

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

The field of study known as human-animal interaction only became known in the eighties when scientific societies were established and international conferences were organised. In South Africa, the Human-Animal Contact Study Group was founded in 1984 and South Africa was also a founder member of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations in 1992. Konrad Lorenz is honoured as the father of this field, for his publications on the subject in the fifties.¹ The field of study covers a broad scope which includes all interaction between man and animal on a continuum from no interaction, negative interaction to positive interaction.²

Despite this inclusive approach to human-animal interaction, it was mainly the emotional and positive aspects that caught the imagination of the public and researchers alike. It was specifically highlighted in the use of animals in therapeutic situations which involved disabled persons. In this regard the pioneer in the field of animal-facilitated psychotherapy was Boris Levinson, a psychiatrist who had his practice in New York. He began his observations in a very modest fashion, by noting that his own pet dog at home where his practice was situated, could assist him in the therapeutic approach to children with communication problems. Levinson had the courage to publish his observations in scientific papers, but not without receiving the expected criticism for his methods.^{3,4,5} History proved Levinson right and silenced many of his critics. He died in 1984, a successful, well-known and in certain circles even famous psychiatrist. His contribution to the field of human-animal interaction paved the way for further similar studies in psychiatry and he will always be seen as one of the main contributors in establishing this field.

In 1987, the field of human-animal interaction studies entered a new phase with the publication of its own scientific journal, *Anthrozoös*. It is an accredited journal which is indexed in many important related publications, inter alia the Science Citation Index. This journal is the vehicle which will take human-animal interaction studies into the future and the direction will be determined by the contributing scientists. The challenge is to keep the contents balanced between the variables of participating scientific fields. The nature of many of the studies is also multidisciplinary.

Anthrozoös is not only important for the publication of research, but the editorials should also be taken note of. The editor, Prof Andrew Rowan from Tufts University in Boston, enjoys high credibility among his peers from the academic and scientific spheres in which he is involved. In one editorial Rowan⁶ argued that there is already solid evidence of animal contact having significant health benefits and that it positively influences transient physiological states, morale and feelings of self-worth, but that more research funds are needed to identify the scope of the influence of animal contact. In another issue, under the heading "The Psychiatric Connection" Rowan⁷ pointed out how psychiatrists had played a role in establishing the field of human-animal interaction. He especially mentioned the contributions by Levinson, McCullough (who died in 1985) and Katcher. One year later, Rowan⁸ indicated his concern about the fact that health professions (veterinary medicine excluded) had shown limited interest in human-animal interaction studies, since the initial attention these received. He said:

"... the lack of medical interest remains a problem that must be addressed by those who wish to promote the wider acceptance of animal-assisted therapy."⁸

1.2 Problem statement

The problem with animal-facilitated psychotherapy is in essence a lack of the theoretical foundations on which its application can be based. If such a foundation can be found, at least some of the variables will be accounted for and could provide guidelines for predicted success, instead of an approach based completely on trial and error. The practical problem regarding the keeping of animals, as well as the hygienic aspects, could be solved when addressed in a multidisciplinary way.⁹ What psychiatry needs most, is a physiological rationale for using pets in therapy.

1.3 Hypothesis

If physiological parameters can support a theoretical basis for animal-facilitated psychotherapy, this will provide a rationale for using animals in psychotherapy.

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

The general aim is followed with some specific objectives for the study.

1.4.1 General aim

The main aim of the study is to provide theoretical and physiological information on human-animal interaction which could enhance animal-facilitated psychotherapy.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

In order to investigate the relationship between a theoretical basis for animal-facilitated psychotherapy and some physiological indicators, the following objectives are stated:

- to organise a corpus of existing knowledge on human-to-human interaction theories in personology as an introductory theme for interaction studies;

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- to link human-animal interaction with aspects of human-to-human interaction theories, indicating a theoretical interface between the two concepts as a basis for animal-facilitated psychotherapy;
- to reflect the current status of animal-facilitated psychotherapy;
- to discuss physiological parameters for positive human-animal interaction based on known physiological parameters for human-human and animal-animal interaction;
- to describe a methodology for measuring physiological parameters during positive interaction on an interspecies level, in order to support the theoretical framework presented in chapters two and three;
- to discuss the results of the experimental investigation;
- to evaluate existing inclusive theories on positive human-animal interaction in relation to this study;
- to indicate the implications of this study, and how these can be applied to animal-facilitated psychotherapy; and
- to make recommendations based on this study.

The following chapter will deal with theories on human-human interaction.

Personality theories could emphasize the role of the person (personism), the situation in which the person acts (situationism), or the interaction between the characteristics of the individual and the situation in which the behaviour occurs (interactionism). This chapter will only deal with theories which emphasize the interaction between individuals (interactionism) or individuals and the environment (environmental interaction).