

**Garry James Aitchison**

**95005314**

**B. Psyc (Hons)**

The Impact of Response Expectancies on Heart Rate Variability  
in a  
Human-Dolphin Interaction

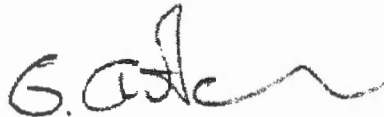
**Supervisor:** Dr Graham Jamieson

9,881Words

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Adler', written in a cursive style.

Dated: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Professor D.R. Grey Postgraduate Research Foundation and thank them for covering some of the costs involved in this research.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of my supervisor, Dr Graham Jamieson, and thank him for providing guidance, advice and encouragement. I also wish to thank Dr Rhonda Brown for the assistance she provided in the initial stages of this research.

I wish to acknowledge the enormous help provided by the management and staff of the Coffs Harbour Pet Porpoise Pool.

I thank Paige Sinclair for allowing me to conduct this research at the Pet Porpoise Pool and I thank all the animal trainers for their advice, cooperation and forbearance.

I especially thank the booking desk staff who guided participants my way and I thank all staff for their kindness and cooperation during my time at the Pet Porpoise Pool.

**Abstract**

Swimming with a captive dolphin is believed to generate an increase in an individual's subjective wellbeing. This study tested that relationship and evaluated the relationship between wellbeing and heart rate variability associated with a paid dolphin encounter. It was hypothesised that a change to heart rate variability resulting from the dolphin encounter would be predicted by the strength of belief the individual held about dolphins and by the individual's predicted emotional reactions to the encounter. Beliefs about dolphins were shown to be an important predictor of change to heart rate variability. Contrary to expectations one category of dolphin vocalisations also proved to be a significant predictor of change to heart rate variability.

**Participant information sheet**

***INFORMATION  
RESEARCH GROUP***



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**Project Title:** *Affective and communicative reactions to a controlled human - dolphin encounter*

**Persons Responsible:** *Garry Aitchison and Dr. Graham Jamieson & Dr. Rhonda Brown*

**Project Expiry Date:** **21<sup>st</sup> April 2012**

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by *Garry Aitchison* as part of his degree requirements as a Psychology Honours student at the University of New England. Participants are required to be over 18 years of age. The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between expectations and emotions in a human dolphin interaction and the results of the projected research will be reported in an honours thesis.

If you decide you would like to participate you will complete a short survey before and after your encounter. Both surveys will take approximately **12** minutes and are completely anonymous; you will not be asked to provide your name or any identifying information. Whilst completing the pre and post surveys your Heart Rate and Blood Pressure will be measured (using a wrist cuff monitor). The information you provide will be combined with other responses so that a summary of results across participants can be presented in the final thesis describing the outcome of the study.

Participation is completely voluntary and if you wish to discontinue participation at any time, you are free to do so without a problem. Completing the survey will be taken as consent to participate. Completed surveys will be securely stored for 5 years in Psychology at UNE. Unidentifiable electronic data will be kept indefinitely for research and teaching purposes.

We do not foresee any risks associated with completing the survey. However, in the event that completing the survey reminds you of personal issues you would like to discuss with a mental health professional, counselling support is available at your local Community Health Centre (consult the white pages of your regional telephone directory) or ring Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Any questions regarding the study may be addressed to *Garry Aitchison* ([gaitchis@une.edu.au](mailto:gaitchis@une.edu.au)) or *Dr Graham Jamieson* (02 6773 4279 or [gjamieso@une.edu.au](mailto:gjamieso@une.edu.au)) or *Dr Rhonda Brown* (6773 2410, email [rhonda.brown@une.edu.au](mailto:rhonda.brown@une.edu.au)).

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE11/066, Valid to 21/4/2012).

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351  
Telephone: 02 6773 3449, Fax: 02 6773 3543  
Email: [Ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:Ethics@une.edu.au)