

“Take me under your wing” - Love in Animal Assisted Psychotherapy:

A clinical perspective on the unique therapeutic bond between animals and humans

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Dr. Sarit lev bendov & Inbar barel

Take me under your wing,

be my mother, my sister.

May your lap be a shelter for my head,

A nest for my desolate prayers.

On a merciful twilight hour,

Lean down and I will reveal the secret of my sorrows;

They say there is youth in the world.

Where is my youth?

And another secret I will confess:

My soul has been burned by a flame;

They say there is love in the world –

What is love?

The stars deceived me.

There was a dream – but it too has passed;

now I have nothing in the world,

nothing at all.

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Abstract

David’s childhood was spent in boarding schools after being removed from his home as a result of severe parental neglect. He reenacts this cycle of rejection in all his interpersonal relationships. In the beginning stage of therapy, the therapist felt it difficult to accept him, to contain his repulsive sides, and to love him. The bonds which David developed with the therapy dog and cat enabled him and also the therapist to connect with feelings of empathy and acceptance, trust and closeness, and finally — love.

Fifteen-year-old Maya is unable to love or to be loved. As a result of a narcissistic injury she endured — due to her problematic relationship with her mother — she is incapable of allowing herself or the therapist to express feelings of love and closeness. The beginning of a change occurs through the help of a therapy dog, who shows his affection clearly and demands love from the therapist.

Animal-assisted psychotherapy introduces love into the therapeutic setting. It is almost a professional axiom to many of those who specialize in this field. But what is it that characterizes this kind of love? What role does it play? What does it enable? Does it make a substantial difference in the therapeutic setting and the treatment process as compared with classic psychotherapy? In this chapter we aim to review the general concept of love in psychotherapy. We will relate to the love that is shared between people and animals, and will focus in particular on the type of love that emerges in animal assisted psychotherapy. This chapter will include theoretical conceptualizations from diverse standpoints, and will integrate case studies from our own clinical work.

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Introduction

Why is it so natural and commonplace to speak of love in poetry, and yet so perplexing to discuss it in the context of psychotherapy? How can countless poets and singers idealize love and be intensely preoccupied with it, while the greatest names in the field of psychology are continually debating, disagreeing and cannot seem to reach an agreement about if and when it is permissible to use the word “love” in connection with therapy.

And what of the animal kingdom? Why do zoologists also argue whether or not love actually exists in nonhuman animals? What makes it so terribly difficult to link such a real and basic emotion to creatures other than ourselves? For the animal lovers among us, and for those who are involved with the human-animal bond, the concept of love in these interrelationships is obvious, at least on the surface level. Anyone who has raised animals must have felt this special kind of love, even though it is often challenging to put into words.

The complex nature of love, and how to define it, is manifest in these questions and issues. There is a gap between our emotional experience and the academic, theoretical approach to it. If so, how can we bridge these gaps? How does one establish professional legitimacy when there are so many reservations and questions regarding the concept of love? Our goal is to make an attempt to explore these and other fundamental issues.

This chapter will seek to investigate the following central questions: Is love present in psychotherapy? If so, what qualities does it possess? Is this emotion

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“Take Me Under Your Wing”

From the earliest days of the psychological literature, it was obvious that there is great difficulty regarding the notion of love in the therapeutic alliance. Most theorists avoided the use of the word “love” and relied on alternative terms instead, such as “affection”, “concern”, “desire”, or on the other hand — “hate”. It seems that these widespread differences stem from the difficulty in defining the concept of love in therapy and from the tendency to link together love and sex. Freud (1963) interprets the existence of love between the client and the therapist as an expression of erotic transference— feelings that are partly unconscious and oedipal— creating an undesirable therapeutic process. From his point of view, love between the therapist and the client is prohibited. However, in a letter to Jung in 1906 (at Glucksman 2010), Freud wonders about the therapeutic process and says: "Essentially, one might say, the cure is effected by love".

Ferenczi (1952) spoke of the active use of the emotions of empathy and love in therapy in order to mend early deficits of love experienced in childhood. Furthermore, he claimed that "No analysis can succeed if we do not succeed in really loving the client. Every client has the right to be regarded and cared for as an ill and unhappy child." According to Melanie Klein (1950), one of the goals of therapy is to enable the

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Balint (1979) approached the notion of love in psychotherapy from a very different angle, pointing out the client’s need, above all, to receive primary parental love, which serves as a necessary platform for therapy. This primary parental love, in and of itself, has a curative power. Balint emphasizes the overall significance of this essential form of love, which encompasses within impulsive aspects, dependency and narcissistic needs, as well as the earliest object relations and the developing self.

More contemporary theorists regard love in therapy not only as a means of reenacting past object relationships, but also as an opportunity for building object relationships with the therapist that will be different and more successful than the earlier internalized ones. Cohen (2006) distinguishes between instinctual love channeled towards the object as a means of fulfilling our own needs, and emotional/spiritual love that typifies the therapeutic relationship, directed towards the object for its own sake. According to Cohen, therapy focuses upon beneficial reconstruction and *repair* of the internalized relationship with parents and on personal *growth*, and is based on a safe and supportive environment. He claims that love in therapy does not only allow for change, but is in itself a cure. He said the healing power

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Glucksman (2010) argues that parallel to the transference love that occurs in therapy, exists a real and concrete relationship based upon sincere feelings of respect, trust, and concern. However, the existence of these feelings is not necessarily indicative of a change in object relations (either of the client or of the therapist). Only later, when this relationship deepens and also includes love, it becomes evident that the change has occurred and that new object relations were acquired. This change results from hard work within the therapeutic process, and indicates that the deficits and narcissistic injuries have been dealt with and treated, and that now a healthy narcissistic core exists, and it is capable of loving others and being loved by them. According to Glucksman (2010) one of the aims of therapy is to love, even if does not have curative powers. It is love that allows and promotes change.

The main consensus among contemporary theorists is that the ability to accept and reciprocate love is at the root of most therapeutic goals. Aharoni (2007) claims that in every psychotherapy process there is an invitation, request and demand, for love, and that in every therapeutic process we are actually engaged in a love story.

From this review of previous psychological literature, it is apparent that theorists approach the subject of love in the therapeutic setting on a broad scale. This wide dynamic spectrum ranges from Oedipal and pre-Oedipal love, characterized by a yearning for complete acceptance, security, exclusivity and sexual satisfaction, and mature love, which serves as the basis for change and even as a curative power, replete with elements of mutual empathy, attachment, respect, trust, affection, and

“Take me under your wing” - Love in Animal Assisted Psychotherapy:

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“They Say There is Love in the World - What is Love?”

As we ponder the relationship between ourselves and nonhuman animals, the question arises: Why do we love animals? What do we get out of this love? Why do we feel the need for this kind of love?

Fairbairn (1952) claimed that the human’s primary motivation is the acquisition of an object. Acquisition of the object functions not merely as a tool to satisfy certain needs, but as an expression of our very nature, the way we develop into human beings. Fairbairn states that just as herd animals must feel belonging to a defined group, Man cannot exist normally if not affiliated to a group. An object becomes meaningful for us when it responds to our needs, especially the basic need for identification and belonging. Furthermore, he claims that the search for the object and the need for touch and connection are the foundation of life and motivation. We spend our lives searching for objects so that we can later be reunited with them, but at the same time, we suffer anxiety over the possibility of their loss ("I had a dream - but it too has vanished...").

According to Fairbairn’s claims, one may assume that the great appeal animals have for us is due mainly to our craving for significant objects. Relatively and generally speaking, animals are objects which are easy to obtain, our relationship with them is less threatening than with humans, they satisfy some of our basic needs, and

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Fairbairn further remarks that (1952) at the moment of birth the absolute connectedness between the baby and its mother abruptly ceases. This also interrupts our absolute connection with nature and the world, and leaves in its wake a deep longing to be reunited, to experience once again the soothing peaceful harmony with the world around us. Contact with animals is a form of reconnecting with nature and the long-awaited chance reunion we seek. According to Lorenz (1952) our wish to raise animals and keep them close to us arises from a general longing to bond with nature.

Shiloh (1974) argues that animals are "comfortable" objects in a relationship, because they are perceived as less threatening than people. He claims that contact with animals calms our separation anxiety, because essentially they do not abandon us. For example, a dog will demonstrate his absolute loyalty to its owner and never leave him of his own free will, or alternatively, caged animals, which cannot leave. (This assumption may explain the difficulty some people have in forming attachment with cats, because cats typically don't alleviate our separation anxiety ...). By this promise not ever to leave us, the animal calms our anxieties and serves our dependency needs. By his very dependence on us, a pet allows us to rest assured in our feelings of dependence upon it and other objects.

Sometimes we encounter clients who put up a strong defense mechanism against their own feelings of neediness and dependency. Animal-assisted psychotherapy offers a non-threatening means to circumvent this defense mechanism and enlist the aid of the dependency needs and neediness of the animals themselves. Therefore, in our

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What *other* being are we referring to when it comes to animals? Who is this unique *other*? Shiloh (1974) argues that animals are actually different from us in that they are *part objects*, compared to another person, who usually serves as a whole object. *Part Object* is a part of a person or other object. It can refer to an organ (a hand), a personality trait or another human aspect. Part objects can be extrapolated to represent the whole object. A *whole object* is a complete object, with feelings, needs, desires and autonomy (Klein, 1961). As animals are perceived by us as part objects, we experience them as less risky and therefore we can form close ties and feelings of love with relative ease and trust.

From this point of view it is easy to understand some individual’s love of reptiles, insects or fish, that are even more partial objects than are mammals (when compared to human beings), as reflecting the difficulty of the individual to recognize a whole object, to make complex connections with an *other*, and also to contain the anxiety created by a connection with a less partial object. Additionally, animals can represent to us the

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“What is love?”

The love that exists between people and animals is a basic kind of love, essentially very similar to that which exists between a mother and her infant. Balint (1979) defines this kind of relationship as “primary love”. He describes this love as a *harmonious interpenetrating mix-up*, a harmonious blend of non-verbal communication that does not need interpretation, but merely to exist. Primary love itself has the power to heal. It is a love that is essentially comprised of instinctual aspects, dependency and narcissistic needs, the earliest object relations, the body and soul.

Primary love is the basis of our relationship with animals - it is love that has intimacy and closeness, a great degree of physical contact, and responsiveness to narcissistic and mutual dependency needs. This love is simple and straightforward; it integrates body and soul and does not need words. It fits the definition of Balint: “The aim of all human striving is to establish — or, probably, re-establish — an all-embracing

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"Take Me Under your Wing, Be my Mother, my Sister": Love in Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy

In Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy we consider an array of relationships within a complex framework. This includes the relationships between the therapist and client, the client and the animals, and the therapist and the animals. In this array of connections, is there always love? Sadly, this is not necessarily so. In psychotherapy we often meet with clients whose early attachments were negative and offensive, who reenact within therapy their injured object relations. In most of these cases, there will be no love in one or more of these therapeutic dyadic relationships. The simple love, formed between the client and the animals, and lacking the complexity that typifies human love, may help the therapist in cases where she finds it difficult to develop loving feelings for the client. This bond allows the therapist to bond with the less accessible parts of the client and love him/her.

Case study - conducted by Inbar Barel

“May your lap be a shelter for my head”

This case demonstrates how the presence of loving relationship in client – animal dyad allowed for the formation of love in therapist-client dyad.

David (a pseudonym) aged 10, began to receive animal-assisted psychotherapy in the boarding school for at-risk children where he resided. David was the only one of four siblings removed from home to go to boarding school. His removal was not by court

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David is a chubby boy with a generally unkempt and inappropriate appearance. He would wear clothes that were not fit for him nor were they appropriate for the season. For example, David would come to the sessions in the winter wearing sandals, a long-sleeved shirt and dirty shorts, with his hair disheveled and oily. He usually would arrive with a runny nose and a strong body odor, from sweat and sometimes even the smell of feces (among other things, he suffered from encopresis, a condition in which children, past the age of toilet training, soil their underwear with stool due to psychological difficulties). David was rejected by his own family, both figuratively and literally, as well as by the other children in the boarding school. The children called him various derogatory nicknames (such as "Shrek") and were not willing to be in the same room with him. David was given to violent outbursts and a host of other problems of self-control and behavior.

David began psychological treatment at the clinic of the boarding school the first year he attended. However, these sessions stopped after only a few meetings, due to his strong opposition to therapy. David started Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy with me in his second year. These therapy sessions included Romi, a female Golden Retriever, Lucky, a black cat – originally a stray, and Bali, a cockatiel. In our first session, I was very discouraged by David's obvious reluctance to cooperate and the way he blocked my attempts to get to know him. It was difficult for me to bear both the odor from his lack of hygiene, and the way he looked, for he made no attempt whatsoever to wipe his runny nose.

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Psychologically, I could explain to myself how David reenacted the rejection he had experienced in the past again and again. It was clear to me that his self-negligence was a part of this reenactment, thus he could unconsciously explain to himself the fact that he had been rejected and thus protect himself from much greater emotional pain.

I asked myself how could I possibly help this boy when I felt such revulsion towards him. I found myself angry at him that he couldn't even be bothered to wipe his nose, or that he behaved his crude, inappropriate behavior. He did not show the slightest interest in even learning my name, nor did he relate to me in any way. I was merely an object to be disregarded, that would of course abandon him, and with whom he should be wary of connecting.

With the animals in the room, however, it was a completely different story. David was elated to have them near him, and in a way that surprised me, he called Romi to come to him and when she wagged her tail, he petted her warmly and very gently. David was another person with her altogether. The same thing happened with Lucky the black cat as he lifted him up and held him. Lucky immediately gave in, cuddled, happily purring on his lap. David was obviously pleased to have him curled up in his lap and enjoyed his touch. Observing the two of them, I thought they seemed like a gentle mother holding and hugging her deprived baby, as if fulfilling the pray: “May your lap be a shelter for my head”. Romi remained at his side throughout the session, resting her head on his knees every so often. David and I sat there quietly for a few minutes, and he seemed to be completely oblivious to my presence in the room. After some time had passed, he looked at me in disbelief and asked me, “Do they act this way with everyone?” Later, he even commented, “I think they really love me.”

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I was amazed how quickly my own feelings of disgust and revulsion, which had been so strong only half an hour earlier, dramatically subsided. I felt my heart melt for this child. I suddenly realized I was beginning to really see him above and beyond his runny nose and self-neglect. For example, I observed that he has very beautiful eyes, something I had not noticed before. With these new empathic feelings towards him, I was much more motivated to establish close bonds with him and to help him.

Picking up a box of Kleenex, I handed it to David to wipe his nose – he consented, and blew his nose without objecting.

An immediate bond was forged when the dog and cat were in the room, something magical, very similar to what Balint had described. I observed between David and the therapy animals a mutual interplay of devotion, give-and-take, something non-verbal and harmonious, that didn't require any interpretation, but simply existed. Through this experience, I was capable of seeing the boy in a different, much more positive light that shattered the walls of rejection he had built between us. I felt that I was starting to love him and that there was hope that I could work with him. A sign of her love for her child is a mother's ability to change soiled diapers, and to handle the infant's excrement without revulsion. In the same way, David's runny nose did not disgust or repulse me as it did earlier (and, of course, at no moment did it repulse or disgust my animals).

Eshel (2009) emphasizes that the therapist's presence in the process undergone by the client, together with the therapist's ability to give through her presence, is of utmost importance. The presence of the therapist together with the animals in the

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A clinical perspective on the unique therapeutic bond between animals and humans in a therapeutic setting create a shared and unique being which enables giving and participation in the client's inner world.

In David's case, such a sense of being would not have occurred had the animals been absent from the room, in other words, if only the therapist and client had met alone. This connection, this genuine intimacy that was created in these sessions also established the necessary platform for the development of love.

Therapy with David continued for approximately four years. It was fascinating to see the meaningful process of change occur; along with the relationship we created. He often tested my love and caring for him with periods of noncompliance. Nevertheless, I never gave up on him. David would often force me to begin our sessions outside by hiding somewhere on campus. Romi (the dog) and I would be searching for him, an experience he seemed to enjoy. This game of hide-and-seek, the act of someone who cared enough to go out looking for him and finding him was extremely powerful even before entering into the therapy room. He told me that he once played hide-and-seek with his peers and spent hours in a closet where he had fallen asleep because none of his classmates, it seems, really tried to find him.

David's last session was an emotional farewell from Romi, whom he hugged a long time and kept repeating the words, "I'll miss you, I'll miss you". It seemed as if he were indirectly relaying to me the same message, so as not to feel threatened by admitting his feelings of attachment towards me. Symbolically, his embrace to Romi was a way of hugging me and saying goodbye, even if he didn't actually touch me and couldn't show me the same affection as he did towards the dog.

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“May your Lap be a Shelter for my Head, A Nest for my Desolate Prayers”

It is obvious that the therapy animals have had a critical role in the work with David. His ability to love them (and their ability to love him) enabled the therapist to love him in such a critical stage of the building of a connection and the establishment of the therapeutic alliance between them. This aspect may also illustrate the role of animals in the processes of transference and countertransference which occur in the therapeutic process. In AAP, these processes exist between all three subjects (therapist, client, animal) and not only between the therapist and the client. In the present example, it is likely that part of the feelings of rejection felt by the therapist represented the rejection which David sensed towards himself. When he experienced love towards the dog, the therapist was able to connect to this love through countertransference, and start feeling love towards him.

One can see within this case example that if we create a therapeutic space that is safe enough for “primary love”, this potential space can contain within it all the psychological processes necessary for the therapy process, both those of the client and of the therapist. Clients who were neglected, abused, or otherwise injured in their primary relationships will usually convey insecure attachment patterns within the therapeutic relationship. In these cases, both they and the therapist might find it difficult to develop healthy primary love. The ability of the therapist to carry and contain the injured love of the client is of crucial importance in therapy. The client’s love may appear in various ways, some of which are camouflaged and distorted. The “injured” client finds it very difficult to express love to the human therapist. However in a relationship with

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It sometimes occurs that the client’s emotional injury does not allow him neither to love nor to be loved. The goal of therapy in this case is to create the opportunity for the client to build new object relations that are different from those he had previously internalized. These new object relations will be based upon intimacy, closeness, caring and trust, from which may grow the ability to love (self and others) and to be loved (be self and by others). The next case description illustrates this point and how animals in the therapy setting, serving as both objects and subjects, as both self and other, may create fertile ground from which love may grow, in a place where humans failed.

A therapeutic Session – conducted by Sarit Lev-Bendov

“Now I have nothing in the world, nothing at all.”

Maya sits crumpled in the chair. The large sweatshirt almost conceals her entire body, but I succeed in seeing that she is angry yet again.

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I've been seeing Maya for a few months. She is a beautiful 15-year-old girl who was born to young parents immediately after the death her older 5-year-old brother who passed away from a severe genetic illness. Her mother, who had hoped to find in Maya compensation and solace, did not bond with the new baby and their relations were characterized from the very beginning and till now by disappointment, anger, and emotional distance.

In every session we had so far, Maya was angry – angry and full of hate. She hates me, my therapy dog Boris (a golden retriever mix), my clinic, the fact that she comes to therapy, and herself – mainly herself. All of my efforts to reach out to her, and Boris's efforts as well, encounter blunt and straightforward aggression. I find myself shifting between great difficulty being with her in the same room, and being emphatic, acknowledging her hate, understanding and containing it.

Boris is finding it harder than me... He bounds over to her as usual, his whole body wagging together with his tail, as if saying “I'm so happy to see you” and “I really need to be patted, will you pat me today?.” Maya shrinks away. “Move” she mumbles angrily. “Nudnik, what do you want from me?!” She turns to me saying, “Move him. Don't you understand that I don't want him to get near me?!!” “I understand,” I tell her. Afterwards, I say, “But it's hard for me.” “For you??!!” She asks, “What's hard for you?!?” “It's hard for me to see you so alone and finding it so hard to accept love. And it's hard for me also to see Boris in exactly the same state – finding it hard to get the love that he so desperately needs.” Maya is silent.

“Love,” she mumbles in contempt. “Yuck.....”

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I feel how my heart shrivels. I feel so dejected and desperate. How can I get to her? How can I peel away these defenses? Why doesn't she let me get close to her? Touch her soul? Will I ever be able to be for her the good enough mother that she so much needs? How is it that there is so much potential for love in the room – mine, Boris's – and Maya does not know how to accept it?

Boris gives up and approaches me. Thank goodness. I need him. I pat him, press my fingers into his fur and “nurse” from him some connection, touch and softness. Boris leans in to me and I, without noticing, reach for his box of treats and give him a treat. I lift my head and see Maya looking at us. “What do you love about him?” she asks me and I suddenly meet a pair of talking, communicating eyes. I feel like this was a beginning, as if Maya now gave herself permission to experience something from within my experience with Boris. It felt right, not cynical, not aggressive, like a beginning “He's good,” I tell her, “He loves me.” Maya shrinks and starts to cry – “Not even my mother loves me”

”On a merciful twilight hour, Lean down and I will reveal the secret of my sorrows”

Maya's life and relationship with her mother began with harsh feelings of frustration, disappointment and even hate. It makes sense then, that the therapeutic relationship would begin with the same feelings. According to Winnicott (1949) these harsh feelings are natural and legitimate, part of the parental experience, although they are not completely acceptable socially. The normatively healthy parent should be able to contain these stormy feelings, work through them, and manage to grow through them

“Take me under your wing” - Love in Animal Assisted Psychotherapy:

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This case description also illustrates the strength and power inherent in that AAP is actually triadic therapy (and not dyadic – therapist and client). This triad enables the client to experience from an observant position, how love is born and continues to exist. An observant position lowers the threat and anxiety associated with an emotional involvement, and thus facilitates change. This unique therapeutic triad may provide the therapist with critical diagnostic information concerning the client’s attachment style and object relations.

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This is one of the aspects unique to AAP. Aharoni (2007), Cohen (2006) and Glucksman (2010) write about the power of the human connection to benefit and even heal. However in places in which the human connection has caused harm, when primary and internalized object relations are the source of the injury and pain (“secret of my sorrows ...”) it is the contact with animals which offers a path to the client’s internal world and beneficial life strength. The connection with animals succeeds in paving the way to emotional areas in which there is death, loss and emptiness, and turns them into life.

In Maya’s case, the basic attachment to the “significant other” was the source of suffering and rejection. Maya’s change and growth will begin if in therapy she will be able to experience new, healthy, accepting and loving attachment connections. It is not simple to create this new attachment in therapy. A great many characteristics of attachment (as defined by Bowlby), especially behavioral ones, may appear in the therapeutic process only in a symbolic way (touch, nourishment, modeling of connection). The great advantage of AAP as it was shown here, with the help of Boris the dog, is the ability to use these characteristics in an actual and concrete way, and thus create fertile approachable ground for the growth of reparative relations built on primary love.

Both case studies presented in this chapter represent an AAP process in which the animal is owned by the therapist. Not in all AAP practice this is the case, as some therapists work with animals they do not own, or such as therapists who work in institutes where the animals belong to the institute. The issue of the ownership of the therapeutic animal encompasses great complexity, which influences, among other

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A clinical perspective on the unique therapeutic bond between animals and humans things, the love of the client towards the therapeutic animal and the bond between the therapist and the client. Therefore, when discussing love in AAP, it is important to distinguish between therapeutic procedures where the therapy animal is not privately owned by the therapist and those in which the therapist does privately own them. In the first case, the therapist brings with him his general love to animals, whereas in the second case, the ownership of the animal brings with it a kind of love that is related to relationships, closeness, and intimacy. This type of love, in many ways, makes the therapeutic encounter much more subjective, and at the same time it puts the therapist in a much less neutral position. A therapist who is assisted by her own animals exposes many aspects of herself and her life, concretely and symbolically. For example, this therapist will depict information on some personal choices, her attachment style, the way she touches and express feelings, and much more. It is important to state that each of these working methods (with your own animals or not), might have advantages and disadvantages, and there is a need to examine their influences and consequences on every individual client. One more important issue arising from this case is the roles the therapy animal plays for the therapist. This case study illustrates how the therapist need for comfort, warmth and acceptance, in a critical point of the therapeutic process were answered by the dog.

To sum things up: In the professional literature studying psychotherapy, from different angles, most therapy deals with emotional distress and hardship. In this chapter we chose to focus on love. We attended to the role and meaning of love in psychotherapy in general, we examined the characteristics of love between man and animal, and focused on the unique love that exists in Animal Assisted Psychotherapy.

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This exceptional kind of love, typical of AAP, is conveyed through various avenues through the diverse dyads:

- The love existing between the therapist and the animals she is assisted by: Many times, this love is the reason and motive by which individuals turn to this profession in the first place, and the means for some of their needs and wants during the therapeutic process.
- The love existing between the client and the therapy animals: Often, young clients are referred to AAP due to their love for animals and the role animals play in their life, outside of therapy.
- The love expressed by the animals, towards the therapist and the client: A non-judgmental, primal and simple love that in many cases has direct and physical “evidence”.

All the above create a unique infrastructure for the therapeutic alliance, a fruitful ground for a relationship based on love. And only when love exists, we believe, change will occur.

This chapter has been based on many years of clinical experience in the field of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy. Our experience, as well as the theoretical and methodological knowledge in the field, has taught us that the issue of love in AAP is complex, with various aspects and layers. In this chapter we have discussed some of these aspects, and others are still in need for theoretical and methodological examination. For example, issues that need more investigation are the subjectivity and neutrality of the therapist, the subject of the ownership of the therapy animal, and the role the animals provide for the therapists themselves. In addition, some new and

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significant questions arise from the subject matter: what happens when a client does not love animals? How does it affect the client, the animal, and the narcissistic needs and injuries of the therapist? Are there disadvantages for love in the therapeutic process, and what costs it might have? When does the feeling of love prohibit other significant feelings to appear (such as anger or hate)?

No doubt that in order for a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between animal, client, and therapist, there is a need for a more methodological and experimental enquiry.

We choose to finish this chapter with inspiring words by Winnicott (1987): "In the case of most babies the fact that they are wanted and loved by their mothers ... gives the setting in which each child can become an individual not only fulfilling his or her own destiny... but also happy to be able to identify with other people and with animals and things in the environment, and with society" (p. 88).

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