

## Reflective Essay

Our research project was for Dr. Maire Ford's close relationships capstone. We were tasked with designing a research question, hypothesis, and study that addresses a gap in close relationship research. We wanted to look at the relationship between dogs and humans, but we first needed to narrow our focus.

We briefly talked about Bowlby's attachment theory in class as it relates to human relationships, but we were curious to see if this research had been applied to dogs. Our proposal needed to be on a research question that had never been explored before, so we began looking for gaps in research. In order to do this, we needed to have a solid understanding of attachment theory so that we could apply it to dogs. Using the library databases, we did a thorough search of articles that contained any information on attachment theory. We looked in numerous databases using keywords, years, authors, and titles. We initiated this search by looking for articles by Bowlby, that cited Bowlby, or that contained "Attachment Theory". The databases we found to be the most successful were PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete, and Social Sciences Full Text (H.W. Wilson). Our research led us to other studies and ideas relating to our topic that we were not aware of. We came across many useful studies that we were only able to access because of the library. There were full text PDF documents available for each of the sources we needed. These were easily downloaded and shared between the two of us. We used this knowledge base to build our understanding of attachment bonds and continued using this research method because it worked so well for us.

Through our searches, we found there was a lack of research looking at owner's attachment to their dogs. We learned from the research that separation anxiety is a necessary

component of an attachment relationship, and we noticed there was very little research done on separation anxiety between humans and dogs. The research looked at whether or not dogs experience separation anxiety when apart from their owner, but there was no research looking at whether or not humans experience separation anxiety when separated from their dog. We saw that this presented us with a potential research question, but we needed to be completely sure there was no other research before we could begin developing our proposal. We used the function that allowed us to search all of the library's databases in order to be confident that we had reviewed all available literature. While we were unable to find a specific study that looked at humans experiencing separation anxiety, we came across research on how service dog owners can develop an especially strong bond with their dogs. These unexpected research findings sparked the idea to compare the experiences of owners of pet dogs and owners of service dogs. We were then able to formulate our hypothesis that service dogs owners, when compared to pet dog owners, would be more likely to experience separation anxiety if their dog fulfilled one of their needs. The library's databases provided us with a strong foundation and support for our predictions.

The library resources were invaluable because they allowed us to complete our research efficiently and effectively. Since we both live off campus, we were very fortunate in that the Hannon Library provided us with access to online resources that we could use when we were not on campus. This was especially useful in the context of a group project, as it was extremely challenging to coordinate times when we could both be in the library. All our sources needed to be peer-reviewed, so having the option to search only for peer-reviewed articles saved us a lot of

time as we sifted through the existing literature. We were also able to use the citation feature to ensure that we were properly using APA formatting.

This project required that we learn how to search broadly for various research topics as well as navigate library resources with immense specificity. We developed a much stronger understanding and greater appreciation for the complexity of close relationship research. We hope to use our newfound skills and inspiration in our future research.