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Correctional Education as Therapeutic Change: Exploring the Use of Animal-assisted Therapy Programs with Incarcerated Women

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ABSTRACT

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION AS THERAPEUTIC CHANGE: EXPLORING THE USE OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY PROGRAMS WITH INCARCERATED WOMEN

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Throughout history and in every culture and country, animals and humans have formed special bonds, often as pets. Well-trained pets have often been used in animal-assisted therapy (AAT) programs in hospitals and nursing homes to help patients cope with illnesses and recovery while away from home. Pet visits to these facilities have documented reductions in medications, stress, and loneliness when a simple wet nose reaches onto a patient's bed for attention.

A variety of animals have been incorporated into various facilities ranging from birds, fish tanks, and puppies and kittens to relieve the stress of residents. Most AAT programs now incorporate dogs to serve as assistants in opening doors, fetching shoes, or any combination of articles to help disabled family members in daily chores. Some therapy dogs are trained as assistants to alert parents before a child has an epileptic attack, avoiding harm to them.

The literature has documented how incorporating animals into prisons has helped to reduce tension, altercations, and medication usage among the inmates since the early 1900s. By incorporating AAT programs into male prisons with the usage of taming wild mustangs, the men learn animal skills in training and care of the horses. In turn, this transforms them into caring human beings by learning compassion for the animals that is extended to fellow prisoners. The

other positive benefit is the possibility of obtaining jobs in animal care when released from prison.

There is little research available on the use of AAT programs with women prisoners that might result in outcomes of learning patience, confidence, self-worth and self-esteem similar to their male counterparts. The purpose of this research was to explore how women prisoners perceived a transformation by working with the dogs in the AAT program while incarcerated.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION AS THERAPEUTIC CHANGE: EXPLORING THE USE
OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY PROGRAMS WITH INCARCERATED WOMEN

BY

TERRIE CIEZ
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Doctoral Director:
Kathryn Jaekel, Ph.D.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	9
Rationale and Significance of the Study	10
Definition of Terms	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Historical Overview of Correctional Education	14
Correctional Education and Recidivism	15
Women Prisoners	20
Animal-Assisted Therapy	24
Benefits of Animal Companionship	25
Pets as Helpers and Therapists	27
Animal-Assisted Therapy in Prisons	29
Prisoners as Trainers in Animal-Assisted Programs	33

Chapter	iv Page
Other Training Programs for Women	34
Transformational Learning Theory	37
Summary	39
3. METHODOLOGY	41
Research Site	42
Case Study	44
Participants	46
Data Collection	48
Data Analysis	49
Goodness and Trustworthiness	51
Challenges of the Study	51
Researcher Positionality	52
Summary	55
4. FINDINGS	57
Confidence, Patience, and Compassion	58
Self-Worth and Self-Esteem	63
Improved Relationships	65
Marketable Skills for Future Jobs	68
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	74
Discussion	75
Confidence, Patience, and Compassion	75

Chapter	Page
Self-Worth and Self-Esteem	78
Improved Relationships	80
Marketable Skills for Future Jobs	83
Recommendations	86
Future Research	89
Conclusion	90
REFERENCES	94
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRISONERS IN THE AAT PROGRAM	100

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. List of Participants in Case Study	47

PREFACE

Several years ago, my father was in a rehabilitation nursing home following a stroke after cardiac bypass surgery that left him paralyzed on his entire left side. Depression set in shortly after he realized he was in for a long recovery process that would be keeping him away from home. To cheer him up with our daily visits, I decided to bring my cat, Shadow, to visit him. Shadow had a personality that was kind, gentle, and affectionate with people, and she loved any attention that she received from all of the patients.

Shadow sat on my dad's bed and all he had to do was pet her, which appeared to help with his depression. Not only did Shadow improve my father's moods, she went from lap to lap with the other residents and also provided them with friendly comfort.

One day while taking classes for my master's program at Edward Hospital, I witnessed fifteen volunteers with their dogs in the hallway outside our classroom. The owners and their dogs had banners that stated pet therapy assistants and they were preparing to visit the patients in the hospital. Conversations with these volunteers revealed that Edward Hospital had an official training program for those interested in providing this comfort to hospitalized patients. I remembered my own personal experience with my cat's visits to my father in the nursing home and how it brought so much comfort to him and the other residents.

As my interests continued to grow in animal-assisted therapy, I was also faced with an ethnography project in one of my doctorate courses. I thought it would be exciting to research a

topic in animal-assisted therapy for my dissertation, so I contacted Ms. Patty Kaplan, program coordinator of the animal-assisted therapy/training program (AAT) at Edward Hospital. Ms. Kaplan allowed me to observe the 30-hour training program that all volunteers with their dogs must complete to be a part of the visiting dog team at Edward Hospital. During the training program, I had several conversations with the volunteers, dog trainers, and Patty to discuss how AAT programs could be incorporated into various institutions to improve the health of patients with various physical and mental diseases.

While reading several books on the history of AAT programs and the positive effects to the recipients and animal trainers, I found several research articles on the use of AAT programs with the prison population in the United States. A review of the research has emphasized that by incorporating animals into prisons as companion animals or to be trained for assisted living with elder or disabled community members, the prisoners involved in these programs learned how to demonstrate care and compassion to the animal as well as fellow inmates (Strimple, 2003). An added benefit with the AAT programs and inmates is that it reduced altercations among prisoners and security guards (Strimple, 2003).

Gennifer Furst, a criminology professor, had commented that homeless animals and prison inmates are often throw away populations discarded by a society that cares not what happens to them. Inmates and animals can help each other in a symbiotic relationship which can result in a win-win- situation, with not only the inmate and animal benefitting, but the larger community as well (Altschiller, 2011). The AAT benefits are now carrying beyond the inmates and animals to our veterans returning from serving overseas with post-traumatic stress disorders that lead to problems with addictions, unemployment, homelessness, and crime (Furst, 2015).

Inmates are training the dogs as therapy companion animals to help the veterans overcome their psychological problems without the use of drugs.

With my love of animals and the new experiences I encountered in seeing how dogs can help people to mend, I was excited to see how they could also help prisoners to mend through my early research on this subject. As I reviewed literature and articles that discussed the benefits of incorporating animals into male prisons, the benefits became obvious for the prisoner. While taking care of the dog and training it, the prisoner learned respect and kindness for the animal which in turn led to respect for their fellow prisoners and guards over time. The added benefit to these programs was possibly obtaining a job in animal care after being released from prison, thereby reducing recidivism. The one area I found missing in all my searches was the lack of or reporting on these AAT programs for women prisoners. This inspired me to search for possible prisons in the area that may have incorporated animal programs with women prisoners.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, the United States (US) population has increased by 7% and the prison population has grown by 19% (Trachtenberg, 2009). A review of the literature demonstrated that approximately 2.7 million individuals are housed in state and federal correctional facilities, with seven million to nine million cycling in and out of county and municipal jails within the United States (Browning, 2007). In 2014, these statistics increased with an estimated 6.8 million in adult correctional systems, with 70% under correctional supervision in the community or on parole or probation (Katsiyannis, Whitford, Zhang, & Gage, 2017). The US incarcerates more citizens than any other nation in the world, with 2.2 million as opposed to Russia with 1.6 million and China with 0.6 million (World Prison Brief, 2016). In 2001, states spent \$29.5 billion for adult correctional facilities, costing US taxpayers \$22,650 per prisoner each year (Jones, 2007). The cost of incarceration in the state of California is over \$45,000 per inmate annually (California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 2011).

At some point in time, 650,000 of those incarcerated will be returned to society and approximately 66% will be rearrested for serious or violent crimes within three years (Jones, 2007). Seventy percent of the incarcerated are high school dropouts and roughly half are illiterate (Jones, 2007). Prior to incarceration, the personal income of 63% of these individuals was less than \$1000 a month due to a lack of education (Wade, 2007). As such, those who have been incarcerated have little financial support and little education. This high rate of relapse into crime

demonstrates the need for change of behavior in the incarcerated by incorporating education and training programs while in prison. While much of the data reporting about individuals who are incarcerated include both men and women, some attention is paid to women who are and/or have been incarcerated. The Sentencing Project (2019) reports more than a 750% increased rate of women prisoners to men from 1980 to 2017. In 1980, there were 26,378 women incarcerated and by 2017, the total of incarcerated women rose to 226,060. This rate does not appear to be decreasing, but a positive impact on women's recidivism could be made by providing more educational opportunities to women in prison (Brock, 2017).

Currently, all correctional facilities are required to offer educational programs to help prisoners complete General Educational Development (GED) requirements, vocational programs, college courses, and/or associate or bachelor's degrees while incarcerated (Jancic, 1998). Research studies conducted at numerous correctional facilities demonstrated that those prisoners who complete one of these educational programs while in prison can be reintroduced into society with enhanced self-esteem and marketable employment skills. Participation in educational programs while in prison reduces poverty levels through employment opportunities upon release and adds a positive benefit of becoming a contributing member of society (Lanaghan, 1998). In turn, these skills have a positive effect on reduced recidivism when compared to prisoners who did not participate in corrective educational programs while in prison (Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Hull, Forrester, Brown, Jobe, & McCullen, 2000; Nuttall, Hollmen & Staley, 2003; Steurer & Smith, 2003;). Wilson's (1994) research has demonstrated a 0% recidivism in youth between the ages of 11-17 when they participated in a vocational training program while incarcerated.

Traditionally, correctional education programs have been instituted in prisons to rehabilitate the incarcerated with vocational skills and basic education needs. The role of correctional education can serve as a catalyst to change the inmate, which benefits the individual, the correctional facility, and society. Correctional education can relieve inmates' boredom during prison time, improve their understanding of society through the education or vocational training, lead to employment upon release, and reduce recidivism (Stevens & Ward, 1997).

The more educational opportunities an inmate has while in prison, the less likely they are to reoffend (Brock, 2017). Quality education is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention since inmates will develop a positive social identity that can be transferred to the community upon release. An additional benefit of education is that it provides the former inmate access to post-release services with their new positive relationship skills. The third benefit of correctional education is the positive impact on the former inmate, who now feels their life has value, which fosters high confidence levels and empowerment (Brock, 2017).

The Wyoming Department of Corrections reported a nationwide recidivism rate of 43.3% while the state's recidivism rate in their women's prison was 26%, in part due to the educational opportunities made available for their prisoners (The Sentencing Project, 2015). The state of Wyoming has the highest incarceration rate of women and girls of all states (The Sentencing Project, 2015). Many of these convictions are for crimes of status violations and technical violations (skipping school or running away from home) that would not be illegal for an adult.

According to Deaton (2005), research studies have indicated that to be truly effective, correctional education needs to transform the inmate to bring about a total change in their human and emotional needs and attitudes. Deaton (2005) wrote further that when addressing education in prisons, the basic human needs of the prisoners are rarely addressed. The author has also

suggested that one way of accomplishing basic human and emotional needs is through the introduction of animals and animal care.

The use of animals in prisons in the United States dates back to the 1900s when animals were first introduced to inmates. Incorporating animals in prisons gives inmates an opportunity to learn how to care for living things (Deaton, 2005). These caring skills provided opportunities for the inmate to learn respect, love, self-worth, and usefulness. Using animals in prisons can open up a new dimension by providing meaningful experiences that lead to healing and change. The AAT program can also help the incarcerated women by providing new goals that include the possibilities of working in animal-related job fields after release from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). Not only do these programs transform the lives of the animals, they can also transform prisoners by preparing them for a meaningful life upon release from prison (Deaton, 2005).

Incorporating animal-assisted therapy programs (AAT) in prisons allows inmates to learn self-esteem and self-worth, develop a marketable skill, and earn college credits (Strimple, 2003). Upon release from prison, some former inmates may receive jobs as assistant trainers in AAT programs or, with a few more courses, can become veterinary assistants. The AAT program in prison can provide incarcerated women with an opportunity to take additional correspondence courses while working with the animals to obtain licensure as dog trainers when released from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). As an added benefit, this program provides the disabled with trained dogs that would have been euthanized under different circumstances (Strimple, 2003).

Graham's (2000) research reported that the human needs of self-worth and respect among prisoners improves with AAT programs in prison. The AAT programs reduce violence among

inmates, need for medication, suicide rates, and illicit drug taking. Besides stress reduction benefits from working in the AAT program, the women can also improve their health with the daily dog training that in turn helps them to lose weight and control their diabetes and high blood pressure (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). Moreover, the community's perception of the prison also improves when these programs are instituted and community members can adopt the trained animals. The most important aspect of AAT programs is that the prisoners learn life-enhancing skills and have lower recidivism rates (Strimple, 2003). Reduced recidivism equates to a positive cost reduction in housing for prisoners in state and federal prisons.

Statement of the Problem

In the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the rate of incarceration of women as compared to men. Although more men are incarcerated than women, there has been a significant growth rate in the incarcerated women population from 1980 through 2017. There has been a 750% increased rate of incarcerated women to men prisoners from 1980 to 2017. In 1980, there were 26,378 women incarcerated and by 2017 the total of incarcerated women rose to 225,060 (The Sentencing Project, 2019). Even with the substantial increase in percent of incarcerated woman in recent years, most correctional education programs focus more on the male population than women. A positive impact on women's recidivism could be made by providing more educational opportunities to women in prison (Brock, 2017).

Review of the literature demonstrated many correctional facilities for women provide very limited vocational training for the incarcerated woman. Many facilities utilize outdated instructional techniques limited to cosmetology or clerical skills that are branded as women's

vocational skills. Women's vocational skills are often low paying and do not offer opportunities for advancement as compared to men's vocational skills. In addition, these programs are limited in addressing the woman's self-esteem or social support needed to re-establish fractured family lives (Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, & Phillips, 2005). Research has stated that the lack of support for the emotional needs of incarcerated women to successfully reintegrate into society often results in higher recidivism rates than for men (Tonkin, Dickie, Alemagno, & Grove, 2004). Women face more re-entry challenges than men when released from prison. Moreover, men typically return to a home and families and secure employment faster than women who are released from prison (Cobbina & Bender, 2012).

In contrast, women ex-prisoners are often faced with added pressures of gaining custody of their children, finding housing, and securing a job that pays a sufficient income to support herself and her children. Many of these obstacles make re-entry into society after prison life more challenging, with recidivism likely to occur (Cobbina & Bender, 2012). More programs need to be available to women before and after release from prison so they can undergo internal changes to have a successful transition into the free world.

A review of the literature indicates that correctional education for men, whether obtaining a GED, college credit, or a post-secondary degree, helps prisoners to change from their previous criminal behavior, build self-confidence and self-esteem, and obtain employment in greater numbers than those who have not participated in such education (Steurer & Smith, 2003). Research studies have demonstrated that when men prisoners participate in educational programs while in prison, employment upon release reduces future poverty levels and adds a positive benefit of becoming a contributing member of society. In turn, these skills have a positive effect

on reduced recidivism when compared to male prisoners who did not participate in correctional education programs while in prison (Jancic, 1998).

Gordon and Weldon (2003) emphasized that correctional education programs reduce recidivism rates from 6.71 % to 8.75% among male prisoners who participated in educational programs as opposed to 26% for those who did not participate in an educational program at Huttonsville Correctional Center. Steurer and Smith (2003) demonstrated that another benefit of correctional education was higher wages in participants. With higher wages, individuals can better support themselves, their families, and hold more sustainable jobs in the future. To date, very little information is available on the benefits of correctional education for women prisoners relating to recidivism and the type of employment opportunities and wages available upon release from prison.

Incorporating animal-assisted therapy programs (AAT) in prisons is another avenue to provide an educational opportunity for the prisoner to learn animal care along with human compassion while caring for and training the animal (Deaton, 2005). AAT programs not only provide the incarcerated with a vocational education, but these skills can lead to employment opportunities as animal care technicians upon release from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015).

More recent research studies have seen the benefits of having prisoners train dogs as companion animals for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As more veterans are returning home from months of serving overseas, there has been an increase in psychological issues affecting the veterans from anxiety, depression, substance abuse, physical health issues, aggression, risk-taking behavior, and even suicide (Furst, 2015). By having prisoners train dogs as companion animals for the returning veterans, this therapy puts both the inmate and veteran in

a win-win situation along with giving unwanted dogs a second chance at life, avoiding euthanasia (Furst, 2015).

Other benefits associated with dog training programs in prisons for juveniles and male adults are that the incarcerated develop a sense of self-worth leading to a reduction in suicidal depression (Arkow, 1987). When prisoners work with animals in training programs, the prisoners learn psychological skills such as empathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, and trust. A potential also exists for prisoners to develop a marketable vocational skill, leading to jobs as animal trainers upon release from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015; Strimple, 2003). Some prisoners may even earn early release from prison after completing the AAT program with a bonus: a job as an animal care technician in a veterinary facility (Strimple, 2003).

Initial research studies with AAT programs in prisons for the purpose of training dogs for the community have demonstrated that recidivism rates of the male prisoners were reduced to 13% compared to the national recidivism rate of 62.5% (Graham, 2000). AAT programs have been primarily instituted and studied with the male prison population, but little research exists with the women prison population.

Importantly, there has been little to no research studies with the women prison population and participation in AAT programs and recidivism after release from prison. While male prison populations have been studied, a few studies center on women, recidivism, and/or women prisons using AAT programs. As such, this study aims to add to the literature not just about AAT programs, but AAT program uses with women prisoners. Two communities were served by this study: vocational education for women inmates leading to employment upon release from prison, and training abandoned animals that might have been euthanized to be companion animals for the community members. These two aspects serve as a give-back process for the

community. This study will not address those women in alternative sentencing programs since AAT programs are not incorporated into those settings.

Purpose of the Study

Using qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 2002) and the theory of transformational learning, this study examined how incarcerated women enrolled in an AAT program perceived themselves and their futures after completing the dog-training program while in a maximum-security correctional facility in the southern suburbs of a large midwestern city. By conducting interviews with incarcerated women working in the AAT program, I gained insight on the participants' transformation through the skills and dispositions these participants identified as being a product of their participation in the AAT program. This educational change may serve as a catalyst to learn life-enhancing skills and develop a marketable vocational skill as animal trainers upon release, providing a second chance for the inmates to become productive members of society with a vocation and job (Wade, 2007).

Research Questions

Exploring the use of AAT programs with women prisoners and their perceptions and program outcomes, the following research questions guide this research project:

1. How do the women prisoners perceive their lives since participating in AAT programs while in prison?

2. What are the perceptions of women prisoners regarding what they learned as a result of their participation in the AAT program?

Rationale and Significance of Study

The women prison population is increasing faster than the male prison population with more educational and reintegration programs tailored towards the male prisoner (Pastore & Maguire, 2007). Most prison education programs do not meet the needs of the woman prisoner who is reintroduced with multiple and complex problems with limited vocational training (Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, & Phillips, 2005). Most incarcerated women enter the prison system undereducated, unskilled, unemployed, often with children, and a lack of a stable living environment (living with friends or in a shelter) prior to incarceration (Young & Mattucci, 2006). Marginalized educational programs, such as clerical job training for the incarcerated women, do not compete in salary or job status among their male counterparts when released from prison (Case et al., 2005). Incarcerated women need support to overcome economic marginalization, parenting issues, and employment discrimination, along with personal issues to obtain successful reintegration into society. Prior studies that examine women offenders demonstrate that the higher the amount of education obtained while incarcerated, the lower the recidivism rate upon release from prison (Skrobecki, 2014). Women offenders suffer more with a lack of self-worth or self-esteem in comparison to male offenders. Most women are incarcerated for crimes relating to drug use, forgery, or theft, which is mainly used to support their children or their own drug habits. In general, women offenders are less violent than men and less likely to be violent while incarcerated (Skrobecki, 2014).

The greatest concern for successful re-entry is building the woman's self-esteem and self-worth through educational opportunities while incarcerated (Skrobecki, 2014). As such, the primary goal of this research project is to come to know how women are offered or not offered support and opportunity using an AAT program. Using transformative learning as a conceptual framework, this study examines how an AAT program serves to change or not change incarcerated women. Because the primary goal of correctional education should be to serve as a catalyst to provide the inmates with educational opportunities to help decrease recidivism, it is critical to further examine this topic.

Definition of Terms

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): Animal-assisted therapy is also known as pet therapy, which incorporates trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients (Turner, 2006). Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Animal-assisted therapy is delivered and/or directed by health or human service providers working within the scope of their profession. Animal-assisted therapy is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, or cognitive function. Animal-assisted therapy is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. The process is documented and evaluated (American Veterinary Medical Association, n.d.).

Recidivism: Offenders who repeat their criminal behavior and are rearrested for the same crime or a new crime after release from prison; reversion of an individual to criminal behavior

after conviction of a prior offense, sentenced, and corrected (Rienert, 1991). Repetition of criminal behavior; habitual criminal. Inmates returning to state custody for a new conviction after having been released (Gonzalez, Romero, & Cerbana, 2007).

Incarceration: The act of placing in jail, subject to confinement, or jailing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Animal-assisted therapy programs (AAT) have been incorporated into various healthcare settings with dog visits to hospitalized patients to help people heal after injuries, surgeries, and to reduce pain medications. Trained dogs also aide with daily activities for the elderly or companionship and the ultimate outcome of decreasing animal euthanasia of unwanted pets. In recent years, AAT programs have also been incorporated into prisons to provide male prisoners with correctional education to train dogs and tame wild mustangs that in turn provide the prisoner with a trade in animal care for future employment upon release from prison. AAT programs also serve as a catalyst for the inmate to learn compassion towards animals which in turn may be conveyed onto mankind.

In 2007, United States prisons and jails held 2,299,116 inmates, which means 1% of all American adults were incarcerated (Trachtenberg, 2009). The Sentencing Project (2019) reports a 750% increased rate of women prisoners to men from 1980 to 2017. In 1980, there were 26,378 women incarcerated, and by 2017, the total of incarcerated women rose to 225,060.

Approximately 75% of men and women released from prison will commit another offense in three years (Hall & Killacky, 2008). This high rate of relapse into crime demonstrates the need for change of behavior of the incarcerated by incorporating education and training programs while in prison. Prior research studies have demonstrated that a lack of education can lead to poverty and high rates of crime; therefore, inmate education and vocational programs can rehabilitate the prisoner during incarceration. Rehabilitation of the inmates will produce positive

effects of employment upon release and development into a contributing member of society (Wade, 2007).

Historical Overview of Correctional Education

The use of correctional education for inmates actually dates back to 1789 in Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail. Prisoners at this facility received correctional education that ranged from basic literacy training and vocational training to college degrees (Gordon & Weldon, 2003). Gehring, the facilities warden at the time, proposed that humans are capable of progressing to higher levels of awareness, and their attitudes, ideas, and behavior can be corrected with education (Gordon & Weldon, 2003).

Correctional facilities offer various educational and training programs to help the prisoners to either complete their General Educational Development (GED) requirements, vocational programs, college courses, and associate or bachelor's degrees while incarcerated. Research studies conducted at numerous correctional facilities demonstrated that prisoners who complete one of these educational programs while in prison can be reintroduced into society with enhanced self-esteem and marketable employment skills. In turn, these skills also have a positive effect on reduced recidivism when compared to prisoners who did not participate in correctional educational programs while in prison (Jancic, 1998).

Correctional Education and Recidivism

The primary goal of correctional education for the incarcerated is to rehabilitate convicts into productive members of society and reduce recidivism by providing education/vocational programs that lead to employment upon release from prison. Additional benefits associated with correctional education for the prisoner as well as the prison staff are positive behavior changes in inmates that result in a reduction in fighting and suicide threats, fewer disciplinary problems, and improved cooperation with prison officials (Gonzalez et al., 2007). These positive changes also help prisoners learn life skills and help improve their communication skills among fellow inmates and prison officials while incarcerated.

Gordon and Weldon (2003) examined recidivism rates among prisoners who participated and those who did not participate in educational programs while incarcerated between 1999 and 2000 at Huttonsville Correctional Center. Prisoners who did not participate in an educational program while incarcerated had a recidivism rate of 26%, those who participated in a vocational program had recidivism rate of 8.75%, and those who completed their GED and a vocational program had a lower recidivism rate of 6.71% (Gordon & Weldon, 2003).

A study performed by the Texas State Department of Criminal Justice (TSDCJ) evaluated a sample of 14,411 inmates who were released from TSDCJ between March 1991 and December 1992. The records of the released prisoners were reviewed 14-36 months after release (Jancic, 1998). The study results demonstrated a direct relationship between the number of hours involved in an educational program and a lower percentage of reincarceration. Inmates who had accumulated 200 hours of academic and/or vocational training had a reduced recidivism rate as opposed to those who completed less hours of training or no training during their incarceration.

Another interesting conclusion from this study indicated that inmates with the lowest IQ and educational abilities who participated in the educational programs not only received the most benefits in learning, but they also demonstrated a lower recidivism rate than those who did not participate in any program (Jancic, 1998).

Steurer and Smith (2003) conducted a three-state study to compare the effects of correctional education on prisoners who participated and did not participate during their incarceration in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of correctional education on recidivism and post-release employment. The unique characteristics of this study reviewed the demographics of 3,170 inmates in the categories of age, city of incarceration, if the inmate had children and their ages, number of prior felonies, incarcerations, level of education before incarceration, and type of employment prior to arrest. The inmates were tracked for three years after release.

The main conclusions and key findings of this study demonstrated that participants in correctional education programs had a lower rate of rearrest (48%) compared to the nonparticipants (57%), a lower reconviction rate (27%) compared to nonparticipants (35%), and a lower reincarceration rate (21%) compared to nonparticipants (31%; Steurer & Smith, 2003). Also, this study demonstrated that participation in correctional education resulted in higher wages earned than nonparticipants. With higher wages, individuals can better support themselves and their families and hold more promise for sustainable jobs in the future.

A majority of the articles on correctional education deals with adult male offenders. Wilson (1994) researched incarcerated youth between the ages of 11-17 at the State of Colorado Division of Youth Services (SCDYS). The purpose of this study was to determine the recidivism

rates for youth who participated in vocational training and/or academic training as opposed to those who did not participate while incarcerated.

The SCDYS study was conducted from July 1, 1984, through June 30, 1985. A total of 459 males and 33 women were included, with information on demographics, age, ethnicity, number of incarcerations, and frequency of drug/alcohol usage. The results of this study demonstrated that the youth who participated in vocational programs had a significantly lower recidivism rate (27.1%) than those who did not participate (51.2%; Wilson, 1994). Another interesting finding revealed that youth who participated in the academic program had a higher recidivism rate as opposed to the youth who participated in the vocational programs (Wilson, 1994). These findings revealed that youth with vocational training had a better chance at obtaining employment after release than youth who took only academic classes and did not complete a GED or vocational program.

Over the last two decades since 1997, there has been a 47% decline in youth being sent to institutional programs for adjudicated offenses in the United States (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2015). Cusworth Walker and Bishop (2016) report that youths institutionalized for various crimes had a lower recidivism rate twelve months after release when structured skills acquisition programs combined with parent visits were incorporated into the process. Youths in this program were sampled from five secure facilities in Washington State, with a total of 637 youth participating, and followed for a period of twelve months post-release (Cusworth Walker & Bishop, 2016).

Stevens and Ward (1997) conducted a research study on recidivism rates with surveys that were sent out to ex-prisoners in eight states and 60 inmates from the North Carolina Department of Corrections (NCDC). Ex-inmates were tracked for a period of three years to

determine the recidivism rate of those who had obtained either an Associate of Arts or bachelor's degree while incarcerated.

North Carolina inmates who had earned a degree while in prison had a 5% recidivism rate as compared to the general population of prisoners, with 40% recidivism (Stevens & Ward, 1997). The conclusion of this study demonstrated that it is less expensive to educate inmates than the cost of reincarceration. The role of correctional education is to serve as a catalyst to change the inmate and the system. Correctional education will benefit the individual, system, and society. By relieving the inmate of boredom from prison time, inmates received an improved understanding of society through education or vocational training, leading to employment upon release and reduced recidivism (Stevens & Ward, 1997).

With respect to the other states involved in the Stevens and Ward survey, Ohio correctional facilities reported a positive relationship between post-secondary education, employment, and recidivism (Jancic, 1998). Not only did educational degrees reduce recidivism, they provided a 7% better opportunity for employment over those who only held a GED. The degreed inmates also demonstrated a 27% increase in employment opportunities over those who received no educational training while in prison. Recidivism rates were 11.6% with the degrees, 15.5% with only a GED, and 29% without any education while in prison (Jancic, 1998).

Alabama's correctional facilities reported that their two-year college program served seven correctional facilities with approximately 2,000 inmates enrolled in full time correctional education. The total prison population was 19,492 with a general recidivism at 35% compared to 1% recidivism for those who had completed post-secondary degrees (Stevens & Ward, 1997).

Stevens and Ward (1997) determined in another study with the New York correctional facilities that 24 colleges and universities provided educational opportunities to the incarcerated.

A total of 3,500 inmates participated in these programs. The recidivism rate of those who earned a degree/education was 26% as opposed to 45% of the general prison population. These statistics reiterate that receiving an educational degree or training while incarcerated positively reduces reincarceration rates of those prisoners after release from prison.

Burke and Vivian (2001) conducted a study at Hampden County Correctional Center in Ludlow, Massachusetts, to determine if inmates who participated in college courses had a lower recidivism rate as opposed to those who did not participate in any courses. The study was conducted on inmates who had taken at least one 3-credit-hour college course while in prison and served a sentence of at least three months. The inmates were released from prison between January 1, 1993, and October 1, 1993. Comparing demographics on the inmates did not change the statistics on the recidivism rates.

The final conclusion in the Hampden County Correctional Center study demonstrated that after five years post-release from prison, an inmate who participated in at least one college course while incarcerated was 21.9% less likely to recidivate after five years. The statistics were more impressive in the first three years, which demonstrated that two-thirds of the inmates without a college course had returned to prison while only one-third of the inmates with at least one course returned (Burke & Vivian, 2001).

Tewksbury and Stengel (2006) calculated that the annual cost to educate a prisoner is \$2,500, which is a smaller investment than \$25,000 to house an inmate. The California Department of Corrections estimated an annual cost of \$45,000 to house an inmate in 2011 (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). The minimal cost for education of a prisoner will lead to better employment possibilities upon release, fewer parole violations, and reduced recidivism, which results in a greater savings to society (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Besides a cost savings in

prison housing, other benefits to society included decreased welfare costs, lower property losses, salvaged family units, and reduced pain and suffering by those who would be victims of future crimes. When an ex-convict finds employment, they add to the increased tax base in society. Employment alone justified spending funds on correctional education because it returns millions of dollars in savings by reducing costs associated with prison housing and adds increased tax revenues with employment (Lanaghan, 1998). In addition, reduced recidivism is a means to reduce overcrowded prisons (Lanaghan, 1998).

Women Prisoners

Prior research studies have demonstrated that male prisoners who participate in correctional education while in prison have reduced recidivism as opposed to those prisoners who do not participate in any form of education while in prison (Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Hull, Forrester, Brown, Jobe, & McCullen, 2000; Nuttall, Hollmen & Staley, 2003; Steurer & Smith, 2003;). Most research studies have focused primarily on recidivism rates for prisoners within the male population. While women comprise only 11% of the total US prison population, their conviction rates are increasing faster than men's (Tonkin, Dickie, Alemagno & Grove, 2004; Young & Mattucci, 2006). One of the reasons for the increased rate of incarcerated women is due to alcohol and drug abuse, drug-related offenses which in the past were misdemeanors; however, these are now prosecuted as felonies (Prison Activist Resource Center, n.d.). With the growing population of women prisoners, correctional education has become a critical policy issue. Prison systems need to focus on the special needs of women that concern their health, educational deficits prior to conviction, emotional and physical illnesses, and high substance

abuse. Deficits in the “soft skills” of women such as reading, math, and interpersonal communications often have created barriers in employment skills upon release, leading to higher recidivism rates (Tonkin et al., 2004).

Research studies indicate that correctional education programs for women are mandated by state prisons, but few women participate in these programs while incarcerated (Rose, 2004). Reasons for lack of participation are due to fewer quality programs available and limited choices in various vocational fields as compared to programs available for their male counterparts (Rose, 2004). Women’s correctional educational programs are usually limited to gender-stereotyped roles such as cosmetology and clerical jobs. These programs use outdated instructional equipment and do not prepare women prisoners for the current labor market shortages (Case et al., 2005). With the limited educational programs offered to women, combined with poor-paying jobs post-release from prison, women inmates are less motivated to participate in these vocational opportunities.

Another setback occurred in educational programs for women with the elimination of Pell Grant funding in 1994 and the enactment of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1993. These actions eliminated funding for non-repayment federal educational grants for women prisoners, which further reduced the number of educational programs for women in prison (Rose, 2004). The Higher Education Act of 1998 denies educational benefits to those convicted of drug offenses (Ellis et al., 2008). Some states have even imposed a lifetime ban on welfare cash assistance for persons convicted of felony drug charges. This elimination of welfare assistance for women convicted of drug offenses is detrimental to their survival, especially those with young children, upon release from prison (Young & Mattucci, 2006).

Since 1990, there has been a 38% increase in the women prison population for drug offenses as compared to men, with a 17% increase for drug-related offenses (Harm & Phillips, 2001; Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). With these statistics, it is important to provide better educational opportunities for women prisoners while incarcerated because many women enter the correctional system poor, uneducated, with few employment skills or unemployed, and on public assistance at the time of incarceration (Rose, 2004).

Women who are released from prison with poor or antiquated training in menial careers such as cleaning and food services earn salaries substantially below their male counterparts (Young & Mattucci, 2006). Research has demonstrated that most women prisoners are single parents with children and the salaries associated with these below-average positions do not cover the expenses associated with housing, food, and clothing for their children, besides the transportation costs to get to these jobs (Case et al., 2005).

Besides the financial implications that women face when reintroduced into society after release from prison, unique social issues plague women unlike their male counterparts. Women need social support to assist in their emotional and psychological recovery to help mend reduced self-esteem, offer support with family care, and re-establish relationships with children (Case et al. 2005; Minton et al., 2015) Many women entering prison have been victimized by rape or childhood physical and sexual abuse, which presents a greater need for psychological counseling and support post-release from prison (Livers & Hiers, 2007).

In addition, women prisoners have unique medical needs compared to men that are not adequately addressed while in prison. Most prisons offer subpar health services with limited skilled physicians who do not address women's gynecologic needs, pregnancy issues, and birth control problems. Sometimes their healthcare needs are ignored or deemed trivial when they

complain to guards who may ignore their requests and not schedule their physician visits in a timely manner (Rose, 2004).

With the ultimate goal of correctional education programs to help women prisoners prepare for a job after release and reduce recidivism, these programs must provide other educational services to the woman inmate. Research studies have demonstrated that 65% to 75% of women prisoners are parents and/or the primary caregiver of minor children, and one child in 50 has an incarcerated parent (Gonzalez et al., 2007; Minton et al., 2015). Parental incarceration can have profound consequences on children with poor school performance and weakened family ties (Livers & Hiers, 2007). Parent education programs for women inmates help women learn parenting skills to become better parents to their children. These classes can help mothers strengthen the bond with their children and motivate the women to stay out of prison, thereby reducing recidivism (Gonzalez et al., 2007).

Case et al. (2005) reported that for successful reintegration of the woman prisoner back into society after release from prison, women need support with overcoming barriers in educational/vocational training, finding successful employment upon release, help with enrollment in community-based drug rehabilitation programs to avoid returning to drug use, and recovery from emotional and psychological scars before incarceration. Financial support is an important factor with transitional housing and transportation needs as well as welfare assistance to become self-sufficient. Each of these support issues for women are important to help reduce their recidivism rates, all factors unlike those faced by their male counterparts (Case et al., 2005).

Currently in Illinois, the Illinois Department of Corrections as of June 30, 2020, has tracked the recidivism rates of females released in 2015, 2016, and 2017 for a three-year period. The recidivism rates of those released in 2015 was 23.8%, 2016 was 24.8%, and 2017 was

22.4% (Illinois Department of Corrections, 2020). Although the female recidivism rate in 2017 was lower than the male rate of 43.0%, more options for educational programs in female prisons is needed to prepare women inmates for employment after release from prison (Illinois Department of Corrections, 2020).

Animal-Assisted Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) activities date back to ancient Rome and Greece when dogs were kept in temples to lick the wounds of the sick. This magical healing power was believed to possess a medicinal value when the sick were healed (Cusack & Smith, 1984). Fine (2000) reported that through time, animals became companions for patients in various therapeutic settings such as the York Retreat Psychiatric Facility in England in the 1700s. This study was one of the first documented cases where animals were used with mentally ill patients to promote socialization and animal companionship. Patients were allowed to roam freely in the courtyards and gardens with the animals, which awakened social and benevolent feelings. This interaction between the patients and animals reduced the need for restraints and harsh drugs, which were typical treatments for these patients (Fine, 2000).

Because psychiatric hospitals more extensively utilize the services of AAT programs, research has found AAT programs beneficial to patients in reducing anxiety and opening withdrawn patients to positively engage with counselors and staff (Walsh, 2009). By incorporating animals with inpatient and outpatient group therapy sessions, research has demonstrated that the presence of a dog in a counseling session with sexually abused girls facilitates more open responses. Walsh also stated about incorporating a dog in therapy sessions,

that the simple presence of a friendly animal can foster a calming effect and sense of security. Moreover, stroking or playing with the dog at the beginning of a session decreased tension in the patient and built trust between the therapist and the patient.

In the mid-1800s, Bethel Institute in Germany utilized animals to aid approximately 5,000 patients in their institution with epilepsy and other physical disabilities (Ormerod, 2005). Besides using animals as companions, Bethel included farm animals, a wild game park, and an equestrian program that was helpful for epileptic patients. Florence Nightingale wrote several passages in 1895 confirming the therapeutic benefits of small pets as companions for the sick with long chronic illnesses (Fine, 2000).

Rigorous scientific research has emerged within the last 30 years on the benefits of human/animal interactions. Ormerod (2005) noted that dogs were first introduced into nursing homes in 1981 to effectively reduce loneliness and depression in the residents. Cats, on the other hand, have successfully increased motivation in patients to respond positively to therapy sessions in nursing homes in 1979. These are just a few of the studies suggesting the human/animal bond has benefits to human health and well-being.

Benefits of Animal Companionship

Throughout history and in every culture, animals have formed bonds with humans documented as far back as A.D. 1000 (Tunajek, 2009). Cats were looked at as mousers and dogs as protectors. For many people, pets are more than companions; they are beloved family members that provide unconditional love, provide emotional support, and even help owners stay healthy (Tunajek, 2009). Research demonstrates that contact with animals can bring

psychological and physiological benefits that promote interactions among people around them. In turn, animals teach people of all ages about responsibility, loyalty, empathy, sharing, and unconditional acceptance. Interacting with animals has a therapeutic effect on the owners as well as patients they may encounter (Tunajek, 2009).

Research published in 2017 by Mother Nature Network reported that having a dog can lower cardiovascular disease. A study was conducted in Sweden with 3.4 million men and women between 40 and 80 years old (Healthy Lifestyle Arena, n.d.). A review of the health records of these individuals in the study for 12 years concluded that those who lived by themselves with a dog reduced their risk of death by 33% in general and 36% of a cardiovascular accident (Healthy Lifestyle Arena, n.d.). A dog also improves the physical health of its owners with daily walks, which in turn improves the social skills of owners being introduced to others in the neighborhood during their walks. Pets can also help the body fight various allergens such as hay fever, pollen, and asthma by exposing a new baby prior to six months of age to build up a stronger immunity.

Pets often have a role in the family by interconnecting members and acting as the “glue” bringing everyone together to increase cohesion (Walsh, 2009). Sometimes it is easier for people to talk to their dogs and confide in them rather than a spouse, which improves one’s mental health and reduces stress. Pets can also present opportunities among family members to set rules, establish boundaries, define responsibilities, and organize family life when caring for the pet like a human family member.

In the late 1800s, Florence Nightingale was an early advocate of the benefits of animal companionship, especially for the chronically ill. Researchers from around the world have demonstrated a direct correlation with pet ownership and improved health, which reduces stress

levels, prevents some illnesses as well as allergies, reduces blood pressure, shortens recovery times, and boosts fitness levels (Tunajek, 2009). Psychological benefits of pet ownership demonstrate that even brief interactions with a pet produces a pleasurable neurological stimulation that encourages relaxation and well-being (Tunajek, 2009). Petting an animal has a relaxing effect that releases muscle tension, lowers blood pressure, and slows heart and breathing rates. These effects did not vary based on race, sex, or type of pet ownership.

Pets as Helpers and Therapists

Pets not only provide emotional support to people, but they can also help disabled individuals with chores of daily life. Animal therapy is now being incorporated into hospital and institutional facilities to help children and adults overcome physical, emotional, and learning challenges. Service animals can provide necessary roles in fostering independence and allowing disabled individuals freedom from their disability, such as guide dogs for the blind and hearing dogs for the hearing impaired (Tunajek, 2009). These service dogs not only provide constant assistance for their owners, they also serve as loyal companions for emotional support.

Initial research studies in nursing homes and acute care settings have demonstrated benefits of animal-assisted therapy programs that reduce loneliness, stress, blood pressure, pain medication, and depression in the patients (Doyle & Kukowski, 1989). Doyle and Kukowski reported positive effects of reduced depression with terminally ill patients in a hospice program who received weekly visits with puppies. Puppy visits reduced the patients' anxiety of impending death by helping them verbalize their feelings of prior pet ownership and happy

moments (Doyle & Kukowski, 1989). These visits helped the patients verbalize more in the presence of a puppy, which helped ease their fears of their imminent future.

In a study conducted by Freidmann, Lynch, and Katcher in 1980, eighty-nine patients from the University of Maryland Hospital had suffered their first heart attacks and were tracked for a period of one year (Becker, 2002). Fifty of the patients had pets and 39 patients did not. At the end of one year, the group without pets had lost 11 patients as opposed to the group with pets, which only lost three. The patients without pets accounted for four times the number of deaths, although the sample was less than half the total number of patients (Becker, 2002). The pet owners also had shorter hospital stays and fewer doctor visits compared to the patients without pets. Pet owners also required less medication for high blood pressure and did not have trouble falling asleep at night. Animals are believed to reduce loneliness and isolation, brighten moods, and reduce depression. Additionally, companion animals help improve health, create sensory stimulation, provide emotional support, and create a feeling of independence (Renzi, 2005).

Edwards and Beck (2002) have reported that weight loss is a common problem with Alzheimer's patients due to poor nutrition or loss of appetite. The use of fish aquariums in a nursing home was studied with the nutritional intake of Alzheimer's patients over a 16-week period. The weights of 62 patients were monitored weekly, and at the end of the study, each patient gained an average of 1.65 lbs. A second positive outcome of the fish aquarium with the Alzheimer's patients was less pacing and a reduction in aggressive behaviors. An added benefit of this research study was the improvement in staff morale and job satisfaction.

In the past, service dogs have been successfully matched with individuals who have mobility impairments, where the help of a service dog allows a person to function independently

in daily activities (Rintala, Matamoros, & Seitz, 2008). The addition of a service dog for tasks associated with turning on lights, pulling wheelchairs, opening doors, and retrieving articles improves the patient's psychological function with thoughts of independence, higher self-esteem, contentment, and more assertiveness with less dependence on other individuals (Rintala et al., 2008). When a service dog is used in assisting individuals with hearing impairments, the service dog improves the patient's safety and social interactions in daily activities. In addition, loneliness, stress, and depression were almost eliminated with the addition of a service dog.

Animal-Assisted Therapy in Prisons

Early animal research studies mainly demonstrate the benefits of pet-facilitated therapy with the elderly and handicapped. Utilizing pets in prisons was unheard of years ago because society did not believe that inmates deserved the opportunity to appreciate, show concern or compassion, and above all, love other living beings (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). The most famous story on the positive successful use of animals in prisons occurred with Robert Stroud, who was better known as the "Birdman of Alcatraz" (Graham, 2000). Stroud, a violent man, was convicted of committing two murders and spent over 20 years in Leavenworth Prison from 1920 to 1942. During his imprisonment, Stroud kept and cared for injured birds and even wrote two books on the diseases associated with birds. Stroud's work with these birds had a profound effect on his character and has since served as the groundwork for future research with animals and prisoners (Graham, 2000).

Moneymaker and Strimple (1991) reported on earlier studies with male prisoners who were given small animals as pets. The prisoners were given the responsibility to ensure the pet's

health and care along with the requirements to attend weekly classes on animal care. Early use of pet-facilitated therapy (PFT) in prisons brought out the good qualities of the prisoners as capable of being mature, responsible, and independent. The early PFT research studies demonstrated positive benefits of behavioral modification in transforming violence-prone prisoners into compassionate, responsible, and caring individuals. Some prisoners even earned early release through PFT with a job as an animal care technician in a veterinary facility.

Moneymaker and Strimple (1991) demonstrated that when inmates are involved in PFT, there were fewer altercations and violations among prisoners and staff, making the prison conditions safer for all. In addition, a second benefit of PFT in prisons demonstrated that unwanted animals were now given a second chance at life that would have been destroyed under other circumstances.

Some of the earliest documented studies with pets as companion animals in prisons occurred in 1981 at Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Lima, Ohio (now known as Oakwood Forensic Center Prison; Arkow, 1987). Arkow (1987) reported that this facility was a long-term care institute where pets actually lived with the male prisoners in their cells. Initial set-up of the animal program had its failures with incorrect selection of animals ranging from a chimp with temper tantrums to turkeys that bit the prisoners during feeding. Through time, the animal selection process at the institute improved with the use of small birds.

Arkow's (1987) research reported that the facility in Lima conducted one of the first documented studies with prisons and pets. Two separate wards of male prisoners with equal numbers and status were compared. One ward of prisoners had pets living in the prisoners' cells while the other ward did not have pets. Final results revealed that by incorporating animals as pets with prisoners, there was a reduction in violent outbreaks among the inmates and also no

suicide attempts occurred with the prisoners with pets (Arkow, 1987). The group without the pets had eight suicide attempts during the study. Another remarkable finding concluded that the prisoners with the pets required only half of the amount of medications as opposed to the prisoners on the ward without the pets (Graham, 2000).

The Lima study also documented that hygiene for the pet stimulated an improvement in the prisoner's own hygiene. The pets acted as companions to the prisoners and in turn this served as a catalyst for the prisoner to build a sense of self-worth that ultimately reduced suicidal depression (Arkow, 1987).

Additional benefits of AAT programs allow prisoners to learn self-esteem and self-worth, develop a marketable skill, and earn college credits (Minton et al., 2015; Strimple, 2003). Upon release from prison, several inmates obtained jobs as assistant trainers in AAT programs and others had the opportunity to become veterinary assistants with a few additional college courses. Another added benefit of the AAT program is providing the disabled community with trained dogs that would have been euthanized under different circumstances (Strimple, 2003).

Ormerod (2005) examined the benefits of animal training programs with male prisoners and reported the following positive benefits for both the animals and humans: 1) animals improved relationships between prisoners and staff; 2) the self-esteem of the prisoners improved with becoming a caretaker; 3) possible future employment in animal organizations upon release from prison; 4) prisoners learned empathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, trust, and nurturing; and 5) animals can be trained for use as companions or service animals for the disabled (Graham, 2000). Hogle (2009) has reported that greyhound dogs used as entertainment in the racing industry now have a second chance at life to be trained as companion or service animals ending in a win-win situation for everyone. The compassion and training that the

inmates provide to these dogs helps ease the pain and suffering from cattle prod scars and fearfulness of people.

Graham (2000) reported that the human needs of prisoners improves with AAT programs by reducing violent outbreaks among themselves, medication, suicide attempts, and illicit drug use. The community's perception of the prison improved when these programs were instituted and community members adopted the trained animals. The most important aspect of AAT programs is that prisoners learned life-enhancing skills, and limited studies have demonstrated lower recidivism rates (Strimple, 2003). The reduced recidivism also equated to a reduction in housing costs in state and federal prisons when the ex-prisoners do not recidivate.

If not all, many animal training programs have been incorporated into adult male prisons. Project POOCH was a special program that was implemented at the Oregon Youth Authority's McLauren Juvenile Correctional Facility in 1993 (Strimple, 2003). Project POOCH matched unwanted dogs with incarcerated youths who provided obedience training to prepare them as adoptable pets for the community members. In turn, this program created improved behavior within the juveniles as well as respect for authority, leadership, and social skills (Strimple, 2003). Upon completion of the program, these juveniles demonstrated improvements in honesty, empathy, social growth, self-confidence, and pride of accomplishment. The most important point of this program was zero recidivism (Strimple, 2003).

More recent studies were conducted with AAT programs and the incarcerated through the Indiana Canine and Adolescent Network (ICAN) and several correctional facilities. ICAN demonstrated positive benefits in the prisoners, with the most significant in self-esteem through the accomplishment of training a dog and the attachment to the dog served as a companion during the process (Turner, 2007). As the prisoner's self-esteem increased, so did his/her social

skills, self-confidence, patience, and communication skills. These new skills reduced anger and aggression while prisoners derived pleasure from knowing their work was helping others and giving meaning and purpose to their lives. While incarcerated, the overall benefit to the prison was the positive impact on the prison environment that was free from aggression (Turner, 2007).

Prisoners as Trainers in Animal-Assisted Programs

AAT programs in prison provide the prisoner with skills in a new vocational trade, but most importantly, they teach life-enhancing skills (Strimple, 2003). Several prison programs have demonstrated these benefits ranging from correctional facilities for youth to adults. Juveniles housed at Charles Hickey School in Baltimore, Maryland, reported that the horse-training program provided a calming effect on the boys when working with the horses. This exposure with the horses taught the boys patience, understanding, and a kind hand, resulting in a strong bond with the horse. In turn, the juveniles received unconditional love from the animals that was missing from their home lives (Strimple, 2003).

An adult correctional facility in Lexington, Kentucky, reported that prisoners who participated in the horse-training program learned that horses demand respect for successful training to take place. This experience helped the prisoners learn respect for life through this interaction. Some prisoners had commented on how these encounters with the horse-training program made them feel important since the horses were dependent on them, a feeling they had never experienced before in their lives (Strimple, 2003).

Other documented benefits for prisoners who participated in a dog AAT program at Kit Carson Correctional Center in Burlington, Colorado, demonstrated a reduction in blood pressure,

asthma attacks, and anxiety in inmates who were given a dog to train (Osborne & Bair, 2003).

An additional benefit in another inmate was a reduction in anxiety medication two months after starting the AAT program. The inmate attributed this positive change to the calming effect produced by interacting with the dog. Other inmates also noted a reduction in hypertensive medications for similar reasons when working with the dogs (Osborne & Bair, 2003).

In summary, AAT programs in male prisons have provided an education for the inmates to learn a new trade that can provide possible employment in the animal care industry upon release, which results in reduced recidivism. These programs also improve the inmate's compassion toward animals which in turn is reflected towards their fellow mankind.

With limited research with the women prison population and participation in AAT programs, this study investigated the therapeutic effects on incarcerated women of working with animals and how these women may be transformed into caring and compassionate individuals. By incorporating AAT programs into women's prisons, this avenue not only provides a new educational opportunity for these women, but also provides a vocational education in animal care. Two communities were served by this study: vocational education for women inmates leading to a transformed, caring individual while training abandoned animals that might have been euthanized to be service or companion animals for the community members. These two aspects serve as a give-back process for the community.

Other Training Programs for Women

US correctional facilities are trying to provide new and better vocational training programs for incarcerated women rather than the previous gender-stereotyped and low-paying

professions when compared to male facilities. As the number of incarcerated women in prison increases, new programs must be developed for women to obtain marketable skills to allow them to support their children and overcome economic marginalization (Young & Mattucci, 2006). Trades in construction, plumbing, and restaurant hospitality are just a few of the new programs that not only add meaningful jobs and salaries but also help to reduce recidivism.

Several New York correctional facilities for women have partnered and implemented a plumbing maintenance program that is taught by experienced plumbers to prepare the women in basic plumbing skills for hospitals, schools, hotels, and apartment complexes. Upon program completion, the women are positioned to apply for admission to trade schools and apprenticeships (Young & Mattucci, 2006). The plumbing program teaches the women basic theories associated with plumbing maintenance and techniques along with hands-on demonstrations of fixtures, tools, videos and classroom instruction. Upon completion of the 36-hour training program, the women have an opportunity to apply to apprenticeships upon release from prison. Of the original 27 women who began in the pilot program and completed, only three women were reincarcerated after 6 to 24 months post-completion of the program. Besides learning how to install a toilet or fix a leaking faucet, the women also bonded together, working long hours to master skills and nurturing each other to finish the program (Young & Mattucci, 2006).

Washington Correctional Center for Women (WCCW) has recently instituted a training program called Trades-Related Apprentice Coaching (TRAC) to prepare women prisoners with skills in the construction trades, including carpentry, iron work, and cement masonry work. The prison has partnered with various unions not only to train the women but also provide them with “preferred entry” for union apprenticeships once they finish their prison terms, making \$25 to

\$26 per hour (Corley, 2018). This program also helps the women to pay their union dues and even rent starting out, since many women are single mothers needing benefits and a place to raise their children while working. In the past six years that the program has been in effect, the recidivism rates are 3 to 5 %, mainly due to technical work release violations (Corley, 2018). On the wall in the WCCW training room are the names of the women who successfully completed the program and have become apprentices and journeywomen after release from prison.

In 2003, the Arizona Department of Corrections for Women in Perryville was approached by more than 100 local restaurants in the Phoenix area to initiate a culinary program for their inmates to train the women in kitchen skills for kitchen jobs upon release from prison (Collins & Cothran, 2011). The pilot program partnered with several organizations such as Walmart and the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management to train the women prisoners first in safety and food sanitation along with classroom skills in food preparation to achieve a ServSafe certification. Thirty women participated in the pilot program and all received their certifications from ServSafe. One year after the 30 participants were released from prison, the recidivism rate was 7%, with two women violating their probation 30 days after release (Collins & Cothran, 2011). The employers of the two women who were re-arrested held their jobs for them until they were released and returned to work. One year later, all of the 30 participants were 100% clean without further reincarceration (Collins & Cothran, 2011).

A partnership was formed in 2005 with the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) between the Washington State Department of Corrections (WDOC) and Evergreen State College to bring science and nature into prisons (Trivett, Bush, Elliott, Mann, Pond, Tharp, Vanneste, Pacholke, & Leroy, 2016). This project was a collaboration between scientists, prisoners, staff, and students to help prisoners rebuild their lives by teaching them how to grow plants and raise

endangered animals to benefit the ecology of the planet. In turn, prisoners learned how to witness seeds being transformed into plants while caring for living organisms inside the prison fences. This gardening project provided training and education to the prisoners while growing food for the prison as well as food donations to community food banks. With the collaboration of the community colleges, prisoners also received college credit that can lead to a degree in horticulture. In turn, this program also provides a safe environment as therapeutic activities for the inmates with challenging work, reduced idleness, and decreased violence in the prison (Trivett et al., 2016). The SPP has grown very large over a period of 11 years, which now offers composting and gardening programs in 12 prisons in Washington (Trivett, et al., 2016). These collaborative SPP gardening programs have also spread to other states including Oregon, California, Maryland, Utah, and Ohio.

Transformational Learning Theory

This study used transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) as a theoretical framework to analyze women prisoners' experiences with AAT programs. Mezirow (1997) reported transformational learning as a process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults gather experience through a variety of exposures to feelings, values, and concepts that define their lives as a frame of reference. A frame of reference is those conditions that help adults understand their experiences and shape or reject expectations, perceptions, knowledge, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997).

The incarcerated population within the United States has increased at an alarming rate since 1980, with women prisoners increasing at a 50% rate faster than men (The Sentencing

Project, 2015). Correctional education in the prison systems is mandatory for all incarcerated persons, with the goal of providing the prisoners with new job skills when released from prison. Animal-assisted training programs when incorporated into prisons not only provide new job skills but may provide the frame of reference necessary for the incarcerated to learn new trades and carefully evaluate their experiences with animals, fellow inmates, and prison staff. Working with and training the dogs enables the prisoners to learn compassion for the animals, which in turn is then directed towards fellow inmates, prison staff, and mankind (Turner, 2007).

A key component in transformative learning is critical reflection. When confronted with a dilemma or problem, adults need to examine the origins, nature of the problem, and possible consequences (Mezirow, 1994). The incarcerated are faced with dilemmas every day in having to examine their convictions and what life changes are needed for successful release from prison and re-entry into civilization. Animal-assisted therapy programs can serve as a catalyst for the prisoner to critically reflect on their experience while training the dogs, which increases their responsibility for their actions and in turn increases their patience levels (Cooke & Farrington, 2016). Increased patience with the dogs leads to increased patience with the terms of their imprisonment and willingness to abide by the facility's rules and regulations. In turn, prisoners may be transformed into compassionate adults by first learning patience for an animal, which in turn can lead to a more cohesive relationship with their fellow prisoners, guards, and prison staff.

The adult learning process involves developing more reliable beliefs, exploring and validating their fidelity, and making informed decisions (Taylor, 2008). Women prisoners have to critically reflect on the training techniques required to successfully train the service dogs for the tasks required by their future companions. Often, the women learn how to collaborate with fellow prisoners and staff to make the dog successful in their tasks. These reflections can

transform the women to be responsible to the animals and in turn responsible adults towards fellow mankind. Upon release from prison, the women can begin to lead productive lives in society as transformed individuals who have learned to respect fellow humans and obtain possible employment opportunities in animal care to support their families.

Summary

This chapter offered both historical and current literature reviews of correctional education and an emphasis on the use of AAT programs in prisons with the incarcerated. Correctional education is a necessary component of all prisons which dates back to the late 1700's through today. Correctional education for prisoners serving time can help the incarcerated to progress to higher levels of awareness of attitudes, ideas, and behavior (Gordon & Weldon, 2003). By rehabilitating convicts through education, they can become productive members of society with new skills leading to potential jobs upon release from prison, thereby reducing recidivism (Gonzalez, et al., 2007).

Past correctional education programs mostly focused on the male prisoners. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported a 750% increase of women being incarcerated as compared to men between the years of 1980 to 2017 (The Sentencing Project, 2019). This has created a need to update and revamp correctional education programs for the woman prisoner (Case, et al., 2005).

By incorporating AAT programs into prisons, this serves as an educational opportunity for the prisoner to learn animal care along with human compassion while caring and training the animal which can lead to potential careers and employment in animal care upon release from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). With little research conducted on AAT programs and the

woman prisoner, this case study serves as an opportunity to research two communities: a vocational education for women prisoners leading to employment upon release from prison, and training abandoned animals that might have been euthanized as companion or therapy animals for the community members.

This chapter also provided a conceptual framework on transformational learning as a process of effecting change in a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). The incarcerated are faced with daily dilemmas in having to examine their convictions and need for life changes for successful release from prison. AAT programs can serve as a catalyst for the prisoner to reflect on their experiences while training the animals which increases their responsibility for their actions and in turn their patience levels (Cooke & Farrington, 2016). In turn, prisoners may be transformed into caring adults by first learning compassion for the animals that leads to improved relationships with mankind.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The design of a qualitative research study focuses on interpretation of a problem or event that can be explained through choosing a sample, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the findings (Merriam, 2002). The focus of this research study was directed towards women prisoners who participated in animal-assisted therapy (AAT) programs while incarcerated. Learning how individuals interact with and experience their social world is an *interpretive qualitative approach* (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) stated that interpretive qualitative research designs work towards understanding the meaning people have constructed of their world and experiences. As a researcher, I have explored participants' feelings and their perceptions in a prison setting and how they changed while interacting with fellow prisoners and training dogs. Simultaneously, I have also explored the phenomena that focus on essence or structure of an experience as viewed by the participants, which in this case study were the incarcerated women in the AAT program (Merriam, 2002).

A case study research design is a description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community (Merriam, 2002). I designed this study as a case study using a prison setting with incarcerated women (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Interviews were conducted with the women prisoners who participated within the AAT program and the data collected was organized and coded to describe perceived perceptions among the caring for and training of animals while incarcerated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A case study research design was employed to examine the themes and patterns to determine if perceived behavioral changes such as improved self-worth, reduced stress, compassion, and caring for

fellow mankind occurred within this population of women prisoners who participated in AAT programs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Exploring the use of AAT programs with women prisoners and their perceptions, program outcomes, and recidivism, the following research questions and subcategories were explored:

1. How do the women prisoners perceive their lives since participating in AAT programs while in prison?
2. What were the perceptions of women prisoners regarding what they learned as a result of their participation in the AAT program?

This research study focused on women prisoners who participated in animal-assisted therapy (AAT) programs while incarcerated. This study used interviews with the women prisoners active in the AAT program in a maximum-security correctional facility in the southern suburbs of a large midwestern city (CCC). The interview data was analyzed to determine how these women perceived themselves and their lives after participating in AAT programs. The second part of this study presents background information collected by the prison on the demographics of women prisoners who participated in the AAT program while incarcerated.

Research Site

The primary research setting for this study was a maximum-security correctional facility in the southern suburbs of a large midwestern city that originally opened as a reformatory for women. For practical purposes, we will refer to this facility as CCC, which houses approximately 1,008 adult women offenders. CCC serves a multifaceted population consisting of

reception and classification, segregation, protective custody, condemned and mental health units, as well as a state-of-the-art medical facility designed to take care of pregnant and critically or terminally ill inmates. The racial demographics as of 2011 consisted of 48 % African American, 41 % White, 9% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 1% Native American. Currently in Illinois, the Illinois Department of Corrections as of June 30, 2020, has tracked the recidivism rates of females released in 2015, 2016, and 2017 for a three-year period. The recidivism rates of those released in 2015 was 23.8%, 2016 was 24.8%, and 2017 was 22.4% (Illinois Department of Corrections, 2020).

Highlights of CCC include affiliation with a nearby college with several vocational programs intended to reduce recidivism rates by teaching job skills for the workplace. Several programs offered through the college affiliation are computer technology, business management, and commercial cooking. In addition, CCC also offers two dog programs: one in grooming and the other in-service dog training aimed at teaching inmates the skills to become grooming technicians and dog trainers for obedience skills.

The trained dogs from the AAT program at CCC are then placed in the community's low-income-homes as companion or service animals for the elderly and disabled. These training programs are conducted with the help of a nearby certified animal-assisted dog program. The intent of these programs is to reduce the recidivism rate of inmates upon release from prison and possibly serve as future jobs in animal care. The dog program at CCC for the inmates has been in effect since 2001 and the facility has approximately 10 years of data for this program.

The research setting for this study took place inside CCC with written consent obtained from current prisoners in the AAT program. CCC supplied the contact information on inmates who consented and participated in the AAT program.

Case Study

Merriam (2002) defined a case study as a description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as a group, institution, or community. This study, which uses the case study approach, aimed to examine how women prisoners participated in and made meaning of their experiences in an animal-assisted therapy program while incarcerated. As such, using the prison site as a bounded system, this study uses a case study approach to better understand how women prisoners within a prison institution experienced the animal-assisted therapy program. As Yin (2014) reiterates, case study research can contribute to our knowledge of an individual, group, or organization being either social or political on a related phenomenon. Moreover, case study research can also focus on a holistic and real-world perspective such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, or organizational and managerial processes. Because this project seeks to come to know about individuals within one specific setting, case study methodology will help explore women's experiences at this specific site.

This research study has been conducted in one prison setting with incarcerated women who train unwanted dogs to be either companion animals or therapy dogs for the disabled. For this study, I collected two sets of data: the qualitative component entailed conducting interviews with the eight consenting prisoners participating in the AAT program. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and data was coded for emerging themes. The second data set was obtained from review of prison files available online from a list of all prisoners who had ever participated in the AAT program (provided by the prison) with demographic data such as name, type of offense, prison sentence with parole or release dates, birth date, photo, and reincarceration.

An effective case research design contains five critical components: 1) case study research questions, 2) purpose of the study, 3) unit of analysis, 4) logic linking data to purpose of the study, and 5) criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2014). Case study research questions are most appropriate in asking “how” in the qualitative component. I specifically asked the women prisoners why they choose to participate in the AAT program and have their feelings towards the dogs and fellow prisoners changed since in the program.

In the second component of case study research design, Yin (2014) discusses the purpose or reason for a case study. My purpose statement focuses on women participants’ perceptions of themselves and their futures after completing the dog-training program while in prison. According to participants, does this educational change serve as a catalyst to learn life-enhancing skills and develop a possible marketable vocational skill as animal trainers upon release from prison?

The third component of the case study design is the unit of analysis or area of focus that is most often tied to the research questions (Yin, 2014). I focused on research questions specific to the women prisoners’ experiences and perceptions of themselves while training the dogs. Some of the questions were directed towards the women’s feelings towards one another in the AAT program along with their feelings towards the dogs since entering the unit.

The fourth component of the case study design is linking data to the purpose of the study. As data is collected, themes begin to emerge during the analysis which are linked to answering the research questions. My research questions focused on the women prisoners and their experiences with fellow prisoners, guards, and their personal feelings when working with the dogs over the 18 months on a 24/7 daily schedule.

The fifth component of research design in a case study is the necessary criteria for interpreting the findings of the research study (Yin, 2014). The researcher codes the data obtained to determine if common themes arise from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I did code the data obtained from the interviews with the prisoners in the AAT program and obtained various themes relevant to the research study. The criteria utilized in determining the most prevalent themes from the interviews were how many women reiterated the same feelings from what they learned while working with the dogs, such as compassion, patience, and self-esteem.

Participants

The participants in this study were eight consenting women prisoners from a maximum correctional facility in a southern suburb of a large midwestern city (CCC). The women actively participated within either of the two dog programs. One of the programs offered women the opportunity to become trained groomers and the other program taught them to train the dogs as therapy dogs for community members with disabilities. The women ranged in age from 37 to 62 years of age. As seen in Table 1 below, I provide each participant's pseudonym, her age, ethnicity, the offense for which she was convicted, her sentence for the offense, how many years she had served, and finally her parole date. This information is public and could be accessed online from the correctional facility's website, which is representative of the prison population at CCC Correctional Facility.

Table 1

Participants in Case Study from CCC Prison

NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	YEARS OF EDUCATION BEFORE PRISON	OFFENSE	SENTENCE	YEARS SERVED	PAROLE DATE
Makala	47	Caucasian	13 yrs.	Solicitation for Murder	18 years	11 years	9-28-18 Discharged 12-1-17
Elise	44	Hispanic	GED	Controlled Substance Trafficking	40 years	18 years	
Lacy	45	Caucasian	14 yrs.	Murder with Intent to Kill	LIFE	23 years	NONE
Shay	62	Caucasian	GED	Solicitation for Murder	23 years	10 years	
April	37	Caucasian	12 yrs.	Murder with Intent to Kill	56 years	14 years	
Tatum	38	African American	GED	Delivery of Heroin	8 years	5 years	
Regan	44	Caucasian	12 yrs.	Murder with Intent to Kill	LIFE	14 years	NONE
Bobbie	38	Caucasian	GED	Criminal Drug Conspiracy	25 years	6 years	

(Data as of August 2013)

Data Collection

Consenting prisoners actively participating in the AAT program at CCC were obtained from a list supplied by the correctional facility. My goal was to obtain a sample of at least five women prisoner participants for this research study. CCC did obtain consent from eight women prisoners for my research study. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage the women prisoners to respond freely on their experiences in the AAT program (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Yin (2014) defines a prerequisite of a good case study research design is to carefully ask open-ended questions and to interpret the results fairly. A set of carefully constructed research questions were prepared for the interviews of the incarcerated women in the AAT program and approved for use by the IRB committee.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Northern Illinois University, my data was obtained through personal recorded interviews with each participant who was actively participating in the AAT program during their incarceration. Each interview was tape recorded with the written permission of each participant. The questions were semi-structured, (Merriam, 2002) open-ended, and lasted between 30 to 90 minutes to obtain the women's opinions of the AAT program while incarcerated at CCC. A total of eight interviews on two separate days were conducted on July 26, 2013, and August 9, 2013. The transcription process was completed for each group within ten days after the interviews. Questions that were asked in the interview process are in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

A qualitative research study was conducted using a basic constant comparative method for data analysis. A constant comparative method approach examines if themes and patterns emerge from the data collected from the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Using this method, key ideas, concepts, and words were identified that were reiterated by participants in their interview. Responses were grouped together into smaller units. The data was organized and coded to describe perceived behavioral perceptions among caring for and training animals while incarcerated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A code is a qualitative inquiry that can serve either as a word or short phrase to assign a summative assessment as a theme of the data collected (Saldana, 2013).

This project utilized first- and second-cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) to describe themes as they emerged from the coding and categorization. The first -cycle coding emerged in the initial coding cycle that categorized data into seven groups: grammatical, elemental, affective, literacy, language, exploratory, and procedural. In my initial stages of first-cycle coding, 25 themes arose from the interviews among the women prisoners. Using the methods of the second-cycle coding, which served to combine like codes together, the 25 themes were then reorganized and refined into six main categories that appeared conceptually similar, with those becoming the major themes of the research component (Saldana, 2013). After combining similar codes, the six themes that were present in a majority of the women prisoners' interviews were confidence, patience, compassion, self-worth/self-esteem, unconditional love, and marketable skills.

Data analysis is best represented in using a spiral image rather than a fixed linear approach (Creswell, 2013). Creswell's (2013) theory to analyzing qualitative data is a custom-

built process, with the researcher moving in analytic circles and touching on several facets to exit with a narrative. I have employed Creswell's data analysis spiral to analyze my research project in six steps.

Step 1: Organizing the Data. I recorded all of the interviews with the incarcerated women and then transcribed them in a Word document for further review and evaluation.

Step 2: Reading. I read all of the documents entirely several times to understand the women's comments and to view the research topic as a whole before breaking it down.

Step 3: Describing and Classifying. In this step, I broke down the data into smaller categories and then labeled each category with a code to see what patterns were emerging from the prisoners' comments.

Step 4: Interpreting Data into Codes. I used this process to generate narrative codes as I reread each interview and found patterns evolving from their conversations during the interviews.

Step 5: Themes. After I coded the interviews with the women prisoners, themes and patterns emerged from the data that were repeated more than once by the eight participants.

Step 6: Interpreting the Data. Creswell (2013) described that it is the codes and themes that arise from a qualitative research study that will make a larger sense of the data that can also be linked to the larger research literature performed by others. In my own interpretation of this research study, I analyzed to determine if perceived behavioral changes such as improved self-worth, reduced stress, compassion, and caring for fellow mankind occurred within this population of women prisoners who participated in AAT programs at CCC.

Goodness and Trustworthiness

As a researcher, my goal is to collect and interpret multiple sources of data to be credible, good, and trustworthy. To increase the trustworthiness of my case study, I employed the strategy of a renowned qualitative researcher by employing the method of triangulation. Yin (2014) described triangulation as a technique of convergence of data collected from different sources to determine a consistency of a finding. This technique allows for one to use multiple sources of evidence that are rated more highly than one source alone and will corroborate the same finding. By conducting interviews with the eight women prisoners, each of the women were asked the same set of questions and their answers recorded. The data was then transcribed and coded to determine if a convergence of meanings and themes of empathy, self-worth, patience, unconditional love, and others emerged from the process as reported in literature reviews.

Challenges of the Study

This project, like other research studies, does have a challenge due to the small number of consenting prisoners from CCC who participated in the AAT program at the time the interviews were conducted. The current inmates in the AAT program at CCC who gave consent to be interviewed provided valuable data on their perceptions of working with the dogs in the program and provided an opportunity for follow-up upon release from prison. The small sample size of eight women prisoners was due to the program's relocation from a facility that was closed due to state funding issues. In the flux of transferring women to other facilities, not all of the women who were active in the program during the transfer were relocated to the same facility. At the

time of the interviews, eight women were active in the current AAT dog program with all consenting to be interviewed.

Researcher Positionality

The primary role for data collection and analysis in case study designs is the researcher. It is important that researchers review their own limitations and views as they collect and interpret their data without adding their own opinions in the outcome of the results. Merriam (2002) stated that qualitative research assumes we have biases and values that can impact the outcome of any data in the process. In this case study, my role was to examine the process of the prison system, how the dog programs were instituted and managed, and how prisoners were selected and admitted to the system.

After months of waiting for review and approval of my request to visit the prison with extensive background checks, approval was finally granted by the governor of the state and the prison warden. After arriving at the maximum security prison, I was not entirely prepared for the thorough physical pat down that was given by a female security guard. I had to take off my coat, shoes, and sweater in a dressing room. All articles were completely checked by the prison guard. The guard then proceeded to pat me down completely from head to toe to ensure I was not carrying any articles such as knives or sharp objects. Once cleared by the guard, I was only allowed to bring in a pad of paper and pen to take notes. All other personal items and my purse were locked up in a locker.

After I was cleared through security, a golf cart driven by one of the prison guards provided transportation to the building where the dog program was housed with the prisoners.

The prison campus was very large, probably twenty or more acres, and nicely maintained.

During my ride, I noticed several groups of women walking two abreast with a guard at the front and back of each unit. The women wore bright color-coded uniforms to signify which building they were housed in. It was an orderly and quiet procession as we passed them.

Upon arrival at my destination, my initial meeting with the supervisor of the dog program lasted as a 3-hour orientation to become familiar with their programs and policies. The meeting served to help me understand how the programs were set up and how prisoners were selected to participate in the dog programs. I was also prepared for what the prisoners might say during their interviews regarding their crimes and experiences. After the initial meeting, I received the names of each prisoner who participated in either of the two dog programs over the 10-year period and began reviewing their demographic background, which included their conviction, age, years served, remaining time in prison, and how long they were in the program. My searches were conducted online since this data is public knowledge.

After my initial meeting, the supervisor gave me a tour of the building she supervised. The main purpose of her building besides the dog programs was to make prison uniforms for male prisoners housed at another facility. The uniform assignment to this building was purposeful since each prison's uniforms are completely different and if stolen by any of the women inmates, escape from this facility would not go unnoticed.

As I walked past several of the inmates on my tour, each woman was very respectful in greeting me with comments of 'good afternoon, madam' or 'have a nice day.' Having never visited a prison before, my preconceived ideas from various video broadcasts or movies about how bad prisons and the prisoners were portrayed was not what I witnessed. This gave me a feeling of reassurance for the next time I would be returning to conduct the interviews with the

women. My next visit to interview several of the consenting women in one or both dog programs was delayed approximately ten months due to the closing of the prison where the dog program was housed. The women prisoners were transferred to different facilities in the state and time was needed to reorganize the dog program. After the dog program was re-established in another prison mid-state, I received my final approval to interview the women prisoners.

With my background in healthcare for 40 plus years, I feel my experience has given me an advantage in learning how to listen to the patients' health problems and question further. I was able to listen carefully to the women's answers without making them feel vulnerable. I feel this experience helped me to be more understanding of the prisoners' interviews and not look at them as criminals but as human beings. My respect towards them in their situation was mutual for both of us. The women were so appreciative of my time to meet with them so they could share their experiences and stories. Several of the women were engaged for more than an hour of questioning. The interviews with the eight women were mutually respectful between both of us, which served to enlighten me on everything they have been through with their convictions and time served. I also witnessed how each woman learned respect for the others in the program. The women became a working team for the betterment of the dogs they were training, the community members they would be serving with these trained dogs, and how they were transformed as human beings through this program.

The interviews at the prison were also an eye-opening experience to me to witness how these women lived in such small quarters without the conveniences we all value in our lives such as our own bedrooms, showers, freedom of our own phones and computers, and being able to go outside anytime. If more people witnessed or visited prisons, there might not be as much crime in our society when they see what it is like on the other side of the prison walls. Having grown up

in a family with law enforcement officers most of my life, we all have preconceived ideas that prisons are bad places where criminals are housed, not realizing that these are men and women like ourselves. They may have made a few wrong choices in their lives along the way, but with education and opportunities for employment upon release, they will have a means of changing their lives to become productive citizens in our society.

My research study along with my conversations with these women have indicated that women do not have the same opportunities in prison as men. There are more programs available for men with education and training programs for outside employment upon release. Women prisoners also experience more health issues in comparison to male prisoners, with limited resources provided. Due to limited federal funding issues in various states, the most common areas that are eliminated are programs such as AAT programs in prisons. CCC does not provide any financial support to the AAT program. All funding is obtained by the women prisoners through training or providing grooming services for the dogs at minimal cost to community members. This case study will add to the research in the field of women prisoners and AAT programs with the positive outcomes of adding more AAT programs for women's prisons in the future.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology and methods incorporated into this research study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the research study and Chapter 5 will discuss the findings, draw conclusions based on the study results, and review the literature in this area. Discussion

will review the implications of this study and make recommendations for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to examine women prisoners who participated in the animal-assisted therapy (AAT) program to determine how their perceptions of their lives had changed while caring for and training the animals. The following research questions were utilized in this study: (a) How do the women prisoners perceive their lives since participating in AAT programs while in prison? (b) What are the perceptions of women prisoners regarding what they learned as a result of their participation in the AAT program?

During the interviews, participants described their perceptions and experiences while working with the dogs. They also discussed their personal feelings about how their relationships with the dogs, fellow prisoners, and guards related to confidence levels, patience, compassion and self-worth/self-esteem and other areas. It was clear through their interviews that the women felt that their experiences in the AAT program were meaningful.

The findings that this chapter reports are based on interviews with the women prisoners utilizing semi-structured, open-ended questions. The data was then analyzed with a constant comparative method with themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interviews provided a variety of information that led to multiple themes emerging that were referenced by two or more participants. The themes that emerged from the interviews entailed how the women prisoners perceived themselves to be more confident, patient, and compassionate. Participants also discussed a noted change in their feelings of self-worth and

self-esteem, improved relationships among prisoners and staff, reduced altercations, and feelings of unconditional love. Other themes that arose were the perceptions of these women wanting to give back to society, possibilities of future marketable job skills upon release from prison, and compassion towards animals.

Confidence, Patience, and Compassion

After interviewing the participants who took part in the animal-assisted therapy (AAT) program at CCC, it became clear that participants discussed how they had observed increases in their own patience and confidence. For instance, prior to incarceration, Shay shared that she had lived with an abusive husband who took away her confidence in herself making her feel “small.” Working in the AAT program with the dogs not only helped Shay rebuild her confidence, she also learned discipline, which is a necessary skill when training dogs. She explained in the interview:

Probably the most valuable thing is that I gained my confidence back and also I became more assertive. I lived in an abusive relationship with an abusive husband for 27 years and I became a very small [woman]. It helped me to find me. Patience. A lot of patience with people. Discipline, a lot of discipline that I really didn't have with my animals, my personal animals. I've learned how to be a disciplinarian and still be best friends.

As Shay discussed in her interview, confidence and patience are important factors in a person's life that allows them to function in day-to-day tasks that may be difficult to achieve without it. For Shay, she felt that she had gained both of these skills as a result of working in the AAT program. Shay also expressed her newly learned trait of patience combined with discipline as a key factor when working with a dog to train it for various tasks. Training a dog for the first time takes repeated instructions over and over with treats after a new task has been mastered by the

dog. For Shay, this experience was a positive one and led to increased feelings of confidence, patience, and discipline as a result of participating in the AAT program.

Tatum, like Shay, shared that she felt increased confidence in herself from working in the AAT program. Tatum's new confidence helped her learn to take charge in training the dogs, which in turn gave her the confidence to care for herself. She shared:

Confidence! A lot of confidence. I love to talk, but I'm also shallow. I'm real shy and it doesn't seem like it to others, but I am when it comes to being the boss of something...confidence is the number one thing. It's also helping me with closeness, as in allowing someone to care for me...like, even with snuggling with the dog and things like that, it's teaching me how to do that. Just to be more of a comfort, I guess.

As Tatum has learned to be a "take charge" leader by working with the dogs, she has also experienced comfort in being close to someone such as the dog. In the past, Tatum felt that all of her love had to go towards her family and children. This has made it hard for her to share love with a dog or anyone else. By learning how to share with a dog, the dog is actually teaching her how to love those close to her which in turn also provides care for her.

Tatum further shared that she felt patience was a key trait when working with dogs as she had learned through her experiences in the AAT program. For Tatum, displaying patience allows the dog to learn obedience through the training process:

I've learned patience. Oh gosh, a lot of patience. I've learned that you always have to be humble because the dogs pick up on everything. They pick up on so much of your energy. It's fascinating. I've learned that I could have a future of working with these dogs. I've learned obedience. I've learned a lot of obedience. I've learned not to be lazy.

What Tatum had learned more than patience was learning how to be humble. Her attitudes and actions had effects on others whether it was a dog or another person. Tatum also learned not to be lazy and put forth more energy in her training process in helping the dog learn obedience, which in turn provides her with patience.

Elsie echoed these sentiments as she discussed an outcome of her participation in the AAT program was patience. As Elsie was growing up, her mother always found her to be impatient and always running, which prevented her from accomplishing many goals in her life. The AAT program has helped Elise gain patience as she states below:

More patience. That in order to receive, you have to put it, you have to give. What you're going to receive is so much more than what you give. I didn't have patience before. My mom used to call me the little storm. I used to come in through one door and leave through the other one. I was in a rush, I was always running. I was impatient. She thought that I couldn't do this because she said, she can't sit still. And I can. I have patience now. Once you develop that and God gives you that, you can do anything. Anything. It's so much easier.

Importantly, as Elsie learned patience from this program, she also learned the importance of putting forth effort to obtain positive results. Thus, for Elsie, this program allowed her to recognize through the dog training program that patience is mandatory and can pay off with hard work.

Feelings of confidence were also felt by participants when others noted that they would be good in the AAT program. As noted by Regan, her supervisor observed that she would be a good fit in the program. This confidence the supervisor had in Regan positively impacted her. She shared:

...my teacher had a lot of faith in me and she made it very well known, she gave me some part with the dog. She told me, I know you can do this. If you can't, let me know. But I wouldn't give you these dogs, because I know that you can, you can take this on. You're probably the only one that can. It made me rethink like, wow, someone actually has faith in me to do something other than what I was already doing. I took a step back and analyzed things when I was in school. I did have some hard case dogs and to see the change in what they were and the finished product was the most amazing thing to me. It just opened up a whole new world of knowledge and understanding that I didn't have.

As Regan has stated with her comments, sometimes it takes an outsider to point out the strengths and abilities that you do not actually believe you can accomplish until you try something new.

Because this program existed, and because someone encouraged her, it served to “open up a whole new world of knowledge” for Regan.

The AAT program provided these women with newly learned skills and, perhaps more importantly, feelings of confidence they did not have before their participation in the program. As noted by participants Shay, Tatum, and Elsie, confidence was something that was lacking in their lives due to a variety of experiences. Yet, this program provided opportunities for them to gain confidence, learn skills, and recognize that they have more to offer. These women also noted that they had opportunity to learn and practice patience and meditation, skills that not only helped them with dog training but their own self-care. Shay expressed her love for the dogs while working in the AAT program. She noted that for her it was powerful because of “their unconditional love”: A dog never judges you. They’re always there for me. And as much as you give to them, they give that much more back to you.” For Shay and others, the animals in the program provided them with unconditional love, no judgment, and an opportunity to reflect upon relationships and on humanity.

Participants also discussed how they felt that the program helped them engage in feelings of compassion. April shared that she had grown up in an environment of sexual abuse since she was a teenager. This environment not only robbed her of her self-worth and self-esteem, April openly displayed negative feelings towards others. After joining the ATT program, April learned compassion for the dogs that was then extended towards her fellow inmates. She explained:

By looking at the dogs and dealing with some of the issues they had, it brought out issues that I had. So not only did it cope with having to confront things head on, it helped me in the aspect that now I can love something and not expect something in return. Which is not something you looked at home, especially when you’ve been abused. But I definitely have learned more compassion for people. I stand a lot by my faith, which also goes into my training and everything. But through the dogs and through God, it’s helped me to see people in a different light and to learn to love in a proper way.

As April voiced in her interview, she found that working with the dogs in the AAT program gave her a new ability to learn compassion for the dogs, which extended towards people.

April also learned how to love again after living in an abusive relationship. She went on to share:

Dogs are different therapy and it does actually help us at times when we're going through something or when we experience a loss outside of here. To have that unconditional love... You know by being in here and away from my family, I can't do the things I want to do for my family. So it helps me change how I think of other people and how I look at other people. You don't judge a book by its cover, but you know that there's deeper issues now and the dogs help also bring that out of you.

Training and interacting with the dogs in the AAT program opened April's eyes to be able to view everyone around her in a different light and not be so negative. For April, it was difficult to trust and love others when being consumed in an abusive relationship. April went on to emphasize the goodness that had come out of her personally from the interactions with the dogs:

It [AAT program] showed me some things I didn't like about myself. I don't know if you've ever heard that a dog can mirror their owner or they show you things that are inside their owners. I didn't realize coming into the program that I had some anger issues I hadn't dealt with. When you're training a dog, it's like having a child 24/7. It showed me parts of myself that I needed to grow on, some abuse that happened in my past that I actually needed to heal from. I had a bad habit of shoving everything and not dealing with it. By looking at the dogs and dealing with some of the issues they had, it brought out issues that I had. So not only did it cope with and confront things head on, it helped me in the aspect that now I can love something and not expect something in return. Which is not something you looked at home, especially when you've been abused. But I definitely have learned more compassion for people. I stand a lot by my faith, which is also goes into my training and everything. But through the dogs and through God, it's helped me to see people in a different light and to learn to love in a proper way.

A major positive benefit of the AAT program at CCC centered on the transformation of the women prisoners learning compassion for their fellow inmates. Besides learning how to work together in training the dogs, Regan's comment in her interview expressed how she entered the prison system as a rebel with no regard for anyone or herself. Regan would incite riots among

fellow prisoners, bring in contraband, and assault staff. Regan's experience in the AAT program has benefited beyond the experience of compassion and caring:

In order to get there [AAT program], you have to be ticket-free [no written disciplinary charges], obviously not going back and forth to segregation. I was kind of a pistol. I was extremely lost coming in the door. I did not adjust. I do not recall the first three years of being in prison. It had just affected me and my ability to recall time and space has been affected. It helped me to learn how to live where I'm actually at - instead of exist. And that's exactly what I was doing - I was existing. The only time that I could be myself before the program was when I had visits with family, my children. After that you shut down, you go back to the unit, you're somebody else. The dogs forced me to be socially involved, active, participating. They give me a goal and purpose.

After reflecting on the comments of these women, they noted they learned traits of empathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, and trust and felt that these traits emerged from their participation in the AAT program. Added benefits to these newly learned traits among the women prisoners were reduced altercations among prisoners and staff, thereby making the prison safer.

Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

Another theme that emerged from the data was feelings of self-worth and self-esteem from participants as a result of participating in the AAT program. These feelings provided the women with the ability to continue on with life's daily struggles and challenges without giving up. For example, April shared that she had struggled with low self-esteem even before being incarcerated. She discussed how the AAT program had helped her build her self-worth and self-esteem when she shared:

I struggled a little bit with my self-esteem. I don't give myself enough credit for something and when other people make bad comments about what they see us doing - because we do have to keep the dogs in line - and although we do a lot of positive

reinforcement, if somebody sees us correcting the dog, trying to get them to relax or just a simple leash correction, you get comments made. Just quit abusing that dog or quit roughing up that dog. Although they just don't understand, it's been a struggle for me because if you have low self-esteem, you have to learn to get that built up.

The AAT program helped April to find ways to continually build her self-esteem when she encountered negative comments from other prisoners who did not understand the mechanisms of training dogs. What appears to others as scolding a dog is just correcting a bad behavior that is often perceived by others as being mean to an animal. April added:

Every time you get hit with a hard comment that they hit that dog or they kick that dog or something, that's not even what happened. For me, it's those comments that still get me sometimes, but not like they used to. So although my dislike has become something that helps me grow and become tougher, it hurts. There are things that still hurt and cut sometimes. A lot of its comments just from other people. When you need to build up, I'm the type of personality that I don't have to be coddled, but don't tear me down all the time because that makes me shut down. This is the type of environment where people definitely pick out the negative in each other. They'll see some negative in your environment instead of the positive.

By working with the other women in the AAT program, positive reinforcement is often shared among each other to improve the training of the dog. The positive reinforcement becomes a two-fold process by improving the women's own feelings of self-worth and self-esteem that is accomplished through the dog's training.

Bobbie also emphasized how she has gained her self-esteem and self-worth back being a participant in the AAT program. She offered:

Before becoming a trainer, I felt like I did not have much of a purpose in life. I felt like a nobody and had nothing to offer anyone. This program has given me self-worth back and made me feel like even though I am in prison, I am doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing at this time in my life. When I step back and see all the lives changed doing what I do in this program, I can't help but think that it is the work of God. However, I am not a religious person. I realize now just how spiritual I am, and at the end of the day, I am blessed with this gratitude feeling of importance and a heart that has been touched.

The simple joy of working with an animal to learn a new task has given the women their perspective of self-esteem and self-worth back that was often lost in bad relationships prior to

prison. Bobbie felt she had a purpose in life where before she felt she had nothing to offer. The AAT program is providing these women with a “purpose” and mediating their views of themselves, their worth, and even their belief systems.

For Michala, who spent years in an abusive relationship that destroyed her psychologically and emotionally, the AAT program gave her back the power of self-worth that was robbed from her years ago, as she stated:

It’s helping us to build that self-worth that was, in probably 99% of the cases, taken from us on the onset of this whole experience...I think for me, personally, the feeling of self-worth. That’s the big thing for me. Being in an abusive relationship – it’s not physical, it was psychological and emotional which I believe, coming through that, was actually worse. Bruises heal, bones repair, but when they start messing with your head, that’s a lot harder to deal with. It’s a lot harder to process and let go of. It’s a lot harder to tell yourself, “No, you are worthy.” ... the program is amazing. I’m glad it’s here. I’m glad for the ones that receive these dogs. I’m glad for the improved self-worth and self-love that the women learn to retain.

Statements by Michala, April, and Bobbie demonstrated not just the growth they experienced as it pertained to self-esteem and self-worth, but the impacts those feelings have had on them while enrolled in the AAT program. As seen from these women’s quotes, they feel as if they have worth and purpose.

Improved Relationships

Tatum expressed that the dogs in the AAT program were the center of everyone’s responsibility, which created a more stable environment in the prison for everyone. With each woman dedicated to the welfare and training of their dogs, peace and cohesiveness existed among everyone in the unit. Tatum shared:

We are one big group. With every group you have problems, but the bottom line is we can all come to each other for anything. We can all communicate. We can all laugh together. We can all have fun together. We can all speak to our boss without it being turmoil within a group. As a whole, we get along very well as a group. That's why we're progressing so far with these dogs. If you can't get along together, you take that along to the dog.

With the dogs as the center of the ATT program, each woman had learned to work together for the main purpose of training the dogs no matter if someone was having a bad day or not feeling well. For Tatum, the women prisoners learned to work together as a team to accomplish their training tasks for the good of the dogs and the program.

Some of the women prisoners had sentences that may soon expire due to changes in the Illinois laws and correctional centers. On the other hand, Regan has a life sentence for dealing drugs, of which she has already served 17 years. Regan felt that the AAT program had helped improve her existence at the prison as well as with her fellow inmates even though she may likely never be released. She shared:

I learned that even in this place, there is happiness, there is light when everything else seems kind of dark. I learned that a simple smile and a little bit of affection can set off your whole day. It's contagious because I used to walk around the institution pretty much mugging – is what they say – but I wouldn't speak to people, I would walk past them as if they weren't there because honestly, I did not acknowledge them. Now I can look everybody in the face, greet them, say hello, good morning; try to help them have a better day. I do understand now that your mood is contagious and can be transferred over to other people. It changes the morale of the institution and the people who are around the dogs, they have a great power in order to be able to do that.

Even with her life conviction, she learned to cope better with her sentence and place all of her efforts in the AAT program and work towards being a better person around her fellow inmates. Regan has found her purpose in life while working on happiness. Even though she will never be released from prison, Regan has found a way to cope, making her life more meaningful for herself and those around her.

Bobbie felt that the AAT program also helped her build a better working relationship with her fellow inmates as well as gain respect from the guards. She offered:

It's a lot better because the girls that you're working with, we like to consider ourselves a team. Sometimes we just say we're a dysfunctional family. But we're together and it's nice to work with a group of people that have the same goals and that are on the same page in life...I think you get a little bit more respect when they (guards) see you doing a good purpose like this. They're more inclined to want to interact and get to know you as a person and what you're doing for the program.

For Bobbie, there was purpose of working together as a family. It allowed both prisoners as well as guards opportunities to interact with one another and build relationships. This program offered participants the ability to work for a similar goal together.

The AAT program has further helped Shay to learn to work with all types of women's personalities, which she often found difficult and challenging:

Sometimes your coworkers can be difficult and that's a growing experience. Everybody has a different personality. Not everybody has the same background, the same values, the same experiences. I've had to stretch out of myself and maybe try to see things from somebody else's viewpoint. That was different for me because I had a pretty sheltered life in a lot of senses. I wasn't exposed to a lot of what these women have gone through. My circumstances were devastating in a different way, but nothing like what some of them had experienced.

Shay learned how to view and work with the many different personalities that exist around her constantly. It was often a struggle to understand and accept that there are two ways to accomplish a task when one feels they have the best solution. Shay learned how to step back and view a problem from another person's view and then work with them.

Regan now has a purpose in life after participating in the AAT program. She continued to actively train the dogs for various tasks needed by the disabled and even went beyond helping her fellow inmates train dogs to reach a certain goal without any reservations. The program also helped her to learn and share problem solving as a group for those occasions when they hit a

stumbling block in training a dog for various tasks. With this newly learned trait, Regan also found a connection with the people in the prison, as she explained:

I haven't had tickets [written disciplinary charges] in years and years. I smile genuinely. I laugh. I connect with people. I'm able to think of more than outside my family. I was very close to my family in the world, extremely tight family bonds. I had a few select friends and that was it. But now I'm able to be more empathetic to others outside of those I know.

For Regan, this experience gave her the ability to connect with others and form bonds with individuals even outside her family. Through their training process in the AAT program, they also participated in college classes that led to licensure through PAWS with college credit applied.

Marketable Skills for Future Jobs

Throughout their interviews, the women noted their participation in the AAT program influenced their future goals upon their release from prison. With the courses taken at CCC through college affiliations, the women could obtain jobs as assistant trainers in AAT programs or find opportunities to become veterinary assistants, with a few additional college courses. With their newly learned skills and certifications, they could also work as animal groomers earning a wage. After talking with the participants, several had goals of obtaining jobs in animal training and care after release from prison. For example, Lacy shared:

I would start my own dog organization down south and use the connections that I've gained from here with drug sniffing and the police who always need dogs trained. Search and rescue, I would love to be involved with the disasters to help find survivors. Gosh, there's so much opportunity with dogs.... Actually, my best friend that I lived 24 years with, had life, and she just got pardoned and she's training service dogs out in South Carolina for the police. That's amazing.

It was clear that Lacy has been positively influenced by the AAT program as it provided her an opportunity to think about how she could utilize these skills in her life after release from prison. For Lacy, participating in the AAT program not only provided her with marketable skills, it also led to a passion to help train dogs for police work in drug sniffing or as rescue dogs searching for victims or survivors in weather-related natural disasters.

April's goal upon release was to work in a shelter with the animals and then obtain employment in the same area. She shared,

I think the first thing I want to do is volunteer in a shelter. The biggest thing I can do is just get word of mouth of I can do this, I know about training. Take the dogs in a shelter and get them out walking them and start working hands-on. If it's cleaning kennels, that's fine. But to let people know that I'm willing to work. I'm willing to get out and do the dirty work because this is something I want to do. Then I want to go into a hospital, take the therapy dogs into the hospital. My mom has health issues, I want my mom to be able to have a dog of her own, that she can take with her places. A lot of the things I desire are volunteer stuff, but I know that through that God is going to lead me to the position. I need to be able to work with my desires, but yet still get paid with dog training.

April wanted to work with animals upon release from prison and was willing to "do the dirty work" because it was something that she was passionate about and something that she was trained to do because of her participation in the program.

Several of the women in prison had been guided and trained to work in the ministry. While working in the AAT program, the women have had opportunities to further their education and complete their degrees in ministry. Lacy was one of the fortunate to obtain her education while in prison in the ministry field. She found that by combining her skills from the AAT program and preaching, she could look forward to a great future career.

For me, I want to use my ministry and my gifts. I want to share my testimony with people and my message with people. How you can go down a hard road or you can go through abusive stuff but come out, like from a caterpillar to the butterfly. You can come out shining and you can come out a better person. Don't let the things you've gone through tear you down, but learn to raise you up and lift you up and be a better person. I know

that the dog training and getting the dogs into the nursing homes or the children's wards in the hospital since the kids can't go anywhere. I have seen God open so many doors since I've been here to just be able to share a quick message with someone or a quick scripture with someone and the dogs here have helped do that. They'll come in and pet the dog and you can see them kind of breath and release a little bit. It just opens the door to ask them a question. I want to use everything that I've learned here to help others out there.

Lacy's analogy of the dingy caterpillar being transformed into a new shining butterfly has given her new hope for a better life when released from prison in the career of ministry. Lacy was fortunate to be able to combine her skills learned in the AAT program with preaching to help people move on after a struggle in life. According to Lacy, by bringing in a dog as a therapy animal, it opened a person's mind to be able to accept a message from God that things will work out even when one feels they are at the lowest point in their life. A quick quote from the Bible while petting a dog helped Lacy spread the word of God, making life seem more bearable.

Elise also had the opportunity to obtain her bachelor's degree in Christian ministry and wanted to combine those skills with basic training of dogs after release from prison.

What I want to do is mainly train people how to have dogs. Because that's the mistake. We have a dog in the house and we keep him in the cage or in the house and we come back 10 hours later and the poor dog did a bunch of stuff he wasn't supposed to do and then we get mad at the dogs. We need to learn how to have a dog in the house.... this is going to be my priority – training dogs and training people. But I can work in anything.

Similar to Lacy's experience with ministry and the AAT program, Elsie also had the opportunity to be able to combine both skills to understand dogs and people when it comes to training. As one works in training dogs, the trainer learns self-confidence and patience with the animal. Training an adult to take care of the dog also incorporates these skills to be a better person in the world and deal with daily struggles with more confidence and patience towards their fellow inmates, guards, and prison staff.

Tatum was planning on combining her skills as a mentor to give back to society where she can get her story out there with her skills in dog training. She planned on demonstrating to various pet stores how she can train a dog for various tasks in hopes it will build her future career.

My goal is honestly to be a mentor. I want to be a mentor, believe it or not. Of course we always have to give back when we're in a situation. I have to get my story out there. I think that my situation can prevent another individual from being in the same situation as I. I think that I have very good communication skills and what I've learned by being incarcerated is that a lot of people take to me. They come to me for advice. They come to me for the positiveness...I'm going to get me a dog and I'm going to train that dog. Because what I've learned here is that working with dogs is not really word of mouth.... It's a different type of thing when you're trying to get business for a dog. People are amazed at what they see when they come for the dog. I've learned that in here – how amazed – so many see the things that these dogs can do and the things that they do. So my plan is, in the midst of me planning my business, planning my career, I'm going to get my own dog and I'm going to incorporate the things I've learned here into my dog and I'm going to go to dog parks, walk the streets, and I'm going to show people the different things that my dog can do so they can be like, wow, how did your dog learn to do that?

Tatum learned the necessary skills to successfully train a dog and she wanted to demonstrate to everyone that training a dog to respond to various commands and tasks is not hard to accomplish. By demonstrating how to successfully train a dog, hopefully this will lead to a future career with various pet stores or training facilities.

Michala's goals after release from prison was to return to the real estate business, but she will continue to demonstrate to people how to train a dog properly for enjoyment or various tasks.

So I've already got my feet in real estate, so I will continue that.... Anything I do, I'll always have a dog with me...the whole psychology part of a dog and what's going on with behavior al issues, what's creating that and how can we fix it. Like he said, most times it's fixing the trainer, it's fixing the owner. It's not the dog. So helping people overcome issues and just be able to enjoy their dogs more freely than they've ever been able to. I want to help people do that. Also, as far as the service work goes, now that I know how to train, and I enjoy doing it, I will forever be with what I call a demo dog, I

will have a dog on hand and hopefully be able to work with an organization that I can say the dog's ready, do you want him? And they say, yes, we have somebody in mind for him. And I'll go get another one and start over.

Michala worked in real estate before she was incarcerated and she hoped to return to it and become a successful agent. Upon learning the techniques for successful dog training in the AAT program, her goal was to continue training dogs to be better companions to people, which also involves training the adults in how to work with the dogs. Michala knew this is a two-way street for training the dog as well as the person.

Bobbie's goals after release from prison were to continue her education and volunteer in shelters with the dogs.

I want to get back in school, I know, so between volunteering at animal shelters, getting in school, working with an organization, I would just about do anything in between to get by until I could get my final goal, as far as wanting to make a career either out of teaching someone else how to train service dogs or being an instructor or something instructive. Teaching everyday people how to train their dogs to be even better quality life.

As demonstrated in these women's interviews, each had a goal to use their new skills from the AAT program in some type of dog training once released from prison. These new skills also gave the women the ability to learn confidence, patience, self-worth and self-esteem by working with the dogs. The unconditional love and patience they gained while working with the dogs allowed them to demonstrate these traits towards their fellow inmates, making them better people while incarcerated and reducing any confrontations among each other or the guards. As noted through the interviews with the women, each one has been transformed from working with the dogs in the AAT program. Their newly learned compassion and understanding for an animal had been extended towards their fellow prisoners, guards, and staff. Upon release from prison, these new traits may be extended towards mankind in their new environments and potential jobs in animal care and training. These newly learned traits could also help the women to learn a

purpose in life that helps them be better parents for their children in setting a good example for them. By increasing their confidence level, the women learned how to deal with daily problems in their jobs or family lives. The women have also learned how to build relationships with family, friends, and fellow employees that were lacking before incarceration.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was to examine women prisoners who participated in the animal-assisted therapy (AAT) program to determine how their perceptions of their lives have changed while caring and training the animals. The guiding research questions for this project were:

1. How do the women prisoners perceive their lives since participating in AAT programs while in prison?
2. What were the perceptions of women prisoners regarding what they learned as a result of their participation in the AAT program?

Research was conducted through interviews with the eight women prisoners utilizing semi-structured open-ended questions. The data was then analyzed with a constant comparative method with themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through these interviews with the women, six primary themes emerged from participants: 1) Confidence, 2.) Patience, 3) Self-Worth and Self-Esteem, 4) Compassion and Unconditional Love, 5) Improved Relationships, 6) Marketable Skills for Future Jobs. Using transformational learning theory as a lens, this chapter will discuss the findings from this study and connect those findings with the literature. Next, this chapter will identify recommendations as well as identify areas for future research regarding this topic.

Discussion

It has been stated that one of the most important aspects of AAT programs is that the prisoners learn life-enhancing skills and have lower recidivism rates (Strimple, 2003). Reduced recidivism equates to a positive cost reduction in housing for prisoners in state and federal prisons (Brock, 2017). Yet, while these programs have shown to be both cost effective and to lower recidivism rates, these programs also can serve to educate, create opportunity, and transform those who participate.

Confidence, Patience, and Compassion

For example, the first finding centers on the participants' perceptions of how the AAT program provided them opportunity to experience increased feelings of confidence, patience and compassion. As Shay mentioned in her interview, she felt that the program helped her gain confidence after spending time in an abusive relationship. In addition, Tatum regained her confidence through training the dog that gave her a feeling of closeness with the dog wanting to comfort her. Prior to this, Tatum had difficulty with sharing or expressing feelings outside of her family. The dog training has provided Tatum with the ability to share feelings and develop close relationships with those she loves, which in turn provides care for herself that was impossible before incarceration. With her increased confidence levels back, Tatum will be able to tackle any future encounter that appears impossible to solve, whether it involves training the dog or a task never solved prior to incarceration.

The AAT program has also transformed Tatum into a caring individual to help her share her feelings with those around her and develop her skills in working relationships. Regaining her confidence along with developing her patience has helped her learn how to take charge in training the dog. Besides Tatum, Regan also noted that her confidence and trust in humanity increased when her supervisor indicated that she would be a good fit in the AAT program. Regan's supervisor noticed how calm she was when around the dogs and felt she would become a great trainer. Regan had never experienced someone believing in her prior to her incarceration and felt lucky to have a new opportunity to learn new skills.

Regan had entered the prison system as a rebel with no regard for anyone or herself. She would incite riots among fellow prisoners, bring in contraband, and assault staff. Regan's experience in the AAT program has benefited beyond her experience of compassion and caring for the dog by transforming her into a productive team player in the AAT program with training skills for employment upon release from prison.

AAT programs help to change the lives of inmates, which also serves to improve institutional environments between inmates, staff, and guards (Britton & Button, 2006). In turn, these programs break down fears and mistrust between staff and prisoners, also reducing behavioral infractions among inmates. Moreover, these women also discussed how working with the dogs helped them cultivate patience. Elise noted that before this experience, she was impatient and rushed everywhere. Yet, working in the program gave her an opportunity to slow down, to sit still, and to have more patience with the dogs and herself.

This finding is echoed in the larger body of research which posits that when prisoners work with animals in training programs, the prisoners learn psychological skills such as

empathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, and trust (Strimple, 2003). Several of the women participants shared that regaining their patience and confidence were key factors in helping them cope with the daily tasks of training the dogs and was further extended into their own lives. For example, Shay felt she lost her confidence before her incarceration due to spousal abuse. By working with the dogs, Shay learned discipline and how to be assertive with the dogs to learn a new task. As noted in other AAT programs in various institutions, working with the animals helps to reduce the women's depression and gives them a sense of doing something of value for society (Granger & Kogan, 2000). The Purdy Treatment Center for Women has a pet therapy program that has successfully trained dogs for individuals with various disabilities for several years, thereby reducing the women's depression with a sense of helping a recipient of the trained dog.

With confidence and patience back in the lives of the women prisoners, they have now been transformed into productive human beings able to take on any job without a second thought about not being successful. These new traits also provide a healthier environment for all, with reduction in stress, anger, and frustration between guards, prisoners, and staff, making it a safer place for everyone (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

Importantly, literature discusses the how incorporating animals in prisons gives inmates an opportunity to learn how to care for living things (Deaton, 2005). These caring skills provided opportunities for the inmate to learn respect, love, self-worth, and usefulness. Using animals in prisons can open up a new dimension by providing meaningful experiences that lead to healing and change and helping support a transformational outlook on their lives and work to develop traits such as the ones discussed here. For example, April found that working with the dogs in the AAT program has helped her to learn compassion for people and how to love again after living

in an abusive relationship. April experienced a new transformation in her life to become the caring and humble person she once was before her incarceration. In this way, the participation in the AAT program gave these women the opportunity to engage a transformation in how they viewed themselves.

Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

The next theme that the women revealed in their interviews was their increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Increased self-esteem is the most significant accomplishment when prisoners train a dog and it becomes a companion during the training process (Turner, 2007). As self-esteem increases, so do their social skills, self-confidence, patience, and communication all of which are also enhanced. In turn, a reduction in anger and aggression can occur when they derive pleasure from knowing their work is helping others and gives them a new meaning to their lives (Turner, 2007). The women participants in the AAT program noted they felt they regained their self-worth and self-esteem to be able to cope with the daily challenges without giving up when a dog would not respond to a command or task. These traits were often lost before their incarcerations, making the women feel small and unimportant with no purpose in life.

For example, Bobbie felt she did not have a purpose in life before she entered the AAT program. Through the program, Bobbie was able to gain her self-worth back through hard work in training the dogs. Bobbie felt the importance of her actions and how she has touched so many hearts, from the dog to her fellow inmates, but also, the recipient who receives the well-trained

dog. Bobbie felt transformed into a caring, responsible, and productive individual ready to go forward in life once released from prison. With Bobbie's increased self-esteem and self-worth, she will be able to adjust to any workplace situation she encounters and feel proud that her contributions to society are valued.

Michala echoed the same feelings of what the AAT program had done for her. Having been in an abusive relationship before incarceration, she felt she was robbed of her emotional feelings. Working with the dogs helped her build her self-worth as well as learning how to work with her fellow prisoners with the purpose of training the dogs. Each woman now has a purpose in life that has been achieved through participation in the AAT program. Adults gather experience through a variety of exposures to feelings, values, and concepts that define their lives as a frame of reference. A frame of reference is those conditions that help adults understand their experiences and shape or reject expectations, perceptions, knowledge, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997). The experiences the women have gained in the AAT program while working with the dogs have laid the groundwork to becoming productive and caring individuals with a purpose.

April talked about how she struggled with her self-esteem in her interview when she shared that she "struggled a bit with my self-esteem...it's been a struggle for me because if you have low self-esteem, you have to learn to get that built up." April built upon her self-esteem, however, with positive reinforcement. While it was sometimes difficult for her, she learned through working with the dogs in the AAT program that she was able to build self-esteem through her accomplishments in working with the dogs. Turner (2007) addressed this and discussed the positive benefits in a prisoner's self-esteem that often occurs through the accomplishment of training a dog and the attachment the dog serves as a companion during the process. Moreover, further literature supported this finding. For example, Ormerod (2005) stated

that the self-esteem of the prisoners improves with being a caretaker of the animals. The women interviewed for this project discussed much of what the literature posits on the importance of self-esteem and self-worth and how working with animals provides opportunity to build these traits. These increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem also provided the participants with a transformational experience as they have the opportunity to reflect upon themselves, their roles, and learn key skills (Turner, 2007).

Improved Relationships

After reflecting on the comments of the women prisoners in the AAT program at CCC, the learned traits of empathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, and trust emerged from their interviews, which in the past only had been applied to male prisoners in an AAT program (Strimple, 2003). An added benefit to these newly learned traits among the women prisoners was reduced altercations among prisoners and staff, making the prison a safer place for all (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). For example, Tatum expressed her feelings that since the dogs are the center of attention among the women, it presented a more stable environment for everyone in the unit. She felt that everyone's attention was dedicated to training their dogs, which in turn created peace and cohesiveness among the group. It also created an environment of open communication with the women working together, laughing, having fun, and accomplishing their goals of training the dogs.

The respect the women displayed towards one another continued towards other prisoners, guards, and supervisors, creating a more peaceful environment for all (Moneymaker & Strimple,

1991). This created a calming effect in the prison quarters with everyone living together in harmony for the betterment of the dogs in the AAT program. As demonstrated in literature, the women learned compassion and patience with the dog that was extended towards their fellow inmates and staff in their housing unit (Ormerod, 2005). From these findings, the women have been given the opportunity to care for a dog, look at their environment from different perspectives, and work with each other as a cohesive group. Through these interactions, the women described working through difficult moments and looking at things from each other's perspectives, providing a framework for their own transformation.

Regan is in a different situation in that she may never be released from prison, with a life sentence for drug dealing. Even with this unfortunate sentence, Regan feels more happiness since she has been in the AAT program. Prior to being in the program, Regan would walk around without speaking or acknowledging anyone. She felt a sense of darkness around her all of the time due to her sentence. Once Regan started in the program, she began to smile to everyone, which became contagious and improved the morale of the institution. Regan also felt that having a dog at your side with a wagging tail helps to create a friendly atmosphere where others smile back. Even though I am not a dog person, I can attest to this in my own life, especially at work; when you see a service dog walking next to a student, you automatically smile at them. While Regan may never be released from prison, she has found a purpose in her life making it more meaningful for her and everyone around her. As for Regan's life sentence, the AAT program serves as a catalyst for her to examine her past while caring for the dogs, which increases her responsibilities and patience levels (Cooke & Farmington, 2016). This frame of reference serves as an effective change in transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997).

Ormerod (2005) examined the benefits of animal training programs with male prisoners and report positive benefits for both the animals and humans that improve the relationships between prisoners and staff. This can also be applied to women prisoners as Bobbie stated that working in the AAT program has helped her build a better relationship with her fellow inmates as well as the guards who witness the good outcomes the women demonstrate with the dogs. The guards saw how the women worked together as a family for the benefit of training the dog and in turn the guards began to interact more with the women demonstrating respect for them and their work. This created an environment of cohesiveness between the women and guards, making the prison a safer place for all (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991).

Working together for the benefit of the dog can also be hard for some women due to the different personalities of each individual. Shay led a sheltered life before prison and did not experience some of the hardships that her fellow prisoners went through. Although her past was devastating in a different way, she learned to come out of her world and see life from another person's viewpoint. These were eye-opening experiences for her and also very helpful in working as a group for the good of the dog. Through the AAT program, Shay has been transformed not only to improve her life but also to become a team member with the other women for the main purpose of training the dogs.

Lacy commented that the living conditions with the dogs presented a healthier atmosphere due to less anger in the unit. There was less stress among the women since each had a responsibility to the daily chores of training and caring for the dogs as if they were their own children. The dogs actually provided Lacy with a coping mechanism to deal with everyday stress. The presence of the dogs provided a therapeutic atmosphere for all of the prisoners, guards, and staff, reducing stress and frustration on everyone's part. When Lacy lived in a unit

without the dogs, she felt she had no purpose in life and her anger was hard to control. She reported feeling more at peace and healthier when the dogs were present. Pet-facilitated therapy (PFT) has been documented in the past with male prisoners by promoting behavioral modifications that transform violent-prone prisoners into compassionate, caring, and responsible individuals when participating in PFT (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). Many of the participants in this study echoed these same sentiments. Similar to studies of male prisoners (Ormerod, 2005), women prisoners discussed similar experiences regarding their transformation into caring and compassionate individuals who make the prison a safer place for fellow prisoners, staff, and guards. Incorporating animal-assisted therapy programs in prisons may be another avenue to providing an educational opportunity for the prisoner to learn animal care along with human compassion while caring for and training the animal (Deaton, 2005).

Marketable Skills for Future Jobs

Training the women in the AAT program can serve as an educational chance to learn life-enhancing skills and develop a marketable vocational skill as animal trainers. The AAT program provided a second chance for the inmates to become productive members of society with a vocation and job (Wade, 2007). Upon release from prison, these individuals can obtain jobs as assistant trainers in AAT programs and have opportunities to become veterinary assistants with a few additional college courses. The AAT program in prison can also lead to opportunities for the women to obtain licensure as dog trainers when released from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). As an added benefit, the AAT program can provide the community with trained dogs for

the disabled or companion animals who would have been euthanized under different circumstances (Strimple, 2003).

Several of the women prisoners felt that after release from prison they would work to find jobs within the animal care industry with their newly learned training or grooming skills. This idea is congruent with the literature that shows AAT programs not only provide the incarcerated with a vocational education, but these skills can lead to employment opportunities as animal care technicians upon release from prison (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015). Lacy was the first to acknowledge that she wanted to start a dog organization in the South with those she had worked with in the past to train drug-sniffing dogs to work with the police. Lacy also wanted to incorporate her training of dogs as rescue dogs after natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods in finding victims trapped in flooded or collapsed buildings. One of her friends is currently working in this capacity with various police departments in South Carolina.

AAT programs in prisons provide prisoners with a new vocational trade, but most importantly, teach life-enhancing skills (Strimple, 2003). Elsie had the opportunity to finish her ministry education while in prison. Her education taught her that to have a dog, you need patience and confidence to train the dog as well as the people who own the dog. By combining the skills of training the dog and understanding the people who will care for the dog, it helps the owners to be better people in the world and to be able to deal with daily struggles of life in general. Although Michala is planning on returning to the real estate business once she is released from prison, she will continue to have a dog by her side and demonstrate that a well-trained dog also needs a well-trained owner. Often, behavioral issues that may occur with a dog are not the dog's fault, but that of the owner who doesn't understand the training process. This can be easily remedied by properly training the owner on how to handle any future behavioral

problems that might arise in the dog. Often, the dog is only half of the problem, with the handler not using the proper techniques the dog was taught for various commands.

April's first step upon release from prison was to volunteer in an animal shelter to demonstrate her new skills in training the dogs, which she hopes will extend into employment no matter what job she is asked to perform. April would be happy to clean cages and walk the dogs, demonstrating her dedication and wanting to be a hard worker. Her next step would be to visit various hospitals with the therapy dogs to put smiles on the patients' faces when they see a wagging tail (Doyle & Kukowski, 1989). Even when the patient is in pain, a wet nose and a wagging tail next to their bed can reduce their pain during the visit. April's experience comes from the smiles her ailing mother would show whenever a dog walked into her own room. The dog would provide comfort to her mother no matter how much pain she was in at the time.

Several of the women were fortunate to finish their education in the ministry while in prison. Lacy intends to combine her skills learned from the AAT program with preaching. Lacy felt she has accomplished being able to change her own life from her criminal past into a new shining "butterfly" and being a better person, as she stated, "You can come out shining and you can come out a better person. Don't let the things you've gone through tear you down, but learn to raise you up and lift you up and be a better person." Her comments state that one should not let themselves get buried in their past but look forward to the future and start anew. Lacy's comment demonstrates key components of transformational learning as outlined by Mezirow in the literature. While Lacy incorporates the dogs into visiting nursing homes and children's wards, this allows her the opportunity to share a quick scripture quote with a wagging tail next to her for a pet. The dog can easily open the door for her into these areas and allow her to share her message from God.

Bobbie's goal upon release from prison is to continue her education and volunteer in animal shelters. Her final career goal is to either work in an organization that trains dogs or become an instructor teaching others how to properly train dogs for various tasks. She feels that teaching people how to be better trained with their own dogs is the most important task for a better relationship with the animal. Incorporating animal-assisted therapy programs in prisons is another avenue to provide an educational opportunity for the prisoner to learn animal care along with human compassion while caring for and training the animal (Deaton, 2005). These women feel that through the AAT program, they have gained compassion by caring for the dogs that has been extended towards their fellow prisoners and everyone at the prison (Strimple, 2003). As these women re-enter society, they will leave the prison with a vocational education in dog training and improved psychological skills of self-worth, self-esteem, compassion, and a purpose in life that they may have never experienced in their lives prior to incarceration (Strimple, 2003). The AAT program has provided a meaningful experience for the women to heal, change, and feel that they are a part of a productive society. As they have learned these new traits, the women have been transformed into caring and productive members of society (Merriam, 2002).

Recommendations

It has been discussed that the most important aspect of AAT programs is that the prisoners learn life-enhancing skills and have lower recidivism rates (Strimple, 2003). When the women are released from prison, they have the vocational skills in animal care to obtain jobs in the animal industry as groomers, veterinarian technicians, and trainers, which provides financial support for their families (Minton, Perez, & Miller, 2015; Wade, 2007). Besides the monetary

benefits of employment and education, the women's lives have been transformed into caring individuals who have acquired the human skills of patience, confidence, unconditional love, self-esteem and self-worth that were lost in prior relationships before incarceration. Each of the women now believes they have a purpose in life with endless opportunities for success not available before incarceration. The women with life sentences who may not be released from prison also have experienced a transformational change to continue to be productive dog trainers in the AAT program in prison. With the changes that states are making to reduce the prison populations, CCC informed me that some prisoners are being released before their sentences expire for time served or good behavior. The women with life sentences may also be released in the future as prison reforms are put in place. The women who participated in the AAT program with the life sentences may be released in the future and will have the necessary skills to obtain jobs in the animal industry. Besides the AAT skills the women have learned, these women have also been transformed into caring and productive individuals in society who will add to the economy while supporting their families.

Productive employment and improved psychological skills can lead to reduced recidivism (Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Graham, 2000). Reduced recidivism equates to a positive cost reduction in housing for prisoners in state and federal prisons. A positive impact on women's recidivism could be made by providing more educational opportunities to women in prison (Brock, 2017). One recommendation is to open additional AAT programs in women's prisons that are currently lacking in many states. Several states have vocational opportunities for men prisoners to train horses as therapy animals for the disabled, but there are very few educational opportunities in animal care for women in AAT programs.

By adding additional AAT programs in women's prisons, the benefit would be fewer abandoned animals in the pet shelters that now have a second chance at life by providing community members either an assistance animal or companion, which reduces euthanasia for these animals (Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991). The other important benefit to the women prisoners is reduced recidivism rates when the women find employed in the animal care industry with their new vocational skills learned from the AAT program.

Besides transforming the women into compassionate and confident adults again, the biggest benefit is their improved attitudes and emotions that were robbed from them prior to incarceration. The dogs in the AAT program helped the women to find peace within themselves and be able to function each day. When the women are released from prison, their lives and attitudes have changed, allowing them to be more at peace in a community setting with their families who had been taken from them prior to incarceration. This also provides a more stable environment for the family as well as employment opportunities as contributing members of society. Since this program has clearly helped these women heal, other areas for investigation could be in community settings such as homeless shelters, schools, and funeral homes where very little research has been conducted. Many homeless shelters house women and young children often in transition. The children could learn how to train the dogs and take care of their daily needs while the parent works outside the shelter. Therapy pets could provide comfort to families at funeral homes when mourning the loss of a loved one. Some schools now have various pets in the classroom, but these are mostly turtles and frogs. Dogs could help the children learn how to care for them while learning compassion for the animal that can be extended to their fellow classmates.

Having worked in the educational arena for more than twenty years, more collaborative vocational programs with educational institutions and prisons could benefit both male and female prisoners helping to prepare these inmates for productive employment upon release. From what I learned at CCC prison, a local community college was sending instructors to the prison for the didactic instruction of the coursework. The lab components of the coursework were conducted at the prison with the program managers overseeing the classes. Since the recent pandemic, the use of electronic learning sources with the internet has expanded throughout the world, making it easier to teach virtually to a large group. Various vocational programs can be taught through a virtual classroom such as culinary, automotive repair, gardening, and sewing/tailoring to name a few.

Future Research

Future research studies are needed to examine the use of AAT programs with women prisoners with a larger number of participants. More participants could result in additional psychological skills revealed from the results as well as determining the employment opportunities the women may seek upon release from prison. My current study was limited with only eight participants available at the time due to the women transitioning between prisons and only one participant being released from prison. We still don't know how many of these women will obtain jobs in animal care upon release, who may recidivate, or how they will function in society with their families after being transformed into caring and confident individuals with their new skills. There are industries that are willing to hire felons like PetSmart, but how many women are close to one of these stores to obtain possible employment. Further research needs to

examine a larger cohort of women prisoners in an AAT program that would look at the perspectives of the women and their social identities, education prior to incarceration and obtained while in prison, employment opportunities obtained after release from prison, and recidivism rates. As of this date, only one of my participants has been released from prison and has not returned.

Conclusion

The interviews with the women have demonstrated several themes that appeared to be in common among two or more women with new skills learned in the AAT program. Each of the women has decided that upon release from prison, she will either try to work in the animal training arena in some capacity or to return to her previous career with a well-trained dog by her side. Even if they do not directly work in animal training, the women can demonstrate that a dog can be trained to be either a great companion or therapy dog. The AAT program has also been successful in serving as a catalyst with the women regaining or becoming transformed with the psychological skills of confidence, patience, self-worth and self-esteem by working with the dogs. Several of the women felt they lost these skills from bad relationships with abusive spouses prior to incarceration. The AAT program also helped the women to learn unconditional love and patience while working with the dogs that has helped them to demonstrate these traits towards their fellow inmates, making them better people while incarcerated and reducing confrontations among themselves or the guards. By participating in the AAT program, each woman has been transformed into a better human being from working with the dogs. Their newly learned

compassion, caring, and understanding for an animal have been extended towards their fellow prisoners, guards, and staff.

Upon release from prison, these new psychological traits of compassion and patience will become a part of everyday life for the women. The women will become productive members of society as they learn how to deal with confrontations or problems that may arise in their daily lives from the training each woman received in the AAT program. These newly learned traits will also provide the women with a purpose in life that helps them be better parents for their children by setting a good example for them as they grow up. By increasing their confidence levels, the women also learn how to deal with daily problems in their jobs or family lives and how to build future relationships with family, friends, and fellow employees that were lacking before incarceration.

The transformational learning theory provides the framework for the women to analyze their experiences from the AAT program and effectively change their feelings, values, and concepts that define their lives (Mezirow, 1997). Critical reflection is a key component necessary for the women to analyze their lives before prison and learn how to make changes for successful release into society (Mezirow, 1994). As the women worked in the AAT program, they also learned how to reflect on the training techniques with the dogs when various techniques did not work. Through collaboration with the other women, they each reflected on how to work together for the success of the dog. These are important skills that each woman will take with her upon release from prison to be successful in her life outside the prison.

An equally important aspect of the AAT program is that unwanted dogs get a second chance at life to become either a great companion animal or assistant dog to a community member. Otherwise, these dogs might have been euthanized under different circumstances. In

conclusion, women prisoners who participate in AAT programs while incarcerated also receive the same emotional and vocational benefits that their male counterparts have received while working in AAT programs during their incarceration. The women are transformed into caring individuals by learning unconditional love for an animal that is extended towards fellow mankind.

As I reflect on my visits to the two women's prisons, the first thing that stands out from inside the walls of the prison is that it is a very organized and orderly setting. We often see the news media reporting on the riots and fights that sometimes occur to an extreme degree in the prisons but never hear of how these institutions work to provide an education to the inmates and prepare them for release to productive lives. At CCC, the women do not sit around all day and do nothing. Outside of the AAT program, the women have chores and classes to attend daily. The AAT program has a 24/7 responsibility for each of the women who are paired together with one dog. This often means getting up late at night to attend to a sick dog or take them out for bathroom needs.

The conversations with the women also reminded me that these are women like you and me who have families, careers, and friends prior to incarceration. Their prior careers were in areas that many of us work in, such as real estate, dental hygiene, and the business world. Poor choices in their lives put them in prison, with time to reflect on their past crimes and try to make changes for future release. My prior ideas that these women were just criminals who were locked away did not match my thoughts after speaking with each one. I was so enlightened by their conversations in how human each one was and how changed their thoughts and feelings were by working in the AAT program. Several of the women discussed how the dog gave them back their compassion and self-esteem they had lost from abusive spouses in the past. Other women also

commented on how they felt that training the dog for community members was their “giving back” for past offenses and how sorry they were for their crimes. A few of the women also sought comfort in the ministry by obtaining college degrees in prison with the goal to preach when released from prison. Two of the women even decided to work with law enforcement by training drug-sniffing dogs for use in airports or crime scenes. I was so impressed by their compassion for the dogs and the program that at times I wanted to cry from their comments.

The other important connection with these women and the AAT program was their comments and experiences that came out in their interviews exactly matched my literature searches of compassion, caring, self-esteem, self-worth, unconditional love, patience, and reduced altercations. From the women’s comments, I now could see that the AAT program was the catalyst for transforming these women into caring and compassionate individuals who had been lost prior to incarceration. In conclusion, when the AAT program is incorporated into women prisons, it provides the women with the opportunity to learn respect and compassion for the animals, which in turn is then extended towards fellow prisoners, staff, and guards. The women become transformed into caring individuals with opportunities to work in the animal care industry upon release. In turn, unwanted dogs get a second chance at life as either as an assistant dog for the disabled or great companion dog for a community member, thus avoiding euthanasia.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRISONERS IN THE AAT PROGRAM

- Why did you choose to participate in the AAT program?
- Has your living situation changed after entering the AAT program?
- Have your friendships with fellow prisoners changed since entering the AAT program?
- How has working with the animals changed your life?
- How do you approach working with a dog?
- What are your feelings towards animals since participating in the AAT program?
- What have you learned from working in the AAT program?
- Have your feeling towards prison guards changed since participating in AAT programs?
- Have your feeling towards fellow prisoners changed since participating in AAT programs?
- How have you changed over time since working with the animals?
- What type of job opportunities will you look for after leaving prison?