

# The Humanistic Psychologist

## **In the Company of Animals: Accompaniment Transforms Prisoners Into Colleagues, Teachers, and Healers**

Tina Bloom, B. Robert Serrano, and G. A. Bradshaw

Online First Publication, September 13, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hum0000256>

### CITATION

Bloom, T., Serrano, B. R., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2021, September 13). In the Company of Animals: Accompaniment Transforms Prisoners Into Colleagues, Teachers, and Healers. *The Humanistic Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hum0000256>

## In the Company of Animals: Accompaniment Transforms Prisoners Into Colleagues, Teachers, and Healers

Tina Bloom<sup>1</sup>, B. Robert Serrano<sup>2</sup>, and G. A. Bradshaw<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> West Seneca, New York, New York, United States

<sup>2</sup> Alfred State College

<sup>3</sup> The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence, Jacksonville, Oregon, United States

The setting is a high-security state prison inhabited by over 2,300 men labeled as “violent,” often having decades before access to the privilege of parole. Over 400 of these men have life without parole. This particular prison is surrounded by a national forest. We begin by describing current problems in corrections to introduce the difficulties facing not only these prisoners themselves, but also the psychologists tasked with rehabilitating them. A serendipitous discovery found that photographs of dogs and nonhuman forest animals opened communication between prisoner and nonprisoner. Then, the story of traumatized adolescent elephants led to prisoners’ willingness to discuss their vulnerabilities. Eventually, several of the prisoners began to relate as colleagues, as professional equals, by taking the initiative to engage in healing activities such as composing effective therapeutic materials—featuring animals—to share among themselves in a process that became known in the prison as *Elephants in the Forest*. Scenarios from the prison, along with the literature supporting how these transformative approaches may work, are presented and discussed. Consistent with what psychological theory and data predict, attachment-based, trauma-informed, nature-grounded accompaniment provided foundational support for mutual transformation in both prisoner and psychologist. Designing and implementing such training and programs are recommended as vital for the success of prisoners and society-at-large rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** attachment-based psychotherapy, dogs, elephants, nonadversarial justice, trans-species psychology

Despite the proliferation of correctional facilities and their associated increasing levels of funding, prisoner<sup>1</sup> populations and rates of recidivism in the United States are growing. The

---

*Editor's Note.* Melissa Trevathan-Minnis served as the action editor for this article.—SDC

---

Tina Bloom  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1635-7672>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to G. A. Bradshaw, The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence, P.O. Box 1446, Jacksonville, OR 97530, United States. Email: [info@kerulos.org](mailto:info@kerulos.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> We use the word prisoner in lieu of “inmate.” The prisoners we know find the term inmate to be offensive because of the sanitizing process of “making it seem alright, as though we are patients in an asylum where we belong.” Instead, they prefer to be known as prisoners, which maintains the connotation that they are being held against their wills. They are imprisoned.

National Institute of Justice (2020) estimates that 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years of release, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years. In short, incarceration in the United States as a means to rehabilitate offenders and prevent crime is failing badly (Whitely et al., 2014). One major factor in the misframing of prisoner treatment and rehabilitation programs is the dismissal of trauma (Cullen et al., 2011; Gibbons & Katzenbach, 2011). Most all prisoners have suffered trauma prior to incarceration including severe relational trauma (Garbarino, 2015, 2017; Garbarino et al., 1991; Grady et al., 2017; Jäggi et al., 2016; Levenson, 2017; Roach, 2013; Thornberry, 2005; Thornberry et al., 2001; Wolff & Shi, 2012). Average Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores in prisoners are four times greater than scores for the general population (Reavis et al., 2013). The ACE studies and subsequent longitudinal research document how early relational trauma seeds subsequent trauma events.

Among the prisoners with whom we interacted, some of whom were labeled by the prison system as the most violent men in the system, when asked whether they experienced childhood abuse, would reply that they had “normal childhoods.” In further discussion, however, these men described their specific experiences as young children. In most cases, prisoners reported experiences of severe abuse, such as beatings resulting in broken bones, deep wounds from beatings with implements such as extension cords while bathing to maximize the pain, being thrown through windows, and even being run over by a car as forms of parental punishment. As they told their stories of *their normal childhoods*, the men fidgeted in their chairs. They expressed both embarrassment and concern that by revealing their experiences and that they had wept during their childhood abuse episodes, they would be perceived as “wimps.” Some of the most disturbing cases were reports of sexual molestation by mothers, grandmothers, older sisters, and other women who, instead of acting as trusted caregivers, became instead sexual predators of little boys. Almost every prisoner interviewed described some version of severe trauma during their childhood experiences that occurred in their homes, and many times, when they were placed in foster care.

Many prisoners enter incarceration having experienced such early childhood abuse and then subsequent traumas related to impoverished social standing. These experiences develop into complex-posttraumatic stress disorder (c-PTSD), a condition that results from successive and sustained traumas (Jäggi et al., 2016; Levenson, 2017; Miller & Najavits, 2012; Roach, 2013; Wolff & Shi, 2012). The significance of c-PTSD is that repeated, untreated symptoms become embodied and intertwined with the individual’s identity and sense of reality, the threads and substrate of his narrative. Because one of the central features of the disorder is the inability of the brain to distinguish between dangerous and safe situations, it is essential to provide space where the trauma survivor can feel safe and relaxed enough to begin to disidentify from his symptoms—to understand that he is not his symptoms, rather that symptoms are his responses that evolved to protect himself from what happened (Society for Neuroscience, 2007).

Currently, much of the correctional psychology literature frames c-PTSD symptoms, such as aggression and behavioral acting out, as immutable characterological defects that must be “managed” (Hare, 1993; Hare et al., 1991; Meloy, 1992; Meloy & Meloy, 2003; Meloy & Shiva, 2007; Salekin, 2002). Management techniques are generally traumatogenic and fear-reinforcing such as the prisoner being punished by being put into solitary confinement. Therapeutic treatment is entirely lacking.

Instead of effective rehabilitation, iatrogenic punishment-laden behavioral protocols (Caldwell, 1994; Caldwell & Van Rybroek, 2001; Caldwell et al., 2006; Monroe et al., 1988; Roach, 2013; Wormith et al., 2007) and misguided, poorly monitored, dangerous pharmacological interventions (Griffiths et al., 2012) exacerbate maladaptive cognitive schemas

(Young et al., 2003) that accompany the prisoners' pervasive trauma-induced hypervigilance and its subsequent adaptive aggression (Jäggi et al., 2016; Roach, 2013; Wolff & Shi, 2012). The anxiety underlying aggression which stems from trauma triggered fear is punished, and therefore exacerbated, instead of acknowledged, processed, and abated. As recidivism rates demonstrate, prisoners, most of whom are eventually released to the community, leave prisons angrier, stripped of the few coping skills they once possessed, and more defiant of authority than they were prior to incarceration.

Our experience with prisoners demonstrates the effectiveness of supporting prisoners' prosocial psychosocial development in a high security institution, housing prisoners convicted of violent offenses.<sup>2</sup> We use our experiences to illustrate that basing correctional treatment in a culture of trauma-informed, attachment-based accompaniment, grounded in nature, yielded remarkably positive outcomes. In contrast to the present, dominant adversarial, hierarchical model in prisons, our approach effectively achieved stated correctional facility goals. A systems-level change in approach within prison culture to nature-based, trauma-informed accompaniment was highly effective, ethically and practically.

### Serendipitous Discovery

In 2010, I (Tina Bloom) was employed by the psychology department of a high security state prison. My revelation of the therapeutic effects of nature were unplanned. In an attempt to reduce the cold, unfeeling dreariness of the endless cinderblock motif in my building, I made my accidental discovery. When I taped photographs of dogs on the drab, putty-colored walls of my office, the demeanors of prisoners who came to session immediately changed. Upon entering the office, their ever-managed poker faces would smile, and then they would begin to open up and share stories of their dogs. Almost every prisoner had at least one dog story. Even when he might have never lived with a dog, a prisoner would begin to describe a dog he knew or saw on TV.

Aware that the presence of dogs often acts as an anxiolytic (Bracha & Maser, 2009), especially for the relationally traumatized (Barker, 1999; Barker & Barker, 1988; Barker & Dawson, 1998), I was reminded of Levinson's (1972) accidental discovery. The presence of his small dog, Jingles, during an unexpected, emergency psychotherapy session was an effective facilitator for a traumatized, resistant little boy who formerly would not participate in therapy. I had discovered that just the photographs of dogs seemed to open prisoners' minds.

Eventually, I moved my dog photos to one wall to add photos of bears, deer, and other Northwoods fauna shrouded in forest greenery to my remaining walls. Although the prison was surrounded by a breathtaking, popular Northern national forest, the prisoners could only occasionally catch a glimpse of its beauty far in the distance. The woodland and its nonhuman inhabitants were far beyond the always windswept concrete walkways interconnecting the many carefully laid out high concrete ramparts, and rows of 12-foot chain link fences, each

---

<sup>2</sup>The population of the institution, although consistently holding at about 2,300 prisoners, was constantly in flux due to persistent, biweekly departure and reception. Thus, some prisoners only experienced our approach one time during a single individual session. Furthermore, the prisoner population with whom we used this approach consistently was also constantly changing, because of their movements in and out of groups and on and off of various housing blocks. In corrections, one strategy to prevent prisoner scheming due to gaining knowledge of physical plant and operations, as well as developing relationships used to manipulate staff, is to unexpectedly and incessantly move them. Despite all these barriers, for over 4 years, from approximately 2014 until 2018, over 800 prisoners participated in groups consistently using this approach, whereas over 3,000 individuals experienced at least one individual session utilizing this approach. Of course, prisoners with more experience responded more noticeably.

topped and bottomed with several rolls of concertina wire that securely enclosed the compound.

Prisoners, the majority of whom hailed from inner cities, were intrigued by various animals in the photographs on my office walls. They would become deeply engaged in conversations about them. All the while, during these imaginal forays into the freedom of the forest, prisoner anxiety abated. It seemed that the discussions about local fauna moved the spotlight off the prisoners' crimes, which had become the entirety of their identities in the current system, and into neutral, yet dynamic, topics that could be tied back into their own circumstances. Prisoners began to feel safety and trust. Posturing stopped, vulnerabilities emerged, and prisoners discovered untapped, nascent aspects of their emotional repertoire, such as curiosity, empathy, and compassion. Often, they would return with sketches they drew or information they found about animals that particularly interested them.

Nature images seemed to be advancing therapeutic progress. Prisoners were processing information instead of anxiously acting out. They became engaged in conversation with me, as equals in the model of accompaniment (Watkins, 2012, 2015, 2019). Because prisoners became capable of talking about their aggressive urges, the frequencies with which they acted out decreased. In the language of neuroscience, their executive functioning improved. In support of these clinical impressions of the impact of Nature on prisoners, photographs of landscapes such as glaciers, waterfalls, and forests were found to reduce tension and diffuse anger in prisoners living in restricted confinement at a high security prison (Nadkarni et al., 2017).

### **Elephants in the Forest**

One day, a prisoner at the facility asked me (Tina Bloom) to speak about the importance of family in violence prevention at a symposium sponsored by a prisoner organization. Because of my interest in transspecies psychology (Bloom, 2006, 2011; Bloom & Friedman, 2013, 2014) and the effectiveness I observed increasingly in my rehabilitative efforts, I searched the literature for research on the effects of separating young, nonhuman animals from their families. I found the work of G. A. Bradshaw, which documented and diagnosed c-PTSD in free living elephants (Bradshaw, 2005, 2009; Bradshaw & Finlay, 2005; Bradshaw & Schore, 2007; Bradshaw et al., 2005).

Similar to the prisoners with whom I worked, the young elephants had suffered repeated traumas beginning with relational trauma experienced as infants. The young male elephants had witnessed their families slaughtered by gun-bearing helicopters, were grabbed, tied to the dead bodies of their mothers until transport, then moved to another unfamiliar terrain where there were no older elephants, or if there were any present, they were unrelated elephants. The landscapes were foreign. The infants did not receive the nurturance and care of a mother and constellation of allomothers (related older female elephants) and young elephants. As they matured into adolescence, they also lacked psychosocial mentorship by older males, which typically spans from the ages of 9 to 11 years of age through early thirties. As they entered their teenage years, these elephants began to sexually assault and murder rhinoceroses leading to the deaths of over 100 white and black rhinoceroses (Bradshaw, 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2005). This was unprecedented. Further research revealed that severely traumatized elephants such as these young males, and their concomitant abnormal psychological states, were increasingly common given broad-scale genocide and torture in both Africa and Asia. Female elephants having suffered similar traumas neglected their young and committed infanticide of their own as well as those of other females—symptoms never found prior to white colonization. These symptoms conform to c-PTSD (Bradshaw, 2009). The parallels with inner city

youth (Freud & Burlingham, 1943; Garbarino et al., 1991; Goffman, 2014), who, like the elephants, live in war zones, are chilling.

At first, biologists in South Africa thought that removing the adult bull elephants had left the young males without the necessary “discipline” provided by the older males. They rationalized that the mere reintroduction of adult males into the population to provide dominance-based constraint would solve the problem. This hypothesis was tested by relocating older bulls to the reserves where the adolescents lived. The unprecedented violence among the juvenile elephants temporarily ceased only to begin again. The “problem” bulls were executed by park authorities.

Introduction of older bulls acted as a temporary band-aid on the adolescent elephants’ searing psychological wounds. As anticipated by trauma healing treatment, the presence of male figures did not work. Indeed, it is a misperception that elephants “discipline” each other. Further, trauma does not resolve with a pill or structural manipulation. Trauma is at heart relational betrayal. To address trauma requires profound relational repair. This has been accomplished at The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Kenya, where dedicated staff members essentially emulate relational repair, reflective of elephant values, family dynamics, and ethics (Bradshaw, 2009). The traumatized adolescent elephants needed time, a sense of care, and security to build trusting, supportive, and understanding relationships. Across species, such restorative, loving connections lead to neuropsychological repair (Bradshaw, 2005, 2009; Costello, 2013).

The attempt to rehabilitate the young elephants with the adult male elephants who, incorrectly, were introduced to act as disciplinarians, mirrored the prison philosophy: highly controlled management enforced by cold, emotionally distanced correctional staff, whereas warm, supportive relationships are viewed as fraternization, punishable by termination of employment. Learning the story of the traumatized adolescent male elephants—how their psyches were shaped from their past traumas and suffered from efforts to control through dominance and discipline—resonated deeply with the prisoners. They understood the importance of building meaningful relationships characterized by warmth, trust, care, honesty, and understanding that effectuate neurological repatterning (Bloom, 2015; Costello, 2013).

The elephants’ story provided a medium by which prisoners could begin to articulate their own symptoms and stories which derived from a life of untreated trauma. Deep self-reflection and the prisoners’ *ability and willingness to discuss* their experiences created open pathways to connect and communicate, not only with Bloom, but among each other. Suddenly, the prisoners felt it was acceptable to discuss their vulnerabilities. They no longer felt compelled to display steely toughness, but instead, they were willing to expose their defenselessness as young children.

By removing the shame and humiliation of past violent deeds, through understanding the causes and symptoms of trauma, the elephants’ story allowed prisoners to discuss their histories openly and honestly. The prisoners engaged in the critical work of consciously putting their tumultuous feelings into words. They increasingly became aware of their feelings beneath the defensive anger and able to regulate strong emotions (Costello, 2013). These sessions were marked by mutual respect and care. Defenses fell and openness abounded. Prosocial activity flourished among the men who were considered to be “unchangeable.” As one inmate insightfully noted during a group with Bloom, “After all, these things can happen to anyone, even an elephant.” Mindful of the national forest in which the prison is embedded, the prisoners began to refer to their work and process as *Elephants in the Forest*, which was not a formalized group or program, but instead an approach, a way of being based on relationship to others.

## The Magic of Trauma-Informed, Attachment-Based Accompaniment

Positive response to nature has been documented elsewhere (Nadkarni et al., 2017; van der Linden, 2015); but *Elephants in the Forest* was explicitly nature-grounded, attachment-based (Costello, 2013); and trauma-informed (van der Kolk, 2014). Furthermore, nature was not anonymous. “Nature” was specific elephants. The prisoners began to relate to these elephants as comrades, brothers, with whom they shared parallel histories and experiences. The *Elephants in the Forest* process offers important insights on trauma healing.

Ordinary memory and traumatic memory differ (van der Kolk, 2014). Ordinary memory is accessed without triggers and capable of being operated upon linguistically and socially, and thus, it is malleable. Individuals speak about their ordinary memories, allowing for different perspectives and processing to occur. Hence, ordinary memory can transform over time, facilitating adaptive functioning. Alternatively, traumatic memory does not allow for such adaptation. Traumatic memory is triggered and must be acted out over time, either physically or mentally (as flashbacks or intrusive thoughts). Traumatic memory is typically unaffected by words, embedded, and embodied and thereby, inflexible and rigid, maintaining associated behavioral rituals and mental narratives.

The origins of the “talking cure” arose from Breuer and Anna Freud’s work in uncovering traumatic memories that were lost to ordinary consciousness either because “circumstances made a reaction impossible” or because they were initiated during “severely paralyzing affects, such as fright” (Freud & Burlingham, 1943 in van der Kolk, 2014, p. 183). At the prison, *Elephants in the Forest* facilitated a similar talking cure in the traumatized prisoners through the medium of the elephants. The prisoners began to understand and process their histories instead of merely reexperiencing intensely negative emotionality (Freud & Burlingham, 1943; Garbarino et al., 1991; Goffman, 2014). They were able to process the adaptively acquired defensive anger, which kept them alive as children but no longer worked for them as adult men, in a way that was allowing them to put it under the conscious control of their own executive functioning (Costello, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014).

Yet, what the prisoners were experiencing was more than trauma-informed and attachment-based. Because the prisoners were not merely passive recipients, assisted at a sanitized distance, they were actively accompanied with each other and the attending psychologist (Watkins, 2019). Paul Farmer (2019), chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School and cofounder of Partners in Health, described accompaniment as follows:

To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end. There’s an element of mystery, of openness, of trust, in accompaniment. The companion, the *accompagnateur*, says, “I’ll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I’ll share your fate for a while—And by ‘a while’ I don’t mean a little while.” Accompaniment is about sticking with a task until it’s deemed completed—not only by the *accompagnateur*, but by the person being accompanied (p. 19)

By feeling accompanied, the prisoners experienced a profound, newly developing sense of care, compassion, and even love for humanity and Nature. They demonstrated genuine empathy as prisoner-colleagues, caregivers, and teachers (Bloom & Bradshaw, 2017, 2018; Bradshaw & Bloom, 2020). For example, they encouraged Bloom to contact Bradshaw so that *Elephants in the Forest* could be shared with others and expanded to diverse venues, human and nonhuman, which precipitated their sustained collaboration. *The effects of prisoner accompaniment rippled out beyond the confines of the prison.*

When Bloom contacted Bradshaw, the successes of *Elephants in the Forest* were trumpeted and the prisoners' journey, accompanied by Bloom and Bradshaw, was formalized through creating a specific curriculum, *The Animal Allies Project* ([www.kerulos.org](http://www.kerulos.org); Bloom & Bradshaw, 2017, 2018; Bloom et al., 2018; Bradshaw & Bloom, 2020).

Working from a perspective of trauma-informed, attachment-based accompaniment grounded in and informed by Nature, the *accompagnateurs* grow as much as the accompanied (Farmer, 2019). Deconstruction of oppression restored moral consciousness among the ranks of the prisoners. Hierarchy leveled, communication opened, and relations evolved, yielding collaborative resolution, and a reduction of intergroup aggression that has been found in other venues (Bloom, 2007; Bradshaw & Watkins, 2006). One prisoner colleague (second author) was moved to write on accompaniment (see Antonio's Story in the Appendix), another prisoner was instrumental in assisting with the most difficult prisoner groups (Bradshaw & Bloom, 2020); and yet third prisoner published a book describing the importance of incarcerated fathers remaining in *meaningful* contact with their children in order to reduce the cycle of violence and imprisonment (Mitchell, 2017, 2018).

### A Timely Tale of Tilikum

Soon after the prisoners learned about the elephants, several viewed the documentary, *Blackfish* (Cowperthwaite et al., 2013); which was aired on cable TV. This film exposed the trauma incurred by Tilikum, an orca, who later gained notoriety because he killed three trainers (Bradshaw, 2017). Tilikum's story is also a story of trauma. He was brutally torn from his mother in the wide-open North Atlantic and sent to live, isolated in a small tank for display, and perform tricks for audiences. Tilikum's story particularly attracted one of the prisoners, Robert Serrano. He was far from his home in New York City and had not seen any of his family since the day he had been incarcerated several years earlier. He was trying to stay busy during his 15-year minimum (30-year maximum) incarceration, as a first-time, but violent, offender landing at the high security prison earmarked for the most dangerous.

Because of his lengthy sentence, Serrano would have to wait 14½ years to meet the requirements for admission to most treatment programming.<sup>3</sup> He applied for numerous voluntary programs, but again, because of his minimum sentence being far into the future, he never qualified. Overworked treatment staff members were too busy cramming prisoners with earlier expiration dates<sup>4</sup> into their already overpacked treatment groups. Serrano was in the absurd situation of being deemed highly violent, yet not qualifying for most programming until just before his potential release to the community a decade into the future. Because of his keen insight, helpful perspective, and exuberant motivation, Bloom hired Serrano as one of her psychology peer assistants.

Moved by the elephants as well as Tilikum, Serrano used his own funds<sup>5</sup> to purchase a subscription to *Psychology Today*. He would take topics of interest from this magazine or ask Bloom to print one of Bradshaw's (2017) *Psychology Today Blog* articles for him (prisoners

---

<sup>3</sup> The long-term offender (LTO) group, was the only group available to men with minimum sentences of 10 years or more who were far from their minimum dates. The curriculum is based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), adjustment to incarceration. There was a long waiting list to get into this program. At approximately 6 months before his release date (with 14½ years of his minimum sentence completed), Serrano would be placed in Violence Prevention, a group based on CBT and designed to help prisoners examine their "faulty thinking," with the purpose of "restructuring their distorted thoughts."

<sup>4</sup> Sentences are described as having minimum and maximum "expiration" dates.

<sup>5</sup> Serrano made 42 cents per hour for 30 hours per week, unless locked down and making nothing. There were usually one to three days of lockdowns monthly, and thus, he made less than \$50 per month.

have no access to the Internet). Then, he would summarize topics in terms that LTO prisoners would find useful. In the LTO groups they cofacilitated, Bloom and Serrano used these materials composed by Serrano, explaining and illustrating topics such as alexithymia, toxic relationships, building healthy relationships through clear communication, being nonjudgmental, and accompaniment. Serrano found these topics to be particularly helpful in his own growth.

Motivated by Bradshaw's (2017, pp. 221–224) depiction of a coyote diagnosed with c-PTSD as a human, Serrano was inspired to write more accounts of animals' experiences in this manner (e.g., see the Appendix). Being known as "stone face" and "mean mug" among the prisoners, Serrano particularly identified with a nonhuman known as Henry in *Carnivore Minds* (Bradshaw, 2017, pp. 153–195), and thus, he wrote Henry's story from a first-person perspective, with which many of the other prisoners could identify (e.g., see The Story of Spooky and Henry in the Appendix). Bloom and Serrano presented and discussed these accounts without initial disclosure of the animals' species. Other prisoners were also involved in such intensive mentoring (Bradshaw & Bloom, 2020; Mitchell, 2017, 2018).

In his stories, Serrano had stripped off the boundaries delineated by species membership. After discussing the stories and learning the characters' identities, LTO prisoners would wonder out loud, "What is it like to be a wounded turkey, relentlessly hunted during hunting season?" Or "What is it like to be a rattlesnake, often murdered on sight just because of the species he was born into?" LTO prisoners had years or even decades before an opportunity to parole, or even participate in a VP group. Much too often LTO prisoners had life sentences. Serrano's stories had the profound effect of opening these men's minds to others' perspectives, including others' suffering, assisting in developing a deep sense of empathy and compassion for life, all life. Once again, stories of animals were changing men. This time the stories had been written by a prisoner turned colleague.

## Conclusions

At heart, criminalization renders certain, targeted individuals into commodities. This agenda permeates the culture, and thus, the perspective of those who operate and staff correctional facilities. The mindset and rules dominating these facilities are shaped by this agenda. Methods referred to as "corrections" and "rehabilitation" in these facilities, therefore, counter all of current and accepted psychological theory and data, in particular, traumatology.

Prisoners are harshly and constantly scrutinized at a cold distance, thwarting the very elements they need to heal and transform neurological patterns that were developed in response to developmental trauma (Haag, 2006). Traumatology insists that to redirect prisoners from an engrained past of violence, the first and essential step is to create a social, physical, psychological, and moral environment of safety. It is necessary to cultivate an environment where these men can experience honesty, trust, empathy, and warmth.

In *How Forests Think*, anthropologist Eduardo Kohn (2013) described presciently *the Elephants in the Forest* experience:

One of the implications of adopting the viewpoints of other kinds of beings is that knowing others requires inhabiting their different umwelts.<sup>6</sup> When one does so, attributes and dispositions become dislodged from the bodies that produce them and ontological boundaries become blurred. I call this transformative process of blurring a "becoming." (p. 7)

When prisoners, who were regarded as hopeless, so highly and irreversibly violent that they were sentenced to decades to LIFE behind bars, were provided the opportunity to touch

<sup>6</sup> In ethology, umwelt means the world as it is experienced by a particular organism.

the lives of animals, the men were able to recognize and reconnect with their own soul sparks which exist despite their external circumstances and their traumatic pasts. Simply seeing photographs and listening to accounts of animals transformed their Umwelt, and “blurred boundaries” to revitalize who they really were. Through the animals, the prisoners were able to become animals, embrace the ethics of care, compassion, and accompaniment with each other and receptive prison staff.

Our experiences with men living in a high-security prison, that is packed with over 2,300 prisoners deemed to be violent, vividly demonstrated that trauma-informed, attachment-based accompaniment, grounded in nature, was a vital catalyst for “rehabilitation,” a redemptive medium for reclaiming their hearts and minds prior to their history of trauma. Honest, trusting, empathic, warm interpersonal experiences allowed prisoners to develop executive functioning much more effectively than did externally imposed risk management strategies routinely employed at prison facilities. When the prisoners were able to touch nature, their natural curiosity, empathy, and compassion awoke. In the language of neuroscience, prisoners were able to tap the power of their own minds to repattern their neurophysiology (Costello, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014). Accompanied prisoners become empathic, caring, stewards of nature and humanity . . . they become colleagues, teachers, and healers. They became we.

## References

- Barker, S. B. (1999). Therapeutic aspects of the human-companion animal interaction. *The Psychiatric Times*, *16*(2), 45–55.
- Barker, S. B., & Barker, R. T. (1988). The human–dog bond: Closer than family ties? *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *10*(1), 46–56.
- Barker, S. B., & Dawson, K. S. (1998). The effects of animal-assisted therapy on anxiety ratings of hospitalized psychiatric patients. *Psychiatric Services*, *49*(6), 797–801. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.49.6.797>
- Bloom, S. L. (2007). The sanctuary model of trauma-informed organizational change. *The Source*, *16*(1), 12–14.
- Bloom, T. (2006, July). Transspecies mood contagion: The impact of canine-human interaction [Poster presentation]. Walden University Summer Research Symposium, University of Indiana, Bloomington Campus, Bloomington, IN.
- 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, Walden University].
- Bloom, T. (2015). *Buddha said: Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Training for Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) Workers (Prisoners) presented at State Correctional Institute: Forest. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections*, Marienville, PA.
- Bloom, T., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2017, November). Elephants in the forest: A Nature-based re-entry program [Paper presentation]. 25th Annual Forensic Rights and Treatment Conference, Drexel University College of Medicine Division of Behavioral Healthcare Rehabilitation, Grantville, PA.
- Bloom, T., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2018, November). Attachment-based, trauma informed therapy: Transforming prisoners into colleagues [Paper presentation]. 26th Annual Forensic Rights and Treatment Conference, Drexel University College of Medicine Division of Behavioral Healthcare Rehabilitation, Grantville, PA.
- Bloom, T., Bradshaw, G. A., & Friedman, H. L. (2018, August). Pachyderms and prisoners: Wildlife as architects for humanity [Paper presentation]. 126th American Psychological Association Annual Convention, San Francisco, CA.
- 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.
- Bracha, H. S., & Maser, J. D. (2009). Anxiety and posttraumatic stress in the context of human brain evolution: A role for theory in the *DSM-V*. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, *15*(1), 91–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2008.00113.x>
- Bradshaw, G. A. (2005). *Elephant trauma and recovery: From human violence to transspecies psychology* [Doctoral dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute].
- Bradshaw, G. A. (2009). *Elephants on the edge: What animals teach us about humanity*. Yale University Press.
- Bradshaw, G. A. (2017). *Carnivore minds: Who these fearsome animals really are*. Yale University Press.
- Bradshaw, G. A. (2017, June 3). *Accompaniment: An ethic beyond accidental fences* [Blog]. [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/bear-in-mind/201706/accompaniment-ethic-beyond-accidental-fences](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/bear-in-mind/201706/accompaniment-ethic-beyond-accidental-fences)
- Bradshaw, G. A., & Bloom, T. (2020). Come to kale: Accompaniment across barriers of species and situations. *The Humanistic Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000211>
- Bradshaw, G. A., & Finlay, B. L. (2005). Natural symmetry. *Nature*, *7039*(435), 149. <https://doi.org/10.1038/435149a>
- Bradshaw, G. A., & Schore, A. N. (2007). How elephants are opening doors: Developmental neuroethology, attachment, and social context. *Ethology*, *113*(5), 426–436. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1439-0310.2007.01333.x>
- Bradshaw, G. A., Schore, A. N., Brown, J. L., Poole, J. H., & Moss, C. J. (2005). Elephant breakdown. *Nature*, *7028*(433), 807. <https://doi.org/10.1038/433807a>
- Bradshaw, G. A., & Watkins, M. (2006). Transspecies psychology: Theory and praxis. *Spring: A Journal of Archetype & Culture*, *75*, 69–94.
- Caldwell, M. F. (1994). Applying social constructionism in the treatment of patients who are intractably aggressive. *Hospital & Community Psychiatry*, *45*, 597–600. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.45.6.597>
- Caldwell, M. F., & Van Rybroek, G. V. (2001). Efficacy of a decompression treatment model in the clinical management of violent juvenile offenders. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *45*(4), 469–477. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X01454006>
- Caldwell, M. F., Vitacco, M. J., & Van Rybroek, G. V. (2006). Are violent delinquents worth treating? A cost-benefits analysis. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *43*(2), 148–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427805280053>
- Costello, P. (2013). *Attachment-based psychotherapy: Helping patients develop adaptive capacities*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14185-000>
- Cowperthwaite, G., Oteyza, M., Despres, E., Ingalls, J., & Towey, C. (2013). *Blackfish* [DVD video: NTSC color broadcast system]. Magnolia Home Entertainment.
- Cullen, F. T., Jonson, C. L., Nagin, D. S. (2011). Prisons do not reduce recidivism: The high cost of ignoring science. *The Prison Journal*, *91*(3, Suppl.), 48S–65S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885511415224>
- Farmer, P. (2019). Existential accompaniment: A “bread” for life. In M. Watkins (Ed.), *Mutual accompaniment and the creation of the commons* (pp. 19–22). Yale University Press.
- Freud, A., & Burlingham, D. T. (1943). *War and children*. New York University Press.
- Garbarino, J. (2015). *Listening to killers: Lessons learned from my twenty years as an expert witness in murder cases*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520958746>
- Garbarino, J. (2017). ACE's in the criminal justice system. *Academic Pediatrics*, *17*(7S, Suppl.), S32–S33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2016.09.003>
- Garbarino, J., Kostelny, K., Dubrow, N., & Ulman, L. (1991). *No place to be a child: Growing up in a war zone*. Jossey-Bass.
- Gibbons, J. J., & Katzenbach, N. D. B. (2011). Confronting confinement: A report of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's prisons. *Federal Sentencing Reports*, *24*(1), 36–41. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fsr.2011.24.1.36>

- Goffman, A. (2014). On the run: Fugitive life in an American city. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226136851.001.0001>
- Grady, M. D., Levenson, J. S., & Bolder, T. (2017). Linking adverse childhood effects and attachment: A theory and etiology for sexual offending *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 18(4), 433–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015627147>
- Griffiths, E. V., Willis, J., & Spark, M. J. (2012). A systematic review of psychotropic drug prescribing for prisoners. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 46(5), 407–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867411433893>
- Haag, A. M. (2006). Ethical dilemmas faced by correctional psychologists in Canada. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 33(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854805282319>
- Hare, R. D. (1993). *Without conscience*. Guilford Press.
- Hare, R. D., Hart, S. D., & Harpur, T. J. (1991). Psychopathy and the *DSM-IV* criteria for antisocial personality disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 100(3), 391–398. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.100.3.391>
- Jäggi, L. J., Mezuk, B., Watkins, D. C., & Jackson, J. S. (2016). The relationship between trauma, arrest, and incarceration history among Black Americans: Findings from the National Survey of American Life. *Society and Mental Health*, 6(3), 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869316641730>
- Kohn, E. (2013). *How forests think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520276109.001.0001>
- Levenson, J. (2017). Trauma-informed social work practice. *Social Work*, 62(2), 105–113.
- Levinson, B. M. (1972). *Pets and human development*. Charles C Thomas.
- Meloy, J. R. (1992). *Violent attachments*. Jason Aronson.
- Meloy, J. R., & Meloy, M. J. (2003). Autonomic arousal in the presence of psychopathy: A survey of mental health and criminal justice professionals. *Journal of Threat Assessment*, 2(2), 21–33. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J177v02n02\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J177v02n02_02)
- Meloy, J. R., & Shiva, A. (2007). A psychoanalytic view of the psychopath. In A. Felthous & H. Sass (Eds.), *The international handbook of psychopathic disorders and the law* (pp. 335–346). Wiley.
- Miller, N. A., & Najavits, L. M. (2012). Creating trauma-informed correctional care: A balance of goals and environment. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 3(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v3i0.17246>
- Mitchell, T. R. (2017). *Felons-R-Fathers2*. Freedom Consultation Group.
- Mitchell, T. R. (2018, December 8). *Identity and the paradigm of crime: A guest post by Tiant R. Mitchell* [Blog]. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/bear-in-mind/201812/identity-and-the-paradigm-crime>
- Monroe, C. M., Van Rybroek, G. J., & Maier, G. J. (1988). Decompressing aggressive inpatients: Breaking the aggression cycle to enhance positive outcome. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 6(4), 543–557. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2370060410>
- Nadkarni, N. M., Hasbach, P. H., Thys, T., Crockett, E. G., & Schnacker, L. (2017). Impacts of nature imagery on people in severely nature-deprived environments. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 15(7), 395–403. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.1518>
- National Institute of Justice. (2020). *Measuring recidivism*. <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/measuring-recidivism#statistics>
- Reavis, J. A., Looman, J., Franco, K. A., & Rojas, B. (2013). Adverse childhood experiences and adult criminality: How long must we live before we possess our own lives? *The Permanente Journal*, 17(2), 44–48. <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/12-072>
- Roach, C. B. (2013). Shallow affect, no remorse: The shadow of trauma in the inner city. *Peace and Conflict*, 19(2), 150–163. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032530>
- Salekin, R. T. (2002). Psychopathy and therapeutic pessimism. Clinical lore or clinical reality? *Clinical Psychology Review*, 22(1), 79–112. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0272-7358\(01\)00083-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0272-7358(01)00083-6)
- Society for Neuroscience. (2007). Biomarker for PTSD and why PTSD is so difficult to treat. *ScienceDaily*.

- Thornberry, T. P. (2005). Explaining multiple patterns of offending across the life course and across generations. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 602(1), 156–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716205280641>
- Thornberry, T. P., Ireland, T. O., & Smith, C. A. (2001). The importance of timing: The varying impact of childhood and adolescent maltreatment on multiple problem outcomes. *Development and Psychopathology*, 13(4), 957–979. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579401004114>
- van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Books.
- van der Linden, S. (2015). Editorial: Green prison programs, recidivism, and mental health: A primer. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health* 25, 338–342. <http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Green-Prison-programmes-recidivism-Linden.pdf>
- Watkins, M. (2012, July). Accompaniment: Psychosocial, environmental, transspecies, earth. Plenary Panel for Psychologists for Social Responsibility in Washington, DC.
- Watkins, M. (2015). Psychosocial accompaniment. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 3(1), 324–341. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v3i1.103>
- Watkins, M. (2019). *Mutual accompaniment and the creation of the commons*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhrxwz>
- Whitely, K., Bloom, T., & Friedman, H. L. (2014). Criminal justice and its many injustices: Focus on prison psychology within the United States. In C. V. Johnson & H. L. Friedman (Eds.), *The Praeger handbook of social justice and psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 241–268). Praeger.
- Wolff, N., & Shi, J. (2012). Childhood and adult trauma experiences of incarcerated persons and their relationship to adult behavioral health problems and treatment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 9(5), 1908–1926. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph9051908>
- Wormith, J. S., Althouse, R., Simpson, M., Reitzel, L. R., Fagan, T. J., & Morgan, R. D. (2007). The rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders: The current landscape and some future directions for correctional psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 34(7), 879–892. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854807301552>
- Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. (2003). *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Press.

## Appendix

### Antonio's Story<sup>7</sup> by Bobby Serrano

The band of brothers slowly made their way across the open field. Finally, they reached the forest's edge where they would seek shelter for the night. Antonio was limping due to his severe injuries. A searing shotgun pellet resulted in a battered upper extremity, and then the graze of a car barreling down a country road resulted in his broken leg. Both injuries are almost always lethal in this situation. Usually the group traveled by foot during the day closely watching each other's backs, always remaining aware of potential ambush. At night, they needed to prepare themselves against both the elements and the potential attacks that always lay ahead. Antonio had lost use of both an upper and a lower extremity. Thus, he was extremely vulnerable. Because of the loyalty of his four compadres, they refused to leave him behind. Antonio would not be abandoned. Forsaking the task of finding food and making it back to their wives, his *compañeros* chose to put fellowship before their individualized interests. Such gestures are described as accompaniment, relating the Spanish concept of *compañero* (friend) and its Latin root *ad cum panis*, to break bread. In everyday speak accompaniment conveys the notion of one person being in the presence with, or journeying with, another. Often in the helping professions, we find that people are more than happy to help from a safe geographical distance. As a society, we are happy to help and serve the poor as long as we do not have to walk with them where they walk. That is, as long as we can minister them from our safe enclosure, we assist. The poor remain passive objects of our actions rather than friends, *compañeros* or *compañeras*, with whom we interact. As long as we can be sure that we do not have to live with them, and thus have interpersonal relationships with them, we will try to help the downtrodden, but again, only from a comfortable distance. Antonio's colleagues accompany him. They share his experience, understanding him from this up close and personal perspective. Antonio's friends would not be unusual in the animal world. The alternative ethical model found in this ancient ethos that reverses the acceleration of selfish is called love.

### The Story of Spooky and Henry<sup>8</sup> by Bobby Serrano

Everyone classified my friend, Spooky, and me as unfeeling killing machines driven by our "primitive" brains. Because of their perceptions of us, people feared and disliked us even though they did not know us. We are described as having "mean mugs" that show no emotion, just that same stone-faced appearance no matter what happens around us. Because people cannot read our emotions, they think we don't have feelings. Spooky got his nickname because he has an intense fear of others. I don't know why he is so afraid of people. Spooky is always on edge, even though no one was ever seen doing anything aggressive toward him. You always know when spooky is there because he is always shaking, quaking so much that you can literally hear him vibrate. But, even though you always hear him trembling, it is impossible to see him before he sees you because he is so aware of his environment and everyone inhabiting it. He is hypervigilant in the most extreme way. I know lots of people think Spooky and I are similar just because we come from the same cultural and genetic backgrounds, but we are not at all alike. Unlike Spooky, I am always much more confident, even though I know my every move is being tracked: my location, my heart rate, my respiration rate, everything. Although the researchers operated on me and placed telemetric equipment under my skin so that they could follow me and know my location anytime they like, I never held it against them. It is their job to study me and my every mood and more importantly, to always know where

<sup>7</sup> Antonio and his compadres are wild turkeys during hunting season described in Bradshaw's (2017) *Psychology Today* Blog, Bear in Mind.

<sup>8</sup> Spooky and Henry are rattlesnakes described in Bradshaw's (2017; pp. 153–195) *Carnivore Minds*.

I am located, to learn what makes individuals like me tick. I know they follow me, but they never harm me. Even when they did surgery on me to place the chip deeply under my skin, they were kind and loving toward me. I believe they are trying to save me and my kind, and thus, there is no reason to hate or fear them. Unfortunately, it is difficult for Spooky and me to counteract the fear of individuals like us with facts. There are too many deeply ingrained cultural myths about our kind being evil. People base everything they think about us on these legends, and of course, how we look, and what they think we are. None of their thoughts about us are based on personal experience with us. Thus, no matter how nonaggressively we act and no matter how compliantly we behave, we are persecuted and even murdered on sight.

### Author Note

Tina Bloom is a licensed psychologist in New York State and currently works in crisis management and forensic outreach. She is an affiliate of both Floragrades Foundation and The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence. She can be reached at [bahnhofdobe@yahoo.com](mailto:bahnhofdobe@yahoo.com).

B. Robert Serrano is a student at Alfred State College. He can be reached at [serranbr@alfredstate.edu](mailto:serranbr@alfredstate.edu).

G. A. Bradshaw has a PhD in Forest Ecology and a PhD in Depth Psychology. Dr. Bradshaw is the Director of The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence. She can be reached at [bradshaw@kerulos.org](mailto:bradshaw@kerulos.org).

Received December 30, 2020

Revision received March 12, 2021

Accepted March 28, 2021 ■