Addressing Implicit Bias: Healing Centered Animal Assisted Psychotherapy (HC-AAP) with Rats

Using Animal Assisted Therapy concepts and techniques, specifically rats, to aid access to therapy, facilitate healing, create safety, and dismantle negative implicit bias.

Nate Joslin, LMHC
Walden School, The Learning Center for the Deaf
Framingham, MA
What is AAT/AAP?
And how does it fit in the larger field of Human Animal Interaction?
Based on definitions from the International Association of Human Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO) White Paper, created in 2014 and updated in 2018.

An organizational Chart of Where Animal Assisted Psychotherapy (AAP) fits into the larger field of Human Animal Interaction (HAI)

- **HAI**
  - Human Animal Interaction
  - **AAI**
    - Animal Assisted Interaction
      - **AAT**
        - Animal Assisted Therapy
          - **AAP**
            - Animal Assisted Psychotherapy
            - **HC-AAP**
              - Healing Centered AAP
      - **AAE**
        - Animal Assisted Education
      - **AAA**
        - Animal Assisted Activity
          - **Therapy Animal**
          - **Emotional Support Animal**
AAT
Animal Assisted Therapy

AAP
Animal Assisted Psychotherapy

AAC
Animal Assisted Coaching/Counseling

HC-AAP
Healing Centered AAP
What is HC-AAP?

- Relational Safety
- Parallel Work
- Co-regulation
- Sense of Agency
- Embodiment work
Dougie and Stevie AAT dogs of Walden School
Relational Safety

- The presence of the animal makes the strange setting and presence of a stranger less threatening

(Sacks 2008)
Relational Safety

- Talking to the Animal
  - Instead of therapist or staff
- Safe and appropriate touch
Parallel Work

- Talking about the Animals thoughts and feelings that are really our own
- Showing the Animal
  - Coping skills
  - Good Behavior
- Helping the Animal
  - To not be scared
  - To eat correctly
Parallel Work (cont.)

- Rat does > you do
  - ILS skills
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Nutrition
  - Personal boundaries
  - Basic needs being met
- Externalization/Narrative work
Example:

Grief and Loss

- Low stakes grief
  - Skill building
- Completed attachment
  - Model of healthy relationships
- Healthy processing
  - Support
Grief and Loss
Left: Dougie and Cora play. Right: Kaa the snake in Therapy
Co-regulation

- Ties into relational safety
- Learns to regulate while therapist labels the interaction
  - Playing in the grass
    - Up-regulate
  - Sitting calmly
    - Down-regulate

(Warner, Wescott, and Cook 2020)
null
Sense of Agency

Taking fragmented pieces of self to create a comprehensive sense of self

- Empathy
- Responsibility
- Purpose
- Goal Setting

Example:
Left: Cora (AAT dog) sits with student. Right: Dougie in the SMART room.
Embodyiment Work

- Caring for the animal
- Pressure or sensory input from the animal
  - Dog lies on student
  - Rat claws on skin
  - Cat purrs in lap

Example:

Student Lead. Safety is Paramount
Dysregulation

- Student becomes protector
- Surprise redirects/connects brain to body
Dysregulation

- Depends on the student
  - Does the Student like?
  - Do they have a rapport?
- Depends on the rat
  - Is the rat a calming rat?
- Is the situation safe enough
- How to I introduce the rat?
Ethics

- Start with a good match
  - Physical Health screening
  - Behavior evaluation
- Ongoing monitoring of stress correlated behaviors
  - Managing stress
    - The handler
    - The Environment
    - The Participant
    - The Intervention

(Ng, Albright, Fine, and Peralta 2019)
### Table 8.2: MacNamara Animal Capability Assessment Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsiveness: Speed With Which Animal Transitions From One State to Another as Well as Presence or Absence of Transitional Behaviors</th>
<th>Ideal Animal Profile</th>
<th>Test Animal Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Reactivity: degree of reactivity, high or low (high degree of reactivity means animal ramps up quickly within a certain behavior)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Flexibility: degree to which animal is flexible or stereotypic (responding to all stimuli with the same behaviors); regulation of response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Behavioral cues: animal displays overt or subtle cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capacity: Degree to Which Animal Interacts With Environment**

| D. Recovery: degree to which animal copes with and recovers from stimulation (tactile, olfactory, auditory, and visual) |  |  |
| E. Affiliation: degree to which animal spontaneously seeks interaction with strangers |  |  |
| F. Behavioral repertoire: diversity of behaviors used by animal to respond to stimuli |  |  |
| G. Explicit communication: degree to which animal displays behaviors that client population recognizes as communication |  |  |

**Skills: Trained Behaviors Relevant to Intervention Aims**

| H. Verbal response: response to verbal commands |  |  |
| I. Gestural response: response to gestural commands |  |  |
| J. Novelty response: response to new environments, activities, or tasks |  |  |
| K. Equipment acceptance: degree to which animal manages variety of training or performance equipment |  |  |
| L. Cue interpretation: degree to which animal understands stranger's attempts at familiar cues or commands |  |  |
| M. Attentional response: degree to which animal uses observable behavioral cues such as eye contact and eye, head, and body orientation to respond to clients |  |  |

**Attributes: Physical Characteristics Contributing to Delivery Approach**

| N. Species/breed type: degree to which animal may be associated with cultural, ethnic, or racial experiences |  |  |
| O. Appearance: coat color, texture, markings, etc. (plumage or scale color) |  |  |
| P. Size: in relation to client and client experience |  |  |
| Q. Vocalizations: loudness, tone, frequency, predictability |  |  |
Ethics (cont.)

YAYABA

“You are your animal’s best advocate”
(petpartners.org)

“A successful AAI is one in which mutuality is present, and when the human benefits from contact with a non-stressed animal.”
(Ng, Albright, Fine, and Peralta 2019)
Why Rats?
#COVIDmood
Why Rats?

Originally for conversation starter on implicit bias

~ But ~

They are a good fit for AAT/AAP
Implicit Bias

- What is Implicit Bias?
- What is Stigma?
- Comparing Rats stigma to Walden School students stigma
- Can you learn to love the rat?
Implicit Bias

n: a bias or prejudice that is present but not consciously held or recognized

Stigma

n: a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person
Residential Student or Rat? (actual quotes)

“I was traumatized previously” Rat

“I will just not go to that area [where they are]” Rat

“Not so bad [now that I met him]” Rat

“Oh, they’re so calm, I’m surprised” Resi Student

“I can’t have him in my classroom” Resi Student

“If he goes in my office I will quit!” Rat

“I’m surprised you can tolerate working with him” Resi Student

“I would like them to not be in the group photo” Resi Student
Who has implicit Bias?

The Pew Research Center conducted a study with single-race white, Black and Asian individuals, as well as biracial white/Asian and white/Black individuals. The study found that about 3/4th of respondents demonstrated implicit racial bias.

(Pew Research Center 2015)
Common myths about Rats and Common misconceptions about residential students:

- Rats are dirty and carry disease
- Rats make bad pets
- Rats have small brains
- Residential settings are dirty
- Those are the “bad” kids
- Kids in residential setting are less intelligent
Can you learn to love the Rat?

- Becoming aware of your own bias
- Helping staff with frustration surrounding student behavior
- Students accept the rat translates to self love
Can you learn to love the Rat?

- Rat’s tail as adaptation
- Students behavior as adaptation
- Accepting them as they are

Sarah’s Story:
R.A.T.

Animal Assisted Therapy
Handling small animals

- Confidence
- Firmness
- Proper approach
- Trust goes both ways
Josephine's Rattery & Rescue  a not-for-profit charity
We will be only a part of your life. You will be our WHOLE life.

- https://josiesrattery.com/
- (516) 510-3728
Rat Ownership

YES, THAT'S A RAT ON MY SHOULDER.
ASK ME ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HAVE SUCH AN AWESOME PET!
The future of HC-AAP
The future of HC-AAP

- Full training course on HC-AAP
- Evidence based
Sources


Sources


Questions?

Nate Joslin, LMHC
Walden School, The Learning Center for the Deaf
Framingham, MA
NJoslin@TLCDeaf.org