

Biophilia in Animal-Assisted Interventions— Fad or Fact?

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Abstract:

Biophilia is commonly defined as the inborn predisposition to affiliate with, or to attend to, natural or natural-like elements and processes. In this paper, I explore whether there is sufficient reason to conclude that the therapeutic or ameliorative effects of animal-assisted interventions (AAIs) are a token of biophilia. Based on a conceptual analysis of the notion, I argue that—to this day—the exact meaning of “biophilia” remains inherently vague because several of its constituent claims have been left underspecified by theorists in the field. Although this vagueness allows one to consider most—if not all—AAI findings as instances of biophilic responses, this barely seems to be a theoretically useful insight. My overall conclusion is that it is imprudent to associate AAI research with a concept whose scientific merits and explanatory potential still remain unclear and underspecified.

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