The history of animals used therapeutically dates back to the 9th century. Reports indicate that taking care of an animal as part of rehabilitation was utilized in Belgium to help persons with disabilities (Fine, 2008a). One of the earliest documented trials of investigating the benefits of incorporating animals into the therapeutic lives of the mentally ill occurred at the York Retreat in England (Fine, 2008a). The staff believed that having animals on the grounds enhanced patients’ morale and behavior. However, it wasn't until the early 1960s that child psychologist Boris Levinson became the leading disciple for utilizing animals in therapeutic settings. He made this discovery serendipitously when his dog Jingles was left with a particularly non-communicative child client. Levinson was very impressed that the child began engaging in a deep conversation and interacting with the friendly pup (Gonski, 1985; Mason & Hagan, 1999; Reichert, 1998). Consequently, Levinson began to utilize Jingles more often in his therapy with his clients.
Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI): Definition of Terms

Before going into the major purposes and applications of AAI, it seems logical that a definition of terms be given. Although AAI is considered a relatively new field, there have been numerous terms used to describe the phenomena of incorporating animals in working with humans (Fine & Beiler, 2008). For example, in a dissertation written by LaJoie (2003), she indicated that there were over twelve different terms in existence today to describe various animal assisted interventions. Terms such as “pet therapy”, “animal-facilitated counseling”, “pet-mediated therapy,” and “pet psychotherapy” have been commonly used interchangeably as descriptive terms. Nevertheless, the two most widely utilized terms are “animal assisted therapy” and “animal assisted activities”. Both of these alternatives could be classified under the rubric of animal assisted interventions.

The Delta Society’s Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Therapy (1996) defines animal assisted therapy (AAT) as an intervention with specified goals and objectives delivered by a health or human service professional with specialized expertise in using an animal as an integral part of treatment. For example, to help a client deal with issues of touch, a therapist may use the holding of a rabbit as a strategy to open a discussion with the child. Whether provided in a group or individual setting, Delta Society reports that AAT promotes improvement in physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning. However these findings are primarily based on anecdotal evidence rather than empirical findings (which is one of the major weaknesses presently confronting AAI).

In contrast, animal assisted activities (AAA) occur when specially trained
professionals, paraprofessionals or volunteers accompanied by animals interact with people in a variety of environments (Delta Society, 1996). In AAA, the same activity can be repeated for many different people or groups of people, the interventions are not part of a specific treatment plan and are not designed to address a specific emotional or medical condition, and detailed documentation does not occur. The familiar sight of volunteers taking their pets to visit patients at an assisted living facility meets the criteria for AAA. It is important to point out that there needs to be a clarification on what constitutes AAT, and how the recreational use of animals, although possibly therapeutic shouldn’t be viewed as therapy.

Many clinicians and laypersons interested in incorporating animals therapeutically definitely could benefit from consultation and support from animal behaviorists. Collaborating with behaviorists may help practitioners become more cognizant of best practice training techniques as well as understanding how to prepare a therapy animal for involvement.

**The Foundation of AAT: Understanding the Basic Tenets**

Fine (2005) has suggested that there are several basic tenets to consider when incorporating therapy dogs into therapeutic practice. For the AAI to be effective, the procedures need to be integrated into the therapeutic goals of the therapy. Fine (2006) developed a simple problem-solving template that therapists could use as they plan on applying AAT interventions with their various patients. The following three questions should be considered:

A: What benefits can AAT/AAI provide this client?

The clinician needs to consider the benefits animals will have in the therapy.
What benefits will the animals provide in the clinical intervention?

B: How can AAT strategies be incorporated within the planned intervention?

A clinician must begin to conceptualize the vast array of opportunities that the therapy animals can provide. A plan must be formulated so the outcome will not be purely serendipitous.

C: How will the therapist need to adapt his/her clinical approach to incorporate AAT?

Chandler (2005) also agrees that the therapist needs to integrate the goals of the therapy into the animal assisted intervention. She points out the therapist should design interventions to involve a therapy animal in ways that will move a client toward treatment goals. The decisions regarding if, when and how a therapy animal can or should be incorporated into therapy depends on: 1) the client’s desire for AAI along with the appropriateness of the client for AAI (which may be prohibited by such things as animal allergies, animal phobias, or client’s aggressive tendency); 2) the therapist’s creative methods to design AAI consistent with a client’s treatment plan; and 3) the therapy animal’s ability to perform activities that assist in moving a client in a direction consistent with treatment goals (Chandler, 2005).

**Animals as Social Lubricants**

Many believe that one of the most natural aspects of integrating animals into therapy, is their role in enhancing therapeutic alliance. O’Callaghan (2008) investigated the various animal assisted interventions incorporated by mental health professionals as part of their therapeutic regime and their intended
purposes. Results from her study found that the vast majority of mental health counselors reported using AAT to *build rapport in the therapeutic relationship*. They often did this by reflecting on the client’s relationship with the therapy animal, encouraging the client to interact with the therapy animal, and sharing information about the therapy animal. Arkow (1982) in an earlier publication suggested that the animal might act as a link in the conversation between the therapist and the client. He called this process a rippling effect. Others such as Corson and Corson (1980) describe this process as a social lubricant. It appears that the presence of the animal allows the client a sense of comfort, which then promotes rapport in the therapeutic relationship. Fine (2006) suggests that when relating to a therapist with an animal, people with difficulties sometimes find the animals the catalyst for discussion, which previously may have been blocked.

Parish-Plass (2008) suggests that AAT is based on the very strong emotional connection and evolving relationship between the therapist, client and animal. She points out that animal’s presence in the environment contributes to the perception of a safe environment. She also believes that the client’s perceptions that the therapist makes the therapy animal feel save, contributes to the client’s impression that s/he will feel safe as well. This perception agrees with the work of Kruger, Trachtenberg, and Serpell (2004) who also suggested that a therapist who conducts therapy with an animal being present may appear less threatening. A gentle animal helps a client view the therapist in a more endearing manner.

**B- The benefits of animals as an extension to a therapist: A method for rapport building**
Animals are known for the zealous greetings they provide to visiting clients they encounter. Levinson (1965), in a seminal article on the use of pets (in the treatment of children with behavior disorders), implies that bringing in the animal at the beginning of therapy assisted frequently in helping a reserved client overcome his/her anxiety about therapy. Many therapy dogs are more than willing to receive a client in a warm and affectionate manner.

C: A therapeutic benefit of animals in therapy: A catalyst for emotion

Fine and Beiler (2008) point out that for many clients, the mere presence of an animal in a therapeutic setting can stir emotions. Simply interacting with an animal in a therapeutic setting can lighten the mood and lead to smiling and laughter. Animals may also display emotions or actions that may not be professionally appropriate for therapists to display. For example, the animal might climb into a client’s lap or sit calmly while the client pets him. Holding or petting an animal may soothe clients and help them feel calm when exploring difficult emotions in treatment that might be overwhelming without this valuable therapeutic touch. Animals within therapeutic settings can also elicit a range of emotions from laughter to sorrow.

D: Animals as Teachers

Teaching animals and supporting their growth can also have therapeutic benefits for the clients. There have been many therapists that have used animals as part of therapy in a teaching manner. Arluke (2007) investigated five settings utilizing AAI while treating teens at risk. The major goal of all the programs was to give the youths an opportunity to act as mentors and teachers for animals that
needed their support. Although there has been limited empirical evidence supporting these programs, anecdotal comments and qualitative feedback seemed to suggest they helped the youth develop more appropriate pro-social skills. The paper also gives some good insight on how one should apply these practices so that there will be more generalization of the behaviors.

Conclusions and Directions for the Future

The field of animal assisted interventions continues to evolve. More attention continues to be given to these interventions as a plausible adjunct to treatment. Although glorified and sometimes misrepresented, it is apparent that animals can make a significant difference to the well-being of many persons, especially those in need.

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