Clinical psychology attempts to describe and explain mental disorders in order to prevent or remedy these problems. Historically, animals other than human made few appearances in the clinical psychology literature except in association with fetishes, phobias, and research models of human disorders. Today, most clinically relevant research efforts in Human-Animal Studies are directed toward understanding animal cruelty’s connection with psychopathology and toward developing therapeutic human-animal interactions in service settings. Although Animal Studies has broadened our understanding of clinical issues and opportunities in our relationships with other animals, it remains separate from mainstream clinical psychology.

**Conceptual and Therapeutic Advances**

*Animal Cruelty and Psychopathology*

The main concern of animal welfare organizations for more than a century, the issue of humans’ cruelty to other animals, crossed into the academic
sphere about 30 years ago when studies confirmed early cruelty to animals as a predictor for later violence against people (Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). This area now takes two directions: continuing the individual, psychiatric approach and adding family systems descriptions, placing abuse of animals within domestic violence. Research connects various manifestations of an over-all culture of violence (Ascione & Arkow, 1999). Information disseminates rapidly to animal welfare, women’s shelter, veterinary, and law enforcement professionals.

Childhood cruelty to animals appears in the DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) as a Conduct Disorder symptom. Early cruelty is widespread and serious (Ascione, 2001; Miller, 2001). Current work on measures of childhood cruelty to animals attempts to sort out developmental pathways of common harm to animals from malice and pathology (Ascione, Thompson, & Black, 1997; Guymer, Mellor, Luk, & Pearse, 2001). Violence toward other animals is intergenerational and cyclical. Children in households with domestic violence often hurt animals (Ascione, 2001). Adults who abused animals as children are more likely to accept corporal punishment and hitting wives as part of family life (Flynn, 1999), bringing the problem full circle.


Sexual abuse of animals (bestiality, zoophilia) has long been included in descriptions of the paraphilias (sexual disorders in which there are unusual preferences) and now appears in discussions of cruelty. Beirne (2000) and Adams (1995) draw connections between sexual abuse of animals and children or domestic terror against women. Beirne creates four categories of “interspecies sexual assault.”

Stories of sick animals jam-packed in filthy conditions shock the public. The review by the recently founded Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC, 2000) describes animal hoarding and discusses explanatory models
(attachment or obsessive-compulsive disorders). Pilot data are being compared for fit with the models, a step toward discovering effective treatment. As keys to further progress, authors in the Ascione and Arkow volume (1999) urge redefining animal abuse for research and legal purposes, achieving recognition of the battered pet syndrome, and increasing cross-agency cooperation. They are among those calling for a shift from humans’ dominion philosophy to another world view that embodies respect and gentleness. Assisting in this shift are new humane education materials for children (Raphael, Colman, & Loar, 1999), preventive programs for at-risk children (Ascione & Arkow, 1999), and AniCare, the first training program for therapists treating adult animal abusers (Jory & Randour, 1999), followed by AniCare Child (Randour, Krinsk, & Wolf, 2002). Outcome research is needed.

The Costs of Caring

Although the following areas have not generated as much academic attention as the areas of mistreatment of animals or animal-assisted therapy, they present important clinical issues in our relationships with other animals.

Empirical examination of peoples’ grief or distress following the death of animal companions increased in recent years (Gosse & Barnes, 1994) and highlights the need for support such as counseling (Stallones, 1994). A strong knowledge base now exists for those who wish to support bereft guardians.

In a recent widely publicized case, a dog was ripped from his guardian’s car and thrown into traffic. Vicarious traumatization (or secondary victimization), occurring when others harm a loved animal, compounded the guardian’s loss. Guardians of companion animals (Arluke, 2000) or laboratory workers who form attachments with animals hurt or killed in research (Herzog, 2002) are among those who may suffer this form of trauma.

When work duties compel a person to harm animals, dissonance may result. Inner conflicts are often transformed into acceptance and justifications, with varying struggles along the way (Frommer & Arluke, 1999). Contradicting the stereotype that only heartless people could make themselves do such things, researchers demonstrate how everyday people incorporate roles that include harm.
Those who devote themselves to animal causes, while citing intrinsic and social rewards, also describe intense financial and social hardships resulting from the choice to devote their lives to advocacy and action (Herzog, 1993).

**Animals as Healers for Humans**

It is now a commonplace finding that other animals hold a special, life-enhancing place in the lives of many people. Purposeful therapeutic use of animals began over 30 years ago and snowballed in the 1980s. Two handbooks (Arkow, 1998; Fine, 2000) provide historical overviews, discussions of practical and ethical issues, and detailed advice for practitioners. The 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion of descriptions of “Animal-Assisted Activities” (AAA) and “Animal-Assisted Therapy” (AAT) in animal welfare, health services, and academic publications. Programs are being offered in a variety of settings using diverse types of animals and different types of interactions with them in order to help humans with a variety of problems. Often, the mere presence of animals is seen as milieu enhancement.

From these myriad descriptions it is possible to sort out several advances. Professionalism (registration and training of the human-animal partners) has increased greatly. Practical advice has been widely disseminated. Ethical standards for the use of animals have been refined. Research often explores effective matches of animal characteristics and specific client problems.

Phil Arkow (personal communication, February 20, 2002) hopes the future will bring increased legitimacy and recognition for AAA and AAT. Staff or volunteers in human service or animal welfare settings conduct much of the published research. Arkow believes that the qualitative descriptions offered by these non-academic practitioners can be illuminating as complements to more traditional clinical research. Though “therapist allegiance” is often seen as a hindrance to objective research, it may be that the enthusiasm of practitioners or the emotional bonds between specific team members are necessary for intervention effectiveness.

Given the large number of variables contained in published studies of AAT, it is understandable we remain convinced in a general sense that AAT is helpful without having a unitary description of what it is or why it may work. Arkow and authors in the Fine (2000) handbook raise further ethical con-
cerns about both clients and animal partners in AAT and note the need for more sophisticated research. They urge researchers to provide clearer operationalizations of process and outcome variables, baseline and long-term follow-up data, and control and comparison treatment groups. To date, relatively few AAT studies have shown these elements. According to Arkow (personal communication, February 20, 2002), “All of the questions we have been asking since the 1970s remain to be answered.”

Penetration of Animal Studies into Mainstream Clinical Psychology

Despite the advances covered above, Animal Studies progresses without the blessing of mainstream clinical psychology. Although authors publish in a variety of journals (Animal Studies, law enforcement, social work, gerontology, nursing, and health services), relatively little appears in academic clinical psychology journals. A search of approximately 30 clinical psychology and family journals for references to “animal abuse”, “animal collectors” and “animal-assisted therapy” turned up only 3 hits for publications from 1990 through 2001. One 2001 article about an intervention for conduct problems of children of battered women made no reference to the work of Ascione and others from the Animal Studies field. A more general search (PsycINFO) for “animal-assisted therapy” retrieved 41 references (none in clinical journals), while a broader data base (CINAHL) found 79, largely in health services journals. It is not clear whether this “furry ceiling” is due to Animal Studies professionals being affiliated with areas other than clinical psychology, academics not submitting to clinical psychology journals, or to journals’ being reluctant, for content or research design reasons, to publish work in this field. Funding for research appears scarce and tends to be internal or from humane organizations.

Along with the future directions already noted, Animal Studies needs a generation of students who will develop as scholars within this field rather than pursuing this area after training in another specialty. Evidence of progress toward this goal is mixed. Two popular undergraduate abnormal psychology texts and three recent handbooks about effective psychotherapy mention animals only briefly and in very limited topic areas—phobias, conduct disorders, and paraphilia—and do not mention AAT. Nationwide, college
coursework in Animal Studies is sparse and largely confined to ethics. However, a scattering of dissertations is appearing and e-mail contacts indicate interest among graduate students. Development of coursework and texts for these students should be a priority in the next ten years.

The “furry ceiling” in academic clinical psychology may ultimately yield to the intense pressures created by tragedies such as routine family violence and September 11. Connections between animal abuse and other forms of violence are receiving media coverage. And the images of AAT teams at work with survivors and workers following September 11 will undoubtedly generate further interest in the healing potential of our relationships with other animals.

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Note

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