

## **Abstract**

The client's experience of their relationship with a pet and the impact of this relationship in the psychotherapeutic encounter, has received little attention in psychotherapeutic theory and practice. The researcher hopes that this study might contribute to building the body of knowledge about the relational aspect of client- pet-relationships in integrative psychotherapy. This small-scale qualitative study has heuristically explored four client's experiences of the relationship with their pets and aimed to identify the specific qualities of this relationship. To facilitate the exploration of participant's personal experiences the researcher used recorded, transcribed and analysed semi-structured interviews which focused on the lived experience of the client-pet relationship. From this data three emerging themes were identified and analysed. The findings indicated that clients and their pets can build relationships with a strong attachment which has similar implication to the sense of self as a human-human relationship. A pet can play a role in client's self-object functioning and offer opportunities for basic relational need gratifications. The author also considered the implications of the study for integrative psychotherapy practice and discussed limitations and suggestions for further research.