton (2021) describes how humans evolved within a complex milieu of other evolving animals, often resulting in “coevolution” in which changes in one species relates to changes in others. Modern humans did not evolve in a vacuum and, in the case of human-canine coevolution, the same processes that led to humans also were at play as some wolves became dogs. Human anatomy and physiology have coevolved alongside many other species, resulting in what exists today. It is interesting that Bloom initially contacted Paxton while he was vaccinating dogs for villagers in New Guinea, requiring her to ask the American consulate to take canoes out into the jungle to find him! Paxton’s pioneering work has been a major inspiration of Team Woof, and his work underpins the fundamental approach taken, which is congruent with that of many contemporary scholars, such as Robert Hare (2017) and Clive Wynne (2019). Although Paxton (2000; 2011), Hare, and Wynne have notable differences in their explanations of the prehistoric-shared canine-human past, all of them have in common that their close personal relationships with dogs led to their profound scientific discoveries (Bloom, 2021). One basic contention is that, just as early humans domesticated wolves into dogs, wolves similarly domesticated early humans into what they are today.

Trevathan-Minnis collaborated with Ken Shapiro, also one of the founders of this field, in writing “Human-Animal Studies in Psychology: The History and Challenges of Developing Clinically Based Ethical Programs Involving Animals” (Trevathan-Minnis & Shapiro, 2021), which describes the obstacles faced by early proponents of the human-animal bond. This article provides the historical background for this area of study and addresses ways to conceptualize the ethical treatment of animals in practice.

This is followed by two applied papers, a qualitative-case study and a mostly quantitative mixed-method study, showing the importance of both types of humanistic research within human-animal studies. These reflect the call previously made in this journal (Friedman & Robbins, 2009) for humanistic psychologists to embrace methodological pluralism, which is relevant as much to human-animal studies as it is to studies only on humans.

Bloom et al.’s article “In the Company of Animals: Accompaniment Transforms Prisoners into Colleagues, Teachers, and Healers” (Bloom et al., 2021), illustrates a practical application of human-animal studies creating change with one of the most intractable clinical populations within one of the most oppressive institutional settings, prisoners incarcerated in prisons. This qualitative case study describes how an accidental discovery by Bloom (i.e., resulting from placing photographs of dogs on her bland, putty-colored, cement block office walls in a high security prison) opened prisoners’ minds and hearts so that they could begin to recover from their traumatic histories. This also shows how the deleterious culture of prison punishment (Bloom & Bradshaw, 2021) can be replaced with more humane approaches through drawing from human-animal studies.

Trevathan-Minnis and colleagues, in “Using Dog Facial-Emotion Recognizability to Explore the Putative Black Dog Syndrome” (Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021), employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a mixed-method study. It shows the importance in this era of epistemic crisis (Meagan & Call-Cummings, 2020) in which so many putative beliefs have been shown to be false, how empirical research can provide evidence to untangle facts from fiction in addressing problems with important consequences. The epistemic crisis goes beyond the replicability crisis, which is just one manifestation of a larger concern regarding what to believe in an era of rampant disinformation, as well as all-too-common sloppy science. Taking a well-regarded belief and carefully examining it through empirical methods resulted in an outcome that suggests debunking of a long-held assumption regarding the adoptability of shelter dogs, although Trevathan-Minnis and team hope that more research

will emerge to better understand the variables that impact adoptability and subsequent euthanasia rates.

Some of the many implications of these articles for humanistic psychology is that a truly human-centered approach to psychology cannot ignore the nonhuman others with which we have coevolved and coinhabit this planet. Human-animal studies show the profound interconnectedness of all life forms on earth, which is at once transpersonal (Friedman & Hartelius, 2015) and transspecies (Bradshaw & Watkins, 2006). The transpersonal aspects of human-animal studies is congruent with the self-expansiveness model (Friedman, 1983, 2018) in which individual's self-concept through the process of identification can expand to encompass all of life—and that human individuals are never isolated beings, while the transspecies aspects of human-animal studies show that species also do not exist in isolation but, rather, are also always coevolving. Team Woof is actively exploring a variety of relevant questions in the area of human-animal studies from the perspective of humanistic psychology.

References

- Bloom, T. (2011). *Exploring human's ability to classify dogs' (Canis familiaris) facial expressions photographed in different situations: Extending Ekman's cross cultural research on the universality of emotions across species*. (Doctoral dissertation, 2011). UMI/ProQuest, 3469598, 284.
- Bloom, T. (2021). An untold story of dogs: Clandestine canine contributions to science. *Society & Animals*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-BJA10048>
- Bloom, T., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2021). Inside of a prison: How a culture of punishment prevents rehabilitation. *Peace and Conflict*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000572>
- Bloom, T., & Friedman, H. (2013). Classifying dogs' (Canis familiaris) facial expressions from photographs. *Behavioural Processes*, 96, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2013.02.010>
- Bloom, T., & Friedman, H. L. (2014). The psychobiological and neurobiological implications of humans' ability to read emotions from facial expressions in dogs. In A. Freitas-Magalhães (Ed.), *Emotional expressions: The brain and the face* (Vol. 5, pp. 85–103). University Fernando Pessoa.
- Bloom, T., Serrano, B. R., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2021). In the company of animals: Accompaniment transforms prisoners into colleagues, teachers, and healers. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(4), 602–615. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000256>
- Bloom, T., Trevathan-Minnis, M., Atlas, N., MacDonald, D. A., & Friedman, H. L. (2021). Identifying facial expressions in dogs: A replication and extension study. *Behavioural Processes*, 186, 104371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2021.104371>
- Boyle, R., (2013, March 18) Yes, you can tell from his face what your dog is feeling: People can correctly identify a wide range of dog emotions by sight. *Popular Science*.
- Bradshaw, G. A., & Watkins, M. (2006). Transpecies psychology: Theory and praxis. *Psyche and Nature*, 75, 69–94.
- Friedman, H. (1983). The Self-Expansiveness Level Form: A conceptualization and measurement of a transpersonal construct. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 15(1), 37–50.
- Friedman, H. L. (2018). Transpersonal psychology as a heterodox approach to psychological science: Focus on the construct of self-expansiveness and its measure. *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, 6(1), 230–242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/arc0000057>
- Friedman, H., & Hartelius, G. (Eds.). (2015). *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology*. Wiley-Blackwell. (Original work published 2013)
- Friedman, H., & Robbins, B. (2009). Special issue on methodological pluralism. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 37(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873260802394442>
- Friedman, H., MacDonald, D. A., & Coyne, J. (2020). Working with psychology journal Eds. to correct problems in the scientific literature. *Canadian Psychology*, 61(4), 342–348. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000248>

- Hare, B. (2017). Survival of the friendliest: Homo sapiens evolved via selection for prosociality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 68(1), 155–186. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010416-044201>
- Lusher, A., (2013, March 17) Scientists prove you really can tell what your dog is feeling by looking at its face. *The Telegraph*, n.p.
- Meagan, L., & Call-Cummings, M. (2020). Knowledge democracy, action research, the internet and the epistemic crisis. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 24(4), 73–82. [https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.202003_24\(3\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.202003_24(3).0002)
- Paxton, D. W. (2000). A case for a naturalistic perspective. *Anthrozoos*, 13(1), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.2752/08927930078699999>
- Paxton, D. W. (2011). *Why it's OK to talk to your dog: Co-evolution of people and dogs*. Watson: Ferguson, and Company.
- Paxton, D. W. (2021). Dogma and Catma: Coevolution of People, Dogs and Cats. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(4), 577–588. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000235>
- Trevathan-Minnis, M., & Shapiro, K. (2021). Human-animal studies in psychology: The history and challenges of developing clinically based ethical programs involving animals. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(4), 589–601. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000260>
- Trevathan-Minnis, M., Bloom, T., Atlas, N., MacDonald, D. A., & Friedman, H. L. (2021). Using dog facial-emotion recognizability to explore the putative black dog syndrome. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(4), 616–629. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000252>
- Wynne, C. D. L. (2019). *Dog is love: Why and how your dog loves you*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Author Note

Harris L. Friedman, PhD, is a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University in 2019 - 2021, and a retired Research Professor in Counseling Psychology at University of Florida. He also consults as a clinical and organizational psychologist.

Tina Bloom is the licensed psychologist on a multidisciplinary forensic outreach and crisis team in New York State. She is also an associate of Floraglates Foundation, Inc. and The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence.

Melissa Trevathan-Minnis is a licensed psychologist with a private practice in Austin, TX. She is also the Internship Coordinator at Goddard College and part-time faculty at Northcentral University.

Received November 15, 2021

Accepted November 16, 2021 ■