The Human-canine Relationship: A Heuristic self-inquiry into canine-assisted psychotherapy

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original piece of work except were acknowledged by citation and references and has not been submitted to any institution for any academic or non-academic award.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The heuristic process of writing this dissertation has been an incredibly emotional evoking of highs and lows of self-doubt and becoming who I am today as a child psychotherapist. Exploring my own experiences through this personal journey has been incredibly painful. I have become a full-time single parent to my two beautiful young children, suffered the loss of my beloved Grandma Kathy Summerhayse, and endured and witnessed my family suffer numerous bouts of Covid-19. These challenges halted the process for me on several occasions, and part of me felt like giving up.

If it was not for the physical and emotional support of my mother, Lynn, and sister Stephanie, I could not have achieved my goals. Throughout this journey, their love allowed me to endure and succeed.

I want to thank my two beautiful children, Nixon and Nola, for their unwavering support and understanding. I appreciate their patience and hope I have made them proud.

I also wish to thank my supervisor Alan Jones for supporting me in completing my dissertation through all sorts of hurdles, such as Covid and bereavement, and helping get me over the finish line.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge and thank my beautiful Labrador Riley, you came to us as a working dog and are now a much-loved member of my family, as well as my co-therapist bringing everyone who connects with you so much joy. You inspired this dissertation research and further research in the future.

Picture of Riley and my son Nixon

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The various advantages of using dogs as adjuct healing agents for human physical and psychological problems are well documented in a huge and expanding body of literature. Even though there is a growing corpus of research on using dogs as adjunct therapies, little is known about the experiences of therapists who bring their dogs to work with them. **Objective**: This research aimed to explore my current understanding and personal experience of canine-assisted psychotherapists using Moustakas' theory of heuristic inquiry. **Methodology**: I was immersed in a continually reading and then writing process, taking notes in a journal to discover new critical themes that can emerge throughout the Heuristic cycle until a well-argued literature review was produced, which, it is anticipated, identified some contribution to the discipline of psychotherapy. **Findings and discussion**: I was struggling with balancing several aspects of my life. However, Riley (My Dog) helped me attain a sense of balance by his patience and genuine interaction. The advantages of the human-dog interaction have seen significant development in our understanding. Animals have naturally been a part of our therapeutic interventions as we have started to understand how they contribute to human well-being. Although originally service animals were only used for physical aid, their use has expanded to include psychological support in order to build on the developing understanding of how animals affect human wellbeing.

Keywords: animal-assisted therapy, canine-assisted therapy

Table of Contents

DECLARATION 3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4

ABSTRACT 5

List of figures and tables 6

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 7

1.1 Background 8

1.2 Problem Statement 11

1.3 The study's purpose and significance 12

1.4.2 Specific Objectives 13

1.4.3 Research Questions 13

1.5 Definition of Terms 13

1.6 The Study's Organization 14

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 14

2.1 Introduction 14

2.2 History of animal-assisted intervention 15

2.4 Ethology. 17

2.6 Reunion: Dogs in Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy 18

CHAPTER 3: STUDY METHODOLOGY 21

3.1 Introduction 21

3.2 Research Design - Heuristic Methods 21

3.2.1 Moustakas's Method of Heuristic Research 22

3.2.2 Essential Elements of Heuristic Research. 22

3.3 Data Collection- Heuristic Research Phases. 24

3.3.1 Initial engagement 24

3.3.2 Immersion 24

3.3.3 Incubation 25

3.3.4 Illumination 26

3.3.5 Explication 26

3.3.6 Creative synthesis 26

3.4 Ethics 27

CHAPTER FOUR: MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE 28

4.1 Initial Engagement and Immersion 28

4.2 Incubation 30

4.3 Illumination 30

4.4 Explication. 31

4.4 Creative Synthesis. 31

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION 33

5.1 Introduction 33

5.2 AAT in psychotherapy 334

5.3 Animals as Facilitators of the Therapeutic Alliance 34

5.4 Contribution to child and adolescent psychotherapy 37

5.5 Canine-Assisted Psychotherapy's Drawbacks 39

5.6 The Study's Limitations 40

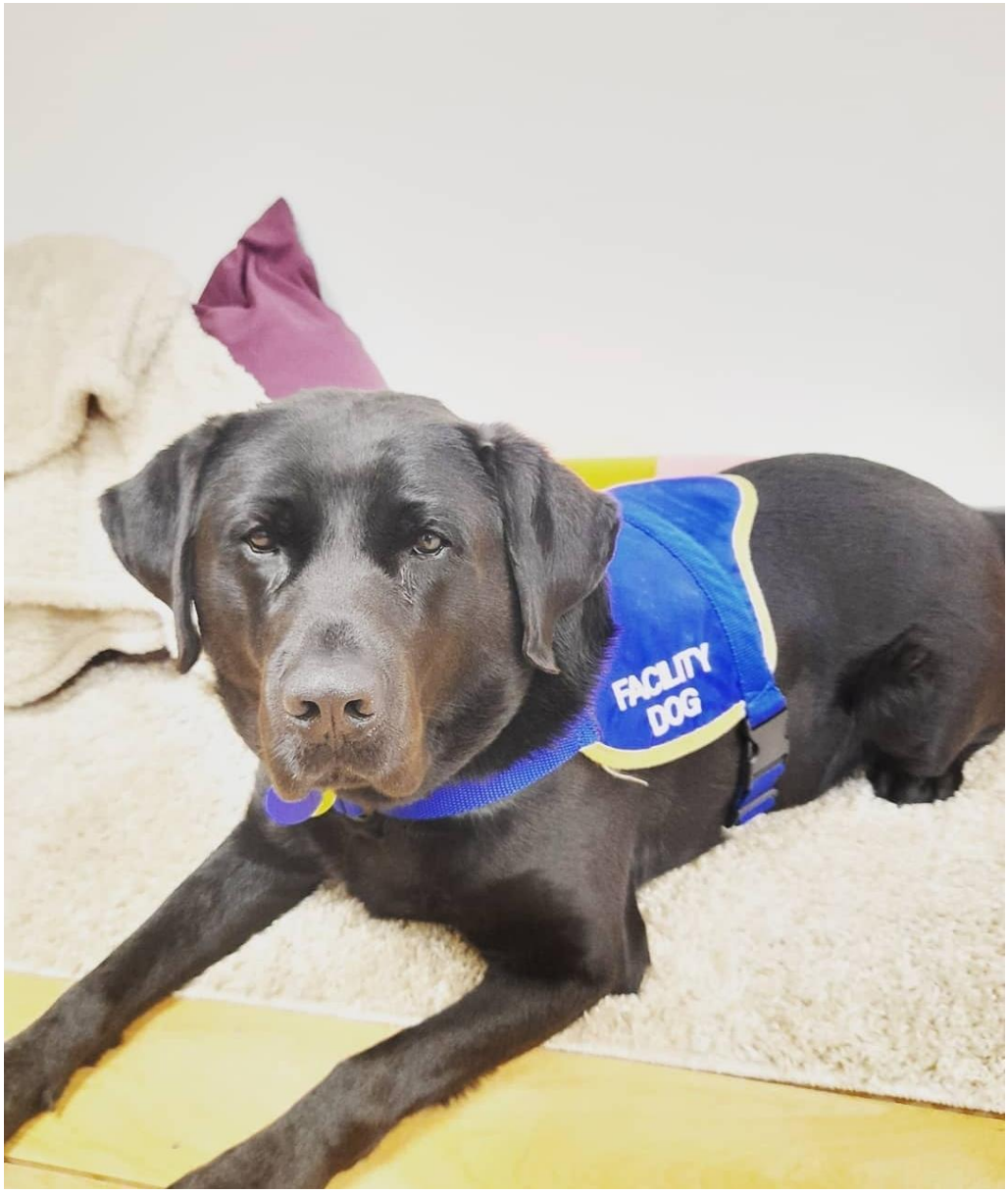
Conclusions and Future Research 40

REFERENCES 43

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Animal-assisted activity, animal-assisted therapy, and animal-assisted education 13

Table 1: the evolution of human-animal relationships and study from a historical perspective..... 16



Riley pictured in the therapy space

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAT	Animal assisted therapy

CAT	Canine assisted therapy
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AAP	Animal assisted psychotherapy
AAI	Animal assisted interactions
AAA	Animal assisted activities

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.1 Background

This dissertation is a self-enquiry into the field of canine assisted therapy. I have been interested and immersed in the subject for several years. In this chapter below, I explain what

lead me to this research, presenting a basic outline of the nature of the heuristic inquiry, the research questions, the intention of the study and my overall understanding of the significance of this research.

Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is a therapeutic tool that can be used during counselling or psychotherapy to benefit clients socially and emotionally (Chandler, 2005). Working with an animal also affords the child plenty of opportunities to develop empathy, patience, kindness, and communication skills. For instance, AAT can assist children who struggle with managing their anger by helping them process their feelings and acquire effective coping mechanisms. Usually, an animal is introduced into the therapeutic process as part of animal assisted therapy (AAT), which aims to improve a person's physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning (Coakley, 2009). Various animals can be used in the process. Canine assisted therapy involves the use of a dog in psychotherapy.

My passion for animals and my interest in this subject of Canine assisted therapy have evolved over my lifetime. This chapter explains what led me to this research topic and my connection to it. I also present an outline of the nature of the inquiry, the research questions, the intention of the study, and my overall understanding of the significance of this research within the context of psychotherapy and my practice as a child and adolescent psychotherapist in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

I must begin by acknowledging that the development of my identity as a psychotherapist with a degree of confidence has been a difficult personal journey; the role of self-care and individual psychotherapy has been pivotal in identifying personal challenges that have displaced my confidence throughout my studies. In addition, my reflective practice has evolved due to the crucial support of supervision therapy and by immersing myself in the heuristic process of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, I have also struggled to hang on to a set of beliefs and a firm identity or desire to incorporate Canine-assisted psychotherapy into my practice within the programme. This all changed, however, when I was introduced to the theories of Donald Winnicott. Here, I found confidence and an understanding that I did not need to desert or abandon a set of theories but instead integrate them into a developing sense of professional identity that allows for my unique style and therapeutic presence to emerge and develop. With this new-found understanding of personal integration, I developed a strong curiosity about object relations and

attachment theories (Winnicott, Transitional objects and transitional phenomena; Psychoanalysis, a study of the first not-me possession., 1953); (Winnicott, 1971)).

My connection to and love for animals has evolved throughout my life; growing up as a child within the bilingual culture of Hamilton meant that my parents enrolled me in my local primary school's Bilingual unit to ensure I received a bilingual upbringing similar to my father's own experience in Fiji as a child.

Unfortunately, the bilingual unit was an environment where I did not feel a sense of belonging and was subjected to ongoing bullying and segregation from my peers and teachers. I sought solace from my pets throughout this time; they served as transitional objects that helped me regulate myself in times of separation, acting (in Winnicott's words) as a bridge to a higher level of functioning that I had not yet experienced (Winnicott, 1971). My animals served as a holding space for me during deprivation; they seemed secure, cosy, and contained. They served as a transitory phenomenon of the adequate mother offering me symbolic protection when I most needed it (Winnicott, 1971). According to Winnicott (1971), the term "transitional phenomena" refers to the stage of human experience between one's inner reality and the outside world. People often need to intertwine the inner reality and the outside world through interactions with certain objects.

Moving forward in my education in 2017, I applied to study for the graduate diploma of health science (Child and adolescent specialism) at AUT. Upon acceptance into the programme, I knew I wanted to incorporate a canine into my study journey, so I applied to an association called Assistance Dogs New Zealand, where I successfully adopted an assistance dog called Riley. I then applied to the university for approval to bring Riley on campus, which was granted. The aim of having Riley present at AUT was, from the very beginning, to use him as my transitional object while doing my dissertation. However, ethics approval was not given to carry out my research with a canine and my child with adolescent clients.

Reflecting on this disapproval to carry out my research, I noticed myself feeling frustrated and disappointed that I had got so far ahead of myself and was left wondering how I was going to navigate the complex training journey that lay ahead of me without losing the thread of animal involvement in my work. This reflection ended up being a very pivotal moment for me. With the help of personal therapy, I could move forward and not give up on my passion. I continued having Riley present at the university to help my education and observation, which later led me to write this dissertation.

However, my confidence in my ability to produce the work was tested when I received approval from the university to carry out this heuristic research. I was overcome with fear and found it difficult to fathom my intense workload ahead of me, as noted in my journal entry below:

"It now all feels real, and that is incredibly confronting for me knowing that I am potentially to be judged, marked for my academics in producing a piece of work that is so truly personal and central to my identity as a child psychotherapist" "what if my experience does not translate to being supported enough academically" "will if fail this."

Retrieved from journal 12/06/2022

To reassure myself of my abilities and that I was good enough, I again sought my animal's comfort, especially Riley's, as noted below in my journal entry.

"Today is the day I'm going to begin!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" "I was supposed to write in here but feel scared to begin, so I'm going to take Riley for a walk; even though the weather is crappy, it feels safer than starting my dissertation."

Retrieved from Journal 22/06/2021

On reflecting upon this journal entry, and several like it, I notice my unconscious fears of not being good enough play out again in the academic environment and Riley becoming my comfort and support as a coping mechanism I had been employing for years.

1.2 Problem Statement

There has been a gradual increase in the body of literature devoted to the use of animals in the mental health setting, with small amounts of empirical research examining the efficacy of AAT in academic settings in recent years. Canines, in particular, have increasingly been used in therapeutic settings alongside counsellors and psychotherapists. However, very little study has examined the effects of the canine-human link employing AAT in a psychotherapy setting (Friedmann, 1995). As the employment of animals in therapeutic settings expands, so do the presentations of kids and teens looking for this kind of help. Unfortunately, the situation in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is particularly concerning, with mental morbidity rates more than doubling over the last two decades (Menzies, 2020).

1.3 The study's purpose and significance

I trained in and now practice child psychotherapy where I work with clients under the age of twenty to reveal unconscious conflicts and relational patterns through means of taking and play therapies. This type of therapy relies on a strong and trusting therapeutic relationship where the client becomes gradually more comfortable accessing and acting out painful material.

Since completing my clinical component of my studies, I have been on a journey of discovering my personal identity as a child psychotherapist, allowing space for my dog Riley to be present alongside me in some therapy settings. This experience led me to consider and reflect on" why I do this" which has been a consistent theme underpinning my study journey and now this dissertation.

The heuristic goal of this study is to explore my own personal experience of the canine-human bond and how it plays out in the psychotherapeutic framework. This paper will look at the examiner's specific challenges and the consequences they have for other disciplines of study.

Through the findings of this study, information will be available to the public and clinicians on the role of canine-assisted therapy in psychotherapy. The use of dogs in therapy has expanded into the field of mental health, with more therapists now offering canine-assisted therapies (Chandler, 2005). The purpose of my research is to advance the developing understanding of how animals affect human well-being within the context of psychotherapy (Tedeschi, P., Fine, A. H., & Helgeson, J. I., 2010). This study can therefore serve as a springboard for additional investigation into the efficacy of this practice as a therapeutic modality in the future and lays the foundation for future research I wish to carry out on the phenomena of canine assisted psychotherapy.

1.4 Goals of Research

1.4.1 General Objectives

To look at my personal experience, views, and beliefs towards canine-assisted psychotherapy.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

a) To investigate my experience with canine-assisted psychotherapy.
b) To examine the use of canine-assisted therapy within the psychotherapy framework with children.

1.4.3 Research Questions

1) What is my experience with canine-assisted psychotherapy?
2) What is the use of canine-assisted therapy within the psychotherapy framework with children?

1.5 Definition of Terms

Animal-assisted psychotherapy (AAP), or pet therapy, is synonymous with animal-assisted interactions (AAI). All three are terms used to describe the overarching activity of using animals to aid in healing patients in various settings. AAA generally provides therapeutic, recreational, and motivational opportunities to individuals and groups. Activities include pets visiting patients in hospitals or long-term care facilities and animals visiting with students at universities to help with anxiety reduction at exam time. On the other hand, AAT is structured and goal-directed, with the pet incorporated as a critical part of the therapeutic process. A professional health provider delivers the therapy, and its courses are well-documented and follow an individualised treatment plan (Fine, 2015).

Animal-assisted activity (AAA)	Provide opportunities for motivational, educational, and/or recreational benefits in order to enhance the quality of life of humans. AAA is delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals and/or volunteers in association with animals that meet specific criteria of safety.
Animal-assisted therapy (AAT)	Are goal-directed interventions in which a specifically trained animal is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is delivered and/or directed by a health/human service provider working within the scope of his or her profession. AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. They are provided in a variety of settings and involve the individual. This process needs to be documented and evaluated throughout.
Animal-assisted education (AAE)	Relies on the use of animals for specific educational purposes, as is the case with problematic children characterized by behavioral problems.

Figure 1: Animal-assisted activity, animal-assisted therapy, and animal-assisted education.

1.6 The Study's Organisation

The literature view in Chapter 2 follows this introductory chapter. The methodology that was employed for this investigation is discussed in Chapter 3. The personal findings, limits, and conclusions of the research are presented in the dissertation's subsequent chapters.

Picture of Riley and Catherine Hunt

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE VIEW

2.1 Introduction

Human interaction is crucial for developing happy relationships and having fulfilling lives, yet individuals in mental facilities often struggle to communicate effectively (Cohen, 2002). Both human-to-human relationships and relationships with animals can benefit people's health. AAT, or animal-assisted therapy, is a therapeutic intervention with a specific goal managed and delivered by experts in medicine, education, and human services. AAT is given by a professionally trained specialist with experience within the field of their profession, which takes into account enhancing the participants' physical, cognitive, behavioural, and/or socioemotional functioning. Canine-assisted psychotherapy is gaining interest as a psychotherapeutic intervention worldwide, with more and more therapists inviting canines into therapy (Chandler, 2005). However popular the intervention is becoming, it remains an intervention with little official research.

2.2 History of animal-assisted intervention

Humanity has understood throughout time that the tie between humans and dogs is special and always changing, with advantages that can last a person their entire life. Dogs are affectionately referred to as "man's best friend" for a good reason: just touching a dog can calm an overactive sympathetic nervous system, lower blood pressure, and lower heart rate (Friedmann, 1995). When people interact with dogs, endorphins (feel-good hormones), oxytocin and prolactin (bonding hormones), as well as endorphin levels, rise while cortisol levels, which are stress hormones, fall (Friedmann, 1995).

Throughout history, dogs have been used as adjuvant practitioners in physical healing. In his book, Asclepius: The God of Medicine, physician and medical historian Gerald Hart (2000) reported that in ancient Greece, a dog, as well as a serpent was the companion of Asclepius. Asclepius was known to use dogs to heal wounds and other ailments. Dogs licked wounds, and through the medicinal properties of the saliva, people recovered as a result of the treatment. When discussing an ancient inscription in Asclepius's temple that described an incident where a child returned to health after a dog had licked a growth on the child's neck (Gerald, 2000).

Table 1: the evolution of human-animal relationships and study from a historical perspective.

12,000 years ago	A human skeleton holding a puppy was found in northern Israel.
Ninth century	Animals were incorporated in treatment of the handicapped in Gheel, Belgium.
1790	Rabbits and chickens were used in therapy with the mentally ill in York, England.
1830	British charity commissioner recommended animals for mental institutions.
1867	Farm animals and horses were used in treatment of epilepsy patients at Bethel in Bielefield, West Germany.
1942	Patients at U.S. Army Air Corps Convalescent Hospital, Pawling, New York worked with farm animals and considered treatment "restful".
1944	Sociologist James Bossad's publication "The Mental Hygiene of Owning a Dog" discussed beneficial relationships between pets and their owners.
1962	Psychologist Borris Levinson used his dog, Jingles, in the treatment of an adolescent; he published his findings in "The Dog as the Co-therapist".
1970s	A visiting therapy dog, Skeezer, became a permanent resident at Children's Psychiatric Hospital, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Psychiatrist Michael McCulloch prescribed pets to patients. Veterinarian Leo Bustad started "Bustad Buddies" at Pullman Memorial Hospital and Tacoma Lutheran Nursing Home in Washington.
1972	Psychotherapist Boris Levinson conducted a survey and found that one third of New York psychotherapists used pets in treatment
1973	Humane Society's "pet mobile" program brought animals to visit nursing homes in Pikes Peak region, Colorado.
1977	Dr. Dean Katcher and Erika Friedmann conducted early research on effects of pets on blood pressure and mortality rates.
1980	Delta Society, a nonprofit organization focused on the human–animal bond, was founded.
2008	Korean Association of Animal Assisted Psychotherapy was founded in Korea.
2012	Delta Society changed its name to Pet Partners.

2.3 Union: The Human–Animal Bond

Human-nonhuman animal relationships have a long history. The analysis of this relationship raises issues about the basis of what it entails to be human and what it entails to be an animal. Throughout the years, these definitions have changed, largely guided by the philosophy of the times and by the influence of Judeo-Christian religions (Friedmann E., 1995)

Animals, especially dogs, have been the topic of study focused on the greater physical benefits they provide to humans (Beck, A., Katcher, A., 1996). However, much has not been published on the psychological benefits canines provide. The most appropriate title for Freud is "father of psychoanalysis." He may also be known as the father of animal-assisted therapy,

though. He was the first analyst to employ his cherished chows Yo-fie and Lun-Yug after his passing in a therapeutic setting (Gavriele-Gold, 2011)

The existence of a dog benefited Sigmund Freud and his patients, as evidenced by his life and work. Yo-fie had a positive influence on his analyses as well. He observed that his patients were more receptive to open communication once the dog was still in the room. Additionally, they were far more receptive to talking about difficult themes, indicating less reluctance. According to Freud, the display of this reluctance was significantly less pronounced while the dog was there since the dog gave the person a boost of confidence (Gavriele-Gold, 2011).

Canine-assisted psychotherapy was not used again after Freud's initial study until Boris Levinson's work with children in the 1960s and 1970s. He was recognised as being the first mental health professional to document a therapeutic encounter involving a dog. When Levinson met Jingles, her dog, while working with an uncommunicative patient in the 1960s, she unintentionally learned about this potentially therapeutic contact between animals and kids (Levinson, B., Mallon, G., 1997) Following this discovery, Levenson started looking at how his clients interacted with animals.

In response to this historical perspective, I engaged in the heuristic process of reflection to deepen my historical knowledge of why I have Riley present. During this process, I have relied heavily on my own intuitive response, insight, and understanding of my experiences with dogs in and out of therapy allowing the literature to deepen my current understanding.

I find myself reflecting on my own experience of having Riley present in my own personal therapy and within the learning environment at AUT. My desire to have him present alongside me is reflected in the rich historical perspective of the human canine bond, where my interacting with Riley had positive effects on my physiology, psychology, and overall well-being (as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation).

2.4 **Ethology.**

Bekoff is a current leader in this field of research, and his achievements are extensive. The study of ethology, especially as it applies to dogs, should be captured in this study because the consciousness of these creatures is critical to the research's investigation. According to the authors, modern scientists have a hard time considering the animal character and its

significance in the grand scheme. One explanation for this apprehension is the enormous difficulties of investigating animal cognition (Bekoff, 2017).

Animal behaviour can be researched, but it is practically impossible to know what animals think before acting. Most of Bekoff's writing, thoughts, and scientific research proved beneficial in this current study. Darwin (1871/2004) was one of the first to recognise that animals, particularly dogs, have a sense of morality, which he compared to human conscience. He asserted that animals can choose one conduct over another and that this decision may be accompanied by internal conflict.

Bekoff also started to explore questions concerning animal play, such as, "*Do animals have honour?" Do animals have a level playing field? Do they face repercussions if they breach the rules or cheat? Do they have empathy for the people they play with? What are the regulations of the game that are fair and which are not?* Many of these problems were answered by Bekoff, who got to the broad assumption that "honour among beasts" exists (p. 86). Bekoff's research provided valuable insight into the current study. Bekoff began to investigate topics about animal play, such as "Do animals have honour?" Is there an equal playing field for animals? Are there consequences if they violate the rules or defraud? Do they care about the people with whom they interact? What are the game's fair rules, and what are the ones that aren't? Bekoff addressed several of these issues, concluding that "honour among beasts" exists (p. 86). Bekoff's research contributed significantly to the present-day research that we enjoy (Bekoff, 2017).

2.6 Reunion: Dogs in Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) and animal-assisted psychotherapy (AAP) are umbrella names that cover two sub-specialties: animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT). As awareness of animals and emotional companions has developed over time, they have also been proven to be highly effective in an objective kind of psychotherapy. Therapeutic connections with dogs are similar to causal relations with them as pets, with the exception that therapeutic connections with dogs are, for the most part, purposeful.

One of the seminal resources in this area is *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy*, edited by psychologist Aubrey H. Fine (2015). Fine's work is a comprehensive guide to the conventional practice of AAP using, for example, therapies designed for patients and dogs (the most popular) as well other animals such as cats, rabbits, birds, and horses as well as some more exotic animals such as elephants and lizards. As mentioned previously, dogs have been the most popular animal used in AAP (Coren, 2015) and many of the chapters in *the Handbook*

on Animal-Assisted Therapy (Fine, 2015) focus on therapy with dogs. It is also known that dogs were used in therapeutic practices such as licking wounds (p. 14). In the initial chapter of the book, Fine and public health ecologist Alan Beck (Tedeschi, P., Sisa, M. L., Olmert, M. D., Parish-Plass, N., & Yount, R. , 2015) also demonstrated that the human-animal bond has been studied extensively and has resulted in a respectable number of scientific studies

Teri Pichot (2011) is well known for her practice of AAP from a solution-focused perspective. Her book, Animal-Assisted Brief Therapy: A Solution-Focused Approach, gives an overview of both AAA and AAT and explains how they might be employed in treatment programs that are solution-focused. Pichot provided examples of how dogs can be incorporated into each of the key interventions commonly used in solution-focused therapy. Her book is a practical user manual for anyone considering setting up a solution-focused treatment program that incorporates AAA and AAT, as the book is based on her own experiences in her clinics with her own therapy dogs (Pichot, 2011).

Another book seated in the conventional approach to dog-assisted therapy is dog trainer Kathy Diamond Davis's (2002) *Therapy Dogs: Training Your Dog to Reach Others.* Davis's book is focused primarily on training therapy dogs and is directed toward the fellow practitioner who wishes to incorporate dog therapy (AAP) in his or her practice. The book also includes sections on choosing a dog with the proper sentiment, using certain therapeutic settings, and training a family pet to be an effective therapy dog. If any, little emphasis is placed on a deeper, spiritual connection with dogs in therapy. Like many of the conventional approaches to dog-assisted therapy, Davis's methods focus on a physical connection and engagement with the therapy dog rather than an unconscious transference or a deep psychological bond (Davis, 2002)

2.7 Conclusion

It has been established that the kinds of animals utilised and the populations, environments, and situations ideal for AAT have evolved over time. The evidence for AAT as a therapeutic tool in mental health and human care professions ranged from significant improvements to little advantages. The majority of AAT animals are dogs, dolphins, and horses, with a few researchers looking at more unusual AAT animals like cows, pigs, bunnies, and llamas.

Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy (1969) and Pets and Human Development (1970) are two of Levinson's most notable works in animal therapy (1972). These masterpieces are critical stepping stones on the path to an evidence-based animal therapy modality (Fine, 2010).

Levinson outlined his dog's benefits to his sessions with children and youth in his book, Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy. Levinson intended this data to inform and stimulate further research into the different therapeutic benefits he had observed. He presented numerous examples of how animals could help treatment, which is mostly founded on anecdotes and case sites (Levinson, 1969).

There has been a modest but steady increase in the number of therapists introducing a dog into the therapy setting, dating from Freud and Levinson (Chandler, 2005). However, the implementation of this intervention method has been strongly criticised due to a huge disparity in research and practice. That chasm still exists today, with canines rarely being the topic of psychiatric research, leaving the human-canine bond unexplored (Fine 2010).

Incorporating animals into the area of psychotherapy offers both benefits and obstacles, and a therapist must ask, "what would I need to understand to make an informed decision to explore Animal Assisted Therapy in psychotherapy?" to ensure it is the perfect fit for a client. As Chandler (2005) noted, the clinician must be well in all facets of integrating animals into therapy to ensure that harm to both the client and the animal is minimised and to recognise how to best use the approach to benefit the client. Until now, publications on Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) tended to emphasise the good features of the field ignoring the inherent obstacles and ethical concerns of engaging a canine in psychotherapy. (Katcher, A. H. & Beck A. M., 1999)

CHAPTER 3: STUDY METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study of the human-animal bond, focusing on humans' relationship with dogs, utilises a heuristic methodology to arrive at its findings and expressed insights. In addition, several other methods have been incorporated into the research to add detail and nuance to the methods of interpreting texts (hermeneutics) and the methods of processing information. This allows for more spiritual and liminal access to information, influence, and insight. Because it is impossible to know the thoughts of dogs beyond how a human may interpret different behaviours observed in the animals, a more qualitative approach to this research was necessary. The methods involved incorporated tacit knowledge, Intuition, incubation, and illumination; more organic, liminal, and spiritual access to information, experience, and influence; and finally, an interpretation that includes the realm beyond the egoic mind.

3.2 Research Design - Heuristic Methods

Moustakas (1990) began to formulate a personally focused methodology for scholarly research while working with doctoral students at the Merrill-Palmer Institute and Saybrook Institute in 1961 after he had completed a deeply personal investigation into loneliness. In research that involves an investigation of the soul and the inner spiritual connections between animals, humans, and nature, it is imperative to employ a research methodology that encompasses a personal inner awareness.

Moustakas (1990) made the observation, "In heuristics, an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness" (p. 12). This comment reminds me of Coppin and Nelson's (2005) concept of the yin and yang of inquiry, in which the yang represents the material quest for information and the yin represents the personal answer and receptivity to that knowledge (pp. 13–14). In heuristic research, the focus is on the inner story, a personal frame of reference, including the attention paid to Intuition and innate "knowing" (Moustakas, 1990, p.20). This type of research, according to Moustakas (1990), is highly reliant on inner thoughts and continual debate with oneself about the research issue and problem. As the researcher presents questions, inquiries, and curiosities to the inner psyche, the answers, or at least a conversation, come about through dreams, active imagination, synchronicities, and chance meetings with physical elements in everyday life that have special meaning due to their relevance to the inner dialogue in which the researcher has been engaged.

3.2.1 Moustakas's Method of Heuristic Research

In his heuristic research system, Moustakas (1990) identified several key components: tacit knowing, Intuition, indwelling, concentrating, and lastly, the internal frame of reference (pp. 20-26). The phases of the heuristic investigation were subsequently identified: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (p.27).

3.2.2 Essential Elements of Heuristic Research.

Tacit knowing

The concept of tacit knowing is based in large part on the work of the 20th-century philosopher Michael Polanyi (2009, 2010, 2012). Polanyi wrote several books on the subject of tacit knowing—the access to innate information that cannot be explained or even fully comprehended. Moustakas (1990), looking through the lens of Polanyi's work, claimed that tacit knowing lies at the very foundation of all heuristic research (p. 20). Moustakas suggested that a thorough understanding of a phenomenon we encounter is essentially due to a reliance on our own intrinsic knowingness of the phenomenon. We may then understand it or, at least, glean a connection with it without knowing—objectively, in a cause-and-effect manner—exactly why we understand it. My staring into Riley's eyes, for example, brings familiar comfort to me, and in an abstract way, I understand, but I cannot put my finger on why I understand; I just know it is so. Moustakas proposed that in heuristic research, researchers give credence to this tacit knowing and allow it to have a key part in the solution of the study problem.

Intuition

As explained by Moustakas (1990), Intuition comes from the integration of tacit knowing with the observable and describable. Through this integration, a bridge is formed between both methods of knowing, and an intuitive sense is created. Intuition allows us to take the ineffable (tacit knowing) and draw conclusions and insight from it. We combine the mystery of the unknown—which, in our hearts, we tacitly know is real—with the sensational reality of conscious and material observational knowledge and create a story from it. Our combined knowledge can then be acted upon without relying on logic and reason. We take the mysterious spices of tacit knowledge and mix them with the consciously observable knowledge of logic and reason to come up with a dish that is luxurious in its consumption and rich with

meaning and purpose. Moustakas said, "Intuition makes possible the perceiving of things as wholes. For example, one can view a tree from many angles, sides, front, and back; the clues that are provided by careful observation, experience, and connecting the parts and subtleties of the tree into patterns and relationships that ultimately enable an intuitive knowing of the tree as a whole." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 23)

A research project, such as this dissertation, becomes a dynamic living entity, always shape-shifting from one creature to another through the course of research as the intuitive process adds new elements to understanding.

Indwelling

Indwelling is the conscious effort of intention to understand the experience more fully (Moustakas, 1990). As explained by Moustakas (1990), the researcher searches the subtleties of experience and knowledge, looking for deeper meaning and purpose. This is a concentrated, conscious process that entails a disciplined, attentive procedure. Moustakas said, "[Indwelling] involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness" (p. 24). Indwelling is a deliberate and arduous process, as knowledge is often acquired in small increments, yet it is important in order to gain a more comprehensive comprehension of the experience being witnessed

Focusing

The heuristic research method described by Moustakas (1990) provides for the essential necessity of the elimination of clutter in the research process, which could include peripheral thought, secondary knowledge, and even inconsequential experience. Moustakas (1990) designated focusing as a clearing procedure that allows for the concretisation of material that more specifically addresses the research, research question, or problem the researcher wishes to encounter.

Focusing is a time of editing—similar to the process in which a writer may engage when central themes and ideas of a story need to be clarified, and all extraneous thought, ideas, and storylines are discarded or put away for future reconnection if needs be. Moustakas (1990) said, “Focusing is an inner attention, a staying with, a sustained process of systematically contacting the more central meanings of an experience. Focusing enables one to see something

as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary awarenesses and insights into one's experiences" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 25).

The internal reference frame

Even if all knowledge is gained using the aspects of heuristic inquiry mentioned above, it is necessary to return to the previous experience. According to Moustakas (1990), "to know as well as understand the nature, meanings, and elements of every human experience, one must rely on the individual who's had, is having, or will have the experience's internal frame of reference." Only the experiencing folks can provide reliable depictions of the experience by looking at their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and senses. (page 26) In conducting this study, I was the one experiencing it all as well as the researcher. This dissertation is the product of a singular heuristic research project employing no other external participants. Although references to the personal experiences of others are included in the commentary on the literature reviewed, the method used for the study incorporated organic inquiry and the internal frame of reference that Moustakas (1990) suggested in explaining his heuristic methodology.

3.3 Data Collection- Heuristic Research Phases.

3.3.1 Initial engagement

Before beginning a research project, one must reach within oneself in order to discover a topic of impassioned interest. Moustakas (1990) identified this discovery as the initial engagement phase of heuristic research when a burning concern manifests into a focused path toward the resolution of a problem or the answer to a question or questions. He described the initial engagement as a calling, an external pull toward the topic; it is erotic and passionate and grips the researcher with excitement, joy, and even frustration and anxiety. Moustakas explained, "During the initial engagement, the investigator reaches inward for tacit awareness and knowledge, permits intuition to run freely, and elucidates the context from which the question takes form and significance." In the earliest manifestation of this passion, a researcher may encounter dreams, memories, or real-life experiences that trigger the desire to learn more. Thus, the researcher succumbs to the call into the inner reaches of the psyche in order to explore the deeper meaning of this encounter.

3.3.2 Immersion

Following the initial engagement, at the point of immersion, the researcher falls into the well and plunges deep into the waters of experience, insight, knowledge, and emotion. She or he becomes immersed in the topic. As Moustakas (1990) noted, every experience, every

sensation, and every dream and thought is seen through the lens of the topic that has gripped the researcher. He commented, "The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question—to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it" (p. 28).

A conscious effort is then made to live the topic, to read about the topic, and to engage in the topic through community, personal social encounters, cinema, poetry, art, and music. Moustakas (1990) observed that the topic becomes, consciously and unconsciously, a central and primary purpose of the researcher's experience. The aforementioned self-dialogue is also an essential element of immersion. The researcher meditates on the topic, asking for guidance, information, and insight. Active journaling, composing poetry, music, and other creative pursuits where the researcher actively communicates with her or his inner world and encourages a dialogue between the outer and the inner realms becomes a focused and conscious part of the researcher's daily life.

3.3.3 Incubation

Immersion is essential to the heuristic process, but so is incubation, which seems to be an antithetical process. As described by Moustakas (1990), with incubation, all conscious and deliberate engagement with the topic ceases, and the researcher then allows for a more contemplative interaction with the topic. This occurs when the researcher's gaze is not directly cast upon the topic but possibly takes a more peripheral angle, often unconscious and less deliberate. Incubation becomes a retreat from the concentrated efforts of topic engagement. At this point, the topic percolates in its alchemical stew of fermentation and awaits a rebirth of new insights and new formulations from the old. This can only occur when the stew is not being directly watched and scrutinised.

Regarding incubation, Moustakas (1990) provided the analogy of the common human experience of not being able to remember a name, but then, suddenly, when no effort is being made to remember, the name pops into conscious awareness. He cited Polanyi's idea that scientific discovery happens in a flicker after a rest period or distraction rather than the way you get to the mountaintop by putting in the immense effort. Our efforts are expended in a futile competition among the rocks and gullies on the hill's slopes. Then, just as we're about to give up and settle down to tea, we're abruptly carried to the top by process of spontaneous brain restructuring unregulated by conscious effort. (Moustakas, 1990). If the researcher allows the relaxed mind to sort through all the information painstakingly gathered, understanding can develop at “levels outside one's immediate awareness" (Moustakas, 1990)

3.3.4 Illumination

When the researcher enters an illumination phase, major elements of the research question or problem that were never consciously considered suddenly come to light. As Moustakas (1990) explained, a gleaning takes place where, seemingly out of nowhere, an integral part of the topic appears and demands to be incorporated into the overall consideration of the material. When knowledge is gathered, as in the immersion phase, and then allowed to stew, unfettered, in the incubation phase, a new aroma is created that was not directly observable before but now contributes to the overall project in a way that may be essential. What was missing from the inner dialogue, as well as a perspective of the researched subject that had remained in the shadows, either held back by the ego mind or simply overlooked as initially unimportant or insignificant, thus becoming illuminated. Moustakas said, "In illumination, it is just such missed, misunderstood, or distorted realities that make their appearance and add something essential to the truth of an experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30)

3.3.5 Explication

According to Moustakas (1990), the penultimate phase of heuristic research involves bringing all of the previous aspects together and observing all of the research and experimental material with great concentration and intention. Focus is essential and a deliberate attempt to understand the experience fully and its relationship to the question or topic being studied. Moustakas stated, "The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (p. 31). The explication step requires a deliberate search for answers in the material. In prepping for the last step of creative synthesis, the researcher searches for new or undiscovered meanings, tries numerous perspectives and approaches and creates prevailing themes.

3.3.6 Creative synthesis

In this case, the written dissertation is the creative synthesis of material produced by the research. In this phase, as described by Moustakas (1990), all of the elements incorporated in the gathering of information, experience, and knowledge and its incubation, illumination, and finally, explication come together in a written form. The creative process of spilling this information into a narrative container is largely tacit and intuitive. The information that the researcher desires to convey in written words must flow in a natural manner, only to be scrutinised through an editing process to conform to certain objective rules of form and presentation.

Moustakas (1990) described the epitome of heuristic research throughout this creative synthesis phase as follows: "Knowledge of the data, as well as a duration of solitude and contemplation putting the focus on the topic and question, are important preparatory measures for the motivation that eventually allows a creative synthesis." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32) The tacit dimension, Intuition, and self-searching are three important notions that underpin a creative synthesis. The investigator must move beyond any constrained or limited attention to the data and allow an interior life on the question to grow in order to realise a thorough articulation of the essence of the phenomenon studied.

A creative synthesis could take the form of poetry, music, or graphic art. My creative synthesis took the form of a written dissertation. As Moustakas emphasised, a heuristic approach to research is a qualitative approach, and the results cannot be presented in a quantitative fashion with numbers, statistics, or other forms of objective measurement. The validity of a qualitative research project lies in its meaning and in its assessment of the myriad qualities of experience.

3.4 Ethics

There are several key ethical considerations to be addressed in this self-study. I did not use any confidential client material of my own throughout this process. Instead, I deepened my current knowledge by reflecting on material that has been published publicly around my chosen topic. Due to the nature of the self-study and my desire to keep my own meanings and experiences at the forefront of the inquiry, I did not apply for ethics approval as I did not use any clinical material from my work with clients, and thoughts that emerged will be in relation to my own personal experience. I adhered to ethics throughout the process of this dissertation. It is important to acknowledge my stance on self-disclosure as a psychotherapist in regard to animal-assisted psychotherapy. I am aware of the difficulty. I was constantly faced with decisions regarding how much to reveal, balancing the use of revealing an aspect of myself with the potential of bias with another, as well as the understanding of the risk of over- or inappropriately revealing (Hartmann, D. J., & McLaughlin, O. , 2018)

CHAPTER FOUR: MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

4.1 Initial Engagement and Immersion

My passion for this subject has never waned, and I've consumed any and all articles, books, websites, and other materials that I found along the way that helped with my research. The incubation phase of this heuristic study was long and trying. Although not much actual writing occurred, I continued to work with my dog in my practice. I also continued to read. I thought about my topic and writing this dissertation each day; it never left my awareness, and my unconscious was most certainly engaged in the work. The pressure of completing the dissertation felt like a huge weight on my shoulders, and I worried that I might never complete it.

Obstacles such as Covid-19 greatly impacted the way I worked, forcibly moving me online, thus losing face-to-face encounters with clients with Riley present. Furthermore, I also struggled with the balance of being a single parent, with my youngest being one year old when I began my dissertation journey, meaning I struggled to balance my time between studies, motherhood, and providing for my family financially. In my journal, I notice myself referencing these obstacles on a weekly basis, and upon reading my journal back, I then realised that, rather than being an impediment to my process, perhaps these factors were actually a necessary part of my process. Moustakas and Douglas (1985) described a feeling of lostness and letting go – "relinquishing control and being tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life" (Douglass, B. G., & Moustakas, C. , 1985, p. 47). I relate to this significantly throughout the immersion stage, where I noticed myself progressively entering into unfamiliar aspects of myself through my exploration.

With hindsight, this dissertation was a self-inquiry which is of great significance as I had nothing but myself and my small family to immerse myself in. This allowed me to begin to watch and wonder what was happening in our interactions with Riley and record them in my journal in order to reflect later.

Upon reflection, I wondered about my past interactions with a number of therapy dogs from assistance dogs in New Zealand. One thing that struck me as odd in these encounters was how the therapy dogs seemed to be so submissive. They appeared to have almost no personality at all. Several dogs that I met would just lie on the floor and let everyone pet them without offering much in return. There was no meeting of the eyes and no real interaction. I know this is not typical of all therapy dogs used in AAP, and I knew that I wanted to be certain my dog would have a distinct and active personality. I wanted him to bring distinct attributes into the research and to be engaging yet still obedient. It was, and still is, important to me that my dogs

are not merely blank slates in my practice but rather engaging and enthusiastic co-therapists. Riley is a serious dog and the most patient animal I have ever known. He loves people more than he loves other animals and is quick to engage with anyone who shows an interest in interacting with him. He will emit a low, gravelly grunt from the back of his throat when he engages in conversation with someone willing to listen and respond, and he continues the conversation as long as that person answers. He is more closely bonded with me than anyone else in my household and follows me around everywhere.

Riley has an instinctive sense of what his job is. He gives all of his attention to me and takes cues from me regarding how much or how little interaction I wish to have with him. Even when it seems like Riley, for example, is not paying attention and is asleep on my feet, a slight shift in my emotion or energy brings him to attention, scanning for what might be his next course of action. It is typical for him to jump up on the couch and lean on me or lay his head over my lap. This act has had a tremendous and profound effect on me as a researcher. The empathy and understanding the dog has conveyed to my research are enormous. I feel comforted in a way I have never experienced. I feel unconditionally loved. This is an extremely powerful moment in my research. After allowing a few minutes to pass, I will typically explore the feelings just experienced in this encounter with Riley, and I then dive further into that exploration.

4.2 Incubation

As a result of my immersion in the subject, I learned that incubation periods naturally happened throughout the inquiry. According to Moustakas (1990), the researcher is kept away from the problem during the incubation phase to allow impromptu and tacit understanding to emerge. In order to assess my mental processes and propensity toward the research, I was able to take a metaphorical step back from it and disengage from the immersion experience.

Throughout my heuristic process, there were various phases where I stepped outside of direct engagement with canine assisted psychotherapy. The first time I did this was when we were plunged as a nation into the first of many lockdowns where I stopped documenting my experience.

One day the inevitable happened, one of my children tested positive for Covid 19, with myself testing positive three days later. This was an incredibly difficult time for me as I became very unwell due to having a pre-existing health condition. Being a single parent, I had no help and had to try to recover myself whilst caring for my sick children, who, by now, had both contracted Covid-19. In the evening, when everyone was in bed, Riley was with me nearly the entire time I was convalescing. Riley was usually close by, curled up next to me, or lying on

the floor. We spent a great amount of quality time together, and I thought of him as my dog nurse. He did not have to do much to be of comfort. The body loves to touch, and the best healing practice in getting myself through the almost three weeks we were in isolation to begin normal function again was to engage in touch and conversation—any sort of loving and nurturing touch (Beck, A., Katcher, A., 1996).

Although I was not documenting my experience during my time of illness, I later reflected upon it, which led me to delve deeper into literature to explore why Riley was of comfort to me during this difficult time.

4.3 Illumination

According to Moustakas (1990), the illumination phase causes "corrections of incorrect understandings" and "synthesis of fragmented knowledge" (p.30). A sense of synthesis between the subject of developing therapeutic participation as a student and the spiritual search for validity and the finding of a more authentic self occurred despite the fact that illumination was a non-linear process that shifted with the immersion and incubation phases.

Both processes, in my opinion, involve a quest for deeper authenticity brought about by knowledge and clarity as well as an inward truth search. Both methods also call for a search for greater interior truth and authenticity through comprehension. In conjunction with the growth of self-awareness and meditation, the interrogative nature of the heuristic process and meditative techniques showed an underlying bias toward a primarily corporeal understanding of therapeutic presence. I was able to better understand how the psychological mind might affect my ability to be present in a variety of ways, thanks to the enlightenment phase.

My process of self-awareness and reflexivity within this heuristic cycle did not come easily. The idea of the ongoing process where I continually shift my understanding of my personal experience emerged significantly in illumination. I noticed my personal stance sitting firmly in a bias towards positive outcomes, not noticing I had not delved into many books or articles that oppose my personal stance. This illumination helped myself be more self-aware of my personal influences, allowing me more opportunities to question and adapt my interpretations of the literature.

As a result, I was able to learn more about the phenomena and how it can affect therapy practice in a critical whole view.

4.4 Explication.

The explication phase, according to Moustakas (1990), thoroughly explores what has formed in consciousness and provides additional clarity through the expression of "awareness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that is derived from conversations and dialogues with others."

Like the other phases, the process of explication was repetitive throughout my heuristic inquiry. I noticed this happened for me in various stages. In the beginning of explication, I took time off work and other commitments to re-read and go over my journal and notes I had acquired so far, beginning to piece together data and noticing new themes and themes that deepen my existing understanding of canine assisted therapy and the human, canine bond. I began to notice links between various journal entries and spent time reflecting upon these, writing down my thoughts, responses, and insights in relation to the data and my journaling.

Following this process, I began my literature review, where I delved deeper into the literature I had found on canine assisted therapy and the human canine bond; articulating, analysing, and synthesising the material I was drawn to. As I wrote my literature view, I began to integrate the ideas and thoughts in the literature with my own personal experiences.

As I was now engaged in a continuous non-linear engagement with the stages for discovery, incubation, and illumination, which yielded the psychological reflection of my present moment interactions, the following stage of the heuristic process, explication happened naturally as a direct consequence of an unintended incident during the research.

4.4 Creative Synthesis.

The creative synthesis of heuristic research is a mirror of the researcher's internal frame of reference, according to Moustakas (1990, p. 32), which is based on prior experience, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments relating to oneself, others, and the outside world.

A new whole is born. In this stage, the researcher tells their story (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 68). In telling my story of my heuristic self-enquiry, I struggled to pull it all together, rewriting my dissertation a total of three times. I began by writing a synthesis that represented only my heuristic view, noticing it lacked an academic lens, so I choose to rewrite it; however, upon sending chapters to my supervisor, I received feedback that it was too academic and lacked in

the heuristic lens. According to Moustakas (1990), once the researcher has mastered the knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is in a position to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). This led me to consider if I had mastered the knowledge of the material, which led me to go back to the beginning phases to delve deeper into the texts.

This reflection, although painful to admit, helped to deepen my understanding of the continual heuristic process where Immersion at the moment is not enough (Sela-Smith, 2002). The therapist must also reflect upon and evaluate, what is happening. Moustakas (1990) supports this stating that "the researcher must move beyond any confined or constricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realised" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I offer my personal perspective on my findings throughout the heuristic cycle within the context of the current body of literature that I have examined. I consider what these findings might mean to me in my work as a child psychotherapist and for the profession of psychotherapy in general.

I noticed as I progressed with my journey a desire to deepen my own understanding by constantly reflecting on what I discovered throughout this heuristic cycle about myself and about the literature on canine-assisted psychotherapy, which led to a discovery and leaning into my own internal world, filled with fear of not being good enough, not being a good enough academic writer, not being a good enough child psychotherapist. Whilst these fears manifested and were amplified in the beginning of my journey, the immersion in the literature helped to validate my personal views of my work being good enough using theories to support ideas from Bowlby and Winnicott validating my personal perspective of the positive outcomes that come from engaging in canine-assisted psychotherapy.

5.2 AAT in psychotherapy

Being a practising Child psychotherapist, it is important to mention the majority of the literature explored within my findings relate to the lens of working with children. Particularly in the last 50 years, our view of the advantages of a human-dog relationship has undergone significant change (Kruger, K. A., & Serpell, J. A., 2006) Animals have naturally been a part of our therapeutic interventions as we have started to understand how they contribute to human well-being. Although historically, service animals have only been used for physical help, their use has expanded to include psychological support in order to build on the developing understanding of how animals affect human well-being (Kruger, K. A., & Serpell, J. A., 2006).

Personal insights from this study showed that I was struggling with balancing several aspects of my life. Therefore, Riley helped me attain a sense of balance through his patience and genuine interaction. If this was my own experience, I began to wonder what it would be like for a child to have an experience with Riley present in the therapy space. This personal experience of mine is consistent with the results of a study done by Berget et al. (2011) that revealed that interaction with animals brought out self-efficiency in patients. My interaction with Riley was able to bring out the best in me, which helped in attaining my academic, parental goals (Berget, B., Ekeberg, Ø., Pedersen, I., & Braastad, B. O., 2011)

From the finding of this study, AAT was seen to reduce anxiety over the unknown. The amount of time needed to demonstrate the potential advantages of the human-animal connection may be short (Barker, S. B., Knisely, J. S., McCain, N. L., Schubert, C. M., & Pandurangi, A. K. , 2010). Previous research found that following a 30-min AAT session, mental health inpatients with mood and psychotic disorders demonstrated a significant drop in anxiety. According to another study, interacting with a dog helped physically unwell hospital patients feel less anxious (Coakley & Mahoney, 2009). Recent findings from these studies have demonstrated that using AAT sessions as a stress and anxiety reduction strategy enhances the educational sector (Crossman & Kazdin, 2015).

5.3 Animals as Facilitators of the Therapeutic Alliance

Freud remarked on the unique relationship between humans and dogs (Beck & Katcher,1996) in a letter he wrote:

"It really explains why one can love an animal life Topsy (or Jo-fi) with such an extraordinary intensity: affection without ambivalence, the simplicity of a life free from the almost unbearable conflicts of civilisation, the beauty of existence, complete in itself. And yet, despite all divergence in the organic development, that feeling of intimate affinity of undisputed solidarity. Often, when stroking Jo-fi, I have caught myself humming a melody which, unmusical as I am, I can't help recognising as the aria from Don Giovanni: "A bond of friendship unites us both." (p. 127)

To begin to understand the finding, I insist I begin with the beginning of therapy, developing the therapeutic alliance. Reflecting on my journal and the process of Riley coming into my life, it became clear to me that having Riley present at university, at home and later in my practice facilitated a crucial role for me. This crucial role was one of containment and acceptance of me feeling good enough. Looking at the literature, I noticed a large body of literature discussing how having a canine present in therapy, particularly for children, aided in developing the therapeutic alliance, which led to better levels of engagement. The importance of the therapeutic alliance within the psychotherapeutic framework got me reflecting on "why do I have Riley present." I look to my journal entry on 24/03/2022

Today I got a phone referral that seems to be becoming a regular reason people want to come and see myself and Riley, the parent had tried therapy elsewhere, but the child had a hard time

engaging and didn't want to go. The idea of a dog present made the parent think their child would more likely be willing to give therapy a go.

After reading my diary entry, I gave it some thought and wondered whether having a dog present in therapy would help the healing process in any way. Turning to the literature, I came to understand that the main justification for using animals in therapy is that "positive human-animal interactions can increase psychological wellness" (Chandler, 2005, p. 16). Therapy animals can bring additional therapeutic benefit while changing the dynamics of a typical session (Chandler, 2005). In a broad sense, having an animal around may make therapy easier (Kruger et al., 2004). By allowing the client to develop a trusting relationship with an animal, the psychotherapist can afterwards gain the client's confidence by proving that they are worthy of that animal's trust (Chandler, 2005).

Supporting this idea further, I discovered studies by Dietz and colleagues (2012) and Signal and colleagues (2017) that revealed adding a dog to child therapy increases the likelihood that the child will complete the therapy process. These results could have a lot of different explanations.

First, considering it through the lens of attachment, where an attachment is sometimes described as a connection that offers emotions of safety as a strong foundation (Bowlby, 2005). My animals acted in a transitional relationship, as I previously discussed for myself, similar to how transitional toys are used with children (Winnicott, 1953). In this case, the animal acts as a source of comfort when it is most needed, gradually transforming into security that is not dependent on the animal (Triebenbacher, 1998). Additional research has revealed that an animal, such as a dog, may serve as both a secure base (from which to explore) and a safe haven (to which one may return in case of perceived threat), both generally and specifically in the therapy context (Zilcha-Mano, S., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. , 2012). Given this, Riley's presence may cause the client to feel secure and safe in the treatment environment.

Kwong (2011) hypothesised that animals could be able to give people—children and adults alike—an emotional tie of attachment that fosters a sense of security and well-being. Dogs excel at playing the responsive attachment role due to their responsiveness; need to maintain proximity and capacity to be attuned to their owners. (Kwong, M. J. Bartholomew, K., 2011)

In a 1983 study, Friedmann, Katcher, Thomas, Lynch, and Messent investigated the impact of a friendly dog on children's heart rate and blood pressure in both a relaxed and

stressful environment. The results of this study suggested that the presence of the dog made the scenario for the kids "less scary and more friendly" (p. 464), which in turn resulted in a lowering of blood pressure and heart rate. The therapy dog can help with skill development on a more practical basis. The involvement of a therapy animal can be incorporated directly into the goals that the therapist and client seek to accomplish during their time together, whether it be boosting confidence by having to take care of them or assisting a withdrawn or unresponsive client develop speaking skills (Friedmann E. K., 1983).

This practice also benefits the animal that is utilised for AAT. The stimulating action is the first and maybe the most important for the animal. The animal becomes more social and interacts with a variety of clients. In addition, the animal is not left alone all day or bored while waiting for somebody to return home as well as providing a stimulating task (Fine, 2015).

To summarise the findings above, the research backs up my observation that, independent of the underlying theory, using a dog in treatment results in "increased and enhanced therapeutic opportunity," which increases the potential for psychotherapy development (Chandler, 2012, p. 133). The benefits of AAT may be explained by people's positive and emotional responses to an animal. By easing symptoms and encouraging social engagement and communication, the human-animal bond is used in AAT to treat chronic psychiatric patients, with the goal of improving patients' quality of life.

5.4 Contribution to child and adolescent psychotherapy

Being a child psychotherapist, it is important to discuss the potential contribution having a canine present can have on my practice as a child psychotherapist in Aotearoa, New Zealand. I began by asking myself What does this mean for my work as a child psychotherapist? I noticed myself becoming more aware of the benefits I was experiencing from having Riley present and began to wonder how this might transition into my work for my child clients. Can Riley potentially alter the dynamics of a traditional session while supplying an added therapeutic value? In a broad sense, can the presence of Riley help to facilitate therapy (Kruger et al., 2004)?

I've discovered through my studies and experience that watching or participating in a child's play is the finest method to get a glimpse into that child's inner world (Axline, 1969; Freud, 1946; Klein, 1932; Landreth, 2012; Winnicott, 1971). These ideas may be expanded upon in order to progress the therapeutic process with the inclusion of a dog in the treatment

environment by a therapist who is aware of the benefits of the human-animal bond. The use of animals during psychotherapy may provide a rich and versatile medium for the client's inner world to be expressed (Oren & Parish-Plass, 2013). In contrast to a doll or other inanimate object, the animal's true nature raises a variety of difficulties and feelings from the client's life, making it a more likely target for projection and transference.

According to Fairbairn (1944), disruptions in early childhood connections serve as the foundation for some psychopathological problems (Fairbairn, 1944). Similar to this, Bowlby (1969) proposed that all individuals rely on internal working models developed through encounters with their parents while engaging in social interactions. The client's subsequent relational style is carried outside of therapy as well as into other interactions. These models might be developed further throughout therapy. Because of this, the foundation of psychotherapy is the relationship-based study of the client's emotional problems within the therapeutic setting. Because multiple potential relationships can exist at once in AAP, many other relational experiences can be acted out in the context of therapy. Therefore, the use of animals in therapeutic settings broadens this idea by allowing possibilities for processing old interpersonal problems in the present, identifying and addressing underlying relationship patterns and internal models, and providing adaptive alternatives (Parish-Plass & Oren, 2013).

Numerous psychiatric problems, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorders, can be successfully treated with animal-assisted therapy (AAT). AAT can be a supplement to many types of psychotherapy. With AAT, the animal is integrated into the therapeutic strategy. Results for clients who use AAT include an improved sense of comfort and safety, more motivation, improved self-esteem, a rise in prosocial behaviours, and a reduction in behavioural issues. AAT gives the therapist a way to establish a therapeutic bond with the client, and the animal can offer the therapist consoling support. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting AAT is effective in treating people with mental diseases, but there is a dearth of studies that back up this claim. More investigation is required.

As a result of the possible benefits and positive outcomes listed throughout this chapter, having a canine present can enhance the motivation, encouragement, inspiration, and insight elements of psychotherapy. These enrichments of the therapeutic process may ultimately allow a client to gain increased benefit per therapy session, leading to the possibility of quicker and greater recovery (Chandler, 2005)

5.5 Canine-Assisted Psychotherapy's Drawbacks

Among the most evident disadvantages of AAT would be that not all human like dogs, some have fears, allergies or a general dislike of the smells associated to a dog. There is risk of client injury where both the client and the therapy animal are at risk during these sessions, whether the client stimulates the therapy animal and it responds defensively or the participant simply stirs up the animal by purposely damaging it. While this may not be a major threat or even something that comes up in any of the therapy sessions with a person, it is standard practice for therapists to consider the animal's and client's safety throughout AAT sessions (Lefkowitz, 2005).

Another disadvantage of individuals who become bonded effortlessly is that they may have to contend with sorrow and loss difficulties when their therapy is over. This is not often, but it can happen. Due to the length of time spent with the therapy animal and the close bond that is formed due to the nature of the activity, very strong relationships are formed between the therapy animal and the clients on a regular basis. Clients may suffer more harm as a result of this than if they just approached therapy without the use of animals (Lefkowitz, 2005).

Personally, it took me a while within the heuristic process to arrive at literature that discusses drawbacks of using a canine however, this all changed when I had an incident I witnessed myself associated to another therapist as noted in my journal entry below on 04/10/22

I was finishing off for the day and notice another therapist had booked the shared space right after my session, which meant it was difficult for me to clean up after my client and vacuum up Riley's dog hair that often goes everywhere when clients pat him. Next thing a lady comes in the room "what are you doing in here" "is that a dog", I replied "we are just finishing up after our sessions, and yes Riley works alongside myself in the therapy room. "That is disgusting" she replies, "how filthy, look at all the hair and the smell" she then leaves the room and I run around the room quickly with the vacuum and exit the room with Riley. Upon exiting the other therapist said, "you know one of my clients are allergic to dogs and personally I am a cat person and don't like that you have a dog in a shared therapy space".

Reflecting on this in the moment I was stunned and angered by how the therapist spoke to me and moving forward I booked half an hour after my last session so I had enough time to tidy up and leave before seeing her again. Several weeks passed and I met with my supervisor

who gave me feedback on the importance to have a whole view and keep in mind why canine assisted psychotherapy might not be suitable. This was a big wake up call for me, all of a sudden, I realised I had not considered the other's perspective, the other therapist was right as those were her personal views. This reflection led me to go back to the literature to deepen my whole understanding not just the positive lens.

5.6 The Study's Limitations

There is no denying that my position has a positive bias towards canine-assisted psychotherapy due to my experiences with animals and dogs, in particular during my life which has largely influenced the positive outlook on canine-assisted psychotherapy within this dissertation. A common critique of heuristic research is that it can become too self-referential and restricted by the researcher's biases and resistances (Fredericksen, 2019).

In the journal entry below, I reflect on my bias.

"it is hard to think about the negatives of using Riley in psychotherapy sessions. I mainly see the good and very rarely see the bad"

Retrieved from Journal 24/02/2022

Reflecting on this journal entry later that week

"*My research isn't about generalisable findings….. it's about me and my experience of it*

So what if I have a bias? This is about my experience which has been predominantly a really positive experience."

Retrieved from Journal 02/03/2022

This research is based on literature that hypothesises the benefits that humans receive from our relationships with dogs. However, not much is explored in relation to dogs likewise benefiting from these interactions. Not surprisingly, most of the current research comes predominantly from a human-centered perspective rather than a canine-centered one (Lefkowitz, 2005)

Conclusions and Future Research

The current study found a role of canine assisted therapy in psychotherapy. Human-canine relationship is a unique, ever-evolving bond that can give benefits throughout one's life. Dogs are affectionately referred to as 'man's best friend,' and for good reason: simply touching a dog can calm an overactive sympathetic nervous system, lower blood pressure, and lower heart rate Therefore, there is need for increased employment of the therapy modality especially in patient with anxiety and depression. Psychotherapy can be used with canine assisted treatment to improve prognosis especially in children. By easing symptoms and encouraging social engagement and communication, the human-animal bond is used in AAT with the goal of improving patients' quality of life.

Throughout the heuristic process my personal experience has deepened and allowed for a whole emerging view of the phenomena of canine assisted therapy and the human canine bond. Moustakas (1990) asserted that the heuristic researcher is the ultimate judge of the validity of the inquiry, because it is only themselves that have gone through the exhaustive and deeply personal journey of discovery. I find this view to be true to my experience.

Because the current study is exploratory in nature, more research is needed in order to acquire a better understanding of how people use animals in therapeutic relationships. This should explain how the intervention's success is documented, as well as whose demographics or mental health concerns the approach appears to be beneficial with. Hundreds of papers and books have been published about the advantages of the human-animal connection and the efficacy of AAT, but much of the study is based on anecdotal experiences or experiments conducted in a closely contained environment (hospital or nursing home). The research still lacks a thorough examination of these professionals' opinions.

The use of standardised evaluation will help to improve the AAT intervention's validity and reliability. AAT's success in dealing with persons of all age groups, therapeutic contexts, and mental health challenges can be measured using a variety of criteria. Future research could look into the effect of having an animal involved and how it affects people's experiences and interventions when dealing with clients. Analysis of all of these diverse characteristics is a critical next step in developing AAT as a reliable therapeutic intervention. Despite the fact that many articles and books have been published about the human-animal bond, a significant portion of the relationship is still yet to be defined.

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