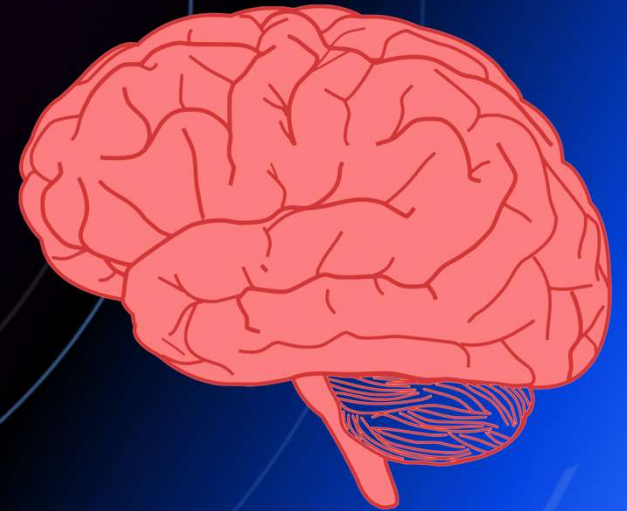


# PETS AND MENTAL HEALTH

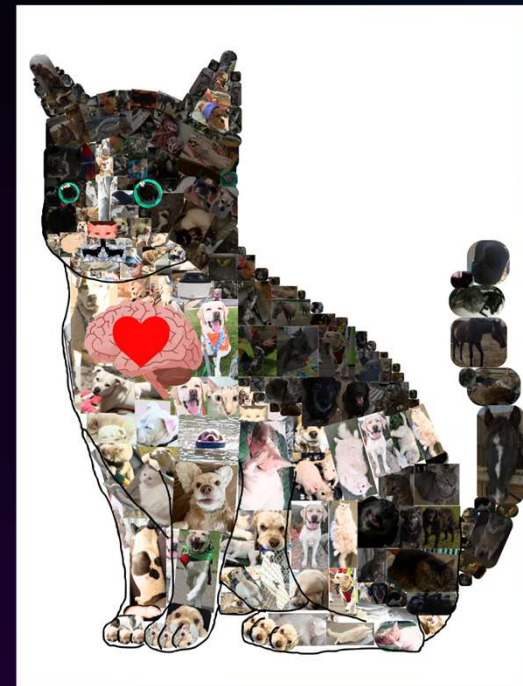
ISAAC PITTS



## MY PROJECT

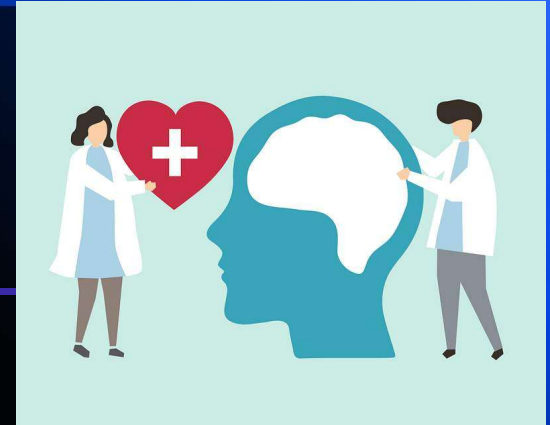
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- I wanted to do something interdisciplinary and out of my comfort zone.
- With that in mind, I settled on an art project. I did not want to do another research paper; I have done many of those. I wanted to do something new and different. Something that would last and have greater meaning than a paper.
- So, I designed this poster.



# MENTAL HEALTH

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- Mental health is a growing concern in the United States
- It is a huge issue in the veterinary medicine realm (High Rates of Suicide)
- It is misunderstood, misrepresented, or not taken seriously
- It needs to be explored more, and those struggling are encouraged to seek help
- Pet can play a pivotal role in helping with these struggles. Numerous studies have investigated how they improve not only mental health but also physical health
- Physical benefits lead to more mental health benefits

# COMPANION ANIMALS AND THE THEORY OF ATTACHMENT



- A companion animal is any domestic or domestic-bred animal whose daily needs are met in the home or in a close relationship with humans. These needs are physical, emotional, behavioral, and social.
- Cats and dogs are the most common companion animals, or pets, around the world, followed by horses and rabbits.
- Non-conventional pets are just as important
- When studying pets, a common theme that comes up a lot is attachment.
  - What is attachment, you might ask. That is the issue; there is no clear definition of attachment when it comes to the human-animal bond
  - The issue of anthropomorphizing





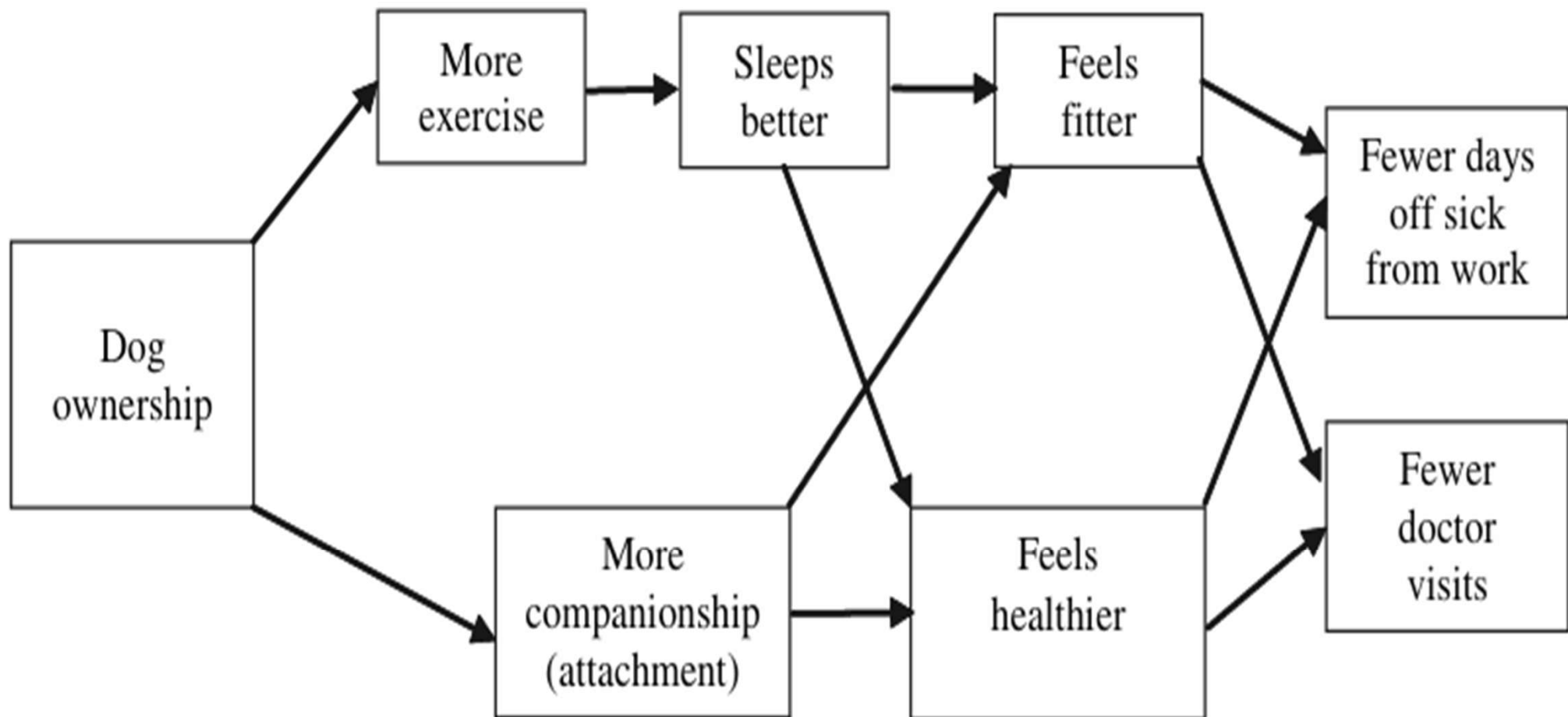
# A NATURAL STUDY (PHYSICAL BENEFITS)

- Previous research in Western countries' data might be skewed.
  - 60-68% of US households have a pet
  - This apparent benefit in these cases could be caused by healthier individuals selecting to own a pet and not the pets benefiting the owners themselves
- This study, done in China, might show better results.
  - Until 1992, pets were banned in China
  - When the ban was lifted, pet ownership increased, especially among women 25-40.
- This study is a better indicator of health benefits acquired through pets because, unlike many Americans, the Chinese were self-selected owners and not raised in a pet-friendly household



For the study, they looked at 6 health aspects

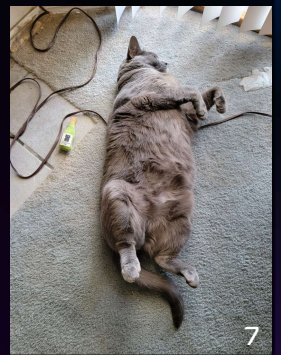
1. Regular Exercise
2. Physical Fitness
3. Self-reported Health
4. Sleep
5. Sick Days Taken
6. Doctor visits.



## PETS IN TURKEY



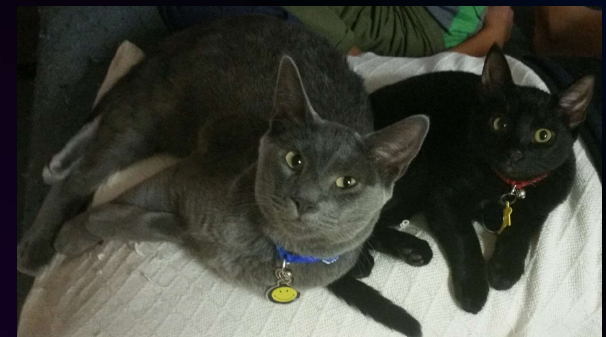
- The study wanted to find if there was an association between owning pets and anxiety (AN), depression (DE), and stress (ST).
- Their results suggested that cats and dogs provided humans with psychological benefits.
- Pet owners had lower levels of AN, DE, and ST compared to non-owners.
- Their findings support previous empirical data.
- They described pets as being a protective buffer against stress and loneliness during COVID.



# MENTAL HEALTH IN OLDER ADULTS



- This next study showed how pets have benefited community-dwelling adults 65 and older.
- As adults get older, they are at risk of a decline in mental health as they deal with life stressors that are specific to later in life.
- From their interview-based study they found 4 themes:
  1. Pets provide comfort and safety
  2. Pets provide social inclusion and participation
  3. Pets provide purposeful routine and structure
  4. Pets provide a meaningful role
- All these themes show how older adults with pets experienced positive mental health benefits. It made owners feel loved and accepted, decreased loneliness, and brought meaning to their lives



# PETS AS RESOURCES



- Pets can be looked at like “resources.” While this term may seem disrespectful to a living creature, it is a great analogy
  - Resources are ecologically important to every living thing on this planet. The more one has, the higher their fitness is.
- They help people recover from stressful days, reducing the negative effects of stress improving mental health
- Every new day brings new, unique experiences; while they may be micro in nature, they have a cumulative effect on your emotional and psychological health. (Micro-events)
- Most of these events are experienced at work, and through recent research, mental health is declining; understanding how work experiences may affect mental health is becoming increasingly important
- When someone gets home, pets can provide moments of comfort, allowing their owner to replenish their resources, effectively acting as a buffer. This reduces the negative effects of stress and promotes a sense of calm and well-being



## WE CAN'T IGNORE THE DOWNSIDES

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- Pets provide humans with many benefits in many ways; they can build social capital, act as agents of harm reduction, motivate healthy behaviors, and potentially participate in doctor treatment plans.
- However, like most things, there are negative aspects that cannot be overlooked.
- Pets can cause harm through bites and scratches, challenge family financial and social prioritization, and are potential sources of zoonotic diseases
- Just owning the pet can be difficult.

# ART AND MENTAL HEALTH

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- Participation in art enhances individual and collective mental health
- As more research has focused on the benefits of art, it has been recognized by the public health sector as a health behavior and asset
- This benefit is seen across all modes (ways people engage in art) and forms of art



# CONCLUSIONS



- Pets are pivotal aspects of our lives, and they provide benefits to our mental and physical health.

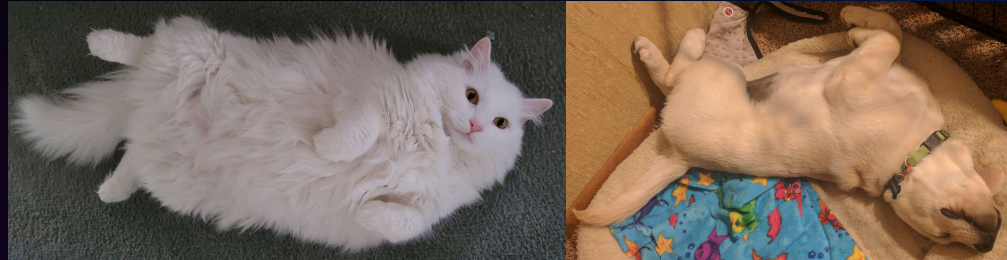


- They decrease loneliness by providing companionship and helping people engage in social events
  - They decrease depression, stress, and anxiety
  - They help people participate in healthier lifestyles, such as more exercise and quitting smoking
  - They can also lower blood pressure by just petting them
- Art is another way to improve mental health
  - Mental health is a serious issue that many people struggle with, including myself. These are just a few ways of helping mediate mental health issues in more constructive and positive ways.

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## REFLECTION



Making this collage was really fun. I loved seeing the picture come to life as I added to it. I was excited when I finished it. Art has not always been my strong suit, so to design something and have it look really good was very uplifting.

Even though this was a homework project, it didn't feel like homework. Amongst all the other work I had to do for classes like physics and forensic chemistry, this project was a nice change of pace. It was a nice, calm break in a stressful day of classes and homework. It was a great stress reliever.

I thought this was a better way to use my thesis. I got to use something that has been shown to help mental health and felt those benefits.

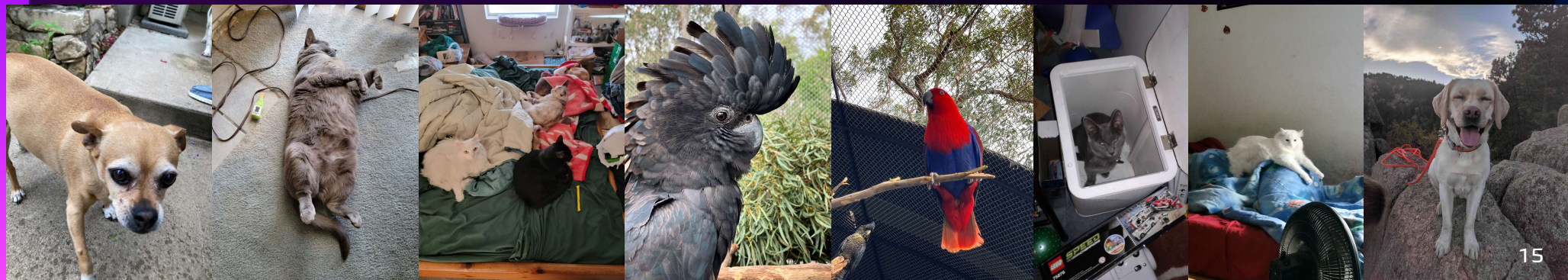
I also got to do something different outside of what I have been doing my entire college career. Doing an art project, something that is interdisciplinary, which will help me be more well-rounded when I graduate. Interdisciplinary studies are the main aim of honors. You get to take classes to get your AUCCs that you would not normally get to do.

# SPECIAL THANKS!

Photos: Aaron Graff, Justine Negron, Xavier Quintana, Christy Fuhrmann, Kenneth Lonquist, Daniel Barclay, and Aunt Carrie for providing photos.

This project would not have been possible without their help.

My Committee: Dr. Tanya Dewey and Dr. Pamela Vaughan-Knaus. Thank you for serving on my honors committee.



QUESTIONS

