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**Exploring the experience of travelling with and taking
care for a guide dog:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Tin-Su Liang

**Submitted for the degree of PhD, Psychology
Birkbeck, University of London**

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where other sources are clearly and identifiably cited.

Abstract

The mobility support that *guide dogs* provide to the visually impaired person is one of the most established forms of assistive dog partnership. The UK has the highest number of guide dog owners per capita globally. While there exists a small body of literature on guide dog partnerships, very few studies have specifically addressed owners in the UK or examined partnerships as experienced by first-time owners. Little attention is paid to the professionals who work with guide dog-owner teams.

This thesis explores the guide dog–person partnership as it is perceived by guide dog professionals and first-time owners in the UK. Two empirical studies are presented; data collection and analysis are guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Study 1 examines the perspectives of five mobility specialists and dog trainers employed by Guide Dogs UK. Study 2 concerns 11 London-based first-time owners and their guide dog experience within and outside the contexts of joint mobility.

The two studies foreground the ambivalence and fluidity that characterise the participants' perceptions of guide dog-person partnerships. The professionals' and owners' accounts depict the guide dogs taking up different and conflicting characters; they shift between being trustworthy guides and forces of dangerous unpredictability, between working animals and subjects of tender loving care. The person's role in the partnership can also take different forms, such as user, carer, 'manager,' and 'client.'

The first-time owners' interviews shed further light on the guide dogs' impact on the existential level. The partnership helps re-establish the security and openness of the self's embodied relation with the physical world and re-embrace the possibility of a more home-like being within the sense of uncanny existence aggravated by sight loss. The owners' connections with their guide dogs also shape the social terrain through which their senses of self arise, in both welcome and unwelcome ways.

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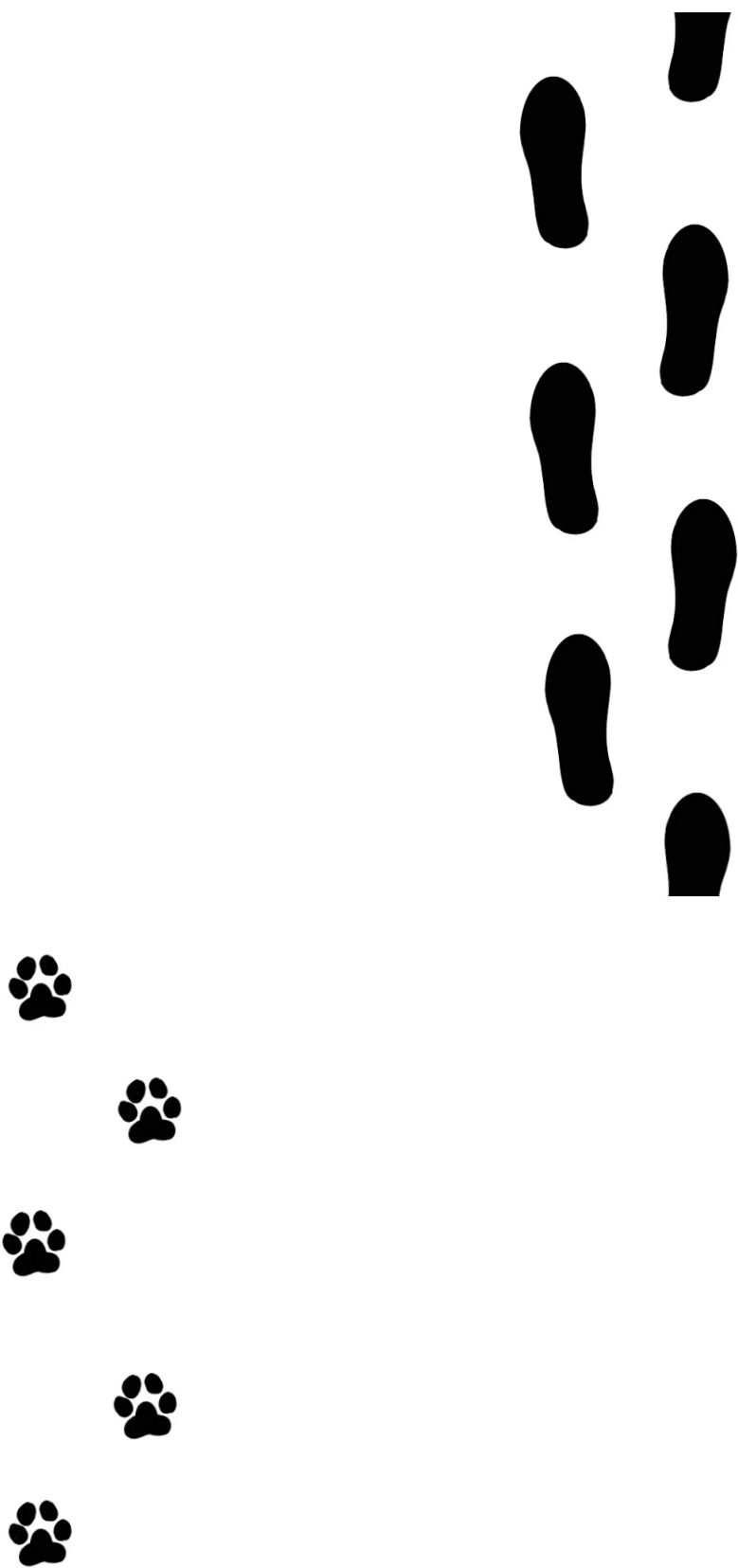
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Illustrations by Xin (artist)

Preface

Setting the Scene

Our associations with other animal beings constitute a major dimension of the human lifeworld. Dogs, in particular, are beings with whom we have maintained the most intimate relationship; of all the animal beings, only dogs are considered ‘man’s best friend.’

But our relationship with dogs is also the most diverse and complicated one. Apart from being our beloved companions, dogs have been brought into our lives for a range of purposes, such as hunting, herding, protection/policing, sports, and other entertainment. More increasingly, dogs are being bred and trained to provide specialized support to help individuals achieve an ‘optimal level of functional independence’ (Audrestch et al., 2015) – the most established example of this being the partnership shared between a ‘guide dog’ and a person with impaired vision that has undermined her/his physical mobility.

I was fortunate to spend my adolescence in the company of our family dogs, which first sparked my interest in the dog-person relationship. My experience with dogs came only in the form of everyday pet dog ownership, however. I had very limited knowledge about guide dogs prior to this study – all I knew came from movie scenes or anecdotes found in mass media.

In fact, it was in the summer of 2015 that I had my first real-life encounter with a guide dog–owner team in action. On the streets of Taipei, I was standing in front a coffee shop waiting for a friend. While I was looking around and searching for a familiar face, my attention was caught by a gentleman and his Labrador on the road verge across the street. The man held the dog’s leash in his hand, standing still and looking forward (not at the dog); at the other end of the leash was the Lab, spinning in a small circle, rather hastily. ‘What are they doing?’ I asked myself. There was something about this scene that made it different from the everyday dog-owner interactions I saw in the park.

As the gentleman cleaned up after the Lab and finally placed the harness back in his hand, I realized, ‘Aha, that is a guide dog; the man can’t see.’ I kept replaying the scene in my head over the next few days. Not just from the excitement of seeing a guide dog in real life, but also because the encounter brought to light a set of preconceptions that I was not aware that I had. In short, I had the image of the guide dog as the ‘superdog,’ who worked magically to guide the person and needed no care. I had thought that the connection that visually impaired owners

experience with their guide dogs was *just* a more emotionally rewarding version of everyday pet companionship.

This short encounter got me thinking: what is it like to live with a specially trained dog, to be cared for by and also care for him/her? What does it mean to be a guide dog owner, whose sight loss and guiding needs have made a trained dog and a working partnership possible options in the first place? How does one define the roles that the guide dog and the human partner each play or the relationship shared between the two?

This thesis tries to find some answers to these questions. The quest spans across two empirical studies and operates with inquisitive lenses guided by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) – a research approach that tackles a phenomenon by focusing on how it is understood and experienced by real people, in real situations, in all its richness and messiness.

The first study turns to a side of the story of the guide dog partnership that is largely absent in the existing literature. It examines the views of workers employed at Guide Dogs UK, who provide visually impaired individuals with the mobility and/or dog training support needed to establish and maintain effective, optimal relationships with their guide dogs. The second study zooms in on a group of clients/owners at Guide Dogs, who are with their first guide dogs. It provides an in-depth, first-timer view of what is it like to live with a guide dog that can be distinguished from earlier academic writings, wherein the heterogeneity of guide dog owners and the context of their experience appeared underrepresented.

In its entirety, this thesis is as much about learning the act of researching as it is about a quest to understand a particular domain of the dog-human relationship. It is the product of an academic work, but it also embodies the dialectic of the knower, the known, and the method, and – last but not least– a caring, attentive regard to the way we relate to the animal beings present in our lives.

The Chapters

This thesis consists of three parts. The first part lays out a series of groundwork to refine the focus and aim of the investigation. Chapter 1 provides a review of existing literature that address (directly or indirectly) the first-person experience of living and working with a guide dog. The rationale and strategy of the literature search process is described. The review of the

literature is presented thematically around key issues pertinent to guide dog owners and their experience of the partnership. The chapter ends with a description of the aims to be addressed in studying the owners' experience of their relationship with guide dogs.

Chapter 2 concerns the existing literature that document the two important professional roles in the provision of guide dog service: mobility specialists for visual impairment and guide dog trainers. The chapter includes a description of the systematic process used to gather relevant literature, which highlights the scarcity of literature on guide dog professionals. The chapter closes with a statement of the questions that will guide the study in examining the perspective of guide dog professionals.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of choice that guides this thesis. It first describes the ontological and epistemological stance taken by the researcher. The chapter then discusses the work of three key contributors to the phenomenological philosophy: Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The discussion describes and compares variants of the phenomenological-oriented research approach, specifically Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The comparison highlights key tenets of IPA that make it the most suitable research approach for this thesis.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters 4 through 9) covers the work prompted by the encounters with the guide dog professionals and owners in the real-life context. Chapter 4 describes the method of Study 1, which is dedicated to explore the perspective of the guide dog professionals. The description details the strategy adopted in recruiting professional participants. The steps involved in designing and conducting an in-person semi-structured interview are explained. Lastly, the chapter explains the analytic process as guided by the IPA approach, with references to examples drawn from case- and group-level analyses.

Chapter 5 presents the results of analysing the professionals' interviews through the interweaving of key interview excerpts and the researcher's interpretive commentary. Four themes are reported; each theme deals with a recurrent subject in the interviews that best illustrates the complexity and tension of the professionals' sense-making. The chapter considers in sequence the nature and working capacity of the guide dog, the guide dog-person mobility, the companionship and the caregiving aspect of the partnership.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the professionals' perspectives in relation to existing literature, which include selected sociological research on human-animal interaction and the

psychological research that focuses broadly on human attitude towards animal mind and use. The discussion concentrates on three areas of the findings that best illustrate the paradox-laden nature of the professionals' perception of the guide dog–person partnership: the minded action of guide dogs, the issue of control, and the affective dimension of the guide dog–person unit.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the method used in the second study, which directs the investigation to the partnership experience of owners who are living with their first guide dog. The chapter explains that the sampling strategy used, and the measures taken to facilitate a smooth experience for the owner participants at different points of the recruitment process (e.g. initial context, informed consent). The method highlights a reflexive discussion of the embodied dimension of the interview encounters with the visually impaired owners. The analytic steps are explained, with emphasis on aspects that differ from Study 1.

Chapter 8 presents the findings of analysing owners' interviews. Four overarching themes are reported, and each is elaborated by the researcher's interpretive claims and evidenced by key interview excerpts. The first two themes highlight the process and issue of establishing a working partnership with the guide dog and the nebulous nature of the guide dog–owner interaction outside of the working time. The third theme centres on the sense of 'confidence–security' that marks the pervasive impact of the partnership on the interconnection between the owner's sense of self, body and the physical world. The fourth theme concerns the owner's complicated experience of the guide dog's impact on their social identity/visibility.

Chapter 9 considers the first-time owners' experience reported in Study 2 in relation to the existing literature. The discussion presents a dialogue between the study's findings and other empirical accounts of the partnership as experienced and understood by the owners. The chapter also shows the connection between the findings with other bodies of literature, such as the phenomenological writing on embodied experience and the theoretical literature on the concept of social identity.

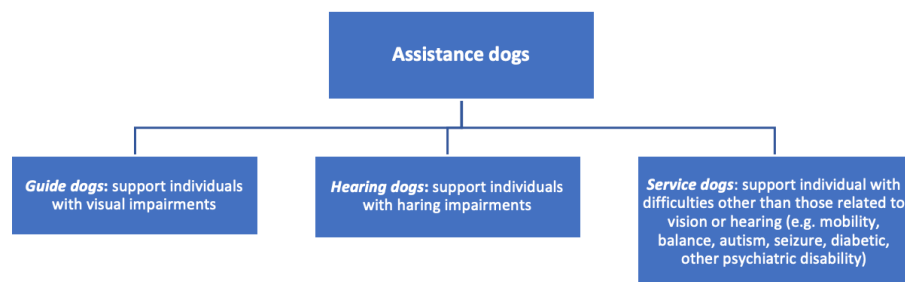
Chapter 10 is the last part of the thesis. The chapter begins by reviewing the key findings from Studies 1 and 2. In particular, the synthesis highlights '*Ambivalence and Fluidity*' and '*Transforming Self, Body, and World*' as important structures through which the guide dog–person partnership shined through as a lived experience and meaningful whole. The discussion then describes the practical implication of the studies and evaluates the quality and applicability of the analytic findings. Finally, potential directions for future research are suggested.

Part I: The Preparation Phase

Chapter 1. Literature Review: The Guide Dog–Person Partnership

Over the last few decades, interest has grown in the West about the various supports (rehabilitative, therapeutic, and emotional) that people can receive from specifically trained dogs (Parenti et al., 2013; Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2002). ‘Assistance dog’ is a widely recognized umbrella term that refers to working dogs providing support for individuals with disabilities, which include people living with sensory difficulties (vision, hearing) and those in need of support for general mobility/physical functioning, specific medical crises, or psychiatric conditions (‘Looking for an Assistance Dog’, 2020). [Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the three common subtypes of assistance dog support and the associated labels.

Figure 1. Overview of the three main subtypes of assistance dog support



In the United Kingdom, the longest standing type of assistance dog relationship is that between a person who is partially sighted or blind and a ‘guide dog’. The guide dogs are specifically trained to provide mobility support for the individuals by performing tasks such as curb recognition or identifying and avoiding obstacles (Audrestch et al., 2015). At present, about 4,950 guide dog owners in the UK (‘Guide Dogs UK’, 2020) are supported by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA or Guide Dogs). While the UK has the highest number of guide dog owners per capita globally (Refson et al., 2001), the guide dog–person partnership does not constitute an everyday experience for all people with sight loss – about 360,000 people are registered as partially sighted or blind in the UK (‘Blindness and Vision Loss’, 2020).

In many respects, becoming a guide dog owner seems to be a significant event for the individual, involving the intersection of experiences of sight loss, assistive support, and relations between humans and other animals.

It’s not just about improving your mobility. A guide dog and its owner exist in a partnership, and the companionship, loyalty, and fun that each partner brings to this relationship can be immensely rewarding. (‘Guide Dogs UK Charity for the Blind and Partially Sighted’, 2016, original emphasis)

As stated, my initial interest in exploring the guide dog–person partnership was sparked by my personal experience with dogs. At the start of my PhD programme in 2016, I found myself feeling like an outsider to the phenomenon that I was set to explore. Experientially, unlike the guide dog owner, I have been fully sighted my whole life, and I have never been visually *impaired*. I started to feel uncertain about whether I would be able to understand with sensitivity a partnership that is intended to assist individuals living with sight loss. Academically, my familiarity with the kinds of accounts or *dialogues* (van Manen, 2016) that other researchers have already addressed on the topic of guide dog partnership was limited to the relatively limited literature I read while drafting my PhD application. I was interested in the topic, but I realized that I needed a clearer sense of where (and how) my quest should proceed.

Against this backdrop, I sought to more thoroughly explore and consult the existing literature that is relevant to the guide dog–person partnership. The literature review was an exploratory and preparatory move to equip me with entry-level sensitivity to the *perspective* of a guide dog owner and the phenomenon in question more broadly, allowing me to garner insights to plan my own study (Kvale, 1996; Willig, 2011). I approached the literature search strategically, laying out certain criteria in advance to specify what literature is *relevant* and to guide where and how to retrieve this literature.

The following sections discuss my search strategy and the review of the literature regarding guide dog owners and their relationships with the guide dogs. The end of the chapter presents post-review remarks on the direction and rationale of the study on the guide dog–owner relationship.

Literature search strategy and process

While the focus of this research project is on the person–guide dog relationship, what/how the owners perceive of the guide dog’s assistance is likely related to their experience of sight loss. Therefore, I decided to include visual impairment research in the literature review process. In addition, I decided that the review would also consult literature related to other types of assistance dog partnerships in which individuals receive support for their sensory/physical difficulties (e.g. hearing dogs and service dogs). This inclusion was based on the assumption that this area of work could provide potentially transferrable insights to contextualize the understanding of the guide dog partnership literature. I prioritized the three topic areas differently in the search, with the guide dog partnership being the core and the other two areas

being supplementary. I took a relatively more inclusive approach to search for literature on the topic of guide dog partnership than for literature pertaining to the two neighbouring phenomena. I conducted the search online through one generic database (*Academic Search Complete*, ASC) and one discipline-specific database (*APA PsycINFO*). I searched all three topic areas in October–November 2016, and I conducted an updated search in May 2020 for literature on the topic of guide dog partnership. Details of the search strategy and selection process are presented in the following subsections.

I. Searching for literature on guide dog partnerships

Table 1. Eligibility criteria and search parameters: Guide dog partnership

Search terms	'guide dog#' 'dog guide #' ¹
Publication time	No specification
Literature type	Peer reviewed journals
Study approach	Empirical, Non-empirical
Language	Qualitative, Quantitative
Geographic location	English
	No specification

Figure 2. Flowchart of the 2016 online database search for literature on guide dog partnership

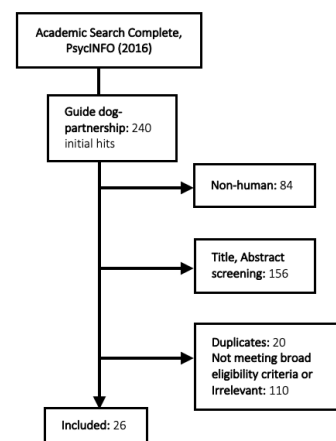


Table 1 presents the specific relevance criteria and search parameters for searching the literature on the topic of guide dog–owner partnership. The process and results of the search are illustrated in Figure 2. Given that the primary concern was the human partners’ perspective on the guide dog partnership, 84 records from journals based on animal science (e.g. animal genetics, veterinary journals) were excluded. Subsequent screening excluded duplicates and records that either did not meet the broad eligibility criteria or did not appear to be relevant to the topic of guide dog partnership. This search led to the inclusion of 26 articles on the topic of guide dog partnership.

A follow-up search on the topic of guide dog partnership was conducted in May 2020 to ensure that the research project stayed informed of current work in the area. The 2020 search was more selective than the initial search in 2016; it focused on Western-based empirical literature published during the period from 2017 to 2020, while the other search parameters from 2016 remained constant. This updated search identified 54 hits. I screened the titles and/or abstracts

for the first 20 most relevant records as rated by the two databases, leading to the inclusion of six additional studies on guide dog partnership.

II. Searching for literature on visual impairment

Table 2. Eligibility criteria and search parameters: Visual impairment

Search terms	'blindness,' 'visual impairment#,' 'blind,' 'lived experience#,' 'personal experience#'
Publication time	2011-2016
Literature type	Peer reviewed journals Empirical article
Study approach	Qualitative, Quantitative Examined report, response provided by the visually impaired individuals
Language	English
Geographic location	No specification

Figure 3. Flowchart of the 2016 online database search for literature on the experience of visual impairment

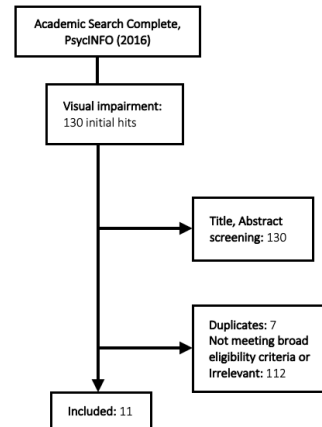


Table 2 presents the specific relevance criteria and search parameters used to search for literature on visual impairment. The aim of this search was to locate literature that provides insights on the *experience* of sight loss and, by implication, the point of view of the visually impaired guide dog owner. As such, the criteria specified that relevant sources would be empirical and examine reports or accounts provided by visually impaired individuals. The process and results of the search are illustrated in Figure 3. As with the first search, aside from duplicates, screened records were excluded either because they did not meet the selection criteria or had examined topics that were too specific (e.g. the use of braille and tactile graphics learning material). At the end of this search, 11 studies that examine the experience of living with sight loss were included.

III. Searching for literature on hearing dogs and service dog support for hearing and other physical impairments

Table 3. Eligibility criteria and search parameters: Hearing dog, service dog

Search terms	'hearing dog#,' 'assistance dog#,' 'service dog#,' 'physical disability*' and 'disability*'
Publication time	No specification
Literature type	Peer reviewed journals Empirical, Non-empirical
Study approach	Qualitative, Quantitative
Language	English
Geographic location	No specification

Note: The databases will recognize and retrieve all terms that contain the root letters preceding the asterisk.

Figure 4. Flowchart of the 2016 online database search for literature on hearing dog and service dog partnerships

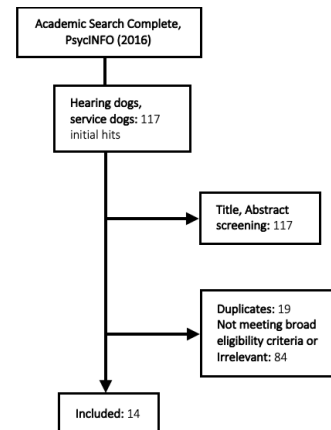


Table 3 presents the specific relevance criteria and search parameters for searching for literature on hearing dog and service dog support. The search included review articles that provide an overview of the broader field of assistance dog service (e.g. in its outcome research). The process and results of the search are illustrated in Figure 4. Notably, two of the 14 articles included through this search were later classified as studies on the guide dog–owner partnership (i.e. Eddy et al., 1988; Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011).

IV. Summary

Table 4. Summary of the 57 articles selected from searching ASC and PsycInfo in 2016 and 2020

By topics:	
Guide dog-partnership	34
Experience of visual impairments	11
Other subtypes of assistance-dog support for sensory/physical impairments: hearing dogs, service dogs	12
By literature types:	
Empirical	48
Non-empirical	9

Overall, I selected 57 journal articles from searching online databases (ASC, PsycInfo) in 2016 and 2020. As can be seen in Table 4, a greater portion of the articles falls under the topic of guide dog–partnership, and the majority of papers report an empirical study.

Literature on the Guide Dog–Owner Partnership

To begin, the review presents an overview of the profiles of guide dog owners in the UK and the decision-making process in applying for the guide dog service. The review then addresses different themes around the relationship between the guide dog and the visually impaired owner: aided mobility; emotional-relational comfort; the enhanced sense of an independent, agentic self; social aspects of the partnership experience; and the providing of care for the guide dog. This review has grown out of engaging with the three bodies of literature mentioned in the search strategy section. The guide dog partnership literature forms the backbone of the review, weaving in the literature on the neighbouring phenomena – experience of sight loss and variants of assistance dog services.

I. Who are guide dog owners in the UK?

There has been a relatively limited uptake of the guide dog service among the broader population of visually impaired people in the UK (Audrestch et al., 2015). As a result, some researchers have turned their attention to examining the ophthalmic, sociodemographic, and health profiles of UK guide dog owners in comparison to their visually impaired counterparts (Jackson et al., 1994; Refson et al., 1999a, 1999b; Refson et al., 2001).

The profiles of 90 guide dog owners in Northern Ireland (Jackson et al., 1994) and 82 owners in Scotland (Refson et al., 1999a, 1999b) have been considered in relation to visually impaired non-owners (e.g. low vision aid users, low vision clinic patients, rehabilitation social services clients). In addition, a three-region study has considered the vision and general demographic profiles of owners in Northern Ireland (87 owners), Scotland (82 owners), and England (77 owners) (Refson et al., 2001).

These studies report similar observations about guide dog owners. Owners are equally likely to be female or male (Refson et al., 2001). They are younger (in their fifties), less like to have major health issues and/or additional disabilities, and experience more severe vision loss for longer times than their non-owner counterparts (Jackson et al., 1994; Refson et al., 1999a, 1999b). In addition, the owners' vision loss is more often associated with a congenital condition or early

onset degenerative disease, with retinitis pigmentosa¹ most frequently reported (Jackson et al., 1994; Refson et al., 1999a; Refson et al., 2001). Notably, while the Scotland-based study observed a greater portion of owners living with someone else and being employed than the visually impaired non-owners, the study suggests that these social status differences reflect more directly the different age distribution observed across the subgroups. Comparable observations about the background of UK guide dog owners (e.g. age, gender, health, vision) have been reported by Whitmarsh (2005), who conducted a large-scale national survey involving 404 guide dog owners and 426 visually impaired non-owners in the UK. These researchers have similarly concluded that guide dog owners represent a specific subgroup of the broader visually impaired population in the UK (Jackson et al., 1994; Refson et al., 1999a, 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005).

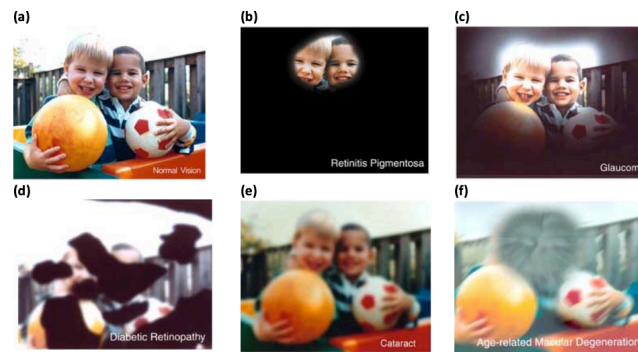
Surveys conducted at the regional (Refson et al., 1999b) and national levels (Whitmarsh, 2005) have documented that the samples of owners (as well as the visually impaired non-owners) are mostly White British. These studies suggest a potential cultural difference in perception towards dogs (Refson et al., 1999b, p. 106) and a less prevalent awareness of guide dog service provision among ethnic minority groups (Whitmarsh, 2005, p. 11).

While these surveys document that UK owners have more profound sight loss than their non-owner counterparts, it is also the case that in most of these studies, a significant portion of the owners surveyed reported that they still experience a certain degree of useful residual vision (Refson et al., 1999b, 2001; Whitmarsh, 2005). As Refson et al. (1999a, 2001) comment, observations like this challenge the notion that a guide dog owner is someone with total vision loss.

At the same time, there is also a potential range of *seeing* that can be experienced by individuals who consider themselves to be a person with residual vision (Marks, 1999, p. 122). The photos below ([Figure 5.](#)) illustrate the various kinds of seeing simulated for several common eye conditions ('Eye Disease Simulations', 2020).

¹ Retinitis pigmentosa (RB) refers to a group of inherited degenerative eye conditions, which are often characterized by the loss of peripheral vision ('tunnel vision') and night blindness. Individuals can experience the onset of symptoms in early childhood or later in their teens through their thirties ('Retinitis pigmentosa', 2020).

Figure 5. Simulated visions for common eye conditions (adopted from the online simulation processor provided by the National Eye Institute)



The six photos show the same image viewed by a person with (a) full vision, (b) retinitis pigmentosa, (c) glaucoma, (d) diabetic retinopathy, (e) cataracts, and (f) age-related macular degeneration.

Both Jackson et al. (1994) and Refson et al. (1999a, 2001) suggest that, with the aging of the population and the advancement of ophthalmic medicine, the typical profile of the UK guide dog owner observed in their surveys is unlikely to be sustainable. The ‘next generation’ of UK owners is likely to feature older owners with age-related eye conditions, with additional health conditions and/or disabilities. While this review was unable to include more recent surveys on the demographic profile of UK owners, recent owner-focused research has commented on the diversity of ages, lifestyles, and vision profiles of the current pool of UK owners (Craigon et al., 2017; York & Whiteside, 2018).

II. To apply or not apply for a guide dog?

For a prospective guide dog owner, the first step is to decide to apply for a guide dog. While this may seem like a trivial or straightforward event, it can be quite significant. The results of a UK-based questionnaire note an association between how physically disabled owners (e.g. those with paraplegia) perceive their relationship with the service dog and whether their application was initiated by themselves or others. More positive partnership experiences are observed in the former scenario (Lane et al., 1998).

For guide dog owners in UK, early surveys conducted by Jackson et al. (1994) and Refson et al. (1999b, 2001) document that the majority initiated the decision to apply for the guide dog themselves. Seeking improvements in mobility, confidence, and/or independence are most readily reported as reasons for applying (Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005).

However, the decision to apply for a guide dog may not be straightforward. About one third of the 82 Scottish owners and half of the 404 national owners who participated in the surveys of

Refson et al. (1999b) and Whitmarsh (2005) indicated that they felt discouraged or apprehensive about their decision to apply. Sanders (2000) made similar observations in his ethnographic study, noting that many of the seven American owners he interviewed expressed 'considerable ambivalence' before coming to the decision to acquire a guide dog (p. 134).

Across the study observations, a main concern for deciding whether to apply is the caring responsibility for the guide dog. Other concerns include having 'too much sight' (i.e. being ineligible to apply²) (Refson et al., 1999b, p. 106; Whitmarsh, 2005) and the stigmatizing potential of a guide dog (Whitmarsh, 2005; Sanders, 2000).

Having a sense of *acceptance* of sight loss has also been referenced with regard to an owner's decision to apply for a guide dog (Jackson et al., 1994, p. 376; Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005, p. 13). In their early survey, Refson et al. (1999b) observed a substantial delay (about 5.5 years) between the timing of the owner's blind or partially sighted registration and their guide dog application. They suggest that the lag may point to an adjustment period in which a person 'comes to terms' with their vision loss before seeking rehabilitative measures (Refson et al., 1999b, p. 108). The study also found a positive correlation between the acceptance score and the duration of visual impairment amongst the Scottish owners surveyed; a greater acceptance was reported by the owners than by the non-owner visually impaired participants. Given that the owners' vision loss is often early onset (Jackson et al., 1994; Refson et al., 1999a), Refson et al. (1999b) suggest that the owners' greater acceptance may be a reflection of them having had more time to adjust to and accept their condition.

A grounded theory study conducted by Hayeem et al. (2005) on the experience of sight loss among individuals with retinitis pigmentosa (RP) provides potentially transferable insights regarding the personal adjustment process prior to becoming a guide dog owner. The study underscores an 'in transition' phase, which features the ambivalent individual's experiences around their identity and the use of assistive devices. The individuals are described as navigating the 'in transition' phase in a series of five stages – precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance – through which they come to self-identify as visually impaired and perceive the benefits of using assistive aids as outweighing the social risks, eventually 'outing' (p. 618) themselves by using assistive devices in public.

² Guide Dogs UK has specified that individuals do not have to experience complete vision loss or be on the registry for the blind and partially sighted to be an eligible applicant ('Guide Dogs UK Charity for the Blind and Partially Sighted', 2016; 'Guide Dogs UK', 2020).

III. Guide dog–aided mobility

Mobility – the ability to get around efficiently, safely, and freely – is a major concern for people living with visual impairment (Douglas et al., 2006; Slade & Edwards, 2015). As noted, the desire for improved mobility often brings people with visual impairment to the guide dog service (Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005). Studies show that the owners' expectations that a guide dog will provide a better mobility experience are often met; this is the case both in the UK and internationally (e.g. Deverell et al., 2020; Koda et al., 2011; Lylod et al., 2008; Miner, 2001; Whitmarsh, 2005; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008). In these studies, owners report more efficient and active travel (e.g. travelling more frequently) through guide dog–aided mobility. For instance, Lloyd et al. (2008) found that the questionnaire responses of 50 owners in New Zealand indicate travelling with a satisfactory guide dog enhanced travel performance irrespective of the individuals' pre-dog travel ability. Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) also report improved mobility as an emergent theme in a descriptive phenomenological analysis of the experiences of six owners residing in South Africa. This theme underscores that aided mobility is a faster, safer, and more confident mobility experience.

3.1 Less mentally/sensorially demanding mobility experience

Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) describe two owners highlighting a reduction in the mental effort demanded in mobility with the aid of a guide dog (p. 1019). Similar observations are documented in other studies (e.g. Gitlin et al., 1997; Refson et al., 1999b; Steffens & Bergler, 1998). For instance, in Refson et al. (1999b), most Scottish respondents reported that mobility was less stressful and required less concentration, resulting in 'easier' mobility with a guide dog compared to a cane (p. 107). An interview extract from a study of North American owners provides a more concrete illustration of what this new mobility experience may be like for the individual:

I know if I had a cane, I wouldn't do as much walking as I do. It's not that I don't have the cane skills, but it is a lot more tiring to use the cane because you have to think about things and be more diligent. (Laila, from Hicks and Weisman, 2015, p. 253)

The observations that owners' mobility is rendered less demanding with a guide dog are interesting, but they are also hard to grasp immediately. As someone who has been able to get around effortlessly, a less-preoccupied mobility is perhaps not relatable as an *improvement* in mobility.

For visually impaired owners, mobility with a guide dog appears as an inherently embodied event. As one comes to recognize that mobility – regardless of an individual’s sight condition – involves a moving body, it is even more peculiar that there has been limited efforts in the literature to explore and account for the embodied side of guide dog–aided mobility in depth. An American focus group study conducted by Gitlin et al. (1997) seems to be an exception. The study investigated musculoskeletal problems associated with mobility aids as perceived by the visually impaired travellers, both cane users (n=12) and guide dog owners (n=9). The findings show that both groups of participants reported physical discomfort; for the guide dog owners, it could take the form of soreness and back pain on one side of the body from being pulled through the harness for extended periods. Interestingly, Gitlin et al. (1997) suggest that one of the ways that the participants managed their bodily discomfort was to distance themselves from it, for they perceived the discomfort as a distraction during the attention-demanding travel or as being psychologically conflicting to the mobility and psychosocial benefits that were also experienced through using the aid.

3.2 Contextual mobility experience

A particular mobility benefit underscored by owners in the study of Gitlin et al. (1997) is that guide dogs are more contextually adaptive (e.g. to rainy weather or heavy traffic) and can handle changing environmental/sensorial cues. In a related vein, a Canadian study investigating the postural and gait changes among four owners found that while the owners still use their residual vision at times, the changes in their locomotion indicated that they rely more on the guide dog as they moved into more challenging settings (e.g. crowds, dim lighting) (Zabihaylo et al., 2005). These observations seem to recognize that the mobility experience for visually impaired owners is contextual, closely linked to how owners perceive their travel surroundings.

Such a view is foregrounded in a visual impairment study. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), Lourens and Swartz (2016) capture the uncertainty, carefulness, and worries that a group of 15 visually impaired students experienced about moving around their university campus in South Africa. These travel-related apprehensions are limiting, as the students found they take up a lot of ‘head space’ and keep them from thinking about ‘things that are really important’ (p. 245). More strikingly, although concerns about moving around may be alleviated as students become more familiar with routes, the analysis notes that the acquired comfort is not fixed; it fluctuates and can be disrupted by slight changes in the built environment (e.g. road construction). This particular analysis accentuates the view that the mobility experience of individuals with visual impairment is contextual and changing.

However, in the owner-focused literature, few comparable research accounts have emphasized the possibility of guide dog mobility enhancement as something contextual and changing for the owners.

Against this backdrop, a series of Australia-based studies generated interesting observations on guide dog-aided mobility (Deverell et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2018). This series features the adoption of a set of newly devised assessment schemes, which specifically examine owners' mobility and vision profiles in both static/familiar contexts (e.g. a local block) and dynamic/unfamiliar contexts (e.g. shops, road crossings). The studies follow a mixed-method design for analysing numeric and textual data; the qualitative component adheres to the grounded theory approach in Deverell et al. (2020) but appears less clear in Meyer et al. (2018).

Conducting assessments with 51 owners, Meyer et al. (2018) identify four distinct mobility styles: 'Intrepid Explores', 'Independent Roamers', 'Social Navigators', and 'Homebodies'. They report that the Social Navigators have smoother mobility in the static/familiar setting than the Independent Roamers, but the pattern reverses in the dynamic/unfamiliar setting, where the Social Navigators found themselves needing to rely more on the guide dog or other social skills to compensate for their limited orientation skills. Crossing roads is of more concern for Homebodies and Social Navigators but not for owners of the other two mobility styles. Furthermore, Meyer et al. (2018) found that the four mobility styles are linked to the age, occupation, health, and orientation skill profiles of the owners – but not to their level of vision (e.g. owners classified as Independent Roamers and Intrepid Travellers are often younger, without health complications, and are students or are employed). Their diverse findings show that uniform results cannot be expected regarding guide dog mobility.

3.3 Dynamic mobility experience: Interactive and potentially processual

Consider the following description shown on the website of Guide Dogs:

While your guide dog can do all of these things to help you get out and about, you will need to give commands, provide encouragement and tell the dog which way to go. Think of it as you being the navigator and your dog being the driver. ('What A Guide Dog Does', 2020)

This description signals that guide dog-aided mobility does not involve the owner simply being 'led' by the guide dog; guide dog-aided mobility is dynamic and interactive. Interestingly, this two-way, interactional view of guide dog mobility does not seem to be something readily entertained in the existing literature.

Nonetheless, Naderi et al. (2001) provide some interesting insights into the dynamic exchange between the owner and the guide dog when they are in motion. The study examines guide dog–owner teams in the UK (n=20) and Hungary (n=14) during their walks in natural and controlled settings. They found that the owners initiate a significant portion of actions (e.g. starting, turning), but there is a constant change in leadership in the dyad – often, the sequence of actions initiated by one is short in duration.

Naderi et al. (2001) indicate that walking with a guide dog requires an owner to responsively shift between different roles; they have to know when to lead and when to accept the initiative taken by the guide dog. A more recent study by Craigon et al. (2017) add to this emerging view of an interactive guide dog–aided mobility. They interviewed 63 UK owners over the phone regarding the aspects of a guide dog’s behaviour that are of key importance to them, finding that owners most valued the attentiveness, obedience, consistency, and confidence of a guide dog (p. 14). That is, for the owners in this study, ideal guide dogs take their lead (‘obedience’, ‘attentiveness’) and are also confident enough to work independently (p. 10).

Nader et al. (2001) also discussed the guide dog–owner walking relationship as evolving, where joint actions can be invented, learned, and modified as the dyad moves across various situations. That is, for the owners, mobility enhancement with a guide dog also seems to be a *process*. However, the majority of existing research accounts on guide dog–aided mobility engages very minimally with its potential processual quality. One of the exceptions is a case study conducted by Bohan and James (2015) on the mobility experience of a guide dog team in Singapore. In this thematic analysis, two of the emergent themes – adaptation and knowledge – highlight the multiple-staged process that the visually impaired owner has to go through to transition from unaided to guide dog–aided mobility and the acquisition of knowledge and practical skills demanded of the guide dog and the owner to ‘transform themselves’ into a ‘guide dog team’ (p. 59).

One American study specifically focuses on the experience of first-time owners (Li et al., 2019). All seven owners in this study are older adults (aged 61–71 years) and were in the first year of their new partnership. Following phone interviews, Li et al. analysed the interviews using a phenomenological approach in conjunction with commercial analysis software. The first two themes – ‘Increased responsibilities for a new owner of a guide dog’ and ‘Changes in habits and routine’ – describe the new adjustments, responsibilities, and skills that these first-time owners perceived as being demanded of them as new owners (Li et al., 2019, p. 456). Learning to keep the guide dogs in control and physically handling their misbehaviours (e.g. distractibility,

jumping on others) are particularly and continuously challenging aspects for these first-time owners. Nonetheless, the first-time owners seem to pick up their new experiences with the guide dog in a largely smooth and positive manner; they are described as being able to ‘quickly overcome/make adjustments’ (p. 459) and invariably perceive that the benefits of the guide dog outweighed the input demanded of them.

The study of Li et al. (2019) is unique for its exclusive focus on first-time partnership. However, Li et al. provided limited descriptions of their analytic procedures; the article did not reference key phenomenological research literature. The style of analysis was rather *thin* in the sense that the analytic commentaries seemed to largely work as a general summary of the spoken words of the participants. There was a limited attempt to explore more closely what was going on within a given piece of interview extract (e.g. term use, contradiction) or to suggest potentially latent aspects of a participant’s response. As such, one cannot help but wonder whether there are potentially more complex or thicker stories to tell about first-time owners’ experiences with guide dogs.

IV. The emotional, relational comfort of the guide dog partnership

Beyond aided mobility, owner-focused studies have reported findings that suggest an emotional, relational comfort as part of the broader benefit of the guide dog partnership (e.g. Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005; Steffens & Bergler, 1998). There have been accounts pointing to a sense of connection perceived by the owners immediately after the dyad is formed (Li et al., 2019; Hicks & Weisman, 2015) or to a sense of relaxation and delight in playing with the guide dog (Deverell et al., 2020; Koda et al., 2011).

While ‘companionship’ has been highlighted as an aspect of the owner’s experience with the guide dog, it sometimes seems to be left as a brief or categorical reference in the research accounts – whether in the context of large-scale, survey-based studies (e.g. Whitmarsh, 2005) or small-scale studies based on personal accounts (e.g. Gitlin et al., 1997). In contrast, Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) make available a more detailed view on the companionship between the owner and the guide dog, reporting the prominent theme of ‘a guide dog provides companionship’ in their descriptive phenomenological analysis of the experiences of owners (n=6) in South Africa. Their analysis captures a sense of ‘reciprocal affection’ and ‘shared personality characteristics’ in the companionship that these owners experience with their guide dogs (p. 1019). These observations suggest that the sense of intimate connection with the guide

dog is reciprocal and imbued with qualities that one would more readily attribute to interpersonal relations ('personality', 'affection').

Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) also foreground the sense of being mutually emotionally attuned in their thematic analysis of the experiences of guide dog owners (n=22) and service dog owners (n=3, with ambulatory difficulties) in Canada. This is the only study reviewed that has an explicit research focus on the emotional-relational bond between owners and their assistance dogs; it also incorporates an analytic angle from the framework of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, cited in Kwong and Bartholomew, 2011, p. 422). This analysis features a hybrid deductive-inductive approach: the deductive element involves analysing the owners' interview responses with pre-defined coding schemes to assess whether key attachment components ('safe haven', 'secure base', 'separation anxiety') are present in the owners' experiences of the partnership.

Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) indicate that 'safe haven' is a relevant attachment construct in owners' relationships with their assistance dogs. They report that most owners explicitly perceive the partnership as a source of comfort in times of distress, and many of their accounts reflect the experience of the assistance dog as being attuned with their emotions.

Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) underscore that a sense of 'felt security' derived from the assistance dog can be explicitly identified from the interviews of half of the 25 owner-participants. (p. 427). They report that some owners' experiences indicate the felt security as being linked to the perceived constant, accepting presence of the guide dog and/or as a support in the owners' personal development and exploration.

Interestingly, Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) comment that identifying the attachment construct of 'secure base' from the owners' interviews is less straightforward (p. 428). They discuss in several cases that it is difficult to clearly disentangle the emotional support and functional support that the participants perceive in their relationships with their assistance dogs. They present one such analytically difficult case in their paper:

When I was out on my own with D, it was much better than me with a cane, emotionally just feeling much more secure. (Participant 161, from Kwong and Bartholomew, 2011, p. 428)

From this extract, one would likely concur that the felt security that this owner refers to reflects a mix of perceived emotional comfort and a sense of *physical security*. Other owner-focused studies have also underlined the owners' enhanced sense of (physical) security (Gitlin et al., 1997; Whitmarsh, 2005). For instance, Gitlin et al. (1997) describe 'feeling less vulnerable to

physical assaults in the city’ as one of the particular ‘psychological advantages’ identified by the owners, in addition to ‘a sense of comfort and companionship’ (p. 350). Related observations are noted in the literature on hearing dog partnerships (Guest et al., 2006; Hart et al., 1996). In their longitudinal, questionnaire-based study, Guest et al. (2006) report significant reductions in measures of tension, anxiety, and fear among UK hearing dog owners (n=51). They suggest that the company of the hearing dog alleviates the constant vigilant state of the hard-of-hearing owners, enabling them to feel more relaxed and less anxious when alone or about the world around them (p. 258).

These observations hint at a potentially complex bond between owners and guide/assistance dogs; there may be no easy way to classify the significance that the individual owners perceive regarding the relationship’s emotional, relational, or functional/physical nature. Such potential complexity has been explicitly noted in Camp’s qualitative study (2001) of American service-dog owners with mobility difficulties (n=5). The study highlights how owners often expressed the perceived relational benefits (e.g. companionship, love) as being inseparable from the functional role of the service dog (p. 513). It also seems to be a potentially intense sense of connection that the individual experiences with the dog partner. The attachment that owners feel for their guide dog has been referred to in situations where owners retain guide dogs who are not in optimal working condition (e.g. at retiring age or when mismatched) or refuse to transition to a new partnership (Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Lylod et al., 2016; Nicholson et al., 1995).

There remains potential depth to be explored with respect to the emotional-relational terms of the guide dog–person partnership. In light of Kwong and Bartholomow’s (2011) analysis, it seems that such an opportunity could be addressed with the adoption of a more inductive and holistic approach at the outset, rather than engaging with it through a singular theoretical lens.

V. The sense of an independent, agentic self

Studies on the guide dog–owner partnership also highlight that it is inclusive of certain positive impacts on how owners perceive themselves as individuals, as reflected in findings on the experience of owners regarding aspects such as independence, confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth (e.g. Gitlin et al., 1997; Li et al., 2019; Whitmarsh, 2005; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008).

Independence has appeared as a commonly referenced and/or measured attribute of the individual in the owner-focused literature (e.g. Jackson et al., 1994; McIver et al., 2020; Miner, 2001; Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005). In several of these research accounts, independence refers to greater functionality, physical freedom, and/or self-reliance in the context of the guide dog partnership. For instance, Refson et al. (1999b) document that independence is the most readily benefit cited by the Scottish owners they surveyed (n=82). The study reports that the owners rated themselves as being more independent with regard to daily living skills (i.e. being totally self-sufficient or undertaking most daily living tasks themselves) than the two subgroups of non-owner, visually impaired participants (p. 103).

Miner (2011) also reported increased independence as an emergent theme in the descriptive phenomenological study on the experience of eight American guide dog owners. The theme description and the extracts presented in this short analysis underscore the enhanced efficiency and freedom in physical mobility that the owners experience in becoming 'a more independent, confident person' through the support of the guide dog.

That's the effect that a dog has on a blind person, they allow freer mobility... [I]t's helped me get places that I don't think I really would get with a cane in a lot of instances.

Using a dog guide has helped me become a more independent person, a more confident person who's out there on the streets. (Miner, 2001, p. 187)

The owners' sense of independence is also centred in a recent study by McIver et al. (2020) with prospective and present guide dog owners in the UK. This is the only research on guide dog owners reviewed that adopts a longitudinal design. The study examines owners' perceptions of quality of life (QOL) between two time points six months apart. The researchers recruited three subgroups of owners: experienced owners who have been with a guide dog for at least three years (n=14), owners who remained on the waiting list without a dog throughout the study (n=17), and owners who acquired a guide dog after the first assessment (n=15). The study used the 16-item adaption of the 15-item Flanagan Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) to measure owners' perceptions of multiple aspects of life. The added 16th item focuses on the perception of independence. The owners' responses are measured in a 7-point format.

However, as one who is unfamiliar with the QOLS series, it is challenging to grasp the kind of 'independence' perceived by the owners that the scale aims to identify, as further description of the item on independence is not directly available in the paper (McIver et al., 2020).³

³ A quick look at the source cited for the adapted QOLS (Burckhardt & Anderson, 2003) suggests that the 16th item is a statement of 'independence, doing for yourself'; the item was initially added to address the importance individuals' perception of remaining independent, such as being able to care for themselves and being physically active (p. 3)

Nonetheless, a main finding reported is the largest effect size observed when comparing the scores of the three owner subgroups on the independence item: the independence of the experienced owner was found to be the highest and increased slightly over time. The score also increased for the acquire-a-dog subgroup, but independence decreased for the owners who remained without a dog throughout the six-month period.

Steffens and Bergler (1998) also present an interesting view on guide dog owners' perception of being a more independent individual in their content analysis. They find that a greater portion of German owners interviewed (n=40) report a stronger sense of 'independence/freedom' when supported by the guide dog than by another person (p. 154). That is, being independent/free for these owners seems to be about not relying on other humans. One of the extracts presented by Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) provides a concrete illustration of Steffens and Bergler's (1998) finding:

Definitely independence! I really don't have to ask someone, I say 'I have to go there', because I can basically just get directions from someone... Then I don't have to worry, then I just have to walk there and keep track of the directions. (Paul, from Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008, p. 1019)

Steffens and Bergler (1998) suggest that there is a 'subjective feeling of freedom' for owners, as receiving the help of a guide dog does not involve potential criticism or entail personal justification (p. 154). From their comment, it seems that the guide dog partnership is a context in which the owners experience an aided and enhanced competence (independence) without incurring the potential cost to their sense of self by receiving help from other people. The significance of the sense of self-reliance, as foregrounded in these owner-focused studies, also seems to be in dialogue with the phenomenological research on visual impairment, which captures a concern about being a *burden* to other people as a prominent experiential theme (Devenney & O'Neill, 2011; Xu et al., 2010).

A critical analysis of the guide dog service in the UK provides interesting insights that potentially situate the empirical research accounts about owners in a broader social context. Anderson and Pemberton (2007) examine the attitudes towards guide dog services at two institutions (St. Dustan and Guide Dogs) that provided support for blind people in the UK during the inter-war period. Their analysis suggests that the institutional approaches of these organisations produced and advocated a particular form of subjectivity based on freedom, mobility, and autonomy as *normal*. By analysing the material in Guide Dogs' early magazine, the authors argue that there is an embedded emphasis on the individual's ability to be independent – with independence being constitutive of self-reliance and managing on one's own, without depending on anybody (p. 472).

In another context, Sanders' (2000) ethnographic study of American guide dog owners offers a more sociologically inspired analysis on the particular ways that owners come to perceive themselves as individuals through the partnership acquisition. This study is distinct for its explicit focus on the impact of individual identity in guide dog ownership. Sanders points to the social stigma around blindness/visual impairment that conceives the individuals as 'helpless' and in need of assistance (p. 133). Drawing on sociologist Goffman's work (1963, p. 16), Sanders (2000) highlights a 'diminishment of self' that sight loss inflicted on the individuals' personal identity by confronting them with socially assumed helplessness and the challenges of managing practical demands. All seven guide dog owners in the study stressed a prominent sense of control through the ownership experience, garnered especially from the experienced ability to proficiently work/walk with and exercise control over the guide dog. The analysis also shows the emergence of the sense of control as counteracting ascribed helplessness and nurturing the owners' sense of self-worth.

Of the various research accounts examined, the case-oriented thematic analysis by Bohan and James (2015) offers a distinct and especially empowered narrative of the positive self as perceived by the individual through the guide dog partnership. Regarding the theme of agency, the analysis points to the sense of being different and judged that featured in a Singapore-based owner's experience as a blind/disabled person; moving in public space with a guide dog confronted the owner with these difficult feelings. The study highlights the individual *agency* this owner has come to perceive as the sense of moving beyond being passively defined by the social world; rather, the owner regards the mobility experience with the guide dog as an impetus for redefining the meaning of being blind/disabled, conceiving a new sense of self, and achieving 'liberation':

Lorraine has given me a lot of independence, confidence, safety and dignity in my mobility. For me, Lorraine has changed what it means to be blind. (Ruth, from Bohan and James, 2015, p. 60)

VI. On the social aspects of the guide dog–person partnership

The impact of a guide dog on an owner's social life with other people has also emerged as a popular topic in the literature. Observations from a range of studies point to a potentially complex and complicated social experience of the owners.

6.1 Social stimulant

Almost all of the owner-focused studies document the social facilitating role of the guide dog and an enhanced social life among owners in the form of having more positive exchanges with the general public (e.g. Eddy et al., 1998; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Gitlin et al., 1997; Steffen & Bergler, 1998; Whitmarsh, 2005). For instance, in the context of the UK, Whitmarsh (2005) reports that 21% of the owners surveyed (n=404) feel that others are more friendly towards them, and some also report receiving more help from others. Refson et al. (1999b) note that improved social contact with the public (and other owners) is the fourth most frequently cited benefit among the Scottish owners they surveyed (n=82).

Likewise, in the US, an observation-based study by Eddy et al. (1998) found that the visually impaired and wheelchair-bound participants (n=10) who were accompanied by a service dog received more smiles and conversations initiated by passers-by in the mall than their control group counterparts (n=10) who moved through the mall alone. An interview segment in Wiggett-Barnard and Steel's analysis (2008) on the experiences of South African owners (n=6) vividly illustrates the social stimulant effect of a guide dog's company:

It's astounding how people stop you when you're out walking, just for a chat, ask about the dog and, wow, I've met a lot of people in class, usually, I now deal with people that I don't believe I would have dealt with had I still used my long cane. (Paul, from Wiggett-Barnard and Steel, 2008, p. 1021)

As in this excerpt, some studies have underscored how the socializing role of the guide dog in public stands out to owners as being different from their experience of travelling with a cane (Hersh, 2013; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Gitlin et al., 1997). Apart from boosting casual engagement with the public, some study observations also document owners' perception of an improved relationship with significant others and/or relatives, as well as an improved sense of broad community engagement (Deverell et al., 2020; McIver et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020).

6.2 'A social unit'

Eddy et al. (1988) observed that most conversations that passers-by initiate with the participants accompanied by a service dog centred on the dog. The study briefly references a participant who expressed the perception that in real life more people know the name of his service dog than his own (p. 43). Other studies similarly document the dog partner as often being the topic in the owners' social exchanges with others (Li et al., 2020; Sanders, 2000; Steffen & Bergler, 1998). It seems that the social attractiveness added through a guide dog has a

potentially limited reach that does not always extend to the owners. Consider this extract presented in Sanders' (2000) ethnographic study:

People in my college classes to this day will say, "Hi, Fanny. Hi Fanny's mommy." They remember the dog but they don't remember me. I'm an appendage of the dog... Many times I feel like a person with a dog and I'm not perceived as a person with my own abilities and self. (Sanders, 2000, p. 136)

Distinct from other authors' approaches, Sanders (2000) puts forth a more engaged and in-depth account of this particular observation, describing the owner and the guide dog as being merged into 'a social unit'. It further suggests that, at times, this merger leads to an identity complication for the owners – 'a loss of individuality' that is powerfully encased by the expression of being 'an appendage' (p. 136) in the extract above.

A recent study conducted by York and Whiteside (2018) provides another view of the sense of being a single social unit with the guide dog: the owners perceive themselves as being held accountable for their dog partner to abide by the social/interactional etiquette and order of the human world.

This UK-based study is unique in that it focuses explicitly on the owners' perceptions of the 'social (non-work)' behaviours of the guide dog (p. 526). The focus group sessions feature 11 owners discussing their experiences with the guide dogs in public space. In their thematic analysis, York and Whiteside (2018) note that the owners perceived their dog partner's good behaviours in public as being vital for having positive interactions with others. The analysis underscores a concern among the owners about ensuring that their dog partners' behaviours are not disruptive to other people in the public space. Moreover, with the theme 'practical and emotional issues', the analysis captures the sense of 'self-blame' and 'inadequacies and personal responsibility' experienced by the owners as prompted by the *socially* problematic behaviours of their dog partners (p. 532). The extracts they present for this theme also reflect a sense of the owners feeling somewhat *torn* in their particular circumstances:

One thing I would say is the stress of poor social behaviour. You can want to give your dog back. You can feel it's your fault which is really difficult. (York & Whiteside, 2018, p. 532)

6.3 An overburdened personal space

York and Whiteside (2018) also underscore a general negative perception of the owners with respect to *uninvited* attention and engagement directed by the public towards the guide dog. The analysis describes the owners regarding the public's responses as having 'unexpectedly and unnecessarily disrupted the dog' (p. 529). Similarly, the national survey of Whitmarsh (2005)

documents that 7% of the 404 UK owners reported 'unwanted attention' from the public as a drawback (p. 16). In the US context, Sanders (2000) and Eddy et al. (1988) both describe how some owners point to the public wanting to pet the guide dog as being particularly problematic.

These observations point to a potential mixed perception among owners regarding the new social life brought about through the acquisition of the guide dog service. While the owners appreciate the more vibrant social experience prompted by the presence of their dog partner, they also find the additional social attractiveness as negatively excessive and encroaching their personal space at times. Some of the research accounts variably engage with this complexity in the owners' social experience. For instance, with the theme 'changed public interaction', Miner's (2001) descriptive phenomenological analysis describes the American owners (n=8) valuing the guide dog as an 'ice breaker' but also sometimes finding themselves feeling 'an invasion of personal space' (p. 187). Consider an extract presented for this theme:

[S]ometimes you just want to go to the mall to pick something up, and you really don't feel like being looked at, being stared at or having people approach you and engage with you. Your privacy is really invaded. Your personal space is invaded. (Miner, 2001, p. 187)

Interestingly, the same expression ('an invasion of personal space') was used by an owner in Sanders (2000, p. 135). Sanders (2000) underscores a considerable concern expressed by all seven owners surveyed over the sense of being rendered 'more conscious' through the guide dog and the unwanted attention that it engendered. The analysis further discusses the particular social experience of the owners in relation to the concept of an 'open person', as proposed by Goffman (1963, p. 126, cited in Sanders, 2000, p. 135). In a similar vein, Deverell et al. (2020, p. 748) describe owners as finding both an enhanced social confidence and an exhausting 'lack of anonymity' when being out with their guide dog.

6.4 The symbolic and stigmatizing potential of guide dogs: Managing the visually impaired/blind identity and status

As noted in the preceding section, Sanders (2000) and Whitmarsh (2005) both document how some owners are concerned about the stigmatizing potential of the guide dog in deciding whether to apply for the service. That is, there was a concern among owners about making their sight loss overt, identifiable, and known to *other people*, and about the potentially negative attributions or response from others that ensue (Hersh, 2013).

Nonetheless, from the observations recounted in the literature, it seems that the owners have experienced largely positive social regard with respect to their sense of status or identity as

visually impaired individuals. For instance, Sanders (2000) notes that while many of the owners had been ambivalent prior to their application about the potential stigmatizing impact, all owners in the study perceived that their public association with the guide dog rendered them as no longer appearing as deserving of pity. Instead, they were seen as competent and had an enhanced identity in the public eye (p. 135). Interestingly, although the dog partner's presence removes the owners' stereotypical helpless status, it seems to simultaneously evoke a sense of membership in a collective blind or guide dog community. They felt 'pressure' to maintain a positive public image for the community (Sanders, 2000, p. 135). Consider this segment of an interview:

You don't want to become flip with people because I think that it is a bad representation of blind people and [the program]. My attitude is that when you are out there you are representing [the program] and also representing blind people as a group. (Sanders, 2000, p. 135)

In the US context, Li et al. (2019) similarly document how the public association with the guide dog could be experienced by owners (n=7) as eliciting positive social response from others towards their visually impaired status. They highlight the experience of an elderly first-time owner who perceived himself as being regarded as more like an 'adult' by others when accompanied by the guide dog than with the long cane:

With [dog guide], they just watched and generally what they say is, "You have a beautiful dog." That's the number one thing that's stated to me every day. So there's a huge difference. The difference is I'm not treated like a child. I'm an actual adult in the community. (Li et al., 2019, p. 457)

Deverell et al. (2020) provide a relatable analytic description in their study of Australia-based owners (n=51): while both a cane and a guide dog make evident the owners' visual status, a cane is potentially socially hindering, 'whereas it is normal to have a dog' (p. 748). That is, the guide dog has the social benefit of equipping the visually impaired owners with a *normal* image.

These accounts indicate that, on the whole, owners experience the public association with a guide dog as favourably enhancing their sense of being a visually impaired or blind individual while navigating through the social terrain. As Whitmarsh (2005) concludes: 'A guide dog was [...] a means of empowering, commanding respect and raising the *status* of a visually impaired person' (p. 17, original emphasis).

While this emerging view is inspiring, it also appears slightly different from the picture painted in the visual impairment literature, which indicates that individuals with sight loss experience their visually impaired/blind identity, overt visual status, assistive aids, and responses of others as complicated, intertwined, and often conflicted and long-standing (Atkinson & Hutchinson,

2012; Dale, 2011; Ferguson & de Abreu, 2016). For instance, in Ferguson and de Abreu's (2016) IPA study of the experiences of seven participants living with Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) in the UK, they highlight how it is not the sight loss but their relationship with sighted others that shapes their self-identity. The analysis also emphasises the continuous adjustment of participants around the tension associated with overtly displaying their visual status to others. One of the participants describes:

Well I use it when I want people to know. I'll get it out folded up when I want people to know, like if I go into a supermarket or something or when I'm getting the train like that, and when I need help. But the rest of the time, I want my friends to know sure, but for everyone else it is not that I don't want people to know but it's not important sort of thing and it is not who I am and it is not what makes me who I am, it is just something that occasionally helps me out. (Christ, from Ferguson & de Abreu, 2016, p. 117)

This extract speaks to a certain variability or fluidity in how this participant perceived the overt status of his sight loss and the influence of the public on his sense of self, as well as the use of an assistive aid. With this view in mind, one cannot help but wonder whether there are potential dynamics to explore further in the social experience of being a visually impaired and guide dog-assisted individual.

VII. Providing care for the guide dog

An essential component of the relationship with a guide dog is that the dog requires *care* on a daily basis. In the UK, Guide Dogs considers the individual's capacity to secure 'guide dog welfare' as an important criterion in their assessment of applicant eligibility. Potential candidates are those who can provide the guide dogs with ('Information on the Guide Dogs Services', 2020):

- Good nutrition
- A safe and secure environment
- Regular checks with a vet
- Exercise, space, and stimulation
- Companionship and appropriate toys

The existing literature seems to suggest that there are three potential ways of understanding the care aspect of the guide dog-owner partnership: *drawbacks, responsibility and adjustment, and reciprocity and interdependence*.

7.1 Drawbacks

In some of the literature, the owners' perceptions of or involvement in providing for their guide dog are reported as part of a broader account of the 'drawbacks' ('disadvantages') associated with ownership. These reports often feature a summary of the individual tasks that the owners find problematic. For instance, Whitmarsh's (2005) national survey reports that 51% of the 404 UK owners perceived that there are 'drawbacks' to owning a guide dog (p. 15). The 'responsibility or inconvenience of owning a dog' is listed as one of the three drawback categories and was most readily perceived as a drawback by the owners surveyed. The specific drawbacks that owners referenced were issues related to dog hair, cleaning up after the dog, and difficulty in arranging holidays (p. 16). The responsibility and hard work involved in caring for the guide dog are also perceived as greater drawbacks by men and older owners than by women and younger owners (p. 19). Refson et al. (1999b) similarly reported observations pertaining to owners' perceptions of caring for the guide dog, describing how the drawbacks referenced by the 82 Scottish owners are more varied than the perceived benefits; the main disadvantages were 'obtaining care for the dog whilst on holiday, taking the dog out in bad weather, dog hygiene, and responsibility and care for the dog' (p. 106).

This drawback frame seems to be consistent with views presented in some of the broader assistance dog literature (Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2002; Winkle et al., 2011). For instance, in a review of 14 outcome studies of hearing dog and service dog acquisition (Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2002), findings across studies pertaining to owners' caring responsibilities for the assistance dogs (ADs) are aggregated and discussed under the broad section 'Disadvantages of ADs' (pp. 268–269), along with other disadvantages like 'cost' and 'access problems'.

7.2 Responsibility and adjustment

The three studies adopting a phenomenological approach to the topic of the guide dog partnership (Li et al., 2019; Miner, 2001; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008) all report themes pertaining to the owners' experience of caring for their guide dogs. Of these, the descriptive account is more detailed in the papers of Li et al. (2019) and Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008).

Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) account for the caring aspect through the theme 'Lifestyles changes result from guide dog ownership' (pp. 1020–1021). This theme describes the sense of 'major responsibility' and the wide-ranging adjustments (e.g. social, time, financial) that the South African-based owners experienced with respect to caring for their guide dogs. The

analysis also references a constant consideration of the guide dog's care when the owners are away for social or business engagements.

Li et al. (2019) also underscore the sense of responsibility and adjustment in their analysis on the experiences of elderly, first-time owners in the US, with the themes of 'Increased responsibilities for a new owner of a dog guide' and 'Changes in habits and routines' (p. 456). The analysis reports that all of the owners perceived a sense of 'increased physical responsibilities' ('feeding, grooming, and walking the dog guide'). They also found that several owners arranged their daily schedule around the needs of the dog partner and perceived that the structure has facilitated them to attend to their caring responsibilities as owners. Although some of these first-time owners indicated being initially overwhelmed with the new responsibilities and adjustments, the analysis shows that this was temporary, with the owners being able to 'quickly' adapt to the new routine (pp. 456, 459).

7.3 Reciprocity and interdependence

In addition to drawbacks and responsibility and adjustment, the literature suggests a third way to view the caring aspect of the guide dog-owner partnership that centres on notions of reciprocity and interdependence.

In addition to the attachment bond, the thematic analysis of Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) explores the 'caregiving bond' in the context of the partnership. Their analysis underscores the sense of 'reciprocal caregiving' as a feature of owners' partnership experience; almost all of the owners (23 of 25) perceived 'considerable pleasure' in caring for their dog partners, and for many, the enjoyment was experienced as mutual (p. 249). They also identify a shared perception across the participants regarding the daily care for the dog as fostering the *bond* that is critical for the working aspect of the partnership. The analysis also notes that several owners have experienced a certain responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of the dog partner, so that they were prompted to manage their own emotions as a way to protect their dog partners from potential distress. This observation is interesting, as many of the other studies seem to imply that the owners primarily perceive physical health and fitness as the *needs* of the guide dogs that they are responsible for, as their human partners.

Likewise, the analyses of Bohan and James (2015) and Hicks and Weisman (2015) both address the owners' involvement in caring for the guide dog through themes that revolve around

notions of reciprocity. For instance, the thematic analysis of Bohan and James (2015) recounts the owner's caring responsibility for the guide dog as part of a sense of 'symbiosis'.

Through the grounded theory approach, Hicks and Weisman (2015) identify 'interdependence and mutual benefit' as the main relationship qualities based on the interview responses of the ten North American-based guide dog owners. The analysis describes the owner-guide dog relationship as being 'multidirectional' and involving 'joint responsibilities between the two' (p. 252). Like Kwong and Bartholomew's study (2011), this grounded theory analysis also identifies the owners' experience of 'genuine enjoyment' or mutual pleasure in their care for the guide dog, as well as the perception that their caring involvement cultivates the bond (the sense of 'safety' and 'trust') needed by their dog partners to carry out their work.

In addition to a general exploratory lens, Hick and Weisman (2015) also have a specific interest in examining whether and how the relationship perceived by the owners with their guide dog impacts their involvement in leisure activities (e.g. walking, hiking, swimming). The analysis identifies a 'service dog orientation' among owners in the leisure context (p. 255) – an expressed genuine concern and care in taking into account the needs of their guide dog. While this orientation had landed for the owners as the need to engage in additional consideration and planning, and had affected their approach to leisure activities, these were not perceived negatively by the owners as drawbacks, constraints, or barriers (p. 256).

Furthermore, Hicks and Weisman (2015) describe the 'unique finding' of the study (p. 257) as the observed instances in which the owners regarded the needs of the guide dog as equal to, or more important than, their own leisure preference and altered their pursuits correspondingly. Through their observation, Hicks and Weisman (2015) suggest that, in the context of the guide dog-owner relationship, the needs of the person and the guide dogs are actively negotiated by the owners towards an arrangement that serves *both* sides best.

Hicks and Wesiman's (2015) findings and the view that caring for the guide dog is part of an interdependent relationship are refreshing. They encourage a richer and more dynamic view and enquiry lens for the caring aspect of the partnership, wherein meanings – such as a person's needs, a guide dog's needs, and the roles of caregiver and service recipient – can be actively interpreted and reinterpreted by the owners as they find themselves in various circumstances.

At the same time, the studies examined in this subsection are distinct from those articulated through the 'drawbacks' frame. The latter provides a rather narrow, static picture of the

owners' involvement in caring for the guide dog, implicitly placing the person–assistance dog relationship into a benefit/drawback dichotomy. But with study observations like those reported by Hicks and Weisman (2015), one cannot help but wonder if what constitutes a benefit and a cost/drawback are not experienced by individual owners in a straightforward, defined, and fixed manner in real life. Could an adequately sensitive story about the guide dog–person partnership be elucidated by assessing the partnership from a simple benefit/drawback lens?

Post-review remarks

The literature review process led me to a small, established body of research on the experience of visually impaired owners with guide dogs. It evoked a recognition of the guide dog–person relationship as a potentially complex phenomenon that touches on mobility, visual impairment, emotions, caregiving, social life, and self-identity all at once.

Becoming a guide dog owner, as the literature seemed to suggest, is a *life-changing* event. This view pointed to the significance of a detailed examination of newcomers to the guide dog service, as they are the ideal informants for providing vivid accounts and before-and-after descriptions of their lives with the guide dogs. However, the review indicated that past research tended to group and study first-time and more seasoned owners together; only Li et al. (2019) specifically focused on the first partnership experience of elder owners in America.

While Li et al. (2019) categorized their study as 'phenomenological,' the style of analysis was relatively descriptive or summarizing; there were limited attempts to 'elaborate and amplify' (Willig, 2012, P.13) the potentially nuanced or latent aspects of owners' responses. Therefore, there is the potential space for a more interpretative-oriented study that focuses on first-time owners in the UK and is committed to deliver a thicker portrait of the phenomenon.

Mobility enhancement was the most readily discussed topic in the literature concerning guide dog owners. However, there was a lack of research that attempted to capture guide dog-aided mobility as an embodied and relational phenomenon – something that is grounded in the active, embodied presences of the person and the dog and their exchange with the physical world. This gap speaks directly to disability scholars' appeal to return the experiencing body to the accounts of the everyday life of people with a disability (Hughes & Patterson, 1997). Given this, I am keen to examine the first-time owners' experience of walking with their guide dogs

through a research approach that facilitates a detailed exploration of the embodied and contextual structures of human experience.

As Craigon et al. (2019) commented, the literature has garnered less detailed descriptions of the guide dog–owner partnership outside the working situation. The thematic analysis of Kwong and Bartholomew (2011) was one of the few examples that demonstrates a more sustained attention to and richer accounts of the affective and caregiving dimensions of life with guide dogs. However, the study’s reference to Bowlby’s attachment theory early in the analytic work seems to have somewhat weakened the study’s capacity to delineate the intricacies of the various roles, demands, joys, and challenges that characterize the owners’ relations to the guide dogs in a non-work capacity. This suggests the potential strength of a study that explicitly attends to the non-work aspect of the partnership and is grounded in a more inductive-oriented methodology.

The review also pointed to the owners’ self-identity as a relevant dimension of the phenomenon of guide dog partnership; past research unanimously highlighted positive changes in owners’ self-perception in areas like independence and confidence. While some researchers on the topic have emphasized that partnership experience should not be regarded as a one-size-fits-all matter (e.g. Meyer et al., 2018; Whitmarsh, 2005), the literature at large appears short of reports that closely attend to the meanings that individual owners make of the personal changes brought on by the guide dog. Though the work of Bohan and James (2015) has stood out from the corpus, the study’s single case design may have missed out additional insights that can be garnered through cross-case comparisons. Similarly, Sanders (2000) has presented a more in-depth account of owners’ perceived changes of their identities, but the ethnographic analysis placed more weight on the social dimension of the owners’ experiences. In response, I want to explore in detail how the owners’ senses of self unfold in the first partnership. Specifically, I want to contribute accounts that not only give a certain primacy to the manners in which the sense of self is interpreted, felt, and embodied by individual owners, but also make more general claims about the first timers’ experience.

To conclude, I departed from a broad concern: *What is it like for a blind or partially sighted person to live with a guide dog?* Through the literature review, this concern turned into:

What is it like to travel with and care for a guide dog for a first-time owner?

Inclusive of this new concern is how owners experience and make sense of the role(s) of the guide dog in the team's mobility and when the dog is being cared for by the owner, as well as how the first-time owners think/feel about themselves as individuals in the context of the partnership. At the same time, I suggest that these objectives could be effectively addressed by a research approach that prioritizes individual experience and personal meaning, advocates methods of data collection and analysis that are inductive and holistic, and provides space for an in-depth, interpretative engagement to bring out the full significance of the data.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: The Guide Dog Professionals

After concluding my initial engagement with the owner-focused literature in early 2017, I started to test the waters of possible recruitment channels. It was then that I came into direct contact with Guide Dogs – the main provider of guide dog services in the UK. During this early encounter, I received a suggestion from Guide Dogs to broaden the focus of my enquiry on guide dog partnerships to consider the in-house trainers and instructors in addition to the guide dog owners. However, in my initial approach to understanding guide dog partnership, I was at best minimally attuned to the service provider side of the picture; at worst, I thought it to be irrelevant. It seems that I was naïve. In reflecting on his journey of becoming a guide dog owner, Canadian sociologist Rod Michalko (1999) writes:

A blind person leaves a dog guide training school with more than a dog. She leaves with the school's conception of blindness, its conception of the dog, and its understanding of how the person and dog should relate. The blind person also leaves with her own interpretation of those conceptions, and the interpretative process continues throughout her life with the dog. (p. 7)

In light of the engagement with Guide Dogs and my attempt to secure recruitment support from the organization, my investigation added another target site: the professionals involved in the guide dog service. In particular, the project would focus on two types of staff who work closely with prospective and current guide dog owners:

- (a) Staff specializing in mobility support for visual impairment, who play an important role in the initial contact and assessment of prospective owners
- (b) Staff specializing in dog behaviours and training, who play important role in training the guide dogs and bringing together the guide dog–owner dyad

With the expansion of the focus of my project, a stronger sense of unpreparedness ensued. I had never had the opportunity to meet either type of specialist staff prior to my PhD research; I was unfamiliar with what they do and what their professional views were. On top of that, I felt that my early review of the owner-focused literature had barely introduced me to the *professional world* of the guide dog service. In response, I was motivated to take another preparatory measure for my project – gathering and consulting literature that provides information pertaining to these mobility and guide dog specialists. I hoped that this step would help me develop a background familiarity with the professionals in question and also to garner insights into how my study might be situated in relation to the existing body of research.

As with the structure of the preceding chapter, I start by looking closely at the process of searching for the relevant material and then move to consider the existing literature on these professional roles. The chapter ends with post-review remarks on the direction and rationale of the study on guide dog professionals.

Literature search strategy and process

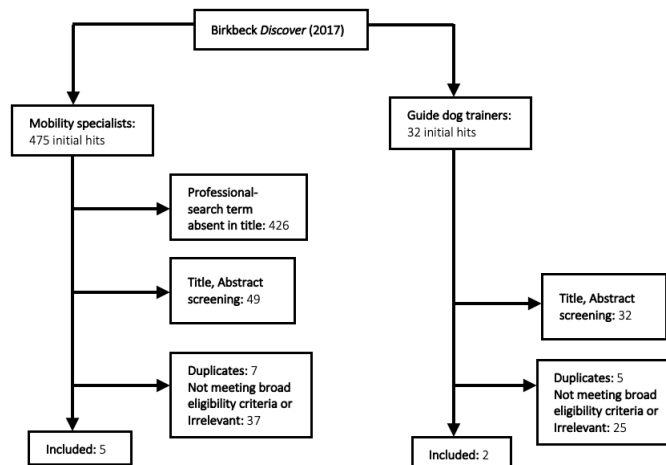
As indicated, this literature review targeted two professional roles that are important in the provision of guide dog service: mobility specialists for visual impairment and guide dog trainers. The literature search aimed to locate material that provides information on what these specialists' professional involvement is like, particularly sources that discuss reports or surveys gathered from these staff on their work related to guide dog services and/or mobility support. The search process for this literature review was an adaptive, unfolding process and involved multiple phases. In December 2017, I initially attempted to retrieve relevant material through online searches of peer-reviewed journals. However, the result of this search strategy was limited. Consequently, I took adaptive measures during the search in 2017. I conducted updated searches online in June 2020 to ensure that the present project remains informed of the current work on these two professional roles. Details of these three phases are described in the following subsections.

I. Online search through Birkbeck *Discover* in December 2017

Table 5. Eligibility criteria and search parameters: Mobility specialists and guide dog trainers

Search terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ("mobility" "orientation") ("Visual* impair*" blind* "partially sighted" "low vision") ("instructor*" "trainer*" "specialist*" "professional*" "practitioner*" "worker*") • ("instructor*" "trainer*" "specialist*" "professional*" "practitioner*") ("guide dog*" "dog guide*")
Publication time	No specification
Literature type	Peer reviewed journals
Study approach	Empirical, Non-empirical
Language	English
Geographic location	No specification

Figure 6. Flowchart of the 2017 online Birkbeck *Discover* search



The online search was first attempted in 2017 through Birkbeck Library's *Discover* service, which searched all of the library's subscribed academic journals at once. There were two layers to this online search, targeting literature regarding the mobility specialists for visual impairment and the guide dog trainers respectively. The two strings of search terms and the specific search criteria adopted in this search activity are presented in [Table 5](#).

The process and results of the search are illustrated in [Figure 6](#). To more effectively identify articles that have an explicit focus on the professionals, the initial results of the search for the mobility specialist literature were first narrowed to records with titles including any of the professional-sensitive terms specified for the search (e.g. 'instructor', 'specialist'). Subsequent screening excluded duplicated records and those that either did not meet the eligibility criteria or addressed aspects of the mobility specialists' involvement or views that were too specific

(e.g. concerns over legal or licencing issues). Five articles on the mobility specialists were included. The search for literature pertaining to the guide dog trainers returned fewer initial results and led to the inclusion of two articles. In total, this phase concluded with the inclusion of a small group of seven journal articles. It is noteworthy that these articles all address non-UK-based professionals, two of them were practice reports (Milligan, 1998; Joyce, 2008), and only one research article involved guide dog trainers (Murphy, 1998).

II. Adapted search measures taken in December 2017

Reference list:

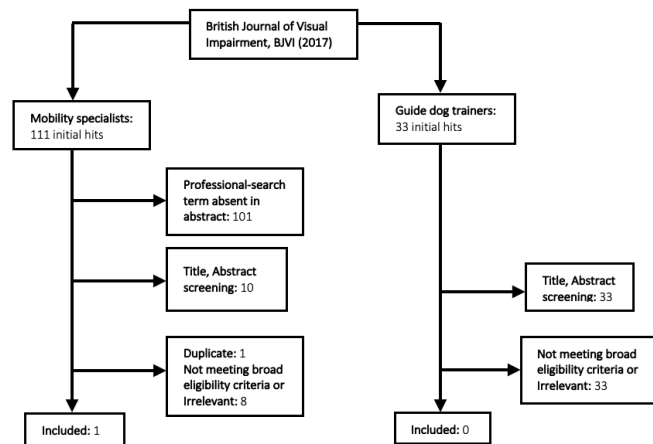
In light of the search results through Birkbeck *Discover* and following advice from the librarian, I decided to consult the reference list of an unpublished doctoral dissertation (Dodgson, 2014) that showed up in the earlier *Discover* search. I considered Dodgson's thesis (2014) because it focused on the perspectives of UK professionals with work experience delivering mobility support to blind and partially sighted people (older clients, specifically).

I later noted that the reference list predominantly consisted of non-peer-reviewed and non-empirical literature (e.g. textbooks, reports by the voluntary sector), which corresponded to the particular search strategy Dodgson (2014) took in response to a lack of scholarly work in the broader field of support services for people with visual impairment (pp. 22–23). Nonetheless, Dodgson's (2014) reference led me to two potentially relevant journal articles on mobility specialists and a key textbook used in UK pre-service training for professionals who provide mobility support for vision impairment – *Foundations of Orientation and Mobility* (Wiener et al., 2010). This textbook was included because its content included chapters on the guide dog service. Since it is used in training specialist staff, I perceived that the material might give me insight into a professional view on the guide dog service.

Specialist journals:

Furthermore, Dodgson (2014) suggested two journals as major sources of literature on professional support for visual impairment (p. 23): the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* (JVIB) and the *British Journal of Visual Impairment* (BJVI). JVIB was already covered via the Birkbeck *Discover* search, so I performed a separate search in the BJVI, following the same search terms and parameters as before ([Table 5](#)).

Figure 7. Flowchart of the 2017 online BJVI search



The process and results of the BJVI search are illustrated in [Figure 7](#). In the search for mobility specialist literature, two of the ten screened articles appeared to be relevant, but one had already been retrieved directly from Dodgson’s (2014) reference list. As with Birkbeck *Discover*, searching the literature on guide dog trainers in BJVI showed fewer initial results. However, none of the 33 hits specifically discussed the involvement or view of guide dog trainers. In total, the 2017 BJVI search led to inclusion of one more journal article.

Personal collection:

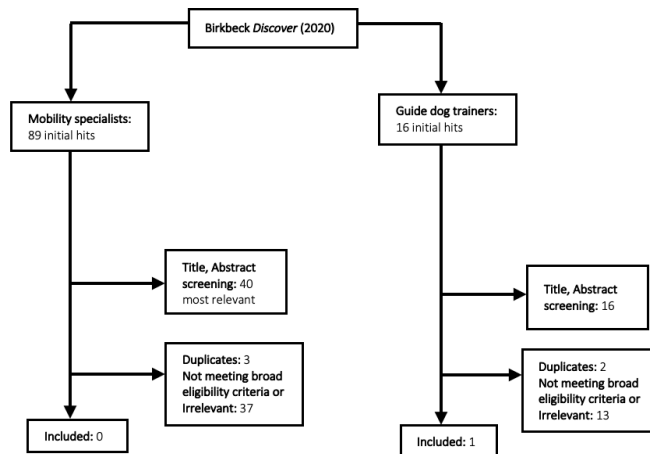
During this search process, I came across a book published by the sociologist Sanders who was the author of one of the studies reviewed in the owner-focused literature chapter (Sanders, 2000). Sanders’ book, *Understanding Dogs: Living and Working with Canine Companions* (1999), includes a chapter that focused on guide dog trainers. In light of the scarcity of research-based journals on guide dog trainers, I decided to incorporate Sanders’ book (1999) into the present review.

III. Updated online search in June 2020

I carried out follow-up searches for academic literature considering mobility specialists and guide dog trainers in June 2020. This update phase was executed exclusively online, accessing the same databases and publications that I searched in 2017 (Birkbeck *Discover*, BJVI). The key terms and eligibility criteria followed those adopted in 2017 ([Table 5](#)); the one adjustment was to focus on literature published between 2018 and 2020. The processes and results of the 2020 Birkbeck *Discover* and BJVI searches are presented in [Figures 8 and 9](#).

Birkbeck Discover 2020:

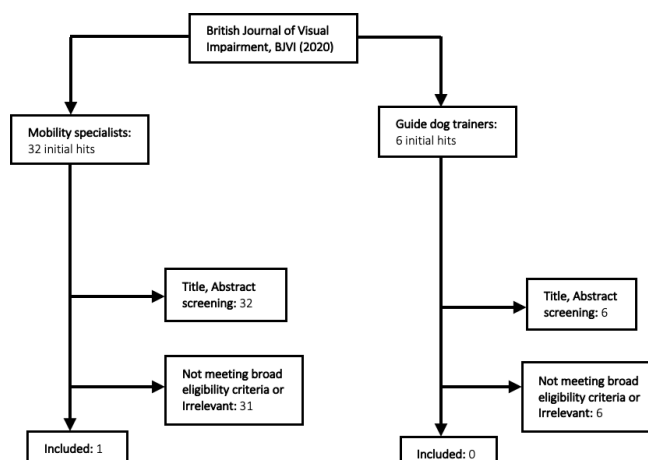
Figure 8. Flowchart of the 2020 online Birkbeck Discover search



As shown in [Figure 8](#), in the search for the mobility specialist literature, the 40 most relevant items rated by the system were screened. However, most of these hits concerned visually impaired participants, not professionals. The first two hits (i.e. the most relevant) focused on the mobility specialists' view but on narrow issues (e.g. whether professionals should acquire knowledge in braille). Thus, I did not add any updated sources on the mobility specialists. Meanwhile, the search for literature on guide dog trainers identified an article presenting a critical historical analysis on the practices adopted by guide dog trainers (Pemberton, 2019), which I included.

British Journal of Visual Impairment (BJVI) 2020:

Figure 9. Flowchart of the 2020 online BJVI search



A separate search of the BJVI for current literature led to the inclusion of one research article that involved mobility specialists (Figure 9). However, as with the 2017 BJVI search, the updated

search for literature targeting guide dog trainers identified no recent articles that focused on the guide dog trainers.

IV. Summary

Table 6. Summary of the 14 materials selected and gathered in 2017 and 2020

By topics:	
Mobility specialists for visual impairment	10
Guide dog trainers	4*
By literature types:	
Peer-reviewed journal articles	12
Textbook, book	2

*This count includes a practice recommendation authored by a professional with dual certification in mobility for visual impairment and dog training

Overall, 14 materials were selected and gathered through the combination of search procedures taken in 2017 and 2020. As the above description and [Table 6](#) indicate, there seems to be relatively limited *academic* and *research-based* work that specifically target the mobility specialists and the guide dog trainers. That is, while there exists a small and established body of academic literature on guide dog owners, this is clearly not the case for the guide dog service professionals.

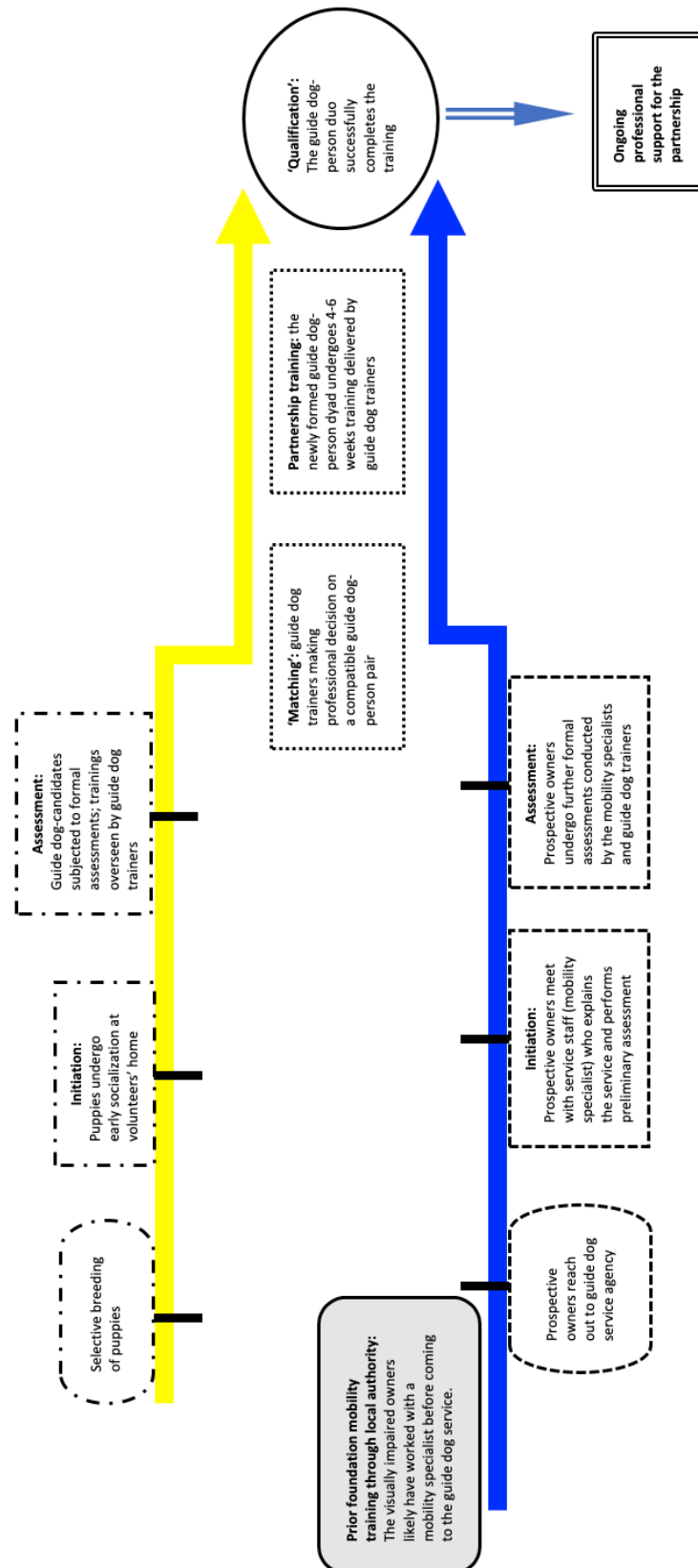
Literature on the Professionals in the Guide Dog Service

The review is divided into three broad sections. It begins with an overview of the chain of professional events in forming a guide dog–owner pair. The review then moves to consider mobility specialists, and the views and practices of guide dog trainers. This review reflects the literature search process in that it takes account of the professional world and perspectives of the guide dog partnership by engaging with various forms of materials and sources.

I. The formation of a guide dog–person unit in the professional context

The union between a specifically trained guide dog and a blind or partially sighted human partner is bound intricately with various activities in which the service agency and its associated professionals engage to equip the guide dog–owner team (Figure 10) (Franck et al., 2010a.; Murphy, 1998; Pemberton, 2019).

Figure 10. Overview of the different professional forms of work in the process of forming a guide dog–person unit



In the professional context,⁴ the guide dog–person partnership is pre-set with the selective breeding of puppies. Puppies deemed to be suitable join a household of trained volunteers to be socialized to various stimuli and structures of the human world ('Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre', 2020; Sanders, 1999). Once they are mature and ready, the puppies receive formal training and assessments at a training school, overseen by guide dog trainers (instructors) who have a professional background in dog behaviour and dog training (Franck et al., 2010a; Murphy, 1998).

Concurrently, for prospective owners, their first encounter with a professional likely takes place before they are enlisted in the guide dog service. In reality, the visually impaired owners would usually have met with specialist staff who are certified to provide mobility support for visual impairment at some point in their life (Franck et al., 2010b; Milligan, 1998). For instance, in the UK context, the owners would likely have received prior mobility support (e.g. use of a long cane) from mobility specialists at the local authority ('Social care and rehabilitation', 2020).

After informing the guide dog agency of their intention to apply for the service, the prospective owners come to their next encounter with the professional. In Guide Dogs UK, this encounter likely involves in-house mobility specialists providing the individuals with further information about the guide dog service and conducting a preliminary assessment of the individuals (e.g. mobility, vision, health) ('Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020). Prospective owners' engagement with the service staff continues as they undergo further assessments by mobility specialists and guide dog trainers that examine more thoroughly their individual circumstances and capacity to work with and care for a guide dog ('Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020; Franck et al., 2010b).

Once a client's application is successful, the guide dog trainers are responsible for identifying a compatible guide dog–person 'match' (e.g. regarding physique, temperament/personality; Sanders, 1999) and delivering the partnership training in which the owner-to-be acquires the knowledge and skills required to walk with and take care of his/her dog partner. As part of the service provision chain, the specialist staff continue to offer mobility and dog-related support to the guide dog–person unit, even after their partnership is officially 'qualified' (i.e. they have successfully completed the training) ('Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020; Franck et al., 2010a).

⁴ I am specifically referring to the professional context in Western societies such as in the UK ('Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020), the US (e.g. Sanders, 1999), and Australia (e.g. Murphy, 1998).

This chain of events underscores the indispensability of professional involvement in the construction of the guide dog–person partnership. Yet, as the literature search process indicates, the professional/service provider side of the story is largely absent from the current literature.

II. The mobility specialist⁵

In the 1960s, the US-oriented specialism of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) was introduced to the UK, which precipitated a more systematic interest in and adoption of mobility as a pillar of the professional qualification and service provision of specialist staff working with visually impaired individuals (Dodds, 1996; Neustadt-Noy & LaGrow, 2010).

As a specialty, O&M consists of a body of knowledge and practical skills regarding the safe and efficient travel of people with visual impairment in their environment (Wiener et al., 2010, pp. xv-xx). The ‘orientation’ component of this speciality concerns the person’s ability to establish and maintain a sense of spatial relationship to the surrounding environment, such as through adaptive uses of various senses or route familiarization strategies. The ‘mobility’ element is the more practical component, focusing on the person’s ability to physically move through space, particularly through techniques to effectively use travel aids (e.g. a long cane) (Blake, 2020; Dodgson & McCall, 2009).

It is estimated that 500 UK specialist staff are qualified to deliver O&M support for people with visual impairment (Neustadt-Noy & LaGrow, 2010, p. 541). However, the limited documentation in the existing literature provides no indication of how many are directly involved in the process of forming guide dog–person partnerships.

As the service overview reflects, the professionals who specialise in mobility support for visual impairment play an important early role: they provide foundational mobility support and assess prospective guide dog owners. On certain occasions, the mobility specialists may also be responsible for delivering professional training to guide dog owners during the course of their partnership (Franck et al., 2010b).

⁵ While there is an array of available titles in use in the literature (e.g. ‘Mobility Officer’; ‘Orientation and Mobility Specialists, OMS’; ‘Rehabilitation Worker’), for simplicity this review will largely use the terms ‘OMS’ and ‘mobility specialist’ to refer to professionals who provide mobility support for blind and partially sighted people, unless a more specific title is appropriate in context.

The terminology:

As described in the literature search section, *Foundations of Orientation and Mobility* (3rd edition) by Wiener, Welsh, and Blasch (2010) is the primary textbook used in the professional field of O&M that includes chapters specifically focused on guide dog service (Chapter 9, Franck et al., 2010a; Chapter 16, Franck et al., 2010b). In the first part of the theory chapter, the *proper* terminology is outlined: ‘dog guide’, ‘handler’, and ‘unit’ (p. 281). The textbook explains that ‘dog guide’⁶ is preferred, for it mirrors the descriptor order of the ‘human guide’ (i.e. sighted human guide). For the visually impaired person, the textbook’s description suggests that the term ‘handler’ reflects the essential in-charge role that any person would play in working with a dog:

Dogs that work in any capacity, such as for the police or customs agencies, are accompanied by humans—called handlers—who direct their dog's efforts. The dog guide and its handler are properly referred to as a "unit." In this case, the term handler is used to describe the person who is blind or visually impaired who works with the dog guide, and reflects the human effort that a successful dog guide unit requires. Handlers need to do what is necessary to get the best possible quality of work from their dogs. In order to do this, they use well-timed commands, praise, encouragement, and the occasional reprimand. (Franck et al., 2010a, p. 281)

In the context of Guide Dogs UK, ‘guide dog owner’ appears to be the primary term used to reference the visually impaired client. Nonetheless, the active, directing role of the individual in relation to the guide dog is also underscored (though with a different connotation):

It will guide you across the road, but it is up to you to decide where and when to cross safely. The guide dog and its owner are a partnership, with the owner giving commands and encouragement and telling the dog which way to go. (‘Training with a Guide Dog’, Guide Dogs, 2018)

Assessment:

An important role the mobility specialist in guide dog service is to provide early professional appraisal of the suitability of the individual for the service, or, conversely, whether a guide dog would be the best support option for the individual. This role can be carried out by in-house staff or external specialists sought by the guide dog agency (Franck et al., 2010b; Milligan, 1998, 1999).

⁶ In the UK and internationally, ‘guide dog’ is the most commonly used and recognized term for assistance dogs that provide support to blind and partially sighted people. This is the main term adopted in this thesis (‘Assistance Dogs International: Types of Assistance Dogs’, 2018; ‘International Guide Dog Federation Home Page’, 2018; Parenti et al., 2013).

Naturally, the way the mobility specialists approach the assessment would be sensitive to and/or in line with the particular acceptance criteria adopted by the guide dog agency. To support fellow specialists in understanding the role of their professional assessment in the process of guide dog application, an American-based OMS conducted a survey on the acceptance criteria set by 13 guide dog schools in the US and Canada (Milligan, 1999). The survey shows that acceptance criteria vary across agencies. In Milligan's (1999) survey, 'problem-solving', 'applicant motivation and attitude', 'ability to plan and execute routes', and 'level of independent mobility' were the most common factors considered by the dog guide schools (p. 243). In addition, all 13 schools surveyed agreed on the importance of O&M skills, if not formal O&M training, in the application decision.

This early survey reflects that, from the professional/provider perspective, physical fitness and independent mobility are particularly important attributes for a guide dog owner. This seems to be in line with the present approach of Guide Dogs UK. For instance, 'orientation and mobility skills', 'walking ability', 'health and fitness', and 'workload' are listed among the main eligibility criteria on the application brochure (*Applying for a guide dog*, 2020). Details are also provided on how the individual will meet the standards. For example, considering the 'workload' criterion, the brochure states:

To maintain a guide dog's skills, you will be expected to work the dog for a minimum of five days a week, for at least 30 to 40 mins (or a one-mile walk) a day. Ideally, you will work the guide dog seven days a week, using a combination of at least three routes. (*Applying for a guide dog*, 2020)

Likewise, the O&M textbook identifies 'life circumstances and activity level', 'health and physical condition', and 'orientation skills' in the seven areas that the future mobility specialists 'must' take into account in their professional appraisal of whether an individual is a suitable candidate for guide dog service (Franck et al., 2010b, p. 520). Another assessment factor highlighted in the textbook is the applicant's level of residual vision (Franck et al., 2010b., p. 520). In particular, the text refers to the applicant's residual vision in terms of the tendency to take over or override the guiding work of the dog. As Milligan (1998) commented, having residual vision can lead to a 'battle of control' between the guide dog and the owner (p. 76). While Guide Dogs UK does not exclude applicants with residual vision, they voice a similar line of caution ('Application questions', 2016; 'Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020).

In the O&M textbook, 'personal preference' (i.e. whether an applicant likes dogs) appears first in the list of the seven assessment factors identified and discussed by the authors (Franck et al., 2010b, p. 520). The textbook suggests that, while an applicant does not have to 'love dogs' to be

a guide dog service user, an individual's personal preference may shape how they keep and care for a guide dog:

Although it is not absolutely essential that the prospective dog guide handler love dogs, a strong dislike or fear of dogs will disqualify some. Dogs need to be fed, relieved, and groomed daily, and taken occasionally to visit the veterinarian. These things take time each day. For people who enjoy the companionship of dogs this will be a pleasure. Others may consider it a chore, but soon learn it is not difficult. (Franck et al., 2010b, p. 521)

When encountering clients who are uncertain about the care/chore aspect of the service, the textbook advises the professional practice of not discouraging such applicants but ensuring that they are aware of the caring aspect of the guide dog service (Franck et al., 2010b, p. 521). In the context of Guide Dogs UK, an individual's ability to provide for 'dog welfare' is a key focus of the application assessment ('Applying For A Guide Dog FAQs', 2020). The organization specifies five areas that the potential applicant must be able to attend to for the guide dog: 'Good Nutrition', 'Good Environment', 'Good Health', 'Appropriate Behaviour', and 'Positive Experiences'. Detailed guidance is given, such as providing 'mental stimulation' or not leaving the guide dog alone 'for more than four hours in a 24-hour period' (*Applying for a guide dog*, 2020).

Notably, both the professional textbook (Franck et al., 2010b) and Milligan's (1998) individual practice recommendation reference the 'additional functions' of guide dog service that are in line with those highlighted in the owner-focused literature – namely, the companionship and the social advantages. The textbook describes the companionship function:

Dog guides have a number of additional functions that, although secondary to guide work itself, are highly significant to the dog guide traveler. The most obvious secondary function is, of course, companionship. The dog guide is a companion in travel, and in life as a whole. The bond of affection and mutual respect between handler and dog is profound. (Franck et al., 2010a, p. 284)

In contrast, Milligan (1998) voices more stringent advice to fellow OMSs on how the 'additional function' of companionship should be approached in making a professional judgment of a client's suitability for the guide dog service:

Only active and otherwise healthy clients with diabetes should be recommended for dog guide training because dog guides are wasted on those who want dogs just for companionship. These trained animals should be reserved for active travelers. (Milligan, 1998, p. 77)

Training:

On certain occasions, mobility specialists may be sought to deliver professional training to the guide dog–owner dyad. This role can be challenging (Franck et al., 2010b; Joyce, 2008). While

they are experts in helping the visually impaired person develop important O&M skills, the pre-service preparation of mobility specialists does not cover the knowledge and skills needed to work with the dog partner of the dyad (Franck et al., 2010a, 2010b).

A separate practice recommendation has been made available for OMSs whose work involves supporting the guide dog–person unit (Joyce, 2008). This article is authored by an Australia-based OMS who also has qualification in dog training (i.e. someone who would be professionally recognized as a ‘guide dog mobility instructor’). Indeed, this dual-certified model is a growing trend in the professional world of guide dog services (Franck et al., 2010a, 2010b; ‘International Guide Dog Federation—About Us’, 2020), including Guide Dogs UK (*Working for Guide Dogs*, 2013).

In her practice advice, Joyce (2008) repeatedly emphasises the mobility specialists’ need to avoid encroaching on the existing relational dynamic between the guide dog and the handler (Joyce, 2008, pp. 67, 68). For instance, she recommends:

An instructor should not command, speak to, feed or control a guide dog when it is being worked by its handler. This should be the sole responsibility of the handler. (Joyce, 2008, p. 67)

Working with clients to plan and familiarize themselves with a travel route is an important aspect of O&M training (Crudden, 2015). Joyce (2008) advises mobility specialists to carry out this aspect of the professional support prior to putting the guide dog–person unit into action. In addition, Joyce (2008) provides tips on how mobility specialists can recognize when the guide dog–handler unit is in need of additional professional support, particularly by attending to changes in the guide dog’s body posture.

In overwhelmingly complex environments such as crowded department stores, the guide dog will sometimes exhibit signs of tension or stress by tightening its ears against its head or dropping its tail. Such signs indicate that the unit is probably experiencing difficulty. (Joyce, 2008, p. 67)

From the material considered in this section, working in the guide dog service seems to involve the mobility specialists drawing on frames of understanding offered by the pre-service training or the local occupational culture, as well as engaging with or taking up a *particular view* about the guide dog, the owner/handler, and their association.

III. The guide dog trainers

The ‘guide dog trainers’ (instructors) are staff with a professional background in dog behaviour and dog training; they are the pillars of the background work of prepping serviceable guide dogs

and bringing together the guide dog–client dyad (e.g. matching, partnership training) (*Applying for a guide dog*, 2020; Franck et al., 2010a). Nonetheless, the literature search conducted for this review suggests that these professionals are rarely the target of research. This section of the review is based on three selected studies, all of which specifically examine the views of guide dog trainers on guide dogs and/or their association with people (Murphy, 1998; Pemberton, 2019; Sanders, 1999). These works adopt different enquiry approaches and, more importantly, appear to bring forth distinct portrayals of guide dog trainers in action.

In the professional context of the guide dog service, temperament assessment of puppies and trainee dogs serves as an important basis for selecting potential guide dogs, tailoring training plans, and making matching decisions (Franck et al., 2010a; Murphy, 1998; ‘Puppy Profiling Assessment’, 2020; Sanders, 1999). Among the three studies, one is a research article on an early study examining how Australia-based guide dog trainers perceive and describe the temperaments of trainee guide dogs (Murphy, 1998). The main aim of this study was to establish a scheme of simple and generalizable descriptors for individual categories of key dog temperaments (Murphy, 1998). As the researcher indicated, standardization of temperament assessment is significant in ensuring the consistency and quality of the service delivered and avoiding the pitfall of ‘anthropomorphism’ (Murphy, 1998, pp. 163, 177), inappropriately attributing dog behaviours as analogues of human conditions.

In this study, nine guide dog trainers at the Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia (RGDAA) reviewed videos of trainee dogs walking on a designated route in a natural environment with a demonstrator trainer. The trainer-participants were instructed to identify and provide simple descriptions of the dogs’ behaviours in the video segments that they perceived as indicative of any of the 20 temperament categories that were then used as the in-house assessment scheme (e.g. ‘concentration’, ‘food distraction’, ‘body sensitivity’). Interestingly, the results of the study pointed to an overlap in the trainers’ assignment of behaviour descriptors to the temperament categories – i.e. a single behavioural element was identified as being illustrative of more than one dog temperament. For instance, trainers assigned ‘irregular pattern of tail swing’ and ‘rigid facial muscle’ to temperament categories of both ‘immaturity’ and ‘anxiety’ (Murphy, 1998, p. 175). In light of the study findings, the researcher proposed that an effective approach in the assessment of guide dogs would be based on interpreting a given temperament by referencing a set of behaviour descriptors rather than just one or two behavioural elements observed of the dogs (Murphy, 1998, pp. 163, 175).

While Murphy's article aligns the guide dog trainers with a professional standard that sees reading dog trainees' responses in human terms (i.e. terms that imply thinking and feeling) as unfavourable, Pemberton's (2019) account puts forth a different portrayal of guide dog trainers. Pemberton (2019) conducted a critical historical analysis of the training methodology and philosophy underpinning the Seeing Eye, the longest-standing guide dog service agency in the US, in the 1930s. This work involved examining unpublished transcripts of lectures by the head trainer at the time. Through his analysis, Pemberton (2019) suggests that the practices of the 1930s Seeing Eye instructors were grounded in a view of the guide dog–person pair as interdependent, mutual, and relationally connected: the dogs were not regarded as 'machines' but rather 'complex, sentient' 'living beings' (pp. 95, 99). For instance, Pemberton (2019) highlights the ethos of the Seeing Eyes as the belief that the dogs could not be forced to enter into a relationship with the human partner (either the trainer or the client) (pp. 94, 98), and the person has an obligation 'to adapt to the specificity of an individual dog' (p. 95).

A main focal point of Pemberton's (2019) analysis is Seeing Eye's professional view that a successful guide dog–person relationship is founded on the human partner 'managing' canine emotions and the affective relationship with the guide dog (pp. 94, 99). The analysis notes that 'caress' was the central element in these instructors' work and was conceived as something to be carefully realized through multiple aspects of the trainer's responses (e.g. physical, verbal) to the guide dogs. For instance, Pemberton (2019) highlights the following segment of the lecture transcript:

If your "That's the girl" is simply mechanical and your thoughts are a hundred miles away or if your verbal reward is given as though you were saying, "You son of a gun," or even if your thoughts are right there but you do not really appreciate what the dog has done [...] Be careful, Do not let your "that's the girl" become automatic. (Pemberton, 2019, p. 98)

Pemberton (2019) also underscores that the 1930s Seeing Eye had adopted an orientation that conceived personal emotional discipline as being a vital professional competence for instructors (p. 95). For instance, he suggests that the training of the guide dog–client pair required the instructors to deliberately exercise physical and emotional 'detachment' to enable the dog's affection to be transferred from the trainers to the clients (p. 97):

Just so long as you continue to speak to the dog and place or caress the dog, it is going to work for the master it knows better...As long as you touch or speak to the dog, it may be working with the blind master, but is looking past him to you and taking its cues from and working for you. I know this is hard for you to remember, but you must master it. (Pemberton, 2019, p. 98)

Another distinct aspect of Pemberton's (2019) analysis is his comment on the appropriation of gender ideals in the 1930s Seeing Eye to naturalize the particular roles and dynamics conceived of through the guide dog–person association (p. 95). Pemberton (2019) argues that the guide

dogs were always positioned in this professional context as a 'she' – naturally nurturing and sensitive. The instructor, on the other hand, was always a 'he', whose masculinity was to be naturally guarded through emotional discipline.

Different from Pemberton (2019), the work of sociologist Sanders (1999) focuses on American guide dog trainers active in the 1990s at a local guide dog programme: *Devoted Companions*. This study forms part of a broader ethnographic enquiry that also includes a focus on guide dog owners (Sanders, 2000; discussed in preceding chapter). Sanders (1999) interviewed six trainers who were active in the programme, and he also joined some of the trainers' outdoor training sessions.

Sanders' (1999) analysis underscores how the way the trainers perceived their canine trainees shaped the interaction they had with the dogs. Sanders (1999) notes that all of the trainers regarded having a 'dog understanding' as being the most critical competence as a trainer (pp. 92, 99). This was not only a familiarity with species and breed characteristics; more essentially, it involved the capacity to 'read' and respond sensitively to the individual characteristics and experiences of the dog trainees. One of the trainers expressed:

A dog trainer is a person that will have a very regimented training technique. If the dog does it right it gets praised, if it's wrong it gets corrected. It's either right or wrong; there's no in-between. An instructor is more humanitarian. Instructors can read a dog's good day or a dog's bad day and know when to put a little pressure on or when to take pressure off. [...] [Knowing a dog's unique] personality is what separate the men from the boys, the successful trainers from the hacks. (Sanders, 1999, pp. 92–93, clarification added in the original source)

That is, the trainers in Sanders' (1999) study seemed to share a view with their colleagues in the 1930s (Pemberton, 2019): both perceived a significance in heeding the individualities of the dogs in the training work. Like Pemberton (2019), Sanders (1999) notes that the trainers in his study tended to perceive the service work of the guide dogs as a 'natural activity' (p. 99) that hinges upon their innate tendencies.

Sanders (1999) notes that while the trainers perceive their dog trainees as being capable of engaging in some form of mental, emotional life, they tend to regard such capacities as basic, especially in contrast to those that feature in the human experience. For instance, Sanders (1999) highlights an 'obvious behaviourist doubt' (p. 103) expressed by a trainer, who talks of dogs as atemporal beings that respond to their surroundings not empathically but through simple association:

[...] but I don't know if that's the same type of sadness you or I feel, because we've put so much more into that, so much more in the past, and so much more of what this event is going to do in

the future. [Dogs] are living in the present. I think they more make association that something's not right and something is different and you may see a response that appears that the dog is very sad or unhappy. But I don't know if it's the same type of emotion that we would have [...]
(Sanders, 1999, p. 103, clarification added in the original source)

Distinctively, Sanders (1999) suggests that *ambivalence* is a discernible feature of the trainers' understanding of guide dogs (p. 108). He notes that conflicting views of the dogs are embedded in the responses of all the trainers in his study. Moreover, his analysis indicates that the aspect of trainers' perception that was fraught with the most ambivalence was whether the dogs are 'thoughtful' (i.e. intelligent) (p. 104). For instance, Sanders (1999) points to how a trainer talked of dog training as if the dogs were as analogous of simple stimulus-response driven 'automatons' (p. 104). Later in the same interview, he observed that this trainer offered a very different account when referring to a *specific* dog:

You could see the dog, I mean, he's looking around and he was looking to see where I could go and see what his options were and it was interesting to see what the dog would do [...] he chose to spin me right around and take me away from all of those things, and out around and around... So I think they do think things through. (Sanders, 1999, p. 105)

For Sanders (1999), the ambivalence of the trainers reflects a tension between how they have come to understand dogs through their everyday, personal experience with the dog trainees and companion dogs and the views of dogs demanded by the particular field of speciality (i.e. dog training) and occupation (i.e. service dog provision) within which they are situated. In the former, they find themselves interacting and having a relationship with dogs as unique, sentient individuals. In the latter, they are expected to condition the behaviours of the homogeneous dogs like a specialised behaviourist in order to produce serviceable guide dogs. Sanders (1999) argues that the trainers' ambivalence, in its fundamental form, is the tension of regarding the guide dogs as *both* an object to be used and a subject with whom to have a socio-affective relationship (p. 108) – an orientation that he identifies as prevailing in the sociocultural practice as a whole towards other animal-beings (pp. 111–112).

Intriguingly, Sanders (1999, p. 109) notes that for all trainers in his study, the conflict in their view of the dog companions was made discernible to them only when it was explicitly pointed out by a bystander (i.e. Sanders); he writes:

It was only when I confronted them directly with the apparent contradiction in field conversations or interviews that the potential problem moved to the perceptual foreground. (Sanders, 1999, p. 109)

When placed in sight, Sanders (1999, p. 109) observed that the contradiction evoked varying individual responses: simple acknowledgment, recantation, and puzzlement.

The analyses of Sanders (1999) and Pemberton (2020) both indicate that how the trainers view and define the guide dogs is reflected in the particular practices they adopt in their work with the dogs (and the owners). These analyses hint at the potential fruitfulness of attending to ways in which guide dog service professionals come to understand the guide dogs. Furthermore, Sanders' (1999) analysis of the guide dog trainers is particularly interesting, since ambivalence and tension have not emerged as potentially relevant themes in most accounts of the guide dog service. There rarely seems to be an explicit suggestion of these notions in the academic literature or in in-house texts, either in work focused on the professional's perspective or on the owner's perspective.

Nonetheless, there are traces of the complexity and tension similar to those foregrounded in Sanders' (1999) analysis embedded in the contexts of some of the accounts reviewed. For instance, while the professional textbook written for pre-service mobility specialists defines the role of the guide dog handlers as 'need[ing] to do what is necessary to get the best possible quality of work from their dogs' (Franck et al., 2010a, p. 281), it also talks of 'a bond of mutual affection and respect' that the handlers can enjoy with their guide dogs (Franck et al., 2010a, p. 284). Likewise, in his article, Pemberton (2019) commented how the 1930s Seeing Eye conceived caress as a form of 'pay cheque' (p. 95) that the trainers utilized to manage their relationship with the guide dogs.

While Pemberton (2019) did not prioritize tension or ambivalence as a key analytic focus like Sanders (1999), in the article's conclusion, Pemberton comments:

From this perspective, while we might consider the guide dog partnership as an exemplary model of interdependence enabling a person with visual impairment to act, the partnership might also be a good place to explore its partial connections, thereby exposing the tensions, stakes and complexities in forging and maintaining interdependent relationships between species. (Pemberton, 2019, p. 99)

The final remark of Pemberton (2019), together with the analysis of Sanders (1999), seem to provide further insight into what a more *reflexive* attempt to investigate the phenomenon of the guide dog–person relationship would be like. It would be an enquiry that is sensitive and open to 'partial connections' (Pemberton, 2019, p. 99), to the nuances and (potentially uneasy) complexities in the perception experienced by a human partner (a professional or an owner) in her/his everyday encounter with the guide dog.

Post-review remarks

The process of engaging with literature on the professionals involved in the guide dog service was more challenging than the previous owner-focused review. There was very limited academic and research-based work in this area. In my review, I was unable to locate empirical studies addressing guide dog-related professionals working in the UK context.

Nonetheless, through this process, I became more familiar with the chain of professional activities involved in forming a guide dog–person unit and the specific roles of the mobility specialists and guide dog trainers in this service chain. I also came to understand how the professionals are an indispensable part of forming a guide dog–owner pair.

At the same time, the material reviewed introduced the professionals to me as individuals whose work requires them to actively define the status and/or nature of the guide dogs, the human partners, and the partnership. While the professionals seemed to find the particular frame of references and the practices they adopt in the field as unproblematic or congruent, the analyses of Sanders (1999) and Pemberton (2019) highlight the potential ambiguity and tension underlying the apparent neutrality.

With this view, my concern for the mobility specialists and the guide dog trainers working at Guide Dogs UK came to acquire a more defined shape:

How do these professional staff perceive their involvement (e.g. assessment, training) in the guide dog service?

How do these professionals make sense of the role of the guide dog, the role of the owner, and the partnership?

The few existing works wherein the views of guide dog-related professionals were solicited and/or analysed had different approaches: standardized measures (e.g. survey, controlled observation), ethnographic interviews and field observations, and critical analysis of dated lecture manuscripts. For my project, the focus on the perspective and sense-making of the professionals calls for a research approach that studies first-person accounts and is concerned with how people understand particular aspects of their world. The enquiry will also be benefited by an approach that advocates for inductive practices and values the diversity (and similarity) between individual perspectives.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Situating the project

The literature review chapters each concluded with my reflexive remarks, where I described potential gaps in the bodies of knowledge of guide dog–partnership and the focus of the present project. That said, my evaluation of the literature was made against the background of a particular *worldview* - a system of beliefs, assumptions that I have (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). More specifically, qualitative researchers have argued that every research endeavour is grounded in a set of *ontological* assumptions about the nature of the world, and certain *epistemological* assumptions that concerns what and how we can know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2000). For each researcher, it is through the lenses of these fundamental beliefs that we come to make decisions about the ‘right’ way or approach to carry out our inquiry (*Methodology*), and the specific techniques or instruments that we will use at different steps of the investigation (*Methods*).

The philosophical lens through which I engage with this project (and everyday life) includes a belief that the world has a material existence independent from human beings. However, I hold an equally strong belief that it is in and through our engagement that we come to perceive and access the world and its things (e.g. other people, objects, events, processes) and experience them as being meaningful (i.e. ‘real’). At the same time, I question claims that suggest our perception of the world is merely a direct and complete mirror reflection of it, such that there is only one ultimate human reality. Rather, I believe in the multiplicity and diversity of human understandings that are made possible through the unique perspectives that we take (individually and collectively) in time and place. Likewise, as a research student, I find it difficult to align myself with the traditional scientific (positivist) conception of the detached or disinterested researcher, whose perspective can and should be subtracted from the process of investigating and understanding the object of interest (Willig, 2013; Schwandt, 2001). In contrast, I recognize the inherently inseparable role that I play in my quest for understanding the topic of my choice.

The chosen methodology and the chapter

Having reviewed the relevant literature and refined my research questions, I am now called to *determine* and *choose* a methodology that will enable me to study and understand the guide

dog–person partnership in a way that is compatible to my broader philosophical commitments. The methodology I chose for this project is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009). As its name indicates, IPA is deeply informed by the thinking and worldview rooted in the tradition of phenomenology. The chapter will first consider what the phenomenological worldview is like by looking at the work of important philosophers. We will then shift to a more practical level to discuss research methodologies that are informed by phenomenological philosophy.

The tradition of phenomenology

To many, phenomenology played an important role in philosophy in challenging the dominant positivist epistemology in sciences and the accompanying view of the subject-object, research-researched dualism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Langdridge, 2007) and in trying to rehabilitate the value of personal and experiential accounts in scientific knowledge (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007). Phenomenology, as many point out, does not stand as a single unified body of thought, but should be more properly understood as an ongoing movement, or an evolving tradition (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). This movement was set in motion through the grounding work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), but other prominent philosophers – such as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) – each have contributed to depicting for us the phenomenological way of thinking about the world and ourselves. While the works of the phenomenologists can be differentiated from one another, they also remained closely related with one another through sharing certain concerns (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Zahavi, 2019). With this in mind, the discussion will turn to three philosophers whose writings have decisive influence on the tradition of phenomenology, namely: Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

The early (transcendental) phase of phenomenology: Edmund Husserl

Starting off as a mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) turned to the field of philosophy at a relatively later age. An important feature of Husserl’s work is a recurring concern with the human consciousness (Finlay, 2011; Spinelli, 2005). To Husserl, consciousness is the only medium through which we come to encounter and know the world and ourselves (Larkin, et al., 2006; Spinelli, 2005). In particular, Husserl’s analysis focuses on the concept of *intentionality*,

which he regarded as the defining property of consciousness and as having an omnipresent role in our understanding and experience as humans (Langdridge, 2007).

Deriving from the Latin word *intendere*, which is translated as ‘to stretch forth’ (Spinelli, 2005), the term ‘intentionality’ suggests the quality of consciousness as being outward, directed, and focusing beyond itself (Spinelli, 2005; Zahavi, 2019). Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something.⁷ When we hear or think, we always hear or think of something (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Consciousness is always directed toward or occupied with something other than itself; it is marked by an openness (Zahavi, 2019). From this view, we never experience an inner, self-isolated, purely mental state; rather, our experience is always about something (Spinelli, 2005).

Husserl also construes intentionality in terms of a correlation between *noesis* and *noema* (Spinelli, 2005). In this context, noesis refers to the way through which we are conscious of or experience something, whereas noema pertains to what is experienced. In Husserl’s analysis, noesis and noema are distinct, but they are also necessarily correlated in our experience (Langdridge, 2007). As Ihde puts it: *‘every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present’* (1986, as cited in Langdridge, 2007, p. 15). That is, while our experience is always an experience of something, we do not experience things as some raw matter in and of itself. Instead, the object of our concern will always appear to be, or be perceived by us, in a distinct manner – as being in some way, being a certain type of thing, or having certain functions, etc. (Spinelli, 2005; Zahavi, 2019).

In speaking of consciousness as intentional, Husserl has helped us reconceive of ourselves as being not merely another physical object stationed in the world; rather, we are characterized more profoundly by being in a co-constitutive relationship with the world. We are also the ‘*subject* for the world’ (Zahavi, 2019, p. 38); it is only through our intentional encounter with the world and the entities within that they reveal their significance – that is, their worldliness and thingness (Larkin et al., 2006; Zahavi, 2019). The ramification of Husserl’s intentionality is the recognition of what we experience or perceive as intentional being is always already an indissoluble interconnection between the mind and the world (Spinelli, 2005). As such, the world can only be properly grasped through referring to our involvement with it, and, equally,

⁷ The object or target of our consciousness can be an object with material existence (e.g. a table, a cake) or an intangible object (e.g. a mathematical model, justice) (Finlay, 2011).

we can only be properly understood through considering how our world is lived and experienced (Finlay, 2011; Zahavi, 2019).

This unique worldview is a key principle of phenomenological philosophy. In many respects, it stands in contrast to the dualistic opposition assumed by positivist sciences between mind and world, knower and known, subjectivity and objectivity (Langdrige, 2007; Schwandt, 2001; Zahavi, 2019). Indeed, to Husserl, the first-person perspective is the epistemic basis for and precursor to any abstract accounts and the knowledge system of science (Smith et al., 2009; Zahavi, 2019).

From objective-logical self-evidence (mathematical “insight,” natural-scientific, positive-scientific “insight,” as it is being accomplished by the inquiring and grounding mathematician, etc.), the path leads back, here, to the primal self-evidence in which the life-world is ever pregiven (Husserl, 1970:128, as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.15).

In Husserl’s view, subjectivity is not an obstacle but rather the enabling condition for the understanding, analysing, and theorizing of the objectivity practiced in the sciences (Zahavi, 2019). That is, the phenomenological perspective resists the traditional views that genuine scientific knowledge can only be acquired by turning away from the perspective of the perceiving subject, and that the ‘really real reality’ necessarily decouples from the *lifeworld* (that is, the everyday experienced world) to disclose a *world as in itself* (Langdrige, 2007; Zahavi, 2019).

With his most famous quote – ‘Back to the things themselves’ – Husserl sketches out the field of human experience as the working terrain of phenomenology (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). By the ‘things themselves’, Husserl urges us to focus on the *phenomena in their own terms*; our investigation should not be led by the preconceptions and expectations that we may have for the object in consideration. Instead, the investigation should honour how and what this object appears to us, and with what meanings it is made manifest to us concretely and intuitively in experience (Finlay, 2011; Zahavi, 2019).

However, from Husserl’s view, the phenomenological project is to be met with certain challenges brought on by the particular way that we lead our everyday and professional lives, a basic mode of being that he labelled the *natural attitude* (Langdrige, 2007; Smith, et al., 2009). Husserl argued that we experience our daily life for the most part as unfolding seamlessly, by immersing ourselves in the various assumptions we have about the world and everyday being and doing (Langdrige, 2007). Although these assumptions may be facilitating, the very sense of taken-for-grantedness that come with them may also keep us at a distance from the potential richness, the complexities of what is intuitively given to us in experience (Larkin et al., 2011).

Following this view, Husserl saw the need for phenomenology to introduce and implement a methodological component in its programme.

One major element of Husserl's methodology is known as the 'reduction' (also referred to as 'epoché' or 'bracketing'). In the Husserlian sense, the reductive steps involve the phenomenologists abstaining from their prior understanding about the phenomenon in question, and even suspending their presumptions about the seemingly self-subsisting character of the world and reality (Finlay, 2011). In this context, the bracketed content is not eradicated or eliminated; rather, it is kept separate and temporarily inactive from the scope of the researcher's investigative attention (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009):

Putting it in brackets shuts out from the phenomenological field the world as it exists for the subject in simple absoluteness; its place, however, is taken by the world as given in *consciousness* (perceived, remembered, judged, thought, valued, etc.) (Husserl, 1927, para.3, as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 13).

To Husserl, reduction is not a one-time procedure, but a process wherein the phenomenologists gradually move away from the pervasive taken-for-grantedness of the natural attitude and shift into the *phenomenological attitude* – a reflective, open, fresh, and expansive attentiveness to the immediate experience in question (Finlay, 2008, 2009). Concurrently, as Husserl suggests, the phenomenologist is to attend to the phenomenon at hand as directly and fully as possible, as it appears anew through the reductive steps. The task is to *describe*, not to explain, every detail that manifests while restraining ourselves from transforming it according to our preconceived hierarchies or theories (Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005).

In his grandest vision, Husserl sees phenomenology with an ambitious goal of clarifying the concepts that are fundamental to individual scientific disciplines by analysing the ways things referred to by these concepts appear to philosophers in experience (King et al., 2008; Langdridge, 2007). Indeed, to Husserl, the intended goal of the phenomenological method was to return to the phenomenon in its *essence* – to identify the universal structures or meanings that characterize our experience of the subject-matter in question (Smith et al., 2009; Spinelli, 2005).

To the many who have been inspired by Husserl's ideas and joined the movement of phenomenology, his philosophy is indispensable for articulating certain themes and features that have defined and continue to characterize the phenomenological way of thinking, understanding, and conducting research (Finlay, 2009; Zahavi, 2019). That said, Husserl was articulating phenomenology as a philosopher, which means that the insights drawn from his work may need to be adapted slightly when being applied by researchers, depending on the

particular focus and context of their empirical interest (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). It is worth noting that Husserl was primarily concerned with the first-person perspective; his methodological account was referring to the process of the philosopher coming to reflect on and know more accurately their own experience of the phenomenon. As noted above, he was also committed to disclosing the essential, invariant properties underlying experience. To psychological researchers, however, the objective of investigation is often to understand the experiential perspective of someone else – i.e. the participant (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), and it is also sometimes about foregrounding the variant aspects – the particularities of individual experiences – and not just the generic patterns (Spinelli, 2005).

More important, there are aspects of Husserl's work that cause issues not only to empirical researchers but also internally, to others engage with phenomenology on the philosophical level (Finlay, 2009; Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). On Husserl's later view, the final act of reduction seems to be marked by one successful bracketing of *all* the presuppositions and emerging as the '*transcendental ego*' to focus on the intentional consciousness itself from above (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Many phenomenologists did not pursue Husserl's transcendental move in their work (Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). Among them, the work of Heidegger – Husserl's former student and assistant – was considering to be a critical force in shifting phenomenology into a post-Husserlian phase – the *existential and hermeneutic phenomenology*.

The existential and hermeneutic phase of phenomenology: Martin Heidegger

Heidegger studied phenomenology under Husserl early in his career. Like his former mentor, Heidegger solidified his status as one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century through his magnum opus *Being and Time* (Langdridge, 2007). However, in contrast to Husserl, who is concerned with addressing specific epistemological and methodological issues, Heidegger's phenomenology features a stronger commitment to an ontological analysis of the nature of human existence (Zahavi, 2019).

Heidegger sees the being of human beings as distinct from the beings of other entities (Spinelli, 2005; Wrathall, 2006). Rather than drawing on traditional terms such as 'subject' and 'consciousness', Heidegger coined the term 'Da-sein' ('Dasein') to refer to human beings (Zahavi, 2019). This terminological choice is not random, but it conveys Heidegger's philosophical view of the kind of being we humans are. Dasein, which

literally means 'there-being' or 'being-there', is also more commonly translated in English as 'being-in-the-world' (Finlay, 2011; Spinelli, 2005). In designating the human being as Dasein, Heidegger means that we are never a self-contained entity to whom a world is then subsequently introduced. We do not, in other words, subsequently *encounter* a world. We always have a 'there'; our very being is involved with the world (Larkin et al., 2006; Wrathall, 2006). As the hyphenation of the term indicates, our being and the world is fundamentally a 'unitary phenomenon': *'The compound expression "being-in-the-world" indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole'* (Heidegger, 1996/1927, p. 78, as cited in Wrathall, 2006, p. 7).

In an important respect, Heidegger's Dasein appropriates the idea of the person-world intertwinement that Husserl addresses in his analysis of intentionality (Spinelli, 2005; Zahavi, 2019). However, Heidegger's position is unequivocal; our involvement with the world is not by choice such that we can occasionally and successfully step out of or 'transcend' our worldly engagement by means of the epoché (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin et al., 2006). Dasein affirms that our very being is always involved with the world (Wrathall, 2006).

Notably, Heidegger argues that the world is disclosed to us as an *already* meaning-ful place (Wrathall, 2006; Zahavi, 2019). We experience the world as 'ready-to-be-used' at once, and the innerworldly entities first show themselves to us by their 'handiness' as useful things, rather than brute (meaning-less) physical objects (Schmidt, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). For Heidegger, our everyday practical dealings are the most original form of our relation to the world. He notes that we disclose the meaning of things 'more undisguisedly' when we actively use them, not when we contemplate them in a distant, theoretical manner (Wrathall, 2006; Zahavi, 2019):

The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as useful thing. The act of hammering itself discovers the specific "handiness" of the hammer. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 65, as cited in Zahavi, 2019, p. 74).

Importantly, Heidegger shows that the world is only there *for* Dasein; it is only to Dasein that things are disclosed as bearing references to Dasein's possibilities of being. Unlike other entities, Heidegger argues, there is no fixed way that we humans must be. As such, we alone must choose what or who we will be and 'care' for our own being (Spinelli, 2005; Wrathall, 2006). In Heidegger's words, Dasein is *'an entity which in each case I*

myself am. Mineness belongs to any existing Dasein' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 78, as cited in Wrathall, 2006, p. 7). In other words, our interpretive self-understanding or sense of selfhood is a defining feature of our being as human (Schmidt, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, Heidegger notes that, in concerning ourselves with our being, we are always found to be ahead ourselves (*'projecting'*), that is, already being there with the world and making present the worldly context in light of our chosen existential possibility and anticipated project (Mensch, 2018): *'The being of Dasein signifies, being ahead of yourself in already being in the world as being there with the entities that one encounters within the world'* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 192, as cited in Mensch, 2016).

At the same time, Heidegger's analysis suggests that Dasein and its world are as inherently social as personal (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007). In defining Dasein, he states: 'it has being-with-one-another as its kind of being' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 163 as cited in Wrathall, 2006, p.45). Heidegger indicates that our experience is always saturated with references to other people, whether they are physically there or not (Smith et al., 2009; Spinelli, 2005):

The tool I am using is bought by someone, the book is a gift from...the umbrella is forgotten by someone. The dining-table at home is not a round top on a stand but a piece of furniture in a particular place, which itself has its particular places at which particular others are seated yesterday. (Heidegger, 1985/1925, p. 239, as cited in Wrathall, 2006, p. 51).

In Heidegger's view, the co-existence of others is already built into the matters we engage with and the things we utilise in our everyday life as well as the cultural and linguistic conventions established by others before our time (Zahavi, 2019). The world, in this sense, is not just a ground for our physical presence and actions, but is also disclosed to us as already furnished with certain options and limits as to the *right* or *meaningful* way of understanding and being in the world (Larkin et al., 2011; Wrathall, 2006). We are, to use Heidegger's metaphor, *'thrown'* into these worldly circumstances (Finlay, 2011; Spinelli, 2005). These pre-existing norms or standards constitute the public perspective, or what Heidegger terms the *'they'* (*'das Man'*) (Finlay, 2011; Spinelli, 2005). As Dasein, this shared, handed-down perspective fosters the everydayness that characterises the life that we lead and adds towards the lens through which we see the world and ourselves (Schmidt, 2006; Wrathall, 2006):

This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 231, as cited in Wrathall, 2006, p. 53).

It is evident that, to Heidegger, our experience and understanding of the world can never take the form of a presuppositionless, direct or descriptive grasping as alluded to in Husserl's phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). Heidegger's analysis of Dasein suggests that our lived world is immediately meaningful; our perception is *always already* grounded in and mediated by our present project and past experiences, relationships with others, and the sociocultural traditions that dominate in our time (Larkin et al., 2006; Spinelli, 2005). Thinking in the research terms, Heidegger's view redirects us from a project concerning the transcendental ego and the identification of invariant structures of our experiences and the lived world to a project concerning individual Daseins, namely, their own manners of experiencing and understanding their being as being there, embedded in and engaged with their lived world (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

To many, Heidegger's work also fostered important connections between phenomenology and the tradition of hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Like phenomenology, hermeneutics is an evolving tradition to which the work of multiple thinkers at different times, including Heidegger's, has contributed (Schwandt, 2001). Early hermeneutics focused on the rule-guided practice of interpretation involved in understanding ancient written language (e.g. biblical texts), but the scholarship further developed into the methodological model designated for Human Science,⁸ that is, the study of 'persons', or more specifically, the study of the *meanings*⁹ that are ascribed, perceived, expressed, and articulated in living their lives as conscious, intentional beings (Schmidt, 2006; van Manen, 2016).

The 'hermeneutic circle' is a prevailing theme in hermeneutic thinking that is particularly pertinent in Heidegger's phenomenology (Mensch, 2018; Schwandt, 2001). In its rudimentary sense, the concept concerns the circular structure of the practice of interpreting text, arguing that understanding the meaning of the text holistically relies on knowing its parts and that grasping the meaning of the parts depends on having some sense of the whole (Smith, 2007). In this view, interpreting texts is not a linear process but is constituted by reciprocal and interdependent events. Importantly, the circle

⁸ In contrast, Natural Science was regarded as the study of the general patterns or laws of how 'things' and 'natural events' behave or occur. This distinction between Human Science and Natural Science was developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, an important figure in the hermeneutic tradition (Schmidt, 2006)

⁹ From Dilthey's account, Meaning seemed to refer to a psychic unity that connects together the series of impressions we perceive in the flow of life/time and a relationship of part to whole identified in our awareness of life (Schmidt, 2006).

foregrounds the role of the inquirer's pre-understanding: one must already have an approximated sense of either the part or the whole to begin interpreting and understanding the text (Finlay, 2011; Schmidt, 2006).

To Heidegger, however, the hermeneutic circle signifies more than a methodological principle or process (Finlay, 2011; Schwandt, 2001). In analysing Dasein, he sees that the basic structure of human existence is hermeneutic, that is, that our being-in-the-world is circular: *'An entity for which, as Being-in-the-world, its Being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure'* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 195, as cited in Mensch, 2018, p. 67). As self-interpreting being, we have already projected ourselves towards the world as the person who will accomplish this or that purpose. However, our capacity to project ourselves also implies that we already have some sense of our world in terms of the range of possibilities of being, namely, the activities, means and norms that are made available to us (Mensch, 2018; Wrathall, 2006). For Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle is ubiquitous, and it does not concern only the work of interpreting texts or the human sciences, because all our experiences of the world and efforts to understand always involve pre-understanding ('fore-structures') (Schwandt, 2001):

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us...understanding always pertains to the whole of Being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1929/1962, p. 191-192, 194, as cited in Finlay, 2008, p. 8).

Yet, for Heidegger, the circularity is not necessarily a vicious one that precludes any true or genuine understanding (Schmidt, 2006). In Heidegger's view, the unfixed basis of human existence that renders us self-interpreting (projective) in the first place also indicates our inherent freedom to go beyond what we presently are (Mensch, 2016, Spinelli, 2005). The initial perspective that we brought to the scene is not fixed but can be revised in light of the encountered new, therefore prompting us to participate in and shape our traditions differently, and opening us up to the possibilities of new meanings and ways of understanding (Finlay, 2011; Schwandt, 2001).

Heidegger deems it essential that, in the process of understanding, we do not hold onto or easily accept what we previously grasped as final or appropriate (Schmidt, 2006). Rather, priority is given to the object or phenomenon in question, against which our fore-conceptions are continuously checked, challenged and amended (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009):

Our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our...fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, 1962/1927, p. 195, as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.25).

Here, Heidegger echoes Husserl in emphasising the importance of an inquirer adopting an open-minded stance during her/his inquiry (Finlay, 2011). At the same time, Heidegger's account suggests that our preconceptions may not be completely clear to us at the beginning of our interpretive work (Smith et al., 2009). Just like the reciprocal illumination between the part and the whole in the hermeneutic circle, our pre-understandings are better known by us amid our ongoing engagement with and evolving understanding of the new object. In an important respect, Heidegger's hermeneutic reading points to a more flexible, multitasked involvement of the researcher (Finlay, 2011; Smith, et al., 2009). Instead of aiming straight to set aside all her/his presuppositions completely, the Heideggerian researcher is found to be in a back-and-forth movement wherein she/he engages, examines, and appropriates her or his personal take on the one hand, and manages or distant from it on the other as she/he responds to the phenomenon in question.

The phenomenological view of the body: Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Merleau-Ponty – a French philosopher and psychologist – was one of the names most readily mentioned with regard to the surge of the French existentialist movement inspired by Heidegger's work (Langdridge, 2007). Merleau-Ponty is most distinguished by his sustained and thorough interest in the special status of our body in relation to the world (Finlay, 2011). While Husserl and Heidegger have both considered the bodily dimension of human experience in their work, it was Merleau-Ponty who placed it at the core of his phenomenology (Seamon, 2013; Zahavi, 2019).

Merleau-Ponty shares Husserl's view that human consciousness is marked by an inherent directedness, that is, an openness towards the world (Smith et al., 2009). But differing from Husserl and more like Heidegger, he stresses that our intentional consciousness manifests more originally in a practical and perceptual bodily form, rather than in an abstract, transcendent manner (Finlay, 2011; Larkin et al., 2011). After all, we are incarnate; we inhabit our world as an embodied subject. Merleau-Ponty notes: *'Consciousness is being towards the thing through the intermediary of the body'* (1962, p. 138-139, as cited in Seamon, 2018, p. 46)

Nonetheless, like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty is critical of traditional philosophy and science for disconnecting us from our original relation to the world. Notably, he is concerned about the reductive treatments of psychology that tend to define our perceptual experience as the sum of discrete sensory stimuli from our surroundings or in terms of mental representations derived from higher cognitive processes (Allen, 2007; Seamon, 2015, 2018). To Merleau-Ponty, these conventional approaches have conceptualized our perceptual body as largely passive in relation to its surroundings and subordinate to the mind. Perception, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is an *active interplay* and *lived dynamic* between the world and the perceptual body that is inherently participatory and intelligent (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 2013). However, Merleau-Ponty also suggests that it is difficult for us to immediately (or directly) recognize and grasp the intentional agency of the lived body, since it mostly occurs in a pre-conscious manner (Allen, 2007; Seamon, 2018). There is an inherent invisibility that Merleau-Ponty discerns in the perceptual body akin to an ever-present 'background' to our experience and understanding (Langdridge, 2007): *'Perception hides itself from itself ... it is of the essence of consciousness to forget its own phenomena thus enabling "things" to be constituted'* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 58, as cited in Seamon, 2018, p. 44).

While the conventional approaches tend to consider our senses separately, Merleau-Ponty sees that the five senses always resonate with and interpenetrate one another (Finlay, 2011). Perception, he defines, is *'a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning'* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 229, pp. 21-22, as cited in Seamon, 2018, p. 44). Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception also takes account of a motor dimension that is normally united and works synergistically with our senses (Seamon, 2013, 2018). Most notably, he introduces the concept of 'body schema' (*schema corporel*) in explicating our everyday movement:

When I move about my house, I know without thinking about it that walking towards the bathroom means passing near the bedroom, that looking at the window means having the fireplace on my left, and in this small world each gesture, each perception is immediately located in relation to a great number of possible co-ordinates ... The word "sediment" [within the body means that] ... this acquired knowledge is not an inert mass in the depths of our consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 149-150, as cited in Allen, 2007, p. 725).

From Merleau-Ponty's words, we can recognize an automatic and smooth bodily unfolding that characterizes most of our everyday experience. This seemingly intuitive body-in-space, body-in-act experience is what Merleau-Ponty refers to when he speaks of body-schema; it is the manifestation of us being inherently *body-subjects* (Allen, 2007;

Seamon, 2013, 2018). Rather than it being merely reactive to the environment and to the mind, Merleau-Ponty foregrounds the body as an autonomous agent that makes sense of and deals with the surrounding space on the pre-conscious level, that is, in its corporal terms (Seamon, 2015). The familiar space is seized and taken by the body-subject as its own, while the embodied-spatial understanding accumulated overtime ‘sediments’ in the body-subject as a repertoire of integrated bodily actions. ‘I know without thinking’—the space has become genuinely ours such that we experience our body as automatically and intelligently offering up the way of engaging with that space or activity. Merleau-Ponty’s account continues:

My flat is for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain around me only as long as I still have “in my hands” or “in my legs” the main distances and directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 149-150, as cited in Allen, 2007, p. 725).

In an important respect, Merleau-Ponty has led us to recognize that our bodily being renders us an inescapable perspective on or ‘attitude’ towards the world (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 2013). Our embodied nature means that we always find the world at hand being disclosed to us immediately as a whole with an irreducible meaning through a particular scope of knowledge, that is, the possible bodily actions given by our individual sensorimotor profile, past experiences, and present project:

I take my place, through the medium of my body as the potential source of a certain number of familiar actions, in my environment conceived of as a set of manipulanda and without, moreover, envisaging my body or my surrounding as objects in the Kantian sense, that is ... as transparent entities, free from my attachment to a specific place or time. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 120-121, as cited in Allen, 2005, p. 725).

As with Heidegger, one finds that Merleau-Ponty’s thinking emphasises the situated nature of our being-in-the-world (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty comments: ‘the most important lesson which reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction’ (Finlay, 2008, p. 10). As incarnate subjects, our body always constitutes our point of departure; we can never be perspective-less and examine the perceived world as if from nowhere (Finlay, 2011). The perceiving body is the experiential reference point in relation to which things and activities disclose themselves to us in specific ways (Zahavi, 2019). Equally, our everyday being-in-the-world as body subjects is inevitably interpretive: the directed and in-sync actions that automatically flow from us have necessarily implicated a certain pre-understanding of our own bodily capabilities, and the physical sustainability and demand of the everyday environment and activities (Seamon, 2015).

Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the ambiguity of our embodied experience (Finlay, 2011; Zahavi, 2019). A notable example he draws on is the touching of hands, that is, when our left hand touches the right. Here, he observes that our experience of a given hand alternates subtly or is reversible between the touching and the touched. That is, the touching hand is necessarily the touched, and vice versa. Merleau-Ponty also discusses the dual nature of our body in relation to the distinction introduced by Husserl between the 'subjective/lived body' that we pre-reflectively live through from the first-person perspective and the 'objective body' as observed and objectified by others (and ourselves) from a third-person perspective (Finlay, 2011; Larkin et al., 2011). We normally are not explicitly conscious of our body, it is given to us most originally as a lived body (Finlay, 2006): while driving a car, our hands and feet appear invisible and act automatically as we keep our eyes on the traffic ahead. But this taken-for-grantedness can be lost when we are ill or injured, when our body or body parts become conspicuous to us: an aching head or swollen foot demands our attention and disrupts the otherwise unified, integrated body-in-driving experience.

Through his distinct reading Merleau-Ponty shows how our embodied existence can neither be adequately characterized in static terms, nor in conventional dichotomies such as subject vs. object; inner vs. outer; acting vs. acted; physiological vs. mental (Finlay, 2011; Zahavi, 2019). At the same time, one finds his embodied analysis keeps bringing into view a fundamental, mutual, and fluid intertwinement between us (the experiencing embodied subject) and the world. While our body is the 'vehicle' through which we are open to and conscious of the world, our sense of body/self is only disclosed to us in our engagement with the world (Finlay, 2011): 'The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 430, as cited in Zahavi, 2019, p. 24).

To psychological researchers, Merleau-Ponty's work sheds light on the role of the body in the research process. The participant and researcher each come from a uniquely embodied perspective that discloses the world in a particular way (Finlay, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). For instance, the heavily text-based format of the academic study may be perceived by a sighted reader like me as familiar and formal. Still, it can mean something different (e.g. as unwelcoming) to the visually impaired guide dog owners participating in the study. That said, as Finlay (2006) commented, in most of the phenomenologically informed psychological research, the body and embodiment, whether that of the participant or researcher, have remained largely under-acknowledged.

Phenomenological methodologies

The distinctiveness of phenomenological philosophy has inspired the emergence of a family of phenomenologically based methodologies. Like the philosophers who contributed to phenomenological thinking, the relation among these methodologies is one of both convergence and divergence (Finlay, 2011). Phenomenological research is united by a shared concern for human experience and their lifeworld; this concern is often addressed by conducting thorough analysis of first-person, experience-close and textual material, gathered from a relatively small group of individuals (Langdridge, 2007). Yet, at the same time, depending on the particular strand of phenomenological thinking that informs them the most, these methodologies may take different stances on certain important issues (Finlay, 2011). Such heated discussions revolve around issues like whether the aim of phenomenological analysis is to understand the essential, general features or the individual variant ones of a phenomenon; whether the researchers should try to bracket out their subjectivity or to foreground and appropriate it during the analysis (Finlay, 2009).

Situated in this complex terrain, the chapter will refer to the two most established phenomenological methodologies that were devised specifically for psychological researcher. We will first consider descriptive phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 1985) and then look more closely to the methodology chosen for this thesis – Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Descriptive phenomenological analysis

Established in the 1960s, Giorgi's (1985) approach is considered the oldest phenomenologically based research approach and is particularly well known in the nursing discipline (Langdridge, 2007). Being faithful to Husserl's thinking, Giorgi argues that the intended aim of a phenomenological study is the identification of the essence – or the general structure and meaning of – a phenomenon in question, and that such a goal is attained by a rigorous application of the Husserlian methods of epoché, imaginative variation and direct description (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi, 2007).

In seeking to describe a phenomenon in general, a study adopting Giorgi's approach typically recruits three or more participants who have relevant experience but vary with regard to

demographic factors such as gender, age and ethnicity (Langdridge, 2007). This sampling strategy, Giorgi suggests, enables the researcher to discern the invariant aspects of experience from those that are idiosyncratic and contingent (Finlay, 2011). In this research context, the main data collection method is the semi-structured interview (Giorgi, 2007), though the lived-experiential material required can also be gathered from participants in the form of retrospective self-written accounts (Langdridge, 2007).

Giorgi (1985) delineates a four-step process of analysing participants' experiential accounts. The analysis begins with reading the study material to get an initial grasp, and then breaking down the data into more manageable 'meaning units.' Notably, Giorgi (1985) stresses that the analyst discerns the meaning units from the participants' accounts in a direct, noninfluential (that is, uninvolved) manner: 'it is essential for the method that the discrimination take place first, before being interrogated further (which is the next step) and that they be done spontaneously' (p. 11). It is also critical for the meaning identification and the subsequent analytic work to all be performed within the attitude of phenomenological reduction, which Giorgi operationalizes as the analyst bracketing all her pre-understandings about the phenomenon and the ready-made character of participants' experiential realities (Finlay, 2011; Giorgi, 1985).

For Giorgi, it is essential that the analyst next moves to extracting the psychological insights of the meaning units perceived, which necessitates practicing Husserl's technique of imaginative variation to transform the everydayness and idiosyncrasy of participants' expressions with more general and psychologically explicit (informing) ones (Giorgi, 1985). It is important to note that, in Giorgi's phenomenological approach, the object of concern is the phenomenon and not the individual experience per se (Finlay, 2011; Giorgi, 2007). That is, the study sets out to know about the general, invariant structure of a given phenomenon, rather than about the specifics of how the phenomenon is lived by any individual participant. In practice, this means that the particularities of individual experience observed will be dropped or generalized as the analyst proceeds with her work. The result from Giorgi's descriptive approach is typically presented in the form of a general, third-person statement that synthesizes all the transformed meaning units and their interconnections (Smith et al., 2009).

Giorgi's approach is an established example of how phenomenology can be adapted into a scientific method and made accessible to researchers. Indeed, Giorgi's work was referenced by the few phenomenologically informed studies on guide dog partnership reviewed in the previous chapter (Miner, 2001; Wigget-Barnard & Steel, 2008). As Finlay (2011) commented, the descriptive approach offers a particularly methodical and rigorous guideline for researchers, and

it could generate results that are robust in the traditional scientific sense. But Finlay also noted, some saw Giorgi's approach as being too mechanistic and rigid. The Husserlian emphases on essence and the researcher's strictly descriptive role are aspects of Giorgi's approach that have received critical review (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007).

Considering my theoretical stance and research demands, I found myself sharing similar stance as Giorgi's critics. On the one hand, I believe in the epistemological significance of research in elucidating the common grounds of human condition. As van Manen (2016) suggests, our phenomenological interest in the human experience is driven by a belief that 'one's experiences are the possible experiences of others' (p. 58). However, I also see that it is vital for our understanding of the general to be achieved steadfastly and that it always retains an adequate view of the experience as individually lived. To me, the details and nuances of personal experience are not just instantiations of the general; they are what give life to the phenomenon and render phenomenological findings evocative, and persuasive.

Furthermore, the research process as depicted by Giorgi's approach appears to me as one that features a researcher who is somewhat distant or detached from her own quest. Within the epoché, meaning units are directly grasped by the researcher from the data, avoiding mixing in her views as much as possible. The researcher's inquisitive engagement must be modest or bounded; descriptive analysis, as Giorgi states, 'dares not go beyond what is present' (2009, p. 127). Certainly, if my experience is being studied, I will be more comfortable knowing that the researcher will respect it for what it is. However, I do not feel that such a goal necessarily excludes an interactive and involved researcher whose personal take on the world has oriented her toward a specific topic in the first place, and whose questioning is driven by an abiding care that assumes a phenomenon could say more than what it explicitly shows itself and wants to explore it in a deeper, fuller way.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

First articulated by Smith in the mid-1990s, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) soon gained popularity among health psychologists (Brocki & Warden, 2006; Smith, 1996). IPA is now regarded as the most widely known experiential research methodology in UK psychology (Langdridge, 2007; Lawthom & Tindall, 2011), and has continued to expand with increasing use both internationally and beyond the field of psychology (Smith, 2011b; Smith & Eatough, 2019).

As with Giorgi's descriptive approach, IPA is grounded in a phenomenological core that is interested in and gives primacy to understanding people's lived experience of an event, process or relationship, as opposed to establishing objective, abstract claims of the matter itself (Smith et al., 2009). IPA also orients itself to phenomenology's motto of 'go back to things themselves'; the approach advocates for systematic examination that enables participants' experiences to be seen on their own terms, rather than being framed externally by a specific prior hypothesis or predefined categories (Smith, 2004). In practice, most IPA researchers gather detailed first-person accounts through semi-structured interviews (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). But IPA is also a framework friendly to other data collection methods and data types, such as diaries (Smith, 1999), focus group (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010), email interview (William & Reid, 2012) and photo elicitation (Silver & Farrants, 2016).

However, IPA and Giorgi's approach also differ in significant ways. As noted, Giorgi was keen to articulate a pure Husserlian methodology. In contrast, IPA's theoretical foundations draw on a wider range of phenomenological positions that include the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty among others (see Smith et al., 2009 for further details). Indeed, as the 'interpretative' in interpretative phenomenological analysis indicates, IPA has a strong affinity with Heidegger's hermeneutic development of phenomenology. IPA shares Heidegger's position and operates with a model of the person as a sense-making, self-interpreting creature (Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). In practice, an IPA study typically focuses on experiences that are personally significant and bear strong 'existential import' to the participants (Smith, 2011b). From IPA's perspective, when people are faced with major life events or transitions, they are spontaneously prompted to contemplate, (re)interpret and make sense of what is happening, as well as of their sense of identity (Eatough & Smith, 2008). As such, the research questions posed by an IPA study typically run along the lines of 'How do people make sense of their experience of x?' or 'How do people experience *and* make sense of x?' (Smith et al., 2009).

Like Heidegger, IPA positions phenomenological inquiry as an inherently interpretive endeavour (Smith et al., 2009). More specifically, IPA sees research as a dynamic process wherein the participants and the researcher are both found to engage with the same human capacity of drawing on their everyday resources in making sense of the matters at hand (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The analysis, as Smith et al. (2009, p. 35) argue, is quintessentially a 'double hermeneutics': 'the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x'. IPA also sees the researchers' access to participants' first-person perspectives as neither straightforward nor complete; rather, their access inevitably requires, departs from and is mediated by their experientially informed, embodied and culturally situated lens (Larkin et al.,

2006; Smith et al., 2009). In these respects, IPA's hermeneutic position clearly sets it apart from Giorgi's approach; the former conceptualizes the researcher's role as active and interpretive, while the latter envisions it as neutrally descriptive and lacking in presupposition.

IPA's approach is interpretative in a further sense. Through an etymological analysis of the term 'phenomenology', Heidegger came to see phenomenology as being about understanding the phenomenon as much for what is masked as for what is manifested (Smith, 2007). In this context, the analytic work ('logos') of the researcher is considered important in probing the phenomenon for its latent meaning and facilitating it as it comes to light (Smith et al., 2009). The 'dual reading' that characterizes the analytic work of IPA researchers (Eatough & Smith, 2008) can be seen as extending from this Heideggerian view of phenomenology. In practice, the researchers begin the analysis with the aim of wanting to see what x is like from the participants' perspective. As the analysis proceeds, however, the researcher moves from trying to *stand in the shoes* of participants to *standing alongside* them; she is prompted to probe their explicit accounts from different angles (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). That is, there is both 'appearing and peering' (Smith, 2011a): the analytic work combines the stances of empathy and questioning, both descriptive and interpretive.

Notably, IPA does not prescribe a specific theoretical angle that the researcher should adopt in standing alongside and questioning participants' accounts (Larkin et al., 2006). As Smith et al. (2009) suggest, the researchers can make cautious inferences from participants' accounts that consider the affective, embodied, cognitive, discursive and existential aspects of the phenomenon. IPA researchers subscribe to a belief in the chain of connection between participants' accounts of their experience and their embodied, cognitive-affective reaction to that experience (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 1999). This epistemological openness distinguishes IPA from other articulations of hermeneutic phenomenology, such as Langdrige's critical narrative analysis (Langdrige, 2007), which expects the interpretative work to be carried out specifically through the lens of established social theory.

While IPA sees the researcher's thinking as necessarily entering the analysis, it remains essential that the study stays faithful to the phenomenological commitment of attending to 'the things themselves' (Larkin et al., 2006). According to Smith et al. (2009), the double hermeneutics in IPA operates in a centre-ground relation: the first-order sense-making is always that of the participants, which is at the centre, while the researcher's sense-making stays second-order, running as the background commentary. Like other phenomenological approaches, IPA sees the researchers as needing to maintain an open sensibility during the analysis to ensure that their

interpretative move is always grounded in the participants' accounts (Larkin et al., 2006). However, in IPA, this phenomenological openness is attempted by the researchers through a form of reflexivity that is more dynamic than classic Husserlian reduction (Smith et al., 2009). As noted, Heidegger's thinking around the hermeneutic circle points to a mutual illumination between the part and the whole, the inquirer and the subject matter (Finlay, 2011; Smith, 2004). Following Heidegger, IPA views researchers' preconceptions may not be all clear to them at the start; they are only made visible to them as the analytic work is underway (Smith et al., 2009). As such, instead of attempting to bracket one's preconception completely from the start – as in Giorgi's approach, IPA researchers see it as more appropriate to flexibly move back and forth between their interpretative comments and the participants' accounts, while staying attuned to the reciprocal relationship unfolding between the two perspectives. With sensitivity, they capitalize on, suspend and adjust their interpretative thinking during this process.

Apart from phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA is also informed by the principles of idiography. While the majority of psychological research is nomothetic, studying people with a primary aim of deducing general or causal claims at a group level, IPA places greater emphasis on micro-level claims that focus on the particular and the individual (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 1995). According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA's connection to idiography has multiple practical implications. Firstly, an IPA study is focused; it investigates how particular individuals have understood their experience of a particular event, object or relationship in their particular context (Smith et al., 2009). Secondly, it is important that IPA researchers attempt to make analytic claims about the participants as a group only after the experiential perspective of each participant has been intensively examined *on its own terms*, meaning that researchers should analyse each case as if for the first time and not be prematurely preoccupied with potential cross-case patterns (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography also means focusing on details, and IPA is known for producing fine-grained analysis (Smith, 2004). IPA researchers thoroughly and systematically engage with each aspect or instance of the interview transcript. A single word or metaphor drawn by the participant can stand out to the researchers for being a crucial 'part' that illuminates and is illuminated by the 'whole' – i.e. the rest of the person's account (Smith, 2011a).

To IPA, its focus on the particular speaks to what it considers as the proper route to knowledge production (Eatough & Smith, 2008). For proponents of idiography and IPA, nomothetic research in psychology tend to prioritize questions and methods that quantify, aggregate and typify experiential phenomena. By doing so, psychology is at risk of being disconnected from information about the actual slices of human life and becoming a human psychology that is

stripped of its intrinsic complexity and diversity (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 1995). But, as Smith et al. (2009) stress, being idiographic does not mean that IPA is against the epistemic value of delivering general claims about people's experiences. It is just that the move IPA researchers take towards generality is slower and more cautious; it has to be founded on an acquaintance with the particulars – the individual cases of lived experience. Indeed, as Smith (2004) indicates, a successful IPA study should bring the readers to see certain common features that characterize the experiences of a particular group of participants on the one hand, and the individual idiosyncrasies that underly the apparent similarities on the other hand.

The analytic accounts of an IPA study therefore look quite different from those presented by Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology. The final/written IPA analysis will present interview excerpts clearly ascribed to individual participants and these excerpts will not be left on themselves; rather they are always preceded or followed by analytic commentaries that bring readers' attention to their particularities (Smith et al., 2009). At the same time, while both IPA and Giorgi's descriptive approach report group themes as part of the study result, IPA does not view them as invariant or universal, as intended in the Husserlian sense. Rather, Smith et al. (2009) stress that the analytic accounts of IPA are understood as local and held at lower levels of generalization; they are considered to be potentially transferrable or applicable to readers with similar experiences, in similar contexts as the study participants.

This also means that IPA calls for a different sampling strategy from Giorgi's approach. A typical IPA study aims to purposively seek out a homogenous group of participants who can provide information on the topic and are similar on some demographic factors or theoretical factors relevant to the study (Smith et al., 2009). To IPA researchers, the emphasis on sample homogeneity means that they can be more confident in claiming that the within-group variation discerned is likely saying something important about individual differences rather than systematic ones. Similarly, IPA's idiographic commitment also shifts its sample size towards a lower end (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The number of cases should be manageable for the researcher to provide detailed accounts of individual experience and be sufficient for the researcher to analyze potential cross-case patterns.

IPA brings together three key traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. IPA, as Finlay (2011) notes, is an example of phenomenological methodologies that cannot be easily fit into the conventional descriptive–interpretive dichotomy. This complex position has rendered IPA with unique strengths (e.g. flexibility, in-depth analysis), but it has also brought it under close scrutiny by critics. Some point to the primacy that IPA places on individual experience and

sense-making and are concerned by the lack of attention to the wider social context – culture, politics, language – within which the individual's reality is situated (e.g. Willig, 2013; Langdridge, 2007; Tindall & Lawthom, 2011). While it is true that the detailed portrayal of personal experience is 'the sine qua non' of IPA (Smith, 2011c, p. 56), IPA does not take the personal and the social as mutually exclusive concerns (Smith et al., 2009), which is in line with its theoretical underpinnings. As we have seen, Heidegger's thinking highlighted that we, as Dasein, are indelibly 'person-in-context' (Larkin et al., 2006), and that our ways of being are in part shaped by the physical, social, linguistic and political worlds into which we are *thrown*. Indeed, Smith et al. (2009) stress that IPA's idiographic commitment does not narrowly translate as a concern with the individual per se (i.e. as if they live in cultural vacuum), but the focus is rather on understanding the meaning of a particular phenomenon for a particular person in a particular context. IPA is an approach capable of attending to both the personal and contextual in analysis. Take, for example, some of the visual impairment research using IPA (e.g. Ferguson & de Aberu, 2016; Lourens & Swartz, 2016a, 2016b). These studies have successfully secured an account that centers the personal, emotional and embodied experience of visually impaired individuals while also sensitively positioning it in relation to the broader socio-political forces around issues of disability, normalcy and disability identity.

IPA places an emphasis on understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences; as such, from the outset, Smith (1996) characterizes IPA as being tied to a concern with cognition. However, some critics consider IPA's stated interest in cognition as being at odds with its phenomenological origin (e.g. Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2013), taking IPA's emphasis on sense-making as a gesture that presumes and/or perpetuates Cartesian dualism (e.g. person vs. world, mind vs. body). However, there appears to be a mismatch between the construct of cognition as conceptualized in mainstream psychology and invoked in the critics' response, and the model of cognition that is operationalized by IPA (Larkin et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). From IPA's perspective, our beliefs, judgments and ideas are not discrete functions or states that we own and later apply to the world. Rather, IPA conceives of cognition as intrinsically intentional, open phenomena directed at the world – as one aspect of our being-in-the-world (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is also distinct from standard cognitive psychology in that it does not parallel cognition to a computerized process or assume it to be compartmentalized and exclusively mental (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The cognition with which IPA is concerned refers to the complex phenomenon of our attempt to make sense of something; this cognition is dynamic and often dilemmatic, and it is registered by individuals in cognitive, emotional, embodied and existential senses (Smith et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that, illness or health-related experience is the most frequently researched topic in IPA's corpus (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith, 2011b). In other words, IPA is often adopted to ask how people make sense of inherently embodied experiences (e.g. Loaring et al., 2015; Murry, 2004; Osborn & Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2017). But in this context, IPA researchers did not translate IPA's focus on sense-making into analyses that are preoccupied with making claims about mental processes or mechanisms from the data as if the participants were disembodied cognizing subjects. Instead, IPA analyses often highlighted a process engaged by the participants to cognitively reflect on their experience that is complex and go beyond the cognitive domain; the analyses attended to how participants impressed meanings on their experience in terms of the felt senses of the lived body, the impacts on personal identity and social connectedness, and the affective responses perceived.

Reflexive remarks: choosing IPA

As complex as it is, I see IPA as an approach that is sensitive to the particular phenomenon and the particular group of participants that are the focus of my PhD project. IPA takes an inductive, holistic approach to how data are collected and analysed; it is therefore inclusive and sensitive enough to tackle the complex phenomenon of the relationship between a guide dog and a person, as indicated by the existing literature that touches on multiple aspects of people's lives (e.g. mobility, social relationships and self-identity). Although the approach of IPA has not been deployed in past research on the topic of guide dog partnership, the recent work by McGhee et al. (2022) examined the relationship between companion dogs and advanced cancer patients and demonstrated IPA's capacity to address the significance of a dog-person connection as perceived by participants in practical, emotional, psychological and existential levels. The same study also illustrates the potential strength of the approach by delineating the dialogical interactions (Smith, 2004) between the study's findings and different psychological theories and constructs (e.g. Bowlby's attachment theory and the Rogerian theory of self).

IPA's commitment to doing justice to the experiential perspective of an individual person means that it is a powerful methodology for contributing to the current literature on guide dog partnership, where thorough, close-up examinations of the perspective of individual guide dog owners and professionals are limited. Furthermore, for a project that directly involves people living with sight loss (i.e. guide dog owners), IPA's individual, embodied, and contextual sensitivity offers a valuable opportunity for the study to address the challenging task faced by disability studies scholars of putting the diverse, experiencing individuals and the intentional

bodies back to the academic discourse on the one hand, and retaining some room for a socially critical lens that attends to the broader socio-political forces within which impaired and disabled individuals are situated, on the other hand (e.g. Duckett & Pratt, 2001, 2007; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Shakespear, 2013).

As a researcher of human psychology, I see IPA as providing me with a comprehensible map for how to conduct my inquiry and comport myself towards developing a psychological understanding of human experience in human terms. IPA's focus on individual lived experience and sense-making matches with my stated position, which considers people as an inclusive part of the reality in which they live. The emphasis on the particulars and the epistemological flexibility possible in analysis are features of IPA that suggest that it is an approach that can bring in the messiness, diversity and ambiguity that I believe to be intrinsic to our phenomenal reality. At the same time, IPA's modest goal with regard to generalization can guide me to safely explore potential patterns and shared grounds of human experience without losing sight of its nuances and idiosyncrasies.

Finally, in the context of IPA, I am able to realize an active role as the researcher that is close to what I envisioned. IPA has rightly framed doing psychology as a joint human activity: I am making sense of participants' making sense of their experience. From the perspective of IPA, I am similar to the participants in that the way we make sense of things always bears our own signature as sentient, embodied, culturally situated beings. As an IPA researcher, my uniquely situated lens is not necessarily a liability; rather, it makes possible a vantage point from which I can try to engage with and make sense of anything in the first place. My preconception can bring insights to *and* be broadened by my encounter with the interpreted. In an IPA study, I am tasked to attend closely to what the participants have explicitly said, but I am also called to move beyond that to carry out the interpretive work of questioning an account from different angles, digging below and making inferences from it in hope of shedding further light on certain aspects or meanings of participants' experiences that might have been less obvious before.

To me, IPA is the methodology that empowers and encourages me to bring in my own voice as a researcher into the study. But, at the same time, I recognize that the possibility and flexibility offered by IPA also lend to uncertainty and responsibility for the researcher. Choosing IPA as the methodology for my project therefore necessitates a commitment to cautious and reflexive practices, to be ready to adapt the method or interpretative frame I use, as prompted by the participants who offer me the chance to make sense of their unique experiences around guide dog partnership and by the particular interactions we have as the study unfolds.

Part II: Entering the Field

Study One: The Guide Dog Professional's Perspective



Illustrations by Xin (artist)

Chapter 4. Method

Guide Dogs is the primary organization providing guide dog services to blind and partially sighted individuals in the UK. I first encountered the organization early in my PhD programme, when my plan for the project on guide dog partnership was still in its prototype. It was through this early contact that I decided to explore the topic in question from multiple perspectives – that of the owners *and* those of the professionals taking part in the formation of the person-guide dog dyad, namely, the Guide Dogs staff specialising in mobility support for visual impairment and staff with professional knowledge in dog training. These two professional roles are formally known as the Orientation and Mobility Specialist (OMS) and the Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI), respectively; they are the ones who first introduce the owners to the dos and don'ts of being a competent human partner to a guide dog.

Yet, as the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 shows, very few writings concerned the views of OMSs and/or GDMI working in the guide dog service; my search was unable to locate reports of any empirical study on UK-based guide dog professionals. Given this, I thought it more sensible to focus the first study on exploring the professional side of the story rather than going straight to the guide dog owners.

The study presented here specifically focuses on OMSs and GDMI working in Guide Dogs UK, and it asks, 'how do these professionals make sense of the roles of the guide dogs and the owners, and of the nature of the partnership in their work?' The aim is to provide research accounts that are in-depth and sensitive to the nuances and diversity of the perceptions of the individual professionals studied. To this end, I chose to ground my inquiry in the approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), for its emphases on sense-making, inductive practices and fine-grain, individual-centred analysis. This chapter will go through the various decisions and actions made at different stages of the first study.

Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy adopted by an IPA study is described as 'purposive' (Smith et al., 2009), which means that participants are not selected randomly or probabilistically; rather, they are chosen on the basis of being in a position to provide particular insights into the phenomenon in question. This study considered OMSs and GDMI working at Guide Dogs as good sources of

information for understanding the guide dog partnership, as they are a particular group of individuals who have close, direct contact with owners and/or guide dogs at some point in the course of the partnership.

IPA also calls for a *homogenous* sample, meaning that the participants recruited should share similar demographic profile (e.g. gender, age) or resemble each other in ways as informed by an a-prior theoretical understanding of the topic under study (Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). But as Smith et al. (2009) suggest, the degree of sample homogeneity that is achievable can vary across studies; defining (operationalizing) homogeneity in a study is both a practical and interpretative task. The present study focuses on a topic that is relatively rare: of the national registry of blind or partially sighted (population 353,379), only 1.3 % of them are identified as guide dog owners (Refson et al., 2001). Without a record of the number of OMSs and GDMIs active in the UK guide dog service, it seemed safe to assume that the professionals represent a much smaller population than the owners.

Thus, to ensure the progress of recruitment, this study only imposed a few criteria in identifying potential participants. The study included individuals with experience working in guide dog services, either as specialists supporting general mobility issues of the prospective/current clients, or as professionals training the guide dogs and bringing together the owner-dog dyad. Given that IPA relies on first-person accounts shared by the participants and the study intended to gather such accounts through in-person interview, prospective participants who were not capable or comfortable with reflecting on and recounting their experiences verbally in a research setting would be excluded. This study sought to recruit three to six participants – a sufficiently small sample for the study to remain loyal to IPA’s commitment of performing intensive, fine-grain analysis with each participant included, but also large enough to conduct meaningful cross-case comparison (Smith et al., 2009).

Recruitment process

In early 2017, I emailed Guide Dog’s London Mobility Team¹⁰ to briefly introduce myself and my interest in carrying out a study on the guide dog–person partnership. I was later invited to meet with the team’s Engagement Officer, Dave – a guide dog owner himself – in person to talk more about the study. The meeting was positive; Dave was interested in my study and was happy to

¹⁰ Guide Dogs has 20 Mobility Teams, each supporting guide dog owners in different parts of the UK.

help out as much as he could. He referred me to the research division of Guide Dogs. At this organizational level, I was instructed to submit a formal application for a decision to be made on whether my proposed study met with the organization's research focus and whether permission would be granted for the study to use Guide Dogs' existing contact lists or platforms of communication for recruitment.

My first application was not successful, however. Through further discussion with my supervisor, I took the organization's feedback and resubmitted an application wherein the scope of my study was expanded to involve not only the guide dog owners, but also the in-house trainers and instructors. The amended application was approved later in November 2017 (Appendix 1), and shortly thereafter, I started to work on recruiting participants for the first part of my study – the OMSs and GDMLs employed at Guide Dogs. Dave helped me to pass on the recruitment material invitation letter and study information sheet (Appendix 2) to other mobility teams in the country; the arrangement was that professionals who were interested in participating could then contact me directly with the information provided.

By March 2018, I had received five recruitment responses. Upon initial correspondence (email, phone call and text), I briefly introduced myself and the study again, and took down respondents' current roles at Guide Dogs. All five respondents matched the study's sampling criteria previously described and were therefore included. Two participants have worked as OMSs at Guide Dogs and are experienced in conducting mobility assessment and training for owners at different stages (e.g. prospective, novice, seasoned). The other three participants all have worked as GDMLs, meaning that their job involves as much direct interaction with the dogs (guide dogs) as with the persons (owners). Notably, two participants in the group are 'dual-certified' OMS/GDMI – they have obtained qualifications and worked in the capacities of the two specialties. [Table 7](#) – presents an overview of the profile of the five participants.

Table 7. Participants background information: Guide dog professionals

Participant (pseudonym)	Current position (mobility team)	Work experience background	Age
Amber	Dual-certified OMS/GDMI ^a	35 years	59
Leonard	Dual-certified OMS/GDMI	Two years as OMS and eight years as GDMI	40
Cathy	OMS	Four years as OMS	46
Olivia	OMS	Five years as OMS	60
Shawn	Leader of the Education and Demonstration Team	33 years as GDMI and has been working as the leader of Guide Dog's demonstration team since 2006	66

^a Orientation and mobility specialist (OMS), guide dog mobility instructor (GDMI)

Ethics

Ethical Approval for the project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck (Appendix 3). Per Guide Dogs' request, the Department's approval letter was attached in the application described earlier.

Informed Consent

As noted, the study was advertised through email circulars to different Mobility Teams that house the OMSs and GDMIs employed at Guide Dogs. Included in this email was an information sheet (Appendix 1) that introduced the study's aim and explained the reasoning behind targeting these participants. This sheet explained that participation would involve attending an in-person interview, wherein the researcher would ask about participants' work experience in the guide dog service, and the conversation would be audio-recorded. It also indicated to participants the expected duration of the meeting, and explained that the interview questions posed were not mandatory and that there were no right or wrong answers to these questions. On this sheet, participants were alerted to the possibility that they may find the interview conversation prompting them to recall distressing, unpleasant, or emotionally charged aspects of their experiences. Participants were informed that in such a scenario, the researcher would ask the participants if they want to pause the recorded conversation, and that as study participants, they had the right to stop the interview at any time without explanation. The same sheet also took the space to explain how information gathered from participants would be managed; it described how the study material would be physically stored, how participants' personal information would be altered and presented in the files, presentation and publication possibly arising out of the study, and the deadline for choosing to withdraw one's data from the study.

When the participants first contacted me about the study, I confirmed with them that they had successfully received the study information sheet and asked if there were any aspects of participation about which they had questions or needed further clarification. None of them had questions in this context, and all were happy to arrange a time for the in-person interview. During this exchange, participants were also asked if they would like to complete the written consent form (Appendix 4) before or on the day of the interview; all preferred the latter. On the scheduled date, I briefly recapped what the meeting would be like (e.g. no mandatory questions, audio-recorded) and reminded participants of their right to pause or stop the

interview at any time. Participants were then provided with the consent form and were encouraged to take as much time as they needed to review it and to ask any questions. All five participants agreed and signed the consent form on the interview day; an extra copy of the form was supplied to the participants for their personal reference.

Researcher Safety

As a researcher and an international student, the idea of travelling alone to unfamiliar areas in the UK and meeting with unfamiliar people was daunting to me. Before commencing the interview phase, my supervisor and I took the time to go over the Department's Code of Conduct for Field Research. In light of this, with participants' consent, all five interviews were arranged in public settings. Also, prior to each interview, I would notify a family member in the UK of the scheduled location and time of the interview. I would text/call him again after the interview to update him on my status so that he knew that no further action was needed for the sake of my safety.

Data Collection

An IPA study approaches the chosen phenomenon by examining how it is experienced and understood by the individuals. Given this, the 'data' with which IPA deals are first-person accounts, stories, or descriptions that people relate to us about their particular experiences with the subject matter (Smith et al., 2009). Face-to-face, individual, semi-structured interview has been most frequently used by IPA studies to obtain such data – it is also the method of choice in the present study.

To IPA researchers, this interview design is advantageous for collecting potentially 'rich' data for an IPA study, and it provides a context that enables active participation of both the researcher and the participant in the research process (Smith et al., 2009). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher enters the scene with a pre-defined plan (Interview Schedule) that concerns what questions or topics could be relevant/important to the targeted phenomenon, and by implication, what kinds of responses or information may be expected from the interviewee (Kvale, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). Unlike in a structured interview, the interviewer in the semi-structured design is expected to treat her schedule as *a potential guiding map* in navigating the data collection event and to advance flexibly (Kvale, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). To IPA, the interviewees are the 'experiential expert' on the chosen phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58). As such, detailed, in-depth experiential material is more likely to be available when the

interviewees have been given the space to reflect, process, and articulate their thoughts, feelings, and contexts as freely and as fully as possible (Smith et al., 2009). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview encourages IPA researchers to stick closely to what the interviewees have said and to follow up on their responses, even when that entails modifying or deviating from the pre-defined schedule (so long as the conversation remains broadly relevant to the targeted phenomenon) (Smith et al., 2009). To IPA researchers, interviewing in this sense is an interactive, dynamic and dialogical event that provides the research with a glimpse of the participants' current relatedness with the particular phenomenon in a particular context; the data accessed in this context is situated and does not embody an absolute truth about the researched (participants) (Lakin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009).

Interview Schedule

The main question underpinning this study asked, 'how do OMSs and GDMIs working in the guide dog service make sense of the guide dogs, the owners, and the dog-person association?' In order to foster the interview into an event in which participants would feel relatable and comfortable to sharing their views, the interview questions were framed around specific elements of participants' professional work in real life (e.g. mobility assessments, matching decisions). Some of the sources reviewed in Chapter 3 (Guide Dogs' website, Winer et al., 2010; Sanders, 1999) had provided me with background information for considering possible approaches to generating interview questions that were sensitive to participants' terms of reference.

Since the participants in this study work in different capacities at Guide Dogs, two sets of questions were devised following the same process and principles. The interview schedule for the GDMIs was presented here ([Figure 11](#)) as illustration (see Appendix 5 for OMSs' interview schedule).

Figure 11. Interview Schedule: Guide Dog Mobility Instructor

1. May I know how long you have worked as a GDMI?
2. Can you describe a bit about your role as a GDMI in the process of an individual becoming a guide dog owner (in guide dog service provision)?
 - Prompt: What are the kinds of work activities that you often engage in (e.g., training, assessment?)
3. What kinds of things do you consider when assessing a client applying for guide dog/service (e.g., in guide dog assessment)?
 - Prompt: What kinds of factors or elements do you usually consider when deciding that an applicant is potentially suitable or that an owner is prepared to be trained with a guide dog?
4. Can you tell me about what you are usually concerned about in the process of matching a guide dog to an owner/client?
 - Prompt: Do you consider physical issues (e.g., the activity level of the owner and the dog), personality or temperament issues, or any other areas that are important in your consideration?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the kinds of exercises that you and the owners do together in the training soon after they have been matched (i.e., partnership training)?
 - Prompt: Can you describe your most recent partnership training with a client?
6. From your perspective as an instructor, what would you describe as an effective (good, ideal, working) interaction/relationship between the owner and the guide dog when they are moving as a team?
 - Prompt: How would you describe the roles/tasks of the owner and the guide dog when they are travelling/moving together as a team?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about what is covered/emphasised in your teaching for owners on taking care of the guide dogs or on interacting with the dogs in the 'off-duty' time?
 - Prompt: In your experience, what are some of the concerns or issues that clients encounter in taking care of their guide dogs?
8. Can you talk about the kinds of things that you do for (with) clients (and/or the guide dogs) in the aftercare (post-qualification) phase?
 - Prompt: Can you talk about an aftercare session that you had with a client?
9. In working with an owner, from the beginning to the aftercare, what would you describe as the changes in your focus of work with him/her as you move along the course?
 - Prompt: Could you talk about one of your cases as an example?

Consonant with IPA's phenomenological commitment to 'the thing itself', the interview questions were pitched as open-ended and neutral to avoid guiding or restricting participants' responses to a limited set of options (Smith et al., 2009). Prompts were also devised in case a participant found an interview question unclear or when he/she was less forthcoming and needed more encouragement. Caution was taken to keep the prompts open-ended (e.g. using the phrase 'any other areas').

The interview schedule was structured such that the participants were initially approached with general questions inviting them to introduce themselves and their professions. This arrangement was intended to ease the participants into the interview setting and to make them feel that they were the focus of the meeting (Smith et al., 2009). The schedule then moved on to asking participants to give an account of their professional involvement at different stages over the course of a guide dog–person partnership: the initial assessments, the training phase and post-training support. The interview questions in these contexts were more evaluative and

analytic in nature (e.g. 'what would you describe as an effective interaction?') and were therefore potentially more demanding of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

Conducting the interview

As part of the recruitment procedures, participants were asked when and where they would like to arrange for the interview to take place. In this context, participants were happy to suggest a time for the interview and let me take care of finding a suitable setting in the area where they work or live. In most cases, I was able to hire a room at a local agency (e.g. public library, YMCA, Regus) ahead of time, with the exception of the meeting with Amber, which took place in a vacant function room which I secured at the last minute in the hotel where I was staying.

The actual encounters with the participants often began with casual small talk and then gradually shifted to the interview mode as I briefly recapped the purpose of the study, the interview style (i.e. participant-led, no wrong answers, audio-recorded) and reminded participants of their right to stop the meeting at any time. I also asked for participants' understanding if they later found some of the interview questions too obvious or self-evident, and explained that my intention was to try to understand things from their perspective as much as possible (Smith et al., 2009). Participants generally received this introduction well. After this was established, participants were provided with the consent form (Appendix 4); all five participants had given their consent. Once the participants indicated to me that they were happy/ready to start the interview, I let them know when I started recording.

To help to ease the participants into the interview dynamic, they were first invited to provide a generic description of their work at Guide Dogs. All participants were fairly articulate (presumably because their work involves teaching and training people). It was noted that a participant's response to a question often simultaneously led to or expanded upon a different question listed on the interview schedule; in that case, I followed the participant's lead rather than fixating on the order set in the schedule. That said, the conversation often unfolded organically to touch on most of the topic areas prepared in the schedule without explicit enquiring on my part.

At times, however, the conversation was prompted by the participant's response to focus on issues outside of the realm of the prepared schedule. For example, in Amber's interview, I noticed that she had briefly brought up the notion of 'confidence/trust' on different occasions. Thinking that this might be something that Amber considered important in a guide dog

partnership, I jotted it down in my notes and followed up on it later in the interview. As the interview extract in [Figure 12](#) shows, Amber responded to my probe with a more elaborate explanation of the unique dynamic that she saw existing between a person and a guide dog, and how confidence/trust can be a delicate variable for the dyad when it comes to travelling safely and effectively on the road.

Figure 12. Example of interview practice: Amber's interview extract

Interviewer: so, this partnership training is not only to, to build this the technique, but also to foster this sense of confidence [Amber: yeah]. Could you talk a bit more, from your professional perspective, why it is important to for a client to build this confidence

Amber: They've got to be able to put, total trust in the dog, the partnership is a 50-50, the dog is in charge of safety, the persons are in charge of where they're going, they're always in charge of direction so they're telling the dog which way to go at any point they'll tell it left or right or cross over a road or find a shop or find the steps or whatever, the dog will, um, carry on in the same direction of path, avoiding obstacles and stopping at any danger points, um, so the dog is in charge of safety but the person is in charge of direction, so they've got to be able to put their trust in that dog, that it's going to get them to where they want to be safely [...] if they don't trust it, and if their wobbly or hanging back or not moving with the dog, then that dog isn't gonna be able to guide them properly and avoid obstacles and then you get bumps and then they lose confidence even more because the dog has bumped them into something

In the context of this IPA-informed study, the research interview was regarded as an interactive event that rests on the active participation of, and a certain degree of rapport established between, the researcher and the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Care was taken in deciding when and how to end such an encounter. When the conversation seemed to reach an end (e.g. the exchange began to tail off or participant was checking the time), I would briefly sum up the main topics covered thus far and asked the participants if there was anything that they wanted me to know or to add on the record. Participants typically agreed in this context that the conversation had exhausted its important topics¹¹. I thanked the participants for their time and reminded them that they could contact me with further questions or concerns. The participants were informed again when the recorder was turned off.

Going beyond the research interview

Right before Amber left the interview setting, she asked me when I would head back to London and offered to bring Max, a guide dog from her team, to meet with me. I was more than glad for the opportunity. Amber later returned with Max and a long cane. We first went over how the cane was used to aid mobility for people with sight loss and we walked around the area, so I

¹¹ One participant, Oliva, responded in this context to briefly mention her work with people with sight loss in another organization unrelated to guide dog partnership.

had the chance to see Max in action, and to attempt to walk with him. I was offered similar hands-on, outdoor experience on the day I met Shawn, prior to our sit-down interview. These experiences gave me – a sighted person and outsider with respect to the guide dog service – important insights into the analytic work of the two studies presented in this thesis.

Transcription

Upon the return from the in-person encounter, each interview recording was transcribed into written words; pseudonyms were used to refer to participants (and the guide dogs) in this context. To the IPA researchers, the primary interest in transcription is the *semantic content* of the stories told by participants in the interview (Smith et al., 2009). As such, participants' recorded speech was transcribed *verbatim* in this study. But IPA researchers also recognize that body posture, intonation, the emotional context and the interviewer-interviewee dynamic during an interview can also be part of the meaningful content of the participants' accounts. Given this, markable instances of non-verbal communication were recorded when I transcribed the interview. The following notations were used in the transcripts:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| • Short pause | ... |
| • Emotional context | [laugh] [sigh] |
| • Speech emphasized | <i>Italicised</i> |
| • Clarifying comments | [text] |

From IPA's perspective, transcription is neither a straightforward reproduction of the interview event, nor a revelation of 'the truth' about the researched/participant. Rather, IPA recognizes that transcription involves the interpretative engagement of the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). At times, I had to actively make sense of what was likely uttered by a participant in segments of the recording that were less audible, and/or to consider which non-verbal utterances appeared important in a participant's account – all these tasks were aided by referring to my recollection of, and the fieldnotes taken on, the day of the interview (Poland, 1995).

On the practical side, I found that the use of ExpressScribe (commercial audio player software) and a compatible foot pedal had made the transcription process more effective and ergonomically friendly. This, in turn, enabled me to engage with the transcription process more as an opportunity to review my interview techniques and to foster a sense of familiarity with the data.

Analytic procedures

The interview accounts of the guide dog professionals were analysed following the IPA approach, with reference to the procedures described by Smith et al. (2022). The analysis unfolded as a dynamic process that moved from concerning each participant individually to including all participants as a group, whilst featuring a series of balancing acts of moving between descriptive – interpretative, general – specific, concrete – abstract. It involves the ‘collaborate efforts’ (Smith et al., 2009, p.92) of both the participant and the researcher – I am making sense of the participant’s making sense of her/his experience.

Immersion

The analysis began with an immersion in the data, wherein a transcript was read and re-read; in some cases, the taped interview was also reviewed. The readings were attempted with the phenomenological attitude – a reflexive, open-mindedness (Finlay, 2011). This attitude was not spontaneous, however. Sitting in each interview and spending hours transcribing the recordings – these prior experiences had stirred up various initial impressions of and ideas about the data. To help approach the data at hand afresh, time was dedicated at the beginning of this step to do a brain dump in the reflexive journal of these prior observations, or ‘noises.’ (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith et al., 2022).

Initial noting

In practice, a close line-by-line noting was already underway during the process of reading and re-reading a transcript (Smith et al., 2022). The comments made were exploratory, meaning that a transcript was annotated for any segments, words or phrases that stood out to me as powerful, perplexing, or marking out patterns of a participant’s line of reasoning. Annotating in this context was active, dialogical and comprehensive – questions were asked and were provisionally answered as I examined different aspects of a transcript (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). The intention was to open up ways of entering the hermeneutic circle and making the most of potentially meaningful material (Smith et al., 2022). [Figure 13](#) presents a segment of Cathy’s annotated transcript, which offers a taste of how the process concerned multiple things in parallel: what appeared to matter to the participant and in what explicit ways; how particular linguistic elements (e.g. the recurring phrase ‘you know’) appeared to offer implicit clues for

grasping the participant's positionality towards her object of concern; and whether/how different aspects of participant's responses appeared to join through a higher order, more abstract concept (e.g. nature, control). My focus shifted between the transcript and the notes, zooming in and zooming out. The transcript was annotated in the Word document on the computer; visually, the interview transcript was placed in the centre, with different parts highlighted or underlined by me, while textual comments were kept in the right margin (Figure 13).

Figure 13. A glimpse of the annotated transcript from Cathy's interview

Experiential Statements	Transcript excerpt	Initial notes
<p>The need of physical and free exercise as universal, innate to dogs</p> <p>Free-running time: liberated and resuming to a normal (mad) dog</p> <p>A workable guide dog– the need of exercise under calculated control</p>	<p>I: Why it is this workload or the exercise for the guide dog is so important for...</p> <p>C: The workload?</p> <p>I: Yeah</p> <p>C: Okay. So if somebody got a pet dog, they take the dog out for mainly the two reasons people their pet dog out for walk is to go to the toilet [I: yes], and to get exercises [I: okay]. Because the dog, <u>you know</u> needs a lot of exercises, our dogs the, <u>the ethos of a guide dog</u>, is that they should be getting their exercise mainly, through their work with the person [I: okay]. So <u>you know</u> how someone takes their pet dog for walk they might let them off in the park and <u>the dog can go mad</u> and having a run around in the park, our dogs would get, that's called free running, so off-lead exercises, free running, so that's when the <u>dog's harness is taken away</u>, and the dog in inverted commas can be a "normal dog", yeah, the dog <u>can just get on and being a dog</u>, unless someone's told otherwise by their guide dog mobility instructor, their dog will need to do that twice a week, at least twice a week, to get its free time, okay. But most of the dog's exercise should be coming through its work with the person, so <u>if the dog has a free run everyday</u>, the dog wouldn't want to do any work, so the dog is doing its <u>workload</u> as we called it, with the person, because <u>it needs the work, it needs the exercise</u>, <u>you know</u>, all the dogs we use are sort of <u>Labrador-Retriever</u> cross of size dog, they are big dogs, they need a lot of exercise</p> <p>Note. I= Interviewer, C=Cathy</p>	<p>#The need of free and physical exercise. <i>The recurrent reference of 'you know' –as if dogs' need for exercise is common sense/given fact <ii> 'Labrador-Retriever'– the need is linked to something biological, hence, innate and inevitable. <iii> 'pet dog', 'the dog', 'our dogs' – seem interchangeable <iv> dog's need for free physical exercise is in its (wild) nature</p> <p># The meaning of 'free run' time <i> 'mad' – when pet dogs are in a powerful, energetic mode; out-of-control state <ii>: 'normal dog' – when GDs are not under control, liberated ('harness'); when GDs <i>return from</i> an artificial state <iii> normal dogs are free and mad dogs?!</p> <p># 'Ethos of a guide dog' <i> involves <i>strategically</i> allocating GDs' natural need for exercise to achieve the need of human. <ii> relates to control?! <iii> conflicting rationale?! The innate need of the GD to run, exercise freely = the on-harness guiding work for the person</p>

Developing Experiential Statements

This analytic step primarily worked with the initial notes developed early on. The main aim was to parse, reorganize and distil from the notes potentially defining aspects of the participant's account (Smith et al., 2022). This involved transforming and compressing the exploratory comments into 'Experiential Statements' (Smith et al., 2022) – concise expressions that capture the claims made by and about the transcript excerpts in question. Generating experiential statements involved working around different forms of duality. For instance, while my explicit focus was on a particular segment of the initial notes (and the transcript), this *local* lens was inevitably informed by a tentative, *overarching* grasp of the participant's account that I had acquired through having systematically gone through and commented on the entire transcript at an earlier time (Smith et al., 2022). Similarly, while I intended to build an experiential statement that was able to convey something *specific* about a particular passage from a particular participant's account, I was also prompted to keep the statement *general* so that it could be effectively and meaningfully compared with experiential statements derived from other participants' accounts later (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The left margin in [Figure 13](#) presents examples of emergent statements derived from analysing Cathy's interview account. At the end of this step, the microscopic, dense, exploratory comments were compressed into a list of chronologically ordered (numbered) experiential statements for that participant (Smith et al., 2022).

Case summary: Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

Here, one tries to make sense of how the experiential statements generated from a participant's interview may interweave and bring to light a meaningful structure or a gestalt view of her/his relationship with the phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 2022). Each cluster of interrelated experiential statements settled through this step constituted a *theme* – specifically, a '*Personal Experiential Theme*' (PET) in IPA's terminology (Smith et al., 2022).

Themes, as van Manen described them, are:

'[P]henomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Themes are the starts that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes' (van Manen, 2016, p 90)

This step of analysis was carried out physically rather than on the computer. In practice, this involved printing and cutting out the list of experiential statements generated earlier to

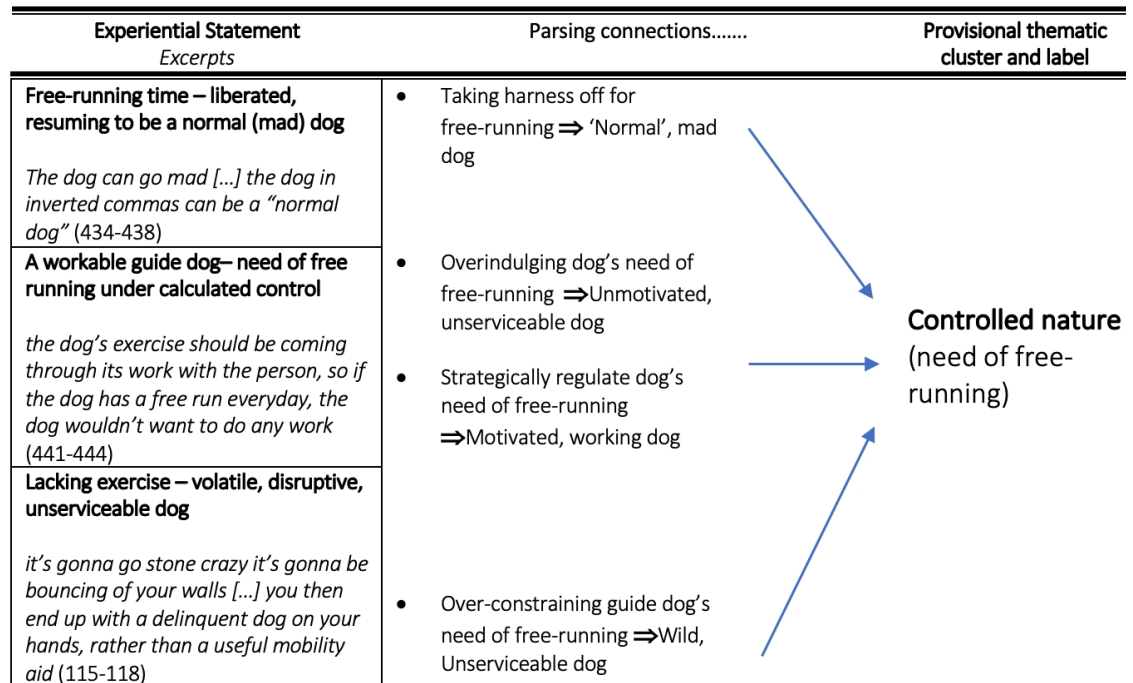
produce multiple cards; each was tagged with an experiential statement (Smith et al., 2009). I also included on each card the transcript extract supporting the experiential statement – I found this arrangement allowed me to check in with the participant’s original account more effectively, to ensure the interpretations remained sensitive and faithful to the participant’s perspective.

I first approached the experiential statement cards by trying to identify and group those that appeared (roughly) similar or alike (e.g. focusing the same event or carrying similar valence) together into separate piles. This initial attempt rendered subsequent work more manageable, as I could then focus on one pile at a time, and concentrate on moving the constituent statements around physically to explore their potential interconnections more closely. The connections between emerging clusters were also examined – whether and how they contributed individually and collectively to understanding the participant’s perception and reasoning. During this process, some experiential statements were found to be overlapping; some were relocated to a different cluster; and some were temporarily put aside for not having a strong fit with the clusters formed at the time (Smith & Osborn, 2015) – these were revisited later when needed as the analysis unfolded. Furthermore, the candidate thematic clusters formed in this process were each assigned a label that pointed to the particular aspect that a participant’s perspective discerned; these labels were not definite but were refined as the analysis proceeded (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

The process of thematizing experiential statements was iterative, dynamic and creative (Smith et al., 2022). The constituents of potential thematic clusters were examined, re-configured and re-examined as I drew on different interpretative frames in determining what counted as a significant connection or pattern. Experiential statements were not only united for their apparent similarity; as Smith et al., (2022) described, individual statements could also be joined for bringing forth potential contradictions or tensions featured in a participant’s account (Smith et al., 2022). For example, two of experiential statements presented in [Figure 13](#) – ‘Free-running time: liberated, resuming to a normal(mad) dog’, ‘A workable guide dog– the need of exercise under calculated control’ – were drawn together as they both concerned Cathy’s views towards guide dogs’ intrinsic need of exercise. As shown in [Figure 14](#) below, I clustered these two with a third experiential statement noted earlier in the transcript where Cathy made another interesting comment on the same object. But these statements also seemed to have captured different impacts that Cathy perceived this natural need of free-running could have on the guide dog: ‘resuming normal’, ‘workable’, ‘unserviceable’. Still, when digging deeper, a higher-order connection among the three seemed to emerge that evoked the notion of control – their

supporting excerpts variously involved a depiction of the dog's need of exercise as the subject of the human partner's control/management. As such, I chose the title 'Controlled nature (need of free-running)' to label and identify this provisional thematic cluster.

Figure 14. Example of integrating experiential statements into thematic cluster



At times, the analytic structure gradually adopted a more complex configuration as the work proceeded. For instance, the provisional cluster 'Controlled nature' was later joined with two other clusters that also addressed how Cathy understood the characteristics or nature of guide dogs, but in two other dimensions ('intentionality', 'emotional need'). Instead of being a PET on its own, the cluster 'Controlled nature' became one of the three 'subthemes' nested under the PET 'Making sense of what/who guide dogs are – complicated beings?' This analytic structure is captured visually in [Table 8](#) presents below.

The re-configuring and re-labelling continued until I felt that the particular constellations of PETs and subthemes proposed appeared to fit well with each other in order to effectively capture and foreground important aspects of how this participant perceived and made sense of the guide dog–person partnership (Smith et al., 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2015). To borrow van Manen's description of theme, this analytic stage was completed when the final thematic structure could serve as one plausible (and sensible) map in navigating the personal and meaningful world of the participant.

In IPA, a case-level analysis was typically consolidated through and ended with constructing a table of PETs, which presented PETs specific to a participant, along with their subthemes and the supporting evidence drawn from the original transcript (Smith et al., 2022). Table 8 shows the theme table developed from analysing Cathy's interview. Notably, the PETs and their subthemes were arranged in the table in a way that is consonant with their interconnections as discerned through the analysis.

Table 8. Table of Personal Experiential Themes: Cathy

Personal Experiential Theme I. Making sense of what/who guide dogs are – complicated being?	
Subtheme	Key extracts (line number)
<i>1.1. Controlled nature</i>	<p>it's gonna stone crazy it's gonna be bouncing of your walls, the dog's behaviors would break down the training will breakdown and you then end up with a delinquent dog on your hands, rather than a useful mobility aid (115-118)</p> <p>The dog can go mad [...] so that's when the dog's harness is taken away, and the dog in inverted commas can be a "normal dog", yeah, the dog can just get on and being a dog (434-438)</p> <p>the dog's exercise should be coming through its work with the person, so if the dog has a free run every day, the dog wouldn't want to do any work (441-444)</p>
<i>1.2. Complex intentionality</i>	<p>the dog's focus of well who is my in charge person, who is my owner gets skewed, and then the dog's training can break down and people can start having difficulties (92-94)</p> <p>you know, they are brilliant animals but at the end of the day it's a dog, it would go to the park, it would end up going where it wanted to if the person is not telling it, this is where you need to go (991-993)</p> <p>if a dog suddenly decides actually I wanna chase a pigeon, and if it sees another pigeon I wanna chase that pigeon I wanna chase, whereas they show no sign of that before, that would then become a problem wouldn't you (1432-1434)</p>
<i>1.3. A varying capacity of emotional need</i>	<p>if the dog is getting physical contact, with the person, then it's making that emotional tie between them stronger (1063-1065)</p> <p>they're used to be with people a lot, so they get, they're more susceptible to separation anxiety than an average pet. (1211-1212)</p> <p>if you are going into a restaurant with a guide dog, you want to put it under the chair to under the table and forget about it, cuz it's a working animal (83-84)</p>

Table 8 continued

Personal Experiential Theme II. Adjustments of becoming a guide dog-aided walker	
Subtheme	Key extracts (line number)
2.1. <i>Taking up an active-passive role</i>	But people don't actually always know, what the reality of it is. So people will thinking is doing is going to be able to cross roads safely for them (1281-1283) the handle, is a reactive thing it's not a proactive thing (672-675)
2.2. <i>Fostering bodily trust in aided mobility</i>	when we first meet people and they are not using any mobility aid, people are generally looking down at their feet, because again it's human's self-preservation, you don't wanna trip (1011-1013) With the dog, we always say to people you need to look upright as well, so you can actually, the dog is doing the job at ground level, and you're looking up to, you know, um, use your vision to the best you can (1019-1021) positive things feed on positive things, so if you can begin to build a trust in the dog and begin to be able to look up, then you can feel the benefits in looking up because you can actually see the way you're going a bit better, which will then build on that trust you're already building (1659-1662)
Personal Experiential theme III. Cane vs. Guide dog: contrasting aided – mobility experiences	
Subtheme	Key extracts (line number)
3.1. <i>Guide dogs as more trustworthy aid</i>	if you can trust the piece of metal, it's gonna be much easier to trust a natural breathing creature [...] it's making judgment according to its brain (1637-1642)
3.2. <i>A constant depleting state of vigilance with the cane</i>	you always walking either thinking I am gonna hitting something soon [...] that's one of the main reasons of people you know, want to have a guide dog, because the emotional and...sort of psychological energy that you need to use to use cane (820-824)
3.3. <i>Invisibility and spontaneity of guide dog-aided mobility</i>	with the dog, they could be thinking, oh is a nice day today and what should I do later and what should I make for my dinner [...] if somebody is using cane, they are not gonna be able be thinking of all those things, because they're looking for, their cane to stop them walking into a road (836-840)
3.4. <i>Perception of space: micro vs. macro</i>	if they are guide dog owner [...] they're thinking about in terms of road crossings. If somebody is using a cane, they are thinking about all the street furniture, they're thinking about benches on and they're thinking about dips (880-884)

Subsequent cases

After completing the first table of personal experiential themes, the analysis shifted to working with the interview transcript of another participant. Again, the individual analysis followed the procedures described earlier to construct a separate theme table for this participant; this process was repeated for the remaining participants. (Smith et al., 2022). Before starting a new case, time and space were devoted to reflecting on and jotting down in the research journal my key impressions from analysing the preceding case – it was like I was temporarily storing away these pre-understandings to clear space for examining the new case at hand on its own terms, with its own particularity (Smith et al., 2022).

Cross-case analysis: Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

Performing a cross-case analysis Involved a part-whole relation on a different scale (Smith et al., 2022). That which had been learned from the individual perspectives of participants ('part') was brought together and examined. Insights then illuminated (and were further illuminated by) an emerging understanding of a perspective shared by these participants as a group ('whole') (Smith et al., 2011a). The group-level analysis departed from the five tables of Personal

Experiential Themes (PETs) produced earlier. The process was executed in a similar manner as the case-level analysis. The case theme tables were printed out, and each page presented only one PET (and its subthemes) from one participant; the printouts were also color-coded for identifying different participants.

I first explored patterns across cases by looking at the labels of all PETs. PETs that appeared similar at first glance were brought together physically into an initial thematic cluster. Next, each of these provisional clusters was examined more closely, one by one; the focus here shifted to the components (subthemes, extracts) nested within each PET (Smith et al., 2022). Often, one or two case-level subthemes were singled out in this way as being irrelevant to or weak instantiation of a new observation about the group upon which a set of PETs were meaningfully joined. These subthemes were then cut out on their own to be repositioned in different clusters or put away temporarily for later re-evaluation. During this process, a label was assigned to each emerging cluster of PETs; this was often later amended as the content and the structure of the cluster underwent further development. Once consolidated, the cluster and its label were considered analytically as a '*Group Experiential Theme*' (GET) (Smith et al., 2022). Relatedly, the expressions of case-level subthemes were sometimes revised to better reflect the new significance or function they acquired in the context of the group experiential theme.

To illustrate, I describe in more detail the experiential evidence and the steps I took to develop the first Group Experiential Theme (GET). One of the tentative clusters that stood out in my initial exploration was composed of individual PETs that variously capture the professionals explicating or making sense of the special working capacity of guide dogs. [Figure 15](#) recreates the initial view of this tentative thematic cluster, showing each of the professionals had one or two of their PETs being pulled under this cluster.

Figure 15. Developing the first Group Experiential Theme: Initial exploration and clustering of similar PETs across participants

Personal Experiential Theme:	Amber	The nature of the working guide dog	Subthemes:	The 'just dog' mode of guide dogs – uncontrollable animal Self-reflective (moral) being	In between the subject- object divide
Personal Experiential Theme:	Cathy	Making sense of what/who guide dogs are – complicated being?	Subthemes:	Controlled nature	Complex intentionality
Personal Experiential Theme:	Olivia	The working mode/capacity of guide dog	Subthemes:	Guide dog as an exceptionally well- behaved animal	The spontaneity and maintenance of guide dog's working capacity
Personal Experiential Theme:	Leonard	The work with two 'sentient beings'	Subthemes:	Do they feel that? – concern over anthropomorphizing, attributing unobservable emotional states to dogs	The matching work
Personal Experiential Theme:	Shawn	Perceiving guide dogs as sentient being	Subthemes:	Natalie the guide dog as independent- thinking being	Guide dogs as being with emotional needs
Personal Experiential Theme:	Leonard	Making sense of the guide dogs as a behaviourist	Subthemes:	Guide dogs/dogs as environment-dependent (stimulus-driven) being	Guide dog as an analgam: submission and positive reinforcement
Personal Experiential Theme:	Shawn	The dynamic of control in the working partnership	Subthemes:	Early partnership as volatile: newly qualified (young) guide dog as rebellious child/teen	Obedience as a continuum

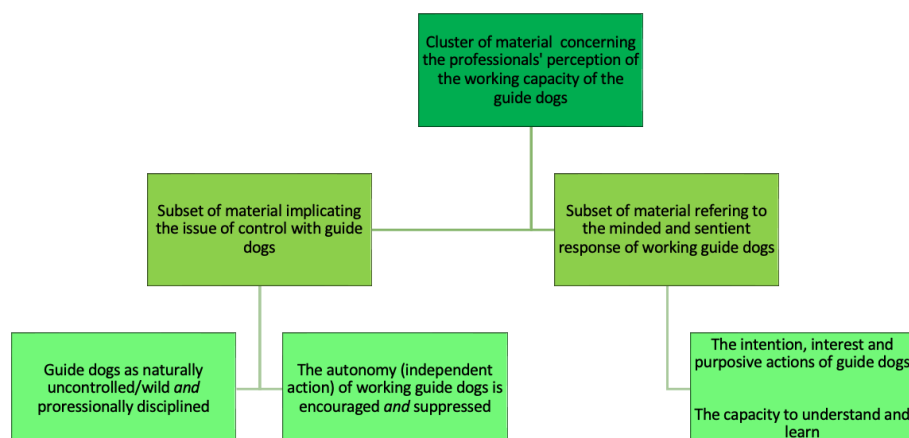
Upon closer examination of the material regarding these PETs, I realized that I could further categorize many of the subthemes as either highlighting the issue of control (e.g. 'obedience as a continuum', 'controlled nature') and/or the mindful and sentient responses of the guide dogs (e.g. 'in between the subject and object divide', 'guide dogs' strategic/creative thinking in work').

That is, to the professionals, these two aspects appeared to be particularly important in terms of making sense of the special existence of guide dogs as working/assistive animals.

To create a better visual view, I cut out the subtheme elements and their extracts from the pages and sorted them into two piles according to this emerging pattern. Next, I spent more time reviewing the two sets of clustered excerpts separately. Re-engaging with the experiential evidence in this way introduced additional meanings and layers to my evolving thematic understanding of the professionals' accounts.

As [Figure 16](#) illustrates, I organized the set of material concerning the minded capacity of guide dogs into one unit that subsumed the extracts addressing the professionals' perception of the intentional, purposive responses and the learning and thinking capacity of the guide dogs. I further split the set of extracts joined by the issue of control into two units; each of them highlighted a particular manner in which professionals accounted the working capacity of guide dogs as resting on the operation of seemingly conflicting characteristics (e.g. being naturally wild but also professionally trained, being submissive but also capable of taking charge).

Figure 16. Conceptual diagram of introducing layers of subthemes underneath the first Group Experiential Theme



Thus, I started from having in view a cluster of experiential evidence that concerned the professionals' perceptions around why or how guide dogs work, and through further interpretative engagement, I was prompted to perceive three interesting features of how professionals made sense of the working guide dogs. Correspondingly, the first Group Experiential Theme was labelled as 'Making sense of working guide dogs', within which were nested three subtheme elements. The thematic structure of the first GET is presented in [Table 9](#), along with the relevant supporting extracts from the guide dog professionals.

Table 9. Detailed view of the first Group Experiential Theme developed from the account of five guide dog professionals

Group Experiential Theme I. Making sense of working guide dogs	
Subtheme	Key extracts (line number)
1.1. <i>Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined</i>	'When they're wearing a harness they put their working hat on [...] soon as that harness comes off, They revert to being young bouncy boisterous run about, crazy things type dogs, so you've got to be careful' (Amber, 189-191)
	'If you had a huge dog like they are, and you are only taking it out for ten minutes every week it's gonna go stone crazy it's gonna it's gonna be bouncing of your walls' (Cathy, Line number 115-116)
	'So if they don't go out and work the dog, it will begin to forget what it needs to do. So, some people seem to think it's, very easy to have a dog and they don't understand, the effort it needs (Olivia, 274—282)
	'We're, highly emotional or, angry or whatever it might be at that stage, that's that's the stage the dog being qualified at' (Shawn, 925-926)
1.2. <i>Minded, intentional beings</i>	'The dog is very much, just being a dog, you know, it's responding to, to whatever is going on' (Leonard, 190--191)
	'There's got to be something about why they do it, why they, why the dog works that degree, what does the dog get out of it' (Olivia, 747-748)
	'We do everything that we do, to get to get something that we want or to avoid something that we don't want and the dog is exactly same as us in that respect' (Leonard, 861-864)
	'So she was looking at it, but she already got her own view, saying "no going that way"' (Shawn, 58-59)
	'They'll see something over there that looks more interesting than what they're doing because they're dogs, they're not machines' (Amber, 1056- 1057)
1.3. <i>Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous</i>	'They are brilliant animals but at the end of the day it's a dog, it would go to the park, it would end up going where it wanted to if the person is not telling it, this is where you need to go' (Cathy, 992-993)
	'Too much obedience, the dog then says, "well, I don't know how to cope, he hasn't told me what to do", I want the dog to actually say "it's alright I know what I am doing", and then carrying on' (Shawn, 1843--1848)
	'It's a bit like with the parent and the child, child will look at the parent for security or for confirmation, of what it's doing is right' (Leonard, 780-782)

As with the case analysis, analysing across cases 'requires the analyst to be selective' (Smith et al., 1999, p.226). That is, decisions were made about which elements of the groups' perspective should be foregrounded and when a case-level instantiation should be dropped. In practice, these decisions were often shaped by multiple factors (Smith & Osborn, 2015). One factor was the prevalence or recurrence of a candidate GET: since the aim of the analysis at this level was to be able to say something important about how the five participants made sense of the topic as a group, it followed that candidate themes that were evidenced for by most of the participants should be prioritized to this end (Smith et al., 2022). However, IPA does not stipulate how prevalence should be operationalized in a study (Smith et al., 2022). Given that only five participants were involved in this study, it seemed sensible to consider a GET evidenced by three or more participants 'recurrent' in this context (Smith, 2011b).

That said, measurable frequency was not the only factor in judging the significance of an observation made across-case: a less prevalent observation evidenced through particularly

interesting data could serve as the critical *part* that stimulated the evolving understanding about the corpus better than a merely prevalent one (Smith, 2011a; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Some subthemes and extracts inherited from prior case analyses were dropped at this stage for not adding further breadth and depth to emerging analytic structure for the group or for being grounded in relatively plain data. Furthermore, the analytic moves made also needed to take into account the story about both the group and the individual, the convergence and the divergence. This is a hallmark of the IPA— while we want the analysis to address how participants regard the researched topic similarly and relatedly as a group, our analysis is also equally committed to attending to and making visible the personally lived and intrinsically unique perspective of each participant (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, these analytic decisions were neither easy nor comfortable to make— they made salient my responsibility in and accountability for partly shaping how this group’s story was told. But this uneasiness was gradually soothed through the process of going round and round configuring and re-configuring the analytic structure, and moving between various thematic labels and participant’s spoken words. This process ended when I felt the analytic structure at hand could effectively convey the most important things that needed to be said about the perceptions and understanding of the five guide dog professionals collectively and individually.

The cross-case analysis of Study 1 completed with a final analytic structure of four Group Experiential Themes. [Table 10](#) presents an overview of the four GETs and their subthemes. Note that the material contributing to ‘Companionship’ is judged to be best organized through a one-tier structure (i.e. without subthemes) in the present analysis. A complete view of the table of GETs with supporting excerpts can be found in Appendix 6.

Table 10. Overview of the Group Experiential Themes for five guide dog professionals

	Group Experiential Theme			
	I. Making sense of working guide dogs	II. Guide dog–person mobility	III. Companionship	IV. The caring responsibility of the person for the guide dog
Subtheme	<p>1.1. <i>Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined</i></p> <p>1.2. <i>Minded, intentional beings</i></p> <p>1.3. <i>Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous</i></p>	<p>2.1 <i>Trusting the guide dogs: A quandary/ predicament</i></p> <p>2.2 <i>Challenging bodily adjustments: Into spontaneity and fluidity</i></p>		<p>4.1. <i>A complex terrain: The emotional responsibility of the person for the guide dog</i></p> <p>4.2 <i>Being responsible for a guide dog is like being responsible for a ‘child’</i></p>

Chapter 5. Study One Results: The Professional's Perspective

The present analysis will first attend to how this small group of GDBA professionals made sense of who working guide dogs are. Then, it will explore professionals' views on the guide dog–person association in three respects: the joint mobility, the companionship, and the caring responsibility. Appendix 6 provides a thematic overview of the present analysis with references to the key supporting moments from the individual interviews. The analysis sometimes refers to the study participants collectively as GDBA or Guide Dogs staff, or professionals and sometimes specifically as OMSs, dual-certified professionals, OMS/GDMI, or ex-GDMI, when appropriate.

Group Experiential Theme I. Making sense of working guide dogs

Who/what are guide dogs? The individual interviews with the Guide Dogs staff were interspersed with their accounts about why guide dogs work, what the dogs are like when working, and why/how the dogs sometimes pull out of their guiding work. For the professionals interviewed, a guide dog's profile is related to its working capability, particularly in relation to its uncontrolled nature and minded capacity (such as subjectivity and thinking). An element of *tension* runs through the professionals' sense-making of working guide dogs. The working guide dog, as illuminated through the professionals' perspectives, is a complex being – striking a balance between being uncontrolled and disciplined, having minded capacity that delivers and hinders their effectiveness as working animals, and being expected to be independently dependent.

Subtheme 1.1. Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined

Across the individual interviews, there is a shared recognition that guide dogs have two distinct modes of behaviours. Professionals speak of a working mode or trained repertoire where the guide dogs are seen as behaving themselves. At the same time, the professionals' descriptions also associate guide dogs with a seemingly natural predisposition to be uncontrollable. From the professionals' perspectives, the effectiveness of guide dogs (i.e. their capacity to provide assistance to owners when needed) relies on the two modes co-existing in a sensible manner. What seems to have emerged from the professionals' accounts is a view where the guide dogs are dynamically situated on a continuum: on the one hand, pulled by their natural propensity to be uncontrolled, but on the other hand mobilized by their professional or trained capacity to

behave. We will first consider an instance from Amber's interview, where she describes the guide dogs as being capable of alternating swiftly between the two modes of being:

When they're not working, they're just dogs and they do doggy things, and there is a difference, well, quite a big difference with some dogs: when they're wearing a harness, they put their working hat on and they're in working mode. As soon as that harness comes off, they revert to being young bouncy boisterous run-abouts, crazy things-type dogs, so you've got to be careful, um, with that side of things, with what, what a person can cope with. (Amber, 184–191¹²)

From Amber's account, the two modes seem to come about in different manners: the guide dogs 'put on' the disciplined working mode and they 'revert' to the 'just dogs' mode. It is as if the former is a more deliberate kind of process that is consciously acted upon, in contrast to the latter. The word 'revert' is worth pondering, as it seems to conjure the presence of a grand and almost irresistible force that drives things back to their innate state. Through Amber's cautionary comments at the end, we are reminded how guide dogs embody an uneasy equilibrium where the natural predisposition to be wild or uncontrollable can always crop up undesirably and override the working capacity of the dogs.

Some professionals point out the owners' responsibility in managing the dual capacities of the guide dogs so that the dogs can take up their work role efficiently when needed. Working as OMSs, Olivia and Cathy are often the first professionals with whom prospective owners meet and converse with about the guide dog service. The 'workload' that the guide dogs need on a regular basis (outside their service time) is an important aspect of their professional assessment for applicant eligibility that is sometimes not readily recognized by prospective/new owners. For instance, Olivia comments:

Because some people think, 'oh, when it gets to the weekend I don't have to work the dog', well that's not true either. If they don't have a route that they need or they don't need to go anywhere at the weekend, they have to have what we class as a 'block route', where they can take the dog out and exercise it. Because it's a young dog that they get initially, and they have to take on the role of the trainer, if they don't go out and work the dog, it will begin to forget what it needs to do. So, some people seem to think it's very easy to have a dog, and they don't understand the effort it needs. (Olivia, 274-282)

It is notable that Cathy refers to the physique, age, and breed of the guide dogs when explicating their need for physical exercises in different instances of her interview. For Cathy, guide dogs seem to live with an innate drive that will accumulate or grow on its own. Therefore,

¹² The line number where the extract appears on the verbatim transcript.

it needs to be dissipated effectively via exercise if the dogs are to hold onto their capacity to function as working dogs:

I am trying very kindly to sort of gently say to her, if you have a huge dog like they are, and you are only taking it out for ten minutes every week, it's gonna go stone crazy; it's gonna be bouncing off your walls. The dog's behaviour breaks down, the training will break down, and then you end up with a—a delinquent dog on your hands, rather than a useful mobility aid. (Cathy, 115–118)

We can sense that the accumulating drive to which Cathy refers is not emotional or mental but rather a physical kind of energy; it is about strength. The serial breakdown that Cathy anticipated for this owner and her guide dog suggests that this innate drive of the dog is something ferocious and disruptive to Cathy; it can become unmanageable to the person if it is left on its own without the person's timely intervention (i.e. in exercising the dog). In some respects, Cathy's view seems to reverberate with Amber's cautionary comment above ('you've got to be careful, um, with that side of things') – in both instances, we sense a looming possibility of nature's triumph, the loss of control and the professional composure of the guide dogs.

While Amber and Cathy's accounts have juxtaposed the guide dogs' professional side with an innate and seemingly animalistic drive, Shawn sees the guide dogs' propensity for misbehaviour as something human-like and developmentally-related. As the most seasoned professional of the group, Shawn refers to adolescence when explicating the difficult times owners can have with young, newly-trained guide dogs whose actions are not easily controllable:

When you think late teens and mid-teens, um, in people, it's about, either stamping your authority on yourself, 'I wanted to do as well as I can do', um, or, possibly, 'I don't wanna take other advice because I know what I am doing, I want to do that'. Um, we're, highly emotional or, angry or whatever it might be at that stage. That's the stage the dog being qualified are at. (Shawn, 922–928)

As this excerpt conveys, for Shawn, difficult young guide dogs are like human teenagers: antsy, rebellious, and seeking independence. In contrast to an ever-present possibility of losing control with the guide dogs that is evoked in Cathy and Amber's responses, Shawn's description foregrounds a phase of emotional or psychological instability that the dogs will presumably outgrow with time on their own. At the same time, Shawn (and Leonard) sees it as important that owners dedicate their time to exercises that aim to develop obedience in the guide dogs:

So if I had someone who didn't like to follow the rules too much and was, sounds horrible but, if I thought someone was a bit lazy and wouldn't do their obedience [training], because it's really important to do [...] you know, make it lie down see if it will lie down, make it sit up, and give it loads of praise so you'd actually create this game, obedience, you know, in plays. But the main aim of obedience is to say I am taking control, I'm the deciding factor. (Shawn, 1799-1812)

Apart from having routine route blocks that keeps the accumulating and ferocious energy of guide dogs in check, Shawn's response suggests that what is also at stake and hence needs managing is the dogs' exercise of individual autonomy.

To the professionals considered thus far, their interviews have variously reflected a view that effective guide dogs embody an uneasy combination of uncontrolled/uncontrollable and disciplined/moderated behaviour related to nature and nurture respectively. However, Leonard's interview seems to be an exception to this pattern. As a dual-certified OMS/GDMI, and having completed his professional qualification in dog training, Leonard's account of guide dogs often features clear and detailed explanations that could be boiled down to notions of stimulus and response. For instance, in explaining the circumstances when the guide dog–person partnership encounters problems, Leonard suggests:

So some of the time, the problem, can be with the person, and quite a lot of the time it is, what's within the environment. The dog is very much, just being a dog, you know, it's responding to, to whatever is going on, um, and there's always ways of, of remedying things. (Leonard, 188–193)

Leonard seems to perceive the guide dog as primarily environment-dependent; it is as if guide dogs are, for Leonard, responsive but passive, and their passivity unfolds into a completed form of manageability. That is, unlike his colleagues, Leonard seems to view guide dogs as inherently and completely controllable.

However, Leonard's view of working guide dogs may not in fact be very distant from the views of the group. In perceiving guide dogs as beings that are to be mobilized on a polarized continuum of control – naturally wild/autonomous vs. professionally disciplined – one seems to tacitly regard them at some points as *lacking in control*, as *needing to be controlled*, and, more importantly, as *able to be controlled*. In this sense, Leonard's view can be seen as making explicit the implicit aspect of others' views: while guide dogs are seen as having the natural potential to be uncontrollable and misbehaving, they simultaneously appear to professionals as being inherently manageable so that they can be nudged towards the pole of ordered composure from time to time through designed workloads and obedience exercises.

Subtheme 1.2. Minded, intentional beings

Across the professionals' accounts, the professionals seem to regard guide dogs as being *minded* in their training and working life, alluding to some forms of *subjectivity* (such as motive or interest), and *thinking*. For instance, Olivia recognises that one cannot make the guide dogs work unless they feel like working; she holds a degree of *certitude* that guide dogs' working behaviour is of their own volition:

There's got to be something about why they do it, why they, why the dog works to that degree. What does the dog get out of it? Um, because it does it all the, you know, it goes back and does it for more, so it's, it's got to be, happiness, or, some form of reward, I think. (Olivia, 747–752)

'What does the dog get out of it?' This question suggests that guide dogs appear to Olivia not as working *objects* (or tools) but as working *subjects* for whom intention or will must be accounted. For Olivia, a guide dog's repeated engagement in work is loaded with a strong agentic basis; it is as if the dog has *consciously decided* to work.

While Olivia can only vaguely identify what the guide dogs want to accomplish through their work, Leonard sees the guide dogs' purposive behaviours as being attributable to a specific set of 'motivators'. This difference may be attributed to how Olivia does not have a specialized background in dog training ('but I am not a dog trainer'), whereas Leonard is a dual-certified OMS/GDMI. Consider the following excerpt from Leonard's interview in which he explains the idea of 'positive reinforcement' – the basis of effectively training dogs to become guide/working dogs:

But very simply, dogs, we do everything that we do, to get to get something that we want or to avoid something that we don't want and the dog is exactly same as us in that respect, um and different things motivate them, but generally speaking, it's either it's food, preys, play um are the three big motivators for our dogs, and for most dogs, sex is another one but that doesn't come in with our training [both laugh]. (Leonard, 861–867)

This excerpt suggests that Leonard perceives dogs as being as purposive as people; what dogs do (or will do) is based on what they 'want' and 'don't want'. However, this sense of minded intentionality appears to be simple, rudimentary, and operating in a bifurcated manner of reward-seeking or punishment-avoiding. The list of guide dogs' 'big motivators' seems *complete* and *exhaustive*. The completeness of the list seems to reinforce that the dogs' minded

intentionality is simple; it is almost as if the dogs' purposive behaviours can be grasped in a predicable way.

The accounts of several professionals also foreground creative thinking or more complex subjectivity that they perceive among guide dogs. Presently working as the leading demonstrator, Shawn's interview account is threaded with multiple references to his current 'demo partner/dog', Sheena. In one such instance, Shawn reflects on Sheena's actions in the demonstration work with the interviewer prior to the individual interview:

She did something today didn't she, I said I don't think I'd seen her do that before; what was that? [...] [I: is it the, to the shoreline when, something] yes, that that's what I am thinking where she suddenly, it wasn't as if the shoreline met her, she made a direct attempt to get into the shoreline of that um of the precinct [...] Um, well that up until that point I've seen her focusing on the straight-line, which was straight across the cusp of it. Um so she was looking at it, but she already got her own view, saying 'no going that way'. (Shawn, 49–59)

Sheena, as Shawn understood, was not merely carrying out the trained, routine guiding techniques. She was spontaneously devising and executing novel acts to address the particular travel environment that they encountered. Shawn mobilizes several action words, which conveys how he vividly perceives Sheena as actively judging, evaluating, coming to a decision, and adjusting her action. Also, Shawn refers to Sheena as 'she' instead of 'it'. Without background information, one could mistakenly think Shawn was recounting another *person's* process of thinking and acting. As a seasoned guide dog professional, Shawn is still amazed by Sheena's spontaneous adaptability; for him, it is as if her learning capacity is unlimited: 'when she specializes in something it's [a] thing I don't even realize she is knowing.'

Interestingly, the professionals spoke of the guide dogs' mental life not only to explain why/how the guide dogs work effectively but also to discuss the dogs' occasional underperformance at work. For instance, from Amber's perspective, the dogs' mind, which enables them to take on responsibility and look after their owners, can also be *interested* in things other than the guiding work at hand:

They'll see something over there that looks more interesting than what they're doing because they're dogs, they're not machines, and, and occasionally accidents happen they might brush somebody against something and then, then they go 'oh gosh, what have I done', hahaha. (Amber, 1055–1059)

For Amber, being capable of feeling interested – an intentional, subjective experience – separates guide dogs from the objectual category of beings. At the end of this excerpt, Amber

voices the thought or self-talk that she perceives the guide dog to have had when it made a guiding/working mistake. In translating the invisible thought of guide dogs into words, Amber seems to reify and consolidate the minded, subject-like qualities of guide dogs. Interestingly, Amber's depiction of the dog's self-talk portrays them as conscious of their own actions and their impact on others. For Amber, the guide dog not only appeared to be consciously drawn by and purposively act in response to its surrounding environment; it was also able to mindfully reflect on its own actions.

Notably, among many other potential things with which to compare guide dogs, Amber refers to 'machines', which are entities of consistency and predictability. This comparison seems to disclose a degree of inevitable uncertainty or unpredictability that Amber recognises from the minded guide dogs. In the interviews with Amber and some of the other professionals, there is a sense that the minded quality of the guide dog is a *double-edged sword*, presented as bringing both enhancements and mistakes in the dog's work performance. The following account from Cathy's interview reflects this paradoxical duality:

They are brilliant animals but at the end of the day it's a dog, it would go to the park, it would end up going where it wanted to if the person is not telling it, this is where you need to go, and if the dog if the person's not doing the instructions, then the dog's obedience can fall away, it's not as effective and the dog end up, you know, as misbehaving and its training breakdown. (Cathy, 992–996)

Cathy seems ambivalent toward guide dogs; they appear to her as minded in both promising and limited ways. They are 'brilliant' but self-indulgent. For Cathy, guide dogs' self-indulgence seems ingrained and dominant. As such, they are not to be left to their own devices. Cathy's excerpt encapsulates a subtle tension in how several professionals regard working guide dogs. For the professionals, guide dogs' subjectivity and thinking seem to allude to their potential to act as independent workers and competent partners, but they also conjure a need for the person's proper intervention or supervision in order to maintain and maximize the dogs' effective performance. This tension around autonomy and submission unfurls further in the next section.

Subtheme 1.3. Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous

To some professionals, their interviews seem to effectively instantiate the delicate profile of working guide dogs in a further respect. In particular, they speak of how the working relationship between the person and the guide dog rests on the dogs taking an *in-between* position in terms of its/his/her reach or entitlement for autonomy/independence.

As noted, some professionals referred to the notion of obedience (either as a quality of and/or training practice with dogs) in their interviews unprompted. Among his peers, Shawn provided a more extensive account of the role of obedience in training effective guide dogs.

Notably, Shawn's understanding of obedience seems to deepen as the interview unfolds. He starts connecting obedience to a sense of being balanced and stressing that obedience should be held at a *just, moderate* amount in relation to the overall profile of the guide dogs:

So, um, obedience is great cuz it keeps a balance, it's saying sometimes I want you to do this, even if it's not what you naturally choose, but it will be nice, too much obedience, the dog then says, 'well, I don't know how to cope, he hasn't told me what to do', I want the dog to actually say 'it's alright I know what I am doing', and then carrying on. (Shawn, 1843–1848)

For Shawn, the ideal guide dogs are *independently dependent*: they are not only able to follow the lead of others from time to time, but they are also capable of acting independently and confidently when needed. *Shawn's rightly obedient* guide dogs are in-between, as Shawn concludes elsewhere in his interview on the topic of obedience: 'somewhere in the middle there's a gentle ground'.

Another interesting illustration of guide dogs' seemingly nebulous position comes from Leonard's interview. Leonard points to several things that people can do to foster the guide dog–owner 'bond', including general caregiving, obedience exercises, and positive reinforcement. For Leonard, the particular guide dog–person bond in working/walking resembles the *child–parent* relationship:

All of these things add up to the dog understanding what's expected of it, understanding the parameters, who you are in a relation to it now, that you are its primary caregiver, you are its primary feeder um, [which] will lead to that dog being relaxed, um, looking to you, when um when it's unsure um when it's when it needs to make decision. For example, you often find the dogs will look at the instructor in the beginning, because they have that bond with the instructor to start with, and they have confidence in the instructor, it's a bit like with the parent and the child, child will look at the parent for security or for confirmation, of what it's doing is right. (Leonard, 773–781)

Guide dogs, from Leonard's perspective, seem to acquire the sense of emotional comfort and reassurance that they need to act independently through their connection to people, similarly to what an exploring child experiences from a parent. At the same time, like the parent–child relationship, Leonard views the guide dog–person connection as hierarchical, with the person being the resource-holding authority. Leonard also seems to conceive of guide dogs as akin to

children who know that they do not have the final say ('looking to you', 'confirmation of what it's doing is right'). That is, the child-like position that Leonard associates with guide dogs appears to be an ambivalent one, where their independence is nurtured and encouraged but is ultimately limited.

In some ways, the dependent independence that the professionals conceive of in relation to ideal working guide dogs has already been woven into the particular ways that the professionals make sense of the dogs' natures and mental capacities. As Cathy commented: 'They are brilliant animals but at the end of the day it's a dog.'

Group Experiential Theme II. Guide dog–person mobility

The accounts of the professionals illuminate that the guide dog–person mobility is not something that one acquires instantly; it requires potential challenging effort on the part of the visually impaired travellers. As the participants underscore, novice travellers are faced with the need for *trust building* (subtheme 2.1) so that they can be effectively mobile with a guide dog. At the same time, the interviews reveal the unique embodied or body-space experiences that individuals must embrace in walking with guide dogs (subtheme 2.2).

Subtheme 2.1. Trusting the guide dogs: A quandary/predicament

In thinking about the joint mobility of a guide dog and a person, one may intuitively think of a dog *leading* the visually impaired person. However, most professionals emphasised the cooperative nature of this aided mobility and drew on the term 'partnership' to describe the working relationship. In a broad sense, the person contributes to directionality and orientation, and the guide dog contributes to obstacle identification and avoidance. Interestingly, across the individual interviews, there seemed to be a shared recognition that it is essential for the person to trust the guide dog for the joint mobility to operate effectively.

The professionals often referred to the issue of trusting the guide dog in relation to the traveller's *concern about safety*, sometimes interchangeable with having 'confidence' or 'belief' in the guide dogs. Importantly, many of the professionals' interviews seem to bring up the various sources of uncertainty that travellers with visual impairment are confronted with in their joint mobility with the guide dog. Amid these uncertainties, being able to trust a guide dog seems like a potential *quandary* or *predicament* for guide dog–aided travellers.

Notably, several professionals used an expression about ‘putting safety in/in the hands of’ the guide dogs to describe owners travelling with guide dogs. For instance, Olivia states:

Um, there’s obviously a big one about trust. Because they’re putting their safety and, everything else, in that dog, you know, they’re taking their chances that the dog will take them safely from A to B. (Olivia, 755–758)

‘Putting one’s safety in’ is an action or condition worth pondering. It seems to involve *giving away* the control of one’s safety to others. From Olivia’s perspective, trusting the guide dog is critical; the owners have to believe that the dog can keep them safe so that they can *outsource* their personal safety to the dog. Nonetheless, Olivia’s account also suggests that the owners themselves have recognized, to some degree, that entrusting one’s safety to the guide dog is *inherently risky*.

Putting one’s safety in the hands of others can be experienced as uncertainty-provoking, since in this context one’s safety becomes externally contingent and less under one’s control. For Amber, travelling with a guide dog – unlike cane-aided mobility – means a diminished sense of control on the part of the traveller:

When you are using a long cane, you're in charge. You're, physically finding obstacles with your cane and you're making that decision to find your way around an obstacle. When you're with a dog you've got no control over that. The dog is avoiding the obstacles without you even knowing it a lot of the time, so you have to just trust that the dog is going to do that and it's not going to walk you into a bollard or a flight of steps or whatever [...] so it is hard for somebody to actually think, well can a dog do all that? (Amber, 412–421)

From Amber’s perspective, for travellers with guide dogs, the sense of ‘got no control’ is accompanied by a sense of *less- or not-knowing* that came from their particular sight condition. Not being in control, not knowing – it seemed that the individuals travel with the guide dogs against a background of uncertainty. In stating, ‘you have to just trust the dog is going to do that’, Amber seems to recognize that, amid such uncertainties, trusting the guide dog is almost impossible or comes about involuntarily.

The complications of trust do not end here. The last part of Amber’s interview excerpt reveals another potential source of uncertainty. She states, ‘Well can a dog do all that?’ This suggests the sense of uncertainty that guide dog owners may have about dogs’ *intellectual capacity* to manage the complex travel task. Amber might also intend to convey a sense of uncertainty among owners in recognizing the *otherness* of guide dogs: can a non-human animal (‘a dog’) handle a complex task? This moment in Amber’s interview points to the complicated potential

challenge of trusting a guide dog. Cooperative guide dog–person mobility presents the visually impaired traveller with a conundrum: the person has to delegate control over his/her safety to a potentially untrustworthy partner (an animal *other*) and simultaneously be less able to track or check how that partner handles his/her safety.

Leonard's account provides a slightly different view of the difficulty of trusting the guide dog. In explicating the owners' trust issue, Leonard emphasizes that it is 'scary' for travellers to be outdoors: 'it's scary, going out'. It is as if the environment strikes the travellers as an uncertainly dangerous place:

It's yeah it's very scary to begin with, like I said that if I put you in a blindfold now you would you'd find it difficult to just follow the dog, you'd be holding back a little bit and you'd be walking very slowly and you'd probably be a bit stiff with fear um, so people do that, because they don't trust the dog um, so fear, is a main thing and then secondly with the other example that I mentioned, sometimes it's a case of feeling that you know better than the dog. (Leonard, 954–960)

Leonard's view seems to shed light on a *double mistrust* in the context of guide dog–person mobility. Not only do visually impaired travellers experience the environment as uncertainly dangerous; they also perceive the guide dogs as potentially less minded and less capable guides. It may already be difficult to entrust one's safety to an unreliable guide, even if everything else in the travel space is okay. How much more difficult would it be to do the same when one perceives the space as dangerous and one's safety as at greater risk?

Thus far, the accounts of Olivia, Amber, and Leonard indicate that they all recognise owners' uncertainty regarding the reliability of guide dogs as travel guides. From Amber's and Leonard's perceptions, the travellers appear to be especially concerned with the dogs' minded (intellectual, thinking) capacity. In this context, it is interesting to note that, when discussing the trustworthiness of the guide dog versus the cane, Cathy reckoned that the former was potentially more trustworthy to visually impaired travellers:

Cathy: Trusting a guide dog is gonna be quite easy because if you can trust the piece of metal, it's gonna be much easier to trust a natural breathing creature.

Interviewer: So, it's easier to trust a guide dog.

C: I would say so, yeah, because the dogs are another living thing isn't it, and the dog has got a brain and it's making judgment according to its brain, whereas a cane, is just a piece of, the cane is just still the person doing that themselves isn't it, um whereas the dog it's two people in partner it's two creatures in partnership. (Cathy, 1637–1644)

For Cathy, dogs are more trustworthy because they are alive. Cathy seems to perceive life as a promising quality, a sign of potential and adaptability. But, from Cathy's perspective, the

trustworthiness of the guide dogs seems to be credited more to their minded/thinking capacity and, hence, their human-like features. The accounts of Cathy, Amber, and Leonard suggest that the trustworthiness of the guide dogs seems to be *relative* to how the dogs' minded/intellectual capacity and/or their human-like status is perceived by the individual.

The perspectives of the Guide Dogs professionals reveal how trust in a guide dog is complex. Their interviews point to multiple and likely intertwining sources of uncertainties – of the guide dog, of the space, of not being in control, of not knowing – that crop up in the individuals' mobility experience with the guide dogs, which potentially make it difficult to trust their dog-partner. At the same time, the professionals' accounts also seem to suggest how the trustworthiness of the guide dog itself may not be something that is definite but rather potentially open to varying individual perceptions.

Subtheme 2.2. Challenging bodily adjustments: Into spontaneity and fluidity

This theme traces a *bodily* dimension in the accounts of several of the professionals interviewed. This bodily dimension makes evident a view of novice owners who are prompted to adjust their embodied selves as they try to establish joint mobility with a guide dog.

Through their experiences of working with visually impaired clients, OMSs Cathy and Olivia describe a looking-down body posture that the clients initially tend to hold, before they learn to travel with the guide dog (or cane). Cathy states:

When we first meet people and they are not using any mobility aid, people are generally looking down at their feet, because again it's human's self-preservation, you don't wanna trip. (Cathy, 1011–1013)

Cathy seems to understand the downward-facing posture of the clients as a form of *instinctive self-protection*. Why do travellers feel the need to protect themselves in this bodily way? Cathy's view suggests that visually impaired travellers perceive the physical space as *dangerous*. The looking-down body posture, the *fixated* moving body, speaks to a sense of space uncertainty; when one feels one is in a dangerous environment and that one's safety is at risk, one intuitively becomes cautious and wants to monitor closely how one's body moves through the uncertain space. Although the downward-facing and fixated body posture is self-protective, Cathy and Olivia stress that it is less helpful in terms of effective guide dog-aided or cane-aided travel. From their professional experience, an upright body posture is the most effective way to travel with a guide dog (e.g. the traveller can better use their residual vision).

The accounts of several professionals also shed light on another form of bodily adjustment: in travelling with guide dogs, the individuals seem to be prompted to take up a less attached relation to the physical space. For instance, Olivia underscores that, when travelling with a guide dog, the traveller needs to be able walk 'mid-pavement', not along either side of the pavement. However, 'mid-pavement' travel does not appear to be a preferred way of moving around for travellers with visual impairment, as being physically connected to the built space is significant for them:

If you are a cane user, very few cane user actually walk, mid pavement, because they like to feel attached to something [I: attach to something ?] Um... if you are with a visually impaired person and you walk them into a room, if you, if they can't see very much and you stand them still and say I'm just gonna go and get a chair, once you're gone, they have no idea of what's around them , so it is much better to ... literally find them a wall to stand against. (Olivia, 525–533)

As Olivia explains, the bodily or physical attachment to space gives the traveller a sense of orientation, or, more interpretatively, a sense of spatial certainty. Thus, like forgoing the looking-down body posture, 'mid-pavement' travel may also prompt novice guide dog-aided travellers to go against the form of embodiment that seems to carry security for them as travellers with limited sight.

As the most experienced Guide Dogs professional in the group, Shawn viewed adopting a more open-ended, flexible body-space relation as important to effective guide dog-person mobility:

Cuz that's really important if you've got the attitude and say, oh actually you know, I will just try out, I will cope, that's a quite a good mechanism to have, um, if you've only got someone who, who perhaps just trails along the wall and doesn't want to leave the wall, with the cane, some people do, and, and go around a block and around a block, they need to think further afield. (Shawn, 254–259)

What is this *thinking afield* that Shawn refers to? For visually impaired travellers who are just learning to establish aided mobility, things that happen in the space right in front of them/their body are the most pressingly important, not the space afield (in Cathy's words, 'you don't wanna trip'). By 'they need to think further afield', Shawn may be pointing to the importance of novice guide dog-aided travellers being able to bring more space into their horizon, to unpin or loosen up their body's position in the space as mentally conceived, and to envision their mobile body as having a more continuous relationship with the space.

An instance from Amber's interview provides another powerful illustration of a *bodily fluidity* that the traveller is to embrace when being mobile with the guide dog. From Amber's

perspective, travelling with a guide dog is distinct from other forms of aided mobility (e.g. cane, human-sighted guide) because it features a sense of being *anchorless*:

You're not using your cane and you're not hanging on to it anybody who's your anchor, you've got this dog in your left, left hand, and you, you keep that hand nice and relaxed so you can feel what the dog's doing and you have to follow where that dog is going. So, it's quite hard for somebody, because they've got no anchor to hang on to if they're not sure about going out and about, to actually then put their trust in a dog who's walking quietly by the side but weaving in and out and guiding them. (Amber, 446–453)

What is this unique sense of being anchorless that Amber refers to? Unlike cane-aided or human-aided mobility, visually impaired travellers do not have direct contact with their guide when travelling with a guide dog; there is only indirect contact through the harness. Amber also suggests the harness should be handled in a 'relaxed' manner so that travellers can detect the dog's guiding movement. Moreover, the guide is not static but moving, 'weaving in and out'. In many respects, there is a degree of fluidity that must be kept between the guide dog and the traveller for the guiding information to be effectively communicated.

From Amber's description, the anchorless state seems to translate into a *felt uncertainty* and challenges the travellers' willingness to follow and entrust themselves to the guide dogs. But, as Cathy and Olivia comment, trust is essential for the travellers to transition from rigid to open embodiment: 'as the person begins trusting the dog you will see their posture improve' (Cathy, 1650–1652). That is, the professionals' accounts seem to depict a rather enigmatic relation between trust and bodily feeling in the context of guide dog-aided mobility: bodily fluidity both deters and is facilitated by trusting the guide dog.

Interestingly, several professionals' responses also suggest a shift in how the visually impaired travellers receive the embodied characteristics of walking with the guide dog. With time, the same bodily fluidity that once appeared unsettling will be re-experienced positively by the travellers as an indispensable aspect of guide dog-aided mobility. In particular, most professionals contrast cane-aided and guide dog-aided mobility, with the latter being a *less stressful* and *more relaxing* experience.

Unlike the cooperative guide dog-person mobility, when travelling with a cane, the travellers themselves have to take on the task of obstacle detection and avoidance. From the professionals' descriptions, learning to travel with guide dogs seems to allow the travellers to be relieved from the *mental burden* that they would otherwise incur in cane-aided travel. Cathy, for instance, gave a vivid depiction of the contrasting experiences:

If I was walking down the street with the friend who is a guide dog owner , I will be having a conversation with that person and we'll be talking about, oh what should we go and do this evening, should we go and have a meal or should we go to the cinema, or what should we do , if I was walking down the road with the same person friend who was using a cane, we wouldn't be able to have a conversation probably, because they will be having to concentrate so hard on what they are doing , that, talking to me is just gonna be, too much. (Cathy, 828–835)

Cathy's view suggests that, for the guide dog-aided traveller, a surplus of mental energy for her/his attention is allocated to several non-travel thoughts. Furthermore, the experience of travelling with a guide dog is not *just* about mobility; the moving body becomes invisible or serves as a background to the experience of the travellers. The invisible moving body that emerges here seems antithetical to the heavily attended body brought forth through Cathy's description of the cane-aided travel earlier in the interview ('have to adjust your position [...] have to adjust your position').

The guide dog owner from Cathy's excerpt is one who multi-tasks while walking; this ability to be side-tracked speaks of the smooth exchange between the body's movements and the surrounding. In Leonard's words, with guide dogs, travellers 'flow through' the environment:

Whereas with a guide dog, the mobility is much more fluid, you flow through the environment, you don't make contact with obstacles. (Leonard, 669–670)

Leonard's description conjures up an image of the moving body that unfolds in the space in a rather graceful, unhindered, and continuous manner.

Together, the professionals' accounts reveal the bodily dimension of guide dog-aided mobility, with challenges and rewards in stepping into a more fluid and spontaneous embodiment.

Group Experiential Theme III. 'Companionship'

As noted, guide dogs are specifically trained to provide mobility support for blind and partially sighted individuals. In this context, all of the professionals interviewed speak of the relationship as having meaning to the owners beyond mobility terms; they uniformly recognize a sense of companionship. Leonard's interview gives a sense of this:

I think unless the dog is er, is helping you with your mobility, it's not a guide dog then it's just a pet dog, so I think from Guide Dog's perspective that's the key, but it does

come hand in hand with the working as well, it's you can't separate the two, because that companionship happens during the work as well, you know, you're out there with your dog, with your buddy, and you are doing these things together as a team. (Leonard, 1102–1108)

For Leonard, mobility support is fundamental to guide dogs' unique standing. Specifically, it is the dual-quality role – being both a mobility aid and a companion – that differentiates guide dogs from pet dogs. Leonard also perceives an experiential inseparableness between the mobility and companionship aspects of an owner's involvement with the guide dog. When Leonard refers to the guide dog, he switches smoothly from 'your dog' to 'your buddy'. It is as if he recognizes that the guide dogs have a hybrid presence for the owners, both an aid in possession ('your dog') and a human-like, engageable being ('your buddy').

Leonard's account suggests that a certain degree of primacy is perceived in guide dogs' role as mobility support. Amber similarly expresses: 'I suppose officially that they [guide dogs] are there as a mobility aid'. For Leonard, regarding the application phase of the guide dog service, a need for companionship itself does not appear as sufficient grounds to warrant a guide dog; Cathy expresses a similar view. These observations speak to a *professional perspective*, which recognizes the guide dog–person union as first and foremost a response to mobility needs. The companionship that this relationship could offer is secondary. Consider Cathy's account:

So we would not give somebody a guide dog just for companionship. But, the companionship that a guide dog brings somebody is a undoubtedly a massive, a massive bonus, to complement, the guiding that it gives. (Cathy, 1416–1419)

Cathy perceives companionship from the guide dog is undeniably part of the clients' experience. At the same time, the words 'just', 'bonus', and 'complement' reveal how Cathy, as a professional, conceives of the companionship offered by the guide dog–person union.

Recognizing the dual aspects of an individual's relationship with the guide dog, Leonard explicitly expresses an interest in understanding how the guide dog owners weigh the working/mobility and companionship dimensions of their experience. Unexpectedly, Shaw's interview suggests some answers for Leonard:

But that was typical of what we often saw, you know, typical, just in as much as, doesn't matter what goes wrong, 'I've got *this*, this is my dog', you know. (Shawn, 1275–1278)

When reflecting on his experience of working with guide dog owners, Shawn notes that for many owners the relationship is *intrinsically valued*, irrespective of the mobility/functional support that the guide dog was able or unable to provide. In what ways is the relationship with

the guide dog intrinsically significant to the guide dog owners? Shawn's subsequent account provides some insights:

Shawn: I went into an interview I was scared to death but I was the only one who went into the interview with my best mate, so when everyone else was nervous, I could just sort of stroke my dog, and it would nudge you and, and gave them confidence. So, yeah, it is, it's that, I couldn't have done this without the dog, but it's not *just* about walking it's about, sort of, them as a person.

Interviewer: The dog as a person

S: Person and a person

I: Person and a person

S: Yeah. So, both. (Shawn, 1280–1290)

Here, Shawn is making sense of what it is like to be accompanied by a guide dog by taking up the perspective of the owner, using the personal pronoun 'I'. This suggests that the owner experiences the guide dog's company as a readily accessible or reliable form of emotional/psychological comfort. More profoundly, from Shawn's perspective, the presence of a guide dog is like the company of another 'person'; the connection with the guide dog is empowering to the owners, not 'just' instrumentally (i.e. with improved mobility), but through a sense of being readily supported and comforted by *another person*.

Leonard and Shawn draw on similar descriptors to capture guide dogs' presence to the owners. They speak of the guide dogs as the owners' 'buddy', 'friend', and 'best mate'. In the dictionary, one of two definitions given for the term *companion* is 'a person you spend time or travel with' (Waite, 2012). Companionship in this sense seems to accentuate the co-presence of *another* being or a sense of 'you *and* me'. The perspectives of Leonard and Shawn draw out this sense of companionship.

Olivia illuminates a different view of guide dog companionship, which appears to resonate with the second dictionary definition of *companion*: 'each of a pair of things intended to *complement* [emphasis added] or match each other' (Waite, 2012). In making sense of the guide dog–person connection, Olivia refers to her own experience with a particular owner/guide dog pair and identifies a prominent sense of complementation and completion – a sense of 'oneness' that permeates this union:

Olivia: From my point of view, from I've seen I think a lot of, guide dog owners and their dogs have real... um, a *real* bond together, they are like a partnership it's not like, a person and an animal, somehow, it's two halves of one thing

Interviewer: Two halves of one thing, okay

O: Um, rather than... um... I mean when I look at Oliver and Otis and um, Oliver puts Otis's harness on, um, to me it's as if it's like the two parts of a jigsaw puzzle together [I:

oh], and then they walk, they are, they become one, whereas I don't think you get that with a, a human, if you had a human sighted guide I don't think that, okay there might companionship but I don't think, you get that, oneness out of it. (Olivia, 665–675)

Olivia draws on interesting metaphors here: 'two halves of one thing' and 'two parts of a jigsaw puzzle'. For Olivia, the guide dog and the owner are distinct from one other; at the same time, they complement each other. Together, they become something (ontologically, existentially) different – more than what they were individually. More subtly, the distinctiveness of the guide dog seems to have a convoluted presence in Olivia's sense-making. Initially, Olivia suggests that the guide dog is not an 'animal' but is more of a human-like partner to the owner. Later, she suggests that human companionship falls short of the guide dog–person connection; for Olivia, the guide dog somehow also does not appear as another person to the owner. Being neither an animal other nor another person, the *otherness* of the guide dog fades or is gradually effaced in Olivia's unfolding sense-making. In her perspective, the guide dog seems to occupy an uncharted realm to the owner. Amid this gradual effacing of the guide dog's otherness, the guide dog–person pair speaks to a sense of complementation and 'oneness' to Olivia; it is a sense of *we/us*, instead of 'you and me'.

For the professionals, the dogs stand both as an aid with a designed or designated function of mobility and as inter-subjective fellows whose company itself is of intrinsic, emotional, and psychological value to the owners. It seems that when the professionals attend to the companionship aspect, the dogs' presence as an animal other dims, to a certain extent. The professionals' perceptions of guide dogs seem to feature some fluidity in terms of the dogs' standing as animal and/or as being human-like.

Group Experiential Theme IV. The caring responsibility of the person for the guide dog

Across the individual interviews, there is a sense of the professionals' *care* toward the guide dogs. Their accounts capture an active consideration of the needs and interests of the guide dogs in various aspects of their involvement in the guide dog service (such as applicant assessment or training). To the participants, an important part of their professional consideration of potential applicants is their capability to provide for the various *needs* of the guide dogs, especially outside of the dog's working time (i.e. off-harness time). They often evoke notions of *responsibility* and *commitment* when speaking about the care side of the guide dog–person relationship. In the professionals' views, while the owners are supported by the guide dogs, they are not just users of a tool; they must be *carers* for the guide dogs.

There are two observations pertaining to how the professionals perceive the owners' caring responsibility for the guide dogs. First, the emotional needs of the guide dogs appear as unsettled terrain, marked by a sense of individual ambivalence or conflict among some professionals with respect to how the owners should emotionally attend to the guide dogs. Second, the professionals perceive – in diverse ways – taking care of the guide dog as being similar to caring for a *child*.

Subtheme 4.1. A complex terrain: The emotional responsibility of the owner for the guide dog

In the interviews, the professionals speak of various *needs* of the guide dogs for which the owners are responsible and often first refer to the category of physical needs (e.g. feeding, toileting, bedding, exercise). The accounts of several interviewees also highlight the *emotional needs* of guide dogs; some identify grooming as an important way for the owners to look after the guide dogs emotionally. Shawn, for instance, again draws on his experience of interacting with his present demo dog, Sheena:

In Sheena's case, if, she's out of harness and I am stroking her, grooming her she just go into jelly and she thinks it's absolutely gorgeous and her brain slows down you can see it, you know, you can see it happening. It's like us, she gets this sweet, you know it's absolutely beautiful, put the harness on her, and, she is the mom, so she, that's why she was looking at you, um, if she could, she would say 'you alright?' (Shawn, 1656–1662)

From Shawn's perspective, off-harness time spent grooming somehow emotionally relaxed Sheena. For Shawn, Sheena is responsive to the affection, and she successfully receives the emotional care he delivers. The affectionate grooming process also appears to be mutually enjoyable. Interestingly, Shawn's recollection of what it was like to emotionally care for Sheena is then followed by a reference to her alternate comportment when in the harness. Shawn perceives Sheena as becoming the one who is emotionally caring and responsible for her human partner ('you alright?'). For Shawn, emotional responsibility is reciprocal in the guide dog–person relationship.

Working as an OMS, Cathy indicates that an important guidance provided by the staff to the clients is about ensuring that the guide dog is not left alone for a long time. From Cathy's perspective, the dogs seem to have a general emotional dependence; the presence of humans is emotionally important to both pet dogs and working/guide dogs. Nonetheless, guide dogs seem *more* emotionally vulnerable and dependent on people than pet dogs, for they grow up with more sustained company:

They're used to be with people a lot, so they get, they're more susceptible to separation anxiety than an average pet dog. Pet dogs are, it's not great to leave your pet dog, but pet dogs have got an ability to cope better when being left because they are more used to it. So, we would say to the person you need to not leave the dog by itself for, for very long. (Cathy, 1211–1215)

Interestingly, Cathy conveyed a seemingly different view of how the individual should attend to the guide dogs earlier in her interview:

If I had a guide dog and I am having meeting with you, I would want to put it under the table and forget about it and just, you know, it's a working dog you forget about the dog as best as you can. (Cathy, 66–68)

Here, Cathy seems to be making sense from an owner's perspective, suggesting that the appropriate response of an owner toward a guide dog who is not being used in a public setting is to disengage/ignore it so that the owner can be fully involved with the personal task at hand. In describing the physical arrangement of the guide dog standing by – 'put it under the table' – there is almost a sense of the guide dog being handled like an object ('put') and regarded as belonging with another piece of furniture ('under the table').

Indeed, there is a contrast between the guide dog that was to be 'put under the table' and forgotten and the guide dog that was vulnerable to 'separation anxiety'; it was as if the emotional needs of the guide dog and the owner's responsible responses are contingent and not set in stone.

A similar contrast is found with Leonard, one of the dual-certified professionals in the group. A notable aspect of his account is his recurrent concern for whether the guide dogs are 'happy' or 'stressed' in different parts of his work (e.g. matching, training). He seems to feel responsible for the dogs' emotional/psychological well-being, as a professional. In explaining the partnership training, Leonard says:

You're dealing with two, sentient beings there. You're dealing with a dog and the person. You have to make sure both of them are happy, confident, and not stressed; that's very important. (Leonard, 156–159)

But, later in his interview, Leonard questions and feels cautious about the dogs' emotional capacity. Observable behaviours appear as a more objective, appropriate basis of people's interaction with the dogs:

I mean do they feel that, I don't know, what they actually, what do dogs feel, I mean you can see what, how they respond to things, but, exactly what emotions they are experiencing is difficult to be sure of without anthropomorphising, so humanizing their

responses, and people do that a lot. (Leonard, 821–825)

Within the same interview, Leonard cares and feels responsible for – and then doubts – the emotional experience of guide dogs. He perceives guide dogs as being close to and then being apart from people in terms of their emotionality.

Also working as a dual-certified professional, Amber describes her concern of whether prospective applicants are capable of giving the guide dog ‘what it needs emotionally’ in addition to being able to work/walk with it. For Amber, this particular consideration seems to have a more *personal root*, motivated by her appreciation of dogs as an individual. Yet, her personal affection for dogs seems to make her working experience challenging:

It’s It is hard, I mean there are people who do have dogs whose dogs, um, are a means to an end and they don’t give them as much emotional input as you would like. As a person who really enjoys the company of dogs, I would [both laugh], I would want all dogs to have lots of, lots of lovely attention. (Amber, 669–672)

Amber’s expressed uneasiness suggests a conflict between what she *personally prefers* and *professionally ought* to conceive of as the applicant/owner’s emotional responsibility for the guide dog. Personally, Amber appreciates dogs as intersubjective beings who *deserve ample affection* from people. Yet, professionally, Amber is not in a position to demand that level of emotional input from owners. Elsewhere in Amber’s interview, she reveals that there is no official stipulation that an applicant has to be a dog person/lover to be an eligible owner. Her uneasiness around such circumstances also seems to be infused with a subtle sense of powerlessness; her hands are tied as a professional, and, as she says, ‘you can’t force people to, to like a dog’ (713).

Close consideration of the professionals’ views reveals how they regard the guide dogs as not ‘just a mobility aid’ but as sentient subjects with emotional needs that are to be addressed by the person (owners and professionals). Yet, the emotional needs of guide dogs and/or the emotional responsibility of the person appear to be a more unsettled ground where one can discern potentially contradictory views that are at play for some of the professionals. That said, except for Amber, the professionals seemed able to hold mixed views about the guide dogs’ emotional standing in a neutral or unproblematic way.

Subtheme 4.2. Being responsible for a guide dog is like being responsible for a 'child'

Four of the five professionals (except Olivia) explicitly compared the guide dog to a child and/or the owner to a parent in their accounts of what it means to look after a guide dog. The consistency of the reference to the child/parent analogy across is only evident in their accounts pertaining to the caring relationship between the guide dog and the owner. Do the professionals' shared analogy point to a sense of demandingness that they perceive in the experience of caring for a guide dog? Indeed, many of the interviewees qualified owning a guide dog as a 'huge', 'big' responsibility or commitment for an individual. For instance, Leonard comments:

Cuz it's a big responsibility of having a guide dog, you have to be ready for that, you know it affects all areas of your life, where you go, the dog comes with you, if you go on a holiday, you have to think about the dog, if you going out at night, you have to think about the dog, it's very much like having a small child with you, [I: a small child, okay] yeah, like a toddler. (Leonard, 272–277)

In addition to the demanding nature of guide dog ownership, Leonard's repeated use of 'have to' subtly conveys a *pressing indebtedness*. It seems that, for Leonard, when the guide dog is implicated, it automatically *claims* a considerate response from the person – arguably, as one expects of a parent in a child's presence.

Both Leonard and Amber identify the caring side of guide dog ownership as a potentially challenging aspect for their clients, in addition to trusting the guide dogs. Amber's interview sheds a different light on the kind of commitment that is expected of the owner is expected in caring for the guide dog:

It's a big commitment for them, lots people struggle with the idea that it's such a big commitment. Because it is, it's like taking on a, it's not like a child is it, but it's a big commitment because um, when, when you train with a dog you have to agree to certain stipulations of looking after that dog and working with it. (Amber, 1446–1450)

Amber seems to recognise a *dual responsibility* of the owners for the guide dogs; they are not only to look after the guide dogs, but they are also expected to do so in particular ways to fulfil certain external standards. According to Amber and Cathy, guide dog owners have to sign an agreement with the organization when they complete the partnership training and become qualified. The agreement defines certain responsibilities of the individuals, such as the amount (and type) of food and exercise they should provide for the guide dog. That is, the caring commitment of an owner is not just for the guide dog but for the organization as well. Maybe it

is this additional layer of commitment that is at play in Amber's uncertainty about the resemblance between taking on a guide dog and caring for a child ('it's not like a child, is it').

As the most seasoned professional in the group, Shawn provides the most readily observed reference to the analogy of guide dogs as kids/teenagers and the owners as parents. In the following excerpt, Shawn recounts what he explained to his trainees about the guide dog–person relationship:

You know when you think about being a parent, when your when they're very dependent on you and then they, and it's lovely and they're beautiful and then they suddenly become teenagers overnight, and you go wow, 'who is this?' You know. Um however much you love them there is shock there, so you say, you know, I talk about that how do you deal with these teenagers, 'I'll just go out, they're horrible', or, 'I try and sit down and talk to them', or 'I shout at them,' whatever it might be, and you get over it, and then you, you're loved by them again, um and that's sort of what happens with the dog. (Shawn, 1031–1039)

Shawn sees an unfolding cycle of the relationship between the person and the guide dog, wherein the guide dog changes along this course (e.g. dependent child, difficult teenager) along with the owners' experience. In foregrounding the dynamic nature of the guide dog–person relationship to his trainees, Shawn seems to implicitly invoke a sense of responsibility and commitment of the owners that is broader than mere caregiving. For Shawn, just like a parent who is responsible and committed to their child, a responsible owner would not forgo the dog or the relationship when things become difficult but would be willing and committed to work through challenges.

As noted at the beginning of this section, it is only in the context of considering the caring side of the guide dog–person relationship that the professionals consistently referenced the guide dog as being like a child. This seems to illuminate something about the group collectively. Why is it a child, not a sibling or a friend, that most professionals associate with guide dogs in terms of the person's caring responsibility? The child-like status that the professionals consistently recognize in the guide dog might reflect how they find the needs of the guide dog as being *authentic, pressing, and irresistible*, like those of a child, and how the guide dogs are not to be taken for granted. These professionals perceive an *intrinsic necessity* in the caring response, irrespective to the utility function that the guide dogs serve in their capacity as *working animals*. The owner (or professional) is *naturally obligated* to care for the guide dog, just like one expects a human parent to care for a child.

Chapter 6. Study One: Discussion

This study is the first part of a project that seeks to understand the relationship between the guide dog and the visually impaired person living in the United Kingdom. The present study focused on the perspective of specialized professionals – OMSs and GDMIs – working in the guide dog service; it aimed to examine how the professionals make sense of the role of the guide dog, the person/owner and the nature of their association. What has emerged, as demonstrated in the analysis, is a view of the guide dog partnership as a complex phenomenon in which the role and duty of each member appear neither singular nor fixed. This complexity shows itself through the undercurrents of *tension* and *dynamicity* woven into the professionals' accounts, wherein seemingly conflicting meanings of the guide dog–person unit were perceived, assigned and held as co-existing, often unproblematically, by the professionals.

The discussion will focus on the paradox-laden nature of professionals' views towards guide dogs in more detail, and will consider the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature. As commented in Chapter 3, academic work reporting the views of guide dog professionals is scant. The literature drawn upon in this chapter includes some studies examined in Chapter 3 and additional literature sought in light of this study's findings.

The chapter is sectioned around the main areas that best highlight the ambivalent views of the OMSs and GDMIs, including: the guide dogs' minded action, the issue of control, and the affective dimension of the guide dog–person unit.

The minded action of guide dogs

The working capacity of the guide dogs emerged as an important object of concern in the interviews with the OMSs and GDMIs. In this context, the professionals often made reference to something internal in the guide dogs, namely the dogs' mental states and thinking, when describing or explicating their working performance. Across the interviews, the professionals' accounts depicted the guide dogs as experiencing a certain level of reasoning, acting purposively, being aware of themselves as having control over their actions and their relation to the social and physical surroundings. But on the individual level, variations existed in how the professionals understood or communicated the nature or the level of complexity of the conscious action of the guide dogs. For instance, the mindedness has been qualified as

primitive, linear and resulting from behaviorist conditioning (Leonard: 'food, prey, pay are the three big motivators') on the one hand, and as associated with a higher, human-like mental state like conscience or empathy (Amber: 'they go " oh gosh, what have I done"') on the other hand.

In foregrounding professionals as regarding the guide dogs as minded beings, this study presents an orientation that is distinct from the broader academic discourse, which has been wary of or has shied away from accounts that allude to the presence of abilities like thoughtful intention or self-awareness in nonhuman animals (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Schilhab, 2002). Influenced by Christian theology, Cartesian philosophy and the behavioristic operationalism of the modern times, the traditional narrative sees mental phenomena as uniquely human; to speak of nonhuman animals with mentalistic language is to commit the categorical mistake of *anthropomorphism* and to fall short of being scientifically objective or sound (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Fudge, 2002; Schilhab, 2002). Indeed, a trace of this traditional perspective can be detected in Murphy's research (1988). Murphy's study voiced the stance that saw the overlap between the existing terms used in assessing guide dogs' behaviors/demeanor with those used for human temperaments (e.g. 'confidence', 'willingness') as being potentially misleading and exposing the professional work to subjective (biased) interpretation (p.164). Correspondingly, the responses of the Australian guide dog trainers participating in the study were elicited in (and restricted to) the form of precise descriptors or expressions of observable, quantifiable physical behaviors of the dogs.

The level of investment that the professionals from the present study showed in the mentality of guide dogs strikes a chord with a small but growing number of psychological researchers concerned with whether and how lay people perceive the mental lives of nonhuman animals (e.g. Herzog & Galvin, 1997; Knight et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2012; Rasmussen et al., 1993). In this context, past research suggests that most respondents believed animals to be capable of thinking and feeling to varying degrees, but not necessarily in the way that humans are. The reports also highlighted the potency of peoples' 'belief in animal mind' (BAM, Hills, 1995) in accounting for the variation of individuals' attitude towards animal use; BAM exhibits a stronger (and negative) correlation with perception of animal use than factors such as gender and age (Herzog & Galvin, 1997; Knight & Barnett, 2008; Knight et al., 2004).

However, previous psychological investigation has tended to adopt a more general approach, such as examining participants' attribution of the mental states of different kinds of animals at once or analyzing statistical patterns across participants' responses for variables underlying

people's perceptions of the animal mind. It was also the case that many previous studies resorted to quantitative design (e.g. Herzog & Galvin, 1997; Martens et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2012; Rasmussen et al., 1993) which arguably tended to limit the opportunity for participants to express how they perceive and make sense of the mental life of animal beings as freely and fully as possible. On the contrary, the finding reported by the present study is much more specific; it provided a glimpse of how a *particular* group of individuals (i.e. OMSs and GDMIs at Guide Dogs UK) perceived the mindfulness of a *particular* type of animal (i.e. guide dogs). The inductive and detail-oriented nature of the methodology chosen in this study also drove the study to bring forth more depth and nuances in the ways that animals could present as minded beings in people's professional lives. For instance, we saw how the guide dog emerged from the professionals' account as having some form of *self-awareness*; with the capacity to orient her-/him-/itself *relationally*; and with the abilities of *independent learning* and *creative problem solving*.

Each professional contributed uniquely to this study by illustrating distinct aspects of the animal mind as they perceived or experienced them. Findings from the psychological literature have suggested multiple variables which are associated with variation in people's beliefs in the animal mind, such as gender, age and past experience with the animal (Knight et al., 2008; Herzog & Galvin, 1997; Morris et al., 2012). While professionals of both genders were included in this study, gender distinction did not emerge as a prominent aspect in the interview and analysis processes. In accordance with previous research (Morris, 2012; Rakecki et al., 1999), it was noted that Amber and Shawn – who had the longest experience of direct involvement with the guide dogs and the owners – described the guide dogs as exhibiting complex, human-like mental endowment in a more frequent and elaborated manner than others. For instance, they spoke of the guide dogs as experiencing a sense of *guilt*; as claiming personal autonomy (Shawn: 'it's often about the dog saying "make me'[...] in some respect we all do it don't we').

As Knight et al. (2008) called into question the relatively straightforward, unidimensional view that prior psychological research has tended to portray of people's attitude toward animals, there appeared to be a certain element of tension or incongruence immanent in how the professionals perceived the minded status of guide dogs in relation to their working capacity. For the professionals, the minded presence of guide dogs appeared to be a *double-edged sword*, something that could be both a positive and a negative attribute of the dogs. One could locate instances in the interview of the same professional suggesting that the mental ability of the guide dogs could in some situations drive or enhance their action for the benefit of their human companions, but in other situations could be an inherent source of uncertainty that

could hinder their productivity as an assistive animal (Cathy: 'They are brilliant animals, but at the end of the day it's a dog, it would go to the park').

The particular ways that the professionals regard the guide dogs were relatable to the American guide dog trainers studied by the sociologist Sanders (1999). As Sanders noted, while the trainers generally perceived their canine trainees as experiencing some level of mental life, the minded status of the dog was also an object of concern about which they expressed the most ambivalent, incongruent views. On the one hand, Sanders' trainers' responses often featured a behaviorist undertone that was inclined to explain dogs' minded action as a simple response of operant conditioning or primal instinct. On the other hand, as Sanders observed, often when the trainers' account was referring to a *specific* dog, the behaviorist overtone gave way to expressions and descriptions that portrayed the dog as a unique subject with rather complex mental content (e.g. manipulation).

Interestingly, unlike in Sanders' study, the behaviorist thinking that underpinned the traditional field of dog training did not emerge as a prominent schema through which the participants in this study made sense of the minded perspective of the guide dogs (with the exception of Leonard). Indeed, for the two mobility specialists (Cathy, Oliva) in this study, canine behavior and training were simply not the areas of focus in their pre-service qualification. Nonetheless, the difference in background did not seem to exempt the professionals from contradictions or tension in their views of the minded perspective of the guide dog. Just as the guide dogs could be perceived by Sanders' trainers as both mentally limited 'automatons' and as beings with independent, intelligent thinking, their mental facility could be perceived by the specialists and instructors from Guide Dogs UK as both enabling and undermining the dogs' capacity to work.

The issue of control

There seemed to be more than one way in which control was perceived by the professionals as an important aspect of the guide dog–person unit. As the analysis highlighted, many professionals have drawn on two distinctive modes of being in describing the guide dog. The guide dog in the *working mode* was typically qualified as being focused, responsible and well-behaved, whereas the *off-duty mode* featured the dog 'reverting' back to her/his/its natural comportment of uncontrolled behaviors and tendencies (Cathy: 'it's gonna go stone crazy, it's gonna be bouncing off your walls'). The guide dogs, as perceived by the professionals, were engendered from an antagonistic combination of the discipline of training and the wildness of nature.

The professionals' understanding of the guide dogs resembled closely that of the 'K-9' trainers and officers working with dogs in the law enforcement context (Sanders, 2006). Central in Sanders' study was the 'liminal character' (p.165) of the patrol dog as perceived and constructed by the K-9 staff. The ideal patrol dog is one who demonstrates an adequate canine instinct of predation and aggression, yet who must be malleable enough to the obedience training to be deployed like a 'predicable and machinelike' (p.167) weapon in the field, as well as be incorporated into the family and community settings as a pet-like socialized companion. The similarity is evident; both the guide dog professionals and the K9 staff regarded their canine trainee/partners as straddling an uneasy continuum; being pulled by the propensity of wild, disruptive, dangerous behaviors on the one hand, and being guided by their trained attributes of obedience, security and friendliness on the other.

The shift from the off-duty mode to the working mode was often depicted by the guide dog professionals as happening spontaneously and instantaneously. Yet this apparent stability might be rather flimsy, since there were also instances in the interview which communicated an indelible sense of the risk or threat of the guide dog being overtaken by its wild nature. Sanders has made similar observations of the K-9 staff, for whom the patrol dogs evoke 'an ever-present concern' (p.167). The comments made by the participants from the two studies can be seen as mirroring one another; both encapsulate a lingering vigilance of the danger of instinct breaking through.

Amber: They revert to being young bouncy boisterous run about, crazy things type of dogs, so you've got to be careful, um, that side of things (184-191).

K-9 handler: You have to be careful. You have to keep in mind that, no matter how well trained the dog, is, it is still a wolf. It's always a little unpredictable (Sanders, 2006, p.166).

That said, as noted in the analysis, the characteristic that was expressed by Leonard alone as the salient attribute of guide dogs was their innate potential of having their behaviors modified or shaped through external means. The guide dogs, in a way, emerged as raw beings calling for human intervention (Leonard: 'the dog is very much, just being a dog, you know, it's responding to whatever is going on'). On the first look, Leonard's response appeared to stand at odds with other participants of the group, for whom the guide dogs' potential uncontrollability was an aspect of concern. But one could suggest that the distinction was actually limited. In conceiving the guide dogs as creatures whose wild nature could break through at any time, other professionals in this study (as well as Sanders' K-9 staff) have similarly associated guide dogs with the need of human attention and intervention to bring things under control or in certain order.

That the need for control emerged as a potential higher order element may not be a novel or unexpected observation, however. The narrative that Western society has constructed of the history of human relationships with animals is one that is marked by our transition to domestication (Ingold, 1994; Wilkie, 2005). Central to this paradigm of domestication, as anthropologist Tim Ingold (1994) noted, was the notion of appropriating, or actively controlling and transforming, other species (animals, plants) belonging to the physical world, and the eventual separation or ascent of humankind from the realm of nature.

To Sanders, the mixed feelings of danger and control with which the K-9 staff regarded the patrol dogs were interpreted in part as a form of 'sociological ambivalence' (Merton, 1976, as cited in Sanders, 2006), in that he argued that the very process of the K9 training has constructed and reconstructed the patrol dogs so that they occupied contradictory social roles – they were 'object-weapon', 'friendly reliably partner', 'family companion' and 'public relation asset' (Sanders, 2006, p.150). In light of this view, the guide dog–person mobility might present as a similar situation in which certain 'structurally induced ambivalence' has been built (Wilkie, 2005). As noted, the professionals have highlighted the cooperative nature of the joint mobility between the person and the guide dog. The duo was described as a 'piolet and driver' team, operating on a '50-50' split of the responsibility for the travel: the person takes charge of direction and traffic assessment, and the guide dog takes the lead in obstacle detection and avoidance.

In essence, to accomplish the joint mobility, the person and the guide dog are both expected to alternate between the positions of leader and follower, between control and submission. As such, as the seasoned GDMI like Shawn emphasized, the competent guide dog will feature both obedience and independence in a balanced state. To handle juggling the two opposing roles that are built into the joint mobility, the dog is expected to take orders from the person in one instance, and then to initiate independent plans and action in the next instance (Shawn: 'too much obedience, the dog then says, "well, I don't know how to cope, he hasn't told me what to do", I want the dog to actually say "it's alright I know what I am doing"').

Interestingly, most professionals have identified the interactive dynamic of the joint mobility as a particularly difficult aspect for the guide dog owners. More specifically, it was the part of following the dog's guidance that deterred the owner; this challenge was often referred by the professionals as the need of 'putting' one's 'trust/confidence' in the guide dog. From the professionals' descriptions, trusting the guide dog is a metaphor for relinquishing one's control

(Olivia: 'they're putting their safety and, everything else, in that dog, you know, they're taking their chances'). Furthermore, by taking on the perspective of the other, the professionals came to recognize the potential predicament faced by visually impaired owners when out and about with their guide dogs. Relinquishing control and relying on another can be inherently unsettling, but the owners have to do so when they are simultaneously deprived of many other sources of certainty— not being able to effectively track/monitor the responses of their canine guide (Amber: 'The dog is avoiding the obstacles without you even knowing it a lot of time'), of their relation with the physical surroundings (Leonard: 'it's scary, going out'), whilst engaging in the form of embodiment that, as Olivia and Cathy highlighted, features a more fluid and less bodily 'anchored' contact with the physical world (e.g. ground, wall) than what the visually impaired travellers would intuitively feel more secure with (Olivia: 'they like to feel attached to something').

Given the centrality that the professionals placed on the complication of trust and sharing control when considering the guide dog-aided mobility, it is intriguing that there has been very limited coverage of the relevant issues provided by the existing academic writings. Though published practical guides have described owners with higher level of residual vision as being more prone to 'a battle of control' with the guide dog (e.g. Milligan, 1998, p.76), the topic was mentioned only in passing; it is only in the present study that the need for control and trust is thematized in detail and illuminated as a complicated phenomenon.

The affective dimension of the guide dog-person unit

While guide dogs are bred, selected, and trained to provide mobility assistance and support for people living with sight loss, all the professionals recognized and spoke about dimensions of the guide dog-person union that are ground in more of an affective concern than an instrumental one. These dimensions were thematized in this study under the subjects of *companionship* and the person's *caring responsibility* for the guide dog.

In these contexts, the professionals' accounts shed light on attitudes towards the partnership between guide dog and person that were distinct but also complementary to their stances in making sense of the team in their working capacity. Notably, the human-animal boundary was made more permeable. The analysis captured the professionals referring to the guide dogs as 'buddy', 'friend', and 'mate' and describing their presence as one with whom the person/owner can feel a genuine intersubjective sense of connection that is as emotionally rewarding and psychologically significant as that with a fellow human being.

Shawn: [...] it's not just about walking; it's about, sort of, them as a person

Interviewer: The dog as a person

Shawn: Person and a person

Interviewer: Person and a person

Shawn: Yeah. So, both (Shawn, 1280-1290).

In a different context, the professionals all spontaneously shifted the guide dogs to the status of a human child when speaking of them as the recipient of care from the owner. The specificity of the reference suggested a possible view wherein the guide dogs are recognized as being more than just 'a means to an end' whose essence lies in serving human needs; rather, they are seen as 'unique beings, existential other in their own right' (Spannring, 2015, p. 617) who warrant respect and moral/ethical consideration by the humans who have shaped and continue to shape the ontological condition of the guide dog.

That being said, the status of guide dog and her/his/its association with a person could at times be too elusive to be pinned down in terms of the dichotomized categories of human vs. animal that we take as the *given* aspects of ordinary life. As commented in the analysis, to Olivia, this was the case when she tried to articulate how she feel about an owner that she is acquainted with. The owner and his dog, as Olivia expressed, are neither 'a person and an animal' nor a human and a human; the division becomes null, as they are simply 'two halves of one thing', 'two parts of a jigsaw puzzle'.

Indeed, instances of other professionals' accounts reflected that the guide dog's recognized status as intrinsically valued and as a sentient being might also be somewhat conditional. The professionals spoke of how the guide dog's intersubjective presence as a companion may not be experientially separable from her/his/its instrumental presence to the human partner. As Leonard said, 'you can't separate the two, because that companionship happens during the work as well'. Yet, some of their responses also outlined a *professional/organizational view* that seemed to only take the functional purpose as the legitimate meaning of what the guide dog is and what the union between guide dog and person is for. As Cathy expressed, 'we would not give somebody a guide dog just for companionship'.

It was not just that the guide dog's identity as a companion appeared as secondary, optional, and hence displaceable; so was their status as a recipient of emotional care. As demonstrated in some of interviews, the guide dogs were perceived by the professionals as sentient beings with a genuine need for affection and the right to be kept from emotional adversity in one moment, and then as mindless animals in another – merely a mobility tool whose emotional experience is

potentially dispensable or a wishful projection of ourselves onto the dogs. The contradiction is particularly strong when these accounts are placed side by side.

Cathy: 'they're used to being with people a lot, so they're more susceptible to separation anxiety than an average pet dog' (1211-1215)

Leonard: 'you're dealing with two, sentient beings there. You're dealing with a dog and the person. You have to make sure both of them are happy, confident, and not stressed' (156-159)

Cathy: 'I would want to put it under the table and forget about it and just, you know, it's a working dog you forget about the dog as best as you can' (66-68)

Leonard: 'do they feel that [...] you can see what, how they respond to things, but, exactly what emotions they are experiencing is difficult to be sure of without anthropomorphizing, so humanizing their responses (821-825)'

The meanings that professionals perceived of the guide dog (and the guide dog–person unit) are multiple, diverse, and fluid. While the guide dogs are grounded in a functional identity, their sentient nature can at times come forth and they can be viewed as a subject of affective interaction and care. However, that shift can also be short-lived, ready to be recalibrated as the perceivers resume a more *professional, instrumental* outlook. The stance of the guide dog professionals seemed to resemble a form of 'concerned attachment' that Wilkie (2005) qualified as the typical manner in which the Scottish hobby farmers in her study related to their livestock. Wilkie (2005) observed that, while the hobby farmers recognized and interacted with their animals individually and treated them as sentient beings, they would often be ready shift to a more detached, commercially minded attitude to 'recommodify' their animal charges in response to changes in their financial or personal circumstances at any time.

Just like the guide dogs who are held as mobility aids *and* companions, these livestock animals emerged as what Wilkie ingeniously referred to as 'sentient commodities'. One may suggest that the paradoxical orientation taken by the guide dog professionals and the hobby farmers toward animals qualifies as a textbook example of the uncomfortable psychological state of 'cognitive dissonance' that demands attention from the individuals (Festinger, 1975, as cited in Knight & Barnett, 2008). Indeed, as Wilkie noted, not all hobby farmers found it emotionally easy to reconcile and recompute their animals.

This also seemed to be the case for Amber, who explicitly expressed her uneasiness ('it is hard', 'challenging') when working with owners whose interest was primarily in the functional mobility dimension than in the socio-affective ones. As suggested in the analysis, Amber's feeling of it being 'hard' could be understood as a form of conflict between what she *personally* conceived and *professionally* accepted as the adequate emotional input of an owner for the guide dog. Personally, as a dog lover, Amber indicated that she would 'want all dogs to have lots, of, lots of

lovely attention'. Yet, as a professional member of an organization that does not require its clients to be a dog lover in order to be a service user, Amber's hands are tied.

This tension between the personal and the professional seems to relate to Arluke's (1994) observations about staff in an animal shelter that practices euthanasia. There, Arluke commented, the staff acquired a 'second self' (p. 188), an institutional/professional self, in order to bracket and secure their everyday personal self, and to adopt a more detached or regulated sensibility towards the animals under their care. But just like Arluke's participants, whose everyday feeling and thinking about animals still leaked into their professional perspective at times and therefore roused uneasiness, Amber's *dog lover-self* encroached her work experience at times and sensitised the circumstances in which the guide dogs were paired up with owners who were less emotionally responsive than Amber would personally prefer.

However, for many other guide dog professionals in the present study, the tension and conflict that were embedded in their views often did not appear to them as something conspicuous or unsettling; this is an observation that matches closely to that of Sanders (1999) in his study of American guide dog trainers:

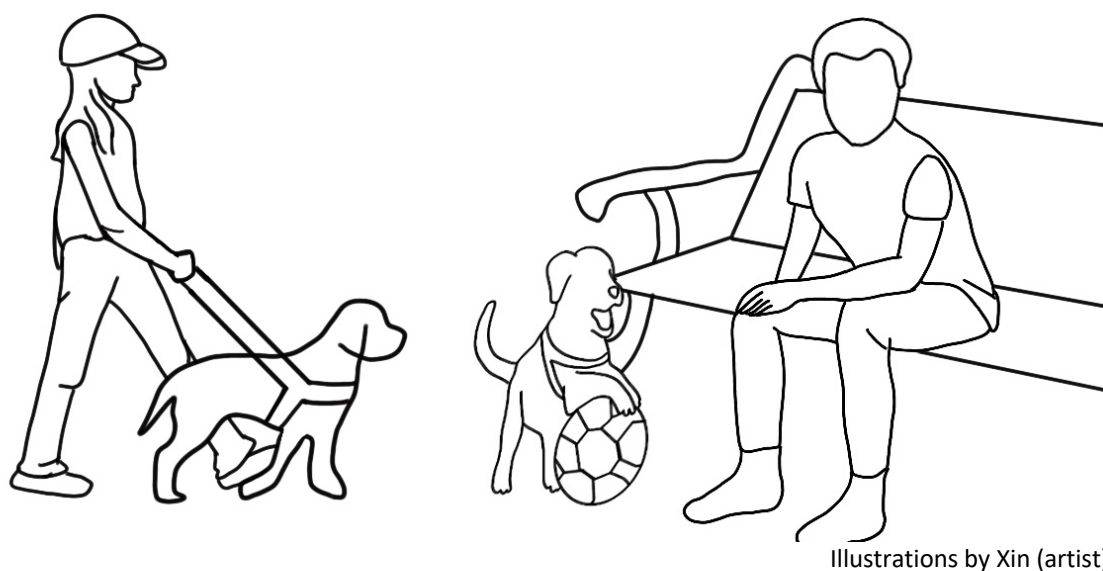
It was only when I confronted them directly with the apparent contradiction in the field conversations or interviews that the potential problem moved to the perceptual foreground (Sanders, 1999, p.109).

Indeed, except the work led by Sanders and his fellow sociologists, the element of ambivalence has rarely been positioned as a relevant topic in the extant literature on human-animal relation broadly (Arluke & Sanders, 1996); the same could be said about research focusing on the guide dog-person partnership.

The unconcerned response of the guide dog trainers is, however, understandable. As Sanders (1999) noted, the practice involved in the guide dog service is largely benign, especially when compared to those associated with the processes of animal experimentation and commercial livestock production (Arluke, 1988; Fudge, 2002). More fundamentally, the trainers' taken-for-grantedness may simply reflect their situatedness in the broader Western socio-cultural context that has a long and successful history of operating concurrently with conflicting attitudes towards animal-beings that cast them as an instrumentally valued *object* on one hand and as a sentient *subject* with whom to have a relationship on the other hand (Sanders, 1999, p. 108; for a detailed account of this history, see e.g. Fudge, 2002; Manning & Serpell, 1994). That is, our 'ordinary ambivalence' towards animals, as Arluke and Sander contend, 'is a sign that social forces must be working successfully' (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p.5).

Nonetheless, the tension seems to be there, embedding quietly in places ranging from our everyday practices and discourse (Fudge, 2002) to the instructional writing produced to train and prepare guide dog professionals (Frank et al., 2010a; Pemberton, 2019). In our everyday life, we take some animal beings as human best friends with whom to form a close bond, whilst feeling comfortable using the others for food at the dinner table or for invasive medical research wherein we see the promise of important benefits to our own (Fudge, 2002; Knight & Barnet, 2008). In the field of guide dogs, these specially trained dogs are seen in the capacities of mobility aid and sentient companion. They are perceived as an object and a subject, like and not like us, a being to control and rely on. It is only when we stand back and look more closely and deeply at the ways we make sense of and relate to animals, they start to reappear to us, as Fudge (2002) described, 'less and less straightforward, and many assumptions that have become wholly naturalized in our cultures are made strange' (p. 11).

Study Two: The Guide Dog Owner's Perspective



Illustrations by Xin (artist)

Chapter 7. Method

The focus of Study 2 turned to the guide dog owners; as they are the ones who have the most direct experience and spend the most time with a guide dog, their perspectives constitute the core in understanding the partnership in this thesis. Study 2 focuses on a particular subgroup of guide dog owners – the first-time owners who were new to the guide dog service. As the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 shows, only one U.S.-based study in the literature corpus specifically focused on the first partnership (Li et al., 2019); in most cases, owners with different amounts of partnership experience were recruited and examined collectively within a single study.

Study 2 asked, ‘What is it like to travel with and care for a guide dog for a first-time owner?’ Included in this broad question is a concern about how the owners perceive (a) the role of their guide dogs in both the working mode and the off-duty mode of the partnership; (b) how they experience themselves differently as individuals through the partnership, and how they construe their new selves.

Specifically, the study aims to present a more holistic account of first-time partnership that is sensitive to the different dimensions of experiences that are salient to the owners, be that social, embodied, cognitive, affective, or contextual. The study also aims to foreground the manners and meaning elements through which the owners try to figure out what has happened to them/their lives. The study will strive for an analysis that is participant-oriented and interpretatively engaged to explore potentially latent aspects of the participant’s experiential perspective. To this end, Study 2 followed the previous study and carried out the processes of data collection and analysis in accordance with the IPA approach.

Sampling Strategy

The purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit a group of 16 to 20 guide dog owners in this study. Guide Dogs’ record indicated there were about 4,800 guide dog owners active in the United Kingdom when this study was conducted (Guidedogs.org.uk, 2016). A possible sample profile was delineated to help identify a subgroup of guide dog owners for recruitment who were relatively accessible and whose accounts could address the particular analytic aims of this

study. [Table 11](#) provides an overview of the criteria and specifications proposed in defining the sample homogeneity and relevance for this study.

Table 11. Sample criteria for Study 2

Criteria:	Specification:
The number of guide dogs the owners have had a partnership with	Guide dog owners who are currently living with their first guide dog
The number of years they have been in their first partnership	Owners in the first year ('novice') and owners in the second or later years ('seasoned') in their current partnership
Area of residence	Greater London
Age and gender	Male and female owners in middle age (40s–60s)
Additional disabilities and/or major health issues	Without current additional disabilities or major health issues.

- **The number of guide dogs the owners have had a partnership with:**

As stated, this study was dedicated to understanding the experiences of individuals who were living with a guide dog for the very first time. This factor was therefore the central source of sample homogeneity for this study. Owners who had had a partnership experience with multiple guide dogs were not included.

- **The number of years they have been in their first partnership:**

The working life of a guide is about seven to eight years, and from the descriptions of the professionals from Study 1, the first year was the 'critical year' when the relationship between the guide dog and the person was relatively under-established and unstable. Given the targeted sample size of this study of 16 to 20 participants, there seemed to be a space to include owners at different stages of their first partnership to make a possible analytic comparison within the study. I decided to aim for a study sample composed of both 'novice' first-time owners (who were still in the first critical year) and 'seasoned' first-time owners (who had progressed into the second or later years), with roughly eight to 10 owners in each category.

- **Area of residence:**

I decided to narrow down the potential sample pool to first-time owners located within the boroughs of Greater London. This decision was made on a more practical ground: the study's recruitment support at Guide Dogs had access to the contact information of London-based owners.

- **Age and Gender:**

As the literature reviewed indicated, the majority of guide dog owners in the United Kingdom were middle-aged (50s), were equally distributed across both genders, and did

not have major health issues or additional disabilities (e.g. Refson et al., 2001; Whitmarsh, 2005). Locally, Guide Dogs' in-house records showed that of the 307 active London-based owners, 145 of them were male and 149 were female; information on age was unavailable. Without specific information about the demographic status of active first-time owners, I decided in this study to select first-time owners with age and gender according to the 'typical profile' of U.K. guide dog owners. That is, the study aimed to recruit a sample of first-time owners in their 40s to 60s, with both genders represented equally. Variation in the gender dimension made it possible to attempt additional analytic comparison in the study.

- **Ethnicity:**

Only a few sources had described U.K. owners in terms of their ethnicity – the national survey (Whitmarsh, 2005) and the Guide Dogs' in-house records on London owners both identified White British as the dominant ethnic group among the owners. While there was no existing study investigating the perceptions of U.K. owners from different ethnic groups individually, other studies that examined guide dog partnership in countries like Singapore (Bohan & James, 2015), Japan (Koda et al., 2011) and Israel (Deshen & Desheh, 1988) reported observations suggesting that the partnership could have distinct meanings and manifestations to owners from different cultural backgrounds. In light of this, I decided to concentrate recruitment on first-time owners who were White British. However, this selection did not mean that the perspectives of owners from other ethnic groups were less important or interesting for research. Rather, from IPA's perspective, the potential distinctiveness of these views warranted undivided attention, which was more likely to be achieved in the context of a separate future study (Smith et al., 2009).

- **Additional disabilities and/or major health issues:**

As introduced, guide dogs are specifically trained to provide mobility support for people living with sight loss. In the United Kingdom, there are other forms of assistive dog service, each providing different support for individuals in different conditions (e.g. hearing dogs for people with hearing loss) (Audrestch et al., 2015). That is, the nature of an assistive dog partnership and the meaning it had to the individual might vary depending on the particular difficulties and needs experienced by the individual. In IPA, participants are included in a study because they have a similar experience of the targeted phenomenon and can therefore provide us potential access to a 'probable shared perspective' (Larkin et al., 2018). Thus, I decided to not include guide dog

owners who identified themselves as having additional disabilities and/or other major health issues.

That said, I was aware that even among guide dog owners without additional disabilities, variations existed in terms of the extent of their sight loss, from partial to complete. However, I decided not to include or exclude owners based on their specific vision status. In practice, no requirement was set by Guide Dogs UK that individuals needed to be registered as blind or partially sighted to be eligible to apply for the service, nor did they make any definite criteria in terms of the vision status of service candidates. Against this background, one might suggest that owners may find an academic study about guide dog partnership in which the eligibility for participation was based in part on how much the owners could or could not see as insensitive or offensive.

As with Study 1, the owners included in this study should be capable of and comfortable with completing a research interview in person where they would be asked to share and express their experiences and thoughts verbally. [Table 12](#) presents a view of the sample group targeted in Study 2 stratified by length of partnership experience and gender.

Table 12. Proposed sample group for Study 2 stratified by two variables: length of partnership experience and gender

Gender	Length of partnership	
	Less than or about one year ('Novice')	More than one year ('Seasoned')
Female	4–5	4–5
Male	4–5	4–5

Recruitment process

Working with a gatekeeper/proxy

As in Study 1, Dave, the engagement officer working on Guide Dogs' London team, provided support in recruiting guide dog owners for the second study. Per our arrangement, Dave would start by helping me to identify London owners on the service list who were close to the sample profile described above. He would then contact candidate owners directly. Following Dave's suggestion, I had put together a short recruitment message (Appendix 7) that summarized key points from the formal study informational sheet (Appendix 2) in more general, personal terms, which Dave could draw on when introducing the study to the owners. This message was made

accessible in both audio and text forms. With their permission, Dave passed the names and contact numbers of owners who might be interested in the study to me.

As reflected in the process described, Dave played a central role in the early part of the recruitment – he was the gatekeeper and the first point of contact with prospective participants. Such arrangement was associated with both advantages and complications, however. On the one hand, having Dave (someone well-known among local owners) make the initial contact with owners could help to avoid a sense of intrusion that some owners might feel if they were first sought out by someone unknown to them. This could be more pertinent to owners who were already concerned about being identified as visually impaired or as associating with certain social groups (Duckett & Pratt, 2001).

But, at the same time, by having Dave act as a proxy during recruitment, I had, in some way, subjected him to a situation wherein he might need to handle sensitive issues and ethical responsibilities that were my responsibility as the researcher (Duckett & Pratt, 2001). For instance, while Dave is an experienced guide dog owner himself, he also works at Guide Dogs. Given this, one might suggest that some prospective owners could see him as a representative of the service provider and could therefore feel pressure to participate in the study. Similarly, one might suggest that as a member of the organization's staff, Dave might feel pressure to source owners whose voices could add to the reputation and image of Guide Dogs.

These potential concerns were brought up and discussed with my supervisor before the recruitment work commenced. In light of this discussion and with a sense of rapport and respect that I felt had been forged in working with Dave for some time, I took the opportunity to convey my thoughts to Dave during one of my visits to his office. This exchange was casual, but it helped to clarify for Dave and me how the recruitment could be executed and helped us to reach a consensus.

The researcher's first contact with prospective participants

I first reached out to the candidate owners by calling them at the number Dave provided. When my call was answered, I would briefly introduce myself and ask the owners if it was okay with them if I took some time to describe the study and the form of participation (in one or two cases, the owners arranged for me to call back later). I would then explain to them that the main intention of my study is to attend to how being in the first guide dog partnership is like from the perspectives and words of the owners themselves; it is not about testing any kind of hypothesis or theories. The owners were informed that I would arrange a 60- to 90-minute-long

face-to-face interview with interested owners to learn more about their experiences in terms of the aided mobility and their off-duty, everyday care time with the guide dog. I would also describe the interview style in detail to the owners – the features were the same as in Study 1.

After this introduction, I would ask the owners if they had any concerns, or if there were any aspects of participation they wanted to know more about, such as how information gathered from them would be handled. One owner in this context asked about the potential implications of the study, and two others indicated they would like to know more about data management – each of these was attended and explained. In most cases, the owners indicated they were happy with the background information given at this point. At the same time, I would remind the owners they could contact me later for further questions or concerns, and I reassured them that the details and terms of their participation would be reviewed again on the interview day.

With these owners' permission, I took the end of this call as an opportunity to gather more information about their background (e.g. age, name of their guide dog, details of length of partnership experience, ethnicity).

Monitoring recruitment and reviewing sampling strategy

Recruiting participants is perhaps the most unpredictable aspect of research, as one cannot identify ahead of time or control all the factors that may shape the course and outcome of recruitment (Robinson, 2014). The recruitment of this study took off slowly; no progress was made in the first 3 months. That said, the process slowly picked up speed in the fourth month. By the end of the fifth month, I had gathered the contact information of 19 London-based first-time guide dog owners. I was able to make an introductory contact with and gather more background information from 18 of them. One owner remained unreachable throughout the entire process.

The sampling criteria were reviewed again with my supervisor as the profile of more and more prospective participants were obtained. The group of 18 prospective participants included equal numbers of female and male owners. Half of the group were considered 'novice' first-time owners (who had been with their guide dog for less than or about one year), the remaining half were 'seasoned' first-time owners (who were two or more years further down into the partnership). None of them identified themselves as having additional disabilities and/or major health issues at the time.

Upon closer review, it was noted that the group was slightly more heterogeneous than planned. The 18 potential cases ranged in age from 25 to 79, and two of them were a couple (in their 20s). There were slightly more female seasoned owners than males (5:4) and fewer female novice owners than males (4:5). In terms of ethnicity, the group included three prospective participants who described themselves as Indian British, one as Black British, and one who introduced herself as White and had moved from New Zealand to London a couple years ago; the other 13 owners identified themselves as White British.

I made the judgement that selection on ethnicity and cultural background could help to secure the sample homogeneity intended by this study without a drastic reduction of the final sample size. I contacted each of the five owners excluded again with an update on the recruitment arrangement and to express my gratitude for their interest and time. This led to a sample of 13 White British first-time guide dog owners. However, it was still the case that there were more female seasoned owners than males (5:2), and fewer female novice owners than males (2:4). Note that I also decided to include the guide dog owner couple at this stage for a potential case study separate from the main group. A more detailed view of the 13 first-time owners' profiles is presented in [Table 13](#).

Table 13. Participant background information: Guide dog owners

Owner's name (pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Guide dog's name (pseudonyms)	Length of the first partnership experience
Josslyn	Female	45	Jessa	3 years
Kandence	Female	79	Knox	6 years
Rosemary	Female	79	Rennie	5 years
Tanya	Female	65	Tess	4.5 years
Bridget	Female	44	Bruce	3 years
Lillian	Female	42	Lyla	2 months
Matthew	Male	42	Marco	13 months
William	Male	64	Walter	2–3 months
Henry	Male	54	Hank	6–7 months
Angus	Male	54	Archie	10 months
Drew	Male	33	Douglas	2.5 years
Eason*	Male	27	Erin	5 years
Emily*	Female	25	Erika	9 months

*Note: the guide dog owner couple

Ethics

Ethic approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck (Appendix 2).

Informing participants

All guide dog owners experience certain degree of sight loss, which has rendered reading an arduous (if not impossible) activity to them in many cases. In practice, this means that disseminating text-based material is likely not the most sensitive and effective means of communication when recruiting participants for this study. To ensure that the study information is made as readily accessible as possible to the visually impaired owners as to the sighted professionals, there were three specific timepoints wherein the condition of research participation was introduced, explained, or clarified for the owner-participants using means of communication that were audio-based and more direct/personal.

- **First point: Gatekeeper's phone call**

The study was first introduced to the owners by the recruitment gatekeeper (Dave) through a phone call, with the information included in the general recruitment message (Appendix 7) described above. In this context, the owners would learn about the aim of the study and what they could anticipate from attending the interview, as detailed in the previous study. This introductory message also assured the owners that key personal identifiable information would be altered in the study to protect the participant's anonymity.

- **Second point: Researcher's phone call**

The second informational point occurred when I directly contacted the owners as the researcher during the recruitment process. In addition to introducing the study's aim and interview involvement to the owners in more detail, I took time to attend to any questions that they might have thought of since receiving the first recruitment contact. The owners were also offered the option of receiving a copy of the study information sheet in the form (audio or text) and method of delivery (post or email) of their choice – one owner took up the offer and retained an audio copy through email.

- **Third point: Interview day**

This step was taken at the beginning of the scheduled interview day. Before commencing the interview, I verbally went through the content of each of the main sections discussed in the study information sheet (Appendix 2) with the owners. An oral script (Appendix 8) was prepared to help me present the information in a manner that was less detached than conventional academic discourse and closer to an everyday conversational exchange between two people. In practice, I checked in with the owners for any concerns or feedback they might have at various points. I hoped that this could

help the owners feel that the process was more like a joint event rather than one wherein they were simply a passive respondent (Duckett & Pratt, 2001).

Obtaining consent

After the informational procedure described above, verbal consent was sought from the owners on the day of the interview. In practice, this was done by having the owners provide their verbal response to the question: '*[Participant's name], are you willing to take part in my PhD research project on guide dog partnership?*' All owner-participants provided their verbal consent. With the owners' prior permission, the process of informed consent was audio recorded on the interview day; in each case, the owner was informed when the recorder was turned on and off.

Interview – revisit ethical considerations

As noted in Study 1, an IPA-informed interview typically involves the participant providing accounts that focus on their personal experiences – on things that matter to them in certain ways (Smith et al., 2009). At times, this process might become more emotionally laden to the participants than they desire (Finlay, 2011). This potential issue was one of the key topics covered as I verbally went through the study information sheet with the owners before the interview commenced.

Arguably, one could suggest that an interview that focuses on the guide dog partnership would be closer to home to the owners than to the professionals. This was the case in the interview with one of the novice owners, Henry. The emotional context of this interview was largely positive, with Henry being relatively expressive and generous in sharing his personal story. However, this flow unexpectedly broke later in the interview; I noticed an unusually long pause Henry took while he was telling me about his encounter with a blind psychologist (and a guide dog owner) to whom he was referred for general emotional support for sight loss about 30 years ago. I did not know how to interpret the pause at first, but Henry communicated to me by pointing to his eyes, indicating tear drops, and it was then that I realized that he was emotionally affected by this recollection. Instead of stepping in right away to ask him if he wanted to stop the interview, I decided to hold my response at the immediate moment as a way to provide the space and time that Henry might need, without making him feel like he was being over-protected. Nonetheless, Henry gradually picked up his words again and refocused on the present to discuss the emotional support he feels from his guide dog, Hank. I followed Henry's lead and invited him to talk more about his positive experience with Hank. [Figure 17](#) below presents the transcript extract for this particular moment featured in Henry's interview.

Figure 17. Example of ethical consideration in interview: Extract from Henry's interview

H: Um, she was, kind of giving me her story of, how she lost her sight, which I found very overwhelming and challenging or whatever. Um, she had a guide dog, with her, her Labrador, um, while she was talking to me, I wept, into her guide dog, I don't know if she knew I was crying, on the dog [long pause] [H pointed to his eyes to indicate tears dropped]. I was very grateful for that dog [I: mhm] [long pause] And, I am very grateful for the dog that I have, hahaha

I: so there is the, emotional support

H: yeah, definitely, definitely I think...yes, yes, if anything, perhaps that's, that's the greatest, aspect of it

I: the emotional part

H: yeah, yeah, definitely

I: so how would you like, as a kind of a, describe that sense of being emotionally supported by Hank

H: oh, that's a great question. Um. Yes, because, because, you know what I said to you [...]

Although I had the information for the hotline services¹³ that could direct the owners to resources for emotional support, should they need it, I did not feel that it was necessary in this context. The interview was emotionally charged for Henry at one point, but, as suggested, this seemed to be temporary. The meeting ended with a positive note; we briefly chatted after the interview, where Henry asked me about my study progress and future plans. I felt assured when I departed, knowing that he was not left alone in the house but with the company of his wife and Hank.

Data Collection

As in Study 1, an in-person semi-structured interview was adopted as the method of data collection for this study. Of the 13 first-time guide dog owners recruited, 11 of them were interviewed on a one-to-one basis, while a joint interview was conducted with the young owner couple.

This chapter focuses on recounting the 11 individual interviews. This presentation in no way suggests that conducting a joint interview was identical to an individual interview (e.g. Larossa et al., 1981; Taylor & de Vocht, 2011; Zarhin, 2018). Rather, the presentation reflects the judgment made after completing the analyses of the 11 individual interviews that the time constraint and researcher manpower at the time could no longer support the intended plan of analysing the joint interview accounts of the owner couple separately for an additional case study in the project.

¹³ I had identified two agencies – the Blue Cross and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) – with hotline services that could provide or refer guide dog owners to emotional support for issues specific to guide dogs and sight loss, respectively.

Interview schedule

I devised a set of questions and prompts that focus on eliciting in-depth, personal accounts from the guide dog owners, following the same principles detailed in the previous study. To check the potential relevance of questions generated, I asked the professionals from Study 1 if they could provide feedback on the draft schedule. All three professionals that I approached at the end of their interview kindly reviewed the draft and indicated that the questions listed were relevant to the owners.

As [Figure 18](#) shows, the schedule consists of three parts. It first focuses on building a more contextual view of the owners as individuals by inviting them to share a general story of their life before acquiring the guide dog service. The second part of the schedule includes questions that target the owner's experience in walking with the guide dog, which was then followed by questions that asked about owners' relationships with guide dogs outside of the working/walking time. As in the previous study, questions that were more analytic or potentially sensitive to the owners (e.g. focusing on their sense of self) were scheduled to be attempted later in the conversation, when the owners were more at ease with the interview dynamic.

Figure 18. Interview schedule : Guide dog owners

<p><u>I. Background information</u></p> <p>1. Could you also tell me a little bit about how you came to decide to apply for a guide dog?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: Did you speak to someone when making the decision to apply for a guide dog? <p><u>II. Mobility experience with the guide dog</u></p> <p>2. Could you tell me about what it was like when you first walked with [dog's name] on the 'matching day'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: What was that 'test walk' like compared to your previous mobility experience (e.g., unaided, cane-aided mobility)? <p>3. How would you describe yourself and [dog's name] when you two are walking together (e.g., the kinds of travel tasks/responsibilities each of you has)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: How would you describe the things that are important for you to have a smooth or successful walk with [dog's name]? • Prompt: Could you describe an instance when the walking experience with [dog's name] was not that smooth? <p>4. Has your experience of travelling with [dog's name] changed over time? If so, in what ways?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: How would you compare your early experience of travelling with [dog's name] (e.g., on 'matching day' or in 'partnership training') to your experience of walking with him/her now? <p>5. How do you think/feel about yourself as you come to travel more and more with [dog's name]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: How would you feel or think differently about yourself if you had not acquired the guide dog mobility? • Prompt: How would you describe your relationship with other people (e.g., family, friends, the general public) after acquiring the guide dog mobility? <p>6. In thinking of the future, is there any aspect of your mobility experience with [dog's name] that you want to change?</p> <p>7. How do you think or feel about your travelling environments (e.g., built structure, public attitude) as a guide dog user/owner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: From your experience of walking with [dog's name], is there any aspect of the environment that you find supportive or challenging, or are there any other aspects of your travelling environment that you would want to address (e.g., issues like pavement condition, access refusal)? <p><u>III. The 'off-duty' aspect of the guide dog unit</u></p> <p>8. Could you tell me a bit about what you thought taking care of a guide dog would be like before [dog's name] came to stay with you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: Could you describe the sort of things that you do to take care of [dog's name]? • Prompt: Does anyone help you with this care side of things? <p>9. What is it like for you to take care of [dog's name]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: How is your experience of taking care of [dog's name] similar or different from what you had anticipated it would be like? <p>10. How do you think or feel about the interaction or relationship between you and [dog's name] when he/she is 'not on duty' (i.e., not guiding)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: Could you describe the sorts of activities that you and [dog's name] do to relax or have fun together when he/she is not 'on duty'? • Prompt: If you are to describe, what are the main differences between the working mode and off-duty mode of the relationship between you and [dog's name]?
--

Conducting the interview

The owners' preference of time and location for the interview was sought and arranged mostly through phone call (except one through email). Of the 11 individual interviews, nine took place at the owner's home, one at a café/restaurant near the owner's place of work and one at a pre-arranged room at Birkbeck. Each interview was preceded by the oral consent procedures described above. As in the consent procedure, I verbally indicated to the owners when the audio recorder was turned on and off.

The interview practices were guided by the same IPA-informed approach as in Study 1. Similar to the OMSs and GDMIs, the guide dog owners were quite forthcoming in sharing their stories with me; in most cases, the conversation unfolded naturally and touched upon the main sites identified in the interview schedule. At the same time, an owner's account would often highlight concrete instances of past and/or present partnership experiences that were specific to her/his condition (e.g. vision status, family, job); this information was followed up on and explored further in the interview.

However, interviewing guide dog owners was also quite different from my encounter with guide dog professionals – to me, the former featured a stronger embodied dimension. To illustrate, I describe three particular aspects or instances of the owners' interviews that stood out in the study.

The first aspect is the eye contact. The majority of the owners in this study retained some residual vision, but in most cases, their visual field was relatively restricted or narrow. This means that, in the actual encounter, I could not always rely on the presence of direct, sustained eye contact as a cue to check if a participant was 'with me' in the joint dialogue. I was also somewhat uncertain at first whether the participant knew I was there 'with them' as they told their story. Nonetheless, after working through the first few interviews, I felt that I had gradually acquired a tacit form understanding of how I should comport myself towards the owners during the interview and respond to the joint connection. This involved me keeping my gaze and face towards the owners as I would when talking to someone, being more attuned to the general tone and pace of the owner's response and attending to subtle changes in the owner's head/body movement (e.g. when they turned towards me, it could be a cue suggesting that they were emphasizing something that they said, or that they were interested in or confused by my question).

The second aspect was the physical setting in which the interview took place. As noted, most of the owners invited me to their home for the interview. To me, conducting the interview at a participant's home seemed to give the interview encounter a more everyday, casual quality. This experience was made the most salient to me in the very first visit I made to the owner's home. Below is an extract from my reflexive journal after returning from this interview:

'Today was my first GDO interview and the first time that I visited a participant's home; surprisingly, I was not as stressed out as I anticipated I would be during this process. Having Matthew sitting comfortably on the couch across from me somehow made me feel as if I also belonged to the setting as Matthew did; the living room, the dog and the cat eased me into a more natural, relaxed physical presence. The dynamic or the sense of connectedness in the exchange felt tender to me. These were quite different from the interview with the professionals, where we were sitting straight at two sides of the table in a room specifically booked for the interview – things seemed to have happened (occurred, unfolded) in a more formal, distant, or "professional" manner.'

The other instance that stood out to me in an embodied way occurred in the interview with Drew. Following Drew's suggestion, I met him at the front of a café/restaurant near his office. After the initial greeting, Drew, Drew's guide dog Douglas and I entered inside; I followed one step after Drew, thinking he was familiar with the place and might have a designated spot to sit. However, Douglas somehow had accidentally walked Drew into a table at one point, but the duo quickly went back on track again. I was not sure how I should respond (e.g. if I should ask Drew if he was okay or offer my help), but since Drew did not mention the incident after we arrived at our table, I thought he might not be bothered and decided to proceed with the introductory consent steps as usual. Yet, something came up not long after the actual interview started. In my post-interview memo, I noted:

'It was an intense/memorable day. I keep thinking that I should have asked Drew if he was alright or said something when he walked into the table. But I wasn't sure it was the right thing to do; my first impression of Drew from our previous calls and when he greeted me at the entrance earlier today was that he was a confident, self-assured person. I was therefore, in a way, caught off guard when I noticed at one point in our talk that Drew was bouncing his legs under the table. What surprised me even more was that I also came to realize that I had been doing exactly the same thing; I know I do that when I am anxious. It was that moment that struck me that perhaps we both have been made somewhat uneasy about the event or the setting, or that I was tense, rushing, and Drew picked that up from my voice/me. I felt responsible – I should be the one who is able to contain the emotional context of the scene.

I was glad/relieved when I noticed Drew starting to sit in a more laid-back way at his end after we spent more time on basic topics like his typical workload and daily route to work with Douglas. In hindsight, it seems that a simple descriptive question offers both the participant and me, the interviewer, an opportunity to slow down to readjust/regroup ourselves.'

Finlay (2006) has emphasized the implication of the body and embodiment in the process of research. In particular, she identified three different angles through which one could attend to the embodied presence of the participant and the researcher. Through 'bodily empathy', the researcher attends to the bodily gestures and demeanours of the participant (Finlay, 2006).

Moreover, the researcher remains sensitive to and reflective of her own embodied experience during the research in the field, with an ‘embodied self-awareness.’ The last layer to consider is ‘embodied intersubjectivity,’ wherein embodiment manifests as a reciprocal, inter-related phenomenon between the participant and the researcher (Finlay, 2006). The distinctions Finlay (2006) delineated are clear and informative. However, I felt that the boundaries seemed to be rather fuzzy or fluid in the interview encounter with the guide dog owners. In each of interview instances highlighted above, there seemed to be an enmeshment of the embodied presence of the owner and myself, the reaction between us, and the particular relation that we had with the immediate physical surroundings.

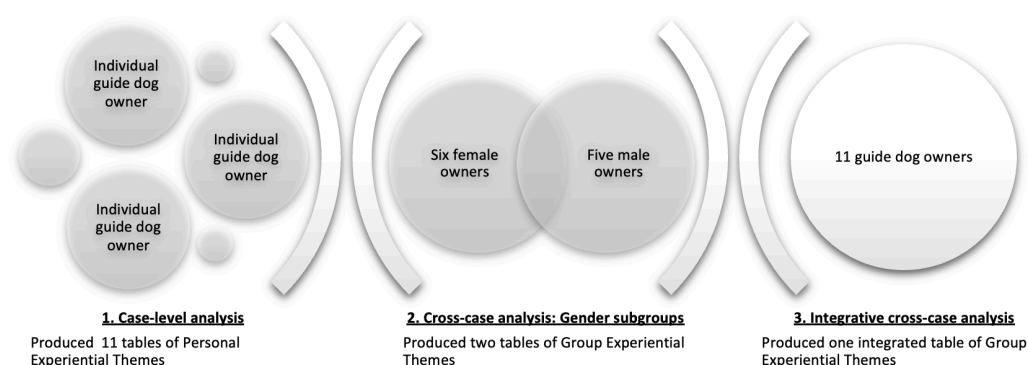
Transcription

The 11 audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using the same practice, notation and instrument as detailed in Study 1.

Analytic procedures

The analysis was guided by the approach of IPA, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009) and followed the same steps as in Study 1. As in the previous study, the process began by examining the interview accounts of 11 first-time guide dog owners individually. A table of personal experiential themes (PETs) was generated for each owner. Once the case-level familiarity was established, the analysis moved on to attempt cross-case comparisons. [Figure 19](#) presents a graphic view of the flow of the analytic procedure completed for this study.

Figure 19. A graphic view of the analytic procedures for Study 2



As indicated earlier, Study 2 set out with the aim of gathering a sample of first-time owners from four categories according to gender and the length of the first-time partnership ('novice'

or ‘seasoned’). However, of the 11 first-time owners recruited, there was only one female novice owner and only one male seasoned owner ([Table 14](#)).

Table 14. 11 participants included for Study 2 analysis stratified by two variables: length of partnership experience and gender

Gender	Length of partnership	
	Less than or about one year ('Novice')	More than one year ('Seasoned')
Female	1	5
Male	4	1

Thus, an analytic decision was made to first approach the 11 owners as two subgroups according to gender. Importantly, this initial stratification was not sought with the intention to build any definite division into the analytic account. Rather, it was held cautiously as an analytic opportunity for the experiential material to be parsed from additional and provisional angles, which, in turn, could help the analysis in searching for the way to bring out the whole partnership experience of the 11 owners in the most faithful and effective manner. With this view in mind, two tables of group experiential themes (GETs) were constructed for the six female owners and five male owners separately, following the same approach detailed in Study 1.

In examining the two table printouts side by side, several points seemed to suggest that the partnership experiences of the female and male owners were more relatable or alike to one another than otherwise. To begin with, both tables were led by GETs that concern aided mobility and off-duty interactions with the guide dog. Of course, this pattern, in part, reflected that the interviews with the female and male owners aimed to address the same research question.

However, the convergence did not seem to be just on the surface. For example, both tables included subtheme elements that pointed to an effort or certain adjustment that the owner needed to make in his or her aided mobility with the guide dog. Similarly, some material that nested within both tables reflected that the interaction and relationship with the guide dog outside of work time was an aspect of the partnership that was particularly complicated or filled with tension. Also, impacts of the partnership on the person's social world appeared as a recurrent aspect for both female and male owners; each of the two tables presented subthemes that indicated certain mixed feelings of the owners towards their new social life.

At the same time, however, preliminary examination in this grouped form cast light on two particular aspects that suggested an interesting distinction in how the partnership experience

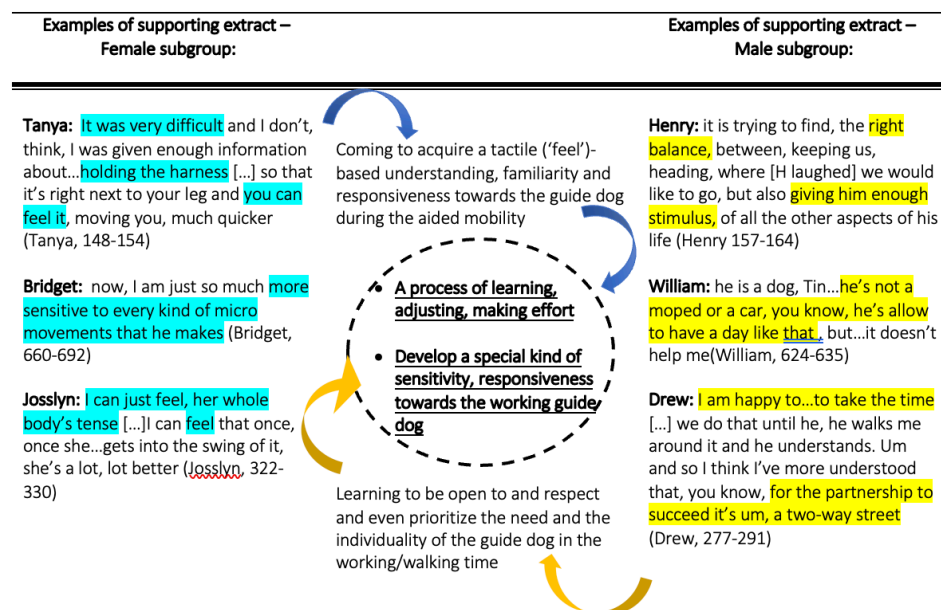
might manifest for both the female and male owners. For instance, early in the initial comparison, it was less clear whether or how there was any meaningful connection between the subtheme ‘Developing a “feel”-based sensibility and engagement with the moving dog/harness’ that was highlighted in the female owners’ perspective and the element ‘Negotiation and compromise’ that stood out from the male owners’ account.

To further explore this, I revisited the supporting extracts listed under the relevant subthemes. As Figure 20a illustrates, the revisit prompted me to see the seemingly distinct extracts as echoing one another in that both sets of extracts captured the owners referring to themselves as being called to develop, manage, and/or exercise a form of *sensitivity* towards the guide dog in working with them. For the female owners, such sensitivity manifested more strongly as a tactile form of understanding the body movements of the guide dog, while for the male owners, it took the form of coming to terms with necessary compromises on personal needs in working/walking with another animated, sentient being.

As Figure 20b presents, the expression ‘Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog’ was chosen as the collective identity of this cluster of quotes from the female and male owners. Nested under this integrated label were the sublabels that retained and made explicit the experiential nuances between the female and male owners.

Figure 20. Illustrating the integrative cross-case analysis: subtheme ‘stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog’

a.) Returning to and reflecting on the relevant extracts from female and male owners



b.) Labelling and presenting the integrated subtheme

	Female subgroup:	Male subgroup:	Synthesis – the 11 first-time owners:
Group Experiential Theme	A 'feel' and 'trust' – based connectedness with the guide dog in the walking/working time	The experience and adjustment for a cooperative working relationship with the guide dog	The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relation with a guide dog
Subtheme	Developing a 'feel' – based sensibility and engagement with the moving guide dog/harness	A discrepancy between the anticipated and actual working/walking experience with the guide dog	Inconsistency and unpredictability
	'Putting your life in their hands': the complicated sense of control/dependence, uncertainty and a demand of 'trust' in the guide dog	Being in control	The demands of managing control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female owners: Ceding control, trust Male owners: Taking/keeping control, overpowering
	Further complication: the unpredictability, (un)controllability and mindedness of the guide dog	Negotiation and Compromise	Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female owners: Coming to a 'feel'-based engagement with the guide dog Male owners: Making concessions on mobility efficiency for the needs of the guide dog

In comparison to the analysis process conducted Study 1, the sample composition of Study 2 opened up further potential layers of interpretation that could add depth to the emerging understanding. One's interpretation could depart from an apparent convergence and then engage with a lower-level divergence; the sense-making could also unfold the other way, starting from accounts of seemingly different experiences and only reaching potential points of shared meanings afterwards.

Nonetheless, there was also a greater sense of tension as the number of participants for analysis increased. It was a concern about the potential risk of losing one's grip with the power and uniqueness of personal experience in the pursuit of more general patterns or trends about the topic at hand. In practice, part of this tension was managed by moving back and forth reflexively between participants' words and my evolving horizon (interpretation); being cautious in making sure that the corpus of extracts presented in the final analytical account adequately makes visible the intrinsic diversity and variability of individually lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Through the initial and final cross-case analyses, the experiences of the 11 first-time owners were synthesised into four major GETs and their constituent subthemes. [Table 15](#) presents an overview of the GETs for the entire group (Appendix 9 presents the full version of the table with supporting excerpts). The analytic structure begins with a more local concern, with the first two

GETs addressing what it is like between the owner and the guide dog. Then the analytic scope moves outward, with the third and fourth GETs concentrating on the interaction between the guide dog–person dyad and their broader physical and social contexts.

Table 15. An overview of the Group Experiential Themes for the 11 first-time guide dog owners

Group Experiential Themes				
	I. The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relation with a guide dog	II. 'Pet,' 'Child,' 'Relaxed kettle': The nebulous sense of person-guide dog relatedness while off-duty	III. Emerging confidence-security in negotiating the physical world	IV. Changing social world in becoming a guide dog-associated person
<i>Subtheme</i>	1.1 Inconsistency and unpredictability	2.1 The defined, firm sense of relatedness	3.1 Being with 'someone': the guide dog as an emotionally anchoring/stabilizing force	4.1 New social visibility: becoming relatable, sociable, welcoming in the eyes of others
	1.2 The demands of managing control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.2a Female owners: Ceding control, trust • 1.2b. Male owners: Taking/keeping control, overpowering 	2.2 The ambivalent, wavering sense of relatedness	3.2 A reclaimed sense of personal agency and competence	4.2 New social visibility: becoming warranting of forgiveness and assistance in the eyes of others
	1.3 Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.3a. Female owners: Coming to a 'feel'-based engagement with the guide dog • 1.3b Male owners: Making concessions on mobility efficiency for the needs of the guide dog 		3.3 A revitalized sense of spontaneity	4.3 The ambivalence of person-guide dog unity in social contexts

Chapter 8. Study Two Result: The Owner's Perspective

The present analysis begins by focusing on what it was like for these first-time owners to build and sustain a relationship with a guide dog partner, in both the working/walking and the off-duty time of the partnership:

- Group Experiential Theme I. The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relationship with a guide dog.
- Group Experiential Theme II. 'Pet,' 'child,' 'relaxed kettle': The nebulous sense of person-guide dog relatedness while off-duty.

The analysis then highlights the personal changes and improvements that these owners experienced as a result of becoming a guide dog owner:

- Group Experiential Theme III. Emerging confidence-security in negotiating the physical world.
- Group Experiential Theme IV. Changing social world in becoming a guide-dog-associated person.

An overview of the Group Experiential Themes and the key supporting extracts is presented in Appendix 9.

Group Experiential Theme I. The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relationship with a guide dog

All the owners spoke of the desire for assistance to get around more freely and effectively as a main motivation for applying for the guide dog service. In an essential way, the relationship between the owner and the guide dog had a task-oriented quality as its basis; the person and the guide dog were partnered to achieve the specific goal of enhancing the person's mobility experience.

For all the owners in the study, this was their first experience with the guide dog service. This section will explore adjustments and challenges that emerged as important to many of the first-time owners in fostering and maintaining the working relationship with their guide dog partner. We will focus on three particular aspects: (1) the owner's experience with the inconsistency and unpredictability of the guide dog's work performance; (2) the task of managing control in working with the guide dog; and (3) the owner's acquiring and acting upon a certain sensibility towards the guide dog during working/walking time. The analysis also highlights certain

differences discerned between female owners' and male owners' experiences and perceptions of the issue of control and the acquired sensibility towards the guide dog.

Subtheme 1.1. Inconsistency and unpredictability

In the interviews, many of the owners made specific references to instances wherein they perceived the guide dog's actions to be inconsistent or unpredictable. For most of these first-time owners, these incidents or difficult moments often occurred early in the course of their partnership (e.g. in the training phase, in the first few months post-qualification, or in the first year for more seasoned owners). The person-guide dog working/walking relationship seems to include an experiential context that features some initial instability during which the owner experiences the working relationship as being prone to mistakes and/or particularly demanding. For Drew, who is now halfway into the second year of his partnership with guide dog Douglas, the first year was "disruptive." In the following passage, Drew recalled his bumpy start with Douglas:

I thought that they just came out of the box, fully trained, just knowing exactly what to do [...] I don't think I, I expected the amount of additional, kind of um, training that you have to do once you have them. If you see what I mean. Um, so, when I...once I had Douglas, I would say there is he is a very willful dog so there was maybe, a year or so, where I had quite frequently had to stop him coz he was going too fast [...] he's sort of walked, walked into a bush or, what have you. Um, he was very good still, um, but I think I just expected they were just come out and be like, robot dogs. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years¹⁴, 38-60)

An incongruity between expectations and the actual experience of the work performance of the guide dog partner was central to Drew's account. We sense that Drew initially thought of guide dogs as *somethings*—objects that came in a batch, with built-in precision and consistency. This preconception was debunked in the first year, as Drew found Douglas to be a thinking individual being with variable and potentially fallible work performance. It is noteworthy that the discrepancy and surprise captured in Drew's passage here was common to many other male owners' accounts of their initial experiences of the working relationship with their guide dogs.

For William, who was only three months into his partnership with guide dog Walter, the sense of confusion and uncertainty was particularly salient. In his interview, William described a recent walk during which Walter suddenly stopped working:

¹⁴ The number of years/months here indicates the length of time that the owner has been with her/his guide dog.

I said why he's stopped, I asked him because I had no bloody idea to even know what, it was really, it was a really bad day on my eyes, and he said he stopped for no reason at all.. and I find it interesting, I wanna find out why, because, it's, peril to me to go out with a dog that just stops...I need to know, am I in danger, is he having a turn, does he wanna wee, are we doing this, are we doing that, er, he stopped for no reason.
(William & Walter – 3 months, 421-435)

In this extract, we can pick up a strong sense of the unknown that William experienced. The uncertainty appeared to be compounded: He was uncertain about how to accurately decipher Walter's abrupt response, and he was uncertain as a result of being caught in a 'bad day' of his unstable eyesight. William's account underscored feelings of insecurity and vulnerability vis-à-vis an inconsistent working partner ('it's, peril to me'). This observation was also noted in the interviews with several female owners. For example, Bridget pointed to how Bruce's distraction at work precluded her from having a sense of trust in the first year:

To begin with, when Bruce and I were working, I didn't really trust him. I mean, he was quite a lively dog, he wasn't even two years old yet, so, he was quite kind of, you know... not naughty, but you know, he would want you know, he might, he might kind of try and sniff or try and eat something, which didn't really help me kind of trust.
(Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 173-183)

To Bridget, it seemed that Bruce's suboptimal work performance early on was the result of some childish or immature developmental phase – an aspect that present-day Bruce had outgrown.

Through the accounts considered so far, we might well come to recognize a certain precariousness that individuals experienced at the outset of the guide dog–person working relationship. For Angus, finding his guide dog Archie falling short of perfection not only roused confusion, but also seemed to cast doubt on his decision to acquire the guide dog service:

When he was doing all that kind of stuff I was thinking, either I've got duff one, or, you know [both laughed], um this is not right[...]so I think there was an element of me thinking, hang on a minute [A laughed], this is not what I, you know, imagined it was gonna be like [...] but yeah, there were different aspects when I was training, when I was beginning to think...I am not sure this is necessarily you know the right thing for me you know. (Angus & Archie – 10 months, 1240-1264)

As indicated above, for most of these first-time owners, the inconsistency and instability that they perceived in their guide dog partner appeared to be somewhat time-bound, with the

greatest intensity occurring earlier in their partnership. However, an interview extract from Rosemary, already in her fifth year of partnership, brought another perspective to our view of the guide dog–person working relationship:

Rosemary: The longer you're with the dog, obviously, the, the...easier it does become [...] but...you know, at the back of your mind, you're always thinking, is she going to do something...that isn't...actually going to be safe, um...

Interviewer: So is this, something that you still...like...think about, now?

R: Yes, yes I do occasionally, yes I do, yes and whether one ever gets over or not I don't know [...] every guide dog, has been trained, to this, very high standard, but um...it doesn't alter the fact you know, she's still a dog, and if something excites her...there's always a possibility that she can go off, at a tangent. (Rosemary & Rennie – 5 years, 188-224)

In this segment of the interview, Rosemary began by pointing to her comfort in the working relationship with Rennie, which came with time and experience. Nonetheless, she then expressed a lack of certainty about the reliability of Rennie's work performance. This uncertainty seemed to have been lingering distally and disquietingly in Rosemary's consciousness. Rosemary's insecurity in the working/walking relationship with Rennie also appeared to be indelible. The way Rosemary classified Rennie towards the end of the passage supplied some clues to help us make sense of her particular experience. We can identify a perceptual tension between nature and nurture. It is as if Rosemary perceived Rennie as 'trained' (nurtured), rendering a certain orderliness and effectiveness in Rennie's response at work. But simultaneously, Rosemary recognized a capricious 'dog' (nature) side of Rennie that had the potential to overtake the 'trained' side at work.

First, we heard William, the rookie of the group, comment, 'It's, peril to me to go out with a dog that just stops.' Then we heard Rosemary, the owner with the second-longest partnership of the group, suggest, 'There is always a possibility that she can go off.' In trying to make sense of the owners' experiences of the inconsistency and unpredictability of their guide dog partners and the concomitant feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, we find ourselves left with Rosemary's half-answered question: 'Whether one gets over or not I don't know.'

Subtheme 1.2. The demands of managing control

From the interviews with many of the first-time owners, there was the sense that the guide dog–person working relationship was a context wherein the person had to make certain

adjustments around control. That is, for the owners, there appeared to be a task of managing control—either in the sense of a subjective feeling or an action—in working with the guide dog.

However, we found a notable distinction between female and male owners regarding the task of managing control. While the accounts of many female owners underscored a sense of ceding control and needing to place some sense of trust in the guide dog, the male owners' interviews appeared to centre on the need to take and maintain control of the working time with the guide dog.

Subtheme 1.2a. Female owners: Ceding control, trust

For many female owners, a sense of giving away control and becoming somewhat dependent stood out to them strongly in their initial experiences of the walking relationship with their guide dog partner. In this context, they often described themselves as needing to put or have some sense of 'trust' ('confidence' or 'faith') in the guide dog. It was as if the request for trust was concomitant with their relative dependence on working with the guide dog. They initially experienced this as challenging and unsettling, as reflected in the use of terms like 'anxious' and 'scary.' We saw these features in a segment of Rosemary's interview, where she described how she felt about herself early on in her relationship with Rennie:

What you actually do, you don't look at what the dog's doing you look ahead, therefore you obviously have to feel what she's doing, rather than watch what she's doing, and it does require, a lot of confidence, to make that that, to make that connection [...] actually relying upon her, you know you...you literally are...you're putting your life in their hands, and that's...quite scary. (Rosemary & Rennie – 5 years, 160 -175)

For Rosemary, being able to effectively walk with Rennie entailed a particular and uneasy sense of ceding control: disengaging the residual vision. The expression 'putting your life in their hands' powerfully conjures an image of Rosemary's taking something that once resided within her and handing it over to someone/something else. Rosemary's account also captured a feeling of vulnerability from dependence, which seemed to characterize many other female owners' initial experiences of working with their guide dog partners.

It is noteworthy that many female owners who were formerly frequent cane users invariably highlighted a contrasting view of themselves in their accounts: from being someone who used the cane to actively parse the travelling environment to being someone who (partly) relied on a guide dog partner for that task. Tanya, for example, described how she wanted to hold onto the cane when she first transitioned into guide dog-aided mobility with Tess:

It's...at first I felt I wanted to use both, because you got used to using the cane, and you knew how to find curbs, and posts and things with the cane, and, getting used to putting all your trust in a dog, was quite difficult, she stops at the curb but of course she...a dog doesn't give you any perception of depth...(Tanya & Tess – 4.5 years, 46-54)

Immediately we noted an expression that was similar to the one that stood out to us from Rosemary's account: 'putting all your trust in a dog.' In both instances, the common denominator 'putting [...] your [...] in' revealed the sense of one's letting something go. From Tanya's account, it was as if in giving up the cane, she felt she would somehow relinquish her usual access to details of the travel space (e.g. curbs, posts, depth). We noted that ex-cane users Bridget and Lillian similarly commented on this sense of lacking depth perception in walking/working with a guide dog.

But there seemed to be further complexity in being in a working relationship with the guide dog that was beyond the unsettling sense of relinquishing control or becoming dependent. Although only two months into her partnership with Lyla, Lillian made a sharp observation about a certain duality in her experience of the senses of control, dependence, and trust in working with the guide dog:

I'm her manager in terms of I'm giving her salary and giving her command. But I also have her client in that she is guiding me, I'm trusting, I am trusting her to make, autonomous decisions [...] It is quite bizarre, it's that constant, you know, constant back and forth of...um...yeah...and especially at night, where, yeah, especially at night, it will be completely, I am completely in her hands [...] it's much more I'm gonna have to absolutely trust her on the obstacles. (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 747-772)

Lillian's description sheds light on an experiential fluctuation, which involved her shifting between two opposite roles towards Lyla: the 'manager' who was in control over Lyla versus the 'client' who depended on the service Lyla provided. For Lillian, her varying sense of seeing between day and night appeared to further stir up the dynamicity that she experienced in walking with Lyla. The night blindness seemed to have augmented Lillian's sense of dependence and vulnerability, *mandating* trust in Lyla.

Interestingly, unlike many of her fellow female owners, Josslyn's early experience of working with the guide dog featured a bolstered sense of security via her newfound dependence. Josslyn's account of the 'extra security' she immediately felt in walking with Jessa unfolded smoothly most of the time in the interview. However, we noted that Josslyn's response became

notably halting when she attempted to make sense of her particular experience in reference to the notion of control:

It's got its own mind and it knows exactly what, what it's gotta do whereas you, you've, you've got more control over the... I don't know, it's difficult [...] she's...I don't know, I just feel more secure with her, you know just feel, like...coz you've got, I've got the control of the cane, yeah, whereas with her, she's got control on her own...her own...you know her job[...] it's really difficult to explain um, but, I, I'll tend to...the cane is...I don't know, I can't, I just can't, I don't know, I don't know how to say it [I: no it's okay] hahaha (Josslyn & Jessa – 3 years, 616-631)

Josslyn first referenced Jessa's minded capacity as the source of the security she felt without issue; this made sense since Jessa 'got its own mind' and was capable of taking charge of the travel task, so Josslyn felt more secure with Jessa than with a cane. However, we recognized certain difficulties as Josslyn tried to pinpoint who was (and who was not) in control of the travel task in the guide dog–person working relationship. Her hesitance was captured in the mid-sentence breaks or pauses and repeated expressions like 'I don't know' and 'it's difficult.' Perhaps the indecisiveness in this particular segment of Josslyn's interview reflects a counter-intuitiveness or perceptual dissonance in experiencing security and reassurance from being dependent and not being in control.

However, for Josslyn's female fellow owners who experienced initial insecurity and uneasiness from giving control to the guide dog partner at work/walk, their interview accounts also suggested they have now come to feel relatively more at ease in trusting and working with their guide dog partners. It is as if they have also attained some assurance and security from their newfound (semi-) dependence.

Perhaps, the subjective feeling of control in the guide dog–person partnership is somewhat amorphous. The description we heard from Lillian earlier now seems evocative in a new way: 'It is quite bizarre, it's that constant, you know, constant back and forth.'

Subtheme 1.2b. Male owners: Taking/keeping control, overpowering

For the male first-time owners, they seemed to experience the walking time with the guide dogs as a context wherein the person's capacity to exert and maintain control was at issue. The interview accounts often underscored a need to be in control or the difficulties related to being in the position to take over control of their guide dog partners. Furthermore, there was often a sense that the owners took a measure of control to address or guard against potential risk.

These notable features were captured in an extract from William, who described a time in which Walter tried to determine where the duo should visit when they were out:

He's got to know...that's where we are going, and sometimes you do it, and he's almost like he looks at you, like, 'are you sure, coz, I, I think we now, are you sure, because yesterday we...', it's almost like that, so, that's why they have a little bit of their own agenda [...]it's very dangerous, it's very dangerous otherwise if they've got their own agenda it could be very tricky...so, you have to make sure you are in control...all the time, when you are out (William & Walter – 3 months, 173-185)

Still only in the third month of partnership with Walter, we noted that the term 'control' and phrases like 'you're in control' were interspersed in William's interview more frequently than for his fellow male owners. For William, an important element of having an effective working relationship with Walter was being able to say 'no' to Walter and to keep Walter's initiative in check. Here, we can sense that William's experience of the need for constant control seemed to grow from a perception of the danger that could occur if Walter, or guide dogs generally, carried out autonomous actions as thinking beings. We can infer the thinking status that William perceived in Walter through the inner, verbal thoughts that William translated for us from Walter's behavioural response in that context.

As an ex-cane user, Angus similarly underscored how walking with a guide dog brought a novel challenge since he now had to take into account how Archie would think about or anticipate where or when they should go. For Angus, there was 'a danger' in completely following Archie, and Archie's attempt to take initiative was something he perceived as needing to be actively suppressed. The following passage enabled us to appreciate certain complexity around Angus's experience and rationale for keeping a dominant position in working with Archie:

There's fine balance[...]as I understand it, it's important, that in our relationship he knows that I am the boss, and that I am making the decisions, you know...because I think that gives him security [...] he's a pack animal so he wants to follow, but he's kind of, being put in this position where he's gotta be a guide dog so he's gotta lead. (Angus & Archie – 10 months, 669-680)

It seemed that Angus actually experienced a dual task in working with Archie: establishing *and* relaxing a dominance hierarchy – to take *and* to share control. (We encountered a similar duality in Lillian's extract earlier.) For Angus, his assertion of the leading role was important, for it connected to Archie's innate social/relational need as a dog. This pack mentality appeared to be a particularly recurrent element of Angus's understanding of his working/walking relation with Archie; it also cropped up in William's interview, though less extensively. Interestingly,

while Angus later explicitly recognized 'a bit of conflict' in his partnership with Archie, his struggle soon resolved, with Angus highlighting again the reassurance that Archie would feel knowing that there was someone in charge.

As indicated above, the interview accounts of the male owners of the group converged in underscoring experiences of exerting control over the guide dog partner at work. But at times, the appeal to exert control seemed to be fraught with emotional ambivalence. This was notable for Drew and Matthew, who both expressed a personal fondness for animals in the interviews.

Drew, for instance, described an impersonal, objectifying stance that he would deliberately take on when working with Douglas. In this work mode, Douglas then ceased to be a personal individual but an inanimate tool, and Drew could downplay Douglas's expressed desire for things like sniffing a bush or going after a biscuit. For Drew, switching to this detached mode was important, for it prevented his 'softness' towards animals from spilling over, which would thwart the exercise of control needed to maintain Douglas's trained, disciplined behaviours, compromising the safety of the team:

I still love him, but, he stops being my, my pet dog and he becomes my mobility aid so he's a, he's a tool [...] I can't allow that softness, to be there, um, when we're, when we're travelling, I can't let his, training unravel, you know [...] like a protection thing on both sides, I know I would be too soft on him, if I thought about him as a Douglas my, my dog, if you see what mean, when he's with his harness on I think very differently.
(Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 191- 218)

Taking control, as manifested in the context of Drew's work relationship with Douglas, was a two-step event: The person endeavoured to achieve emotional management first, which in turn enabled the implementation of control over the guide dog partner. Although Drew aimed to compartmentalize his 'softness,' we noted the peculiar blend of references embedded in his account. There was a sense that the work- or control-oriented mode for Drew was still one of being detached, affectionate, and caring toward Douglas, all at once.

For Matthew, it was the use of the gentle leader (a form of headcollar with loop that goes around the dog's nose/mouth) that seemed to be the particular measure of control that sparked ambivalence on his part. From Matthew's description, he adopted the gentle leader in an attempt to address Marco's tendency to excessively pull, and/or sniff on the walk:

He doesn't like the gentle leader. However...for, for our safety, it is better if I am working and he has that on. [...] I do, I do take it off every now and then, just to see how

he gets on, and then if it's too much, it's like, 'sorry, you gotta put this back on', you know. And I say sorry because I...he doesn't object, to me putting it on, but I, I, I know he prefers not to, but... (Matthew & Marco – 13 months, 499-511)

Like Drew, Matthew's implementation of control seemed to be motivated by concern and a sense of responsibility for the safety of the team. However, in Matthew's account, there was a sense that he was continuously beckoned by Marco's expressed dislike for the gentle leader; as such, he found himself needing to apologize to Marco when he had to put the leader on. The apology was made consciously, but apologizing did not seem to have absolved Matthew of the tension of the competing demands confronting him in working with Marco, namely, needing to protect the safety of the team versus needing to take into account Marco's feelings. The tailing off of the passage towards the end seemed to signal that Matthew was still caught in this ambivalence.

For both Matthew and Drew, taking a measure of control in order to effectively work with the guide dog partner seemed to have instigated emotional complications that could not easily or readily be resolved.

Subtheme 1.3. Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog

As introduced, the 11 owners interviewed were at different stages in their first partnerships with their guide dog partners, ranging from 2 months to 6 years. In the analysis of their accounts, individual perspectives taken together illuminate a certain sensibility, understanding, and responsiveness towards the guide dogs in the owners' experience of this unique working relationship. Often, there was the notion that this sensibility was learned; that is, it was not there when the owner began the partnership, but emerged later as the relationship unfolded. In stepping into this sensibility, the owner seemed to experience her/his interaction with the guide dog partner at work in a more individualized, responsive, and flexible manner.

Noteworthy, the accounts of the female and male owners appeared to highlight distinct manifestations of this sensibility and responsiveness towards the guide dogs at the experiential level. Many female owners pointed to a need to acquire a certain 'feel'-based capacity to engage with the guide dog partner at work/walk whereas the accounts of the male owners foregrounded an experience of the owner's making personal concessions related to mobility effectiveness and efficiency in order to accommodate the needs of the guide dog partner.

Subtheme 1.3a. Female owners: Coming to a 'feel'-based engagement with the guide dog

In speaking of their initial experiences of working with the guide dogs, many first-time female owners underscored a perceived need to learn to 'feel' the moving guide dog and/or harness when walking. For them, the "feel"-based sensibility for the guide dog was something unfamiliar, and they invariably experienced it as a challenge.

For Tanya, part of her difficulty in acquiring the 'feel'-based engagement with Tess at walk arose from being underinformed during the training phase. Now a relatively seasoned first-time owner, Tanya is aware that there is a particular way that she has to hold and place the harness in order to effectively pick up Tess's movements. However, as Tanya commented, this key detail was unavailable to her at an earlier time:

It was very difficult and I don't, think, I was given enough information about...holding the harness, and, positioning the harness, coz you know now I know, I hold it, really lightly, so you...it's moving me I am not moving it...and, also, about keeping it...like down your trouser leg[...] you can feel it, moving you, much quicker than if it's out in front of you. (Tanya & Tess – 4.5 years, 148-154)

Tanya emphasized holding the harness 'lightly.' This comment was intriguing since it was as if Tanya had to adopt a bodily openness to be effectively receptive, to 'feel' the fine movements of the moving harness/guide dog. From Tanya's account, we learned that to feel the guide dog partner at walk entails a very sensorial, tactile kind of sensibility.

However, the accounts of the female owners seemed to have elucidated further nuances about the feel-based engagement that they were to master to work with the guide dogs. Many female owners described themselves feeling the movements of the guide dog and/or harness and then becoming aware of the travel space in a certain way based on what was felt (e.g. feeling a sideways pull indicated the presence of an obstacle). At the same time, they recounted the experience of reading the subjective state of the guide dog partner based on what they felt through the moving harness (e.g. feeling a speeding up or tension as indicating that the guide dog was excited by a squirrel ahead). That is, there was the sense that there were two aspects of the feel-based sensibility towards the guide dog at work/walk.

This distinction was explicitly recognized by Bridget. In the interview, Bridget referred to a more 'mechanical...practical' feel-sensitivity that she acquired initially, contrasting this with a 'deeper...emotional' sensitivity towards Bruce's 'thinking' and 'feeling' that emerged at a later time:

I just know how Bruce's feeling, I know if he's a bit tired, I know if he's sort of, I just, I can't really explain I just know on a sort of deeper level[...] now, I am just so much more sensitive to every kind of micro movements that he makes [...] to begin with, you're being taught, you know, feel through the harness, do this, tell him to go forward, tell him to go left . And so there's quite, you know, mechanical. And it's like, you need, time, to kind of get that emotional, layer, and that sort of, you know, this, yeah, the much more of the emotional layer on top of the practical layer. (Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 660-692)

There was the sense that for Bridget, the emotional layer was the essence of a more advanced sensibility towards Bruce. Interestingly, as time progressed, Bridget's sensitivity repertoire not only became deeper but also more expansive, prompting her to be attuned to a wider range of Bruce's movements. We might also take note of a certain ineffableness that Bridget perceived at the beginning of this passage; this was a recurrent feature in Bridget's interview when she attempted to describe the kind of awareness she now experiences with Bruce at walk. This ineffableness seemed to cement how the sensibility towards the guide dog was experienced as feel-based and tactile/embodied, empathic, and tacit.

From Bridget's description, we could appreciate that to feel the guide dog partner was a personal, individual or dog-specific kind of familiarity. This appeared to be a subtle feature of many other female owners' accounts. For instance, a related observation was made in Rosemary's interview, where it captured Rosemary's indecisiveness about whether the sensibility and familiarity established with a guide dog would be transferable to a different guide dog/partnership:

If you get another dog of course, all that has to be relearned, but it doesn't have to be because you've, you've got the harness, but, it would have to be relearned because you're...well you are in harmony with them, or they with you (Rosemary & Rennie – 5 years, 425-437)

It seemed that for Rosemary, part of the feel-based sensibility was transferrable: the aspect that concerned the person-harness. However, Rosemary seemed to also recognize an aspect of the acquired familiarity that was partnership-specific and had to be relearned with a different guide dog, i.e. the *mutual* sensibility and responsiveness between the person and the guide dog. We are thus brought back to Bridget's experience of the distinctive 'mechanical...practical' and 'emotional' layers of the feel sensibility for the guide dog partner.

Subtheme 1.3b. Male owners: Making concessions on mobility efficiency for the needs of the guide dog

For the five male owners of the group, an aspect that appeared particularly salient to them in their working relation with the guide dog partner was the need to make adjustments to their expectations of the mobility effectiveness of the guide dog-person unit. In this context, they often noted instances where they made concessions on their personal needs in the working/walking time to accommodate the individuality and needs of their guide dog partners. For most of the male owners, the relative ease, tactfulness, and/or proactiveness in adjusting the workload of the mobility unit for the guide dog only seemed to occur after some time had been spent interacting with and getting to know their guide dog partner in the working context.

As the most seasoned male owner of the group, Drew reflected on the role of a guide dog owner in this shared experience:

I am a bit more understanding of his limitations um, and, I am a better guide dog owner in that, I am happy to...to take the time I think, as well not rush around all over the place that if he misses an obstacle [...] we come back and we do that until he, he walks me around it and he understands. [...] I've more understood that, you know, for the partnership to succeed it's um, a two-way street. I can't just expect him to be perfect all the time, but then be a bit crap myself sometimes. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 277-291)

Here, we can sense that Drew experienced some form of transformation that led to more acceptance of and patience with Douglas in the working time. For Drew, the transformation seemed to be tied to having a different understanding of Douglas. No longer seeing Douglas as a 'robot dog,' Drew was able to recognize Douglas's individual needs at work and was willing to respond to them, even if that meant a more time-consuming journey. Drew also seemed to experience a new appreciation of the nature of the guide dog-person partnership. Now a 'better' owner, Drew perceived the working relationship with Douglas as something mutual and interactive in which he as an owner had an equally responsible and contributing role in the work to be accomplished by the team.

In some way, Drew's passage gave us an example of how concessions made by the person had eventual rewards in the mobility service that the person received. However, several male owners also described instances in which the compromises that they made (or felt that they must make) did not seem to have clear practical significance. For instance, Henry's account underscored a sense of obligation to ensure that the working time accommodated Hank's

various non-work-related needs. For Henry, the joint mobility stood out more strongly to him as a context that entailed certain sacrifices on Hank's part:

Hank is having to combat, all of the um, love of being a dog. The wanting to sniff, the wanting to meet other dogs, the, the greetings of people, are all aspects of...his personality, whom he is and so it is trying to find, the right balance, between, keeping us, heading, where [H laughed] we would like to go, but also giving him enough stimulus, of all the other aspects of his life. (Henry & Hank – 7 months, 157-164)

Note that none of Hank's needs (e.g. sniffing, greeting other dogs) were conducive to more efficient mobility for Henry. But for Henry, Hank's needs seemed to hold certain intrinsic importance; they were the needs of Hank as a living being and as an individual.

The phrases 'finding the right balance' and 'a two-way street' indicated that Henry and Drew both seemed to perceive an importance in fostering a working relationship with the guide dog partner that was mutual and equal. From Henry's and Drew's extracts, we could also grasp certain tact and ease in how they understood and oriented towards the working relationship as it demanded their adjusting the work-goal for the guide dog partner.

However, as the novice among his fellows, adjusting the workload for Walter appeared to appear to remain a source of tension. In speaking of either recent walks or upcoming travel plans, William seemed to be torn, shifting between seemingly competing perceptions of being concerned about Walter's functional role versus the relational appeal of the partnership. We could identify such ambivalence and dynamicity in the following extract in which William referred to a recent walk with Walter that had gone particularly badly, as Walter refused to walk/work in the rainy weather:

He's supposed to help me and do that and the other but, he is a dog, Tin...he's not a moped or a car, you know, he's allow to have a day like that, but...it doesn't help me, but if I can recognize that [Walter's dislike of rain], that's when you asked me about a good walk[...] maybe I will leave here with him and think, today what I better do is, some straight-lines and, keep it a bit simple [...]I know that isn't how it's supposed to ...and I think...my views are, different because maybe I am a novice, but, it's not a machine and never will be to me, I'm gonna be more aware of him. (William & Walter – 3 months, 624-637)

William's account shows there was no easy way for him to settle into how he was to experience Walter and the working relationship. William first appeared to regard Walter instrumentally, and he felt frustrated by Walter's inability to deliver the assistance that he was supposed to provide, but he quickly came to recognize Walter as a living subject and wanted to respect his

individual needs. The relational appeal was soon taken over by the functional evaluation that made salient the compromised personal needs. What followed was yet another shift in William's perception toward prioritizing Walter's needs and cutting back on the workload.

However, the end of William's response seemed to elucidate additional complexity in his ambivalence with a subtle sense of self-censorship. It was as if William perceived himself as at risk of violating some standard or rule by indicating a willingness to cut back the workload to accommodate Walter's dislike of rain. Interestingly, William also anticipated that the more experienced he became, the less likely he would be to engage in such perceived wrongdoing. But still being the novice owner, William felt he have to re-orient and respond to the relational appeal in order to make a meaningful sense of his working partnership with Walter – at least for now.

Group Experiential Theme II. 'Pet,' 'Child,' 'Relaxed kettle': The nebulous sense of person-guide dog relatedness while off-duty

While the relationship between a guide dog and the owner seeks to deliver mobility assistance, in real life, the duo does not work/walk all the time. For many of the first-time owners in the study, off-duty time appeared to them as being relatively distinct from working time, involving changes in the status of the guide dog and in owner responses. It was noted that various classification dimensions or frames of reference had been drawn on by the owners as they described and made sense of the off-duty aspect of their partnerships. The main observed dimensions or frames included pet animals, forms of interpersonal relationships (e.g. parent-child), and inanimate objects/tools (e.g. 'kettle,' 'cane'). There was therefore a sense that the off-duty time, as manifested through these owners' perspectives, was a potentially nebulous, liminal context in which the roles of the guide dog and the person and the status of the relationship were somewhat fluid and relatively open to individual (re)interpretation and adjustment.

Furthermore, we discerned a particular distinction among this group of first-time owners. On one hand, some owners seemed to be able to land in the off-duty context with a relatively clear and determined sense of relatedness towards the guide dog. On the other hand, other owners' interviews seemed to point to a less straightforward, sometimes tension-laden experience with their off-work guide dog partner. The two subthemes below capture these two stances.

Subtheme 2.1. The defined, firm sense of relatedness

The personal accounts of several owners often indicated a sense of the individual's having an unequivocal or determined view of the status of the guide dog and/or the particular treatment that the owner was to follow. Noteworthy, this subset was joined by owners who had many or no personal experiences with animals in the past. Bridget, for instance, spoke of a clear distinction between the working and off-duty time experienced with Bruce. Speaking as someone without prior pet ownership or parental experience, Bridget specifically referenced the parent-child relationship to account for Bruce's relatively one-way dependence on her that characterized the off-duty time:

I feel much more, I think, protective and much more of a parent to him, I think, when he's off harness [...] when he's off harness, it's parent-children, definitely. Coz you know, when we're together, it's kind of, yes, I'm in charge of him but it feels much more of a, balanced relationship I'm depending on him and he's depending on me, whereas when he's off harness, you know, he's my dependent. (Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 590-602)

For Bridget, it seemed that when Bruce's harness was off, he exited the role of a somewhat equally contributing work-partner and became one who elicited worry and care from Bridget and for whom she needed to stand in. The change was not just in Bruce's status, but also Bridget's, who explicitly re-qualified her off-duty role to that of a parent.

Unlike Bridget, Josslyn's experience of off-duty time did not centre on a marked shift of the guide dog's and/or the owner's role. Instead, for Josslyn, off-duty time seemed to be a context that held a defined task for her: to keep Jessa's trained and disciplined capacity:

I am still strict with her, because obviously if you don't have boundaries, then, you know if you don't keep the boundaries that you've been, taught. [I: what are the boundaries sorry?] Like she's not allowed to, she's not allowed to watch people eat, she has to um, she's not allowed to um, eat, you know, take things off the side in the kitchen she's not allowed to um, to slip down the sofa [...] I do let her be a dog, you know, I am not constantly say no, no, no, no, you know, I do let her relax, you know, just let her relax. (Josslyn & Jessa – 3 years, 640-654)

There was a subtle sense that something undesirable could result if Jessa were not kept in line during this time. The repetitive phrase 'if you don't' conveyed a pressing need in the off-duty time. Also note that Josslyn was able to promptly list various 'boundaries' that were to be kept for Jessa in response to the interviewer's query, which cemented the specificity and precision of the actions that Josslyn understood as necessary in off-duty time. Interestingly, while

maintaining Jessa's identity as a trained (special) dog was the clearly defined task in off-duty time, Josslyn also seemed to recognize a need to let Jessa return to her spontaneous nature as a dog occasionally. As a cat owner as well, for Josslyn, there was a sense that Jessa, even when not working, was to be treated quite differently from the cat(s).

Matthew, however, expressed a clear, personal understanding that Marco was to be treated no differently from the family's cats outside of his working time. This orientation seemed to be of particular importance to Matthew. At one point in the interview, Matthew described being aware of the potential misconception among some members of the public that guide dogs work all the time:

Some people have said, 'well I think it's cruel', you know, 'these dogs, they are just, they are just working.' And it's like...[M laughed]...this dog is treated like royalty, you know...but, when I say that, he's treated no differently to the cats, you know, he's part of the family, he's part of this house[...] look at him, he's, he's chilled, you know, he's...this is his *home*, and, you know, just like it's, it's the cats' home...and he knows that, this is his home, and the reason he knows it's his home is because, I've... he made to feel, like this is his home. (Matthew & Marco – 13 months, 1232-1239)

As someone who was familiar with pets and therefore knew well how to treat animal companions appropriately, Matthew saw the potential concern of the public about guide dogs as an overreaction. For Matthew, that off-duty Marco had the same status as the cats not only meant that Marco was able to enjoy his freedom as much as a pet. But it also meant that Marco felt belonging and unconditional love as a family member, which was reflected through Matthew's emphasis on the word 'home.' And for Matthew, it seemed that this sense of home was possible only through him putting in effort as the owner.

One would suggest that Matthew's response to his off-duty time with Marco was charged by moral and ethical imperatives. This was a feature that was shared by Rosemary and Henry, who had no and rich experiences with pets, respectively. As with Matthew's response, both Rosemary and Henry intuitively equated their off-duty experiences to key interpersonal relationships. For instance, in Henry's interview, he often evoked the human rule of 'equal love and respect' when discussing his interactions with Hank and the family dog. In the following extract, Henry described how this rule had guided him through a specific exchange with Hank during down time:

All good marriages[...] all good, relationships with your children, are treating them equal love and respect, and it is the same, for a guide dog versus a family pet, you know.

[...]On our first, night, of Hank being here, in our house...he lay, on top of me, and just wanted to be hugged [...]in the end I gave up, and allowed him, to lay on me and be hugged because, that was clearly, what he wanted [...] I don't believe, that my preference, that he finds his own space, on the floor, was, necessarily right. (Henry & Hank – 7 months, 573-602)

Henry's description captured a dynamic interaction with Hank in this off-work context. He started off being somewhat resistant to accommodating Hank, but from Henry's extract, we noticed that at some point he came to acknowledge Hank's need. He then was prompted to reassess and challenge the prominence that the human-first frame would normally assume.

Subtheme 2.2. The ambivalent, wavering sense of relatedness

For the owners considered in this subsection, we noted that their accounts invariably underscored a certain tension and/or transformation that appeared salient in their individual experiences of off-duty time.

Tanya, for example, highlighted the confusion and worry that she experienced in off-duty time when she started her partnership with Tess. In Tanya's account, there was a sense that she was particularly uncertain about the identity of the off-harness Tess. Specifically, she was confused about whether Tess was still a special dog that required a specific kind of care, or if she would become a normal pet that could be attended to in a casual manner. While Tanya briefly pointed to her inexperience with pet dogs, it seemed that a lack of training exacerbated the ambiguity of Tess's off-duty status; there was a sense that the off-duty aspect of the partnership was left largely undefined in her encounter with the professional guide dog trainer:

Nobody explains to you, that...when you are not training, we are not working, she's just, a pet, she will just lay there, she just goes to sleep, I spent a lot of time when I first got her, worrying about what do I do...we've been for a walk and now we indoor, what do I do? [...]they don't tell you, that, I think that was a big problem when I first got her. (Tanya & Tess – 4.5 years, 520-529)

While Tanya was now able to experience off-duty time with ease, as she had come to resolve the identity mystery, this was not the case for a novice owner like William. For William, the sense of 'hard work' appeared central to his experience of off-duty time. He noted that he found Walter, the first dog he had ever had, 'a bit more needy' in contrast to his pet cats. Interestingly, William also emphasized, on more than one occasion, that he wanted the off-duty care to be a 'joy' not a 'chore' and that he would deliberately remind himself of the existence of other pet dog owners. It was as if William experienced the involvement with Walter in the off-

duty context as somewhat uncharted, needing deliberate realignment; it could be like caring for a pet dog or not. This potential complexity seemed to appear more through this segment of William's interview:

I kind of feel a little isolated and I think also [I: isolated?], well...isolated in terms of [being] the only person with the dog, the only person with the responsibility of a dog, and that's why when I said, you know, people go out and buy a puppy and it brings joy to the family [...] I forget, that, you know, it it's...it's a joy thing, um, so, I was adding up, you know, I am gonna do this, gonna do that, gonna do this [...] also because, it's not even if he was a puppy I bought, or a dog I got, it it's a guide dog, and they are particular, and very strict[...] so, he's a very precious cargo for them, an expensive precious cargo for them. (William & Walter – 3 months, 1039-1054)

William first brought our attention to this feeling of isolation compounded by the demands of off-duty time. It seemed that William's experience with Walter ('the dog') in off-duty care was not completely like the caregiving between a person and pet dog ('a dog'). He therefore felt alone in what he was doing, set apart from the majority of ordinary pet dog owners. Note that William attributed the isolation and demanding nature of his role to oversight or omission on his part; he had somehow overlooked the nature of off-duty care as being an intrinsically engaging, joyful experience, instead regarding Walter as a quantifiable list of tasks.

As William's account unfolded, we further grasped the precariousness of his experience. It seemed that while William wanted his relationship with Walter in the off-duty time to resemble that between the person and a pet dog, he recognized that Walter was not purely a pet, an individual subject with whom he was to have some personal, spontaneous, and enjoyable relationship. For William, Walter was also perceived as property for which he was tasked to provide certain standardized care.

Our consideration of William's perspective shed light on the liminality and conflict that could be experienced in the off-duty time, specifically of a tension in whether the guide dog partner was to be regarded as subject, object, or both ('he's a very precious cargo'). This object-subject ambivalence also appeared to characterize Angus's perception of the off-work Archie. Coming from a background of being a proficient cane user and mobility specialist, Angus indicated early in the interview that his decision to acquire a guide dog was predominantly motivated by his assessment of guide dogs as the 'best mobility aid.' Although Angus was aware of the caregiving aspect of the partnership, it seemed that he still found the actual experience somewhat perplexing and difficult to construe. In this passage, Angus elaborated on a sense of 'paradox' he felt about the off-duty time:

Coz you feel like he's a bit of pet, at that point, you know, um, and, I think that's where the, it becomes a bit sort of like...[sigh] not exactly intrusive but it does affect you because it's like, it's not like a cane, you know, when I come in...um, when using the cane I stick the cane in the drawer and I don't give it a second thought until I need it again [...] like this morning he's of no use to me whatsoever, you know what I mean, that's not his, that's not what he's doing, he's not being useful to me whatsoever, in fact it's the other way around you know. (Angus & Archie – 10 months, 799-822)

It seemed that to Angus, the off-duty Archie was neither a pet nor an aid. For Angus, Archie's tool-status was essential in defining who/what Archie was. Angus repeatedly brought us to attend to this changed aspect of Archie. Not only did the off-duty Archie lose his instrumental capacity, but he also acquired a restrictively demanding presence for Angus. There also appeared to be a certain role reversal for Angus in the off-duty time with Archie, the sense that some grounding order of the person-guide dog relationship was disrupted or challenged. The off-duty time was a 'paradox' for Angus; it was not how things were *supposed to be*.

As the only owner of the group who had explicitly expressed a personal dislike for dogs, Kadence also perceived the change in the instrumental capacity of Knox as the salient feature of off-duty time. When speaking of the distinction between the working and off-duty time experiences with Knox, Kadence first referred to the absence of her need for Knox's mobility support and a similarity between off-work Knox and a variety of household appliances ('kettle,' 'shower,' 'hairdryer'). It was as if Kadence felt her connection with Knox was somehow severable, ceasing to exist or be meaningful outside of the service time, just like that between her and an appliance. Nonetheless, Kadence's experience was perhaps not that clear-cut. Consider how Kadence responded when asked to describe Knox, who stayed close to Kadence's feet throughout the interview:

It's a relaxed kettle [both laughed], he's great lump of, that's how I would describe him, often he sits on my, right on my feet, so I can't move my feet and I have to my feet on him but no, he's, how would I describe him, I think he, I think he is lovely, he is a lovely dog [I: but not a kettle like, in] no no [...] no no, I said that if I was being really cynical, perhaps shouldn't be that cynical but...it he is an asset isn't he, he's, he's something that I use. (Kadence & Knox – 6 years, 595-613)

Immediately, we might find 'it's a relaxed kettle' here powerfully encased an object-subject duality similarly to 'he's a very precious cargo' we saw in William's extract earlier. This duality unfolded itself through the rest of the extract as we heard Kadence referring to her felt interaction and affection towards Knox and then resuming an objectifying frame as she

evaluated her connection with Knox. Kadence's attempt to recant her statement reinforced the intricacies of her sense-making process. That said, it was clear from Kadence's interview that the sense intimacy and affection had grown from Kadence's involvement in looking after Knox, such that Knox stood out from the rest of the species of dogs: 'I still do not like dogs, no I don't like dogs [I: but Knox it's okay] Knox, I like Knox, I love Knox, Knox is like one of the family' (510-526).

Lillian's interview also depicted her change in attitude, but unlike Kadence, Lillian was only in the second month of her partnership. Lillian emphasized how she came with the anticipation that the engagement with Lyla outside of work would be minimal, which she attributed partly to her starting off with the view that guide dogs were just 'working animals' and partly to her having experience only with more independent cats. However, it was later in the real-life partnership context that Lillian surprisingly found herself experiencing off-duty time in a much more personally involved, emotionally attached manner:

So I didn't expect that I would want I would actively want to change my, change on the things that we do so that she, has the best life [...] in that way she's like one of my kids, you know, I want her to, have the best life, and for her to be happy. Like, there's no point me going to an event with her where she's, gonna be, you know, there's gonna be like loud noises or things that make her anxious. There's no, there's no...there's no enjoyment in that event for me. (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 675-692)

It seemed that Lillian experienced Lyla as morphing from instrumental and different from her to intrinsically valued and less differentiated from her. In the interview, expressions like 'best life' and 'best time' came up repeatedly when Lillian commented on her orientation towards off-duty Lyla. These expressions seemed to reverberate with the comment that Lyla became 'one of my kids' and reinforce for us an intense connection of unconditional care for Lyla. However, we could not help but wonder whether the change that Lillian experienced in her relationship with Lyla that appeared to start in the off-duty context could have also carried itself over to the working aspect of the partnership since the Lyla-centred approach seemed to have erased the boundaries between Lillian's mobility needs and her anticipation of Lyla's individual needs.

Group Experiential Theme III. Emerging confidence-security in negotiating the physical world

In the interviews, almost all of the first-time owners spoke of feeling more 'confident,' 'secure' ('safe'), or less 'vulnerable' after the acquisition of the guide dog. This notable sense of

confidence or security seemed to manifest to them the most when they were out and about, engaging with the physical world. Confidence and security appeared to be referred to by the owners indiscriminately or interchangeably, as if they shared the same experiential referent. Furthermore, we noted that the owners often spoke of this confidence-security in a way that suggested that something about their experience of being visually impaired had been alleviated or undone.

In an important respect, the primary concern of this section is a particular kind of improvement that featured in many of these first-time owners' experiences of the partnership. To that end, we need to take account of the owners' experiences prior to the service acquisition, i.e. their particular experience of sight loss. The exact medical nature and unfolding of the visual impairment differed for the owners in the study. Nonetheless, the owners related to each other in that their sight loss experiences were all marked by having undergone a significant change—a substantial reduction in eyesight—often not long before they started contemplating the guide dog service. Almost all interviews opened with the owners describing this significant bodily change when asked how they came to the service. This aspect of their lifeworld continued to be interwoven into their accounts of the guide dog-person partnership.

The personal accounts of many owners shed light on certain impacts that the sight loss had on them as individuals, specifically how they perceived themselves, how they acted, how they did things, and how they experienced the physical world. In particular, often from the owners' accounts, there was a sense that the sight loss had drastically transformed the scenery of their lifeworld. They came to experience things with greater effort, caution, limits, and/or an undertone of vulnerability and a lingering concern for physical safety. It was against this background that the owners almost unanimously and specifically pointed to feeling more confident and secure as the most significant change that they experienced as a result of the service acquisition. As commented on above, the owners often appeared to draw on the notions of confidence and security in a broad manner. However, a close examination of the owners' personal accounts suggested that this change was a potentially multifaceted experience, centred on three feelings: *I am not alone*, *I can/I am able*, and *I am relaxed/I am free*. These three dimensions or manifestations of the newfound confidence-security are considered individually in the following subsections.

Subtheme 3.1. Being with 'someone': the guide dog as an emotionally anchoring/stabilizing force

In describing the enhanced confidence-security that they had acquired since becoming guide dog owners, many owners in the group pointed to a sense of feeling that they were with 'someone' when they were out. Across the interviews, this perception of being with someone often seemed to translate into the experiential terms of an assurance or a feeling of *I am not vulnerably alone*. It was as if the presence of the guide dog partner was experienced as a certain kind of emotionally anchoring, stabilizing force in the face of the surrounding world. For owners who had travelled with a cane before, this sense of being with someone was one of the features that distinguished for them the experience of being out and about; there was a sense of being in a 'team.' For instance, Angus and Lillian expressed:

That's one of the things probably gives me confidence, is that, Archie is with me[...] you do feel that kind of, you know, yeah we are a team, there's two of us, you know I am not just on my own, (Angus & Archie – 10 months , 874-880)

It does feel like we're, we're facing the, facing the world as a team. (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 481-484)

It seemed that Angus and Lillian felt they were teamed with their guide dog partner, not for an ordinary task, but for a potentially challenging one – something that they may not have been able to accomplish by themselves. 'Facing the world as a team,' as Lillian described it, suggested that the 'world' was a particular kind of world that somehow needed to be overcome or "face[d]." It was against this less familiar world that Angus and Lillian found certain assurance in the team with the guide dog partner.

It is noteworthy that several interviewees also underscored how the sense of assurance or anchoring established in the context of the partnership was not necessarily contingent on the actual working or guiding capacity of the guide dog partner. For a 'dog-lover' owner like Henry, Hank's mere presence was experienced as having a 'giant teddy bear' alongside him, a unique entity that provided him with substantial emotional and psychological comfort when being out and about, when such comfort seemed to be needed the most:

At worst, if it becomes all too overwhelming um, I still have someone that I can hug hahahaha [...] I still got...this giant, teddy bear [...] when I find the world a stressful and challenging place, as well as Hank being able to provide, um, er eyes for me, he's also got fantastic fur, for giving a stroke to, that tactile, aspect of him, cannot be underestimated. (Henry & Hank – 7 months, 1044-1059)

In the expressions 'overwhelming' and 'world a stressful and challenging place,' we were reminded again of a particular background, a less homey world in which the individual owner came to value a certain comfort or assurance from the guide dog's company. We further noted that, for Henry, the sense of comfort that was established and experienced was not just emotional and psychological, but it was also something very much bodily and physically felt. This observation was echoed in Drew's interview where he described the security he felt through certain physical/bodily contact that Douglas initiated or directed towards him when he found himself standing still in a 'busy place in London':

He would always stand very close to me press against my leg and, and then that's very very nice, it's like a, it gives me a good sense of security. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 462-466)

The 'hug' in Henry's earlier description appeared to be a useful analogy to appreciate Drew's particular experience. When Drew noted that 'he would always stand very close to me press against my leg,' it was almost as if Drew was feeling hugged or held by Douglas, as if Douglas had forged a bodily shield around him.

It was noted that for some of the female owners of the group, the comforting awareness of having someone also registered as having unconditional support. For Bridget, the perception of herself having someone who would 'always' be on her side was empowering. In the interview, Bridget spoke of how she felt motivated to try out unfamiliar places and activities, and she felt supported in potentially stressful circumstances like work meetings:

It's a kind of inner confidence, and that confidence to kind of, go into different places go into new places, it's much easier when you've got, someone with you, you've got the dog with you [...] if I go into the meeting with Bruce, I'm just like, well, there's someone on my side, and it's quite a weird, you know, quite a nice sort of feeling to always know that you've actually got someone on your side, someone who's going to support you. (Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 307-313)

We see that for Bridget, the feeling of having someone or unconditional support seemed to have extended beyond the context of navigating in the physical world and into a pervasive kind of confidence or driving force.

Subtheme 3.2. A reclaimed sense of personal agency and competence

Across many individual interviews, it was noted that the owners' descriptions of themselves before the acquisition of the guide dog service often involved terms like 'bump,' 'crash,' 'fall/fell,' and 'walk in.' These personal accounts also featured some owners' cutting back from participating in certain activities or at times from going out at all. What seemed to be underlined by these interview observations was not only a less successful experience in engaging with the physical world, but also an experience of a relatively less able, competent, active self in the context of visual impairment. This latter sense was evidenced strongly in several interviews where the owners explicitly pointed to feelings of *I can't* or *I am not able* that were central to their experiences of sight loss.

However, in many cases, there was a noted contrast between the owners' descriptions of their pre-guide dog time and their experiences now. Many owners emphasized that they no longer experienced themselves bumping or walking into things or people when they were out and that they came to resume or start doing various things (e.g. going out at night, hanging out with friends). This contrast was often observed regardless of the exact length of time that the owner had been with her/his guide dog. From these personal accounts, there was a sense that through the partnership experience, the owners had come to reclaim a sense of personal agency and competence and to re-experience themselves as *I can* or *I am able*. A more active connectedness with their surrounding world ensued.

The following extract from Henry's interview provided us with a starting point to appreciate the main experiential features observed from the group:

The loss of eyesight, um, as a mental, battle[...] your brain is telling you, oh but you don't have eyesight, you can't [...] those bollards, that can you really hurt you if you walk into them, I don't walk into them anymore [...] So he is, um.....empowering me, through his...senses. (Henry & Hank – 7 months, 761-772)

Here, Henry pointed to a 'mental battle' that prevailed in his experience of sight loss – a battle between two opposite views of himself: *I can* versus *I cannot*. With Hank's support, Henry came to experience himself as someone who was able to successfully and effectively negotiate with the physical world ('I don't walk into'). For Henry, such a positive experience seemed to have toned down or counteracted the negative voice that grew from the awareness of having limited sight and facilitated a more autonomous, empowered feeling about himself to come to

the centre. Subtly, it also seemed that what emerged for Henry was a cooperative agency, something that was experienced as inseparably linked with Hank.

As commented earlier and captured in Henry's extract, no longer bumping or walking into things was a change that registered and was valued strongly by many of the first-time owners about their partnership experience. Undoubtedly, bumping into things is physically unpleasant ('hurt,' 'painful'). But what also seemed to be illuminated by these personal accounts was a sense that this rough, prickly kind of encounter with the physical world could have repercussions that reached the individual's very sense of self. Consider this passage from Drew's interview:

I haven't bumped up against my um own, um.....um I don't know what you'd call it, like my own physical flaws quite so often you know, there, every time I bumped into someone one or I bumped into something or I fell off a curb [...] constantly a reminder see, you are blind, see, you can't get around on your own. Um, that, that begins to wear on your [...] so that bit has made me more comfortable, having him has made me more comfortable about my own skin. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 369-378)

We should remind ourselves that Drew was speaking as someone who had been a frequent and skilled cane user before coming to the guide dog service. But even with this proficiency in aided mobility, Drew still found himself with an often abrasive or abrupt experience with the physical world. From Drew's account, we can recognize that coming into contact with physical surroundings in this manner mirrored for him an image of an incompetent self, which Drew experienced as his own inadequacy with the physical world, not the other way around. It was against this background that Drew perceived a transformed experience through the partnership; Douglas's support had relieved him of challenging encounters with the physical world so that he could secure a more affirmative sense of self.

The observations 'Your brain is telling you' and 'see, you can't' from Henry's and Drew's accounts above suggested there was also a sense that it was an enforced, uninvited negative voice that was mitigated by the partnership experience. This observation was echoed in Kadence's interview. Kadence's account of the impact of the partnership centred on the metaphor of 'trap' and a powerful imagery of two contrasting events: the closing and then the opening of the trap.

What sight loss does is it narrows you, it closes you in [K put the two palms together, palm met palm], and that's what happens and, however much of you try not to, sight loss closes you in, like that , it's like a trap [...] you can't do it, you just can't do it all of

the sudden you can't, and so you're, you're [K closed her palms again], closed inside this, trap[...]then he, he came...but then everything opened, but everything opened, wider than it had been before, because we joined the local church, I go to the local gym, I go to the local hairdresser, do everything, and, you meet, masses and masses of people. (Kadence & Knox – 6 years, 700-721)

For Kadence, sight loss was experienced as a 'trap' that had cornered and petrified her with senses of vulnerability and inability; this trap was impinging, descending forcefully on her. From Kadence's interview, we noted that she was left entrapped both emotionally-psychologically and physically since elsewhere in her account she described eventually not leaving the house. But for Kadence, Knox and the mobility opportunity he provided released her from this trap and enabled her to re-experience herself and the world in a lively, vibrant manner, being active, going out, engaging again. From Kadence's account, there was also a sense that she had found herself coming out to a new world and life. It was not only a bigger world with more opportunities, but for Kadence it was also a locally rooted life that was distinct from the more city-centred life she had before the onset of her sight loss.

We might feel that Kadence's account of sight loss as a trap alluded to something seemingly suffocating or stifling about the experience of sight loss. It was as if sight loss were a trap wherein there were few life activities going on, and exiting this trap offered liveliness once again. Josslyn, like Kadence, had similarly experienced a pre-guide dog time where she had stopped going out and had become somewhat 'reclused' when her sight further deteriorated. Josslyn frequently drew on expressions like 'life changing' and 'new lease of life' in her interview to capture the changes that she had come to experience through the partnership with Jessa. It was as if for Josslyn, coming to re-experience herself as one who was now able to go out and who could do things was symbolically close to the resurrection of the self. This sense of returning to life could be appreciated effectively through this extract from Josslyn:

I supposed it was like reborn because, you know I was able to, go and see[...]I can just do things on my own I got my independence back, you know, um, and it was just a, massive...um, life changing situation and, and, you know, it was just um, well gift from God really. (Josslyn & Jessa – 3 years, 440-447)

The expressions of 'reborn' and 'gift from God'- resonated strongly with each other and conveyed the sense of being alive that stood out to Josslyn as she came to re-experience herself as agentive and competent; they also seemed to suggest what Josslyn experienced is something mighty or omnipotent.

Earlier, Kadence described herself as emerging from the partnership with experiences ‘opened wider than [they] been had before.’ These senses of broadening and newness in re-experiencing the self as one who could also stood out to Matthew in his first road-crossing with Marco:

I got to the side of the road and I was crying. Because...it, I hadn’t done that in such a long time [...]you just got million things going around in your head, it’s like, for Marco, it’s like, “yeah we just cross a road now what”, you know, but for me it’s like [...] he helped me cross the road, but we discovered the new world, you know, he helped me discovered a, a new world. (Matthew & Marco – 13 months, 1107-1130)

From Matthew’s account, we reappraised how a taken-for-granted aspect of our experience in negotiating the physical space could actually be an important bedrock of a sense of personal agency and competence. For Matthew, the sense of *I can/I am able* re-established in this road-crossing seemed to simultaneously bring about a new horizon. This new horizon brought a ‘new world’ comprised of possibilities, opportunities, and activities, as opposed to the old world of impossibilities and limitations. Here, the expression a ‘million things going around’ resounded with the ‘opened wider’ in Kadence’s account; both suggested a sense of expansion, of a bigger world that was disclosed to Matthew and Kadence as they reclaimed their senses of agency and competence through the partnership with their guide dogs.

We can appreciate how coming to rediscover one’s agency and competence through the partnership and the surging possibilities perceived was exciting and profound for a first-time owner. But these welcoming changes could also be experienced as destabilizing, stirring up an owner’s prior or existing view of her/himself or life broadly. This latter sense seemed to come up particularly strongly for Lillian, who also happened to be the most recent guide dog owner.

The sense of a ‘mixture’ of feelings appeared to be central in Lillian’s accounts of her early experience of guide dog-aided mobility. On one hand, there was the excitement and joy of feeling herself coming to acquire an ‘extra skill’ in being able to go out at night with the support of Lyla and of the ‘hours and hours’ and activities with her children that were ‘opened up’ by this new skill. But at the same time, Lillian seemed to find herself in limbo. Not only did she re-examined her prior life and assess it as somewhat of a missed opportunity (‘I should have done this years ago’), but she also called into question her prior understanding of who she was as a person. Finding herself to be more competent, but also devoid of proper identity, was a confusing experience:

I've always had trouble and navigating around at night. But suddenly I'm, I'm a person that can. So what does that mean? You know, what does it... what does it mean? (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 53-62)

Subtheme 3.3. A revitalized sense of spontaneity

Many of the first-time owners in the group underscored being able to feel relatively 'relaxed,' 'free,' or 'liberated' when being out and about as a notable, significant change brought on by the partnership. The owners' accounts of this newfound relaxation invariably featured themselves as moving away from arduous, mentally or emotionally stressful, and often bodily tensed ways of being out and about. There was a sense that what the owners had acquired through their partnerships with the guide dogs was a multifaceted, encompassing spontaneity in orienting and engaging themselves with the physical world.

For owners who were frequent cane users before, this emerged relaxation appeared to be a particularly resonating topic, as reflected in the often detailed, eloquent qualities of this aspect of their interview accounts. As an adroit ex-cane user and a mobility trainer, Angus provided an elaborate explanation of the different ways that guide dog-aided and cane-aided mobility operated. From Angus's description, obstacle identification with a cane was executed in a reactionary manner ('you gotta hit it to know it's there') and seemed to be less precise in differentiating whether an object was an 'obstacle' or a 'landmark.' In contrast, Angus emphasized that a guide dog effectively recognized and proactively avoided an obstacle en route, thereby sparing one the need to actively 'hit' everything encountered, allowing for a 'smoother', 'more relaxing' experience. As an example, Angus described being out on a bin day:

He just weaves in and out those so, that you know, when it's bin day, like today, all the wheelie bins are out, on the pavement, now that with a cane is real pain, because, you're walking and bang, oh, okay, right, I gonna try and get around this [...] I just follow him, and he'll just find a path through, you know so, it's much more, more relaxing [...] you are not constantly thinking, Oh Crikey, I hit an obstacle, you know, it doesn't sort of surprise you every time you hit something. (Angus & Archie – 10 months, 139-144)

From Angus's extract, the hit-based, reactionary orientation with the cane seemed to mean a rather abrupt, guarded way of finding himself in relation to the physical surrounding. We could also almost picture the stop-start, halting body movements if Angus were out on a bin day with the cane. On the other hand, a bin day walk with Archie would not only enable a more graceful bodily unfolding in the space but also an ease of mind.

For Kadence and Rosemary, who were not committed cane users before the service acquisition, their interviews underscored a certain relaxation that they came to seize in negotiating with an aspect of the physical world that had been particularly troublesome for them: steps. As Kadence described:

I am really frightened of the steps because I can't see, if I look out there, I can't see anything at all, here, it's all gone. So...if I was, by myself, if I go out if I went out on my own, I have to go out walking like this [M arched her back], with my head down, which is not, very comfortable, whereas with Knox, he um, he stops at steps and, waits for me to, work out what's happening. (Kadence & Knox – 6 years, 186-191)

From Kadence's description, it seemed that when she was out and about on her own, she would assume an emotionally and bodily tensed, rigid mode as if she were preparing for the steps that would be lurking somewhere but that she could not effectively find because of her impaired vision. For Kadence, it seemed that through the partnership with Knox, the steps were no longer something that was anxiety-provoking since this detailed aspect of the physical world would be made known to her through Knox's response, exempting her from an emotionally-bodily uncomfortable vigilance that would otherwise characterize her experience.

In the interview, the owners were sometimes actively prompted to describe a memorable walk or a moment with their guide dogs. It was noted that the specific instance that some owners recalled was one where they registered a relaxed journey. Bridget, for example, referred to how a usual route to work turned out to be a 'seminal moment.' In the interview, Bridget recalled how nothing stood out to her for the most part in this journey, but when she arrived at her workplace, she found herself with a somewhat elusive feeling that something had been forgotten, yet she could not immediately identify what that something was:

I thought, hey, I've forgotten something, and, I check my bag, have I got my mobile phone, have I got my ID card for work, Bruce, all of that there, and I realized the thing that I was missing was the stress, and that stress that I'd had from using a cane [...] I hadn't been thinking about, the mobility side of anything, just thinking about what I had to do that day. (Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 196-211)

It took Bridget a moment to realize that what she felt had been left behind was actually the stress of navigating with a cane that had once been an ordinary aspect of her experience of this daily route. From Bridget's extract, we see that it was then that she also came to realize how her mobility had actually unfolded in a relatively automatic, inconspicuous manner and receded to the background of her attention while she was preoccupied with something else. This walk seemed to have demarcated for Bridget her transition from a cane-aided to a guide dog-aided

traveller with a new ordinary meaning of mobility. We could infer the significance this walk had for Bridget through the details that she was still able to describe for us in accounting an event that took place 3 years ago.

The sense of the mobility, that the walking itself acquired a somewhat inconspicuous, background quality seen in Bridget's extract, appeared to be a feature that many other owners had attended to in the context of their partnership experiences. From the owners' accounts, there was a sense that with the aid of their guide dog partners, they came to experience their moving body engaging with and unfolding in the physical surroundings smoothly, yet also effortlessly, like in auto-pilot mode. It is noteworthy that the owners invariably emphasized a sense of freeing their minds with less mental energy spent (e.g. 'switch off') or the freedom to focus on something other than the walk/mobility itself (e.g. 'in a more constructive place').

Most of the owners in the group still experience a certain degree of useful residual vision. For some of them, their accounts suggested that their freed minds allowed them to attend to things further afield in their travelling surroundings. As Henry succinctly remarked: "It is a partnership of extending one's senses" (197-217). There was the sense that walking, being out and about, had become a more spatially expansive experience for the individuals. Tanya discusses this aspect in her excerpt below:

If I was using a cane...I would feel a lot more, confined and a lot more...less spatially aware, with Tess I can...if I am holding Tess, I can still look around and do things, you can't do that with the cane [...]with the cane, you're...one hundred per cent concentrated on the cane, with Tess, I can...I can daydream. (Tanya & Tess – 4.5 years, 304-314)

Tanya seemed to experience her conscious attention as being somewhat relegated to what was going on between the tip of the cane and the space in the immediate vicinity. But with Tess, her mind was freed to attend to and engage with things farther than an arm's length on her own accord or to roam freely in her mind space.

From Tanya's extract above, we also come to appreciate how the partnership not only relieved her of the concentration-demanding quality of walking, but also seemed to mean that walking could be experienced as an intrinsically enjoyable, pleasurable activity, where one could 'daydream.' This seemed to be a subtle but relevant feature of several owners' experiences of partnership. They described being out and about as an 'adventure' or getting lost in a 'fun' way. Drew's interview captured powerfully this transformed experience of walking. For Drew,

walking at night had been an activity during which he would usually find himself filled with 'anxiety' and with his 'shoulder[s] tensed' and a 'headache' from worrying about walking into other people (or the other way around). Later in his account, Drew gave the following description of a particularly memorable walk that he took with Douglas on one summer night:

It was in the dark, it was summer so it's nice and warm and, and then we just started marching along, passed people, that was quite windy so, blows of nice warm air flying through my hair, um, I felt like some sort of um, I don't know what you call that, you know like um, some kind of er, whatever the blind equivalent of being on like holiday in, in California, hahaha. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 168-174)

The vivid details of Drew's account highlight a sense of basking in the sensorial aspects of the physical world. From Drew's description, we recognize a certain smoothness that his moving body experienced, not bashing into anyone. Drew's concluding remark – 'Like holiday in California' – reinforced for us how walking at night had potentially become an enjoyable experience in and of itself for him.

The emerged spontaneity seemed to render walking a more truthful individual resource for the owners. Some owners spoke of being more willing to travel farther or to unfamiliar areas, or to 'pop' into shops or other establishments. However, for a newcomer like William, whose working/walking partnership with the guide dog was still experienced largely as a work in progress, the sense of a relatively relaxed, smooth mobility appeared to be more of a flickering moment than a recurrent, sustained feature of being out and about:

When it works, well...I can, I can understand, the...I could actually close my eyes and trust him, um, but not every time no, I think he's got a fair way to go [...]you know the penny dropped then that's what, that's what life with a guide dog is about, actually, when it's like that, rather than it being a hard work. (William & Walter – 3 months, 465-492)

For William, even though 'good walks' came about rarely, the experience of such a moment seemed to be important to him, as it reminded him of the good that will come and motivated him to keep up his present work for the partnership with Walter. 'It's getting better, getting better, getting better, getting better...' said William, repeatedly (243-244).

Group Experiential Theme IV. Changing social world in becoming a guide dog-associated person

In the interviews, almost all of the owners spontaneously pointed to certain changes they had experienced in their relations with other people after the service acquisition, particularly in the public sphere. Many owners' accounts of their pre-guide-dog time (either using a cane or without an assistive aid) highlighted experiences in which they—as visually impaired individuals—were not effectively (or comfortably) recognized by others in the social setting. For instance, they described being 'ignored' or 'knocked over' by others, feeling 'self-conscious' using a cane, or being misunderstood as 'drunk' or 'slight/rude' for their occasionally less tactful comportment.

The owners' accounts show they invariably experienced a greater social visibility in being a guide dog-associated person. The physical co-presence of a guide dog not only rendered them more visible to others as visually impaired, but also made them simultaneously more relatable, welcoming, and warranting of understanding and assistance in the eyes of others. However, several of these personal accounts also illuminated certain complications in navigating the social world as a guide dog-associated person. The personal accounts in this context pointed out the tension and ambivalence that were evoked for the owners about their unity with the guide dog partners in the particular social situations (e.g. unsolicited engagement, access/denial to the guide dog).

Subtheme 4.1. New social visibility: becoming relatable, sociable, welcoming in the eyes of others

Almost all of the first-time owners in the study took note of a new influx of social interaction that marked their experience of being out and about as a guide dog-associated/assisted person. The owners underlined how they found that members of the general public would more frequently initiate friendly, casual exchanges with them, in contrast to their earlier experience of either being out with a cane or without any assistive aid. From the owners' accounts, there was a sense that they came to experience a new and more positive social visibility through the co-presence of a guide dog; they had somehow become more relatable, sociable, and welcoming in the eyes of other people. An extract from Lillian's interview provides us with a starting point to see this change:

People know how to respond to a dog, or they're, they're more comfortable, they're like, 'Okay, this is a dog we get it,' whereas the cane they're a bit like, 'What is that and who is this person?' (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 946-959)

From Lillian's extract, we sense that she experienced the cane as an undefined object to the public. As such, her physical association with the cane gave her an ambiguous status in the eyes of others: Is she visually impaired, or is she...? For Lillian, the visible company of a guide dog seemed to have transformed her otherwise ambiguous presence in the social context and clarified for people who she was—someone with visual impairment—and therefore what the viable interactional scripts would be. Subtly, Lillian seemed to experience the guide dog's co-presence as relieving her of not only an undefined social visibility, but also a suspicious, unwelcoming one. Elsewhere in the interview, she remarked that people often reacted to her and the cane with 'panic' and 'fear.' However, with a guide dog by her side, Lillian found that people were eager and excited to chat with her, sometimes too much so.

The sense of being removed from a relatively undefined, ambiguous presence in the eyes of others as described in Lillian's extract is deserving of further consideration. This observation guided us to a particular aspect of the social experience of visual impairment, an undercurrent that seemed to be common to several owners' accounts of the new social world that the partnership had fostered for them. Sight loss, as an impairment, usually bears no physical mark. As such, it is not often visible or readily recognized by other people. From the interviews, there was the sense that the visibility or discernibility of the owners' sight loss hinged largely on whether they used physical aids and the types of aids used. The majority of owners in the group had used a cane before (to various extents), and there was a shared experience that a cane was suboptimal for making them visible and signalling their visual impairment to others, as we saw in Lillian's extract.

However, while the guide dog was experienced as being more effective (or unambiguous) in making their sight loss visible to other people than the cane (or without any aid), the owners' descriptions also suggested the association with a guide dog seemed to bestow on them certain additional attributes—making them relatable, sociable, welcoming—in the eyes of the general public. Let us consider a passage from Kadence's interview:

They don't, doubt, that you are going to be, communicative, kind, talk to them, no, they don't doubt it, people will just come up to me [...]people just, trust, they come towards you, I think they think you've got a guide dog you...you're safe, you're, you know what I mean you're, you're not gonna, you're not gonna hurt the child, you know you're not gonna do anything. (Kadence & Knox – 6 years, 766-773)

The expression 'They don't doubt' indicated that for Kadence, it seemed that other people's seeing her and a guide dog prompted them to automatically assume she was a sociable person. But interestingly, Kadence also seemed to experience her co-presence with a guide dog as lending her an aura of trustworthiness and credibility, perhaps because the guide dog epitomizes people's charity. Likewise, the expressions 'You're safe' and 'who is this person' from Kadence's and Lillian's descriptions, respectively, mirror each other and reinforce a sense that with the guide dogs by their side, they shed a somewhat suspicious, intruder-like disguise and re-entered the view of others as someone more relatable and fitting in.

For the most part, the owners experienced their new social visibility and attractiveness as a guide dog-associated person positively. Angus, for example, perceived the newfound social attention experienced in the company of a guide dog as an opportunity for interpersonal connection in the otherwise dull public sphere of modern life:

It does attract other people, you get, you know...invariably, you know, people will stop, a conversation or something like that, I mean, it does tend to be about dogs but, you know. [I: How do you find that aspect?] It's fine, yeah I don't mind.[...]it's fine, it's quite nice really, because otherwise, you know what's like when you commuting and stuff like, nobody talks to anybody so, just breaking that it's quite nice. (Angus & Archie – 10 months, 880-889)

Like Angus, many owners found themselves being approached by people with questions about their guide dogs or the guide dog service or by those who wanted to share their personal stories about dogs. In the interview, Matthew spoke from his experience of how Marco the guide dog had been a great 'conversation starter.' Matthew also perceived the social attention directed to the guide dog as having the potential to be redirected to him and thereby make such social encounters opportunities for other people to know him as an individual person:

I will be very surprised if, if, someone didn't come over, and say, oh, he's a lovely dog, blah blah blah blah, it happens all the time, you know. And, it gives people, I think it gives people that opportunity to ask about guide dogs, and in turn, they then turn their attentions [I: to you] to you, me, yeah. (Matthew & Marco – 13 months, 1324-1334)

For Bridget, the particular new social circumstance in which she found herself through the partnership was also a positive opportunity on a personal front. Bridget noted how she felt more confident and encouraged to take part in social events knowing that others would actively approach her when she was accompanied by a guide dog. Importantly, for Bridget, there was a sense of an upgraded identity. She appeared to find herself experiencing a new meaning of

what it is to be someone with visual impairment – a shift from regarding herself as in a strained relationship with other (sighted) people to one marked by openness and relatedness:

I feel like, there's something that I can just kind of, bond with people on the level of talking about dogs, I can, you know, even if they don't have a dog [...] So I think it's, it's just given me a, very positive, identity I guess, as a blind person [...] an identity that, is, open, to others, and, and I can relate, you know, to people I can relate to others, others can relate to me a lot better now that I have Bruce. (Bridget & Bruce – 3 years, 804-810)

From Bridget's extract, it not only seemed that the visible company of the guide dog had shaped how others viewed her, but she also seemed to emerge through the new, more welcoming responses of others with the experience of an additional dimension of her identity. It was as if she no longer felt like a blind person who was *just different*, but also an *ordinary, everyday* dog-owner.

Subtheme 4.2. New social visibility: becoming warranting of forgiveness and assistance in the eyes of others

Apart from a surge of friendly exchanges initiated by others, several owners' accounts further highlighted the greater understanding and help that others expressed towards them when they were accompanied by guide dogs. In particular, what seemed to stand out to these owners was how the visible presence of guide dogs more effectively prompted other people to understand and respond sensitively to their occasional blunders in the public/social context (e.g. knocking into things). Josslyn, for instance, referenced her pre-guide-dog time in the interview, underscoring how others used to assume she was 'drunk' when, in the absence of a visible assistive aid, she entered their view as someone tripping over or walking into things:

People thought I was drunk because, you know I was...I couldn't see things, so yeah so they kind of, yeah, the, people weren't very, um...understanding when I said, I've got something wrong with my eyes because I don't look...like, you know, like I've got a problem, look just normal. (Josslyn & Jessa – 3 years, 9-12)

Josslyn's relatively 'normal' appearance – the invisibility of her sight loss to others – concerned her. Josslyn described herself more than once through expressions like 'I don't look' or 'I look.' As commented, sight loss is a condition or impairment that is often less discernible to other people due to the absence of physical marks. In addition, like most other owners in the study, Josslyn continued to experience a certain degree of useful residual vision and used it in her daily life whenever she could. As such, there was a sense that Josslyn experienced her residual vision as contributing to her rather 'normal' appearance. With the lack of physical marks, the residual

vision, and a lack of a visible assistive aid, it seemed that Josslyn perceived her sight loss as ever opaque to others, leaving her unable to defend the authenticity of her visually impaired status. In referring to the pre-guide dog self via the statement ‘ people thought I was drunk’, Josslyn seemed to experience the invisibility of her visual impairment as being capable of making her unsteady actions like irresponsible *personal actions*, casting her as a social rule transgressor in the eyes of others.

Josslyn’s extract directed us to another potential background feature of owners’ experiences in the public sphere as someone with visual impairment. There was a sense that a social predicament had been set up for visually impaired owners. While having sight loss could mean that the individuals might at times not comport themselves exactly like their sighted counterparts (i.e. in a less socially expected or accepted manner), it was also a condition that was not a readily viable justification for them unless they managed to make their sight loss effectively discernible to others. Without making their sight loss convincingly visible, though, the owners’ social blunders, and themselves, were susceptible to negative judgment, criticism, and blame (‘drunk’).

However, as the accounts of Henry and some other owners suggested, they valued the company of a guide dog for effectively making visible and authenticating their visually impaired status, absolving them from the potential social predicament. Among the owners interviewed, Henry expressed the strongest appreciation for the greater social understanding that he experienced in the context of the partnership. Hank’s social visibility stood out greatly to Henry in comparison to his earlier experience with a cane. Henry appeared to experience Hank almost as a ready-made proof of his sight loss and a socially acceptable justification for others to make sense of his breaking the rules in social exchanges:

Hank allows, for, um, somebody to understand why you might not be behaving, in a way that they might expect [...] I might miss, a man’s hand being offered to me, they, would then take that as a slight [...] If you have a guide dog with you, the explanation is there for them, to pick up, ‘Oh he’s got a guide dog’, he can’t see my hand.’ (Henry & Hank –7 months, 484-495)

For Henry, the social visibility of a guide dog also had the perk of effectively eliciting help from others. He described finding others more responsive to his requests for support when he approached them with Hank by his side, or people more proactively offered assistance even when not requested. In their interviews, several other owners also underscored this experience of more helpful, supportive others. Tanya, for example, spoke of a sense of security, of being

looked after in knowing that people's assistance would be readily available when she had a guide dog with her:

People just go ohh...guide dog, and they come and help you, whereas...you know if you go with the cane people completely ignore you, you knock over things people get at you, whereas if the dog...walks you into something, they'll tell the dog off, they think it's the dog's fault, you know, and...and that really gives you that security, that kind of...people are gonna look out for me because I've got the dog. (Tanya & Tess – 4.5 years, 281-286)

With a guide dog by her side, Tanya seemed to no longer perceive herself as being susceptible to personal criticism or blame for failing to smoothly engage with the physical surroundings as socially expected or demanded. Instead, she entered the view of others as someone who warranted their help and intervention.

Entering the public scene together with a guide dog, the owners found themselves seen by others as visually impaired persons whose social blunders were therefore understandable and warranting of assistance. It was as if through the visible presence of the guide dog, the owners were alleviated of the risk of feeling personally unfit, blamed, or criticised in public. As Drew remarked, he felt himself facing a public who were 'a lot more forgiving' when he had Douglas the guide dog by his side:

People are a lot more forgiving I think, I think the guide dog is such a, um...an overt symbol of sight loss [...] it's like um, such a strong symbol, people see a guide dog they like okay, blind person. Whereas I think there's, not as much understanding around white canes or why you might have them. Um, and so, um, in my experience people more readily apologize, people more readily um, then after, you know, a confrontation will help me get to where I am going that kind of thing, so I found the world a kinder place since I have Douglas. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 328-334)

As expressed in the statement 'I found the world a kinder place,' Drew and many other first-time owners in the study found that a new public sphere seemed to have been fostered for them through the partnership. With their guide dog partner visually and symbolically embodying their sight loss, they found others responding to them in a friendlier and more understanding and supportive way. In this new form of social encounter and new sense of relatedness with others, the owners also came to experience themselves as more relatable, welcome fellow members of the public and less as suspicious strangers or unfit transgressors.

Subtheme 4.3. The ambivalence of person-guide dog unity in social contexts

As discussed in preceding sections, almost all the owners in the group underscored how other people were prompted to regard them more positively because of the co-presence of a guide dog. But within this broad convergence, several owners' accounts also unravelled a more complex view, wherein their experience of the new social reality appeared to be less straightforward. In particular, these owners' interviews invariably captured a tension or ambivalence felt in their encounters with others as a guide dog-assisted person. There was a sense that they, at times, found themselves feeling inappropriately linked or unlinked with their guide dog in the particular ways others responded to them. Such social encounters seemed to also have certain repercussions especially on how they thought and felt about themselves as individual people.

As noted, almost all of the owners spoke of how they were actively approached and sought out more by others when out with guide dogs. However, Henry and Lillian seemed to see the rise in social popularity and unsolicited contact as a potential mixed blessing, in which they traded personal space and individual autonomy for the socialization:

The moment you have a guide dog, you enter a different world [...] having a guide dog doesn't mean that you want to talk to people, but people will talk to you, you know, that's the, aspect of it [...] whether you want to be or not [I: Whether you want to be or not] Yes, it's no longer your choice. (Henry & Hank – 7 months, 523-566)

For Henry, there was a sense that when others approached him unsolicited, they seemed to have inferred from his linkage with the guide dog a publicly accessible status. He became someone open for interaction by default and someone with whom the rules of personal space were rescinded. We could pick up a subtle sense of powerlessness from Henry's account. He had no choice over his publicly accessible role; it was something that came with using the service.

To Henry, however, there was the sense that he was not strongly troubled, but relatively accepting of these new aspects of his social experience. Indeed, elsewhere in the interview, Henry described how he was driven to be socially available to the public because he was 'grateful' to them for their donation for making the service possible in the first place. However, as a newcomer to the service, Lillian appeared to be still grappling with her experience of being approached by others unsolicited when out with the guide dog. Lillian's interview stood out in the group for the strong and explicit ambivalence that she expressed about the new social world fostered through the partnership:

It feels like we come as a package [...] it feels like I'm...like, we're kind of...like we're on display for public curiosity [...] I feel like I ought to answer them. Um. So how much is it within...I suppose my question is, how much is it within my... where do I set the boundaries? [...] It feels even more of an obligation, because obviously, you're grateful, for the person, giving the money for the dog, and you wouldn't have a dog without public, generosity. But, does it mean that again, it's kind of... like, am I a pub- am I...are we public property? (Lillian & Lyla – 2 months, 820 -858)

Here, Lillian seemed torn. On one hand, she wanted to have personal space and privacy and to exercise her right to decline when people approached her for conversation. On the other hand, she also felt that it was mandatory for her to commit herself to being accessible to others, i.e. the perceived donors. But Lillian's extract seemed to contain a deeper, more profound ambivalence. There was the sense that, in the face of people's unsolicited engagement, Lillian felt she was at risk of being subsumed by the partnership if she were equated with her dog partner and thus would become part of the end-product of people's donations. Subtly, the ambivalence captured here appeared to be less about being thankful to donors and more about Lillian's struggle with the potential loss of her individuality and subjectivity through others' unsolicited contact. The deindividualization or objectification unravelled itself effectively through the terms 'package,' 'property.' Lillian seemed to be still in the heat of her ambivalence, as she came across as undecided and engaging with a frame of pronoun reference that was unsettled between 'we' and 'I' (e.g. 'I'm...like,' 'we're,' 'am I...are we').

Lillian's and Henry's accounts illustrated the circumstance in which the owners could feel too linked to the guide dog partner in the social context. However, some owners' interviews also captured encounters where they appeared to perceive themselves as inappropriately decoupled from their guide dog partners by others. For instance, in Josslyn's case, the sense of tension seemed to be embedded in the social exchange where she was misattributed as the 'trainer' of her guide dog partner:

A lot people asking me, um, am I training Jessa, because I don't, you know, I don't look like, like if there is anything wrong with me but then...and I said and they're very surprised when I said, no she's actually mine [...] it's a bit odd. (Josslyn & Jessa – 3 years, 507-512)

For Josslyn, it seemed that her sense of self as a visually impaired individual sometimes remained socially precarious despite having Jessa the guide dog by her side. Instead of reading her co-presence with Jessa as owner-guide dog, Josslyn found her normal appearance misguided others (once again) to read the association as trainer-trainee. We could sense

Josslyn's uneasiness with the mismatch between her view and the views of others regarding her personal status. Subtly, to Josslyn, others' responses seemed to be translated into a form of scepticism (albeit unwittingly) and a burden on her to authenticate her identity as visually impaired and/or the legitimacy of her need for Jess.

Kadence's experience was relatable to Josslyn's, though for her, it involved a more unpleasant scenario. In the interview, Kadence spoke of how a longtime friend had deemed her need for or use of a guide dog as unwarranted since Kadence retained residual vision. Kadence described how this friend 'went berserk' when Kadence attended a regular gathering with Knox. Eventually, Kadence stopped visiting this friend:

They sent an email the other day, um saying, sitting in the conservatory drinking Prosecco, and missing you, and I wanted to write back and say, you won't welcome Knox, so because you don't welcome Knox, I no longer feel welcome[...]I don't feel welcome in your house, because you, won't welcome...that part of me and, and that's how I feel that's when I said earlier, somehow I feel...that something of me has transferred into the dog. (Kadence & Knox – 6 years, 358-385)

Through the expression 'that part of me,' we recognize Kadence experienced Knox as an indispensable part of her. Earlier in her interview, Kadence described experiencing a change in her perception of herself amid her sight loss: She had become someone who was dependent on Knox. That is, Knox had come to embody her very sense of independence as a visually impaired person. For Kadence, it was not just Knox's being rejected or the lack of hospitality that she felt in her falling out with this friend, but perhaps more critically, it was her experience of having her sense of self as a visually impaired person unfairly negated.

Kadence was not the only one in the group who had experienced other people's refusing access to their guide dog partners. Lillian and Drew described being caught in similar scenarios in a workplace and a restaurant, respectively. For Lillian and Drew, their experiences of such incidents were filled with anger. Interestingly, both of them emphasized how it was rather unexpected for them to find themselves feeling an intense personal denigration ('personal insult,' 'discriminated') despite the fact that others' rejection was directed at the guide dogs. It was also in such incidents that their connectedness with their guide dog partners was made ever more salient to them.

Although access refusal was not a common type of social encounter, it nonetheless appeared to have left a strong impression on the individuals. For instance, when the interviewer asked Drew

if there was anything else he wanted to share towards the end of the interview, he chose to open up about his first-year experience of restaurant staff not allowing Douglas entry:

It's hard not to feel...um take that as a personal insult, if you see what I mean, because, coz he is me, you know, you are not just, being horrible about my dog, you are being horrible about me as person so, I think that's maybe something I wasn't prepared for, when I, when I got him, that I would feel so.....I would feel so inextricably link to him that if anything, was said to him or, or, done to him I would take that as a personal front. (Drew & Douglas – 2.5 years, 549-559)

Drew's sense of oneness with Douglas registered strongly when others rejected Douglas or when others mistakenly saw Drew and Douglas as separable. It also seemed that when Drew's linkage with Douglas became more salient to him, Drew simultaneously felt his sense of self had somehow become more publicly or socially open and susceptible to the responses of others.

This undertone of an added, newly emerged social vulnerability appeared to be an aspect that was lingering in the personal accounts that we considered in this subtheme. We recognized that the ways in which the owners thought and felt about themselves had been modulated by their experience in the social contexts and by the particular ways that others interpreted and responded to their associations with the guide dogs. And in every case, the owners' extracts captured a certain conflict between their personal views and the views of others of the guide dog-self linkage – of who or how they should be as individuals.

Chapter 9. Study Two: Discussion

The second part of the project approached the guide dog–person partnership by shifting to examine the views of the guide dog owners themselves. This study concerned a particular perspective: that of white British first-time owners residing in London. The chapter will discuss the key findings of the study by considering their relations to observations and views presented in the extant owner-focused research discussed in Chapter 2 and additional literature sought in light of this study’s findings.

Working/walking with the guide dog

The accounts of the first-time owners highlighted how walking/working with a guide dog was neither a straightforward nor overnight accomplishment. Rather, it involved a form of interactive synchrony that was built through what Bohan and James (2015) noted as a *process* that demands active learning and continuous adjustment of both the guide dog and the person over time.

As demonstrated, an unsettling sense of inconsistency and unpredictability emerged across the interviews as a salient feature of the owners’ early impressions of guide dog–aided mobility. The interview accounts illustrated the diverse way in which such experiential quality manifested to the individual. As presented in the analysis, the unstable work performance of the dog partner could engender feelings of surprise and confusion (Angus: ‘This is not what I imagined it was gonna be like’) as well as danger/vulnerability (William: ‘Am I in danger?’); it could be understood as a transitory state (Bridge: ‘He wasn’t even two years old’) or as something permanent (Rosemary: ‘Whether one ever [gets] overcome or not, I don’t know’). In an important way, the owners’ first-hand experiences complement the observations made in Study 1, where the professionals linked the working guide dogs with wild behaviours and a mental facility for spontaneous/unpredictable actions. The owners’ experience also seemed to connect to that of the participants from some previous research. For instance, in the study of Li et al. (2019), the responses of the older, first-time owners suggested handling and restricting the dog partner’s unexpected or undesired behaviour as the area that demanded most of their learning and adjustment.

While the issue of control emerged from this study as an important aspect of the owners' experience of learning to work/walk with the guide dog, distinct from past research, this study also shed light on potential gendered patterns in how the task of control manifested to the individuals. To many female owners in this study, what initially stood out to them was the sense of being shifted or demanded to relinquish certain control and become (partly) dependent in walking/working with the guide dog (Tanya: 'Putting all your trust in a dog'). This new state of dependence also appeared particularly salient to those who had been frequent cane users in the past.

The accounts of many male owners, however, highlighted the perceived need or challenge of exerting control on/over the guide dog in the working/walking context. Oftentimes the act of control was described by the male owners in reference to a concern for the physical safety of the team, though the specific form or instance of control concerned by them differed (e.g. verbally suppressing initiative made by the guide dog, utilising a particular type of headcollar).

However, to some male owners, the measure of control seemed to be experienced in an emotionally laden way. Matthew, for example, described how he would explicitly and verbally apologise to Marco when using the gentle leader with him ('Sorry, you gotta put this back on'). Drew, on other hand, described how he would deliberately adopt a more detached, objectified stance towards Douglas when the two were out and about. While Drew saw that this shift prevented him from being 'too soft' on Douglas, thereby potentially endangering the team, from Drew's account, a full/complete compartmentalisation seemed impossible in practice. Rather, we found him relating to Douglas in a paradoxical stance of *detached care*: 'I still love him, but he stops being my pet dog, and he becomes my mobility aid, so he's a tool'.

The gendered distinction around the issue of control observed is interesting; it may also be potentially understandable. On a broader level, Western culture has traditionally held different sets of attributes and roles for women and men (O'Neil et al., 2016; Tronto, 1987). While socialisation fosters attributes such as nurturing, giving, and responsiveness in women/girls, it tends to define men/boys as possessing qualities such as power, control, independence, and restrained emotionality (Gilligan, 1982, cited in Shaprio, 1994). If gender norms are one important source of resources that guide people in navigating through everyday life, this frame of reference could also appear meaningful to the owners in responding to the issue of control in the working relationship with their guide dogs (Ramirez, 2006).

In a smaller context, dominance and obedience have traditionally been the key tokens in the dog training world, wherein the person is conceived as adopting the 'pack mentality' natural to the dogs and assuming an 'alpha' position to effectively work/train with the dog (Greenebaum, 2010). The language spoken in this field is arguably masculine (Pemberton, 2019) and potentially resonates more with the men's way of doing things. Indeed, the male owners in this study did appear to refer to their in-charge position to the guide dog more intuitively or frequently than the female owners. However, at the same time, for individuals like Matthew and Drew, one saw how assuming authority over their dog partner was not perceived by them as a completely natural, unproblematic stance without also experiencing any personal conflict or emotional complication.

While the owners' accounts of their initial working/walking experience with the guide dog featured certain challenges and adjustments, the owners also variously referred to a new sense of sensitivity and responsiveness towards their dog partners which they have acquired through spending more time actually interacting with the dogs at work/walk. Also, in orienting to the guide dog through this acquired sensitivity, the owners found themselves starting to experience the work/walk in the form of a more flexible, tacit, harmonious activity.

Interestingly, as demonstrated, the kind of sensibility that stood out in the female owners' interviews could be differentiated from that in the male owners' accounts. It was noted that many female owners perceived themselves as becoming more able to 'feel' the movement of the handle attached to the harness positioned on the guide dog. They were, in other words, more able to pick up, interpret, and respond to the information relayed to them haptically through the moving bodies of their dog partners.

Through a form of tactile-kinaesthesia connection, the guide dogs bring forward physical details of the travelling environment to the owners, and the latter respond accordingly. Moreover, as Bridge recounted, the felt connection would expand and deepen. Bridget felt that her repertoire of Bruce's meaningful movements grew, the grip on the handle no longer just relaying information about the space but also the subjective experience of her dog partner ('I just know how Bruce's feeling [...] You need time to kind of get that emotional layer').

While the female owners in this study highlighted the corporal, tactile-kinaesthetic changes in their connection with the guide dog during the work/walk, the existing literature on guide dog-aided mobility (and visual impairment research, more broadly) seems to have rarely attempted to capture the participant's view as an experiencing embodied subject. That the body

'disappears' (Hugh & Patterson, 1997) in the literature is peculiar, however. Touch and more embodied forms of communication are arguably immanent aspects of the guide dog–owner partnership. Not only is walking with a guide dog an event wherein the person is guided by an alingual partner, but also, as the professionals from Study 1 explained, the person should keep an upright posture and follow the dog's guidance through feeling at hand rather than through residual vision.

Though focusing on a specialist walking group of sighted (human) volunteers and visually impaired walkers, the study by Macpherson (2012) lends transferrable insights into understanding the feel-based sensitivity which the female owners experienced with their guide dogs. Taking a phenomenological orientation, Macpherson (2012) captured the sight–guide relationship in terms of the pre-reflective, shared corporalities. As the sighted guide, she perceived herself as being prompted to incorporate into her own bodily awareness the embodied existence of her visually impaired companion. Touching or holding onto the guide's arm (the hand or strap of the guide's backpack), the visually impaired walkers would read the terrain through the guide's movement and their own 'tactile-muscular and kinesthetic senses' (p. 138) and adjust their movements accordingly. Extending from Merleau Ponty's work, the sight–guide relationship, Macpherson suggested, was the 'coupling of body schemas' (p. 147).

The working/walking relationship between the guide dog and the owner is not very different from the interpersonal engagement depicted by Macpherson (2012). Like the sighted human guide, the guide dog was trained to encompass the body of the owner into her/his perceptual field (e.g. looking out for overhanging branches that the owner may bump into). The owner, on the other hand, has learned the specific meaning intended by the moving handle (e.g. a sideways pull meant a lamppost ahead). However, the kind of felt connection forged between the guide dog and the owner appeared to be more intense, intimate, and personal than that between the human guide and the walker. The guide dog–owner pair shared a longer history. As Bridget accounted, she felt tactile-kinaesthetically attuned to Bruce not only on the 'practical layer' but also in the 'emotional' way where the touch disclosed to her what/how Bruce might be feeling in this moment of the walk (e.g. a tighter pull may be a sign of distress or excitement). What the female owners experienced as the partnership progressed closely resembles what Shapiro (1990) labelled as the 'kinesthetic empathy' adopted by the person in her way to understand the animal companion.

However, what emerged as more salient, strongly from the male owners' interviews, was their perception of a growing openness and commitment to adjust the work/walk need of the person

for the needs of their dog partner. They came to understand the working/walking relationship as both goal-directed and relational; the joint mobility, as Drew and Henry described, was a 'two-way street' wherein the needs of both the person and the dog are equally important and to be balanced. There was often the sense that, through interacting and working with the guide dog on a one-to-one basis across time, the owners were brought to recognize and appreciate the dog more as an animated, individualized being than as an instrumental entity ('robot dog', 'moped or car').

That said, the study's attention to and interest in comparing the accounts of the female and male owners was neither intended to verify the causal role of gender in determining people's relationships with their guide dogs nor intended to assert that the two genders experience the partnership in some fundamentally different ways. The study shares the view that people's relationships towards animal beings are likely to be shaped by a wide range of factors (e.g. gender, age, religion; Knight et al., 2008). And speaking from the hermeneutics point of view, the gendered patterns were the 'parts' that only acquired their analytic significance in light of the 'whole' (Smith et al., 2009), the broader common features that link the partnership experiences of the 11 first-time owners as a group.

The off-duty time and the caregiving aspect of the partnership

From its conception, the association of the guide dog and the person was recognised and valued by society primarily as an instrumental, goal-oriented relationship (Audrestch et al., 2015). However, to the owners actually living with the guide dog, they may not spend a significant portion of time working with the dog partner for attaining particular mobility or functional needs (Craigon et al., 2017) but in responding to the individual needs of the dog or them simply being each other's company in settings like homes or parks. That said, with a few exceptions (e.g. Kwong & Bartholomow, 2011; York & Whiteside, 2018), this non-work aspect of the owner's experience has rarely been a subject for specific and in-depth investigation in past research.

In contrast, this study was driven by an explicit interest in understanding how the owners perceive their orientation towards and involvement with the guide dog in the non-working capacity. The experiential accounts of the first-time owners foreground off-duty time as a distinct context wherein the nature of the guide dog, the person, and the relationship was rendered more fluid and open for the owners to apply their own definition or interpretation than the clearly goal-directed working time. This fluidity was evidenced in part through the

different and multiple classificatory dimensions (e.g. parent–child, pet, ‘precious cargo’) that have been evoked by the owners, both within and across the individual interviews, to describe their involvement or the guide dog’s role outside of travel time.

However, patterns could also be discerned from this rich body of experiential material. Some interview accounts connected to one another as they all depicted the owners having a relatively firm or unequivocal understanding of how they should attend and respond to their dog partner when the harness is off. Rosslyn, for example, saw that her role as the owner in off-duty time was clearly defined; she was tasked to keep the set of ‘boundaries’ that secured Rosa in the specially trained, disciplined capacity and ensured that Rosa did not relax into being simply, completely a dog (‘She’s not allowed to [...]’). In the case of other owners, the unambiguous sense of relatedness manifested as a strong personal belief in regarding the dog partner outside of working time with the same intrinsic appreciation one would have for another significant person or an endearing family pet. In this context, looking after the off-duty dog was registered as a morally/ethically charged undertaking.

The second subset identified in the analysis was constituted by owners whose accounts made salient an experience with the guide dog off work that was characterised with confusion and/or fluctuations. Angus, for example, emphasized on Archie’s loss in his defining identity as a mobility aid on the one hand and Archie’s partial status as a genuine companion animal on the other. To Angus, the off-duty time was a somewhat ‘paradoxical’ and ‘intrusive’ experience where he was felt being caught in an odd, unnatural, and befuddling version of human–animal relation that centres on him attending to the range of needs of Archie (‘He’s not being useful to me whatsoever. In fact, it’s the other way around, you know’).

The experiential material drawn from Angus’s interview suggested that being the carer of the guide dog could be more complex to the individuals than being simply a form of ‘drawback’ or labour/time demandingness as implied in some reports (Refson et al., 1999b; Whitmarsh, 2005). Rather, the owner’s conflicting perception of off-duty time could reflect an inherent difficulty and uneasiness within this relational context for the individual to rely on the conventional frame of references and position the guide dog straightforwardly as either a companion or a tool (Arluke & Sanders, 1996) and to perceive, derive, and settle with a perfectly congruent sense from his/her engagement with the dog partner.

In William’s case, the uneasy incongruency of the off-duty time manifested in the sense of being ‘isolated’ that he felt in the care aspect of the partnership. To William, the sense of isolation

was grounded in his uneasy, liminal relation to Walter: (a) William saw himself as being both qualified and disqualified for the identity of the everyday pet owner ('It's not even he was a puppy I bought or a dog I got'); and (b) William wanted looking after Walter to be an intimate, intrinsically rewarding thing ('I forgot that, you know, it's a joyful thing') but simultaneously experienced his connection to Walter as being somewhat conditional and as something lent by the organisation ('He's a very precious cargo for them').

The expression 'He's a precious cargo' effectively illustrated how the status of the guide dog and the guide dog-owner relation were rendered notably fluid and hazy outside of working time. To William and Angus, the dog partner under their care appeared neither as a subject ('he' 'pet') nor as an object ('cargo' 'useful') but uncomfortably as both or neither of the two. In an important respect, the personal accounts examined in this study have introduced diversity to the existing corpus; they offer an alternative view to that presented by Hicks and Weisman (2015) and Kwong and Bartholomow (2011), which highlighted the caregiving relation of the partnership as a primarily positive, mutually rewarding, and personal meaningful experience.

In addition, while the guide dog-owner unit has been typically referred as a two-party event in the literature, it was clear that William perceived the off-duty care as a tripartite engagement in which the interests of the guide dog, the owner, and the organisation were all at stake. Such observation prompts one to question the level of personal autonomy that an individual could experience in receiving any form of assistance/help (Marks, 1999; Shakespeare, 2006), and to ponder the extent to which the owners could feel genuinely empowered to interact or bond with their dog partner freely in a personally meaningful, intimate, and spontaneous manner.

That said, Kadence's and Lilian's interviews both illustrated them having undergone a substantial transformation from initially viewing their dog partner was just 'working animal' that needs limited or no engagement outside of work, to viewing him/her as one of their own and/or actively taking action to improve his/her quality of life in the downtime. Such transformation was interesting since Kadence was the only participant who had explicitly expressed a dislike for dogs in the interview. It was also interesting considering Lilian and Kadence were at quite different timepoints of their first partnership (second month vs. sixth year). The similar trajectory in which Lilian's and Kandace's experiences unfolded seemed to echo to the observation in past study that suggested that changes in individuals' attitudes towards animals were associated more with the quality rather than with the quantity per se of their direct encounter with the animals (Morris et al., 2012).

The impact of the guide dog partnership on the owners' sense of self was an area that was readily addressed in previous research; improvements in terms of owners' perceived independence, confidence and self-esteem have been documented in both quantitative (e.g. McIver et al., 2020; Whitmarsh, 2005) and qualitative studies (e.g. Gitlin et al., 1997; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008).

The present study was driven in part by an interest in investigating how the owners think and feel about themselves as individuals in light of the partnership experience. But, as the interview and analysis proceeded, it became clear that any change that the owners perceived in their self-identity was almost always considered in relation to their particular experience as a visually impaired individual before acquiring the guide dog service.

Detailed discussion on the owners' pre-guide dog time was quite limited in the literature, as the research tended to focus more on measuring the functional improvement or benefit that a guide dog service could bring to the individuals (e.g. Deverell et al., 2019; Steffen & Bergler, 1998). This approach, however, seems to unwittingly (mis)represent the individuals and their experience with the guide dog as an acontextual single event in time, independent from other frames of reference that constitute the individual's lifeworld as a whole.

To the owners in this study, their current views of themselves were positioned against their historical background of sight loss. All of them were born with full sight or had been functionally sighted for the most part of their life (i.e. childhood to young adulthood). While the owners have sight conditions that differ in nature and in length, they all experienced a substantial reduction in their vision a few years before applying for a guide dog. All the owners, in other words, came into the guide dog relationship having undergone a *major change* in their perceptual capacity as an embodied being. This change – that is, the sight loss – emerged across the interviews as an event that brought on disruption, not just in the sensorial or local sense; it was often pervasive or deep enough to affect how the owners viewed themselves *and* the material entities and activities that constitute the world. With sight loss, the world (e.g. stairs, road-crossings) appeared to lose its familiar, meaningful structure and became uncertain and impossible, while the self was reduced to a being of vulnerability and inability.

The way that deteriorated sight seemed to radically transform the background that structures the owners' experience can be related to the phenomenological literature on the experience of illness (e.g. Svenaeus, 2000; 2015) and disability (e.g. Patterson & Hughes, 1997; Toombs,

2013). These writings are all grounded in the phenomenological recognition of the body in the content and the range of possibilities of our experience (Carel, 2016; Finlay, 2011).

A central theme emerged from these works was the loss of the familiar, taken-for-granted world experienced in a major change in one's body function – the closing down of one's capacity to be in and with the world in a habitual, comfortable and spontaneous way. This view has been linked to the concept of 'uncanniness' in Heidegger's ontology, which suggests that a fundamental aspect of our being-in-the-world is a feeling of 'not-at-home-ness' (Carel, 2016; Svenaeus, 2000). To Heidegger, we can find the world to be an unwelcoming, resistant place where our body is made manifestly present and alienated, just as we can find the world to be a familiar, home-like place in which we effectively deal with the requirements of our everyday living through an established range of taken-for-granted, meaningful actions and comportments (Finlay, 2006). This sense of not-at-home-ness, or the contingency of our existence, is usually latent but becomes obtrusively salient in illness or other conditions that result in major changes in our bodily capacity (Svenaeus, 2000).

Against an uncanny being-in-the-world with sight loss, the owners variously emphasized the notable sense of 'confidence' and 'security' that they came to experience in being the guide dog owner. To the owners, the notions of confidence and security seemed to be experientially interchangeable or closely related, pointing to how something primal and unwanted about living as a visually impaired individual had been alleviated, reversed or undone through the guide dog partnership.

In some studies on guide dog owners, a person's report of feeling more confident or secure seemed to be framed as an intrapersonal phenomenon or as being pertinent to discrete components of a singular core self (e.g. McIver et al., 2020). The present analysis, however, would suggest that feeling more confident-secure in becoming a guide dog-aided walker points to a broader, unitary aspect of their experience. It is a positively different state of being, a more homelike sense of interconnection felt between the self, body and the physical world; experientially, it manifested to the first-time owners in three notable ways or senses, which include: *I am not (vulnerably) alone*, *I can/I am able* and *I am relaxed/I am free*.

I am not (vulnerably) alone

The first manifestation of the new state of confidence-security is the sense of *I am not (vulnerably) alone* that was demonstrated in the expression of having 'someone'/'somebody',

which occurred in most owners' accounts of being out and about with the guide dog. From the interviews, the guide dog emerged as a *resourceful* and *empathic* partner whose physical presence was an assuring and anchoring force that the owners strongly valued vis-à-vis a world that was made strange and challenging due to sight loss (e.g. Lilian: 'we are facing the world, as a team').

This experience of 'I am with someone/somebody' or 'I am not (vulnerably) alone' could be aligned to a sense of *companionship* that owners in other studies identified as one of the positive aspects perceived to come from a guide dog partnership (e.g. Gitlin et al., 1997; Whitmarsh, 2005; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008). The present finding could also relate, to some extent, with Kwong and Bartholomew's (2011) analysis, which reports that guide dog owners perceive their dog partner as the source of 'felt-security', providing comfort in times of distress in ways that correspond to key components of Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) like 'safe haven' and 'secure base'.

The sense of unconditional support that was registered by some owners in this study (e.g. Bridget: 'always know that you've actually got someone on your side') was also reported by participants in Kwong and Bartholomew's study (2011). A similar observation was made by McGhee et al. (2022) in their IPA study of advanced cancer patients' experience of everyday pet dog companionship. In this context, the authors highlighted the positive attachment (e.g. unconditional nature and emotional congruence) perceived by participants as a 'grounding effect' (p. 6) that prompted participants to shift from a focus on loss to an acceptance of new possibilities in life.

But, distinct from previous research, the present study captures a bodily dimension of the sense of reassuring companionship that the owners experience when being out with their dog partner. For example, the analysis takes note of an extract from Henry's interview, where he stresses that he found a sense of comfort and security from Hank's capacity to be a proper recipient of intimate bodily contact ('hug', 'stroke') as much as from Hank's guiding/working capacity in the physical world. The analysis also highlights Drew's account of a 'good sense of security' from experiencing a bodily shield that Douglas appeared to deliberately forge around him when they found themselves in busy environments that are potentially overwhelming to traverse, like London: 'he would always stand very close to me and press again my leg, and then, that's very very nice'.

I can/I am able

To many owners, the pre-guide dog self was remembered as someone who was prone to ‘bump’, ‘fall’, or ‘crash’ into things and people in their living world. Such rough encounters with the world were physically unpleasant (‘painful’, ‘hurt’). Most importantly, these experiences of bumping and crashing into things appeared to accumulate and take a toll on the owners’ very perception of their self. Drew’s interview powerfully reveals how these little accidents on the road directed his perception towards himself as a third-person critic, picking up his ‘physical flaws’ and claiming his incompetence: ‘see, you are blind, see, you can’t get around on your own’. To some owners, the bumping and crashing turned into a ‘mental battle’ or ‘trap’; they constantly felt a denigration of the self, as Kandace articulated vividly: ‘however much of you try not to, sight loss closes you in, like that, it’s a trap’.

The owners’ accounts reveal how the sense of *I can’t/I am not able* came to characterize their view of their self with sight loss. In doing so, they illustrate the mutual disclosure that phenomenologists see as being immanent in the relationship between the self, body and the world (Finlay, 2011; Spinelli, 2005). Falling off from the curb or walking into people not only presented and re-presented to owners the world as a dangerous, resisting place; it also rendered their vision-impaired body *dys-appear* (Leder, 1990) – as alien to the living world of structure and dynamism that are forged by and for the majority of able-bodied (in this case, functionally sighted) people (Patterson & Hughes, 1997).

To most of the visually impaired owners who came to the guide dog service for the very first time, it was through the aid of their dog partner that they re-experienced a safer and more effective engagement with the world that they had not experienced for quite some time. Most owners referred to themselves in more agentic terms than they did when recounting their pre-guide dog time; they spoke of the places they went, the people they met and the activities they enjoyed after becoming a guide dog owner. This sense of *I can/I am able* appeared as the second core constituting the broader state of confidence-security that stood out to the owners through the partnership.

The very moment in which the owners felt they reclaimed a sense of agency was often registered deeply in the individuals’ memories. Matthew, for example, spoke vividly of how he was brought to tears in the first road-crossing he accomplished with Marco, he felt that a ‘new world’ of possibilities suddenly came into life for him: ‘you just got million things going around in your head’.

A horizon of possibilities is immanent in – and disclosed by – the smooth interaction between the body and the world. In her phenomenological analysis of illness, Carel (2016) speaks of how this horizon could be limited in the experience of illness or any radical change to one's bodily function, such as substantial loss of vision. To a visually impaired person, a road-crossing experience that once led to a joyful trip to the shop or a casual meeting with friends could be disclosed through their vision-impaired body in terms of uncertainty and constraints (e.g. Can I see clearly/far enough? Does the sound alert work for this pelican crossing?).

But, as the accounts from Matthew and some other owners seemed to show, the partnership experience served to re-open the horizon of possibilities for the owners, so that they came to see more possibilities in themselves and the world. Kadence spoke of the new life in sight loss that Knox brought up: 'then he came, he came, but then everything opened, but everything opened wider than it had been before'.

That said, a supposed positive change could evoke a sense of confusion to an individual, as was demonstrated in Finlay's (2008) study of the experience of receiving a cochlear implant. This was the case for the newcomer Lilian, for whom a reclaimed competence and a new horizon placed her in a transitory state. Her old self-perception became obsolete, and the new one was still undefined: 'But suddenly I'm, I'm a person that can. So what does that mean?' Notably, the nuanced dynamic between old-self and new-self that is particularly salient in Lilian's account has also been noted in earlier IPA studies – particularly those involving participants who have experienced changes in their bodily/physical affordances to navigate through their everyday lifeworld (e.g. Clarke et al., 2011; Dickson et al., 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Clarke et al. (2011), for instance, reported the theme 'Personal growth: integration of old and new identities' in their analysis of the experience of survivors of oesophageal cancers.

Together, the experiences of the first-time owners and the participants from past IPA work suggest the delicacy of self as individuals walk through important changes in their life. More importantly, these observations highlight the active and interpretive involvement of an individuals in their identity. The work around self, as Clarke et al. (2011) commented, is highly individualized – this is well reflected in Lilian's case.

I am relaxed/I am free

Most of the owners in this study spoke of being out and about in the pre-guide dog time as a relatively arduous experience, a localized undertaking, to which the unfolding of the body in

space needed to be consciously attended and could also place strain on certain body parts. Like the participants in past studies (e.g. Refson et al., 1999b; Hicks & Weisman, 2015; Steffens & Bergler, 1988), the owners in this study spoke of relaxation in walking or freedom in general as an important change experienced through the guide dog partnership. This new feeling of *I am relaxed, I am free* appeared as the third component underpinning the overarching sense of confidence-security the owners perceived in becoming a guide dog owner. This change also seemed to be particularly salient to the owners who used to walk around with a cane.

While previous studies have documented relaxation and freedom as part of the improvement owners perceived in becoming a guide dog-aided walker, the observation tended to receive little coverage in the reports and be denoted as a primarily cognitive phenomenon. For instance, the descriptive phenomenological analysis of Wiggett-Barnard and Steel (2008) describes how 'two participants specifically referred to the reduction in mental effort that their guide dogs have facilitated' (p. 1019). Similarly, Refson et al. (1999b) report that most owners who were surveyed expressed their mobility as being 'easier' in terms of being 'less stressful' and having 'greatly reduced concentration demands' (p. 107). But does this cognitive view capture all that is meant when the owners indicated they experience their mobility as becoming more 'relaxed' with the aid of the guide dog?

The body, as phenomenologists have observed, usually effaces itself and its operation in our everyday movement in space and in our dealing with projects (Carel, 2016; Leder, 1990). The seemingly automaticity and transparency of the body that characterizes most of our experience in waking time is what Merleau-Ponty was referring to with the concept of 'body-subject' (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 1980). It reflects the mature repertoire of a bodily way of knowing the world that we have acquired through being in the world for some time (Seamon, 2018). It is crucial that the operating body remains largely in the background of our everyday experience. As phenomenologists suggest, without the need of constantly planning every step we take to the bus stop, or each movement the fingers make on the keyboard when typing on the computer, this is what provides us with the capacity to go beyond the basic requirements of everyday living (e.g. walking, eating) to pursue more significant projects in life (Carel, 2016; Seamon, 1980).

From the phenomenological perspective, then, what was disrupted in the owners' basic experience of mobility was not just the level of mental effort demanded in dealing with the everyday environment. Rather, to the visually impaired owners, it was the transparency of their operating body (Leder, 1990; Seamon, 2017) and the capacity for a spontaneous way of being

that could touch their experience mentally, bodily, affectively and spatially (Carel, 2016) that had been undermined in sight loss and was then re-established in the aid of the guide dog.

Indeed, this seemed to be what was demonstrated through the personal accounts of the first-time owners participating in this study. For example, Bridget recalled a typical trip to work: 'I hadn't been thinking about, the mobility side of anything, just thinking about what I had to do that day'. It had turned into a 'seminal moment' where she came to realize a new meaning of mobility, as well as a new *ordinary* of being in the world as a visually impaired individual. To Bridget and many other owners, it was in the context of guide dog-aided mobility that they came to (re)experience the body and that its negotiation with the physical world started receding into the background of their perceptual field.

When the body-in-action was experienced less as an object demanding owners' explicit attention, it seemed to become a 'stabilizing force' (Seamon, 1980, p. 157) that opened owners up to 'the freedom to extend their world horizons'. To Tanya, for example, it was in being out with Tess that she felt herself came out of the 'less spatially aware' experience of walking with cane, and became free to be drawn out and to immerse herself in the lived world and its kaleidoscopic manifestations ('I can daydream'). This sense of the owners became more fully with or open to the world is also encapsulated in Drew's account, where he vividly recalled the sensorial details of the world that he took in during a particularly memorable walk with Douglas on a summer night: 'blows of nice warm fair flying through my fair'.

To Drew and some other owners, being out and about became an intrinsically enjoyable experience in itself – they described trips and walks as a 'holiday in California' and an 'adventure'; they talked about getting lost in a 'fun way'. Some owners also indicated being more willing to visit unfamiliar places or to make unplanned trips to the shop. To the first-time owners in this study, the partnership with the guide dog seemed to bring on something more than relief from the mental effort demanded in navigating in the physical world; it was a context wherein the 'existential capacity for spontaneity' (Carel, 2016, p. 71) and the sense of being-at-homeness (re)emerged:

At home, we can relax into our own ways of doing things, and do so without a plan, without determining in advance where we should be and for what purpose. It is when we rest securely at home that we can find room for daydreaming, for wandering in thought, feed, or imagination without worrying that some alien person or demand will interrupt us (Jacobson, 2009, p. 359).

The changing social world

One aspect that has been readily reported in research on guide dog partnership was the social facilitation role of the guide dog (e.g. Deverell et al., 2020; Eddy et al., 1998; Li et al., 2019; Wigget-Barnard & Steel, 2008). The present study has made a similar observation, but it also provides a more comprehensive account by showing how the new social status that owners experienced with their guide dog was preceded by or situated in a sense of social invisibility from being visually impaired.

Sight loss, like deafness and several other conditions, has been referred to as an ‘imperceptible impairment’ that usually does not involve visible changes to the person’s physical/bodily appearance (Marks, 1999, p. 120). Not only does the imperceptibility defy the general assumption held by many able-bodied people that impairments are always visible (Marks, 1999), but it also leaves the impaired individuals with a certain level of control *and* responsibility as to whether – and the extent to which – they make others aware of their impairment/difference (Ferguson & de Abreu, 2016; Marks, 1999). Indeed, this issue of *coming out* to others has been discussed in relation to the individuals’ willingness to use assistive aids, such as a cane or a guide dog (Hersh, 2013; Sanders, 2000; Whitmarsh, 2005).

Although the owners differed in whether, before acquiring a guide dog, they had chosen to go out with a cane or without any aids, they seemed to share a similar experience wherein they felt that their visually impaired status was not made known to others in an effective or comfortable way. They described how others did not know how to respond to them entering a public setting as someone who looks normal yet was holding a cane or was walking in a wobbly way on their own (e.g. Rosslyn: ‘people thought I was drunk’). That is, before acquiring a guide dog, the owners had been caught in a state of ‘social liminality’ (Murphy et al., 1988) where others saw them as a difficult case to be classified under or associated with any social categories or identities/roles (Lilian: ‘what is that [cane] and who is this person?’). The owners’ pre-guide dog experience resembled the lack of identity that Dale’s (2010) visually impaired participants perceived vis-a-vis the social/sighted world.

To many owners in this study, it was through the co-presence of the guide dog that they acquired a new social visibility and exited their liminal condition. Not only were they able to enter the view of others as a visually impaired person (i.e. someone with a disability) more unambiguously, but they also emerged to others as someone with certain positive attributes that others did not (or could not) recognize from them before.

Like the participants surveyed in previous research, most owners in this study took note of the surge of positive exchanges initiated by others when they were out in public. The presence of the guide dog was automatically taken by others as an indicator of certain personal attributes. In effect, the owners acquired a new 'virtual' social identity (Coleman-Fountain & McLaughlin, 2013) as someone who was gregarious, trustworthy and fond of animals (e.g. Kadence: 'they think you've got a guide dog, you... you're safe').

The symbolic role of the guide dog not only shaped who the owner was, it also seemed to offer others a ready-made, socially legitimated explanation to make sense of why the owners may behave in ways that fall outside the expected flow or frame of social encounters (e.g. Henry: 'Oh he's got a guide dog, he can't see my hand'). This finding is worth pondering, however. In some ways, it seems to unveil a sense of exoneration that the owners experienced through the visible presence of guide dogs. As noted in the analysis, some owners depicted a pre-guide dog self who was at risk of being a *transgressor*: 'people thought I was drunk' (Rosslyn), 'who is this person' (Lilian) and 'people get at you' (Tanya). That is, the study's material sheds light on the *moral pressure* from the public realm that seems to characterize the owners' experience of being people who are visually impaired, disabled or different. To the owners, the guide dogs' presence exempts them from unfavourable moral and personal judgment by others. Interestingly, the visually impaired participants in Keys et al.'s (2021) study provided comparable descriptions of their experiences in wearing prosthetic eyes. In this case, the thematic analysis foregrounds the ambiguous visibility/invisibility the participants perceived of their eye injury and artificial eyes in the social setting and the fear of their different appearance or comportment being (mis)attributed by others to 'inherent personal flaws' (p. 4).

That said, the new social visibility was received positively by the owners for the most part. This seemed to be in line with the main picture depicted by the guide dog literature; for instance, Whitmarsh (2005) has concluded that the guide dog is a 'means of empowering, commanding respect and raising the status of a visually impaired person' (p. 17). But, if one takes a step back, the owners' new social life seems to re-emerge itself as an experience that remains similarly precarious or conflicting as that depicted in early visual impairment research (Atkinson & Hutchinson, 2012; Ferguson & de Abreu). On the one hand, the visible presence of the guide dog provided the owners with certain socially valued attributes (i.e. sociable, trustworthy, animal friendly); they were, as reflected in the others' welcoming response, a fellow member included in the group. At the same time, the guide dog also marked the owners as someone who is different – who warrants extra support and forgiveness (Drew: 'people are a lot more forgiving'). Rather than simply being elevated to a higher social status, the person associated

with a guide dog seemed to continue occupying a somewhat complicated social position of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider, conforming to and deviating from the supposed normality (Gerland-Thomson, 2011; Whitburn, 2014).

To some owners in this study, being out as a person associated with a guide dog has brought on other forms of complication in their social life. One aspect highlighted in this context was the mixed feelings that Lilian and Henry expressed towards being approached, unsolicited, by the public; it was as if they had lost some of their personal space and choice (e.g. Henry: 'it's no longer your choice'). In the literature, the works of Sanders (2000) and Miner (2000, a shorter account) are the few examples that have reported on or discussed the potential downside of the social popularity gained through becoming a guide dog owner. Sanders (2000), for example, commented that the owners have been re-categorized by the public as what Goffman referred to as the 'open person' (Goffman, 1963, as cited in Sanders, 2000) with whom the norm of civil inattention or the prohibition of talking to the unacquainted others was somehow suspended.

But, in their interviews, both Lilian and Henry conveyed a sense of *obligation* they felt to be socially available to those who approached them, as any of them could have donated to the organization and hence made available the guide dog service. Similarly, Sanders (2000) pointed to a certain sense of 'pressure' felt by the owners to maintain a public image for the visually impaired community and their guide dog programme. This social obligation or pressure, however, seemed to have an undermining effect on the owners' sense of self: it could feel like having part of one's independence and identity stripped away (Sanders, 2000, p. 135), or, in Lilian's case, a loss of one's basic sense of subjectivity ('am I... are we public property?').

Although it is not a common experience, the present study has also found access refusal to be another aspect of the owners' social life that could be unsettling. In such incidents, the rejection of others concerned the guide dog, but to each of the owners who have encountered refusal, what they perceived was a direct and intense negation of themselves as individuals. It was also in such contexts that the owners were brought to recognize for the first time how their sense of self has extended or become fused with their dog partner (e.g. Kadence: 'something of me has transferred into the dog').

Whether in access refusal or in being approached in an unsolicited manner, there seemed to be an element of conflict between what Mead (1934) distinguished between the two interrelated components of self, namely, the self as socially perceived ('Me') and the subjective part of the self that acts partly in response to how others view or treat us ('I') (Mead, 1934, as cited in

Callero, 2003). When being out, the owners may need to compromise on whether they are a gregarious or reserved person; or whether they are an authentic guide dog-associated-person, with the legitimate right to access establishments. In some ways, there seemed to be a hidden social cost to becoming a guide dog owner. The owner's perception of self was turned into a more public phenomenon and became more exposed or susceptible to the dynamics of the owner's immediate social environment.

Part IV: Final Remarks

Chapter 10. Conclusions and Evaluation

The central concern of this thesis was to develop a fuller understanding of the relationship between a guide dog and a person with visual impairment. Study 1 initiated the quest by exploring the perspectives of key guide dog professionals (OMSs and GDMIs). The quest deepened in Study 2, which focused on the views of first-time guide dog owners and their front-row perspective of what it is like to walk/work with and take care of a guide dog in an everyday context and what the partnership means to a person's sense of self-identity. Each study opened a unique (and inevitably partial) window into the partnership between guide dog and person, allowing for a thematic structure or 'map' to be developed that delineates important features of the phenomenon as perceived by the group of participants surveyed. [Table 16](#) presents an overview of the thematic results derived from the two studies.

Table 16. Overview of Study 1 and 2 results

Study One: The professional's perspective			
I. Making sense of working guide dogs	II. Guide dog-person mobility	III. 'Companionship'	IV. The caring responsibility of the person for the guide dog
1.1 Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined	2.1 Trusting the guide dogs: A quandary/predicament		4.1. A complex terrain: The emotional responsibility of the person for the guide dog
1.2 Minded, intentional beings	2.2 Challenging bodily adjustments: Into spontaneity and fluidity		4.2 Being responsible for a guide dog is like being responsible for a 'child'
1.3 Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous			

Study Two: The owner's perspective			
I. The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relation with a guide dog	II. 'Pet,' 'Child,' 'Relaxed kettle': The nebulous sense of person-guide dog relatedness while off-duty	III. Emerging confidence-security in negotiating the physical world	IV. Changing social world in becoming a guide dog-associated person
1.1 Inconsistency and unpredictability	2.1 The defined, firm sense of relatedness	3.1 Being with 'someone': the guide dog as an emotionally anchoring/stabilizing force	4.1 New social visibility: becoming relatable, sociable, welcoming in the eyes of others
1.2 The demands of managing control • 1.2a Female owners: Ceding control, trust • 1.2b. Male owners: Taking/keeping control, overpowering	2.2 The ambivalent, wavering sense of relatedness	3.2 A reclaimed sense of personal agency and competence	4.2 New social visibility: becoming warranting of forgiveness and assistance in the eyes of others
1.3 Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog • 1.3a. Female owners: Coming to a 'feel'-based engagement with the guide dog • 1.3b Male owners: Making concessions on mobility efficiency for the needs of the guide dog		3.3 A revitalized sense of spontaneity	4.3 The ambivalence of person-guide dog unity in social contexts

The first section of this chapter will summarise the key findings from Studies 1 and 2. The discussion is presented under the headings of 'Ambivalence and Fluidity' and 'Transforming Self, Body, and World.' The chapter then describes the practical implications of the studies, evaluates the quality and applicability of the analytic findings, and suggests potential directions for future research.

Ambivalence and Fluidity

Ambivalence and fluidity constitute a dominant theme of the findings in this thesis. This theme refers to the degree of dynamicity and tension that appeared to be continuously in force in the professionals' perception of and the owners' experience with the working and off-duty aspects of the guide dog–person partnership. In both studies, participants engaged with different and often contradictory meanings or positions. Such contradiction could manifest within a single description or experiential moment, or it could be a more subtle or gradual shift that implicated different time points in the overall unfolding of the participant's sense-making experience.

For instance, in Study 1, all the professionals recognized the guide dogs as demonstrating certain thinking and subjectivity and concluded that this mindedness is an essential aspect that makes guide dogs trainable to deliver the needed support. At other times, however, the professionals seemed to perceive the dog's mind as an inherent limitation and/or a source of unpredictability in joint mobility (e.g. 'They are brilliant animals, but at the end of the day, it's a dog'). Similarly, the professionals' understanding of the guide dogs' characteristics of self-control and independence was not unary or static. This was illustrated, for example, by interview excerpts in which the professionals expressed that an effective guide dog embodies an uneasy balance between a wild, potentially disruptive nature and a repertoire of trained, controllable behaviours. The issue of trust also emerged as an essential but unsettling element for mastering joint mobility with the guide dogs. In particular, the professionals' accounts shed light on the flimsy ground of uncertainty on which the owners stand when they are called upon to decide whether they will entrust themselves to the dogs' lead.

Focusing on first-time owners, Study 2 highlighted a 'process' of adjustments involved in learning to walk/work with a guide dog. The study captured the senses of inconsistency and unpredictability that owners felt in their early experiences of walking with their guide dogs (e.g. 'It's peril to me to go out with a dog that just stops'). The owners' experience of this learning process also featured adjustments around *managing control*. Here, Study 2 expanded on the early professional view in two important ways. First, this study observed a distinct pattern in how owners responded to the leadership alternation that drove guide dog-aided mobility: while the female owners made more salient the challenge in the person ceding control to the guide dog, the male owners' accounts centred more explicitly around issues of exercising control over the guide dog. Second, the personal accounts of some male owners revealed the potential emotional repercussions that the owner may incur in playing a dominant role over the dog partner (e.g. 'I say sorry').

Study 2 also contributed to understanding the partnership's development by foregrounding a *learned sensibility* that the owners took as a key marker where they started to experience the partnership in a smoother, more in-tune manner. The owners typically referred to this newfound sensibility in terms of changes in their beliefs or attitudes that fostered an openness toward the individuality of their dog partner while working/walking. Interestingly, the acquired sensibility manifested itself more as a form of tactile-based responsiveness for female owners and as making a personal concession for male owners.

Regarding the guide dog–owner interaction outside of working, the totality of the professionals' and owners' accounts suggested an absence of a universal or fixed set of terms and conditions that an individual can draw on to make sense of how dog-person interaction should or can be. A notable diversity was found, both within and across the two studies, in the participants' views about the nature of their partnerships in the dogs' off-duty time.

For instance, in Study 1, most of the professionals chose to label off-duty guide dogs as standing in relation to the owner like 'children.' This label reflected a primal, unconditional sense of caring obligation that the professionals perceived in what it means to be a guide dog owner. However, some of these professionals expressed notably ambivalent attitudes about caring for the emotional needs of the guide dogs, with their personal accounts capturing them seemingly engaging with *and* distancing from emotional needs as a genuine aspect of the person–dog relationship.

In Study 2, the owners drew on various classificatory dimensions (e.g. parent-child, inanimate object, pet) to explain their off-duty interactions with their guide dogs as they experienced them. Notably, some responses stood together in depicting the owner as engaging with off-duty care through a relatively unequivocal or axiomatic sense of understanding about how they should react, which implicated discourses like parental protection, animal domestication, and animal rights and ethics.

However, other first-time owners' experience of off-duty care was complicated by either a sense of confusion or an unexpected attitude change towards their dog partners. Of particular interest was the former, where the owners described themselves evaluating their off-duty dog partners explicitly and simultaneously as both objects and subjects (e.g. 'He is a precious cargo to them'). The sense of confusion, in effect, reflected the owners' inability to derive a coherent meaning of the role of the dog, the role of the person, and the nature of the interaction.

Together, the accounts of the professionals and the owners bring the guide dog–person partnership into view as a context wherein the role and identity of the dog, the person, and the dog-person union are entangled and fluid in ways that may be distinct from other forms of human-animal encounters. Not only did aided mobility operate through a timely shift of the possession of control and leadership between the guide dog and the owner, but the partnership as a whole relied on each member’s ability to differentiate between and step in and out of an instrumental work mode and an off-duty socio-affective mode of interaction.

However, there seems to be a certain distinction between the partnership as understood vicariously and the partnership as experienced directly. Compared to the professionals, the owners more often expressed in their interviews being conscious of and/or uncomfortable about the nebulous character of the partnership. Being the ones who share their lives with guide dogs, it seems understandable that the owners were more aware of the nuances of the partnership than those more distantly related to the phenomenon. The partnership is something in which the owners have greater personal stake; it beckons more in-depth personal exploration and reflection for them. To the professionals, whose encounters with the guide dog (or dog-owner dyad) are typically time-limited and judged for occupational productivity, sustained reflective consideration of individual practices or beliefs around the partnership may simply be impractical (Sanders, 1999). Ongoing ambivalence, as Sanders (1999) suggested, is like a ‘cognitive luxury item’ in settings where people’s jobs centre on animal training or use (p. 110).

Transforming Self, Body, and World

Study 2 provides most of the material on how the owner’s sense of self unfolds in light of the partnership experience. The findings portray guide dog owners as embodied subjects who are always already engaged with the objects and people of the world, whose sense of identity can be meaningfully understood only through these connections (Finlay, 2011; Larkin et al., 2006). The owners’ personal accounts first laid bare how sight loss had drastically disrupted their way of being-in-the-world, such that it became, in Heidegger’s terms, notably and unpleasantly *uncanny* and *unhomelike* (Svenaesus, 2000, 2011). The once-familiar world was rendered dangerously uncertain and resisting, and the embodied self closed itself off and manifested in terms of vulnerability and inability. But to the owners, it was against this background of *unhomelikeness* that any change or improvement brought on by the guide dog’s aid acquired its significance and meaning. What was most striking to the owners in becoming a guide dog-

assisted-person was the sense of *confidence-security* that came to reinfuse their experience of the self, the body, and the world.

Study 2 showed this confident-secure feeling manifested to the owners in three important and interrelated ways. First, many owners perceived their dog partners as emotionally anchoring and stabilising forces that worked against an unsettling sense of solitude that cropped up as they navigated through the uncanny world of visual impairment. Second, the owners valued the aid of their dog partners in facilitating smoother and more effective engagement with the physical world, which in turn reconnected them to an affirmative conception of the self. Moreover, this emerging view of the self as '*I can/I am able to*' aligned with a shift in the owners' understanding of the world. The world that once appeared resisting and restricting had come to life and become broader and full of possibilities.

Third, the owners' descriptions of walks taken with their guide dogs reflected their experience of the moving body operating on its own, while the person's conscious attention reached out freely to the spatial-sensorial world and other aspects of everyday life (e.g. work meetings, dinner plans). Notably, the owners' first-person accounts corresponded to what the guide dog professionals observed in their work. In Study 1, the professionals illuminated the impact of the guide dog partnership as an embodied transformation in which the visually impaired owner was released from a head-down, rigid posture in walking to an upright and expansive, flexible posture. In both cases, the participants' descriptions highlighted the openness and ease of the person in her/his embodied relation to the world.

Owners experienced disruption and restoration, with shifts from vulnerability to security, from closedness to openness and spontaneity. In the context of the partnership, the owners started re-embracing a more homelike being-in-the-world (Svenaesus, 2011). This coming-to-home touches on something that is broader than the restoration of physical mobility or functional independence of the individual – the kinds of improvement or positive outcome that tended to be emphasized in research on guide dog partnership. Rather, to the first-time owners in this study, the guide dogs brought back a fuller experience of two distinct but complementary forces of human life—our existential capacities to dwell *and* adventure, to rest *and* grow (Seamon, 2015; Todres & Galvin, 2010).

At the same time, the partnership experience also changed owners' perception of the self on the social level. The findings of Study 2 highlighted the symbolic role of guide dog. The presence of the guide dog not only made owners' sight loss known to other people more effectively, but

it also automatically bestowed certain socially valued attributes (e.g. gregarious, trustworthy) on owners or functioned as a ready-made justification for people to make sense of why owners might act differently than others (e.g. walking in a wobbly manner). For the owners, the more welcoming and supporting responses of the public started taking away the otherness and liminality that had stood out to them in the pre-guide dog time. However, the new social visibility/popularity could come at the expense of the individuality of the self. In entering the public scene, the owners could not help but find their sense of self being shaped or dictated by, to some extent, how others chose to act towards their dog partners. 'Whether you want to be or not,' as Henry expressed, the self was rendered a less personal matter.

Practical implications

The thesis highlights the owner's working relationship with the guide dog as a developing process that is rattled by issues of uncertainty, trust, and alternation of leadership but gradually settled through the sensitivity and flexibility that the owner acquired in his/her perception of and response towards the dog partner. This view points to the potential value of maximising the opportunity and resource for the owners to nurture a personal sense of familiarity and understanding of the dog partner at the earliest time. To this end, the partnership training programme could incorporate exercises that actively cultivate the owners' capacity for *mindfulness* such that they could attend to the guide dog and understand how the interaction transpires in an open, receptive, and non-judgemental way (Brown & Ryan, 2003) rather than being sensitised by sedimented thinking-behavioural patterns that may unwittingly present the interactive situation as more unfavourable, threatening, or stressful than adaptive (Gartner, 2013; Hulsheger et al., 2013).

In practice, the support work with guide dog owners could take advantage of the established mindfulness training protocols, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT, Kabat-Zinn, 1982) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR, Bishop, 2002). These programmes consist of standardised exercises that mostly draw on everyday terms and resources, such as the use of breathing to ground mindful attention ('Three-minute breathing space') or practicing a daily activity (e.g. eating, showering) as the object of the mindfulness exercise (Hulsheger et al., 2013).

The findings also highlight the bodily dimension of owners' experience as a potential target of service provision. The process of learning to walk with a guide dog engages the owners bodily;

the body is enlisted both locally and globally in developing a tactile sensitivity to the moving handle and in adjusting the body's posture.

The centrality of the body suggests the significance of putting in place resources that help the owners to enhance their *body awareness* – a mindful attentiveness to the body such as how it is used and experienced in everyday action and activities (e.g. walking, breathing), in the expression of oneself, and in the connection between the body and the emotions (Barni et al., 2013; Gard, 2005). Such resources may facilitate a smoother transition into guide dog-aided mobility as well as maximise the potential of guide dog service contributing to the owner's sense of well-being in a holistic way that includes the commonly neglected role of the body (Barni et al., 2013; Patterson & Hughes, 1999). While a cluster of therapies were specifically structured to increase the individual's body awareness, their application may be less transferable as they are mostly practiced in Nordic countries and with clinical populations (Gard, 2005). In practice, support work with guide dog owners could more easily borrow elements from the established MBSR and MBCT, which feature a focus on the body, such as the widely practiced 'body scan' exercise, where the individuals are guided to attend to each part of the body in sequence (Hulsheger et al., 2013).

Evaluation

Evaluating an IPA study entails situating it in a larger context where qualitative researchers have agreed on the importance of having a piece of work examined for its quality, and the assessment criteria used to evaluate the work should be sensitive to the theoretical considerations that are distinct to the study in question (Elliot et al., 1999; Willig, 2013; Yardley, 2000). Against this backdrop, Smith (2011b) was the first to outline a set of criteria for judging whether an IPA-informed work demonstrates a level of quality that is 'Good', 'Acceptable' or 'Unacceptable'. In their most recent publication, Nizza et al. (2021) expanded Smith's 2011 work and outlined in detail four quality indicators of 'Good' IPA studies:

- Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative
- Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account
- Close analytic reading of participants' words
- Attending to convergence and divergence

While these quality indicators will be attended to individually in the present discussion, they ought to be considered, as Nizza et al. (2021) suggested, as closely interlocked markers that can co-exist in a given part of a good IPA analysis.

Constructing a Compelling, Unfolding Narrative

Strong narrative strength is a hallmark of high-quality IPA work (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith, 2011b). The content of the findings and the manner in which they are synthesized and organized work together effectively such that the text as a whole acquires a coherent rhythm and is dialogically engaging to the readers. The narrative development bestows a certain dynamicity or aliveness that is warranted by the textual findings that are *about* human lived experience and are derived *from* a sentient agent making sense of another agent's sense-making.

Narrative strength was secured in this thesis through various elements. As can be seen Chapters 6 and 9, each theme (or subtheme) started with a brief introduction that provides the readers with a general sense of what this theme is about (i.e. the main experiential feature or group pattern concerned or the interconnection of the subtheme elements). This narrative voice could facilitate a smoother transition for the readers between different themes presented in the analysis.

The introduction of the theme is typically followed by a participant's quote to demonstrate the group pattern in question. For instance, in Study 1, Subtheme 1.1, '*Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined*', the first excerpt from Amber vividly captures the two contrasting modes and makes manifest the tension between nature and nurture, uncontrollability and controllability that is shared across many professionals' conception of the working guide dog. Indeed, each of the quotes that the analysis presented under this subtheme were selected because each of them gave a *distinct* view of the group pattern. [Figure 21](#) illustrates how the theme addressed in this thesis was evidenced through varying examples.

Figure 21. Example from Study 1 demonstrating how a theme was evidenced through carefully selected extracts that reflected the variability in experience



The diversity of the experiential material is evident in the work of this thesis, which instils the analytic narrative with a sense of progression and expansion. There is a movement from one participant's perspective to another's, as if the narrative is bringing into the reader's view more and different sides of the phenomenon. The order in which the quotes were presented was usually specific such that a recurrent feature was first established (e.g. Amber) that could then be complicated by the introduction of an atypical case (e.g. Leonard).

The narrative strength of this thesis was also demonstrated through the sense of momentum derived from the alternation between the participant's voice and the analyst's voice. Each quote is preceded and followed by interpretative commentary that acted almost like a voice-over to give clear indication when a participant's quote was introduced (e.g. 'Cathy speaks

about'), to highlight the particular way in which the quote contributes to the theme in question ('we get a sense that'), and to inform the readers when a divergent case was considered (e.g. 'Leonard's account seems to be an exception'). This dialogical structure was sustained and evident throughout the analytic account.

Developing a Vigorous Experiential and/or Existential Account

As a phenomenologically-based approach, IPA features a core concern in how something was perceived by people actually experiencing the phenomena of interest (Smith et al., 2009). More specifically, IPA concerns itself with people's experience of major events or circumstances in which being able to make sense of what has happened presents itself to the individuals as a task of great personal stake and/or emotional valence (Smith, 2019). Thus, 'good' IPA work is satisfactorily *phenomenological* in that the findings that are presented can bring out important or interesting observations about the texture of people's experience and the content and manner in which they bestow meanings on their experience (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2009).

The themes reported by this thesis have addressed a certain tension in participants' perception of the guide dog partnership (e.g. subtheme 1.3 in Study 1 – '*Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous*'), and/or the deeper, existential level of significance of their partnership experience (e.g. subtheme 3.3 in Study 2 – '*A reclaimed sense of personal agency and competence*'). In this thesis, the phenomenological core was established and demonstrated through the quality of the data elicited and the sensitivity and responsiveness of the analyst to interpretative engagement.

For instance, the analysis of Study 2 has captured an owner explicating her partnership experience via a powerful imagery of the closing down and the opening up of the 'trap' sight loss. More than the physical sense of incapacitation or restriction, the interpretation attends to how this 'trap' was experienced by the owner as the self being swallowed by an impinging sense of vulnerability and how the guide dog's support to her signalled the way out of this existentially-annihilating trap to re-experience an agentic self and a meaningful world of possibilities. This example illustrated the kind of phenomenology description delivered in this thesis. The researcher's reading sprung from rich experiential material, stayed faithful to the participant's actual spoken words but also brought depth to the emerging view by shedding light on different layers of meanings and/or the deeper existential concerns at stake (e.g. sense of self, worldview).

Close Analytic Reading of Participants' Words

Quality IPA work is marked by a high level of thoroughness in the researcher's engagement with the data (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith, 2011b). Taking on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, IPA considers the phenomenological investigation of lived experience as an interpretative endeavour: it involves a double hermeneutics of the analyst making sense of the participant's sense-making (Smith et al., 2009). For both Heidegger and IPA, the researcher is concerned as much with the latent aspect of the phenomenon as with that which is explicitly manifested (Smith, 2007). She/he has the task of bringing to light a fresh look at the phenomenon through a sensitivity to the dynamic between the part and the whole on various scales, which can only be achieved through full and open-minded attention to different aspects of the material being studied (Smith, 2011a).

In this thesis, the analyst's reading of a specific instance of the participant's interview was situated in a broader attentiveness to the interview conversation as a whole (e.g. 'elsewhere in her interview'), and/or the respective history of the participant (e.g. 'as someone who was familiar with pet animals'). The quotes presented in the analysis were not left to themselves, each quote was accompanied by an interpretive commentary that unfurled the meanings of the quotes through pointing out various features of the excerpt and their potential connections.

For instance, in Study 2 analysis, Subtheme 4.3 '*The ambivalence of person-guide dog unity in social contexts*,' the interpretation considered the specific terms that a participant drew on (e.g. 'property', 'package'), as well as the 'I'– 'We' shift in her pronoun usage, to be clues that elucidated the subtle sense of objectification or de-individualization embedded in her new social life. Also addressed in the interpretation was a possible temporal dimension of this participant's experience: the repetition or lags found in her response suggested her ambivalence was very much ongoing (e.g. 'how much [...] how much'; 'am I...are we'). In effect, the analytic claim was built up incrementally by engaging with a range of evidence, which concretized or made transparent both explicit and latent aspects of the participant's experience.

Attending to Convergence and Divergence

IPA is committed to the theoretical principles of idiography (Smith et al., 2009), which argue that the focus on the particular is the proper starting point for the attempt to develop a solid understanding of things concerning the realm of human life (Smith et al., 1995). This theoretical

adherence means that a good IPA study will be able to offer a 'dual reading' that (a) communicates features of the discussion that are shared by a group of participants in how they experience or perceive the topic in question, (b) while making sure the readers can appreciate the individual participant and the idiosyncrasies of his/her actual slice of human life from which the general patterns emerged (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith, 2004).

This thesis is characterized by a sustained idiographic focus. As discussed, the analyses have established the narrative momentum in part through evidencing each theme with a collection of quotes that were not only selected because they represented a shared experiential feature but also because they encapsulated something that is salient or significant *at the case level*. That is, there was always a concern for the 'portrayal of personal experience' (Smith, 2011c) in the analyst's unfolding sense-making, even when the case in question appeared 'atypical' to the group pattern observed (e.g. 'unlike many of her fellow female owners'). The idiosyncratic details embedded in the experiential material were also kept alive through the microscopic lens of the analytic commentary and the care taken to supply the readers with relevant background information they need to situate the immediate quote in the particular lifeworld of the participant (e.g. 'for William, who was only three months into his partnership').

On the other hand, the narratives presented in the thesis gave clear indication of the prevalence of the themes reported (e.g. 'most professionals gave prominence to'; 'many of the owners made specific reference to). Convergences were sufficiently evidenced – in Study 1 (n=5), all but one theme¹⁵ was evidenced by a minimum of three participants' quotes; Study 2 (n=11) also illustrated all but one theme by presenting quotes from at least five participants (Smith, 2011b). Furthermore, the evidence bases presented in both studies were fairly balanced in presenting the discussion in such a way that each participant had her/his pieces of experiential material marshalled by the analytic narrative with similar frequency (Smith, 2011b; Smith et al., 2009).

The patterns of convergence and divergence evident in good IPA work demonstrate the study's sensitive engagement with the hermeneutic circle – the reciprocal relation between understanding the parts and the whole of the phenomenon (Nizza et al., 2021). For instance, in the segments of Study 1's analysis discussed above, the close attention to each individual participant's account foregrounded the tension between a wild nature vs. disciplined nurture as a shared concern of several participants' (e.g. Amber, Cathy, Shawn) understandings of the working capacity of the guide dogs. Against the emergence of this convergence in respondents'

¹⁵ The prevalence was measured at the subtheme level, reflecting the analytic structures derived from the two studies (Smith et al., 2009, p.107).

beliefs, one participant (Leonard) stood out as being different for his expressed belief about the complete passivity and inherent malleability of the dogs. But the analysis moved beyond this explicit divergence, as it saw the atypical response as manifesting a message of the dogs as *needing to be* and *able to be* controlled, which was also implicitly embedded in other participants' accounts. That is, one saw the thematic understanding evolve and deepen through a series of comparison and mutual illumination between the atypical case and the emerging pattern.

In Subtheme 1.2 (*'The demand of managing control'*) of Study 2, the narrative brought on control as a shared concern amongst the group of first-time owners. But the narrative went on to show this group convergence bifurcated into distinct ways in which owners of each gendered subgroup foregrounded the task of control as an issue of either ceding control or maintaining control. At the same time, the narrative returned to the case level systematically to do justice to individual lifeworlds and show the idiosyncrasies in how the issue of giving control and keeping control was perceived by individual female and male owners, respectively. There was a flexibility of the hermeneutic circle where the elements of the part and whole varied, which guided the readers to parse the experiential material in a fuller manner and to appreciate the depth and nuances involved in the experience of walking/working with a guide dog.

Research Limitations – Transferability of the Findings

While IPA has effectively guided this thesis to produce a body of textual understanding that is rich and evocative, the specificity and small sample size demanded by the research approach inevitably narrowed the findings' generalizability (Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

For example, Study 1 was based on five participants who have all worked at Guide Dogs UK in positions (OMS, GDMI) that have direct and frequent encounter with owners and/or guide dogs. However, sociological researchers have noted that the different professional roles in contexts that involve the training or utilization of animals provide different opportunities and constraints on human-animal interactions and could have bearing on how individuals are oriented to the paradoxical practices and meanings embedded in such contexts (e.g. Arluke, 1988; Wilke, 2005). Even individuals working in similar professional roles may perceive the animal-human relation in question differently depending on their organizations' culture (Arluke & Sanders, 1999). It is therefore more sensible to take Study 1's findings as revealing *one possible aspect* of the professional side of the story on human and guide dog partnerships. That said, by presenting

the verbatim extracts from the professionals alongside a distinguishable analytic voice of interpretive and contextualized comments, and describing in detail important aspects of the study (e.g. the participants' profiles, steps of recruitment and analysis), the study hopes its transparency would prompt the readers to join the hermeneutic circle and make their individual evaluation of the transferability of the study's findings to the immediate contexts of their professional life that may be similar or distinct from the GDMIs and OMSs in this study (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51).

In contrast to the past literature where owners with different numbers of partnerships were often grouped and studied together, Study 2 focused on first-time owners. While the specificity of the study could bring a more nuanced understanding of the partnership phenomenon, it also meant that the findings likely have more transferable insights to readers more interested in first-time partnerships than subsequent ones. Indeed, the 'second dog syndrome'¹⁶ noted in Llyod et al.'s study (2016) indicates the need to be cautious in making generalizable claims across different partnership contexts. Furthermore, the first-time owners who took part in this study shared a distinct profile: White British, London-based, and without additional disabilities or major health issues. As Whitmarsh (2000) commented, the partnership between the person and the assistance dog is closely linked to the particular 'physical, cultural and legal context' in which the duo situated (p.8). Given this, the findings reported here may not effectively reflect the partnership experience of first-time owners who reside in rural areas (Hersh, 2013) or come from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds (e.g. Deshen & Deshen, 1989; Koda et al., 2011).

Like any research work, the investigation presented in this thesis took place amidst a series of inter-person connections and exchanges, such that the inter-person dimension of the study needed to be taken into account when considering the generalizability of the study's findings (Finlay, 2011; Willig, 2013). As described, the recruitment process was made possible through the support of Guide Dogs. All the professional and owner participants recruited were either the organization's employees or service recipients. These participants' pre-existing relationship with Guide Dogs may (wittingly or unwittingly) manifest as a pressure that could shape their narrative in the interview. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the responses gathered could effectively represent those who declined to participate or those who could have been reached outside an organizational context.

¹⁶ Llyod et al. (2016) used 'second dog syndrome' to refer to the higher rate of partnership breakdown observed between owners and their second guide dogs than that between owners and their first or third guide dogs.

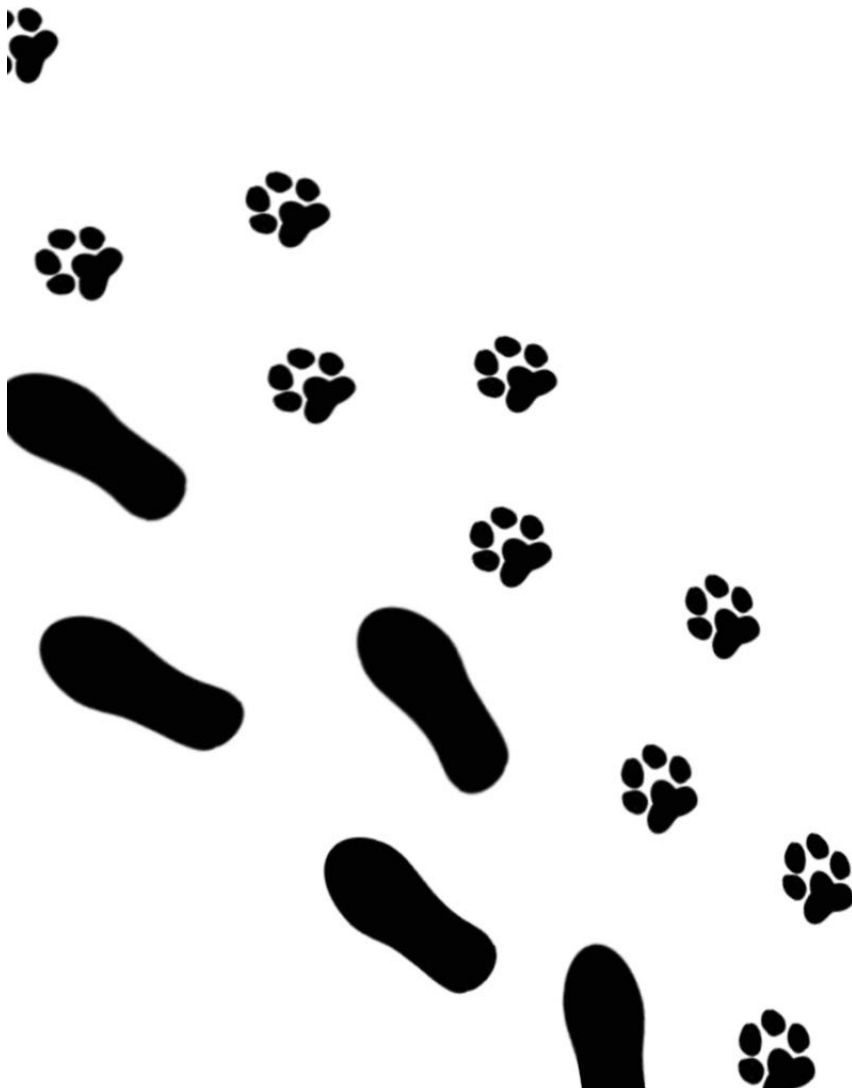
Directions for Future Research

In an important way, the findings of the thesis invite a processual view of the development of the working partnership between guide dog and owner: The owners were first sensitized to the feelings of unpredictability and uncertainty concerning their dog partner the new embodied experience, and the seeming predicament of trust. As more direct contact with the dog partner accumulated, the owners opened up to a more harmonious experience with their dog partner in their walks. However, this processual view only represented a possible line of thought, as the owners in this study were at different points of their first partnership (e.g. ranging from two months to six years). Future research could explore the processual view further or elucidate new patterns by taking advantage of a longitudinal IPA approach (Farr & Nizza, 2019) to systematically track and interview owners at selected time points during the ‘critical year’ – the first 12 months of the partnership where potential before-and-after observations could be made (Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008).

As Craig et al. (2019) commented, much of the existing research tended to focus on the guide dog–owner partnership in its working capacity than its non-work aspect. Driven by an explicit interest in the off-duty time of this partnership, this thesis illuminated the particularly liminal, nebulous nature of this relational context, where it relied more on the owners to make their own interpretations and judgements about how/what the guide dog is and how they should interact with and care for it/her/him. Although about half of the owners in this study had relatively smooth experiences of making sense of their off-duty time, there were other owners whose off-duty experiences were marked by confusion, ambivalence, and/or unexpected attitude change. A future study that concentrates specifically on the latter or more *complicated cases* could help to identify areas where further support can be established for the owner and the guide dog to facilitate a harmonious, enduring partnership. Such a study could entail the researcher actively recruiting and interviewing owners who identify themselves as having experienced notable issues and difficulties in the off-duty time of the partnership.

This research took a multi-perspectival approach to the view that the partnership, as a phenomenon, lies not only within the guide dog owners’ accounts but also within the accounts of those who have close encounters or interactions with the guide dog–owner dyad (Larkin et al., 2019). Apart from the guide dog professionals interviewed in this study, the partnership is also a relevant phenomenon to those living with the owners. Indeed, as with typical UK-based guide dog owners (Whitmarsh, 2005), most of the owners from this study did not live alone.

Given this, future research that examines the family's or partner's perspectives could help to contribute to a fuller view of the phenomenon.



Illustrations by Xin (artist)

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Student Research Contract with Guide Dogs



Head Office and Registered Office
Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
Berkshire RG7 3YG

A company limited by Guarantee
Registered in England & Wales
Company No. 291646
Registered Charity in England and
Wales (209617) and Scotland
(SC038979).

THE GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND ASSOCIATION STUDENT RESEARCH CONTRACT

This Agreement is made on: 29 October 2017

BETWEEN

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association ("Guide Dogs"), of Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading, Berks, RG7 3YG).

AND

Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck College, University of London ("**the University**").

AND

Ms. Tin-Su Liang ("**the Student**"), of (The University)

1. DEFINITIONS AND INTERPREATIONS

In this Agreement, the following words shall have the following meaning:

"Research" means the research entitled "Exploring the experience of travelling with and taking care for a guide dog - An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study",

"The Data" means Personal Data of which Guide Dogs is the data controller OR, any other Guide Dogs data relating to clients, dogs, supporters, volunteers, employees or any other stakeholder of Guide Dogs.

"Material" means biological material collected from Guide Dogs' stock,

including but not limited to hair, cheek cells, faeces, urine.

2. PURPOSE OF THE AGREEMENT

- 2.1 The Student wishes to access, for academic research purposes only, certain [Material/data] belonging to Guide Dogs.
- 2.2 The collection of the [Material/data] shall be carried out in accordance with and pursuant to, this agreement together with the research protocol as detailed in Appendix A ("The Appendix").

3. STUDENT OBLIGATIONS

- 3.1 The Student shall use the [Material/Data] for the research purposes as detailed in The Appendix and for no other purpose.
- 3.2 Should the Student wish to change the Research objectives or method of collection, the Student must first inform Guide Dogs in writing. These changes should not be implemented until permission is granted from Guide Dogs in writing.
- 3.3 The Student agrees to provide a written, final report ("the Final Report") summarising the results obtained from the Research undertaken with the Material. The Final Report should be submitted within 3 months of the completion of the Research. Research Final Report Guidelines are available on request from the Canine Research Team.
- 3.4 Where Final reports submitted by the Student do not meet the requirements specified by Guide Dogs the Student shall agree to remedy any deficiencies and submit a revised report within 1 month of Guide Dogs request for remedy.
- 3.5 The Student agrees to acknowledge the support of Guide Dogs in all publications, presentations and other papers or discussions in relation to the Research; Guide Dogs will be given 28 days to review all publications, presentations and other papers prior to their submission/presentation and will be allowed to request the removal of their attribution (e.g. in the event they disagree with the findings). This does not constitute the right of veto to prevent the output being put into the public domain.
- 3.6 The Student shall inform Guide Dogs in writing, not less than 30 days prior to any proposed publication or presentation relating to the Research. The Student shall not publish such materials without Guide Dog's prior written consent.

- 3.7 Guide Dogs reserves the right to nominate a named co-author for any publications resultant from the Research if/where it is appropriate to do so, according to the UK Research Integrity Office guidance note on good practice in the authorship of research publications.
- 3.8 The Student or University agrees to provide all the equipment necessary for undertaking the research.
- 3.9 Any information concerning Guide Dogs, its business affairs or employees acquired by the Student during the course of the Research must be regarded as confidential and not be disclosed to any third party or used by the Student. This shall not apply to information forming or contributing towards the Research.

4. THE DATA

- 4.1 The Student shall hold the Data in the strictest confidence and not disclose or allow the disclosure of any part of the Data without the prior written consent of Guide Dogs.
- 4.2 The Student shall ensure that the Data is not modified, amended or altered except as expressly authorised by Guide Dogs in writing;
- 4.3 Guide Dogs reserves the right to have access to and to use data compiled during the course of the Research and will respect existing guidance on confidentiality of any data which it obtains.
- 4.4 On termination of this agreement, the Student shall return to Guide Dogs any Data held in relation to the Research.

5. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- 5.1 In return for the provision of [Material/Data], the Student agrees to inform Guide Dogs promptly of any inventions or discoveries made wholly or partly as a result of the use of the [Material/Data] and prior to any disclosure to third parties. Disclosures may not proceed without the written consent of Guide Dogs.
- 5.2 In the event that any intellectual property with commercial value is created from this research, the College and the Student undertake to inform Guide Dogs to allow a suitable subsequent agreement to be reached. Neither the College nor the student has the right to commercially exploit any intellectual property arising from this project until such an agreement has been reached.

6. FINANCIAL AGREEMENT

- 6.1 The Student acknowledges that no funding will be provided by Guide Dogs for undertaking the Research.

7. TERMINATION

- 7.1 If the Student fails to comply with his or her obligations contained within these terms and conditions and any failure (if capable of being remedied) remains unremedied for fourteen (14) days after being brought to their attention by notice served by Guide Dogs, then Guide Dogs shall be entitled to terminate the agreement forthwith.
- 7.2 All parties subject to this Agreement may terminate this Agreement with or without cause by giving the other Parties fourteen (14) days prior written notice of its intention to do so.

8. LIABILITY

- 8.1 The University shall hold harmless Guide Dogs and Guide Dogs employees from any loss, claim, damage, illness or injury to persons or property whatever the cause may be, arising out of or pertaining to, the Students use of the [Material/Data].
- 8.2 This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with English law and the parties submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts.

9. GENERAL

- 9.1 No amendment or addition to this Agreement shall be effective unless made in writing and signed by or on behalf of all Parties.
- 9.2 The Appendix shall be deemed to form part of this Agreement.

STUDENT RESEARCH CONTRACT

1. Signed for and on behalf of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Name (Capitals): CHRIS MULDOON

Signed:

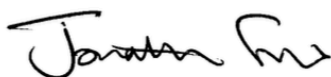


Job Title: RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

2. Signed for and on behalf of the University:

Name (Capitals): JONATHAN A SMITH

Signed:

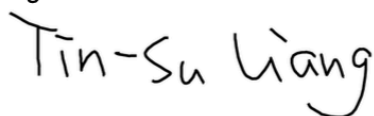


Job Title: Professor of Psychology

3. Signed by the Student:

Name (Capitals): TIN-SU LIANG

Signed:





FAO Ms. Tin-Su Liang
Department of Psychological Sciences,
Birkbeck College,
University of London

8 February 2019

Dear Ms. Tin-Su Liang,

Contract for research into 'Exploring the experience of travelling with and taking care for a guide dog - An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study' dated 29 October 2017 and made between The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (1) and Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck College, University of London (2) ('The Contract').

I am writing to confirm Guide Dogs' agreement to extend the above named contract with immediate effect so that it now expires on 31 March 2020.

This extension will be made on the basis that no cost is incurred by Guide Dogs.

Please accept this letter as formal confirmation that the Contract is varied to the extent described above, and should be interpreted accordingly. Save as mentioned in this letter, all the terms of the Contract shall remain in full force and effect.

I should be grateful if you could sign and date the duplicate of this letter, to confirm acceptance, and return to Rachel Moxon by email, or to Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre, Banbury Road, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV33 9WF as soon as possible. The original should be kept with your copy of the Contract.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Moxon
Senior Canine Research Associate
On behalf of Guide Dogs

Date: 8 February 2019

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading RG7 3YG
t: 0118 9835555 f: 0118 9835433 e: info@guidedogs.org.uk



Project title:

Exploring the experience of travelling with and taking care for a guide dog - An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

Project background:

The project is motivated by a broad research question: What is it like to travel with and to care for a guide dog? The project is informed by a research approach known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Following the IPA approach, the project's main concern is to try to understand the topic(s) of interest by staying close to the perspectives of individuals who have the 'first hand' experiences relevant to the phenomenon of interest. The IPA approach values diverse individual viewpoints; it is not the aim of this project to test a particular hypothesis or theory about the guide-dog partnership. This study recognises two groups of individuals as the experts on the topic of guide-dog partnership: the guide dog owners and the professionals who work closely in the provision of the guide dog service. Regarding the professional groups, the present study will focus on the perspectives of orientation and mobility specialists (OMSs) and guide dog mobility instructors (GDMLs).

The study will obtain personal accounts from both the owners and the professionals by inviting them to attend one individual interview (discuss below). Through the personal accounts provided by the owners, the study aims to explore how the owners' experience their relationships with the guide dogs, and how they make sense of the various facets of their personal experiences. There is also a specific concern regarding owners' sense of self in the relational contexts of moving with and caring for their guide dog. Furthermore, the study aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the process of establishing and maintain a guide-dog partnership (unit) by taking accounts of the perspectives of the professionals who work closely in the guide dog service, in conjunction with that of the owners.

Why have you been chosen?

The present project is interested in the personal experiences of London guide dog owners who are currently with their first guide dog and with the following personal/demographic profile: middle-aged (40-60 years old); White British. Additionally, the project will examine the perspectives of OMSs and GDMLs from Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA). Further, since the project relies on the personal accounts shared by participants, it is anticipated that prospective participants are individuals who are able/comfortable to reflect and articulate their personal experience verbally during an in-person interview (discussed below). As such, prospective participants without serious medical conditions that may limit their engagement in the interview will be recruited.

How will you participate in the study?

Your main role as a participant in this study involves a one-on-one interview with me on your experiences with your guide dog(s) or your working experience in supporting the owners and their guide dog. You will be interviewed once. The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes, and I would be happy to come and meet you at a place of your choosing (so long as it is suitable for a sustained conversation). The content of the interview will be audio recorded, as the verbatim transcript of the interview will be the data for the study analysis.

The interview format is open, flexible, and intended to provide space for you to share your personal experiences with your guide dogs or your work experience in the guide dog service as freely as possible. As part of my preparative work, I have drafted some questions that may be useful in our meeting. However, the interview of this study is not structured with you answering a mandatory set of questions. I am interested in any aspects of your experiences that are important or significant to you, and I will follow them up with more questions in our talk. There will be no right or wrong answers to the questions I pose during our meeting.

Your rights as a research participant:

As a research participant, you have the right to terminate the interview without giving a reason and without enduring (having) any negative consequences. If you desire to withdraw from the study after an interview has been taken place, you could do so by contacting me within two weeks after the interview date. Please do hesitate to contact me if you have any question about or feedback on the study.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?

The present study has not identified any physical risks to the participants involved. Nonetheless, during the study interview, you will be talking about your experiences with your guide dog, or your experiences in supporting guide dog owners, and at times, this could involve you recalling less pleasant aspects of your experiences, and this could be upsetting to you. In attending to your discomfort, we will pause the conversation to support you with the space and time you may need. When appropriate, I will also ask you if you would like me to turn off the audio-recorder. Equally important to reiterate in such circumstance is that as a participant, you have the right to terminate the interview anytime should you need it.

What are the potential/possible implications of the study?

It is not expected that there will be direct benefits to you of participating in this study. However, I hope that the interview will be an enjoyable and interesting experience for you. Also, through engaging with the experiences and stories that you share with me, I hope the study could contribute to building the detailed and experience-close understandings on the phenomenon of guide- dog partnership, and shine some lights on the aspects of our current practices and environments that could be more sustaining, supportive for owners and their guide dogs.

How will your anonymity and confidentiality be potentially implicated and managed in the study?

To ensure your anonymity, the original names of the guide dog owners, the guide dogs and the professionals will be changed; pseudonyms will be used in and to label any electronic and paper files pertaining to the study. The electronic and paper documents pertaining to the study, and the presentation or publication possibly arising out of the study - thesis report, conference presentation, journal publication- will only describe/disclose participant's personal information in the following areas: age, gender, vision, the length of experience in using or working in the guide dog service, and the current employment position in the guide dog service. Any personal information that does not fall into the above categories will be removed or altered to protect anonymity.

All the paper files containing the excerpts and/or personal information gathered from you will be locked in the drawer at the researcher's workstation at Birkbeck College when they are not in use. The researcher will be the only person who has access to the key to the cupboard. Further, all the audio recordings gathered for this project – the consenting process (gather from guide dog owners) and the interview – and other electronic files pertaining to the study will be stored in the researcher's laptop and the designated computer station at Birkbeck college, both access points are protected by password only known to the researcher. The interview recordings and other documents with your personally identifiable information will be destroyed once the study has been written up, which will be around March 2020.

Who will review the study?

This research project has received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London. The associated reference number is 161768.

If you would like to take part:

If you would like to take part or would like to discuss things further before making a decision, please contact me (Tin). My contact information can be found at the end of this information sheet.

PhD student: Tin- Su Liang Email: tliang01@mail.bbk.ac.uk Phone: 0789-822-6577

Additional contact information:

Supervisor: Professor Jonathan A. Smith Email: ja.smith@bbk.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time and consideration.

**Departmental Ethics Committee
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES
BIRKBECK COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

CLASSIFICATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Date of approval: 15/06/2017
Supervisor: Jonathan Smith
Investigator(s): Tin-Su Laing
Reference Number: 161768
Title: Exploring the relationship between owners (users)
and their guide dog – an interpretative
phenomenological analysis study

Dear Jonathan Smith and Tin-Su Laing,

The above application has been given ethical approval by the departmental ethics committee.

You should be aware that it is your responsibility to report any unexpected problems or events arising from the research that might have adverse consequences for you and/or your participants. In the first instance, please discuss with your supervisor who will advise you as to whether the problem causes a change to the planned research and needs further ethical approval from the committee. If so, please submit a revised application giving details of why this is necessary.

Approval for this study expires June 2020. If the study is still ongoing at this time please submit a renewal of ethical approval form that can be found on the departmental webpage.

Please retain this certificate for your records.

Good luck with the research.



Emily Jones
Chair of the departmental ethics committee
Date: 15/06/2017

Appendix 4. Written Consent Form

Appendix 4

BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CONSENT FORM FOR: *Exploring the experience of travelling and taking care for a guide dog – An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study*

I understand that I may terminate the interview without giving a reason and without enduring any negative consequences. Further, if I desire to withdraw from the study after an interview has been taken place, I could do so by contacting the researcher within two weeks after the interview date.

I understand that audio recordings of the interview process will be made.

I understand that I will remain anonymous.

- Any electronic and paper files pertaining to the study will be identified/labelled by a pseudonym.
- The electronic and paper documents pertaining to the study, and the presentation or publication possibly arising out of the study will only describe/disclose my personal information in the following areas: *age, gender, type of professional qualification, current employment position, length of working in the guide dog service.* Other personal information you disclose during our talk will be removed or altered.

I understand that all information given will be kept confidential.

- The audio recordings and the electronic files pertaining to the study will be stored in the researcher's personal laptop and her designated workstation at Birkbeck college, both access points are protected by password only known to the researcher.
- All the paper files pertaining to the study will be stored in the researcher's desk drawer at Birkbeck College when they are not in use. The researcher is the only person who has the key to her desk drawer.

I understand the interview recordings, and other documents contain my personally identifiable information will be destroyed once the study has been written up, which will be around April 2019.

I understand that that all the information given will be used for this study only and I understand how the results of the study will be used.

- Results will be written up for a thesis and may be used for conference presentation and/or journal publication.

I have had the details of the study explained to me and willingly consent to take part. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I confirm that I am over 16 years of age.

Name (participant):

Signature:

Date:

Name (researcher):

Signature:

Date:

If you have any question regarding the study, please contact:

PhD student: Tin-Su Liang
Email: tliang01@mail.bbk.ac.uk
Phone: [0789-822-6577](tel:0789-822-6577)
Department of Psychological Sciences
Birkbeck College, University of London

Appendix 5. Study 1: Interview Schedule – Orientation and Mobility Specialist (OMS)

1. May I know how long you have worked as an OMS or mobility instructor?
2. Can you describe your role/involvement as an OMS in the process of an individual becoming a guide dog owner (in guide dog service provision)?
 - Prompt: What are the kinds of work activities that you often engage in (e.g. training, assessment?)
3. What kinds of information do you emphasize / talk through with clients at the first in-person meeting (e.g. 'general information visit')?
 - Prompt: Can you talk about a recent or memorable general info visit that you've had?
4. Can you tell me what kinds of things you consider when assessing a client applying for guide dog service (e.g. in the mobility assessment)?
 - Prompt: What kinds of factors do you usually consider when deciding that an applicant is a potentially suitable owner/ is prepared to be trained with the guide dog?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the kinds of exercises that you and the clients do together in the mobility training session?
 - Prompt: Can you tell me about your most recent session with a client? Can you tell me a little bit about the owner/client? What was the focus of that session? What did you and the owner/client do?
6. How do you compare guide dog aided mobility to other forms of aided mobility that individuals with visual impairments may choose to use (e.g. long cane)?
 - Prompt: For example, the way one reacts to obstacles, orients to the environment, the level of concentration, the emotional or social aspects, or any other aspects of the travel experience?
7. Can you talk a little bit more about the kinds of support that you provide to clients after they become a qualified owner?
 - Prompt: Can you describe a client you have worked with for some time as an example?

Appendix 6. Study 1: Table of Group Experiential Themes

Group Experiential Theme I. Making sense of working guide dogs

Subtheme 1.1 Dynamic situatedness: Naturally uncontrolled/uncontrollable vs. professionally disciplined

'When they're wearing a harness they put their working hat on [...] soon as that harness comes off, They revert to being young bouncy boisterous run about, crazy things type dogs, so you've got to be careful' (Amber, 189-191)

'If you had a huge dog like they are, and you are only taking it out for ten minutes every week it's gonna go stone crazy it's gonna it's gonna be bouncing off your walls' (Cathy, 115-116)

'So if they don't go out and work the dog, it will begin to forget what it needs to do. So, some people seem to think it's, very easy to have a dog and they don't understand, the effort it needs (Olivia, 274—282)

'We're, highly emotional or, angry or whatever it might be at that stage, that's the stage the dog being qualified at' (Shawn, 925-926)

'The dog is very much, just being a dog, you know, it's responding to, to whatever is going on.' (Leonard, 190--191)

Subtheme 1.2 Minded, intentional beings

'There's got to be something about why they do it, why they, why the dog works that degree, what does the dog get out of it' (Olivia, 747-748)

'We do everything that we do, to get to get something that we want or to avoid something that we don't want and the dog is exactly same as us in that respect' (Leonard, 861-864)

'So she was looking at it, but she already got her own view, saying "no going that way"' (Shawn, 58-59)

'They'll see something over there that looks more interesting than what they're doing because they're dogs, they're not machines' (Amber, 1056- 1057)

'If a dog suddenly decides "actually, I wanna chase a pigeon", and if it sees another pigeon "I wanna chase that pigeon"' (Cathy, 1432-1433)

'They are brilliant animals but at the end of the day it's a dog' [...] if the person's not doing the instructions, then the dog's obedience can fall away' (Cathy, 992-993)

Subtheme 1.3 Being in-between: Autonomous and non-autonomous

'Too much obedience, the dog then says, "well, I don't know how to cope, he hasn't told me what to do", I want the dog to actually say "it's alright I know what I am doing", and then carrying on' (Shawn, 1843-1848); 'somewhere in the middle there's a gentle ground' (Shawn, 1831)

'It's a bit like with the parent and the child, child will look at the parent for security or for confirmation, of what it's doing is right' (Leonard, 780-782)

Group Experiential Theme II. Guide dog–person mobility

Subtheme 2.2 Trusting the guide dogs: A quandary/predicament

‘They’re taking their chances that the dog will take them safely from A to B’ (Olivia, 757-758)

‘You’ve got no control over that, the dog is avoiding the obstacles without you even knowing it a lot of the time [...] well can a dog do all that.’ (Amber, 414-421)

‘So fear, is a main thing and then secondly with the other example that I mentioned, sometimes it’s er, it’s a case of feeling that you know better than the dog’ (Leonard, 954-956) ; ‘it’s it’s scary, going out’ (Leonard, 899)

‘The dog has got a brain and it’s making judgment according to its brain’ (Cathy, 1641-1642)

Subtheme 2.2 Challenging bodily adjustments: Into spontaneity and fluidity

‘People are generally looking down at their feet, because again it’s human’s self preservation, you don’t wanna trip’ (Cathy, 1011-1013)

‘Some people look permanently at the floor [...] um and try and get them to understand that they don’t have to worry out about what to meet to be in front of them cuz the dog would sort that out’ (Olivia, 498-503)

‘Very few cane user actually walk, mid pavement, because like to feel attach to something’ (Olivia, 526-527)

‘They need to think further afield’ (Shawn, 259)

‘It’s quite hard for somebody, because they’ve got no anchor to hang on’ (Amber, 450)

Someone is using walking it down the road by themselves with the dog, they could be thinking, oh is a nice day today and what should I do later and what should I make for my dinner’ (Cathy, 835-837)

‘Whereas with a guide dog, the mobility is much more fluid, you flow through the environment, you don’t make contact with obstacles’ (Leonard, 669-670)

Group Experiential Theme III. 'Companionship'

'It's you can't separate the two, because that companionship happens during the work'
(Leonard, Line 1104-1106)

'It helps to take away fear any fear that you have or anxiety have about being out and about'
(Leonard, 624-627)

'I suppose officially that they are there as a mobility aid, guide dogs, but, they give so much more because, they are a companion and they open up um, conversations with people as well'
(Amber, 909-911)

'So we would not give somebody a guide dog just for companionship' (Cathy, 1416-1417)

'That was typical of what we often saw [I: typic-], you know, typical, just in as much as, doesn't matter what goes wrong, "I've got this [emphasized], this is my dog", you know'
(Shawn, 1276-1278)

'But it's not just [emphasized] about walking it's about, sort of, them as a person. I: the dog as a person S: person and a person I: person and a person S: yeah. So both' (Shawn, 1285-1290)

'To me it's as if it's like the two parts of a jigsaw puzzle together [...] it's two halves of one thing' (Olivia, 665-675)

Group Experiential Theme IV. The caring responsibility of the owner for the guide dog

Subtheme 4.1 A complex terrain: The emotional responsibility of the person for the guide dog

'I am stroking her, grooming her she just go into jelly and she thinks it's absolutely gorgeous [I laugh] and her brain slows down [...] if she could, she would say "you alright?"' (Shawn, 1656-1661)

'They get, they're more susceptible to separation anxiety than an average pet dog' (Cathy, 1211-1212)

'It's a working dog you forget about the dog as best as you can' (Cathy, 67-68)

'You have to make sure both of them are happy, confident, and not stressed; that's very important' (Leonard, 156-159)

'But, exactly what emotions they are experiencing is difficult to be sure of without anthropomorphising, so humanizing their responses, and people do that a lot' (Leonard, 821-825)

'It's it is hard, I mean there are people who do have dogs whose dogs, um, are a means to an end and they don't give them as much emotional input as you would like' (Amber 669-671)

Subtheme 4.2 Being responsible for a guide dog is like being responsible for a 'child'

'You have to think about the dog, it's very much like having a small child.' (Leonard, 276-277)

'It's like taking on a, it's not like a child is it[...]you have to agree to a certain stipulations of looking after that dog and working with it' (Amber 1447-1450)

'It's the same as well not the same, you know when you think about being a parent [...] whatever it might be, and you get over (Shawn, 1031-1037)

General Recruitment Message for Guide Dog Owners

Dear guide dog owners,

My name is Tin, and I am a PhD student from the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London. My research project focuses on the topic of guide dog partnership. I would like to interview first-time guide dog owners from the London area about their experiences. In particular, I am keen to learn about what it is like for owners to travel with their guide dogs, as well as the owners' experience of the 'off-harness' time with their guide dogs (such as taking care for the guide dog).

The interview will be one-to-one and with a quite flexible style. There will be no right or wrong answers to the questions I pose in the interview – you, as the guide dog owners, are the expert on the research topic, and I will be interested in any experience that you want to share with me. We will likely be talking for around 60 to 90 minutes (or longer if you like), and I will come and meet you at a place of your choosing (so long as it is a place where we can both hear each other clearly). Because the interview is for my research project, I will use an audio recorder to document our conversation. But if you wish to stop the interview at any point, you are welcome to do so without needing to tell me why.

I will generate verbatim transcripts from the individual interviews and replace all the personally identifiable information. The interview transcripts will be analysed which then enable me to produce a research account of the owners' perspectives on the guide dog partnership.

If any owner has questions, or thinks/feels that he/she would like to take part in the study, please feel free to contact me by phone (0789-822-6577), text, or email (tliang01@mail.bbk.ac.uk).

Appendix 8. Study 2: Oral Consent Script

Oral consent script – guide dog owners

Part I: Setting the context

- When I turn on the voice recorder you will hear a beep sound, and there will be another beep sound when I turn the recorder off, just in case if you wonder where the beep/strange sound comes from.
- Shall we start?
- Thank you
- **turn on the recorder **

Part II: Recapping study background and participation

- As I introduced myself in our phone call, I am a PhD student from the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, which is part of the University of London. I am working on a project that focuses on the topic of guide dog partnership.
- Before we take the time to recap or talk in more detail about participation in the study, may I ask if there is any aspect of the study (e.g., interview, management of personal information) that you want us to focus on first?

1. Topic and purpose:

- As I explained in our call, the intention of my project is to get a deep understanding of how first-time owners experience and understand their partnership with their guide dogs. I am particularly interested in learning about your experience of walking with your guide dog and your experience in terms of taking care of your guide dogs (as well as other aspects of your partnership experience that are important to you). As I stressed earlier, the study does not aim to test any hypothesis or theory; the focus is very much on attending to the first-person perspectives of the owners (e.g., how you perceive yourself, your guide dog and your relationship).
- So, this is a short description of the project background. Is there anything that I can address at this point?

2. Interview structure:

- It may also be helpful for us to revisit what the interview will be like.
- As I described earlier, the interview will be slightly similar to 'a conversation with purpose', and I have prepared some questions that I would like to ask you about your experience of walking with and taking care of your guide dog, but I will draw on these questions flexibly so that our talk can stay close/open to aspects of your partnership experience that are important/relevant to you. Of course, there are no questions involving right or wrong answers; in our talk, you are the experiential experts on the topic.
- As I indicated earlier, because the content of our interview will be used as the data for later analysis, an audio recorder will be used.
- From my past experiences, the interview could run between 60 to 90 minutes. But as I explained earlier, you can always pause or stop the interview without needing to explain.
- So, what we just covered was the interview process. Is there any aspect about the interview that I can describe further for you?

3. Potential risk:

- We will now move on to consider an important but potentially less pleasant (adverse) aspect of participation in the study.
- As I indicated earlier, the interview is structured around the owners/participants telling their own stories in their own words. It is recognized that, at times, this process could be upsetting or emotionally charged to the individuals, especially when the interview touches on memories, incidents that bear strong significance to the participants.
- Considering this, it may be helpful for me to explain the step I will take in case of a participant expressing discomfort during the interview. In such a context, I will first try to provide the time and space that the participant needs to regroup himself/herself, when appropriate. This could mean asking him/her if he/she wants to pause the interview and have the recorder turned off, or if he/she wants to terminate the meeting at this point.
- So, what we discussed is the potential risk of participating in the study. How are we doing so far? Is there anything that I can clarify or explain further?

4. Right to withdraw:

- Importantly, as I stated earlier, as the study participant you can always pause or terminate the interview without having a particular reason.
- At the same time, the participant can withdraw from the study even after an interview taken place. To do that the participant only needs to notify me about his/her intention to withdraw within **two weeks** after the interview date.

5. Handling personal accounts and information:

- I also want to take this time to give a more detailed description of how information gathered from the participant will be handled in the study.
- All the files relevant to the study will be stored securely throughout the course of the research. The electronic files will be stored on my personal laptop and my computer station at Birkbeck College; the computer access points are password protected. When I am on campus, the print files will be locked in my drawer when I step away from the office.
- I will also change the original names of the participants and their guide dogs in all the documents. Only limited descriptions about the participants' backgrounds will be described in the publications and/or presentations that emerge from this project. The background description will be limited to participants' age, gender, length of experience with guide dog service (in years) and vision status, ethnicity and general health status.
- It is also important to let you know that the final thesis report that I submit to the university will present selected quotations from the interview, and the quotations may also be used in future publications and/or conference presentations. However, in these instances, names will be changed and limited background info will be provided.
- Last but not least, I will properly destroy the interview recordings and other personal information gathered from the participants once the study has been written up, which will be around Date
- So, this concludes how personal information will be handled in the study.
- Is there anything that I can further address for you on this part?

6. Ethical approval:

- It may also be useful/ important for you to know that this study has received ethics approval from the Ethics committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College.
- A proposal for this study has also been reviewed and approved by the GDBA.

7. Summing up

- Before I ask for your formal consent, may I ask if there is anything about the study background, the interview, the handling of data or anything else that you would want us to revisit or address?

Part III: Obtaining consent

- Okay, so now I will ask the final question, and please feel free to take all the time you need to respond. When you feel you are ready, you can respond by verbally indicating yes or no to my question.
- *'[Participant's name], are you willing to take part in my PhD research project on guide dog partnership?'*
- [Await response].
- Great. Thank you for being willing to take part in the study and for your patience in going through the informed consent process with me.
- I will turn off the recorder for now and we will hear another beep sound.

****Turn off the recorder****

Appendix 9. Study 2: Table of Group Experiential Themes

<p>Group Experiential Theme I. The experience and adjustment of the working/walking relation with a guide dog</p>
<p>Subtheme 1.1 Inconsistency and unpredictability Drew: I thought that they just came out of the box, fully trained, just knowing exactly what to do (Drew, 38-60) Matthew: the next day, we went out again and he it was sniffing everything (Matthew, 569-574) Angus: I was thinking, either I've got duff one, or, you know [both laughed], um this is not right [...] I am not sure this is necessarily you know the right thing for me you know. (Angus, 1240-1264) William: I wanna find out why, because, it's, peril to me to go out with a dog that just stops..I need to know[...] he stopped for no reason (William, 421-435) Henry: I told my mother, that Hank had dog distraction, she said, well you can't have him (Henry, 54-66) Tanya: when I first, first got her, she..she's..she had two speeds, which was..slow..or flat out [...] it was very difficult [...] just sort of totally believed that she wouldn't walk me into anything (Tanya, 61-66) Bridget: he was quite a lively dog, he wasn't even two years old [...] he might kind of try and sniff or try and eat something, which didn't really help me kind of trust. (Bridget, 173-183) Lillian: She is a dog, you know, she does dogs [...] suddenly, she'll just lunge at a chicken bone, and I'm there, tryna and wrestle, you know, wrestle the bone back out of her mouth. (Lillian, 499-503) Rosemary: at the back of your mind, you're always thinking, is she going to do something..that isn't..actually going be safe[...]whether one ever get overcomes or not I don't (Rosemary, 188-224)</p> <p>Subtheme 1.2 The demands of managing control Subtheme 1.2a Female owners: Ceding control, trust Bridget: it was, really quite scary, coz I suddenly had to trust Bruce, and trust his judgment to avoid things. Whereas before it was completely my decision (Bridget, 83-92) Tanya: It's...at first I felt I wanted to use both, because you got used to using the cane [...] getting used to putting all your trust in a dog, was quite difficult (Tanya, 46-54) Rosemary: you literally are..you're putting your life in their hands, and that's..quite scary (Rosemary, 160 -175) Lillian: I'm her manager in terms of I'm giving her salary and giving her command. But I also have her client in that she is guiding me, I'm trusting, I am trusting her to make, autonomous decisions [...] It is quite bizarre, it's that constant, you know, constant back and forth of (Lillian, 747-772) Josslyn: it's got its own mind and it knows exactly what, what it's gotta do whereas you, you've, you've got more control over the... I don't know, it's difficult [...] it's really difficult to explain um, but, I, I'll tend to...the cane is...I don't know, I can't, I just can't, I don't know (Josslyn, 616-631)</p> <p>Subtheme 1.2b. Male owners: Taking/keeping control, overpowering William: it's very dangerous otherwise if they've got their own agenda it could be very tricky...so, you have to make sure you are in control...all the time, when you are out (William, 173-185) Angus: there's fine balance[...]it's important, that in our relationship he knows that I am the boss [...] he's a pack animal so he wants to follow, but he's kind of, being put in this position where he's gotta be a guide dog so he's gotta lead (Angus, 669-680) Drew: I still love him, but, he stops being my, my pet dog and he becomes my mobility aid so he's a, he's a tool [...] I can't allow that softness, to be there, um, when we're, when we're travelling, I can't let his, training unravel (Drew, 191- 218) Matthew: he doesn't like the gentle leader. However...for, for our safety, it is better if I am working and he has that on. [...] And I say sorry because I...he doesn't object, to me putting it on, but I, I know he prefers not to, but... (Matthew, 499-511) Henry: the hardest part was, I would try and override Hank, with my limited eyesight, which was ridiculous. (Henry, 721-749)</p>

Subtheme 1.3 Stepping into an acquired sensibility towards the guide dog

1.3a. Female owners: Coming to a 'feel'-based engagement with the guide dog

Lillian: So the difference between...er...weaving to avoid something and a sudden pull, which meant that she'd seen a dog or a squirrel[...] it's just so, difficult to know. Um. So I felt quite daunting. (Lillian, 348-356)

Tanya: It was very difficult and I don't, think, I was given enough information about...holding the harness [...]so that it's right next to your leg and you can feel it, moving you, much quicker (Tanya, 148-154)

Bridget: now, I am just so much more sensitive to every kind of micro movements that he makes [...]you need, time, to kind of get that emotional, layer, and that sort of, you know, this, yeah, the much more of the emotional layer on top of the practical layer (Bridget, 660-692)

Josslyn: I can just feel, her whole body's tense [...]and I can feel that once, once she...gets into the swing of it, she's a lot, lot better (Josslyn, 322-330)

Rosemary: if you get another dog of course, all that has to be relearned [...]because you're..well you are in harmony with them, or they with you (Rosemary, 425-437)

Subtheme 1.3b Male owners: Making concessions on mobility efficiency for the needs of the guide dog

Henry: Hank is having to combat, all of the um, love of being a dog[...] so it is trying to find, the right balance, between, keeping us, heading, where [laughed] we would like to go, but also giving him enough stimulus, of all the other aspects of his life (Henry 157-164)

Drew: I am a bit more understanding of his limitations um, and, I am a better guide owner in that, I am happy to...to take the time [...]I've more understood that, you know, for the partnership to succeed it's um, a two-way street (Drew, 277-291)

Angus: my own view is that it would be safer if he just walks straight down the middle [laughed], you know, um, but, obviously his instinct and his training and, you know his personality and stuff, as such that, he'll do how he's comfortable and that's fine you know (Angus, 321-327)

Matthew: I could say yeah we could walk around that no problem, but how do I know that he's not gonna get stressed out by that. You know, you gotta take, ownership, of, not just the dog but of the situations that arise (Matthew 542-557)

William: he's not a moped or a car, you know, he's allow to have a day like that , but...it doesn't help me [...]I know that isn't how it's supposed to [...] but, it's not a machine and never will be to me, I'm gonna be more aware of him (William, 624-637)

Group Experiential Theme II.

'Pet,' 'Child,' 'Relaxed kettle': The nebulous sense of person-guide dog relatedness while off-duty

Subtheme 2.1 The defined, firm sense of relatedness

Bridget: I feel much more, I think, protective and much more of a parent to him, I think, when he's off harness. [...] when he's off harness, you know, he's my dependent. (Bridget, 590-602)

Josslyn: I am still strict with her [...] I do let her be a dog, you know, I am not constantly say no, no, no, no, you know, I do let her relax (Josslyn, 640-654)

Matthew: this dog is treated like royalty, you know, he...but, when I say that, he's treated no differently to the cats, you know he, he's part of the family, he's part of this house[...]I've... he's made to feel, like this is his home (Matthew, 1232-1239)

Rosemary: if I'd...I'd adopted a child, that child would have to, been, my child, er to be looked after as if, I had produced him or her myself, I don't think...it's, it's a huge responsibility and, you do...you are responsible for them, you are responsible for their, their welfare for their happiness (Rosemary, 742-749)

Henry: All good marriages [...]all good, relationships with your children, are treating them equal love and respect, and it is the same, for a guide dog versus a family pet [...] I don't believe, that my preference, that he finds his own space, on the floor, was, necessarily right (Henry, 573-602)

Subtheme 2.2 The ambivalent, wavering sense of relatedness

Tanya : nobody explains to you, that..when you are not training, we are not working, she's just, a pet[...] I spent a lot of time when I first got her, worrying about what do I do... (Tanya, 520-529)

William: isolated in terms of [being] the only person with the dog, the only person with the responsibility of a dog [...]it's not even if he was a puppy I bought, or a dog I got, it it's a guide dog [...]he's a very precious cargo for them (William, 1039-1054)

Angus: you feel like he's a bit of pet, at that point [...]it becomes a bit sort of like...[sigh] not exactly intrusive but it does affect you because it's like, it's not like a cane [...]he's of no use to me whatsoever[...] in fact it's the other way around (Angus, 799-822)

Kadence: It's a relaxed kettle [both laughed], he's great lump [...] he is a lovely dog [...] but...it he is an asset isn't he, he's, he's something that I use. (Kadence, 595-613)

Kadence: I still do not like dogs [...]I think I just love him, you know, I've come to love him. (Kadence, 510-526)

Lillian: I didn't expect that I would want I would actively want to change my, change on the things that we do so that she, has the best life [...] in that way she's like one of my kids (Lillian, 675-692)

Group Experiential Theme III.

Emerging confidence-security in negotiating the physical world

Subtheme 3.1 Being with 'someone': the guide dog as an emotionally anchoring/stabilizing force

Angus: that's one of the things probably gives me confidence, is that, Archie is with me[...]yeah we are a team, there's two of us, you know I am not just on my own (Angus, 874-880)

Lillian: it does feel like we're, we're facing the, facing the world as a team (Lillian, 481-484)

Matthew: I don't feel as vulnerable with Marco as I do with, um a cane [...]me and Marco we are a team. Me and my cane aren't[...] but something could happen to Marco, what am I gonna do then(Matthew, 463-474)

Henry: at worst, if it becomes all too overwhelming um, I still have someone that I can hug [...] I still got.. this giant, teddy bear [...] he's also got fantastic fur, for giving a stroke to, that tactile, aspect of him, cannot be under-estimated (Henry, 1044-1059)

Drew: he would always stand very close to me press against my leg and, and then that's very very nice, it's like a, it gives me a good sense of security (Drew, 462-466)

Bridget: it's a kind of inner confidence, and that confidence to kind of, go into different places go into new places[...]it's quite a weird, you know, quite a nice sort of feeling to always know that you've actually got someone on your side (Bridget, 307-313)

Tanya: knowing that she's there with me..it is...is...is...like a..I don't know, it's confidence, it's..security..it's knowing that somebody cares[...]it's like having another person there (Tanya, 472-478)

Josslyn: I've got someone that will have my back, you know, that always be, well not always be there but, will be there, for the future (Josslyn, 793-797)

Subtheme 3.2 A reclaimed sense of personal agency and competence

Henry: the loss of eyesight, um, as a mental, battle[...] your brain is telling you, oh but you don't have eyesight, you can't [...]I don't walk into them anymore [...]So he is, um.....empowering me, through his...senses (Henry, 761-772)

Rosemary: I've never bumped into anything, or anybody [...]that's where she is my eyes, she's..she's leading me, er, where I can't lead myself (Rosemary, 352-361)

Drew: I haven't bumped up against my um own, um.....um I don't know what you'd call it, like my own physical flaws quite so often [...]having him has made me more comfortable about my own skin (Drew, 369-378)

Kadence: you just can't do it all of the sudden you can't, and so you're, you're closed inside this, trap[...]then he, he came...but then everything opened, but everything opened, wider than it had been before (Kadence, 700-721)

Matthew: I was crying. Because...it, I hadn't done that in such a long time [...]you just got million things going around in your head [...] he helped me cross the road, but we discovered the new world (Matthew, 1107-1130)

Josslyn: it was like reborn because, you know I was able to, go and see[...]it was just a, massive...um, life changing situation [...] gift from God really (Josslyn, 440-447)

Lillian: there was a confusion there [...] I've always had trouble and navigating around at night. But suddenly I'm, I'm a person that can. So what does that mean? You know, what does it... what does it mean? (Lillian, 53-62)

Subtheme 3.3 A revitalized sense of spontaneity

Angus: he just weaves in and out [...] it's much more, more relaxing [...] you are not constantly thinking oh, crikey, I hit an obstacle (Angus, 139-144)

Lillian: sort of.. flying, um, or gliding [...] Although the cane, absolutely does help, um, it's much more clunky[...]you're getting shock and vibration, you know, through your system (Lillian, 76-86)

Kadence: if I go out if I went out on my own, I have to go out walking like this [K arched her back], with my head down, which is not, very comfortable, whereas with Knox, he um, he stops at steps (Kadence, 186-191)

Bridget: I thought, hey, I've forgotten something[...]that stress that I'd had from using a cane [...]I hadn't been thinking about, the mobility side of anything, just thinking about what I had to do that day. (Bridget, 196-211)

Tanya: if I was using a cane[...] a lot more..less spatially aware, with Tess I can..if I am holding Tess, I can still look around and do things [...]with the cane, you're..one hundred per cent concentrated on the cane, with Tess, I can..I can day dream (Tanya, 304-314)

Henry: it is a partnership of extending one's senses[...] Having Hank, keeping me on the path, means that I can use my senses elsewhere. So he is extending, what we might have as a team... (Henry, 197-217)

Drew: blows of nice warm air flying through my hair, um, I felt like some sort of [...] blind equivalent of being on like holiday with in, in California, (Drew, 168-174)

Josslyn: if I have to go out, with the cane, I don't tend to walk, very far, because I don't feel as safe so, but if I've got Rasa I will walk anywhere (Josslyn, 208-216)

William: I could actually close my eyes and trust him, um, but not every time no, I think he's got a fair way to go [...]you know the penny dropped then that's what, that's what life with a guide dog is about (William, 465-492)

Group Experiential Theme IV.

Changing social world in becoming a guide dog-associated person

Subtheme 4.1 New social visibility: becoming relatable, sociable, welcoming in the eyes of others

Lillian: people know how to respond to a dog, or they're, they're more comfortable, they're like, Okay, this is a dog we get it, whereas the cane they're a bit like, what is that and who is this person? (Lillian, 946-959)

Kadence: they don't, doubt, that you are going to be, communicative, kind, talk to them [...] I think they think you've got a guide dog you...you're safe (Kadence, 766-773)

Angus: it does attract other people [...] invariably, you know, people will start off a conversation or something [...] nobody talks to anybody do they so, just breaking that it's quite nice (Angus, 880-889)

Rosemary: when Rennie walks in, everybody comes to make a fuss of her, um, and I get marvelous treatment (Rosemary, 504-507)

Matthew: I think it gives people that opportunity, to ask about guide dogs, and in turn, they then turn their attentions [I: to you] to you, me, yeah (Matthew, 1324-1334)

Josslyn: it's just nice and they talk to you and they ask how you are [...] I am more confident, um...to talking to people you know, and, if someone asks me a question, I am more than happy to, answer (Josslyn, 552-561)

Bridget: I feel like, there's something that I can just kind of, bond with people on the level of talking about dogs [...] it's just given me a, very positive, identity [...] an identity that, is, open, to others (Bridget, 804-810)

Subtheme 4.2 New social visibility: becoming warranting of forgiveness and assistance in the eyes of others

Josslyn: People thought I was drunk [...] people weren't very, um...understanding when I said, I've got something wrong with my eyes because I don't look...like, you know, like I've got a problem (Josslyn, 9-12)

Henry: If you have a guide dog with you, the explanation is there for them, to pick up, 'Oh he's got a guide dog', he can't see my hand.' (Henry, 484-495)

Tanya: you knock over things people get at you, whereas if the dog...walks you into something, they'll tell the dog off, they think it's the dog's fault [...] that really gives you that security, that kind of...people are gonna look out for me because I've got the dog (Tanya, 280-286)

Drew: people, are a lot more forgiving [...] I think the guide dog is such a, um...an overt symbol of sight loss [...] people more readily apologize, people more readily um, then after, you know, a confrontation will help me [...] so I found the world a kinder place since I have Douglas (Drew, 328-334)

Subtheme 4.3 The ambivalence of person-guide dog unity in social contexts

Lillian: It feels like we come as a package [...] like I'm...like, we're kind of...like we're on display for public curiosity [...] how much is it within my... where do I set the boundaries? [...] it's kind of... like, am I a pub-am I...are we public property? (Lillian, 820 -858)

Henry: having a guide dog doesn't mean that you want to talk to people, but people will talk to you, you know, that's the, aspect of it [...] whether you want to be or not [...] it's no longer your choice. (Henry, 523-566)

Josslyn: A lot people asking me, um, am I training Jessa, because I don't, you know, I don't look like, like if there is anything wrong with me but then...and I said and they're very surprised when I said, no she's actually mine [...] it's a bit odd. (Josslyn, 507-512)

Kadence: I don't feel welcome in your house, because you, won't welcome...that part of me and, and that's how I feel that's when I said earlier, somehow I feel...that something of me has transferred into the dog (Kadence, 358-385)

Drew: coz he is me, you know, you are not just, being horrible about my dog, you are being horrible about me as person so, I think that's maybe something I wasn't prepared for, when I, when I got him, that I would feel so.....I would feel so inextricably link to him. (Drew, 549-559)