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Sarah H. Winchester
New Questions, Multiple Meanings:
Exploring Attachment Theory,
Self Psychology, and
Anti-Oppression Perspectives on
Human-Companion Animal
Relationships in the Rural West
A Theoretical Study

ABSTRACT

In spite of burgeoning interest in the significance of human-companion animal relationships in social work and related fields, the theoretical conceptualization of these relationships in the context of mental health remains largely limited to the cross-species and cross-cultural application of Attachment Theory. Further, the literature on human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory reflects a narrow scope of research methodologies and demographic variables, thus leaving the unique, multiple meanings of these relationships – and their intersections with varying and marginalized sociocultural identities – largely unexplored. In order to address these gaps and expand theoretical discourse on the phenomenon, the thesis explores and analyzes human-companion animal relationships through the lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology. The thesis utilizes social constructionist, feminist, and anti-racist paradigms to inform its analysis, thus focusing on the relationships and intersections between companion animals, women, and People of Color in the rural West. The thesis argues that the application and generalization of Attachment Theory across species lacks theoretical coherence and clarity regarding the particularities of human-companion animal relationships. Moreover, this paper hypothesizes that the theoretical and practical application of Self Psychology, with its emphasis on subjectivity and the role of non-human selfobjects, may add to a more holistic, nuanced, and coherent theoretical formulation of the woman-companion animal bond in contemporary rural and multicultural contexts. Finally, the thesis posits that the

human-companion animal bond holds potential for improving mental health in rural women, a possibility best explored by investigation of this phenomenon beyond its existing theoretical conceptualizations.

NEW QUESTIONS, MULTIPLE MEANINGS:
EXPLORING ATTACHMENT THEORY, SELF PSYCHOLOGY,
AND ANTI-OPPRESSION PERSPECTIVES
ON HUMAN-COMPANION ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE RURAL WEST
A THEORETICAL STUDY

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2013

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HUMAN-COMPANION ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS	11
III. ATTACHMENT THEORY AND HUMAN-COMPANION ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS.....	43
IV. SELF PSYCHOLOGY AND HUMAN-COMPANION ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS.....	83
V. DISCUSSION	140
REFERENCES.....	163

“Yet he was gone. She knew it most keenly in the diminishment of her own self. In her life, she’d been nourished and sustained by certain things, him being one of them, Trudy another, and Edgar, the third and most important, but it was really the three of them together, intersecting in her, for each of them powered her heart in a different way. Each of them bore different responsibilities to her and with her and required different things from her, and her day was the fulfillment of those responsibilities. She could not imagine a portion of her would ever return. With her it was not hope, or wistful thoughts – it was her sense of being alive that thinned by the proportion of her spirit devoted to him” (p. 195).

– from the perspective of Almondine, canine protagonist

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle, by David Wroblewski (2008)

“Now Almondine occupied his thoughts. He hadn’t seen her for two months or more, and suddenly it felt like he’d been severed from some fundament of his being...[o]thers dreamed of finding a person in the world whose soul was made in their mirror image, but she and Edgar had been conceived nearly together, grown up together, and however strange it might be, she was his other” (p. 457).

– from the perspective of Edgar, human protagonist

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle, by David Wroblewski (2008)

“People have used particular animals symbolically and epithetically...and it’s not fair to the animals. A wolf is a love-’em-and-leave-’em heel; a little rat is a sneaky coward; a pig is a glutton with filthy habits; an octopus is a predatory enveloper of undersea explorers. And so on, and on. And what...made humans decide to hate them all in the first place?” (p. 4)

– *Animals Nobody Loves*, by Ronald Rood (1971)

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In both the literature and popular culture, contemporary Western depictions of the human-companion animal bond acknowledge the significance of humans' relationships to animal companions, and the role they play in the emotional and psychological landscapes of people. The common characterization of companion animals as members of the family reflects this perspective (Cohen, 2002; Kurdek, 2009; Pagani, et al., 2009; as cited in Walsh, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). These conceptualizations may help explain the predominance and relevance of Attachment Theory in the human-companion animal bond literature. Attachment Theory acts as the prevailing theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon, and commonly appears in current research and scholarship on human-companion animal relationships across varied fields, including social work, psychology, anthrozoology, Animal Assisted Social Work (AASW), and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) (Bonas et al., 2000; Geist, 2011; Fine, 2006; Kurdek, 2009; Noonan, 2008; Sable, 1995; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011).

In spite of this burgeoning area of interest, the literature on human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory reflects a narrow scope of research methodologies and demographic variables, particularly with regard to sociocultural diversity. Focal populations include older adults (Enders-Slegers, 2000; Keil, 1998; Raina, Waltner-Toews, Bonnett, Woodward, & Abernathy, 1999), children (Ascione, 1997; Geist, 2011; Parish-Plass, 2008), and female trauma survivors (Ascione, 2000; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000). While

these often marginalized and at-risk groups demand attention, the intersections between gender, race, place, and other sociocultural locations remain largely unexplored in the literature.

Research in rural communities appears limited, and indicates a focus on older adults (Miller & Lago, 1990; Miltiades & Shearer, 2011; Winefield, Black, & Chur-Hansen, 2008). Notably, there appears a striking dearth of research on the relationships between companion animals and rural People of Color through the lens of Attachment Theory. Further, when racial identity is included in the research literature, study participants frequently identify as White. This dismissal of intersectionality and silencing of marginalized voices reflect criticisms regarding the attempted universalization and cross-cultural application of Attachment Theory present in the literature (Bretheron, 1992; Brown, 2005; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg 1988). Finally, quantitative methods (Kurdek, 2009; Miltiades & Shearer, 2011; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011) far outweigh qualitative methods (Enders-Slegers, 2000; Pagani, Robustelli, & Ascione, 2007).

Future recommendations found in the empirical literature also point to the potential theoretical limitations of the application of Attachment Theory to the phenomenon. These include further assessment of the particularities of human-companion animal attachment, their implications for mental health, and the need for data on a range of attachment responses to companion animals, both positive and negative (Brown, 2005; Cohen, 2002; Nagasawa, Mogi, & Kikusui, 2009; Kurdek, 2009; Pachana, Massavelli, & Robleda-Gomez, 2011; Pagani et al., 2007; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011). Further inquiry to address these recommendations will add to a knowledge base that includes descriptions of companion animals as surrogate attachments, and at times, warns against such attachments (Allen, 2001; Flynn, 2000; Miltiades & Shearer, 2011).

With consideration of the above, this theoretical thesis aims to explore, critique and add to existing theoretical and historical conceptualizations of the human-companion animal bond found in social work and related literature. Additionally, given the gaps found in this body of work, and the limitations of the study, the project focuses particular emphasis on the connections between this phenomenon, rural women's mental health in the West, and the impact of race and racism, in both contemporary and recent historical contexts. With regard to clinical considerations, the researcher hopes that inquiry into the human-companion animal bond in the context of intersecting social identities will contribute to rural social workers' ability to provide more holistic psychodynamic-, anti-oppression- and person-in-environment-centered treatment.

In addition, rural life engenders specific challenges, including social, physical, and psychological isolation, lack of access to services, infrastructure problems, and limited funding (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003; Coward et al., 2006; Lohmann & Lohmann, Eds., 2005). Locke & Winship (2005) cite the scholarly agreement that rural social work practice requires a generalist approach. Moreover, the authors argue, rural communities benefit from social workers who embrace "creativity, flexibility [and], knowledge about how to access both informal and formal helping services" (p. 6). Such alternative strategies regarding rural women's mental health could include examining the impact of existing relationships – like bonds with companion animals. As such, the thesis aims to contribute to rural social work scholarship and practice through exploration of the multiple, subjective meanings of relationships between rural women and their companion animals, and through investigation of alternative constructions of their significance.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The following argues that the application and generalization of Attachment Theory across species lacks theoretical coherence and clarity with regard to the particularity and specificity of human-companion animal relationships. A close reading of the literature reveals that consideration of Self Psychology may add to a more holistic and coherent theoretical formulation of the woman-companion animal bond in contemporary rural and multicultural contexts. Indeed, the small but compelling body of psychodynamic literature that includes Self Psychology in discussion of the human-companion animal bond reflects this hypothesis, in its attention to the significance of multiple perspectives and subjectivities, and the intersections between human-companion animal relationships and sociocultural identities (Blazina, 2011; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011a; Brown, 2011b). More specifically, Self Psychology's theoretical and practical attention to the significance of subjective experience reflects the thesis' argument, and the anti-racist, feminist, and social constructionist paradigms that underlie it. This includes investigation of the historical interrelationships between the phenomenon and the animal rights and welfare movement, slavery, racism, the development of the social work profession, and the human-companion animal bond (Beierl, 2008; Preece, 2011). Thus, through a review and re-visioning of this alternative psychodynamic approach, this paper investigates whether or not rural women's relationships with a companion animal function as reparative relational or intrapsychic experiences. Finally, the thesis posits that the human-companion animal bond holds potential for improving mental health for rural women, a possibility that can be explored and enhanced by investigation of this phenomenon beyond its existing conceptualization within prevailing theoretical frameworks.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this paper, “the West” refers to the Global North, with a focus on the United States and Western Europe. This parameter is, in part, a reflection of the scope of available literature. “Rural” has proven difficult to define, and the literature reflects this difficulty (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005). U.S. Census data from 2010 defines rural by omission; i.e., rural areas are areas that are not urban, and the criteria for urban areas indicates a population of “at least 2,500 people.” (U.S. Census Bureau website). Relatedly, the synonymous dichotomy of “metropolitan/nonmetropolitan” implies marginalization and inferiority of rural areas, as these dual terms clearly privilege urban areas (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003). Finally, after a review of the literature, it seems some social work scholarship equates “rural” with agriculture and farming (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003). This paper will reflect these complexities, and attempt to grapple with them.

Per the guidelines set forth in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010) 6th ed., “White” is capitalized in the thesis, as it is used to define a racial group and considered a proper noun. This is distinct from “white” or “black,” since “the use of colors to refer to other human groups currently is considered pejorative and should not be used” (p. 75). However, this manual also warns against “unparallel designations” such as “African Americans and Whites,” as “one group is described by color while the other group is described by cultural heritage” (p. 75). However, this parallel is often used in the literature and highlights the reality of White privilege, and the dominant, damaging racial coding which perpetuates the myth that Whiteness indicates a lack of racial identity. Thus, the use of a parallel designation such as “African Americans and Euro-Americans” can obfuscate racial inequality.

Finally, “pet,” and “companion animal,” are delineated in this paper, as “companion

animal” implies the mutuality of the relationship, and an emotional and/or mental bond, and simultaneously eschews ownership and mastery over the animal (Downey, 2002). Similarly, “human-companion animal bond” and “human-companion animal relationship” will be used interchangeably.

Conceptualization and Methodology

The following chapters will examine the phenomenon of human-companion animal relationships through the theoretical lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology. The phenomenon chapter (Chapter Two) offers a review of the historical, contemporary and mental health contexts of human-companion animal relationships in the rural West, in keeping with the goals and scope of the thesis within the frame of social work, and in order to provide a holistic and comprehensive view of the phenomenon. Similarly, the theory chapters (Chapter Three and Chapter Four) provide a review of the theories’ origins, contemporary themes related to each theory, sociocultural issues in the context of each theory, key terms and concepts, and an exploration of the literature on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of 1) Attachment Theory and 2) Self Psychology. In this vein, each section of the thesis will begin broadly, with a general overview of the phenomenon and each of the theories; then, in efforts to sharpen, rather than narrow the focus of the project, specific threads of each broad section will be further examined, allowing comprehensive conceptualization, and a clear approach to the research questions.

Special focus will be paid to the impact of gender, race, and place, reflecting the social constructionist, feminist, and anti-racism paradigms which frame the thesis, and in keeping with field’s commitment to social justice, diversity, and person-in-environment approaches to treatment. As an extension of these efforts, the thesis aims to engage in a rich, critical, compare

and contrast analysis of the complex and unique relationships between humans and companion animals, in hopes of contributing to future developments in rural social work practice and policy.

The Theories

The similarities between Attachment Theory and Self Psychology can be found in their psychodynamic roots. More specifically, these theories share a belief in the importance and impact of early caregiver relationships on the self, the unconscious, and future relationship patterns. As stated, this understanding explains the application of these theories to the myriad relationships humans encounter in their lives – including relationships with companion animals. Yet the thesis aims to examine the differences between the theories, the differences between human-human and human-companion animal relationships, and the layers of difference within human-companion animal relationships themselves. In critically examining the contrasts, as well as similarities, between the theories, and by engaging with their strengths and limitations in the context of the human-companion animal bond, the thesis attempts to move toward a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The thesis will utilize some of the core concepts of Attachment Theory to interpret and analyze the phenomenon, as reflected in the theoretical literature, and in the human-companion animal bond literature. These key concepts include: *internal working model*, *attachment figure*, *attachment pattern (or style)*, and *functions of attachment*, among others. Similarly, the thesis will employ key concepts in Self Psychology for the same purposes; some of these concepts include *self*, *selfobject*, *selfobject functions*, *selfobject (or narcissistic) transferences*, *narcissism*, *the tripolar self*, and *empathy*.

Limitations

Though the theoretical thesis will not encounter the same problems that may burden qualitative or quantitative research projects, some considerations of potential biases hold true. Participant wariness of “outsiders” is a well-established issue in research, and may be particularly salient when considering the social insulation often found in rural areas, even in the context of a theoretical project (Padgett, 2008). Given that this researcher is familiar with and connected to rural communities, particularly in New England, this social insulation and insider/outsider mentality may manifest itself in the research through favoritism or positive bias toward the positive aspects of rural life, and rural women. Conversely, this researcher’s focus on rural women, and particularly rural People of Color of any gender, reflects the underrepresentation of these voices in the literature, and subsequently, aims to address the need to honor their oft-silenced experiences. However, the need for this research also points to the limited data available to the researcher.

The foundation of the thesis also continues to build from an awareness of the researcher’s privileged social identities. As a White, heterosexual, educated person, this researcher brings agent identities to the project. As a historically rural, lower income woman, this researcher’s target identities may prove significant as well. The conception of this project originated in part through personal efforts to examine these social locations for the purpose of dismantling interlocking oppressions, and to challenge the researcher’s own internalized dominance and privilege. Most importantly, focus on the positive or reparative potential of human-companion animal relationships may privilege arguably White, American, middle-class perspectives on companion animals.

Summary and Conclusions

It is essential to investigate the human-companion animal bond within historical, contemporary, and mental health contexts, and Attachment Theory and Self Psychology offer two interrelated yet distinct theoretical lenses with which to view these various facets of the phenomenon. This includes exploration of the intersections between sociocultural identities and human-companion animal relationships, and sociocultural events and phenomena that could elicit both positive and negative relational experiences with companion animals. Particular attention is given to the impacts of racism and other oppressions, and to women's relationships with companion animals in contemporary rural and multicultural Western contexts. Thus, the study attempts to grapple with issues of oppression and multiple identities, through reflection on a range of human-companion animal relationships through the lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology, and exploration of this phenomenon as it exists at the margins of Western culture. The results of these efforts may prove useful to future research and rural social work practice.

CHAPTER II

Human-Companion Animal Relationships

The Psychology of the Human–Animal Bond (Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011) begins with an important observation. The authors note the relative absence of discourse on human-companion animal relationships within mental health research and practice as little as twenty years ago. The authors posit that these bonds were perhaps perceived as insignificant, or beyond the bounds of the field. Nonetheless, the authors also cite the origins of modern research on the phenomenon, most notably a number of studies that emerged in the late twentieth century, and examined the impact of the human-companion animal bond on emotional well-being, loneliness, loss, and mental health of older adults and children (as cited in Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Levinson, 1978; Miller & Lago, 1990; Ory & Goldberg, 1983;).

Historically, psychoanalytic inquiry regarding the human-companion animal bond can be traced to Sigmund and Anna Freud (Genosko, 1993; Roth, 2005). Levinson, who wrote extensively on the role of animals in human lives throughout the middle to late 20th century, understood the significance of these relationships through the lenses of developmental psychology, as well as history and folklore (Levinson, 1962; Levinson, 1978; Levinson, 1982). More recent research on the ties between human-companion animal relationships, animal cruelty, and interpersonal violence has significantly shaped contemporary discourse in mental health (Arkow & Ascione, 1999; Ascione, 1997; Ascione, Weber, & Thompson, et al., 2007; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Faver & Strand, 2003; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005). The predominance of these

issues in research and practice thus warrants their inclusion in any discussion of the human-companion animal bond in the context of mental health. In addition, the thesis devotes attention to trauma, cruelty, and/or abuse in the context of the phenomenon in efforts to honor the layers of complexity inherent to them.

A review of the recent literature suggests that scholars from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, anthrozoology, philosophy, psychology, social work, environmental and veterinary sciences, and literature, have shown a growing interest in this phenomenon (Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011). Several key themes cut across these varied fields, including questions of morality, animal consciousness, inferiority/superiority, anthropomorphism, utilitarianism, and spirituality (Beierl, 2008; Braje, 2011; Hoffer, 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Preece, 2011).

Scholars utilizing feminist, anti-racist, and social constructionist paradigms have paid particular attention to the intersections between these themes, human-companion animal relationships, and multiple social identities (Blossom, 2008; Brown, 2002; Brown, 2005; Faver & Strand, 2003; Gaard, 1993; Gaard, 2011; Gruen, 1994; Hoffer, 2011; Markovitz & Queen, 2009; Sax, 2009). Ultimately, perspectives and values regarding animals and their treatment may reveal important information about humans' treatment of each other (Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009).

Recent scholarship seems to appreciate the importance of multiple historical and theoretical perspectives, as this sort of deep inquiry may offer a more comprehensive understanding of people and their animal companions. This type of multidisciplinary exploration is perhaps most relevant to social work, as it mirrors the field's commitment to the person-in-

environment framework; the myriad interactional, relational, environmental and systemic influences that shape individuals and communities.

Thus, this chapter draws from a range of epistemologies to present an historical and theoretical overview of the phenomenon. However, with consideration of the purpose of the thesis and the research questions, the following will continually attempt to sharpen its focus in order to illuminate the intersectionality so critical to the field of social work and to the thesis itself. This sharpening also hopes to draw the reader toward the apex of the chapter, which aims to highlight the marginalization of narratives and research regarding rural People of Color and animal companionship. First, the chapter briefly traces the phenomenon from its deep historical context through to the 19th century, which introduces the project's geographical limitation: the rural West. The impacts of Enlightenment-, Romantic- and post-Enlightenment-era thought on the human-companion animal bond in the rural West are explored. Second, the chapter locates human-companion animal relationships in general contemporary and mental health contexts. This section investigates the social construction of companion animals, including the development of the dichotomy of utilitarianism/anthropomorphism, and issues of cruelty and violence. Next, the chapter probes more deeply, examining the impact of the phenomenon on rural women, again in historical, contemporary, and mental health contexts. Spirituality, intersections between sexism, speciesism, and violence, the role of ecofeminism, and gender differences in human-companion animal relationships are examined. Finally, the chapter investigates race, racism, and the human-companion animal bond within the three contexts. This includes investigation of rural African American experiences, state-sanctioned police dog violence against People of Color, trauma, and African Americans in the field of animal welfare.

It is important to note that the chapter's exploration of sociocultural phenomena associated with trauma and abuse within human-companion animal relationships is presented in order to shed light on marginalized voices and experiences, such as police dog violence in communities of color. Similarly, in reviewing historical accounts of African American farm families in Vermont, for instance, we attempt to better understand the complexities of the phenomenon; the role of companion animals and livestock in both the well-being and in the marginalization of rural People of Color. Thus this focus also aims to present a more holistic and realistic picture of the phenomenon, in the service of avoiding bias.

However, given the interrelationships between race, gender, class, and place through time, and the thesis' interest in them, the separate sections endeavor to engage with the ways in which these contexts and social identities overlap. The controversial and problematic conflation of animal exploitation and slavery in the West is one example. Additionally, the sections compare and contrast some of the aforementioned overarching themes that thread themselves through the literature in the three contexts.

The Human-Companion Animal Bond in the Rural West

Historical Contexts

The history of human-companion animal relationships begins in antiquity, predating agriculture and pastoralism (Braje, 2011). Findings from evolutionary science cited in the social work and related literature consistently note the significance of animals in the “adaptive success” of “anatomically modern” humans (AMHs), though the mutuality of these relationships remains unclear (Braje, 2011; Coppinger & Coppinger, 2001; Herzog, 2002; Perkins, 2003). Walsh (2009) writes: “[t]he domestication and socialization of animals was an interactive process of mutual cooperation and coevolution based on a shared need for shelter, food, and protection” (p.

463). The interdependence and adaptation to relationship between two species, or mutualism, can perhaps be understood in a modern context as the interactions between humans and working dogs, for example (Coppinger & Coppinger, 2001). Yet early human understanding and experience of animals has long been complex. As Herzog (2002) points out, the evolution of the human species depended on multiple interactional patterns, as “some animals were helpers (wild canids who may have warned against predators or cleaned up the garbage around the campsite), some were foes (large carnivores, venomous snakes), and still others were prey” (p. 362). Further, human perception of the symbolic and spiritual importance of animals appears to have coexisted with animals’ role as food source beginning as many as 50,000 years ago, in the Paleolithic Era. These findings all suggest that certain features of the deepest origins of human-animal interaction may extend across cultures, locations, and beyond utilitarianism (Braje, 2011).

However, the human-companion animal bond is culturally and socially bound, value-laden, and placed. These relationships are often associated with rurality, just as rural life is frequently aligned with agriculture and thus, animals (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003). The complexity and depth of this history, while far too vast for this project, must nonetheless be considered for their implications on the current study. What has changed about human-companion animal relationships, particularly in the rural West? What has remained the same? Drawing from the social sciences with an emphasis on psychodynamic, social work, and social justice approaches, the racialized, gendered, classed, and geographi-ed facets of these bonds begin to emerge.

Prior to the emergence of animal welfare legislation in Britain in the early 19th century, Western discourse around animals remained tied to Judeo-Christian beliefs regarding the utility of animals; i.e. “animals were set upon the earth [by God] for man’s use” (Hoffer, 2011, p. 111).

Further, the question “do animals have souls?” preoccupied the minds of scholars and philosophers from Ancient Greece through and beyond the Enlightenment era. Nonetheless, for centuries, animals were generally viewed as the personification of sin in the West: lustful, dangerous, unintelligent brutes (Perkins, 2003). The 17th century Cartesian view of animals served to bolster this perspective, as this philosophy argued that animals lacked consciousness and sentience, and instead, likened them to “machines.” Descartes is considered highly influential on attitudes toward and treatment of companion animals, and his work is frequently cited to help explain the persistence and exacerbation of the violent mistreatment of animals well into the 18th century to the present. After all, machines cannot feel, and therefore do not warrant or require ethical treatment. (Gruen, 1994; Perkins, 2003; Preece, 2011; Walsh, 2009).

The juxtaposition between the influence of Enlightenment- and Romantic-era thought in the West illustrates significant shifts in human attitudes toward and relationships with animals, particularly later in history. Poets and intellectuals like Blake, Byron, and Shelley brought a new emotionality, idealism, and altruism to the discourse around human-animal relationships. They ascribed animals with qualities theretofore reserved for humans, even lauding the moral superiority of animals (Perkins, 2003). Lord Byron penned this poem, placed at the grave of his Newfoundland dog, Boatswain: “who possessed Beauty without Vanity, Strength without Insolence, Courage without Ferocity, And all the Virtues of Man without his Vices” (Byron, 1808).

By the early- to mid-19th century, the middle to upper classes increasingly welcomed some companion animals into domestic spaces, while others – namely livestock – became more clearly separated from them. This “demarcation of space” reflected the increasing separation of working and living areas common to a period defined by economic growth (Hoffer, 2011, p.

109). By contrast, the books of hours of the middle ages reveal the intense presence of animals, regardless of class and social standing. Livestock of this era “are almost wild by contemporary standards, and one may encounter them foraging around the home, in the forest, or sometimes even in the towns” (Sax, 2009). Increasing awareness of the horrific treatment of many working and companion animals developed simultaneously, as captured by the now-classic literature of the time. The “sympathetic imagination” cultivated by authors like Anna Sewell (*Black Beauty*), Jack London (*The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*), Jane Austen (*Mansfield Park*), and Richard Adams (*Watership Down*) was highly influential in the development of empathy for animals in the hearts and minds of many across the West (Beierl, 2008; Hoffer, 2011).

Perhaps equally influential, Queen Victoria endorsed animal ethics and founded the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1824 (Preece, 2011; Walsh, 2009). Indeed, there is a clear connection between social hierarchies, economics, and animal companionship during this period. Lapdogs, for instance, were associated with financial wealth in Britain, and were arguably more often employed as status symbols than companions (Hoffer, 2011). Walsh (2009) points out that the growth of the middle class spurred various attempts to enter high society, including increased interest in “ ‘aristocratic’ animals to compensate for a human lack of ‘proper breeding.’ The competitions for ‘best of breed’ enabled commoners to emulate the rich” (p. 464).

Thus, despite the impact of Romanticism, and growing concern for animal welfare, distinctions between animals like lapdogs and workhorses mirrored the post-Enlightenment preoccupation with hierarchy, superiority/ inferiority, establishment of order, and ownership. Most importantly, the global impact of centuries of slavery comingled with and informed this Western worldview, leading some to (controversially) associate animal cruelty and human

slavery, and treat animal relationships as exercises of ownership and power, instead of expressions of companionate love (Beierl, 2008). Some scholars regard Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* as an "antebellum slave narrative;" a response to the collective cultural trauma of the Civil War and a reflection of the growth in social concern for the powerless and oppressed (Beierl, 2008; Blossom, 2008). Similarly, as Arkow & Ascione (1999) report, early SPCAs recognized that animals, women, and children shared a vulnerability to abuse and oppression, and thus understood and supported the interconnections between these emergent social movements. In light of the above, it is not surprising that the Thirteenth Amendment, the founding of the American Humane Society and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the development of the Settlement House movement and modern social work all began in the period following 1865 (Beierl, 2008). However, exploration of both the benefits and dangers of the companion-animal-as-symbol for the aforementioned historical dualities and equations will continue throughout the chapter.

Contemporary and Mental Health Contexts

Contemporary views of the human-companion animal bond reflect the historical dichotomies of superiority and inferiority, freedom and oppression, and companionship and utilitarianism. Additionally, much of the literature on modern manifestations of the phenomenon in the West refer to sheer numbers (Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, 2011a; Herzog, 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Walsh, 2009). According to the 2007-2008 American Pet Products Manufacturers Association National Pet Owners Survey, over 63% of households in the U.S. report at least one pet. Moreover, 87% of American "pet owners" consider their companion animals family members (Cohen, 2002; as cited in Walsh, 2009). While the anthropomorphizing of dogs, cats, and myriad other companion animals has increasingly contributed to the view that

animals are “members of the family” or “best friends,” the dynamic of human mastery over animals remains intact (Serpell, 2002). Dog training, and similarly, show dog culture, support this argument. In a study comparing and analyzing two different methods of dog training, Greenebaum (2010) found that while “dog-centric,” rewards-based training aimed at meeting the needs of dogs and humans continues to increase in popularity, “human-centric,” dominance/obedience-based training focused on mastery over dogs persists. Thus, the dog represents the ambiguity of human attitudes toward companion animals, and, more broadly, the ideological tensions this chapter explores.

Additionally, since many livestock animals are more frequently viewed as utilitarian, and thus not socially constructed as companions, they are less likely to be treated as such. Similarly and perhaps surprisingly, Coppinger & Coppinger (2001) argue that service animals such as therapy dogs suffer similar consequences as a result of this perspective: “[o]f all the working dogs, service dogs have the most difficult jobs, and the least fun while doing them. Theirs is a stressful occupation with little reward... Theirs is a dead-end occupation” (p. 270). In a study of perceptions of the human-animal relationship (HAR) among stock managers on UK dairy farms, Bertenshaw (2009) notes that “[i]n the scientific literature thus far it has been believed that fear of humans is the predominant relationship on dairy farms...” (p. 59). Some studies show that rural, and subsequently agricultural, views of animals depend on a utilitarian perspective, which may lead to the justification of animal abuse in these areas (as cited in Tallichet & Hensley, 2005).

Tallichet & Hensley (2005) surveyed 261 male inmates at three southern U.S. prisons regarding experiences with animal abuse. The primary purpose of the study was to explore rural and urban differences, if any, in the frequency of and contact with animal abuse, and the type of

species abused. Notably, the study gathered information on the racial identity and residence of the participants, in order to address these gaps in the literature. Findings suggest that the predominantly White rural participants reported a higher level of exposure to family members killing or harming an animal, while urban participants reported exposure to both friends and family abusing animals. Interestingly, the study also found that rural participants reported more abuse toward cats, while urban participants reported abuse toward cats, dogs, and wildlife. The authors posit that due to prevailing notions of the utility of animals in rural areas (regarding game hunting, livestock, and working dogs, for instance) cats may be viewed as “more materially expendable” (p. 722). Given the low 12.5% response rate to the survey, these findings are admittedly limited. However, the authors focus their data analysis on compelling perspectives regarding differences in socialization around animal abuse in rural and urban areas, and help bolster the argument that perpetration of animal abuse may stem from exposure to it. The authors suggest that tightknit, insular, and family-focused rural communities are socialized to underreport animal abuse, for “[t]urning in animal abusers is often a sticky issue for those officials who are also friends, relatives, or neighbors of those they are reporting” (p. 723). Most importantly, recommendations include promotion of humane education in rural areas, with a particular focus on educating community members and social services professionals on the interpersonal violence that animal cruelty may foreshadow.

McPhedran (2011) interprets Tallichet & Hensley’s findings differently. As outlined above, it initially appears that urban participants reported higher and broader-reaching rates of animal cruelty. McPhedran posits that simple growth in urbanization in the West may account for this difference in rural and urban areas. The author’s understanding of the study seems to hinge on these facets of the findings, stating “the authors propose that a rural upbringing may

engender heightened respect for animals,” remarking that this hypothesis was not tested (p.265). Notably, McPhedran seems to link a utilitarian view to an attitude of respect, which differs greatly from the material expendability and the negative consequences of utilitarianism that the study speaks to.

It seems rural human-companion animal relationships that appear utilitarian, or even abusive, can reveal layers of complexity. Using an interview guide approach, Chitwood, Peterson & Deperno (2011) conducted open-ended and participant-directed interviews with 78 dog hunters in the coastal Hofmann Forest of North Carolina. As opposed to “still-hunting,” dog hunting commonly refers to hunting for white-tailed deer and/or black bear through the use of dogs, who track game using sight and smell (“scent-trailing”) (p. 131). In efforts to explore how dog hunting may shape rural identity in response to recent bans on the practice, the authors used Ricoeur’s theory of narrated identity to conceptualize and analyze the rich, qualitative data. This theory explores the ways individuals gain self-knowledge through social interaction. Narratives, and the interpersonal connections contained within them, are told and retold, thus constructing and reconstructing identity through time. Two features characterize the theory: sameness and selfhood. Sameness refers to both the more stable and shared aspects of one’s identity, while selfhood refers to one’s uniqueness.

Findings indicate that dog hunting contributed to both sameness and selfhood for participants. First, participants’ stories of dog hunting as a means to connect and strengthen ties to family, friends, community, dogs, and nature revealed themes of sameness. Perhaps most surprisingly, participants’ narratives around dogs and nature often involved assertions that killing game remained secondary to these social ties: “[i]t ain’t all about killin’ somethin’. Hearing the dogs run is wonderful...It ain’t all about killin’ (Robert)” (p. 134). Similarly, themes of selfhood

appeared in these narratives as well, as participants made efforts to dispel myths about hunting they perceived from the larger social discourse, to emphasize their concern for animal welfare, and to differentiate themselves from still-hunters: “[w]hat those people don’t understand is that [we] don’t kill every deer that the dogs run” (Brandon)... [y]ou just ain’t going around killin’ everything...it ain’t a killing sport like everybody thinks it is (Robert)” (p. 136). Further, participant Gabe states “I treat my dogs like if I was a dog I’d want to be treated” (p. 137).

The authors note that dog hunters’ narratives point to the importance of preserving dog hunting as a means of honoring historic rural traditions. Additionally, the authors remark on the presence of both companionship-centered and utilitarian views of human-animal relationships, as evidenced by the participants’ narratives of ethical concern for dogs and wildlife.

In addition to growing acknowledgement of the multiple meanings of human-companion animal relationships in rural areas, the interconnectedness between social work practice, mental health, and the animal rights movement reveals another notable shift in contemporary theories on the phenomenon. Scholars have long-argued that until animal cruelty is understood as a major versus a “minor offense,” the complexity of these interconnections will remain unexplored (Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). Yet the relationship between animal cruelty and mental illness is well-documented, as evidenced by its clinical recognition in the DSM since 1987 (Ascione, 1997; Ascione, 2000; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005).

Ascione is often cited as an influential scholar on the interrelationships between animal cruelty, mental illness, and interpersonal violence. Currently the Scholar-in-Residence at the Graduate School of Social Work and Animal Assisted Social Work programs at the University of Denver, his work is particularly pertinent to the thesis. However, given the breadth of his research, it is necessary to provide an overview of Ascione’s work, in keeping with the

limitations of this project. His research is also cited in other sections of the chapter and the thesis.

McPhedran (2011) also notes the presence of Ascione's work, includes his research in a review of "now well-known and oft-cited studies," and remarks specifically on the frequent adoption of Ascione's definition of animal cruelty as any "socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to, and/or death of, an animal" (as cited in McPhedran, 2011, p. 266). According to McPhedran, this definition includes psychological abuse, like animal taunting, but excludes "socially acceptable" behaviors such as animal research. McPhedran criticizes this definition as lacking scientific rigor, arguing that it relies on social constructions of animal cruelty in attempts to create a fixed understanding of it. The author warns that cruelty thus applied can be manipulated to serve the purposes and individual biases of researchers. Ascione and colleagues have recently responded to similar criticisms, underscoring the empirical support for the connections between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty, and the importance of both quantitative and qualitative research (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Pagani, Robustelli, & Ascione, 2010). Moreover, Ascione & Shapiro (2009) acknowledge the social construction inherent to Ascione's definition of animal cruelty, and recommend further investigation of cruelty outside the bounds of socially unacceptable behavior.

One recent study by Pagani, Robustelli, & Ascione (2009) used mixed methods to comprehensively explore the role of animals in the lives of 800 Italian young people, ages 9 to 18. In the older age categories, 11-12 and 13-18 (p. 279), questionnaires included open-ended questions regarding pet loss, concerns about a pet, animal abuse experiences (witnessed and/or perpetrated), fears of animals, being comforted by animal in difficult times, and empathy toward animals, among others. The authors note that these methods proved valuable in drawing forth

rich details regarding attitudes and behaviors toward animals. Findings show a positive correlation between fondness for pets and other humane or empathic perceptions, such as disapproval of zoos. Alarming, abuse toward animals was positively correlated with fear of them, and not correlated with pet ownership. The authors note that this supports the hypothesis that a child's attachment with an animal is more significant in determining empathy towards them than pet ownership.

While the study above seemingly focuses solely on the relationships between the participants and companion animals, Ascione's interest in the phenomenon is deeply tied to its connection with issues of violence and mental illness (Ascione, 1997; Ascione, 2000; Ascione, Weber, & Thompson, et al., 2007; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). In their review of recent developments in research, practice and policy, Ascione & Shapiro (2009) make recommendations for future inquiry into the complex etiologies of the "link," defined as "a concept suggesting that animal abuse is, at times, related to forms of maltreatment involving human victims" (p. 572). Though recognition of this link continues to grow, the authors' comprehensive review of the research offers startling insight into the range of psychopathologies and traumas that animal cruelty may indicate. More and more studies show correlations between anti-social behaviors such as fire-setting, perpetration of sexual assault, bullying, and animal cruelty, behaviors that make up the diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder (as cited in Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Strikingly, the authors state "[w]e know that rates of animal abuse are higher in groups of abused children than in nonabused children, in samples of clinically distressed children than in normative samples, and in families experiencing intimate partner violence" (pp. 572-573), though they call for further study of these findings.

Theoretically, the authors suggest that the growing inclusion of companion animals as

family members in contemporary Western society may help explain the link. As such, mental health researchers and practitioners could benefit from a systems model, as companion animals and humans alike take on role assignments, alliances, and conflicts. This approach may shed light on the complex web of dynamics within family systems, particularly within dysfunctional family systems where abuse may be present. Similarly, the authors conclude with a review of the “primary–secondary–tertiary prevention public health model,” which utilizes humane education, outreach to at-risk populations, and integrative intervention and treatment, in efforts to disrupt the cycle of animal and interpersonal violence (p. 569). The thesis continues this review process and critical analysis of interpersonal and animal abuse “now with the clear view that these and other forms of violence are related to cause and resolution” (p. 582).

Further exploration into the impact of intersecting social identities, both historically and currently, must be considered in this dual context of the human-companion animal bond and mental health. The Discussion and Theories chapters will also include analysis of these intersections.

Women and Companion Animals in the Rural West

Historical Contexts

With consideration for the above, analysis of the intersections between animal cruelty, interpersonal violence, and rurality must include further exploration of violence against women. First though, we examine the historical context of women and companion animals in the rural West.

Sax (2009) discusses the historic spiritual connection between women and animals in the context of witchcraft, folklore, and rural life through the centuries, and makes the case that gender- and species-based oppression in the rural West began prior to the 19th century’s

“demarcation of space” (Hoffer, 2011). The author explores the interrelationship between rural women and animals in his analysis of English witches and their “familiars,” or demonic servant spirits, thought to take the form of small animals common to farms and houses. Sax argues that the height of the English witch trials in the 17th century, which included the persecution of women who consorted with animal familiars, paved the way for a significant change, and one that persists today: “Animals lost nearly all mythic significance, leaving them little importance beyond companionship and utility” (p. 328).

Sax explains that the roots of this loss in the West may lie in the tensions between the Catholic and Protestant Churches. While Catholic rituals and symbols often assigned divine importance to animals (St. Francis of Assisi is a common example), the core of Protestantism insists that an individual’s relationship to God must remain unmediated by external means like saints, the Church hierarchy, and animals. Thus, in addition to the influence of Cartesianism and utilitarianism on the human-animal bond, Protestantism endeavored to remove the mystical elements from religious practice, thereby further damaging these relationships and their meanings. This also helps elucidate the growing separation between animals and humans during the period, as the English witch trials stirred terror in anyone consorting with animals in any capacity; removing animals from the vicinity acted as a protective measure against persecution.

Sax also explores the differences and similarities between continental animal familiars and shamanic traditions throughout the world. He also remarks that influential scholars like Eliade and Jung seemed preoccupied with the shared features of shamanisms across cultures, rather than the characteristics that make them unique, and guards against such generalizations. Nonetheless, scholars and folklorists seem to agree, somewhat vaguely, that shamanic practices generally include the utilization of animal helpers, and the conceptualization of animals as

connectors to the spirit world, and that these practices can be found in Christian, Native American, Muslim, Buddhist and other traditions. Most notably however, Sax makes two important distinctions. First, the English witch trials infiltrated and involved nearly all spheres of society. Yet those who suffered most were predominantly “female, poor, rural, and elderly” (as cited in Sax, 2009, p. 327). Second, the author states that familiars

“do not differ markedly from many figures in European and world folklore, including shamanic helpers, local spirits, mascots of deities or saints, and theriomorphic guides in fairy tales. The sole uniqueness of familiars lies in the fact that both they and their human associates were demonized” (pp. 328-329).

Just as the social construction of contemporary human-animal companionship can be traced to the classist, racist, and sexist hierarchies of the early modern- and Post-Enlightenment-eras in Britain, feminist and social work scholars Bryant & Pini (2011) locate the social construction of rurality in the West squarely in the myth of the British “rural idyll” (p. 6). This concept lays bare the common Western cultural constructs of rural places as romantic and pure, while simultaneously antiquated, culturally bereft, and backward. Again, the dichotomy of degradation and idealization reveals the impact of historical schools of thought. Most importantly, Bryant & Pini (2011) point out that contemporary ideas of rurality seem to center on the conservation and control of wilderness areas for middle-class (and White) consumption; in other words, the gentrification of rural spaces. It is important to examine both gendered and racialized othering in rural areas in the analysis of the phenomenon.

Gruen (1994) argues that historical narratives of “human social evolution” provide Western patriarchal societies a foundation with which to oppress vulnerable “others” (p. 539). In part developed out of post-WWII ideologies of the superiority of “advanced” Western societies,

the evolutionary construct of Man-as-Hunter is a powerful symbol of male biological superiority over weak, inferior beings – including both animals and women. The author points out that the shift from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies expanded the domestication and control of nature, thus further separating animals and humans. Gruen draws parallels between the treatment of animals and women in agrarian communities, as both were socially constructed as servants to men, “animals as sluggish meat-making machines and reluctant laborers, and women as breeders of children” to populate the workforce (p. 539). To Gruen, this objectification of animals and women reflects the privileging of the Cartesian and “objective” scientific approaches that pervade Western culture. Further, the author argues that examining the roots of these similarities and intersections, while maintaining a “deep respect for difference,” is the necessary course to dismantling all oppressions (p. 546). The following will explore the controversies engendered by ecofeminist perspectives like Gruen’s.

Contemporary and Mental Health Contexts

After a review of the literature, it appears that attempts to grapple with the interconnections between women, rurality, and animals are often found in ecofeminist scholarship. At its foundation, this epistemology argues that the dominant paradigms that sanction and reproduce sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and speciesism, are the same paradigms that oppress and support the destruction of nature and the environment (Gaard, 1993). While ecofeminists argue that this philosophy serves as a rallying cry for an end to all forms of oppression, and aims to challenge highly privileged White, heterosexist, and positivist ways of knowing, ecofeminism has spurred numerous controversies over the years, suffering accusations of essentialism, colorblindness, and racism.

Similar to the simultaneous development of the animal rights, children’s rights and

abolitionist movements in the 19th century, late 20th century ecofeminist movements attempted to grapple with interlocking oppressions, evolving alongside the social and environmental justice movements of the time. However, ecofeminism was not without critics within the broader feminist community. Gaard (2011) describes the scholarly feminist journal *Signs*' rejection of an ecofeminist review essay in 1992, noting that the editors had requested the review only a year prior to its rejection. According to Gaard, the editor's explanation read " 'ecofeminism seems to be concerned with everything in the world . . . [as a result] feminism itself seems almost to get erased in the process' " and " 'when [ecofeminism] contains all peoples and all injustices, the fine tuning and differentiation lose out' " (as cited in Gaard, 2011, p. 32-33). It appears that in efforts to explore intersectionality, ecofeminists were deeply criticized for their inattention to difference.

The publication of Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* in 1988 clearly illustrates this problematic perspective. As recently as 2008, Spiegel filed a civil suit against People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) for the animal rights organization's use of excerpts from her book without permission and without context, in a travelling exhibit entitled "Are Animals the New Slaves?" The exhibit depicted violent images of animal and human death side by side, like a photographic pairing of a slaughtered cow and a lynching. Groups like the NAACP and the Southern Poverty Law Center expressed outrage over the exhibit. However, it appears that favorable reviews of Spiegel's book note its nuanced perspective and critical scholarship on the controversial topic (Goldstein, 2005).

Other ecofeminist scholars have faced similar critiques. In a review of Carol Adams' 1994 book *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals*, Stange (1995) criticizes Adams for attempts to bolster her argument on the similarities between the social

constructions of race, gender, sexual orientation and species through the misuse of quotations from other feminist scholars. Stange states “[s]urely, had the theorists to whom she appeals intended to include non-human animals as the equivalents of blacks, all women, lesbians and gay men, they would have done it themselves” (p. 18).

Gaard (2011) argues for the adoption of a contemporary ecofeminist approach, one that engages with the lessons of the movement’s history. Interestingly, the author remains committed to the ecofeminist model and the ideal of a shared cause, one which reaches “across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation—and affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism” (p. 44).

Interest in gender differences in bonds with companion animals has received some attention in recent research (Chitwood, et al., 2011; Glasser, 2011; Herzog, 2007; Markovits & Queen, 2009; Prato-Previde, Fallani, & Valsecchi, 2006). It is important to note that women – not just Queen Victoria – were a guiding force behind the development of the animal welfare movement in the 19th century, and studies show that this pattern persists today (Gaarder, 2008; Glasser, 2011; Markovits & Queen, 2009). Findings suggest that women may take a more anthropomorphic, empathic stance toward animals, while men are more likely to view animals as utilitarian (Glasser, 2011; Prato-Previde, et al., 2006).

Glasser (2011) cites Herzog’s 2007 “meta-analysis,” in which the author reviewed literature on gender differences in human-animal relations and relationships. It seems that women make up nearly 70 to 80% of animal rights activists in the U.S. Additionally, “men are more likely than women to hunt recreationally and to have abused animals in both childhood and adulthood, and women are more likely to be involved in grassroots animal rights activism” (p. 310). In a study which surveyed 255 dog rescue workers in Michigan, 35% of whom lived in

rural areas, Markovits & Queen (2009) found that women found meaningful fulfillment from their activism work, and viewed “their activity in dog rescue as a form of creating and fostering social capital” (p. 340). In an ethnographic study, Johnson (1994) found that relationships with animals were hailed as a marker of “life satisfaction” for rural Minnesota women. What are the implications of these findings? Unfortunately, they could be used to perpetuate gender stereotypes, allowing readers and researchers to ignore the complexity of human-companion animal relationships in the context of gender and place.

The experiences of rural women in the West may mirror the experiences of their animal companions, both on and off the farm. Though the thesis interests itself in the reparative potential of human-companion animal relationships, recent research on trauma experiences shared between women and their companion animals points to the clinical relevance of these issues for rural social workers. Ascione (2000a) and others have undertaken research regarding the ties between rural women, domestic violence, and animal abuse. Findings indicate that rural women’s choices to seek refuge from intimate partner abuse are often tied to their concern for companion animals (Ascione, 2000; Faver & Strand, 2003).

In a 2003 study, Faver & Strand review research indicating that violence against companion animals may stem from abusive partners’ understanding of the deep emotional bond women reserve for their companion animals. The authors also speculate that rural social isolation may increase the strength of this bond. With consideration of these hypotheses, the current researcher would add that abusive partners’ cruelty toward animals might serve as an act of interpersonal violence in and of itself.

The authors surveyed 61 women receiving services or residing in one of six battered women’s shelters (two rural shelters and four urban) in the southeastern U.S. The authors used

Ascione's (2000) Domestic Violence Pet Abuse Survey, which measures 1) threat to companion animals by partners, 2) actual harm to companion animals by partners, and 3) whether or not concern over companion animal welfare influenced respondents' decisions to leave, or remain with, an abusive partner. Data analysis focused on the 41 respondents who completed the questionnaires, and demographic information was collected. Most importantly, the authors state: "The studies reviewed thus far did not report the race or ethnicity of the women in their samples (Ascione, 1998; Jorgenson & Maloney, 1999; Quinlisk, 1999), or the samples were predominantly White women (Flynn, 2000)" (p. 1370). Findings indicate that race as a variable did not prove statistically significant regarding differences between the rural and urban respondents, but the authors warn readers to interpret this finding conservatively. The authors also found that rural respondents reported more threats to, harm to, and concern for companion animals than urban respondents. Similar to Tallichet & Hensley (2005), the authors posit that rural animal cruelty may be underreported, or undetected as a result of the isolation found in rural areas.

Finally, Faver & Strand highlight their most significant finding: respondents' concern for companion animals as a factor in decisions regarding leaving or remaining with partners appeared equally high, regardless of whether or not their partner had threatened, or actually harmed, a companion animal. Thus, the study further supports the argument that distress over companion animal welfare may play an important role in determining rural women's choices around whether or not to leave an abusive partner.

Through examination of the intersections between social identities, interlocking oppressions, and the human-companion animal bond in previous sections of the chapter, it is clear that race and racism in the context of the phenomenon remain simultaneously interwoven

through, and absent from, the literature. With this in mind, the following examines race, racism, and human-companion animal relationships in the rural West.

Race, Racism, and the Human-Companion Animal Bond in the Rural West

Historical Contexts

After review, there appears to be a staggering lack of literature devoted to theoretical and empirical studies of rural People of Color and human-companion animal relationships in the West. Thus, this section of the chapter works to glean as much data as possible from existing research, and engage with the literature, while emphasizing the silencing and marginalization inherent to this observation.

It is important now to return to an important concept interwoven through earlier sections of the chapter: the connections between the human-companion animal bond, and the legacy of slavery. First, we revisit and Coppinger & Coppinger's (2001) argument. As we can recall, the authors use the phrase "dead-end occupation" to describe the plight of service dogs. However, they extend the metaphor, and conclude by stating: "[t]heir symbiotic relationship with people is thus *dulosis* – slavery" (p. 270). In Tuan's (1984) book *Dominance and Affection: the Making of Pets*, the author views the social construction of pets as an extension of the human ambiguity captured in Greenebaum's study; the capacity to both care for and dominate vulnerable others. In a review of Tuan's book, Wachtel (1985) notes that this argument "over-extend[s]" its analysis of domination by including slaves, women, and children. Like some critiques of ecofeminism, Tuan succeeds in developing a theory of the human-companion bond through the lens of the possessor and the possessed, but perhaps fails to honor difference. Thus the danger of any overarching perspective of oppression lies in the fact that it must necessarily reduce and silence marginalized voices.

In other words, discourse around the complexities of the social construction of human-companion animal relationships in the context of race and racism seems to get lost in much of the literature. Skabelund (2008) offers a unique historical perspective on these manifold aspects of the phenomenon. The author sheds light on the quintessential police dog, the German Shepherd, and the implications for its construction, exploitation and employment as a tool for racism, colonialism, and violent oppression.

Skabelund posits that the flexible social construction of the “German” Shepherd dog led to use of the breed in state-sanctioned violence across the globe, and traces its roots from WWI Germany to 1930s Imperial Japan. For the purposes of this project, discussion of the article will center around the breed in Germany, and include reference to German colonialism in Africa. The author argues that despite the German Shepherd’s association with multiple regimes, the breed remained almost universally 1) lauded for “purity,” loyalty, and bravery, and 2) understood and experienced as a representation of oppression and violence.

It would appear that the founding of the Society for the German Shepherd Dog, or “SV,” in 1899 by retired Prussian soldier Max von Stephanitz laid the foundation for many of the tragic and horrific acts involving the breed. As stated earlier, ideologies around purity of breed and bloodline for both humans and companion animals dominated cultural consciousness in the West in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Under Stephanitz’s influence, this preoccupation takes on an even more monstrous form. By the 1920s, his fascination with purity and unwavering promotion of the SV was, in fact, linked to his political support of the Nazis, and “[i]ndeed, Stephanitz’s quest to form a pure, healthy, strong, and standardized race of dogs anticipated and served to bolster Nazi racial policies” (as cited in Skabelund, 2008, p. 359). Stephanitz’s assertions of loyalty reflected sexist as well as racist beliefs, as he constructed narratives of the breed’s

obedience to “him who carries the most weight in the house, i.e., the master, and that is the man, in spite of women’s suffrage...” (as cited in Skabelund, 2008, p. 360). Further, descriptions of the Shepherd’s bravery served as a racial code, implying protection and militarization. In fact, Stephanitz encouraged political leaders to use the dogs in policing and military efforts. Notably, Skabelund states that “[a]mple photographic evidence from German possessions in Africa suggests that colonial officials and settlers followed Stephanitz’s advice” (p. 361). These carefully constructed stories seem to have appealed to the Nazis, who embraced the breed largely as a result of Stephanitz’s efforts to ascribe them with traits that mirrored the ideologies of the Third Reich. Thus, the German Shepherd became a tool of war, oppression, and violence.

Some recent studies investigate the impact of the phenomenon through both contemporary and historical lenses, thereby attempting to grapple with legacies of oppression. Wolch, Brownlow, & Lassiter (2001) analyzed data from a focus group study aimed at illuminating the relationships between sociocultural identities – particularly race, ethnicity, and nationality – and attitudes toward nature and animals in an urban setting. In the article, the authors choose to center their analysis on one of the focus groups, comprised of 11 low-income African American women residing in urban Los Angeles, California. Participants answered questions regarding general beliefs about nature and the environment, perceptions of animals, and types of human-animal relationships. As a result of the feminist- and post-colonialist-informed paradigms and qualitative methodology of the study, the findings appear extensive, rich, and complex. In order to untangle these complexities, the authors classify animals as “pet,” “food,” or “wildlife” (p. 93). Interestingly, the authors focus their discussion of these findings on the observed interplay between the multiple social constructions of animals, place, race, and other sociocultural categorizations. For instance, the authors note the common view that urban

communities remain distanced from agricultural practices, like the slaughter of animals for food. As such, “[t]his renders livestock animals such as chickens, pigs, sheep and cattle the most ‘outsider’ of outsider animal groups” (p. 93). Most strikingly, the authors note that when participants exhibited anthropomorphic views of animals, these perspectives often involved identification with their shared marginalization. Participants’ sympathy for pets and “for suffering wildlife and their claim that people should help wildlife in distress, just as people should help each other regardless of colour [*sic*], hints at their solidarity with animals as brethren due to their outsider status” (p. 94). Findings also show that utilitarian views accompanied attitudes of solidarity. The authors posit that for some African Americans, centuries of slavery and systematic oppression may result in powerful identification with the concept of survival, and all that it engenders. In this vein, cultural traditions around food and food animals may serve as powerful representations of resiliency and sustenance. While it is clear that such a small sample size carries numerous limitations, the authors’ and participants’ contributions to the literature highlights the interfacing of deeply embedded social identities, social constructions, oppressions, and relationships to animals.

The silencing of rural People of Color in historical and empirical literature is an overwhelming and well-documented tragedy (Bryant & Pini, 2011; Goodwin, Williams, & Anderson, 2006; Harris & Worthen, 2003; Nicholas, 2005). Guyette (2010) speaks to this wide-reaching gap in her book *Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790 – 1890*, a case study focused on the Peters, Clark, and Langley families, who resided in a farming neighborhood of Hinesburgh known as “the Hill.” As the reader will discover, companion animals play a significant role in these histories.

In the introduction, the author explains that the “myth of a slave-free, White North” took

root in Vermont during the era of interest, and persists today. She attributes this to the particularly xenophobic and racist attitudes of White, Anglo-Saxon (“Yankee”) Vermonters during the period, which brought a growth in both immigration from Europe and Canada, and Northern migration of African Americans in the wake of the Civil War. Additionally, Guyette argues that town records from the period reflect more diverse racial demographics than state records might reflect. From 1790 to 1870, records show that African Americans made up only .2 or .3 percent of the state’s population. However, in 1790, the town of Vergennes was 7% African American. In 1820, Burlington was 3.4% and Hinesburgh, 2% “free [P]eople of [C]olor” (p. 5).

The author states that “[a]n important historical theme in this narrative is the nature of a rural nineteenth-century agricultural community. We know so little about the history of rural black people that it is difficult for historians to make generalizations about them” (p. 8). Upon review, Guyette does not seem motivated by essentialism in describing rural African American experiences, but rather to add to the literature through a “ ‘zone of contact’ ” narrative. The author argues that this type of case study may shed light on issues of race, racism, and rurality in a state dominated by the myth of Whiteness, a myth that serves to further marginalize the voices and histories of rural People of Color.

Guyette’s research shows that the presence of animals permeated the lives of the Peterses, the Clark, and the Langleys. Records from the 1790s and early 1800s show that African American and White families on the Hill frequently loaned each other livestock, particularly cows or sheep, if a member of the herd fell ill and a replacement proved unaffordable. However, it is important to challenge this image of racial “harmony.” In sharp contrast, Guyette notes that the Princes and the Braces, two African American families whose records provided additional context and background for the book, reported on violent experiences of racism perpetrated by

White neighbors, who “tried to force them to move by regularly pulling down their fences, destroying their crops, burning their hay ricks, killing their animals, and spreading slanderous lies about them” (p. 27).

In 1824, the U.S. government’s “protective tariff” on wool prompted a boom in sheep farming (p. 49). Merino sheep from Spain became extremely popular in Vermont, as “their cleft lips made it easy for them to browse in the stony soil” (p. 49). In that same year, the Peterses’ owned 28 sheep, and earned income by renting out their two oxen and three horses to neighbors. Records from 1827 show that the Clarks owned 40 acres of cleared land, and their herd grew to include 45 sheep, 9 cows, and 2 horses; by 1840, the Clark herd included 129 sheep. By 1835, many sheep farmers on the Hill had achieved a modest level of economic stability and prosperity.

This brief review of Guyette’s research offers an intriguing historical perspective on particular rural African American families, and their complex relationships with companion animals. As Guyette writes, “[t]he partial picture I have been able to piece together provides examples of successful farming on the Hill as well as both interracial collaboration and strife in an increasingly racialized America” (p. 62). Nonetheless, the fact remains that the countless histories and narratives remain systematically silent and silenced, and this wide gap requires particular attention in future research.

Contemporary and Mental Health Contexts

The voices and experiences of rural People of Color are also missing from a more general, contemporary dialogue on the human-companion animal bond. We will return our focus to the specifics of rurality shortly. First though, we consider Walsh (2009), who notes the lack of research on the impact of difference, and race and racism, in the context of the human-

companion animal bond, stating: “[f]or instance, in low-income minority communities where police dogs are used to intimidate and apprehend suspects, residents (especially children) might more likely develop fear of dogs or see them as providing aggressive home protection rather than companionship” (p. 467).

Indeed. As shown above, the roots of cultural trauma wrought by the militarization of dogs run deep, and examination of this history is essential to our current understanding. Though the literature appears limited, there exists some compelling scholarship on the contemporary roles of police dog violence, racism, and trauma within the context of the human-companion animal bond. Campbell, Berk, & Fyfe (1998) studied the relationship between the racial demographics of neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California, and the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) forcible deployment of police dogs. The authors used LAPD police dog handlers’ “arrest and search reports” from 1990 to 1992 as data for the study. Comparable reports from LASD (Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department), spanning the years between 1989 and 1991, acted as a replication. The authors warn that the data should be interpreted with caution, given the probability that police self-reports may contain accidental errors and/or inaccurate or falsified information.

The authors frame their discussion of findings by acknowledging the presence of systematic oppression on the basis of race. As such, they suggest that “line officers” are necessarily under the supervision of powerful police bureaucracies that reflect this structural racism. This helps explain why the data “do not support the proposition that individual canine handlers treat Anglo, African American, Latina/Latino, and Asian suspects differently” (p. 556). Strikingly, findings suggest a different outcome when it comes to police hierarchies and “deployment decisions.” The authors point to late 1970s records of LAPD shootings, which

show that 55% of police shootings of African Americans were either deemed “out of policy” or registered “administrative disapproval,” compared to 84% for shootings of Whites. Relatedly, the authors note the long-standing and well-researched problems with policing methods and police response times to complaints and crime in African American communities. Thus, while the authors do not claim to understand the nature of individual racially-motivated or racist actions on the part of officers, they posit that, as a result of institutionalized racism, officers may understand that grievances of police abuse by People of Color carry less weight: “[a]s a result, deploying dogs in minority neighborhoods is far less risky, and canine officers may feel less constrained in how they go about their job” (p. 556).

Similarly, according to the authors, the LAPD has argued that higher rates of police dog deployment in African American communities reflects higher levels of crime in these neighborhoods. The authors point to a scatter plot diagram illustrating a very different empirically supported perspective: “five of the six highest crime neighborhoods are predominantly White” (p. 547). Yet again, deployment decisions do not reflect this statistic. Campbell and colleagues state: “[t]he 77th Division, which has the highest proportion of African American residents in Los Angeles, experiences the most dog deployments by far” (p. 547).

Both similarly and in contrast to Skabelund’s (2008) findings, the authors note that police dogs, unlike firearms and other weapons, are rarely considered a tool of force by police agencies. Rather, “they are thought of as likeable, devoted, highly trained, and disciplined adjuncts to police...efforts” (p. 536). Unfortunately, according to Campbell et al., survivors of police dog violence in Los Angeles often suffer more severe and longer-lasting psychological trauma and/or physical disabilities than police shooting survivors.

The existing rural social work literature may help shed light on the dearth of research on

the relationships between companion animals and People of Color in the rural West. According to Harris & Worthen (2003), recent studies show that rural African Americans, 91% of whom live in the South, have expressed an increased interest in farming. However, due to the dual impacts of historical and contemporary racism – like discrimination around loan provision for the sale of agricultural land – African American farmers face myriad barriers to entering the already-stressed agriculture industry. These barriers, as well as the conflation of agriculture and animals, may aid in explaining the lack of research on rural African Americans and their relationships to companion animals. In other words, barriers to entering farming life may obfuscate the visibility of rural African American farmers, and subsequently, silence narratives and data regarding these relationships.

In her seemingly unique research, Brown (2002, 2005) attempts to grapple with questions of race and animal companionship in her studies of 1) the relationship between companion animal attachment and ethnic identity amongst American veterinary students and 2) the lack of racial diversity, particularly with regard to African Americans, in the animal welfare field. Brown (2005) notes that previous research, including her own, seems to indicate that White participants favor an anthropomorphic view of companion animals, while African American participants appear to favor a more utilitarian perspective. However, the author goes on to emphasize the importance of embracing complexity, and cautions against essentialism when studying human-companion animal relationships, particularly when employing measures of attachment:

“expressions of pet attachment measured by any existing instrument may be biased toward White, middle-class populations – thus far, questionnaires on pet attachment have not been widely used with minority groups, which may have feelings, beliefs, or

expressions of attachment toward pets not measured by any standard scale” (p. 99).

Thus, while it is crucial to acknowledge the impact of the legacies of slavery and deployment of police dog violence against People of Color, sweeping characterizations about contemporary relationships between companion animals and People of Color as largely negative may reproduce racist stereotypes. Brown’s work in particular supports the hypothesis, and will be a grounding resource for the thesis in further chapters.

Overall, much of the literature seems to suggest that the companion/utilitarian, privileged/oppressed, and superior/inferior dichotomies found in theory and research on the human-companion animal bond are gendered, racialized, classed and geographi-ed. Thus, the weight of the complex Western sociocultural legacies discussed in this chapter must be considered in the following theoretical inquiry, and may help inform future rural social work policy and practice.

CHAPTER III

Attachment Theory and Human-Companion Animal Relationships

In literature and practice, psychodynamic theory often refers to the “four psychologies:” drive, ego, object relations, and self. Pine (1988) distinguishes between theoretical frameworks (i.e., Freud’s drive theory, Fairbairn’s object relations theory, etc;) and the clinically-derived data from which the theories sprung, defining the four psychologies as the latter. Object relations psychologies find their foundation in the notion that early childhood relational experiences with caregivers, or “internal dramas” between self and object, are 1) both consciously and unconsciously integrated into the psyche and 2) repeated and brought to bear on contemporary relationships (p. 2). While generally regarded as a developmental model, rather than a psychodynamic one, Attachment Theory is included under the rubric of object relations, as it concerns itself with the significance of the early relationship dynamics between child and caregiver (Holmes, 1993; Mitchell & Black, 1995).

The above also illustrates that object relations theories engage with the phenomenon of transference, a key component of psychodynamic theory and practice, described as the propensity to repeat past internalized object relations in the present (Pine, 1988). Within Attachment Theory, these dramas became known as *internal working models*, or “internal templates or schemas of interactions, defining the expectations of infant and young child of what close relationships are like” (Bowlby, 1969; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008, p. 194). Further, internal working models affect and are affected by a broad range of expectations regarding the self, others, and the physical environment (Ainsworth, 1989).

Pine (1988) also notes important distinctions, as well as interconnections, between the four psychologies. Like drive psychology, object relations psychology underscores the individual's search for "pleasurable experiences" (Pine, 1988, p. 7). Yet these internal yearnings aim toward contact with the caregiver, whether or not the individual's actual parental interactions could be deemed pleasurable. Indeed, repeated attempts to gain closeness to a withholding, abusive, or distant other is perceived as an unconscious attempt at mastery over the original trauma of a withholding, abusive, or distant caregiver. Put another way, in contrast to the other psychologies, "object relations theory looks more closely at how needs are met or not met in relationships, rather than at the satisfaction or frustration of particular impulses" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 123). Thus, object relations psychologies emphasize the intrapsychic impact of historical parent-child dynamics.

Yet, in contrast to classical object relations, Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of "real," external interactions between child and caregiver, "e.g., the way a parent treats a child" (van der Horst, 2011, p 20), and their impact on internal working models. More specifically, Attachment Theory utilizes the term *attachment figure*, defined as the child's "principal caregiver" (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710). Thus the experiential relationship with the original attachment figure is considered a blueprint for future relationships, behaviors, and mental health. Early *attachment patterns*, also called attachment styles, or patterns of relating based on interactions with and/or experiences of separation from the attachment figure, extend to other attachments across the life cycle, from relationships with romantic partners and colleagues, to friends and therapists (Levy, et al., 2011; Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981). Conversely, attachment patterns, in adulthood offer clinical data that may illuminate early family dynamics (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Keeping in mind the characterization of companion animals as family members in the previous chapter, it is important to note that even an initial review of these family-centric core concepts and origin narratives helps explain the application of Attachment Theory to the human-companion animal bond in recent literature. The thesis will return to this connection more thoroughly later in the chapter.

The roots of Attachment Theory can be traced to the early 20th century, though the literature locates the formalization of the theory in the mid-1900s (Bretherton, 1992; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Attachment Theory is attributed to the work of British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby, and American-Canadian psychologist and researcher Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992; van der Horst, 2011). A member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and trainee of Melanie Klein, Bowlby developed Attachment Theory in response to his clinical experience with emotionally disturbed and institutionalized children, in which he observed the detrimental effects of parent-child separation, parental withholding of care, and loss. Bowlby's observations and subsequent hypotheses on the causes of psychopathology stood in opposition to Kleinian object relations, and its sole focus on patients' unconscious fantasies and inner drives. Bowlby's interest in "real" caregiver-infant dynamics is also reflected in his interest in ethology, or the study of animal behavior, which greatly contributed to the foundation of Attachment Theory.

In light of her scholarly interests during her time in graduate school just prior to World War II, it seems that Ainsworth was primed for her role as the co-founder of Attachment Theory. Ainsworth studied "security theory" at the University of Toronto, a reportedly "anti-Freudian" institution (Bretherton, 1992, p. 434). Security theory's central principle holds that children must possess a sense of safety and dependence on the caregiver, in order to establish the capacity to

venture out into the world independently. As we shall see, Ainsworth's early work in security theory would come to influence important tenets of Attachment Theory (Bretherton, 1992, p. 434; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). In addition, the literature recognizes Ainsworth's development of research instruments and authoring of numerous influential studies as nothing less than groundbreaking within the field of attachment research (Bretherton, 1992; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van der Horst, 2011).

The current chapter aspires to further examine Attachment Theory. First, the chapter presents an overview of the theory's historical and epistemological roots. References to important definitions and key terms of Attachment Theory are included in this overview, but several are examined in more detail later in the chapter. As such, the second section of the chapter explores key assumptions, terms, concepts, and contemporary trends within Attachment Theory, namely attachment functions, attachment patterns in childhood and adulthood, current clinical applications of Attachment Theory, and sociocultural issues.

Third, and most importantly, the chapter's brief review of findings from the empirical literature investigates human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory. A summary of the important points from Chapter II will be included to contextualize these findings. This review focuses on some of the ways Attachment Theory appears in research and therapeutic practice in the context of the phenomenon, and explores three important themes: 1) the use and misuse of the language of Attachment Theory in the literature on human-companion animal relationships, 2) companion animals as replacement or surrogate attachment figures, and 3) the interrelated a) application of Attachment Theory across species and b) particularities of human-companion animal attachment.

Finally, the chapter reflects briefly on the prevalence of Attachment Theory in the literature on human-companion animal relationships. The chapter will then transition to the thesis' second theory, Self Psychology.

Attachment Theory: A Psychodynamic and Developmental Model, Part I

In order to contextualize and explore Attachment Theory within the framework of the thesis, and the phenomenon in particular, it is necessary to first review the foundations of the theory. As such, the following section of the chapter grapples with the historical and epistemological roots of Attachment Theory, namely through investigation of the work of its co-founders: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. In this way, the chapter hopes to address questions essential to the thesis, regarding motivations for the theory's development, its purposes, and the introduction of key terms and guiding principles. Given the confines of the thesis, and the breadth of the literature, it is necessary to limit discussion of the key aspects and history of Attachment Theory to a few noteworthy sources. Thus the following will attempt to combine the rigorous theoretical reviews of a small number of notable scholars with information gleaned from original sources.

As a result of the eclecticism that contributed to its origins, it is difficult to locate Attachment Theory within a specific field or category. The literature generally agrees that developmental psychology, psychoanalysis, and ethology formed the basis for the theory (Bretherton, 1992; Holmes, 1993; van der Horst, 2011). Moreover, it is precisely the conflicts and theoretical disagreements on the validity and coherence of Bowlby's ideas between experts in these varied fields that solidified Attachment Theory outside the boundaries of existing epistemologies. Attachment Theory thus necessarily developed a niche of its own, and is conceptualized as both a developmental and psychodynamic model that has grown to influence

multiple modes of treatment, including family, cognitive, and psychodynamic therapies (Holmes, 1993).

The Roots of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby

Bowlby studied developmental psychology at University of Cambridge in the 1920s, followed by a volunteer position at a school for troubled children. His experiences observing their struggles led Bowlby to child psychiatry, a career he pursued in tandem with his training at the British Psychoanalytic Institute, where he practiced under Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, a colleague of Klein's. Though considered a proponent of drive theory, Klein firmly believed that drives are intrinsically motivated to seek objects and relationships with them, and is thus considered an object relations theorist (Flanagan, 2008). Further, she argued that unconscious fantasies (or "phantasies," to use Klein's spelling) do not act in place of unfulfilled needs or drives as Freud suggested, but exist innately in the human psyche, and thus offer rich clinical data for psychoanalysis (Flanagan, 2008, p 134).

Through his training experience and postgraduate work, Bowlby came to believe that "real" family experiences proved more significant than fantasy in the development of psychopathology. Thus, in 1938, Bowlby expressed interest in the potential clinical benefit of speaking with the mother of one of his young patients. Klein flatly refused, arguing that an analyst should attend only to fantasy, not reality, in the analysis. Apparently, Bowlby's anger towards Klein regarding this formulation grew and persisted, even decades later (Kagan, 2006). Hence, the theoretical disagreement between Bowlby and Klein is credited as contributing to the development of Attachment Theory.

By the 1940s, Bowlby had embarked on his first empirical study of his theory at London's prestigious Tavistock Clinic, where researchers and psychoanalysts of varied

backgrounds collaborated on research and case formulations (van der Horst, 2011). He reported his findings in a paper titled “Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home Lives.” (as cited in Bretherton, 1992, p. 434). The study combined quantitative data with case studies in order to argue that subjects’ mental health problems, including antisocial symptoms, were connected with separation and/or deprivation from the mother. Soon after, Bowlby was asked to lead Tavistock’s Children’s Department. It was there that he began to invite the parents of his young patients to join in the sessions. He also began his own separate research unit, further distancing himself from the Kleinians, many of whom practiced at the Tavistock Clinic. (Bretherton, 1992).

In 1948, Bowlby began research with James Robertson, a Scottish psychiatric social worker and psychoanalyst, to study the impact of institutionalization and parent-child separation (van der Horst, 2011). Robertson had extensive training on clinical observation of child behavior through his work at Anna Freud’s Hampstead residential clinic for homeless youth (Bretherton, 1992). Yet spurred by two years spent as an “uninvolved research worker” on Bowlby’s research team, Robertson insisted that his observation of troubled children extend to intervention (Bretherton, 1992, p. 435). In a watershed moment in attachment research, in 1952 Robertson made the film *A Two-Year Old Goes to Hospital*, which detailed the trauma suffered by the film’s subject, Laura, after being separated from her mother during a nine-day hospitalization (as cited in Bretherton, 1992; van der Horst, 2011). According to Bretherton (1992), the poignant images “helped improve the fate of hospitalized children all over the Western world” and highlighted the damage wrought by orphanages and institutionalization (p. 436). Later, in 1969, Robertson and his wife and research partner Joyce Robertson made *John: Nine Days in a Residential Nursery*, which would become one of their most famous films (Freud, 1969;

Robertson & Robertson, 1969; Skilkret & Skilkret, 2008). *John* poignantly captured the trauma of a 17-month-old child separated from his mother and placed in an institutional nursery during delivery of her second baby, a common practice at the time. Notably, the film confirmed Bowlby's theory that lack of a consistent replacement attachment figure after separation from a secure attachment to the mother often results in a *protest/despair/detachment* pattern, as John exhibits anxiety and grief at the separation from his parents, disorganized attempts to seek comfort from an overwhelmed and under-available nurse, as well as a stuffed toy, and finally, numbness (Bowlby, 1960; Robertson & Robertson, 1969; Skilkret & Skilkret, 2008).

Around the time Robertson began making films, Bowlby published another influential paper known as the World Health Organization (WHO) report (Bowlby, 1951). The commissioned monograph aimed to investigate the presence of mental illness in post-WWII homeless youth, and argued that children's well-being and development depends on an intimate, nurturing, and reciprocal relationship with the mother, other attachment figure, or what Bowlby called a *permanent mother substitute* (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). Yet Bowlby had not yet abandoned the parlance of psychoanalysis, also arguing that the mother acts as the child's ego and superego until she or he is capable of regulating impulses and drives independently (Bowlby, 1951; Bretherton, 1992).

Bowlby struggled to develop his theory of attachment within the framework of psychoanalysis, and also recognized the need for more rigorous testing of his hypotheses. Beginning in 1951, his interest in ethology endeavored to bridge his interest in both psychoanalytic and biological approaches to the parent-child bond. (van der Horst, 2011). Thus arrived another peak moment in the development of Attachment Theory when Bowlby discovered the work of ethologist Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz's research on imprinting in birds,

characterized by the phenomenon of young birds trailing after their mother, demonstrated that the need for parent-child attachment extended beyond the context of physical survival because it “suggested that social bond formation need not be tied to feeding” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 438; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). As Ainsworth (1994) remarks of the ducklings’ relationships to their mother, “it was her presence that was the essential thing” (p. 14). Additionally, in 1954, Bowlby met British ethologist Robert Hinde, who mentored Bowlby in his study of ethological fundamentals. This multidisciplinary and ethological approach remained controversial among Bowlby’s colleagues, including Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992; van der Horst, 2011).

The British Psychoanalytic Society provided an audience for Bowlby’s first formalized account of Attachment Theory, which took the form of three controversial papers: 1) “The Nature of the Child’s Tie to His Mother” (1958), 2) “Separation Anxiety” (1959), and 3) “Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood” (1960). The first paper argued that attachment to others is necessary throughout the life cycle. Most notably, using both empirical data and his own clinical experience, Bowlby attempted to prove that *attachment behaviors* like crying, sucking, following, smiling, and clinging observed in 1-year-old infants “have the function of binding the infant to the mother and the mother to the infant” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 439; Mercer, 2006). This hypothesis extended beyond psychoanalytic conceptualizations, which held that attachment behaviors were needs- and libido-driven, and argued that attachment serves to ensure physical survival, as well as social and emotional health.

The second paper argued that existing theories could not fully demonstrate why children often express *separation anxiety*. This is described as distress upon separation from the attachment figure, and that “children experience separation anxiety when a situation activates both escape and attachment behavior but an attachment figure is not available” (Bretherton,

1992, p. 440). The paper posited that various extremes in separation anxiety often indicated the presence of “adverse family experiences, such as repeated threats of abandonment or rejection by parents” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 440).

Finally, in the “most controversial” of the three papers, Bowlby challenged Anna Freud’s theory that infants cannot experience mourning – a process she believed dependent on more mature ego development – but only mere separation anxiety, if a replacement caregiver is at hand (Bretherton, 1992, p. 441). Bowlby argued that frequent shifts between substitute attachment figures may negatively impact an individual’s ability to engage in meaningful relationships (Bretherton, 1992). He posited that a child’s separation from the mother’s breast at weaning was not merely a frustration of drives, but had the potential to cause grief due to a broader sense of “loss of the mother figure” (Bowlby, 1960, para. 216). Anna Freud and others issued protests of Bowlby’s theory and his interpretation of psychoanalytic ideas, and Bowlby never formally presented his theories to the British Psychoanalytic Society again (Bretherton, 1992).

Bowlby did however, go on to write and publish incredibly influential research on Attachment Theory, most notably his Attachment “trilogy:” *Attachment and Loss, Volume 1: Attachment* (1969), *Attachment and Loss, Volume 2: Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (1973), and *Attachment and Loss, Volume 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression* (1980) (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1980; as cited in Bretherton, 1992, p. 463). While far too extensive to outline here, the trilogy offers important Attachment Theory fundamentals, some of which will be further explained later in the chapter.

In *Volume 1: Attachment*, Bowlby (1969) explains the concept of the “complex behavioral system,” arguing that complex organisms like humans act on biologically-based innate instincts, and act, plan, and set goals according to shifts in the environment. This indicates

the presence of intrapsychic or mental phenomena as well, in the form of internal working models that serve to organize an individual's experiences and interactions. Thus, such a behavior system includes both internal and external forces; biologically-, environmentally-, and psychologically-based motivations. Through this explanation, then, Bowlby defined attachment behavior as an end in itself, as infants "become increasingly focused on those primary figures who are responsive to the infant's crying and who engage the infant in social interaction" (as cited in Bretherton, 1992, p. 448).

Bowlby builds on key findings from Ainsworth's studies from the same period, explaining that the quality of relationship and responsiveness from the caregiver during infancy plays a role in determining the nature of the attachment. If the parent is rejecting to the child, and if proximity in the parent-infant dyad engenders distress for both or either party, the strength and security of the attachment may be compromised. Further, the caregiver cannot then provide the infant with a *secure base* from which to survey the surroundings, or a *safe haven* to return to (as cited in Bretherton, 1992, p 448). Originally developed by Ainsworth, these concepts of secure base and safe haven, or "functions" of the attachment figure, will be further clarified later in the chapter.

Bowlby also addresses the role of the attachment behavior system in parent-toddler relationships through the concept of the *goal-corrected partnership* (Bowlby, 1969). Here, Bowlby attempts to explain the growth in sophistication of the parent-child relationship during the toddler years. Through observation and relational experience, the toddler learns that the caregiver possesses personal motivations and goals separate from the toddler. This insight allows the young child to extend her behavior beyond her own needs and desires and toward the goals of the parent-child dyad (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992).

In *Volume 2: Separation, Anxiety and Anger*, Bowlby (1973) expands some of the ideas put forth in *Volume 1*, while also adding to the theoretical framework of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1992). Moreover, *Volume 2* offered particularly compelling implications for the clinical relevance of Attachment Theory. Bowlby challenges one of Freud's theories of motivation, which Bowlby describes thusly: "a mother is sought only in so far as she helps to reduce a build-up of tension arising from unmet physiological drives, and is missed only because it is feared such tension may go unrelieved" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 78). In contrast, Bowlby argues that human motivation is governed by a more complex system; a striving for balance between the familiarity of safe attachment figures and environments, and discovery of new experiences.

Importantly, Bowlby also broadens his discussion of the connection between the functions of attachment, and internal working models in *Volume 2*. If early interactional patterns create a blueprint for future relationships and self states in the form of an internal working model, then a child who is repeatedly rejected by the primary attachment figure when distressed, or restricted in her efforts to explore, may grow to believe she is unlovable, undeserving, or inadequate. Yet if the child achieves the balance Bowlby describes, her internal working model will more likely reflect the sense that she is worthy and capable.

Finally, in *Volume 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression*, Bowlby (1980) explores the relationship between internal working models and defenses, through the lenses of the behavioral system of attachment and "information processing" theories (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1992, p. 451). Since internal working models of historical circumstances and relationships inform the present, some distortion of incoming information cannot be avoided. Yet Bowlby was interested in the idea that information passes through multiple stages of processing before entering

awareness, as evidenced by studies on selective listening, which demonstrate that humans can attend to one aural stimuli at a time, even when multiple stimuli are present. He argued that particularly traumatic, shameful, or unbearable thoughts can be treated the same way through “defensive exclusion,” perhaps resulting in splitting of the internal working model and other repressive phenomena that can be implicated in psychopathology (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1992, p. 452).

The Roots of Attachment Theory: Mary Ainsworth

In 1950, Mary Ainsworth arrived in London after completing her education at the University of Toronto, where she studied security theory, a model that investigates the significance of childhood dependency on caregivers (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008, p 191). Her doctoral dissertation, entitled “An Evaluation of Adjustment Based on the Concept of Security,” examined the child’s need for a secure base within the family, setting the stage for Bowlby’s research and one of the basic tenets of Attachment Theory. It is crucial to note that although Bowlby influenced Ainsworth, and she him, Ainsworth was thoroughly acquainted with the role of security in parent-child relationships prior to her work with Bowlby (Main, 1999).

Ainsworth answered an advertisement calling for assistants to aid Bowlby in his growing body of research on parent-child separation. One of her early tasks included analysis of Robertson’s data. Robertson’s excellent observation skills and methods would come to influence Ainsworth’s own future research, as they mirrored her own deeply-held interest in narrative data collection. Ainsworth proved committed to gathering and analyzing data in context, rather than through the more traditionally favored quantitative methodologies (as cited in Bretherton, 1992; Mercer, 2006).

In 1953, several years before the presentation and publication of these important writings, Ainsworth embarked on what is considered the first empirical study of Attachment Theory, in Uganda (Bretherton, 1992). She set her sights on the investigation of Bowlby's ethological formulations of attachment, which she continued to doubt. Ainsworth studied 26 participating mother-infant dyads for as much as 9 months per family and involved bi-monthly two-hour interview and observation sessions. According to Bretherton (1992), "Ainsworth was particularly interested in determining...when these signals and behaviors became preferentially directed toward the mother" (p. 443). Perhaps most significantly, findings from the Uganda study helped sharpen Ainsworth's theories on attachment patterns, and the correlation between "maternal sensitivity" and an infant's sense of *secure* attachment (Bretherton, 1992, p. 443). The thesis will define these concepts in more detail shortly.

It is important to note that Ainsworth's Uganda study continued to influence her work a decade later, in an even more intensive project known as the Baltimore Project. Again, Ainsworth studied 26 participant families, making 18 home visits per family to observe the infants from age one month to 14 months. Ainsworth's narrative data collection consisted of handwritten notes, which were then read aloud in to a recorder and transcribed. Strikingly, this method produced "approximately 72 hours of data collection per family" (Bretherton, 1992, p. 444). This volume of detailed data allowed Ainsworth to explore the apparent presence of patterns in caregiver-infant relationships, particularly in the context of the dyads' interactions around attachment behaviors like crying, following, affection, close physical contact, and, like Bowlby would later outline in *Volume 2: Separation, Anxiety and Anger*, "the attachment-exploration balance" (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1992, p. 445). Moreover, Ainsworth found a large range of individual variance among each pattern of behavior. How often mothers responded

to or ignored infant crying, for instance, varied greatly (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth's observation of patterns in attachment behaviors in the first year of an infant's life, documentation of individual differences in caregivers' responses to them, and identification of distinct attachment styles constitute three of Ainsworth's key contributions to the field (Ainsworth, 1989).

The Baltimore study led to a laboratory procedure known as the "Strange Situation," which aimed to replicate findings from Ainsworth's extensive observational home studies (Shilkret & Shilkret, p 193). As such, the purpose of the Strange Situation study was to investigate the presence and characteristics of attachment behaviors in one-year-old infants in a laboratory environment, where infants interact with both their mothers and strangers for a planned 20-minute sequence (Bretherton, 1992). First, mother and baby enter the research room, followed later by a female stranger. As the stranger and baby interact together, mother exits, then returns. Finally, baby experiences a brief period of solitude before the stranger returns, followed by the mother. (Bretherton, 1992). Though Ainsworth was interested in the infants' behavior and affect depending on whether or not the mother was present, it was the "infant reunion patterns," like those caught on film by the Robertsons, that captivated her, as they seemed to highlight important information regarding the characteristics of caregiving and of internal working models (Bretherton, 1992, p. 446; Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981). Ainsworth published findings and data analysis from the Strange Situation in 1969, and later in 1978 (Bretherton, 1992). The latter analysis outlined the classification system of attachment patterns that would become so well-known, further bolstering Ainsworth's role in the development of Attachment Theory (Bretherton, 1992).

Around the time Bowlby published *Volume 1: Attachment*, Ainsworth's findings from the Baltimore Project were released to some criticism regarding the validity of her attachment pattern classification system. Bretherton (1992) notes that critics tended to focus solely on the laboratory findings from the Strange Situation, and not the extensive narrative data gathered from Ainsworth's home observations. However, the depth and complexity of her research captured the interest of numerous students and scholars, Bretherton included, and notably Mary Main, who will appear again later in this chapter. Replications of the Strange Situation study emerged, and testing of its subsequent classification system grew, adding to Ainsworth's accomplishments and contributions to Attachment Theory (Bretherton, 1992).

Attachment Theory: A Psychodynamic and Developmental Model, Part II

Like the previous section, the current section of the chapter aims to examine and contextualize Attachment Theory for the purposes of framing the phenomenon and the thesis as a whole. The following elaborates on key terms and guiding principles of Attachment Theory referenced in the previous section of the chapter, and provides definitions and descriptions of other essential Attachment Theory fundamentals and contemporary trends. This will allow the reader to engage more deeply with the empirical research and analyses contained in later sections of the chapter, where the thesis examines the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Attachment Theory. Finally, in keeping with the paradigms that inform the thesis, the following aims to engage critically with concepts of attachment, while also providing clear and concise information.

Key Concepts in Attachment Theory: Basic Principles

To review, Bowlby conceptualized attachment as a behavioral system, made up of mental, emotional, and biological components (Bretherton, 1992). Mercer (2006) remarks that attachment generally refers to “the emotional ties that exist between human beings and guide their feelings and behavior” (p. 2), and that childhood attachment is a long-term tie “that lasts even after the child is an adult” (p. 47). These brief descriptions acknowledge the power and complexity of both interpersonal relationships and internal working models, and their impact on human lives. Therefore, care must be given to the multiple meanings and experiences that these ties engender.

Key Concepts in Attachment Theory: Definitions of Terms

To review, the chapter has defined or referenced several important terms in the context of the chapter’s historical review of Attachment Theory: *internal working model*, *attachment figure*, *attachment pattern*, *protest/despair/detachment pattern*, *permanent mother substitute*, *attachment behavior*, *separation anxiety*, *secure base*, *safe haven*, and *goal-corrected partnership*. For the sake of clarity and understanding of the current chapter and of the thesis at large, some of these terms require separate attention and additional explanation, while several key terms have yet to be introduced.

Attachment behavior.

Attachment behaviors, like crying, clinging, and following, act as signals to draw a caregiver to the infant. Between birth and approximately six months of age, these behaviors are believed to be indiscriminate and instinctual, and meant to elicit care and protection in general, rather than from a specific individual. However, around six months, attachment behavior appears more “directed,” as evidenced by behaviors like reaching for the primary caregiver.

These active attempts to engage the caregiver also illustrate another developmental milestone of attachment: the internal working model. The infant now understands the caregiver as an individual, who exists when close by and in absentia. This awareness helps explain the emergence of separation anxiety at this stage (Ainsworth, 1989). Ainsworth states that “at this point, the baby is capable of attachment” to the primary caregiver, and potentially to other well-known individuals (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710)

Attachment figure.

As previously discussed, Attachment Theory uses the term “attachment figure” to describe the “principal caregiver,” commonly in reference to the mother, father, or a “parent surrogate” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710). Individuals can also have more than one attachment figure, and new attachment figures in adulthood, like a spouse or partner. No matter what the life stage, or who fills the role of the primary attachment figure, this connection is person-specific and lasting.

Affectional bond.

Ainsworth (1989) defines an affectional bond as a sustained emotional tie to an attachment figure, and as a connection that is distinct from other relationships. First, as opposed to often-brief relationships, an affectional bond is characterized as a long-term connection. Second, while relationships imply duality, affectional bonds rely on the internal working model of the individual. In addition, an affectional bond is unique, specific and cannot be replaced. Finally, Ainsworth (1989) states that an attachment is a type of affectional bond. However, unlike other affectional bonds, an attachment can serve secure base and safe haven functions, which will be discussed below.

Functions of attachment.

Proximity maintenance.

The term “proximity” appears a number of times earlier in the chapter. This stems from the essential concept of “proximity maintenance,” which is defined as the infant’s pull towards closeness to the attachment figure, particularly in situations of stress (as cited in Bretherton, 1992; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011).

Safe haven.

“Safe haven” refers to the use of the attachment figure for reassurance, as a comforting and encouraging presence, and for soothing in times of stress (as cited in Bretherton, 1992; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011).

Secure base.

Ainsworth (1994) attributes the origins of the concept of secure base to William Blatz, a scholar in security theory. However, Ainsworth developed the idea and defines it as the infant’s perception of the caregiver as a steady attachment figure thus allowing the infant to explore his or her world (as cited in Bretherton, 1992; Ainsworth, 1994).

Key Concepts in Attachment Theory: Attachment Patterns or Styles

The classification of attachment patterns, or attachment styles, emerged from Ainsworth’s Strange Situation study (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth found that a child’s reaction to reunion with the mother after a period of separation depends upon established patterns of caregiving (Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981). For instance, a child who has grown accustomed to feeling ignored or berated during periods of distress, will react differently to her mother’s return after a separation than a child accustomed to consistent soothing during these periods. Thus attachment style refers to a child’s expected pattern of responsiveness from the attachment

figure. This classification system was only possible as a result of the extensive home observation studies Ainsworth had so painstakingly executed through the Uganda study and the Baltimore Project. Thus, Ainsworth's observation of individual attachment behaviors over time was empirically supported by the Strange Situation study, resulting in the classification of attachment styles. The following reviews and defines attachment styles both within and outside of the context of the Strange Situation, as Ainsworth's findings from that study have been adopted to describe patterns of attachment more generally (Bretherton, 1992; Meyer & Pilkonis, 2002; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Secure.

Attachment styles are characterized as either "secure" or "insecure." Within the context of the Strange Situation, Shilkret & Shilkret (2008) define secure attachment on three axes: 1) the infant, who appeared upset at the mother's exit, welcomes her return, 2) the infant utilizes the mother to regulate affect and soothe herself, and 3) as a result of the feelings of security engendered by her mother's presence, the infant now feels comfortable to venture out into the environment. Tracy & Ainsworth (1981) found that mothers of infants classified as secure in the Strange Situation study "more frequently displayed affectionate behavior when they picked their babies up" when compared to the mothers of infants classified as insecure (p. 1343).

Insecure.

Ainsworth identified two types of insecure attachment: "avoidant" and "ambivalent" (or "resistant.") Main later introduced a third category known as "disorganized" attachment (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Insecure attachment styles are thought to emerge as a result of inconsistent, absent, or dangerous attachment figure responsiveness. Shilkret & Shilkret (2008) note that while attachment insecurity may be a risk factor for mental health issues, it is not necessarily

considered a deterministic diagnosis, as “insecurity is seen as an exquisite adaptation to a particular history of parenting experiences” (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008, p. 197).

Avoidant.

An avoidant attachment style in the Strange Situation is characterized as the infant who does not appear distressed when the mother leaves, and is not particularly attentive to her return (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Tracy & Ainsworth (1981) note that mothers of avoidant infants were previously observed as “more rejecting in relations with the baby” than the other attachment classifications, and appeared more reluctant to physical contact (as cited in Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981, p. 1341). Notably, the authors state “[i]t was not so much that rejecting mothers lacked loving, affectionate feelings toward their babies, as that these feelings were more frequently submerged by irritation, resentment, and sometimes outright anger” (Tracy & Ainsworth, 1981, p. 1343).

Ambivalent.

Also known as “resistant,” ambivalent attachment style refers to the infant who expresses protest at the mother’s departure, but rejects or does not appear capable of soothing when the mother returns. Shilkret & Shilkret (2008) note that in ambivalent babies, “clinginess alternated with anger” (p. 194).

Disorganized.

Main developed this fourth category of attachment in efforts to classify the insecure attachment styles that fell outside the boundaries of Ainsworth’s original three (Levy, 2010; as cited in Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). It is characterized by its inconsistency, in that infants classified as disorganized show alarming behavior, like initially moving toward the mother, but

then stopping the approach, seemingly out of fear. Disorganized attachment is often associated with trauma, abuse, or neglect (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Attachment Styles in Adulthood: the Adult Attachment Interview

Since Attachment Theory holds that internal working models continue to impact attachments over the lifespan, though these models undoubtedly shift and change over time, it follows that attachment patterns continue to be relevant in adulthood. Though adults and infants respond differently to attachment and separation, given the differences in development, some features of attachment patterns persist (Mercer, 2006).

Main is credited as authoring the Adult Attachment Interview, a semi-structured interview tool used to explore childhood experiences as a method of assessing attachment styles in adults and adolescents. Questions focus on relationships with and separations from attachment figures, and their impact on the present. The adult attachment classification system developed by Main mirrors Ainsworth's original categories (Levy, et al., 2011; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Secure.

“Secure” adults tend to show an openness to others and their surroundings, present as clear and steady when discussing relationships or memories, even painful ones, and seem capable of managing anger (Levy, et al., 2011; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Insecure.

Dismissing (avoidant).

“Dismissing” adults may find it difficult to request and receive help, and minimize the impact of past and present attachments. They may idealize early caregivers, and/or have trouble expressing painful feelings about them. They tend to recall little about early family dynamics

(Levy, et al., 2011; Mercer, 2006; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Preoccupied (ambivalent).

“Preoccupied” adults may appear willing to discuss historical and current relational problems, even perseverating on painful childhood experiences, and may cling to anger at past or present attachment figures. They often present with contradictory childhood memories, and lack a cohesive narrative of them (Levy, et al., 2011; Mercer, 2006; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Unresolved (disorganized).

“Unresolved” adults are often classified as such due to unresolved and unintegrated feelings and memories around trauma. Unresolved adults may present as chaotic and alarmingly disorganized when discussing trauma, and may fear relationships (Levy, et al., 2011; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008).

Contemporary Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory: An Overview

Bretherton (1992) states “I predict that, in the future, attachment theory may provide the underpinnings of a more general theory of personality organization and relationship development” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 460). Upon initial review of contemporary applications of Attachment Theory, this prediction appears accurate.

Despite the focus on the research, theoretical exploration, and rigorous testing that so interested Bowlby and Ainsworth, it seems clear that Attachment Theory was never intended to exist as a theoretical pursuit separate from therapy room. Levy, et al. (2011) state that Bowlby meant for Attachment Theory to inform clinical practice “from its inception” (p. 193).

Ainsworth (1989) discusses Bowlby’s belief that the psychotherapist can act as an attachment figure by functioning as a crucial secure base, as patients delve into their painful histories and attempt to reorganize old internal working models. This secure base function and a secure

attachment with the therapist also offers opportunities for the patient to explore the self and new experiences. These Attachment Theory-based interventions and ideas continue to inform current research and practice (Levy, et al., 2011).

Another important point regarding contemporary ideas about Attachment Theory involves the concept of permanence versus change. It is common for clinicians to identify insecure attachments as a risk factor for long-lasting psychopathology, and attachment styles do tend to persist throughout life (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Yet some studies show that “earned security,” or a shift from insecure attachment style to secure attachment style, can be achieved through changes in harmful family structures, new relational interactions with “helpful other[s],” or psychotherapy (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008, p. 197).

Newer theories of attachment also tend to discuss the role of parent-child dynamics, as in the context of bonding. If an infant’s attachment behavior clearly communicates needs and affects, parents may be more likely to feel confident and secure in their abilities as caregivers. In contrast, a less responsive infant might engender anxiety and impact parent-infant communication, potentially interrupting bonding. From the parents’ side, a variety of emotional factors – like recent grief or loss, postpartum depression, or hormonal changes – may also interrupt this process (Mercer, 2006).

Sociocultural Issues and Attachment Theory: An Overview

Criticism of Attachment Theory’s approach to sociocultural issues and identities is well-documented (Bretherton, 1992; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988). Much of this criticism is rooted in challenges to the positivist attitude that guided science in Bowlby and Ainsworth’s time. This statement by Ainsworth (1989) reflects this perspective, as she comments on the benefits of conceptualizing attachment as a biologically-based behavioral system because it “implies a search for basic processes of functioning that are

universal in human nature, despite differences attributable to genetic constitution, cultural influences, and individual experience” (p. 709).

Bowlby and Ainsworth aimed for a generalizable Attachment Theory; a universal statement about human development. Put simply, “[a]ttachment theorists tend to emphasize the universals of development; their critics emphasize cultural specificity” (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008, p. 202). From a contemporary perspective that incorporates anti-racist, feminist, and social-constructionist concepts, it is necessary and important to consider difference, and to consider the value-laden and socially-constructed qualities of theorizing. Ultimately, Attachment Theory’s engagement with difference, multiple family structures, and sociocultural identities, go hand in hand with its ability to remain relevant.

Revisiting the Roots of Attachment Theory: Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Issues of Gender and Privilege

It is also important to note the influence of privilege and oppression in the literature on the roots of Attachment Theory. Regarding Klein and Anna Freud, Holmes (1993) notes that Bowlby considered “both women and most of their followers as hopelessly unscientific,” (p. 4) illustrating not only Bowlby’s embrace of more strictly-scientific ethological concepts, but perhaps the era’s gender stereotypes.

As Bretherton states, “[w]ithout Mary Ainsworth’s work on patterns of attachment in the Strange Situation and Mary Main’s Adult Attachment Interview that built on them, Bowlby’s theoretical contributions to developmental and clinical psychology would not have had their current influence” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 460). Additionally, Main states that despite criticism of attachment research as favoring quantitative and experimental methods, “it should be kept in

mind that, in using these procedures, subsequent research in the field has remained anchored in Ainsworth's original naturalistic home observations” (Main, 1999, para. 24).

Feminist critiques of Attachment Theory remark on problems in empirical measurement, racial biases, and disproportionate focus on the role of the mother (Ballou & Brown, 2002). In contrast, Main (1999) offers examples to illustrate Ainsworth as “a model of calm feminism” explaining that Ainsworth often challenged sexism, like unequal pay, directly and with fervor (Main, 1999, para. 17). This suggests that Ainsworth’s experiences with and challenges to sexism played a role in her work.

Conceptualizing Human-Companion Animal Relationships: Through the Lens of Attachment Theory

In order to conceptualize human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory, it is important to add to the theoretical terms and concepts outlined above through a review of key themes from the phenomenon chapter. First, serious consideration of research and practice regarding the human-companion animal bond in the context of mental health appears relatively new, with studies investigating the effects of human-companion animal relationships on emotional and mental well-being emerging in the later part of the twentieth century (as cited in Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Cohen, 2002; Levinson, 1978; Miller & Lago, 1990; Ory & Goldberg, 1983). Second, contemporary inquiry into the phenomenon often focuses on the interconnections between the human-companion animal bond, interpersonal violence, and animal abuse, thereby necessitating discussion of these issues (Arkow & Ascione, 1999; Ascione, 1997; Ascione, Weber, & Thompson, et al., 2007; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Faver & Strand, 2003; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005). Third, the phenomenon chapter reveals overarching themes within the literature on human-companion animal

relationships from varied fields, such as issues of anthropomorphism, utilitarianism, inferiority/superiority, morality, animal consciousness, and spirituality (Beierl, 2008; Braje, 2011; Hoffer, 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Preece, 2011). Finally, human-companion animal relationships in the rural West are examined in historical, contemporary, and mental health contexts. Issues of gender and sexism, race and racism, and place are investigated within these three contexts. Through this method of inquiry, additional themes emerge, including the social construction of companion animals, intersections between sexism and speciesism, gender differences in human-companion animal relationships, African American agricultural communities, the impact of police dog violence on People of Color, and issues of race and racism in animal attachment and the animal welfare field.

The following will incorporate some of these themes in a review of the existing literature on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Attachment Theory. However, as the phenomenon chapter endeavors to show, the history and range of experiences elicited by human-companion animal relationships is vast. Marginalized voices, particularly women and People of Color in the rural West, remain somewhat excluded from discussion and dialogue as to the multiple meanings of human-companion animal bond. As such, the thesis has endeavored to highlight the intersectionality of these themes, the phenomenon, and multiple social identities with the purpose of informing rural social work, and exploring the reparative potential of human-companion animal relationships.

Human-Companion Animal Relationships: An Attachment Theory Lens

Representations of the human-companion animal bond in the literature, as well as in the Western cultural arena at large, recognize the significance of humans' relationships to companion animals, their role in the emotional lives of people, and their classification as

members of the family (Cohen, 2002; Kurdek, 2009; Pagani, et al., 2009; as cited in Walsh, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). These conceptualizations of the human-companion animal bond help explain the prevalence and relevance of Attachment Theory in recent scholarship on the phenomenon. Attachment Theory appears again and again in the literature, and undergirds some of the current research on human-companion animal relationships in a wide range of fields, including social work, anthrozoology, psychology, Animal Assisted Social Work (AASW), and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) (Bonas et al., 2000; Geist, 2011; Kurdek, 2009; Noonan, 2008; Sable, 1995; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011).

Despite broad interest in human-companion animal relationships, and their intersection with attachment and/or Attachment Theory and mental health, the literature reflects a limited scope of demographic variables and methodologies. Most notably, there appears to be very little evidence of research on the relationships between companion animals and rural People of Color through the lens of Attachment Theory. Indeed, the racial identity of participants, when it is noted in the studies, is predominantly White.

Attachment Theory is implicated and used to examine the multiple roles of companion animals, as caregivers, -getters and -takers, (as cited in Fine, Ed., 2000; Kurdek, 2009; Noonan, 2008). Similarly, as previously discussed, some literature argues that attachment and Attachment Theory are universal, and can be demonstrated cross-culturally (Ainsworth, 1989). In contrast, literature concerned with the intersectionality of sociocultural identities reminds us of the dangers of this universalization. (Bretheron, 1992; Brown, 2005; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg 1988)

So why is Attachment Theory applied across species, race, and gender? Can we truly understand the nature and significance of human-companion animal relationships when the

voices of rural women and People of Color are missing from so many studies of human-companion animal relationships and Attachment Theory? These intersections require further inquiry.

Some of the literature and concepts reviewed in this section of the chapter will attempt to address these questions, and their connections to the research questions and hypothesis, which argues that the application and generalization of Attachment Theory to human-companion animal relationships lacks theoretical coherence and clarity with regard to the particularity and specificity of these bonds. The thesis explores whether or not rural women's relationships with companion animals function as reparative relational or intrapsychic experiences that can be more fully understood beyond the framework of Attachment Theory. The following review focuses on the phenomenon through the lens of Attachment Theory, and includes discussion of three themes: 1) the use and misuse of the language of Attachment Theory in the literature on human-companion animal relationships, 2) companion animals as replacement or surrogate attachment figures, and 3) the interrelated issues of the application of Attachment Theory across species, and particularities of human-companion animal attachment.

Human-companion animal relationships and the use and misuse of Attachment Theory.

Attachment Theory generally appears in two ways in the literature on human-companion animal relationships: 1) as formal Attachment Theory, or 2) as the language of attachment. Winefield, Black & Chur-Hansen (2008) note that the persistent utilization of attachment concepts in studies of human-companion animal relationships “fails to reflect attachment theory comprehensively,” which suggests that these measurements “have not necessarily been psychologically meaningful” (p. 304). This lack of distinction and context creates confusion in

the literature, which leads to questions about the validity of the Attachment Theory lens with regard to the phenomenon. Further, inattention to these issues could subsequently impact policy and practice involving human-companion animal relationships, particularly in the context of mental health.

Ory & Goldberg (1983) utilize the language of attachment in their study of “life situation variables,” including attachment to and relationships with companion animals, and their impact on subjective perspectives of well-being in older women (p. 391). The authors define subjective well-being as “perceived happiness” (p. 391). A five-year study measuring these factors of well-being provided data for the Ory & Goldberg study, which consisted of structured, hour-long interviews. The final sample included 1073 White, married, female respondents from Washington County, Maryland. Respondents were between the ages of 65 and 75, and primarily “nonurban” residents (65.5%). The authors note the importance of improving the heterogeneity of sampling with regard to race, gender and age in future studies.

With its interest in social context and the value of rich qualitative data from members of an oft-marginalized group (older women), this study is of particular interest to the thesis. However, the authors’ use of attachment language in the interview questions appears confusing, as “quality of pet interactions” is “measured by degree of attachment rated on a five-point scale ranging from very to not at all attached” (p. 394). They found that the respondents’ level of happiness was related to their level of attachment to a companion animal, with low levels of attachment to animals correlated to higher levels of unhappiness. As a result, the authors speculate that “certain women are less likely to have attachments, either with other humans or with pets” (p. 405). In contrast to Attachment Theory, which conceptualizes attachment as biologically innate, this statement indicates a different use of the concept of attachment, one that

conceptualizes attachment as present or absent. Thus, despite the benefits of the study's qualitative methodology, the impact of the mis- or differently-used application of attachment concepts may mislead readers or misrepresent data.

Given that interest in the potential benefits of human-companion animal relationships was still relatively new at the time of this study, it is important to note that Ory & Goldberg perceived that clinicians and researchers were “conceptualizing the animal-human bond as a special subtype of social interactions” (p. 391). It appears the tension between the need for a solid theoretical framework for human-companion animal relationships, and acknowledgment of the difficulty conceptualizing them, is nothing new.

Beck & Madresh (2008) argue that the application of Attachment Theory and existing measures of attachment “offer a robust and well-documented theoretical framework for research on relationships between humans and pets” (p. 46). However, the authors also admit that “the word ‘attachment’ is often loosely applied” to the phenomenon. They cite measures of human-companion animal attachment, like the “Pet Attachment Scale” and the “Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale,” both of which reference attachment generally, but never formally reference Attachment Theory (as cited in Beck & Madresh, 2008, p. 45). The authors recognize that this inconsistency has the potential to obfuscate research goals and call into question the relevance of existing literature on human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory.

Nonetheless, Beck & Madresh (2008) argue that Attachment Theory remains a significant framework for understanding human-companion animal relationships, and merely requires more systematic measures. The authors adapted two measures of attachment style and insecurity – the “Relationship Questionnaire” and “Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised” – to compare

participants' romantic partnerships and companion animal relationships, and measure similarities between them (as cited in Beck & Madresh, 2008, p. 47). The final sample included 192 respondents to a "Pet Owners Survey" distributed on the internet. Respondents were predominantly female (168), compared to 24 male respondents, and data on education level and type of companion animal was also collected. Eighty-six percent of respondents were college graduates, 36% identified as "dog owners," 29% as "cat owners," and 35% identified as owning both dogs and cats (p. 48).

In their findings, the authors report some correlations between human attachment and companion animal attachment in measurements of attachment insecurity subtypes (i.e., anxious and avoidant). However, the authors report a lack of evidence regarding the consistency of these correlations, for instance, participants assessed as avoidant in partner relationships, were frequently not categorized as avoidant in their companion animal relationships. The authors also comment that romantic relationships are based on past romantic partnerships, while "[p]et relationships are defined by a different set of experiences and interactions," suggesting differences between internal working models of romantic partnerships and those of companion animals (p. 52). The authors also found that respondents reported higher levels of attachment security to their companion animals, when compared with their romantic partners.

In addition, despite their support of the Attachment Theory framework, the authors recognize the limitations of adapting a human-specific attachment scale to animals:

"[w]e recognize that changing the target, especially to another species, may have changed meaning of the scales in ways not apparent in the results of the current study, and look forward to learning more about the specific attributes of pet relationships in future research" (p. 47).

Ultimately, the authors engage with their critique of the use and misuse of Attachment Theory in the context of the phenomenon by attempting to adapt measures to better reflect the theory. Nonetheless, results remain mixed.

Companion animals as replacement or surrogate attachments or attachment figures.

The view that companion animals may function as replacement or surrogate attachments or attachment figures appears as a common theme in research on human-companion animal relationships. Kurdek (2009) cites studies that report widowhood as a possible indicator of “emotional close[ness]” to companion animals, as widowed individuals may “have difficulty replacing lost members of their social support system” (as cited in Kurdek, 2009, p. 440). Allen (2001), in his work on attachment and trauma, cites research that found interpersonal trauma survivors’ connection to companion animals may be an attempt to replace or repair ruptured human relationships.

Miltiades & Shearer (2011) used the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale and the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale to measure depression and attachment between dogs and their owners respectively, in the rural Northeastern U.S. As the reader will recall, the Lexington scale, while implicating Attachment Theory, measures the vague and difficult to identify “general attachment,” in addition to “people substituting” (as cited in Beck & Madresh, 2008, p. 46). Miltiades & Shearer’s (2011) review of the literature highlights the mixed results of previous studies, citing findings that illustrate a wide range of both positive and negative effects of attachment to companion animals. They hypothesized that “higher pet attachment will have a negative effect on emotional well-being,” and that since “high pet attachment serves as a substitute for human relationships,” respondents with strong human social supports will report lower levels of depression than those with dogs and inadequate human social supports (p. 149).

One hundred and seventeen White, rural-dwelling, older adults constituted the non-random sample, who were recruited through animal-centric locations (veterinary clinics, etc;). Seventy-four percent of respondents were married, and 50% were female. The self-administered, anonymous questionnaire was mailed to researchers after completion. Interestingly, regression analysis found that higher levels of depression correlated to higher levels of widowhood and pet attachment, and the authors posit that this supports the argument that dogs may act as substitute attachments for older adults. However, the authors also found that higher levels of depression were related to respondents' concerns about their ability to provide proper food, shelter, and/or medical care to their dog. The authors cite Miller and Lago (1990), who also found that animal attachments are not indicated in improving mental health.

Veevers (1985) identifies three functions of human-companion animal relationships. The "projective function" refers to the ways in which a companion animal serves as a symbol of the animal "owner's" personality characteristics and values (p. 13). The "sociability function" refers to the ability of the companion animal to act as a medium for social interaction with other humans (p. 15). The following discussion focuses on the third category, the "surrogate function," which refers to companion animals' role as replacements for human relationships (p. 19).

It is important to note that like some of the other literature reviewed in this section of the chapter, Veevers does not explicitly utilize the framework of Attachment Theory in defining the surrogate function. Yet use of the term "surrogate" mirrors Bowlby and Ainsworth's use of it, in that both refer to a surrogate as a replacement attachment figure. Additionally, Veevers implicitly references attachment concepts like attachment functions and affectional bonds, and the author is cited in attachment literature (Meissner, 2005).

The author explains that humans' anthropomorphizing of companion animals forms the basis for the surrogate function concept. Examples include assigning human names to companion animals, talking to them, and grieving their deaths. Veevers goes on to categorize the role companion animals as surrogate friends, mates, children, parents, and enemies. She remarks that one "stereotype about childless couples" is the use of companion animals as surrogate offspring (p. 22). She also states "it seems likely that animals as friends would be most likely sought out by persons who do not have dense social networks" (p. 21). In both of these instances, the author admits that her arguments are based on little to no data.

Veevers concludes the article with a final question: "How can surrogate animals be selected and managed to maximize the advantages which accrue [*sic*] to their owners while minimizing the practical, psychological and social costs?" (p. 27) It appears that Veevers' attitude reinforces the dichotomy of utilitarianism/anthropomorphism, a common social construction of companion animals outlined in the phenomenon chapter. This dualistic perspective relegates companion animals to rigid categories; either "member of the family," or utilitarian object. The danger of this view lies in its objectification of companion animals, and subsequent disregard of the complex meanings human-companion animal relationships may contain. Furthermore, it limits discussion of and engagement with the unique characteristics of the human-companion animal bond.

Further reflection on Beck & Madresh (2008) offers additional perspective on the conceptualization of companion animals as replacement attachments or attachment figures. The authors state "[w]e speculate that pets are not merely substitutes for human interaction, but fill a specific role by providing a consistent, and relatively controllable, sense of relationship security" (p. 53). The thesis posits that this argument, while well-supported, does not go far enough.

Further, it seems contradictory to state that an animal “fill[s] a specific role,” but only within the confines of Attachment Theory. It may be more useful to return to Beck & Madresh’s (2008) recommendation, and continue efforts to grapple with the “specific attributes” of human-companion animal relationships, thereby aiding mental health clinicians and researchers in a new and more holistic understanding of their role in clients’ lives, and their potential benefits to emotional and mental health (p. 47).

Attachment Theory applied across species and particularities of human-companion animal attachment.

Given the role of ethology in the development of Attachment Theory, there exists a powerful argument for the exploration of human-companion animal relationships through this lens. Further, the reverse lens – the application of animal studies to a huge range of human phenomena – is a widespread practice in experimental science. Ainsworth (1989) offers the example of interruptions in mother-infant bonding to discuss behavioral similarities between humans and animals, namely potential feelings of rejection or loss of tenderness toward the infant following an early separation.

Bonas et al. (2000), Geist (2011), Kurdek (2009), Zilcha-Mano, et al., (2011), and others discuss the parallels between human-human attachment and human-animal attachment styles, and use of the companion animal as an attachment figure, particularly through attachment functions like proximity maintenance and secure base. Yet other basic concepts of attachment theory, that is, the specificity and irreplaceability of the attachment figure, and the species-specific characteristics of attachment itself, remain in question. A child’s internal working model, based on the internalized attachment figure, is said to impact relationships with other humans; siblings, friends, sexual partners, etc;. Beck & Madresh (2008) argue that internal

working models do not similarly capture relationships with companion animals. Replacing human-human attachment with human-animal attachment denies the unique qualities of this bond, and instead equates it across species.

Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver (2011) employed an Attachment Theory framework to examine the correlates between human-human relationships and human-animal relationships. The authors surveyed Israeli pet owners using the 26-item Pet Attachment Questionnaire, which measured attachment on two dimensions (anxious or avoidant) in human-companion animal relationships. The study investigated possible parallels between attachment style and expectations of the animal, and responses to the loss or death of the pet. Findings suggest that attachment styles in interpersonal relationships may be repeated in human-companion animal relationships, suggesting that an individual's internal working model of relationships extends to animals.

Similarly, Kurdek (2009) employed an online survey measure (Kurdek, 2008) to assess 4 attachment features of human-dog relationships, including proximity maintenance and secure base, with a focus on safe haven (““When I am feeling bad and need a boost, I turn to my dog to help me feel better;”” p. 441). The original sample was 96% White and 90% female, with a mean age of 48, and included 975 participants from the U.S. and Canada. The author found that a focus on safe haven functions provided compelling data about whether or not dog owners use their pets to regulate affect, which is implicated in the establishment of positive attachments (p. 444).

It is important to note two significant features represented in this review thus far: the homogeneity of the samples, and the dominance of quantitative methods (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Kurdek, 2009; Zilcha-Mano, et. al, 2011). Chur-Hansen, Winefield, & Beckwith (2009) bemoan the general lack of qualitative data regarding the connection between human-companion

animal relationships and mental health. As a result, marginalized voices and complex narratives remain excluded from assessment of human-companion animal attachment. This potentially limits the validity of the results regarding the wide application of Attachment Theory, and limits discussion of alternative frameworks of conceptualizing the particularities of the human-companion animal bond.

In contrast, some recent literature endeavors to grapple with these issues. Nagasawa, Mogi, & Kikusui (2009) review particular features of human-dog attachment. In recognition of the frequently imprecise application of Attachment Theory, the authors specify their interest in the biological components of attachment and specific attachment figure relationships. Recent studies show that dogs, as opposed to wolves and apes, may possess visual/cognitive abilities comparable to humans, including comprehension of “where human attention is directed” and a tendency to reject food offered by blind-folded researchers (p. 211- 212). According to the authors, this finding is extremely significant in explaining attachment between humans and dogs because it bolsters the argument that humans and dog relationships evolved to aid the survival of both species (as cited in Nagasawa, et al., 2009). In other words, shared use of social cues, like visual communication, may constitute a biologically-based attachment between dogs and humans. In addition, the authors’ own study of the role of oxytocin, a neurotransmitter that contributes to mother-infant bonding and stress relief in humans, demonstrates that this same neurochemical process is present in human-dog relationships. Results show that oxytocin levels rose for participant dog owners who were permitted to engage in long gazing periods during 30 minute testing intervals.

These findings may suggest the presence of biologically-based attachments between humans and dogs. More importantly however, the authors urge future researchers to recognize

that the biological components of attachment demonstrated in the study are a “manifestation of the specificity of dogs,” and that research on “interspecies attachment” must be further explored (p. 217). These findings demonstrate an interest in the particularities of human-companion animal attachment, and in critically engaging with the theoretical framework of Attachment Theory.

Human-Companion Animal Relationships and Attachment Theory: Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that Attachment Theory dominates historical and current inquiry on human-companion animal relationships. Regarding limitations, several themes emerge in the literature. These include recognition of threats to external validity, including homo- or heterogeneity of samples (Ory & Goldberg, 1983; Pagani, et. al, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011), mixed results produced by quantitative designs (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Miltiades & Shearer, 2011; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994), and dearth of qualitative data (Kurdek, 2009; Ory & Goldberg). Additionally, future recommendations include further assessment of the particular positive features of the human-companion animal attachment bond (Kurdek, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011) and its implications for mental health (Pagani et al., 2009). Kurdek (2009) recognizes the limitations of favoring samples of people with positive attachments to animals.

The confusion and inaccuracy regarding the use of Attachment Theory in the context of human-companion animal relationships creates a climate ripe for change. Further, ignoring these theoretical concerns could directly impact clients. For example, understanding whether or not internal working models of attachment figures correlate to those of companion animals could significantly inform clinical practice (Beck & Madresh, 2008). Similarly, studies of correlations between human-human attachment style and human-companion animal attachment style are

inconclusive (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011). Therapists who expect similarities in attachment style across species may benefit from learning that a client who appears dismissive in her attachment style with other humans may share a unique and special bond with a dog or cat. Such revisions to theoretical formulation could improve treatment. Further, the review presented in this chapter suggests that future research attend to the significance of diversity regarding demographic variables, and demonstrate a commitment to the importance of including women, People of Color, and rural communities, whose voices remain strikingly underrepresented in the literature.

Summary and Conclusions

The thesis now turns its attention the second theory: Self Psychology. The following chapter will offer key terms, concepts, and background information, with an emphasis on discussion of the phenomenon through the lens of Self Psychology. The thesis argues that Self Psychology may offer a more complete and complex theoretical formulation of the woman-companion animal bond in contemporary rural and multicultural contexts, and explores the potential clinical implications of this hypothesis.

An analysis comparing and contrasting the lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology in the context of the phenomenon will be presented in the final Discussion chapter. This analysis will include exploration of the possible insights and clinical implications each theory offers to the conceptualization of human-companion animal relationships, particularly in the context of rural social work with marginalized clients.

CHAPTER IV

Self Psychology and Human-Companion Animal Relationships

Just as Attachment Theory is included under the broader umbrella of object relations theory, Self Psychology is conceptualized as a descendant of ego psychology in the literature (Elisha, 2011; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Strozier, 1985). Ego psychology attends to development, and to the defensive and adaptive processes that emerge as a result of both environmental and internal phenomena, which are often rooted in conflict. This emphasis on the impact of real, external, environmental factors marks one of ego psychology's distinct contributions to psychodynamic theory. An individual's adaptive and defensive capabilities are thus understood as shifting over time, in response one's surroundings (Mitchell & Black, 1995). In addition, these capacities are conceptualized as either strengths or "ego defects," like difficulty with affect regulation or impulse control, that may reflect impairment in intrapsychic or environmental adaptations (Pine, 1988, p. 2).

The Austrian-American psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, who authored Self Psychology, examined the role of the environment in the development of the self. As such, many of Self Psychology's core concepts reflect the influence of ego psychology. More specifically, Kohut argued that "environment must in some way provide necessary experiences that allow a child to grow up not only *being* human but *feeling* [emphasis original] human" by joining with a broader community (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 149). Unlike Freud's drive theory, and its focus on conflict, Kohut centralized the impact of early development (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

According to Kohut, connections to the environment are provided by lifelong interactions with *selfobjects*, or real figures, objects, or phenomena that provide meaningful psychological and emotional resources to the self (Blazina, 2011b; Flanagan, 2008). Moreover, selfobjects are experienced as internal to the self, functioning as fuel that “give[s] the self what it needs in order to become and remain energetic and cohesive” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 171). Kohut believed that the presence and utilization of selfobjects across the lifespan could aid in fulfillment of previously unmet psychological needs, a guiding principle in both theoretical and clinical applications of Self Psychology. (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008). Thus, from the perspective of Self Psychology, disorders of the self emerge when selfobject needs go unmet. This can occur in the presence of neglect or trauma, including the psychological damage wrought “by the lack of empathic responses from the selfobject” (Kohut, 1977, p. 77).

It is important to highlight Self Psychology’s inclusion of non-human beings and phenomena in its definition of selfobjects. Fine (2006) notes that initial understanding of this core concept held that selfobject functions were provided solely by humans. Yet, in the author’s discussion of the efficacy of Self Psychology in framing human-companion animal relationships, particularly with regard to children, she states “more recent research finds that many children report these building blocks in their relationships with their pets (Melson, 2001). Thus, the range of ‘self– object’ experiences now includes other species, not just human– human bonds” (p. 213). In this way, symbols, objects, art, music, experiences, ideas, and most importantly, animals, are inherent to the framework of Self Psychology. Thus, Self Psychology by definition allows space to directly address and conceptualize human-companion animal relationships (as cited in Brown, 2011; Fine, 2006; Flanagan, 2008).

Like Attachment Theory, the literature also discusses the influence of object relations on Self Psychology, as both emphasize the internal and external impact of past relational patterns on the present (Bacal, 1995; Elisha, 2011; St. Clair, 2004). However, though Kohut is credited with the development of Self Psychology, he famously omitted explicit information regarding its origins, particularly in the context of object relations. He also reported having no familiarity with object relations theory prior to his development of Self Psychology (Elisha, 2011). Critics and scholars took offense to these slights, and accused Kohut of ignoring the legacy of theorists who paved the way for Self Psychology (Flanagan, 2008). As the following will show, it seems this lack of deference, along with other controversies, characterized Kohut's career.

Kohut's theory of Self Psychology formally emerged as literature in the 1970s and 1980s. Born to a Jewish family in Vienna, Austria in 1923, Kohut began his career as a neurologist, despite facing educational barriers as a result of Nazism. Tragically, Kohut suffered the loss of several family members in the Holocaust. He sought asylum in the United States in 1939, where he began his illustrious and often controversial career, initially as a classical analyst, at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. Notably, Kohut maintained close contact with ego psychology founders Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann for many years (Kieffer, 2012; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Strozier, 1985).

Yet, like Bowlby, many of Kohut's colleagues brutally rejected his ideas, citing his lack of attention to conflict, drives, and insight into the unconscious. Indeed, Kohut challenged many aspects of Freud's drive, economic, and structural theories, instead arguing that unmet narcissistic needs, not impulses, are subject to repression – and the source of psychopathology (Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995). Put another way, when a child's "grandiose-exhibitionistic wishes and fantasies" are met with disapproval, the resulting shame and inhibition

can lead to future psychological disturbances (Ornstein (Ed.), 1978, p. 70). It is this concentration on *narcissism* that would form the core of the theory (Ornstein (Ed.), 1978).

Moreover, Self Psychology's unique approach is characterized by efforts to engage empathically with the complexities of narcissism, which stemmed from Kohut's work with "neurotic character disorders," or more specifically, narcissistic personality disorder (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, para. 3). Kohut found that these individuals, characterized by "unusually labile" self-esteem and heightened sensitivity to "failures, disappointments, and slights," did not seem to benefit from classical analysis, which held that the development of healthy narcissism occurs through redirection of the libidinal drives from self to object (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, para. 3; Mitchell & Black, 1995). To Kohut, it appeared that analysis of conflicts and drives did not speak to the experience of individuals with certain character disorders, as this approach did not account for the ongoing role of important internalized figures, or selfobjects, in the development of the self. (Kohut & Wolf, 1978; Ornstein 2008). This concept will be further explored later in the chapter.

In contrast to the linear Freudian perspective, Self Psychology emphasizes a more fluid understanding of narcissism, arguing that separation-individuation and the polarization of self- and object-love are not necessarily markers of a healthy self. Further, Kohut believed that the fulfillment of narcissistic needs such as admiration and acceptance are essential to psychological well-being (Ornstein (Ed.), 1978). Thus, Kohut believed in the necessity of human interdependence, care, and connection over the lifespan, and their essential contributions to psychological health (Flanagan, 2008; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978).

Thus, Self Psychology remains distinct. In contrast to Attachment Theory, Self Psychology is also considered one of the foundational four psychodynamic psychologies

(Flanagan, 2008; Pine, 1988). As such, its theoretical and practical conceptualizations, while interconnected with them, differ significantly from drive, ego, and object relations frameworks. Another important cornerstone of Self Psychology mentioned briefly above epitomizes one of these differences: the concept of *cohesion*. It is also necessary here to outline Kohut's definition of the *self*, which he understood as both a mental structure, and "an effective independent center of initiative and as a focus of perceptions and experiences" (Kohut, 1977, p. 94). Though all psychodynamic psychologies more or less attend to issues of the self, Self Psychology distinguishes itself through a "focus on understanding the self as a cohesive whole" through the exploration of subjective realities (Flanagan, 2008, p. 161). The concept of cohesion appears throughout the core tenets of Self Psychology, namely, in the theory's unique treatment of *empathy* and transference, its understanding of anxiety and motivation (and the complex role of selfobjects), and the concept of the *tripolar self* (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984). These terms will be more fully explored in the following sections of the chapter.

Overall, Self Psychology offers a unique perspective on psychological health and psychopathology in its emphasis on the individual's subjectivity and the cohesion of the self, and the significance of this approach in clinical practice. Further, despite the controversy surrounding Kohut, some contemporary views laud "...the rise of Kohutian self psychology to shake what had once been the monolithic hegemony in America of the so-called 'classical' ego psychological metapsychology paradigm." (Thomä & Kächele, 1987, para. 6). Kulka (2012) argues that the legacy of Self Psychology on postmodern and intersubjective ways of knowing cannot be overemphasized, in that the theory laid the groundwork for understanding that "the individual is a context-dependent occurrence liable to constant changeability, [which] has released psychoanalytic psychology from the fetters of the myth of the individual as a discrete

unit and a constant being” (p. 265). In this way, Self Psychology has shifted the positivist attitudes that characterize some psychoanalytic theories, thus allowing space for exploration of multiple meanings and diverse experiences in clinical practice settings and scholarly discourses (Ornstein, 2008). This is reflected in Self Psychology’s role in the development of contemporary Relational and Intersubjective theories and practices, and by extension, anti-oppression epistemologies. As such, Self Psychology serves as a compelling lens with which to view the phenomenon, in light of the thesis’ research questions, hypothesis, and feminist, anti-racist, and social constructionist paradigms. Self Psychology’s impact on the fields of psychoanalysis, psychodynamic psychotherapy, clinical social work, and mental health in general cannot be underestimated.

Just as the characterization of companion animals as family members helps explain the application of Attachment Theory to the human-companion animal bond outlined in the previous chapter, the brief introduction above similarly elucidates the less frequent but cogent application of Self Psychology to the phenomenon. Self Psychology’s inclusion of non-human beings and objects as performers of selfobject functions stands out as a striking example of the relevance and utility of this lens (Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007; Fine, 2006; Flanagan, 2008). From its inception, then, Self Psychology offers a complex and clinically appropriate framework for exploring human-companion animal relationships and their relevance to mental health. Later sections of the chapter will revisit this key component of the hypothesis.

The current chapter aims to further investigate Self Psychology. First, the chapter offers an overview of the theory’s origins in its historical and epistemological contexts. Like the previous chapter, a number of key concepts in Self Psychology are introduced and defined in the overview, with several more detailed definitions appearing later in the chapter. Thus, second, the

chapter examines key assumptions, terms, concepts, and contemporary trends within Self Psychology, namely the self, selfobjects, transference types, the bipolar and tripolar self, and the role of Self Psychology in the development of Relational and Intersubjective models (Bacal, 1995; Elisha, 2011; Flanagan, 2008; Kieffer, 2012; Kulka, 2012; Stolorow, 1995). Sociocultural issues in Self Psychology are also reviewed (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut & Ornstein, 2011; Kulka, 2012; Ornstein, 2008; Teicholz, 1999).

Third, the chapter briefly explores and reviews findings from the empirical literature on human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Self Psychology. Sue Ellen Brown's scholarship will serve as a touchstone for the literature review on this understudied yet compelling area, and for other sections of the thesis (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011a; Brown, 2011b). Essential points from Chapter Two will be summarized to frame these findings.

A close reading of Brown reveals three key themes in the existing clinical and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon through the lens of Self Psychology. These themes constitute the basis of the review and are, as follows: 1) companion animals as providers of selfobject functions, 2) Self Psychology as a framework for exploring the uniqueness, specificity, range, and multiple meanings of human-companion animal relationships, including the ineffable and/or spiritual qualities of human-companion animal relationships, and 3) the intersections between human-companion animal relationships, Self Psychology, and issues of race and racism. Finally, the chapter offers reflections on the relative absence of Self Psychology in the literature on the human-companion animal bond, and briefly discusses the benefits and limitations of the theory in this context.

Self Psychology: A Psychodynamic Method and Theory of Selfhood, Part I

As a method of conceptualizing Self Psychology and the phenomenon in the context of the thesis, this section of the chapter offers an overview of the historical and epistemological origins of Self Psychology. This overview will focus on further exploration of the work of Self Psychology's founder, Heinz Kohut. In doing so, the chapter aims to capture the impetus of the theory's development, its purposes, and to introduce key terms and guiding principles. Like the previous chapter, in light of the limitations of this project and the volume of literature, the purpose of this chapter is to succinctly address the thesis' central questions through its overview of Self Psychology. As such, the following limits itself to a small number of laudable sources, including Kohut's own scholarship on Self Psychology.

The roots of Self Psychology can be traced to the metapsychologies of psychoanalysis, namely, ego psychology and object relations theory. Notably however, Self Psychology is most often conceptualized as a response to the clinical limitations of Freud's drive, economic, and structural theories (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Pine, 1988; St. Clair, 2004). Indeed, it appears that Kohut's simultaneous appropriation and rejection of these theories contributed to the formation of Self Psychology. Ultimately, Self Psychology joined the ranks of these foundational theories as one of the four psychologies, through its drastic re-visioning of core psychodynamic principles regarding the nature of psychopathology and motivation, and its centralization of narcissism and the self (Pine, 1988). As a method of practice, as well as a theoretical model, Self Psychology stands apart as a theory unto itself, while remaining an important influence on the contemporary Relational and Intersubjective models that continue to guide psychodynamic psychotherapy and clinical social work (Elisha, 2011; Kulka, 2012).

The Roots of Self Psychology: Heinz Kohut

Kohut's illustrious education and career began during his childhood in Vienna in the 1920s, where he received private tutoring in addition to traditional schooling (Strozier, 1985). A gifted student, Strozier (1985) notes that during his time at the University of Vienna in the 1930s, Kohut displayed independence and a penchant for breaking the rules. In 1936, for instance, Kohut decided to leave Vienna for medical training in Paris, ostensibly pursuing an independent education, all the while maintaining his enrollment at the University of Vienna. After graduating with a degree in medicine in 1938, psychoanalysis captured Kohut's interest. He began an analysis with one of Freud's colleagues, August Eichorn. Soon after – though the two never had and never would meet – Kohut followed Freud to England. Most importantly, Kohut's exodus was forced; he was attempting to flee the 1939 Nazi occupation of Vienna (Kieffer, 2012). He hoped to continue on to the United States in order to “escape war in Europe and build a new life” (Strozier, 1985, para. 10). However, without a visa, Kohut found himself in a British camp for refugees for several months in 1939. Though his position as a doctor afforded him certain advantages, Kohut caught pneumonia in the camp. By 1940, he had secured a visa and travelled to Chicago where his friend, Sigmund Levarie, taught music at the University of Chicago. There, Kohut began his American career as an intern in a small hospital, and soon after, worked his way up to resident of neurology at the University of Chicago. He was granted United States citizenship in 1945, and by 1947, completed the shift from medicine to psychoanalysis and began an assistant professorship in psychiatry (Strozier, 1985). Kohut would remain in Chicago from age twenty-seven to age sixty-eight, when he died, sadly, of lymphocytic leukemia (Kieffer, 2012; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Ornstein, 2008). Ornstein (2008) notes that Kohut's cancer was an ever-present threat during the last decade of his life.

As previously stated, Freudian drive, structural, and economic theories, ego psychology, and theory all appear to play a greater or lesser role in the development of Self Psychology. First, Kohut differed from Freud in his understanding of psychopathology, and more generally, of the human experience. From a Freudian perspective, the roots of mental illness reside in the internal conflict between the drives, or between the intrapsychic structures of id, ego and superego. Guilt, then, is interpreted as a moderator of impulses, keeping humans from following all of their instinctual whims (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Kohut began to question these existing frameworks, as they seemed to lack effectiveness in addressing certain characterological traits and problems he noticed in some of his patients. To Kohut, isolation and disconnection, not conflict, seemed to plague Western society. Thus, the literature frequently describes Freud's perspective in terms of "the Guilty man," and Kohut's in terms of "the Tragic man" (Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Swartz, 2007).

The late 20th century brought somewhat of a sociocultural sea change with regard to these experiences of tragic isolation, as reflected in the art and social discourses of the era, which grappled with themes of existential emptiness and fragmentation. In reference to a notable era in Self Psychology's development – the United States of the 1970s and 1980s – Flanagan (2008) states "[m]agazines such as *Self* flourished; popular novels such as *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and movies such as *Wall Street* chronicle society's preoccupations with power, individuality, and greed" (p. 164). Thus, Self Psychology emerged within a period and alongside a culture marked by a fixation on the self, and "not surprisingly, the pathologies of the times became 'self' pathologies: the empty self, the fragile self, the fragmented self" (p. 164). As such, Kohut's tragic man did not struggle with guilt and hidden fantasies, but rather, with an existence bereft of meaning and richness (Flanagan, 2008).

Like Bowlby, Kohut's clinical experience shaped his theory of Self Psychology (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Most importantly, it shaped his conceptualization of Self Psychology as both a theory and a clinical methodology (Bacal, 1995; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978). Bacal (1995) argues that Self Psychology's contributions to the field are largely practical with respect to narcissism, as Kohut developed the theory through his work with narcissistic personality disordered patients, who expressed not a conflict of drives, but "rather, a struggle to express the need for responses that would evoke, maintain, or enhance their sense of self" (Bacal, 1995, para. 2). Kohut (1977) explains this hypothesis, stating "the primary psychological configurations in the child's experiential world are not drives, [but]... drive experiences occur when the self is unsupported" (p. 171). In this way, Kohut broke from Freud again, in his theory of narcissism.

Freud conceptualized narcissism as consisting of two types: primary and secondary. Regarding the former, Freud believed that infants begin life in a state of magical, omnipotent thinking. As the central actors in their own worlds, libidinal impulses are necessarily turned inward in a state of *primary narcissism* (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 150). Gradually, as the infant's grandiose fantasies become interrupted by reality, and her attempts to satisfy herself are stymied, she begins to turn her libidinal energy toward others for fulfillment. This linear shift from self-love to object-love characterizes Freud's theory of healthy narcissism, while continued libidinal self-investment is thought to result in pathological narcissism (Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995).

In addition to a stagnation in libidinal energy, that energy can also be withdrawn from objects and back in to the self, in a process Freud called *secondary narcissism* (Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995). Thought to occur later in the life cycle, secondary narcissism results from "thwarted growth opportunities, disappointments, illness, trauma, or old age" and is marked

by a return to primary self-involvement (Flanagan, 2008, p.166). Overall, narcissism appears in Freudian contexts as “something to be outgrown, avoided, or treated (Flanagan, 2008, p.166).

Kohut disagreed with these judgments and questioned their therapeutic value in the analytic situation (Kohut, 1966; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978). Yet Kohut’s central challenge to classical theories of narcissism did not reflect a rejection of Freud’s theories per se, but rather a questioning of their impact on psychoanalytic practice; after all, a pejorative view on the part of the analyst of an analysand’s most pressing problem and internal experience could undermine treatment (Kohut, 1966). Indeed, the literature outlines Kohut’s deep reverence and loyalty to Freud. Moreover, Kohut never considered himself the radical dissenter of classical theory that others seemed to (Mitchell & Black, 1995; Strozier, 1985). Nonetheless, while a Freudian approach to narcissism in a clinical context focuses on helping the analysand arrive at more realistic perspective of self and the world through the relinquishment of grandiose fantasies, Kohut believed that this technique did not address what he observed as a central intrapsychic ambition: to achieve “the continuity and enhancement of a cohesive and vital sense of self” (Bacal, 1995, para. 3). Instead of guiding the analysand away from self- to object-love, Kohut believed that “transformed narcissism,” or the “redistribution of the patient’s narcissistic libido, and of the integration of the primitive psychological structures into the mature personality” proved a “more appropriate goal” for psychoanalysis (Kohut, 1966, para. 1).

Beginning with this foundation – a unique theory of narcissism – Kohut built the architecture of Self Psychology, as both a theory and clinical methodology (Bacal, 1995; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978). Though scholarly opinions seem to differ regarding which of Kohut’s writings could be unequivocally named the official treatise on Self Psychology, the literature identifies several of Kohut’s major works, and reflects on the impact of each, using adjectives

like “essential,” “preeminent,” “a classic,” or “groundbreaking” to describe nearly all of them (Kieffer, 2012; Kohut, 1984; Kulka, 2012; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978; Strozier, 1985). Given the limitations of this paper, the chapter will briefly outline some of Kohut’s most prominent major works. They have been selected on the basis of 1) their frequency in the literature and 2) their value in elucidating key concepts and guiding principles of Self Psychology.

Kohut attempted to achieve the goal of “transformed narcissism” through what he called *empathic immersion* and *vicarious introspection*, concepts first introduced in his 1959 paper, “Introspection, Empathy and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between Mode of Observation and Theory” (Bacal, 1995; Kieffer, 2012). Through introspection and empathically immersing himself in the patient’s subjectivity, Kohut believed the analyst could feel the emotions and experiences of the analysand as if they were his or her own, and thus “begin to appreciate the meaning” of the analysand’s internal world (as cited in Ornstein, (Ed.), 1978, p. 207). Bacal (1995) notes that Kohut himself characterized this paper as his best work. Strozier (1985) opines that the paper “broke new ground in psychoanalytic theory” (para. 24). Similarly, Ornstein (2008) argues that this paper “laid the groundwork, unbeknownst even to himself at that time, for what was to emerge a decade later as self psychology” (p. 571).

Ornstein (2008) identifies important themes from this paper, first arguing that Kohut proffered a “post-positivist” view of psychoanalytic inquiry, in that an individual’s understanding of the internal and external realities of the other can never be fully grasped, as one is always limited by subjectivity and the tools of observation (p. 572). This view remained consistent throughout Kohut’s career (Kohut, 1984). Second, Ornstein holds that this perspective involves re-visioning and expansion of the classical, “quasi-biological” concept of drives, and the analyst’s surveillance and interpretation of them (p. 572). Instead, Kohut argues

for another method of observation for achieving psychological insights: that of empathy (or more specifically, empathic immersion) and vicarious introspection, or “think[ing] ourselves into [another’s] place” (as cited in Ornstein, (Ed.), 1978, p. 207). In this way, Kohut introduced the concept of drivenness:

“...much clarity is gained if we admit that the psychoanalytic term ‘drive’ is derived from the introspective investigation of inner experience. Experiences may have the quality of drivenness (of wanting, wishing, or striving) to varying degrees. A drive then, is an abstraction from innumerable inner experiences...” (Kohut, 1959, para. 32).

In this way, and perhaps most importantly, Ornstein (2008) argues that Kohut’s model of driven experiences “become psychological entities open to empathy-based study in the clinical context” (p. 572).

Kulka (2012) argues that another oft-cited early paper, 1966’s “Forms and Transformations of Narcissism,” contains a fully realized and holistic representation of Kohut’s essential formulation of Self Psychology, a perspective Kohut himself apparently shared (p. 269). Kohut initially presented the paper in 1965, a period which Goldberg characterizes as the apex of Kohut’s career within the mainstream psychoanalytic community (as cited in Kohut, 1984). As a result, this paper was met with more acceptance than some of Kohut’s later work (Kohut, 1984). In it, Kohut expanded on his formulation of empathy as the preeminent technique in the clinical application of Self Psychology, stating

“[e]mpathy is an essential constituent of psychological observation and is, therefore, of special importance for the psychoanalyst who, as an empirical scientist, must first perceive the complex psychological configurations which are the raw data of human experience before he can attempt to explain them” (Kieffer, 2012; Kohut, 1966, para. 40).

Kulka (2012) holds that this paper set forth Kohut's foundational theory on narcissism, and two important ways in which it diverged from Freud's. First, while Freud conceptualized primary narcissism as an infantile, archaic force "lurking in the psyche," Kohut viewed it not as a personality structure, but as a "textural energy nurturing the individual's continuous sense of the self" (p. 269). Second, based on his understanding of the importance of fostering healthy narcissism, Kohut restructured primary narcissism into two distinct parts: the *narcissistic self* and the *idealized parent imago*. Thus, in his conceptualization of the narcissistic self, Kohut emphasizes the necessity of grandiosity in early childhood as an adaptive and protective process; a human desire "to be looked at and admired" (Kohut, 1966, para. 14). Similarly, the idealized parent imago is essential to the healthy development of the self, as the caregiver is perceived as powerful and perfect; the object of the child's "healthy and happy wide-eyed admiration" (Kohut, 1977, p. 172). Thus "the idealized qualities are loved as a source of gratifications to which the child clings tenaciously" (Kohut, 1966, para. 11). Like the classical Freudian view of narcissism, idealization is generally regarded as a defense in psychoanalytic theory; an impractical, fragmenting, and thus unhealthy view of reality. Akin to his theory of narcissism, Kohut argued for the inherent nature of human ideals, the role of idealism as a contributor to psychological health, and even as an opportunity for "merger with the transcendent" (Kulka, 2012, p. 271).

Kohut argues that ideally, these narcissistic structures "form a healthy continuum with the ego" (Kohut, 1966, para. 24). As such, the *mirroring* and approval of these displays of the narcissistic self by the selfobject serves an integrative function, allowing the self to simultaneously take pride and revel in their achievements, and cope with the reality of inevitable disappointments and failures. Similarly, the idealized parent imago, or "the internalized image

of perfection” acts as a figure to look up to and *idealize*, and provides a framework for ambition and goal-directed behavior, while also acting as “an adaptively useful object of longing disappointment,” when goals remain out of reach (Kohut, 1966, para. 24). Conversely, if selfobjects respond with disapproval to these early displays of grandiosity, or idealization of the parent imago remains unintegrated, the child’s narcissistic needs remain inhibited and unmet, resulting in deep feelings of shame often associated with personality disturbances (Kohut, 1966; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978). Kohut concludes with this powerful statement:

“In many instances, the reshaping of the narcissistic structures and their integration into the personality—the strengthening of ideals, and the achievement, even to a modest degree, of such wholesome transformations of narcissism as humor, creativity, empathy, and wisdom—must be rated as a more genuine and valid result of therapy than the patient’s precarious compliance with demands for a change of his narcissism into object love” (Kohut, 1966, para. 60).

The narcissistic self and idealized parent imago would later undergird Kohut’s conceptualization of the bipolar self, which will be defined shortly (Kulka, 2012). Most notably, Kulka argues that the ideas presented in the 1966 paper support Kohut’s claim that primary narcissism is not an inevitable hindrance or “a defensive move against development,” but “a development in itself” (p. 270).

Kohut’s writing increased after the mid-1960s, marked by the publication of several books (Strozier, 1985). Some scholars note that Kohut’s first book, *The Analysis of the Self* (1971), is considered his first major formal work on Self Psychology (Kieffer, 2012; Kulka, 2012). It also attracted strong criticism from the psychoanalytic community for expressing dissent against Freud’s theory of narcissism, “an act regarded by many as bordering on heretical”

(Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 156). It is in this volume that Kohut fully “defines narcissism as the ‘libinal investment in the self,’” thus formally outlining his re-visioning of narcissism (Rhodewalt & Sorrow, 2003, p. 520). In contrast to Freud’s linear view, Kohut argues that narcissism is formed and transformed throughout development (St. Clair, 2004). As such, Kohut discusses the necessity of selfobject functions – like mirroring – over time, based on the premise that narcissistic needs last throughout the lifespan. For instance, though narcissistic needs may shift over the years, the grandiose self, with its need for admiration and acceptance, continues to require selfobjects. St. Clair (2004) uses an example to summarize this concept, asking readers to reflect on the pain engendered by the “non-responsive person:” “[i]f we make efforts on behalf of someone who is indifferent and nonresponsive, we feel helpless and empty, with a lowered self-esteem and a narcissistic rage” (p. 154). Relatedly, Kohut’s theory of narcissism can also be explained using the example of a romantic adult relationship, wherein each partner serves as a selfobject. After all, it seems clear that loving relationships require a mutual process of mirroring and idealization, thus bolstering the self-esteem of each individual (St. Clair, 2004).

Kulka (2012) also notes that Kohut replaces the narcissistic self with the *grandiose self* during this period, while retaining the term idealized parent imago. Put simply, the former holds the ambitions of the self, while the latter contains the ideals and goals of the self (Kulka, 2012). The growth of these concepts further support Kohut’s ideas regarding cohesion of the self, and the role of narcissism during different developmental periods. St. Clair (2004) describes this process, stating

“[g]radually, the grandiose self becomes tamed and merged into an intact, cohesive personality. The maturing self of the child allows her to begin to see the idealized object

as a separate object, and aspects of the idealized parent image become introjected as the superego” (p. 149).

Kohut’s concept of *horizontal* and *vertical splits* refers to interruptions in this psychic integration. Horizontal splits occur through the repression of the unconscious. Further, the grandiose self fails to join with the reality of the ego, and thus remains in a state of “narcissistic deficiency,” characterized by depression and low self-esteem (St. Clair, 2004). Conversely, vertical splits remain conscious. Reality is disavowed by the unrealistic expectations of the grandiose self, characterized by vanity, or arrogant behavior (Kohut, 1971; St. Clair, 2004). As such, “[t]herapy seeks to remobilize the split-off or repressed grandiose and idealizing self by means of the narcissistic transference for the sake of taming the grandiose and exhibitionistic needs and bringing them under the influence of the reality ego” (as cited in St. Clair, 2004, pp. 161-162).

Kohut’s 1971 volume also introduced the concept of *narcissistic transferences*, later to be deemed *selfobject transferences* (Kohut, 1977; Kohut, 1984; Kulka, 2012). His theory of transference reflects yet another significant break from Freudian theory and technique. In the latter, transference is conceptualized as a projection of early childhood emotions, thoughts, behaviors and relational patterns with caregivers and other important figures onto the analyst, connoting a distortion in the analysand’s perspective. This understanding tends to focus on conflict, discredit or minimize the individual’s subjectivity, and leaves little room for exploring the contemporary or novel (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008). In contrast, Kohut conceptualized transference as a reactivation of narcissistic needs, thus centralizing the analysand’s subjective experience, serving to illuminate the present manifestations of these unmet childhood needs and their bearing on psychoanalytic treatment, and future self-growth. Thus, transference in Self

Psychology aims to wholly conceptualize past experiences, present experiences, and movement toward a “creative-productive future” for the self; in other words, cohesion (Kohut, 1984, p. 52). Stolorow et al. (1987) succinctly capture the important theoretical distinction between Freud and Kohut with regard to transference, and by extension, to the entire paradigm of psychoanalysis: “invoking the concept of objective reality, along with its corollary concept of distortion, obscures the subjective reality encoded in the patient's productions, ... precisely what psychoanalytic investigation should seek to illuminate” (as cited in Lieder, 1989, para. 41).

In his work with narcissistic personality disordered individuals, Kohut differentiated two subtypes of narcissistic transferences: *mirroring transferences* and *idealizing transferences* (St. Clair, 2004). In mirroring transferences, the analysand revisits the early phases of self-development, in which the grandiose self strives for a state of primary narcissism “by concentrating perfection on a grandiose self and assigning all imperfection to the outside” (St. Clair, 2004, p. 156). Mirroring transferences may take a number of forms. The analysand may experience the analyst as undifferentiated from the self. Or, the analysand may recognize the analyst as a separate self, but only insofar as the analyst provides narcissistic needs to the grandiose self (St. Clair, 2004).

Just as mirroring transferences relate to the activation of the grandiose self, idealizing transferences relate to the activation of the idealized parent imago. The analysand thus experiences an arousal of the early developmental phase wherein the self strives to merge with the perfection of the idealized object. When the analyst is perceived as perfectly good in an idealizing transference, the analysand feels strong and competent; conversely, a fissure in this perception can contribute to feelings of worthlessness. Thus narcissistic (selfobject) transferences reveal data about the health and developmental phases of narcissistic structures.

An unmirrored grandiose self, for example, continues to experience low self-esteem in adulthood, perhaps manifesting as the rageful or overly-demanding personality often observed in individuals with narcissistic personality disorder (Kohut, 1971; St. Clair, 2004).

Stolorow (1986) notes the consistent presence of two other important clinically-focused concepts – *optimal frustration* and *transmuting internalization* – in much of Kohut’s later work, but argues that their most elaborate description occurred in the *The Analysis of the Self*. To Kohut, the formation of the self depends on this dual process of optimal frustration and transmuting internalization, which occurs in early childhood and in psychoanalysis. In a treatment context, the two occur through the therapeutic engagement with narcissistic (selfobject) transferences (Stolorow, 1986). The analysand gradually develops the ability to perform the selfobject functions initially provided by the analyst, like self-acceptance, self-empathy, self-soothing, and inner strength. In addition, the analyst’s empathy and acceptance act as a “facilitating medium,” which reactivates processes of psychological growth and self-formation once interrupted in childhood (Stolorow, 1986, para. 21). Kohut knew, however, that no analyst can ever provide perfect empathy or gratification, nor should she. It is optimal frustration, then, which acts as another ingredient in the facilitating medium, allowing the individual to experience the empathic failures of the selfobject in the new context of the narcissistic (selfobject) transference (Bacal, 1995). In other words, optimal frustration is necessary and inevitable, as the empathic failures of caregivers, or the analyst, activate the individual’s ability to locate love, acceptance, and strength within the self (Flanagan, 2008).

Kulka reports that Kohut’s second book, *The Restoration of the Self* (1977), labeled and solidified Kohut’s work as Self Psychology, and formally introduced the concept of the bipolar self first outlined in his 1966 paper (Kohut, 1977; Kulka, 2012). Kohut’s initial understanding of

the self-as-polar rests on his definition of dual narcissistic forms: the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago. Flanagan (2008) defines Kohut's "pole" as "an aspect or pathway of development within the self that has its own energy and needs" (p. 170). The needs of each pole depend on selfobjects, and their provision of functions like attunement and acceptance, which serve to maintain self-cohesion (Flanagan, 2008).

This initial concept would later become the somewhat convoluted tripolar self (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984; Leider, 1989; Stolorow, 1986). Flanagan (2008) addresses this confusion, noting that just as Freud's use of id, ego, and superego "were probably not the best choices to identify parts of the self in English, so too the choice of the word *pole* [emphasis original] for parts of the self is awkward" (p. 170). The tripolar or "tripartite" model actually appeared earlier in Kohut's writing, through his discussion of *twinship*, or, the self's need for feelings of mutuality and sameness (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1971; Kohut, 1977). However, the concept of *twinship transference* or *alter ego transference*, was generally included under the umbrella of mirroring transferences until later in Kohut's career and scholarship (Kohut, 1977; St. Clair, 2004).

The Restoration of the Self marks another turning point for Kohut, in terms of the psychoanalytic establishment's reaction to the bipolar/tripolar model. Following Kohut's formal challenge to Freud's structural model, Kieffer (2012) writes that "he soon became a pariah in psychoanalytic circles" (para. 7). Kohut wrote of the pain and humiliation he felt as his colleagues seemed to drift away from him (para. 7). Conversely, Kulka (2012) notes that soon after the publication of *Restoration*, Kohut presented his model of the self at the inaugural Self Psychology conference, held in Chicago in 1978, where "his most prominent followers openly praised what seemed then as a final consolidation of the Kohutian principles" (p. 271). This type

of intriguing commentary on the controversy surrounding Kohut appears throughout the literature (Kieffer, 2012; Kohut, 1984; Kulka, 2012; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Stozier, 1985).

Overall, Kohut's 1977 book presented a number of important concepts, namely a re-envisioned structure of the self, represented by the new terminology of the bipolar model. As a result, the uniqueness of Kohut's clinical approaches became clearer as well. If the Freudian structural and drive models are indeed replaced with the bipolar self,

“the purpose of remembering in the analysis of disturbances of the self is not to ‘make conscious’ the unconscious components of structural conflicts... – a move... from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, from the id to the ego – but to strengthen the coherence of the self” (Kohut, 1977, p. 184).

To Kohut, this is achieved through the therapeutic utilization of empathy (Elisha, 2011; Kohut, 1977).

Kohut's final book, 1984's *How Does Analysis Cure?* endeavors to address several questions raised by 1977's *The Restoration of the Self* (Kohut, 1984; Leider, 1989; Stolorow, 1986). Notably, the former attempts to present new ideas regarding the nature of empathy, the psychoanalytic cure, and selfobject transferences, and grapples with remaining problems and challenges in Self Psychology. In response to criticism that his 1977 volume advocates “that certain structural defects in the self should in [cases of disorders of the self] be allowed to remain unhealed,” Kohut argues that his “central hypothesis” has remained steadfast throughout *The Analysis of the Self* (1971) and *The Restoration of the Self* (1977) (Kohut, 1984, p. 4). This hypothesis, which centers around the analytic situation and Kohut's concept of selfobject transferences, can be described as follows: problems or “defects” in the self elicit and sustain selfobject transferences in the therapy. Through the process of transmuting internalization, the

analyst's engagement with these selfobject transferences provides an opportunity to fill in gaps left by unmet selfobject needs in childhood, thus healing the "defects" of the self (Kohut, 1984, p. 4). Nonetheless, Lieder (1989) notes that Kohut's career-long inquiry on the nature of the psychoanalytic cure remains ambiguous in the 1984 book, insofar as Kohut posits that empathy in and of itself does not make a cure, but rather "the therapeutic process requires a phase of understanding, sometimes very protracted, necessarily followed by a phase of explanation" (Lieder, 1989, para. 32).

Kohut (1984) generally abstained from introducing new theoretical concepts into the field of Self Psychology in his final book, with the exception of his elaborations on the tripolar self. In addition to the grandiose self pole, and the idealized parent imago pole, Kohut described the role of the twinship or alter ego pole in his model of the self, stating "we now conceive of the self as consisting of three major constituents (the pole of ambitions, the pole of ideals, and the intermediate area of talents and skills)" (p. 192). Kohut (1984) argued that he based this addition on clinical observations that could not be contained in the bipolar model. Thus, the twinship pole is perhaps best addressed through its manifestation as a third selfobject transference: "in which the damaged intermediate area of talents and skills seeks a selfobject that will make itself available for the reassuring experience of essential likeness" (p. 193).

In sum, Kohut developed Self Psychology under the premise that the fulfillment or unfulfillment of relational and environmental needs, not conflicts, contributed to psychopathology and the intrapsychic structures of the self. Thus, his work is characterized by a new formulation of the psychological landscape and personality; one rooted in empathy, the honoring of subjective experience, and the acknowledgement of the human need for validation, connection, and cohesion across the lifespan.

The Roots of Self Psychology: An Overview Regarding Controversy

Kohut's professional relationships with ego psychologists Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann are well-documented in the literature (Kieffer, 2012; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Strozier, 1985). As previous sections of the chapter have shown, Self Psychology appears rooted in ego psychology, particularly with regard to Kohut's attention to the role of the social environment in the development of the self. Strozier (1985) and others note that prior to the mid 1960s, Kohut was known as "Mr. Psychoanalysis" for his adherence to and respect for Freudian theory, and leadership in the psychoanalytic community (Kieffer, 2012). Notably, Kohut served as the president of the American Psychoanalytic Association from 1964 to 1965 (Ornstein, 2008). Yet Kohut's growing ideas soon eclipsed his commitment to tradition and the approval of his forebears. Strozier (1985) reports that Anna Freud "minimized the importance of *The Analysis of the Self* in 1971 and after that quietly withdrew from Kohut's ideas" (para. 22). Kieffer (2012) goes further, and describes this withdrawal as a desertion (para. 7). Similarly, other colleagues openly disapproved of or even attacked Kohut's theories, leaving Kohut desolate, confused, and "crushed" (Strozier, 1985, para. 22).

Just as Bowlby faced criticism from the British Psychoanalytic Society, particularly for his theoretical dissent from Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, Kohut's experiences of rejection and controversy were both theoretical and political (Bretherton, 1992; Kagan, 2006). However, the maelstrom of conflict seems particularly volatile in Kohut's case, and appears tied to his perceived disrespect of his predecessors as much as to his rejection of classical psychoanalytic models (Bacal, 1995; Elisha, 2011; Flanagan, 2008). To offer one example, Hartmann's theory of narcissism appears very similar to Kohut's, as both discuss narcissism in terms of "libinal investment" and the self (St. Clair, 2004, p. 147). Kohut (1977) speaks to these issues in *The*

Restoration of the Self, particularly with regard to Hartmann and Winnicott, yet seems to discredit the logic of this particular controversy, stating “my continuing lack of integration of their contributions with mine is not due to any disrespect – on the contrary, I have great admiration for most of them – but to the nature of the task that I have set for myself” (p. xx). Kohut goes on to describe this task as his ongoing struggle to reckon with clinical problems that seem beyond the bounds of existing psychoanalytic theories, theories which he perceives as fluid, rather than stable and monolithic. He uses this rationale to explain that “[t]o the best of my knowledge I am giving full credit to those whose work has in fact influenced my methods and opinions. But my focus is not on scholarly completeness – it is directed elsewhere” (p. xx).

Kohut’s lack of deference to his predecessors also left scholars to speculate as to the roots of Self Psychology, hypothesizing that object relations theorists Winnicott and Fairbairn foreshadowed, if not unequivocally influenced, Kohut’s work (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; St. Clair, 2004). Even a compulsory understanding of object relations and Self Psychology reveals clear parallels between them, like their shared use of the terms self and object. Further, Winnicott and Kohut share the belief that “the provision of a new object (or new experience) facilitates development that had been thwarted in early childhood” (Kieffer, 2012, para. 19). Yet Kohut reportedly insisted that he was unversed in object relations (Elisha, 2011). It appears that both Winnicott and Fairbairn considered Kohut’s lack of acknowledgement offensive (Flanagan, 2008). Thus, despite Self Psychology’s eventual designation as a metapsychology in and of itself, the circumstances surrounding such an esteemed categorization were not without incident.

Self Psychology: A Psychodynamic Method and Theory of Selfhood, Part II

Like the section above, the current section of the chapter aims to explore and contextualize Self Psychology in the service of framing the phenomenon and the thesis. The following further explains previously discussed key terms and guiding principles of Self

Psychology, and offers definitions and descriptions regarding additional concepts and contemporary trends. This will allow the reader to deepen their understanding of and engagement with the empirical research and analyses contained in later sections of the chapter, where the thesis examines the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Self Psychology. Finally, in keeping with the paradigms that inform the thesis, the following aims toward a critical reading and analysis of Self Psychology, while also providing clear and succinct information.

Key Concepts in Self Psychology: Basic Principles

To summarize, Kohut conceptualized the self as both the central structure of the personality, as well as a cohesive “unit” (Kohut, 1977, p. 99). His understanding of narcissism, in both its healthy and pathological manifestations, and its contributions to the development of the self, undergirds Self Psychology. Similarly, Kohut regards the role of selfobjects, and their provision of acceptance, ambition, ideals, and merging, as crucial to development of the self throughout life. (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; Ornstein (Ed.), 1978; Stolorow, 1986).

Flanagan (2008) identifies three concepts as central to Kohut’s framework of Self Psychology: the significance and meaning of empathy, or, vicarious introspection, the tripolar self, and the role of selfobjects. Stolorow (1986) also argues that Kohut’s focus on empathy and selfobjects, and their roles in both early development and clinical treatment, constitute the essence of Self Psychology, adding that the centrality of subjective experience also acts as an important guiding principle.

This brief overview of Self Psychology’s basic principles illuminates its powerful and revolutionary perspective on the importance of compassion, connection, and both individual and collective experience. It is important to restate Kohut’s inclusion of non-human selfobjects in the context of these principles. Thus symbols, art, music, experiences, and non-human beings such as companion animals are understood within the framework of Self Psychology as

contributors to the well-being and growth of the self (as cited in Brown, 2011; Fine, 2006; Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984).

Key Concepts in Self Psychology: Definitions of Terms

To review, the chapter has heretofore outlined or defined a number of key terms in the context of the chapter's historical review of Self Psychology, including: *self*, *selfobject*, *narcissism*, *primary narcissism*, *secondary narcissism*, *cohesion*, *bipolar self*, *tripolar self*, *empathy*, *the grandiose (or narcissistic) self*, *the idealized parent imago*, *twinsip*, *mirroring*, *idealization*, *horizontal splits*, *vertical splits*, *empathic immersion*, *selfobject (or narcissistic) transferences*, *mirroring transferences*, *idealizing transferences*, *vicarious introspection*, *optimal frustration*, and *transmuting internalization*. In order to further elucidate our understanding of the current chapter and the thesis as a whole, the following offers additional explanation of and attention to some of these important concepts.

Narcissistic shame and rage.

Given its centrality in the framework of Self Psychology, earlier sections of the chapter offer a somewhat detailed description of Kohut's theory of narcissism. However, the role of narcissistic shame and rage warrants further explanation. Mollon (2001) explains "[p]rimitive forms of shame, self-consciousness and embarrassment are shown by infants when their expectations of a responsive maternal face are disrupted...narcissistic affects arise in the *gap* [emphasis original], the gaping crack between expectation and the actual response of the other" (pp. 5-6). In other words, the narcissistic, grandiose self bases her very existence on the consistent presence and resources provided by the mirroring or idealizing selfobjects. This helps explain why rage and shame arise when the expectations of the grandiose self go unfulfilled. As such, the unfolding experience of narcissism, and its accompanying shame and frustration,

reflects Kohut's empathic understanding of narcissism as a complex developmental process, rather than a unidirectional process of unhealthy self-love (St. Clair, 2004).

Self.

The very concept of the self continues to elicit debate and investigation of its multiple meanings across fields and disciplines, notably in the psychoanalytic literature (St. Clair, 2004). Nonetheless, the term self seems to connote both the self as an individual, and the self as a personality structure that is experienced subjectively by the individual (St. Clair, 2004). Kohut understood the self as an intrapsychic structure, but more frequently, particularly in his later work, he discussed the self as a cohesive whole unto itself, as well as the experience of selfness. St. Clair (2004) defines Kohut's self as the "locus of relationships and an active agent performing functions" (Kohut, 1977; St. Clair, 2004, p. 149). This view of the centrality of selfhood reflects Kohut's efforts toward a more experience-near understanding of human struggle and existence. Further, "the self is viewed as having a tremendous desire and capacity to grow if its needs are met" (Flanagan, 2008, p. 164).

Selfobjects.

While selfobjects and selfobject functions (or needs) can be understood as distinct in Self Psychology, selfobjects are defined, in part, by the functions they serve for the self (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). Stolorow (1986) speaks to this concept, noting that selfobjects are not defined as distinct entities or people, but rather as constellations of functions that contribute to the cohesion and maintenance of the self. However, these functions require a particular relationship. In Kohut's efforts to empathically understand the subjectivities of his patients, he concluded that "significant others are experienced as nonautonomous components of the self," or, selfobjects (Banai, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, p 227). This highlights Kohut's attention to the significance

of early relationships in the formation of the self. Further, Stolorow (1986) emphasizes the clinical significance of this concept: “[o]nce an analyst has grasped the idea that his responsiveness can be experienced subjectively as a vital, functional component of a patient's self-organization, he will never listen to analytic material in quite the same way” (para. 6).

The relational and developmental aspects of selfobjects also illuminate “the ways in which Kohut’s theories begin to transcend modern Cartesian notions of the isolated mind” (Elisha, 2011, p 135). While Kohut’s theories indeed emphasize the individual self, they also reflect the essential role of interconnectedness with others. This perspective also explains another crucial component of selfobjects: their role throughout the lifespan. Indeed, selfobjects are viewed as “necessary as oxygen and food... from infancy to the end of life” (as cited in Kieffer, 2012, para. 11). Selfobjects function to provide empathy, acceptance, mirroring, ideals, and feelings of alikeness that sustain the self.

Most importantly, Kohut’s development of the concept of selfobjects extends beyond anthropocentrism. Selfobject functions can be provided by non-human beings, including objects, experiences, cultural phenomena, and animals (Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011b; Fine, 2006; Kohut, 1984). The significance of companion animal and other non-human selfobjects will be explored further later in the chapter, as they form the thesis’ central hypothesis.

Selfobject or narcissistic transferences.

Self Psychology as theory, and Self Psychology as practice, are deeply intertwined (Bacal, 1995; Brown, 2011). As the above has shown, Kohut developed a theory of self in response to clinical issues of the self. Thus, many of the concepts explored in this chapter refer to theoretical ideas that apply directly to clinical interventions, as shown through discussion of selfobject (or narcissistic) transferences. In the case of a fragmented or injured self,

psychoanalysis can reactivate narcissistic needs previously unmet by selfobjects in early childhood, thereby establishing a selfobject transference (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). Thus, selfobject transferees are understood as reflective of early childhood experiences, yet also act as contemporary relational experiences, wherein the analyst becomes the selfobject, endeavoring to meet narcissistic needs in a new and different way. As St. Clair (2004) states, “it is the presence of the narcissistic transference that confirms a diagnosis of narcissistic or self disorder” (p. 156). The following will add to previous definitions of mirroring and idealizing transference types.

Mirroring transference.

Kohut & Wolf (1978) succinctly define a mirroring transference as an analytic experience “in which an insufficiently or faultily responded to childhood need for a source of accepting-confirming 'mirroring' is revived in the treatment situation” (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, para. 3). In describing the features of the mirroring transference, Kohut & Wolf (1978) note the importance of empathy. In a beneficial mirroring transference, the analyst conveys empathic attention to the analysand’s narcissistic needs for mirroring and approval, resulting in the analysand feeling “whole and self-accepting” (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, para. 19).

Idealizing transference.

Like a mirroring transference, Kohut & Wolf (1978) clearly define an idealizing transference as an analytic experience “in which a need for merger with a source of ‘idealized’ strength and calmness is similarly revived” (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, para. 3). In a beneficial idealizing transference, the analyst empathically understands the need to be idealized; to be seen as admirable and strong. This contributes to similar feelings of strength in the analysand (St. Clair 2004).

The bipolar self and the tripolar self.

In the context of the bipolar self, there exists a tension between the two structures of the grandiose self and the idealized parent imago, and their separate orientations. The ambitions of the self are located at the pole of the grandiose self, and ideals at the idealized parent imago pole (Kieffer, 2012; Kohut, 1977; St. Clair, 2004). This tension and intrapsychic energy motivates the self to act; he is an individual “‘driven’ by his ambitions and ‘led’ by his ideals” (Kohut, 1977, p. 180). Later in his career, Kohut introduced a third pole, the pole of twinship, to describe the self’s need for kinship, and feelings of alikeness (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984).

The grandiose self (or the pole of ambitions).

St. Clair (2004) defines the grandiose self as “healthy self-assertiveness vis-à-vis the mirroring selfobject” (p. 153). The development of the grandiose self occurs through selfobject responsiveness to the child’s expressions of grandiosity and exhibitionism. Nontraumatic and approving selfobject responses to these displays contribute to a cohesive self, while rejecting, cruel, or absent selfobject responses result in damage to the self (Kohut, 1977; St. Clair, 2004).

The idealized parent imago (or the pole of ideals).

St. Clair (2004) defines the idealized parent imago as “healthy admiration for the idealized selfobject” (p. 153). When the selfobject parent tolerates, welcomes, and responds with empathy to the child’s need for merger and idealization, the idealized parent imago is established. The strength and attention to goals inherent to the idealized parent imago cannot develop without opportunities to merge with and look up to the idealized selfobject (Kohut, 1966; Kohut, 1977, St. Clair, 2004).

Twinship.

Flanagan (2008) notes that Kohut's inclusion of the twinship pole later in his life and career leaves questions regarding the theories of motivation or anxiety inherent to it. The author posits that twinship speaks to the need to be seen not as strange or different, but similar to others; the feeling that no one is "the same as me," can elicit anxiety (p. 177).

Contemporary Clinical Applications of Self Psychology: An Overview

While Self Psychology itself is still practiced today, it is often cited for its influence on the more contemporary Relational and Intersubjective psychodynamic theories (Bacal, 1995; Elisha, 2011; Flanagan, 2008; Kieffer, 2012; Kulka, 2012; Stolorow, 1995). Though Kohut's definition of self underscores the experience of an individual's distinct wholeness and the value of the subjective experience, his theory of narcissism and the need for selfobjects over time reflect the complementary concept of interdependence, and connection to others (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1977). As such, Elisa (2011) and others note Kohut's role as an important "transitional figure," who opened doors to a new era of psychodynamic theory and practice (p. 135; Kulka, 2012). Kohut's attention to subjectivity, interconnectedness, and empathy can be clearly observed in Relational and Intersubjective approaches, which ground themselves in an acknowledgment of relational patterns, and the impact of both historic and current relationships on clinical treatment (Elisha, 2011; Kieffer, 2004; Kulka, 2012).

Further, Kulka (2012) argues that Self Psychology reflects not only the trappings of the postmodern paradigm of subjectivity, but contributed to the Intersubjectivist perspective, which emphasizes the honoring of personal context and experience, while recognizing "the myth of the individual as a discrete unit and a constant being" (p. 265). Similarly, Kulka argues, Relational theorists, who centralize relational dynamics and relationships in the clinical situation, have

profoundly shifted psychodynamic theory and practice in their attention to issues like sameness and difference, identity, and authenticity. The author holds that these developments mirror the powerful ideals of equality and liberty, rooted in Western democracy. The chapter will further expand on sociocultural issues in Self Psychology below.

Sociocultural Issues and Self Psychology: An Overview

Flanagan forthrightly (2008) states: “[I]ike most other psychodynamic theories, self-psychology does not pay much attention to specific issues of race, class, culture, gender development, sexual orientation, or even biology” (p. 184). Moreover, Self Psychology has been criticized for focusing on individualism at the expense of multiple sociocultural contexts and identities. As previously mentioned, Self Psychology appears laden with the mores and values of its time, especially the American emphasis on individualism (Flanagan, 2008).

Yet, in his final book, Kohut (1984) directly addresses the impact of cultural forces and cultural selfobjects. Kohut conceptualized cultural selfobjects in the context of social group membership. Just as individual selves idealize individual selfobjects, cultures too, contain “cultural hero-ideal[s]” (p. 203). By extension, just as traumatic selfobject failures impact individuals, failure of these cultural selfobject functions reproduces collective alienation, fragmentation, and pain, particularly within marginalized groups.

Flanagan (2008) points out that those within feminist, LGBT advocacy, and social justice-oriented circles have shown a history of acceptance and interest regarding Self Psychology. First, as pointed to in previous sections of the chapter, Self Psychology’s emphasis on the value of subjective truth and experience closely mirrors feminist, post-positivist, anti-racist, and social constructionist perspectives, particularly in terms of the intersections between oppression, privilege, and identity formation (Flanagan, 2008; Kulka, 2012; Ornstein, 2008). This becomes especially clear when considering the application of Self Psychology to severe

systemic problems like racism and sexism, in the context of sociocultural selfobject failures: “People of color, the poor, many women, homosexuals, the disabled – to name a few groups – are rarely mirrored for their special qualities” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 185). Similarly, the pervasive devaluation and silencing of members of marginalized groups leaves little opportunity for idealization and merger, or twinship.

Kohut also shook the very pillars of psychoanalytic theory in his challenging of Freud’s views on gender and sexuality. By placing the subjective experience of cohesion and vigor as the key indicator of psychological well-being, Kohut necessarily created a model wherein “heterosexuality is not held out to be any more healthy than homosexuality” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 184). Rather, sexual development hinges on the individual’s experience of becoming their most cohesive and healthy sexual self.

With regard to gender and gender oppression, though he did not explicitly join with the feminist movement within psychoanalysis and its attempts to dismantle the sexist underpinnings of the field, Kohut’s rejection of the primacy of the drives represented a rejection of Freud’s emphasis on sexuality and phallocentrism. In *A Note on Female Sexuality*, Kohut (2011) states “[t]hat the woman's wish for children should...be reducible to the wish for a penis that she experienced when she was a little girl has always struck me as one of the few badly skewed opinions held by Freud” (Kohut & Ornstein, 2011, p. 285).

Kohut also rejected gendered views of parenting, and in fact, argued for a gender-neutral understanding of child development (Teicholz, 1999). He argued that selfobject functions are not gender-specific, and can be provided by either parent (Kohut, 1971; Teicholz, 1999). Additionally, he underscored that males and females appear to share experiences in the context of self-development. As Teicholz (1999) states, “although Kohut was no feminist and although

he did not directly question the gender status quo, his theory did provide a framework for ‘equal opportunity’ parenting and equal opportunity childhood development” (p. 226).

Given Kohut’s treatment of gender outlined above, it must be stated that Self Psychology’s attention to sameness becomes problematic in its potential blindness to the impact of difference in the context of sociocultural identity. Social constructions like race and gender contain real and dangerous consequences for members of marginalized and oppressed groups. These themes and others will be explored further in the following section of the chapter.

Conceptualizing Human-Companion Animal Relationships: Through the Lens of Self Psychology

As a reflection of the chapter’s efforts to conceptualize human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Self Psychology, it is essential to add to the theoretical concepts previously outlined through a review some of the key themes included in the phenomenon chapter. These themes include 1) the relatively recent emergence of research and practice on the intersection between mental health and the human-companion animal bond, 2) the oft-cited interconnections between human-companion animal relationships, interpersonal violence, and animal abuse, 3) cross-disciplinary themes in the human-companion animal bond literature, particularly issues related to anthropomorphism, utilitarianism, inferiority/superiority, morality, animal consciousness, and spirituality, and 4) the exploration of human-companion animal relationships in historical, contemporary, and mental health contexts. The significance of gender and sexism, race and racism, and place are investigated within the three contexts. This research method reveals additional threads of content, such as the social construction of companion animals, the intersectionality of sexism and speciesism, gender differences in human-companion animal relationships, African American agricultural communities, the effects

of police dog violence in communities of Color, and issues of race and racism in animal attachment and the animal welfare field (Arkow & Ascione, 1999; Ascione, 1997; Ascione, Weber, & Thompson, et al., 2007; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Beierl, 2008; as cited in Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Braje, 2011; Cohen, 2002; Faver & Strand, 2003; Hoffer, 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Levinson, 1978; Miller & Lago, 1990; Ory & Goldberg, 1983; Preece, 2011; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005).

Some of these themes appear in the following literature review on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Self Psychology. At the same time, as outlined in previous chapters, it is important to reiterate the broad scope of human-companion animal relationships, and to continue to acknowledge the relative absence of marginalized voices in this body of scholarship. Rural People of Color and women across racial groups remain noticeably excluded from research and discussion on human-companion animal relationships.

In consideration of these gaps in literature and research, Brown's scholarship appears unique in its framing of the phenomenon, through the author's use of Self Psychology, and through her attention to sociocultural identities, intersectionality, and difference. In keeping with the epistemologies and interests which undergird the thesis, Brown's use of a Self Psychology framework contributes to the investigation of the multiple meanings and diverse experiences which human-companion animal relationships engender. Self Psychology serves as a compelling lens with which to view the phenomenon, in light of the thesis' research questions, hypothesis, and feminist, anti-racist, and social constructionist paradigms. As such, the thesis remains focused on the theories, the phenomenon, and their intersection with multiple sociocultural identities, with the purpose of informing rural social work, and exploring the reparative potential of human-companion animal relationships.

Human-Companion Animal Relationships: A Self Psychology Lens

To review, historical and theoretical perspectives on the human-companion animal bond in the West underscore the importance of these relationships in the emotional and psychological lives of people. In particular, the characterization of companion animals as members of the family, and as caregivers, -getters, and -takers, helps explain the frequent utilization of Attachment Theory in the context of the phenomenon (Bonas et al., 2000; Cohen, 2002; as cited in Fine, Ed., 2000; Geist, 2011; Kurdek, 2009; Noonan, 2008; Pagani, et al., 2009; Sable, 1995; as cited in Walsh, 2009; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011). Moreover, Ainsworth (1989) suggests that attachment and Attachment Theory can be universalized and applied cross-culturally, perhaps further elucidating the hegemonic influence of Attachment Theory. Counterarguments warn of the dangers of this universalization (Bretheron, 1992; Brown, 2005; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg 1988).

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the misuse of Attachment Theory, attempts to apply it across species, and inattention to the particularities of human-companion animal relationships have proven problematic. Moreover, despite the dominance of Attachment Theory in the literature on human-companion animal relationships, commitment to diversity in both demographic variables and methodologies appears limited. This inattention to difference reveals itself clearly in the absence of research investigating a broad range of human-companion animal relationships and experiences, particularly in the context of marginalized sociocultural identities. Yet, as the thesis has shown, the literature suggests that gender, race, and place – and experiences of marginalization, oppression, and violence based on the targeting of these identities – appear historically, clinically, and subjectively relevant to these relationships (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2005; Campbell, et al., 1998; Chitwood, et al., 2011; Faver & Strand,

2003; Glasser, 2011; Guyette, 2011; Harris & Worthen, 2003; Herzog, 2007; Markovits & Queen, 2009; Prato-Previde, et al., 2006; Skabelund, 2008; Walsh, 2009; Wolch, Brownlow, & Lassiter, 2001).

In contrast to Attachment Theory, Self Psychology appears much less frequently in the literature on the human-companion animal bond. Brown (2007; 2011a) suggests that that this dearth of research may reflect the difficulty in empirically measuring the theories and concepts outlined in Self Psychology. However, this empirical limitation also reflects one of Self Psychology's strengths. Let us return to Walsh (2009), cited in Chapter Two. The author observes the absence of scholarly attention on the impact of marginalization, particularly race and racism, in the context of human-companion animal relationships, stating: “[f]or instance, in low-income minority communities where police dogs are used to intimidate and apprehend suspects, residents (especially children) might more likely develop fear of dogs or see them as providing aggressive home protection rather than companionship” (p. 467).

This brief statement reflects notable similarities between Walsh's perspective, and Kohut's theory of Self Psychology, and may help illuminate the relevance and efficacy of Self Psychology as a lens with which to view the human-companion animal bond. First, like Kohut, Walsh highlights the crucial importance of honoring subjectivity with regard to human experiences and relationships. This allows space to explore multiple meanings and narratives (both positive and negative) of human-companion animal bonds that may extend beyond the boundaries of their dominant social constructions – like animals as “members of the family.” Second, by addressing the importance of subjectivity, Walsh attends to the ways in which difference and individual experience may contribute to the formation of relationships and the self. In other words, the role of companion animals as family members may be a frequently cited

sentiment, but what of the role of companion animal as aggressor? How does racism and/or police dog violence contribute to one's sense of self and future relationships with other animals, or animal selfobjects? These questions reveal the importance of empathy, and of honoring subjective (and often marginalized) voices, in order to achieve a complex and holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Brown's (2002; 2004; 2005; 2007; 2011) research on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Self Psychology grapples with similar questions. The following will attempt to explore and synthesize the author's scholarship, and its connection to the research question and hypothesis, which argues that the application and generalization of Attachment Theory to human-companion animal relationships lacks theoretical coherence and clarity with regard to the particularity and specificity of these bonds. Moreover, the thesis posits that Self Psychology may add to a more holistic theoretical formulation of the human-companion animal bond, particularly for women in contemporary and historical rural contexts, and holds that the human-companion animal bond holds potential for improving mental health for rural women, when explored beyond dominant theoretical frameworks.

The following review focuses on the scholarship of Brown, which explores the phenomenon through the lens of Self Psychology. This review includes discussion of three key, overlapping themes: 1) companion animals as selfobjects and/or providers of selfobject functions, 2) Self Psychology as a framework for exploring the uniqueness, specificity, range, and multiple meanings of human-companion animal relationships, including the ineffable and/or spiritual qualities of human-companion animal relationships, and 3) the intersections between human-companion animal relationships, Self Psychology, and issues of race and racism.

Human-companion animal relationships and selfobject functions.

In addition to Brown's attention to the role of sociocultural identities and oppression in the context of the phenomenon, much of the author's research focuses on companion animals' ability to provide selfobject needs for humans. As such, her scholarship forms the basis for the discussion of human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Self Psychology in the current chapter.

In a unique qualitative study, Brown (2007) hypothesizes that companion animals can serve important selfobject functions for individuals. According to the author, this area of research "has never been done before" (p. 330). Specifically, the study aims to clarify the primary selfobject function of each companion animal, and thus attempts to measure and categorize these primary selfobject functions as mirroring, idealizing, or twinship types (p. 330). Researchers developed a "scoring guide to selfobject type" based on definitions provided by Wolf (1988) and Silverstein, the principal investigator and a "self psychology expert" (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 331).

Researchers conducted convenience and snowball sampling. The principal investigator was previously acquainted with 54% of the 24 participants, who were recruited through a horse rescue internet group. It is important to note Brown's attention to demographic data represented in the sample, particularly the participants' self-identified sociocultural identities. Inclusion of racial and gender identities, education, relationship, and parenthood statuses, age, family income, birthplace, and geographical area, offers a more complete picture of the participants, and acknowledges the impact of these sociocultural identities and locations. As such, Brown notes the predominance of White, middle-aged and college-educated females, with fewer than two children, represented in the sample. Twenty-three participants identified as female, and one as

male, while 20 participants identified as White, one as Japanese, and three as African American. Twenty-three participants reported birthplace as the United States, while one reported Canada. Forty-four marked the mean age, 1.2 the mean number of children, and all participants reported completing “some college” or higher regarding education status. Fifty percent of participants were married, and the same percentage reported less than \$50,000 in family income; the other half of participants reported \$50,000 or more in family income. Interestingly, Brown notes the past and present geographical locations of participants. Forty-two percent of participants reported currently living in a rural area, and 33% reported growing up in a rural area.

Participants completed semi-structured, one-hour interviews addressing the presence of selfobject needs and functions in relationships with companion animals. Participants selected the currently living companion animal “they were most attached to” to serve as the focus of the interview (p. 331). Attachment was partially defined through context, as “the animal whose loss would be most upsetting” (p. 331). The final companion animal sample consisted of one rabbit, four cats, nine dogs, and ten horses.

Sixty-seven percent of interviews indicated the presence of both primary and secondary selfobject types. Overwhelmingly, 63% of responses showed mirroring as either the primary, secondary, or sole selfobject type, and dogs were most frequently categorized as providing mirroring functions. Brown notes that the participants’ perception of the companion animal’s “devotion and loyalty” contributed to feelings associated with mirroring selfobjects. Dogs’ physical and vocal expressiveness – like tail-wagging, whining, following, and licking – also point to mirroring (p. 339). As Brown notes, “[f]eeling special, treasured, admired and valued are all aspects of how one might feel in a mirroring selfobject relationship” (p. 334). These are

precisely the feelings that participants described in discussing their relationships with companion animals, especially dogs. Of her terrier Pepper, participant Trish reports

“...I get the feeling, I joke about it, but it’s like he loves me more than anyone has ever loved me, including my mother. You know, he doesn’t ever get mad at me. So, I think to lose him would be a significant loss” (p. 334).

Idealizing appeared less frequently than mirroring and twinship selfobject types, with only four of the 24 participants scoring idealizing as their primary selfobject type. Horses dominated the idealization category, which was characterized by “admiring the animal for their virtues, strength, or ability to protect the person” (p. 334). Participant Carol, in discussing her draft horse Phros, describes her admiration of his truthfulness, honesty, and “sense of ‘order’” (p. 335). Participant Elizabeth refers to similar qualities in her draft horse, Bill, and to a sense of “being lifted to a higher place.” “[w]hen he’s near me I feel...I don’t know what the word is. I feel he gives me a sense of power. I feel empowered” (p. 335).

Researchers found evidence of twinship in 61% of the responses, with nine of the fourteen interviews in this percentile scoring twinship as the primary or sole selfobject type. Horses were most frequently scored as twinship selfobject types, though four cats, one dog, and one rabbit also appeared in this category. Feelings of oneness, likeness, kinship, and a sense of shared feelings or perspective characterize the functions of a twinship selfobject. Participant Gail and her cat Melisa seem to engage in mutual affect regulation, as Gail describes a sense of synchronicity, and Melisa’s ability to be “so in tune with my emotions” (p. 337). Brown observes that participant Denise and her horse Sebastian exemplified twinship in the context of the study: “Denise felt a sense of deep connection with her horse both physically when riding

and psychologically. She even described the connection as a spiritual one. Denise felt Sebastian was her soul mate” (p. 336).

Throughout Brown’s scholarship, the author points to a significant advantage in the use of a Self Psychology framework in exploring human-companion animal relationships: the role of subjectivity. Brown cites Kohut, reminding readers that though selfobjects are real and external, they function internally, to grow and/or maintain a cohesive, vital sense of self. As such, the external qualities of selfobjects remain secondary, or even unimportant (p. 338). The implications of this finding cannot be understated, as it suggests that questions regarding anthropomorphism, namely, the projection of human thoughts and feelings on the companion animal, proves a moot point if the individual’s subjective experience is centralized. In other words, “if people strongly believe that their dogs’ behavior shows devotion, love and understanding, they will probably feel comforted and loved, regardless of what the dogs truly feel” (p. 338).

Using a Self Psychology lens, Brown also addresses a number of questions that appear frequently in the literature. She argues that the “selfobject status” of a companion animal may help explain disputed findings regarding the health benefits of human-companion animal relationships. In other words,

“[t]he effect of an animal that represents the heart and soul of a person in a twinship relationship is going to be much greater on the mind and body than would be the effect of a utilitarian guard dog...that is not a selfobject” (p. 339).

Finally, Brown argues that the selfobject status of companion animals may contribute to theoretical and clinical understanding of the range of responses individuals exhibit following a companion animal loss.

Regarding limitations to the study, Brown notes that true understanding of an individual's selfobject experiences requires Kohut's clinical tools of empathy and introspection – an impossibility during short, one-hour interviews. In addition, Brown admits to the difficulty in precisely measuring selfobject functions and types, particularly given the fluidity and changeability of selfobjects over time. It is also important to acknowledge that like Ory & Goldberg (1983), and Beck & Madresh (2008), Brown uses the term “attachment” in her descriptions of participants' bonds with companion animals, without specifically addressing the definition of attachment in the context of the study: “[a]n effort was made to select people who appeared highly attached to their companion animals” (p. 330). However, given the study's focus on Self Psychology rather than Attachment Theory, the author's use of attachment arguably recalls a more general use of the term (i.e., a strong bond).

Finally, Brown posits alternative explanations for human-companion animal bonds outside the realm of selfobjects, noting that a dog could be perceived as performing a selfobject function, but perhaps better categorized as part of a relational pattern or defensive structure: “[o]ne participant discussed how her horse was an escape from family stress...[t]his is the same pattern she used as a child when she involved herself in school projects outside of home to take her mind off of family conflicts” (p. 341). The author's characterization of these alternative interpretations as a limitation to the study prompted this researcher to ask, “what limitation?” It appears that Brown's consideration of a range of interpretations maintains a strong psychodynamic approach to the phenomenon. In addition, the author remains consistent in her commitment to the Self Psychology framework in her observation that a lack of selfobject functions may prove as clinically significant as the presence of them. Brown's remarks regarding possible relational patterns and defensive processes opens up inquiry comparing

human-animal to human-human relationships, yet unlike the Attachment Theory literature, the author does not attempt to come to conclusions about possible similarities. Instead, Brown embraces her commitment to holistic and post-positivist approaches to research. Brown's recommendations for future research include further investigation into the impact of childhood trauma on intense companion animal relationships in adulthood, and further inquiry in to the esoteric or spiritual aspects of the human-companion animal bond. The chapter will return to these areas of interest later in the chapter.

In Brown's (2011a) overview paper, the author summarizes key findings on the application of Self Psychology and the human-companion animal bond, particularly regarding the concept of selfobjects. Aside from the dearth of scholarly attention to this particular theoretical lens as a method of exploring the phenomenon, Brown calls for the need for further research into Self Psychology's concept of selfobjects more generally. The author cites the *Self-Object Needs Inventory* (SONI) as one of the few instruments designed to measure respondents' desire for and rejection of selfobject needs (as cited in Brown, 2011a, p. 138). Further, Brown cites the dearth of empirical research on selfobjects and selfobject needs in the context of the human-companion animal bond, despite previous inquiry in to the functions of non-human selfobjects (p. 138). However, Brown returns to an important tenet of Self Psychology with regard to selfobject needs: they are met through an array of relationships. The author reiterates the important concept that selfobject needs can be fulfilled "by an animal, person, thing, idea, or experience in the environment which gives a sense of cohesion, support, or sustenance to a person's sense of self" (p. 139).

Multiple meanings and spirituality in human-companion animal relationships.

Brown (2011a) makes the important distinction between the external realities of a selfobject, and selfobject functions. According to Brown, though a companion animal may not be *the* selfobject, an individual's selfobject needs can be met through a confluence of factors pertaining to the companion animal. First, the companion animal is experienced as a "particular external object" (p. 139). Most importantly however, the companion animal evokes a particular "inner experience" in the self (p. 139). It is this internal activity, not the external qualities of the selfobject (whether human, animal, or object), which proves meaningful to the self. Thus, for example, a rural woman may experience feelings of strength and peace in the presence of her equine companion, regardless of whether or not the horse could be empirically measured as being strong or peaceful (Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011a).

In a review of literature on both Self Psychology and the human-companion animal bond, Brown (2004) examines the application of Self Psychology to the phenomenon in order to gain "a new understanding of these unique relationships" (p. 67). Further, the author aims to expand existing research by arguing for the benefits of this framework in exploration of human-companion animal relationships across the lifespan. Specifically, the author employs a Self Psychology lens to investigate the phenomenon as it relates to childhood, and in the case of companion animal loss.

In the context of childhood, Brown reviews Alper (1993), and suggests that children seek relationships with companion animals to address impeded selfobject functions. Alper (1993) uses case material and personal clinical experience to argue for the practical and theoretical utility of a Self Psychology lens on the "child-pet bond" (para. 1). Alper hypothesizes that companion animals may function as selfobjects for children, particularly when primary selfobject

needs remain unmet by caregivers, as in the case of empathic failures, or, more specifically, in the case of traumatic or dysfunctional family environments. Companion animals, Alper argues, “do not retaliate, feel over-whelmed [*sic*], or reject the child who is expansive in displaying her or his grandiose self. They can, however, provide approximations of mirroring, idealization, and twinship selfobject functions” (para. 7).

Alper remarks that selfobjects tend to be conceptualized within the context of human-human relationships, and that this perspective can obfuscate the importance of non-human selfobjects. The author states that “[a]spects of the child's self that may otherwise have been thwarted or defensively sequestered may be affirmed and kept alive vis-à-vis this essential self-selfobject bond” present in relationships with companion animals (para. 35). Moreover, Alper emphasizes the need for selfobjects over the lifespan, in order to maintain a cohesive, vital self, and points out the shifting roles companion animals may play over time. The author recommends further research on the selfobject functions of companion animals in adulthood, with attention paid to the variables of gender and age.

In the context of loss, Brown (2004) examines variations in selfobject functions, pointing out that a companion animal may act as the sole sustaining selfobject in an individual’s life. For instance, Brown distinguishes between an individual who relates to their dog as protector, versus someone who experiences a sense of deep despair and disintegration following their dog’s death. The latter suggests that the deceased companion animal served some selfobject function or function, as feelings of disintegration could indicate a rupture in the individual’s sense of self-cohesion. This suggests that the selfobject status of the animal reveals information pertaining to the particular and/or multiple meanings of relationships with specific companion animals.

Brown's (2004) utilization of Self Psychology in the context of the phenomenon also expands the knowledge base regarding human-companion animal relationships through a unique line of inquiry with regard to their multiple meanings and significance. Instead of attempting to measure whether or not companion animals function as surrogate or substitute human attachments, the author aptly examines the myriad subjective meanings and experiences of human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Self Psychology. Further, Brown argues for acknowledgement of the "special and unique" qualities of the human-companion animal bond (p. 77). When a companion animal dies, feelings of love, acceptance, competence, and cohesion afforded by the companion animal's selfobject functions may be lost as well. Like the grief that follows the loss of a crucial human relationship, this perspective helps explain the depth of mourning individuals may experience after losing a companion animal. Notably, Brown references the limited body of research on the intersection between sociocultural identities and the particularities of human-companion animal relationships, also reviewed in the thesis (Brown, 2002; Wolch, et al., 2001), and calls for future research on the role of "cultural differences" in attitudes toward companion animals as selfobjects (p. 79). The author also recommends further development of measurement instruments to assess the selfobject status of companion animal, thus allowing mental health professionals to "empathize more fully and help the person gain insight into this and explore additional ways of getting those particular needs met" (p. 81). Overall, Brown's argument offers new insight and possibilities for honoring and investigating the role of companion animals in the lives of individuals, and in therapeutic contexts.

Let us return to Brown's 2007 study of companion animals as selfobjects. Within the category of idealizing and twinship companion animal selfobjects, Brown discusses another

important finding: participants' descriptions of the unique spiritual and/or transcendent qualities of their relationships with companion animals. In addition to admiring companion animals for strength and honesty, characteristic of idealizing selfobjects, participants "described almost having access to higher levels of consciousness through their relationships with their horses" (p. 334). Regarding horses, and her relationship with her horse Phros, participant Carol states "[t]here is just something, I mean, I guess I just want to say spiritual...that they are the one domesticated animal that's so close to nature and they really help to remind us of our connection to nature" (p. 335). When the interviewer asks participant Elizabeth to expand on her feelings of "oneness" with her horse Bill, she states "[y]es, and oneness, you know, with, oh gosh, with nature, with God, connected through, to earth and God through the horses" (p. 336). Adding to her description of likeness and kinship with her horse Sebastian, characteristic of twinship selfobjects, participant Denise describes an incident while travelling overseas, during a particularly difficult period in her life:

"[w]hen I was out walking...I had a perfectly clear impression of that horse holding me quietly in mind...[i]t's as if my head was his head, it was a very strange sensation, but a very comforting one too. I hate to actually state that I think his spirit came and found mine but it probably did. It was very distinct, very clear, it wasn't a hallucination" (p. 337).

Brown (2007) also argues that Self Psychology may help explain the particularities of the human-companion animal bond between an individual person and individual animal. Therefore, an individual in need of an idealizing selfobject may form an especially intense bond with a strong, powerful, and admirable horse. Brown reports that most participants reported the mere physical presence of the companion animal could improve emotional well-being or mood. Most

importantly, some participants “noted that they had relationships with humans that provided the same sort of silent presence that they found calming, but also noted that few human relationships were like this” (p. 340).

Human-companion animal relationships, Self Psychology, and issues of race and racism.

Though Brown (2002; 2005) does not explicitly discuss Self Psychology in her studies of the impacts of race and racism on animal welfare fields, her parallel use of Self Psychology to frame the phenomenon in other studies, and consistent attention race and other sociocultural identities, suggests a synthesis and cohesion in the author’s scholarship (Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007). Moreover, Brown (2002) challenges existing attempts to measure attachment in human-companion animal relationships, particularly regarding potentially biased cross-cultural application of attachment instruments. These criticisms foreshadow her emphasis on Self Psychology, which reflects the theory’s focus on difference and subjectivity, and its similarities and contributions to postmodern, feminist, and anti-oppression models, as outlined in previous sections of the chapter (Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984; Kulka, 2012; Ornstein, 2008; Teicholz, 1999). It would be interesting to discover whether or not Brown’s arguments against companion animal attachment scales contributed to her utilization of Self Psychology to explore the human-companion animal bond. Importantly, Brown seems to stand alone in her unique attention to the impact of marginalization and oppression on the human-companion animal bond in the context of mental health. The following overview of Brown’s 2002 and 2005 articles, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, will proceed with these important contexts in mind.

Attitudes toward companion animals, animal welfare, and racial identity: exploring the intersections.

Brown (2002) reviews the brief literature regarding the intersection between racial identity and differences in attitudes toward animals, citing studies by Friedman, Katcher, & Meislich (1982), Katcher (1982), and Seigal (1995) (p. 253). Brown notes that some of these studies suggest that Whites display more anthropomorphic attitudes and higher “attachment” to companion animals, while People of Color exhibit more utilitarian attitudes and lower “attachment” to companion animals. Brown cites significant limitations and biases in these studies, namely that most human-companion animal bond research focuses on White, middle class adults and children. Further, Brown does not discuss the previous studies’ definitions or uses of “attachment,” but notes that attachment scales may favor White participants.

The purpose of Brown’s 2002 study is twofold: to 1) begin to explore possible racial or ethnic variations in attitudes toward animals, in order to investigate implications for human health as well as animal welfare, and 2) add to existing research on attempts to measure attachment to animals in a group of African American and White veterinary students. Brown hypothesized that White participants would show higher scores of “pet attachment” than African American participants (p. 254).

The study’s final sample included 104 females and 29 males; 76 participants were African American and 57 were White. All were age 18 or older, with a mean age of 25.9. Overall, “participants were 78% female, 99% born in the United States, 81% single, and 90% childless” (p. 255). Participants completed a basic questionnaire which included background and demographic information, and data regarding their companion animals, as well as the Pet Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) (as cited in Brown, 2002, p. 255). The latter is “frequently

used in the animal companion literature” and includes questions regarding participants’ beliefs in the health benefits of companion animal relationships, and the status of the companion animal as a family member, among others (p. 255).

Brown found support for the hypothesis, noting that White participants’ PAQ scores appeared “significantly higher” than African American participants’ scores (p. 258). White participants also reported higher rates of companion animal ownership, and allowed companion animals to sleep on their beds more often than African American participants. Most notably, Brown remarks that “females, regardless of race, scored higher on pet attachment than did males” (p. 259). Additionally, Brown found that African American and White participants scored similarly on four out of the eight PAQ questions. The author notes that higher rates of companion animal attachment could be expected in veterinary students versus the general population, regardless of race or gender, and this expectation was confirmed by the study findings.

As for biases and limitations, Brown emphasizes that attachment in the human-companion animal bond literature appears consistently ill-defined. Further, the author argues that attachment scales appear limited by their racial and sociocultural biases, and that “[m]inority populations may have feelings, beliefs, or expressions of attachments toward pets not measured by any standard pet attachment scale” (p. 261). Importantly, Brown refers to the demographic information missing from the study, including “urban versus rural background,” as a limitation. She remarks that attention to inequalities based on sociocultural identity, including geographical area, are relevant to studies of the human-companion animal bond (p. 263).

Brown recommends that future research include exploration of intersectionality between sociocultural identities. If cultural differences in attitudes toward animals prove relevant, the

author emphasizes that “understanding more about each one’s own cultural views, attitudes, and values of animals would help create a more compassionate world for all living beings, that is, people and animals alike” (p. 264).

In a review of the literature, Brown (2005) offers possible hypotheses for the underrepresentation of African Americans within the fields of animal welfare and veterinary medicine, including the impact of systemic racism and oppression, and economic disparity across racial lines, thus preventing African Americans from pursuing these careers. Notably, Brown cites Clifton, who posits that this underrepresentation may also be tied to “[w]hite animal protectionists who compare animal rights to the abolition of slavery or civil rights struggles [which] may alienate African Americans” (as cited in Brown, 2005, p. 101).

The purpose of Brown’s 2005 study aims to clarify and gain further understanding of the underrepresentation of African Americans in animal welfare fields. Participants included nine African American animal welfare professionals, five female and four male, recruited through snowball sampling. Five participants were veterinarians, three were non-profit administrators, and one, an animal control manager; all worked primarily with companion animals. Three participants lived on the “east coast,” three, on the “west coast,” two in the south, and one outside the United States (p. 103). Participants answered open-ended questions regarding African American underrepresentation in animal welfare fields during 45 to 90 minute telephone interviews.

Brown (2005) reports a number of compelling findings, which both challenge and expand the author’s hypothesis. Findings regarding underrepresentation fell into two categories: external barriers and personal choice. Within the former category, participants reported economic concerns as limiting companion animal ownership, racism and prejudice within animal-related

institutions, lack of support for career training and advancement, and lack of awareness of animal welfare fields among African Americans. In the category of personal choice, participants reported a prioritizing of civil rights challenges over animal rights, a prioritizing of human service careers, negative views of animal-related careers, and negative or infrequent experiences with animals.

Brown (2005) argues that all nine participants held jobs in animal welfare “as the White U.S. culture defines” (p. 117). Like the author’s 2002 study, Brown reaffirms the need for an expanded vision of human-companion animal relationships beyond their dominant constructions. Citing Clifton, Brown states “people of color have humane values that may be expressed differently...[h]e observed that people of color had a great deal to teach about compassion and consideration for people and animals” (p. 117).

Brown (2005) emphasizes that approximately half of participants objected to inquiry regarding racial differences in attitudes toward companion animals, as they primarily feared “misleading generalizations, such as that Whites are more compassionate, loving, and caring about their companion animals than African Americans” (p. 117). One participant associated Whites with involvement in non-anthropomorphic, utilitarian, and even harmful treatment of animals, like sport hunting. Thus, Brown recommends that future research control for race-related variables to avoid the potential for misconstrued findings. In addition, Brown’s writing reflects social constructionist and anti-oppression views of race. The author points out that engaging with difference and heterogeneity within often “lump[ed] together” social groups makes it “more difficult to make reductionist overgeneralizations about any category of people” (p. 118).

Finally, Brown (2005) calls for structural change, and an increase in institutional diversity to support the interests and needs of People of Color involved or interested in animal welfare related careers. She reports that all nine participants believed in the importance of increasing African American representation in animal welfare jobs, namely, in order to serve as “visible role models” to future African American animal welfare professionals (p. 111). Moreover, Brown observes the need for including marginalized voices and subjective experiences in dialogue and research regarding animal-related issues and policy development. As one participant stated, “Whites don’t own the knowledge on what’s right or wrong about relating to animals” (p. 112).

Human-Companion Animal Relationships and Self Psychology: Discussion

Self Psychology offers a compelling lens for exploration of the human-companion animal bond. It offers a flexible yet cohesive framework for exploring the phenomenon and its impact on mental and emotional health, particularly given Kohut’s attention to and inclusion of the significance of non-human selfobjects in the formation of the self.

The findings presented above point to a number of limitations. First, as Brown (2007) acknowledges, empirical measurement of the often-changing selfobject types or functions proves difficult. Further, measuring or scoring the internal experience of the self and its selfobjects is nearly impossible within the framework of existing methodologies (Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011). In other words, a dearth of quantitative data likely undermines validity. In addition, subjective and qualitative data are limited in their generalizability, particularly in the case of small sample sizes, and thus considered limited in their contributions to research, practice, and policy.

Yet Brown works to address some of these problems and limitations, and the limitations presented in the Attachment Theory literature on the human-companion animal bond,

particularly in her attention to the importance of heterogeneous sampling, and to the significance of particularities in human-companion animal relationships. These theoretical comparisons will be further explored in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter Five).

Though Brown succeeds in expanding the knowledge base in her focus on sociocultural identities and their effects, further research must continue to broaden its scope to include more marginalized and/or isolated groups. As stated, the thesis' focus on Brown's scholarship emerged from necessity as much as interest, as it seems, quite sadly, that the author's areas of interest rarely appear in the literature. Women, People of Color, and rural communities, remain largely absent from the literature on the phenomenon in the context of mental health, and this gap demands further inquiry.

Summary and Conclusions

The thesis argues that Self Psychology contains the potential to provide a more holistic and complex theoretical formulation of the woman-companion animal bond in contemporary rural and multicultural contexts, and concerns itself with the implications of this hypothesis on rural social work in the West. The following Discussion chapter aims to more fully examine this hypothesis through analysis comparing and contrasting the lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology in their application to and understanding of human-companion animal relationships. Keeping the thesis' particular framing of the phenomenon in mind, this analysis will focus on the benefits, insights, limitations, and clinical implications of each theory in the context of social work in the rural West. Most importantly, the Discussion chapter aims to synthesize the thesis' exploration of the intersections between the human-companion animal bond and marginalized sociocultural identities – particularly gender and race – in both historical and contemporary rural

contexts. Special attention will be given to issues around the presence and absence of voices of rural women and rural People of Color in the literature.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Previous chapters have endeavored to clarify important themes and concepts relating to the human-companion animal bond in historical, contemporary, and mental contexts, with a particular focus on the rural West, and the impact of sociocultural identities and interlocking oppressions. Attachment Theory and Self Psychology have been employed to frame the phenomenon with these contexts and approaches in mind. In order to support the discussion presented in this chapter, it is important to first briefly review the key points from the phenomenon chapter (Chapter Two) and theory chapters (Chapter Three and Chapter Four).

Review of Chapter Two: Human-Companion Animal Relationships

The study of the human-companion animal bond in the context of mental health remains a relatively new field of research. Human-companion animal relationships carry a history of dismissal and stigmatization, despite contemporary evidence that supports their clinical and theoretical significance across a range of disciplines, including anthrozoology, psychology, social work, environmental sciences, and literature, among others (Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Brown, 2004). In recent decades, research has often focused on the intersections between the phenomenon, and themes of loss, loneliness, and the psychological health of children or older adults (as cited in Blazina, Boyraz & Shen-Miller, Eds., 2011; Levinson, 1978; Miller & Lago, 1990; Ory & Goldberg, 1983;). Notable theoretical themes include issues related to morality, animal consciousness, spirituality, and the dichotomies of

anthropomorphic/utilitarian, privileged/oppressed, and superior/inferior, dualities which reflect the impact of the structural forces, and the social constructions of race, place, and gender (Beierl, 2008; Braje, 2011; Hoffer, 2011; Knight & Herzog, 2009; Preece, 2011). Inquiry into the connections between human-companion animal relationships, animal cruelty, and interpersonal violence has also emerged as an important area of interest (Arkow & Ascione, 1999; Ascione, 1997; Ascione, Weber, & Thompson, et al., 2007; Ascione & Shapiro, 2009; Faver & Strand, 2003; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005). These intersections have proven particularly salient in the thesis' efforts to address gaps in the literature, namely, further investigation of the impact of sociocultural identities on a range of human-companion animal relationships, and the subsequent implications for rural social work practice and policy. A limited but noteworthy number of studies have included geographical identity, race, and gender as relevant variables in research on exposure to or perpetration of animal abuse, and attitudes toward or concern for companion animals (Ascione, 2000; Brown, 2002; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2005; Chitwood, et al., 2011; Faver & Strand, 2003; McPhedran, 2011; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005; Wolch, et al., 2001).

The thesis has endeavored to expand theoretical inquiry on these themes and issues, thus reflecting social work's commitment to intersectionality, social justice, and the person-in-environment framework. Through its review of the historical, contemporary, and mental health contexts of the human-companion animal bond, Chapter Two endeavors to represent the social constructionist, feminist, and anti-racist paradigms that undergird and frame the thesis as a whole. Tracing the social construction of companion animals in the West reveals transitions, from the Cartesian view of animals as machines, to the Romantic Era poets and artists who idealized animals, to the emergence of animal welfare movements, Queen Victoria's SPCAs, and the classing of companion animals (Gruen, 1994; Perkins, 2003; Preece, 2011; Walsh, 2009).

Similarly, Western social constructions both devalue and romanticize rurality, thus contributing to the perpetuation of White, middle-class control of wilderness and rural areas (Bryant & Pini, 2011). The ever-growing number of companion animals and their classification as family members marks an important moment in the social construction of the contemporary human-companion animal bond in the West (Cohen, 2002; as cited in Walsh, 2009).

With regard to a feminist understanding of human-companion animal relationships, the impact of marginalization and devaluing of women's relationship to animals can be traced to the English witch trials (Sax, 2009). Ecofeminists aim to explore intersectionality, particularly the damaging effects of patriarchy and positivist epistemologies on women, animals, and a range of other marginalized groups. However, this perspective is often criticized for its disregard and disrespect for difference (Gaard, 1993; Gaard 2011; Stange, 1995). From *Black Beauty* to *The Dreaded Comparison*, slavery, oppression, and racism have emerged as a controversial facet of literature regarding the relationships between People of Color and companion animals (Beierl, 2008; Campbell, et al., 1998; Guyette, 2010; Goldstein, 2005; Hoffer, 2011; Skabelund, 2008).

At the same time, the rich data contained within the limited literature on the intersections between racial identity and the human-companion animal bond reveal complex positive attitudes toward and relationships between companion animals and People of Color (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2005; Guyette, 2010; Wolch, et al., 2001). Indeed, the thesis emphasizes both the legacy of racism on the human-companion animal bond, as well as a range of positive experiences and relationships, in order to more fully represent the diversity of these bonds and to challenge the often-privileged perspectives represented in the literature. Overall, the thesis' three underlying paradigms all aim to challenge and critically engage with the dominant theoretical narratives of

human-companion animal relationships in the rural West, in order to better address their clinical relevance and explore their multiple meanings.

Review of Chapter Three: Attachment Theory

To review, attachment is defined as a behavioral system consisting of biological, psychological, and emotional components, which guide the development of bonds between individuals. These bonds, in turn, guide emotions and behavior (Bretherton, 1992; Mercer, 2006). Though it finds its roots in the four psychologies, Attachment Theory challenges traditional psychoanalytic views of human motivation, development, and psychopathology. In contrast to Kleinian object relations and Freudian drive theories, Bowlby and Ainsworth explored the impact of real, external, family experiences – like attachment figure responsiveness, and the quality of infant/caregiver relationships – on psychological health and relationship patterns across the life cycle (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1992; Flanagan, 2008; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Bowlby's early influences, particularly ethology, shaped the theory's focus on the significance of social bonds between infants and caregivers, and the function of attachment in ensuring not only physical survival, but emotional and psychological well-being as well (Bretherton, 1992; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008). Ainsworth's in-depth style of narrative data collection and research allowed for further development of crucial Attachment Theory concepts, like secure base, safe haven, attachment styles, and internal working models (Bretherton, 1992). The collaborations between Bowlby and Ainsworth provided a framework for the conceptualization of the theory (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1992).

Contemporary understanding of Attachment Theory further recognizes its clinical applications, and the implications of attachment in adulthood and in various relational contexts (Ainsworth, 1989; Bretherton, 1992; Levy, et al., 2011). This type of broad perspective on

attachment has also elicited criticisms regarding racial biases, disproportionate focus on mothers, and the dangers of generalization and universalization within Attachment Theory (Ballou & Brown, 2002; Bretherton, 1992; Shilkret & Shilkret, 2008; van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988). This inattention to difference and uniqueness is crucial to the thesis' argument, hypothesis, and research question, as it is reflected in the generalization of Attachment Theory to cross-species relationships. This under-emphasis on difference also points to the value-laden dominance of the theory.

Overwhelmingly, literature on human-companion animal relationships and Attachment Theory reflects a notable homogeneity with regard to both demographic variables, and methodologies (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Kurdek, 2009; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011). Other key themes in this literature include those outlined in Chapter Three. First, the interchangeable and confusing use of both formal Attachment Theory, and the language of attachment, reflect the use and misuse of the language of Attachment Theory in the literature on human-companion animal relationships. This lack of clarity begs questions regarding the validity and meaningfulness of the research, and could negatively impact social work practice and policy (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Ory & Goldberg, 1983; Winefield, et al., 2008). Second, the characterization of companion animals as replacement or surrogate attachment figures persists in the literature (Kurdek, 2009; Miltiades & Shearer, 2011; Veevers, 1985). This limited perspective disregards the complex myriad meanings of human-companion animal relationships and works to restrict discussion of their unique qualities. Third, the interrelated issues of the application of Attachment Theory across species, and particularities of human-companion animal attachment appear problematic. While parallels between human-human attachment and human-animal attachment styles may be observed in some studies, questions remain with regard to other

Attachment Theory tenets, like the specificity and irreplaceability of attachment figures, and the species-specific qualities of attachment (Bonas et al., 2000; Geist, 2011; Kurdek, 2009; Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011).

Though Beck & Madresh (2008) argue for the utility of Attachment Theory in the context of the phenomenon, it is worth reiterating the authors' counter-observation, which argues that the concept of internal working models may not coherently address human-companion animal relationships. Further, it is worth restating the authors verbatim:

“[w]e recognize that changing the target, especially to another species, may have changed meaning of the scales in ways not apparent in the results of the current study, and look forward to learning more about the specific attributes of pet relationships in future research” (p. 47).

Similarly, Nagasawa, et al. (2009) recommend further research into questions regarding “interspecies attachment” (p. 217).

Review of Chapter Four: Self Psychology

To review, Self Psychology defines the self as both a personality structure, and a whole “unit” in and of itself (Kohut, 1977, p. 99). Kohut's unique perspective on narcissism and its role in self-development, and his concept of selfobjects, or important others that contribute to the maintenance and growth of a cohesive self, further define the core of Self Psychology (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; Ornstein, 1978; Stolorow, 1989). Like Attachment Theory, Self Psychology emphasizes the role of external, environmental factors, as well as the long-term intrapsychic impact of early relationships with primary caregivers (selfobjects). Additionally, Self Psychology also questions classical psychoanalytic theories, and is frequently conceptualized as a response to the limitations of the Freudian metapsychologies and their

emphasis on conflict and drives (Bacal, 1995; Flanagan, 2008; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Pine, 1988; St. Clair, 2004). By contrast, Kohut conceptualized psychopathology and the human experience as reflective of the struggle to become a vital, cohesive self (Bacal, 1995).

Though Kohut seemingly focuses on the individual self, Self Psychology's focus on the contributions of selfobjects is expansive, and includes objects, phenomena, and non-human beings – like companion animals. Through the clinical processes of vicarious introspection, narcissistic transferences, and transmuting internalization, Kohut believed in the power of restoring selfobject needs, and in the clinical impact of empathically understanding the analysand's subjectivity. Kohut's emphasis on the role of relational dynamics, interconnectedness, empathy, and the importance of subjectivity, act as crucial elements to the conceptualization of the current hypothesis and research questions (Elisha, 2011; Flanagan, 2008; Kieffer, 2012; Ornstein, 1978).

As opposed to Attachment Theory, Self Psychology is included as one of the four psychodynamic psychologies (Flanagan, 2008; Pine, 1988). Like its three counterparts, Flanagan (2008) argues that Self Psychology has also undergone scrutiny for its inattention to sociocultural issues and identities. Yet Self Psychology's impact on contemporary anti-oppression models belies this perspective, as Self Psychology has proven itself as a unique influence on modern psychodynamic thought (Kulka, 2012). Self Psychology's regard for the truth and authenticity of subjectivity mirrors contemporary feminist, anti-racist, post-positivist, and social constructionist paradigms, and relational and intersubjective therapeutic approaches (Flanagan, 2008; Kulka, 2012; Ornstein, 2008). This explains the theoretical application of Self Psychology to structural oppressions, as in the case of sociocultural selfobject failures (Flanagan, 2008). Ultimately, Self Psychology offers a model of selfhood built on empathy, connection,

and the importance of the individual and collective experiences of being (as cited in Brown, 2011; Fine, 2006; Flanagan, 2008; Kohut, 1984).

The literature on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Self Psychology, though limited, nonetheless offers compelling support for the utility of this theory, and addresses several of the limitations presented in the Attachment Theory literature on the phenomenon (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2007; Brown, 2011a; Brown, 2011b).

Brown's scholarship offers three important themes as outlined in Chapter Four; first, the author explores the role of companion animals as selfobjects and/or providers of selfobject functions. The rich, qualitative data on selfobject status of companion animals presented by Brown (2004) is underscored by the author's inclusion of a wide range of information regarding the sociocultural identities of the participants. Brown reminds readers of the importance of each individual's subjective experience of the companion animal's selfobject functions, and the clinical implications of companion animal selfobject status.

Second, Self Psychology acts as a framework for exploring the uniqueness, specificity, range, and multiple meanings of human-companion animal relationships, including the ineffable and/or spiritual qualities of human-companion animal relationships. In addition to her consistent attention to the need for more research on the intersections between sociocultural identities and human-companion animal relationships, Brown (2011a) acknowledges 1) the particularities of the "inner experience" evoked by a companion animal (p. 139), 2) the "special and unique" characteristics of human-companion animal relationships (Brown, 2004, p. 77), and 3) the spiritual, transcendent and powerful characteristics of the human-companion animal bond, which some describe as akin to a connection to God or a higher consciousness (Brown, 2007).

The third theme explores the intersections between human-companion animal relationships, Self Psychology, and issues of race and racism. Brown (2002; 2005) explores the impact of structural oppressions, particularly racism, on the underrepresentation of People of Color in animal welfare fields, and on attempts to measure differences in cross-cultural attitudes (i.e., utilitarian vs. anthropomorphic) toward and attachment to companion animals. These important lines of inquiry thread themselves throughout Brown's scholarship.

**An Analysis of Human-Companion Animal Relationships:
Through the Lenses of Attachment Theory and Self Psychology**

After review, certain connections between the phenomenon and each of the theories become clear. First, certain notable similarities exist between Attachment Theory and Self Psychology, with regard to their theoretical and practical origins, perhaps explaining their shared presence in the literature on the human-companion animal bond, particularly within the context of mental health. Both Attachment Theory and Self Psychology emphasize the significance of early relational dynamics and patterns between children and their caregivers, and the impact of these interactions throughout life. Additionally, Bowlby and Kohut both developed their theories within the context of practical experience, and conceptualized Attachment Theory and Self Psychology as both theoretical frameworks and clinical methodologies (Bacal, 1995; Levy, et al., 2011; Ornstein, 1978). Finally, just as human-companion animal relationships have faced stigmatization and dismissal in mental health and related fields, Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Kohut and their theories share a similar history of outsider status, as evidenced by rejection and controversy within the psychoanalytic establishment.

The focus on family membership and relationships in contemporary social constructions of the human-companion animal bond, and the subsequent comparisons to human attachments,

helps explain the broad application of Attachment Theory to the phenomenon. Yet, the thesis has endeavored to highlight an important point of comparison and contrast between the two theories, one which contributes to the assertion that Self Psychology holds greater potential than Attachment Theory for conceptualizing the phenomenon, namely that the inclusion of a variety of non-human selfobjects, (i.e., animals) in the framework of Self Psychology, and contemporary discourse on the role of companion animals as providers of selfobject functions, offers a more holistic and nuanced understanding of human-companion animal relationships. Further analysis of this and other crucial aspects of the hypothesis continues below, followed by a synthesis of the research and analysis presented in the thesis.

Analysis: Human-Companion Animal Relationships and Attachment Theory

So what is wrong with conceptualizing the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Attachment Theory? Are there clinical consequences to utilization and application of Attachment Theory and its language to the phenomenon? First, the benefits of an Attachment perspective seem clear. Assessing human-companion animal relationships using existing scales of attachment could aid clinicians in understanding the role these relationships play in clients' lives, using a theoretical framework that is already familiar to many. In addition, though not initially intended as a theory for understanding relationships between humans and animals, Attachment Theory partially stems from the study of animals and their behavior. Further, Attachment Theory offers an accessible method of conceptualizing the significance of emotional ties to others, which are arguably present in both human-human attachments and human-animal relationships.

After reviewing the literature on human-companion animal relationships through the lens of Attachment Theory, it follows that further research should broaden demographic variables to

include more marginalized and/or isolated groups, such as women, People of Color, and rural communities as these sociocultural demographics are vastly underrepresented. After all, can we accurately assess the reparative relational potential of human-companion animal relationships in marginalized rural communities through the lens of Attachment Theory, in the presence of such stark biases and limitations?

Importantly, this review of the Attachment Theory literature contributed to the thesis' further exploration of a range of attachment experiences with animals, both positive and negative, examination of the particularities of human-companion animal relationships, and a re-visioning of the dominant theoretical lens of Attachment Theory in the context of the phenomenon. The researcher found a compelling and nuanced consideration of these themes in the small body of literature on the human-companion animal bond and Self Psychology.

Analysis: Human-Companion Animal Relationships and Self Psychology

Self Psychology can provide a foundation for organizing and understanding the multiple roles of companion animals in the lives of people, whether they act as selfobjects or not. Further, Kohut included non-human selfobjects within his theory, creating a cohesive psychodynamic space for investigating the impact of human relationships with companion animals (Fine, 2006; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2011; Kohut, 1984). Thus, conceptualization of the phenomenon is intrinsic to Self Psychology's design and approach. This indicates that Self Psychology holds the capacity to partially dispel the inaccuracy and incoherence present in Attachment Theory research on the phenomenon, and, as noted, constitutes a main supporting component of the current hypothesis.

Moreover, Self Psychology offers clinicians a framework with which to view the unique impact of human-companion animal relationships, without concern that the theory could prove

imprecise. The most relevant aspects of the Self Psychology framework in the context of the human-companion animal bond include the theory's attention to the unique, subjective nature of self-selfobject relationships, thus approaching interspecies bonds from a more experience-near, specific, and depathologizing perspective. Further, Kohut's belief in the clinical importance of the restoration of thwarted selfobject needs is indeed reflected in the literature pertaining to the phenomenon, through exploration of the particular – and, at times, reparative and spiritual – bonds between humans and companion animals (Alper, 1993; Brown, 2004; Brown, 2007; Fine, 2006).

Other Self Psychology concepts point to the advantages it may hold over an Attachment Theory lens, with regard to the phenomenon. Kohut's unique theories on empathy and the subjectivity of the self utilize the tools of flexibility, compassion, and connection to guide theory and practice, representing an important post-positivist shift in psychoanalysis, and a set of tenets that clearly translate to the phenomenon. Further, Self Psychology's connection to and impact on Relational and Intersubjective approaches reflects its relevance and utility in contemporary clinical practice and in post-positivist, anti-oppression approaches to scholarship, particularly with regard to the exploration of a wide range of relationships. Hamilton-Mason (2010) strikingly captures the interconnections between core Kohutian concepts and Intersubjective models, stating:

“Intersubjective theory reflects a postmodern epistemological critique of analytic theory that questions the privileging of objectivity and scientific method as the final arbiters of truth (Berzoff & Mattei, 1999). Consequently, intersubjectivity rejects drive as a primary motivator and utilizes empathy and introspection as guiding principles” (p. 317).

Just as Kohut – and his Relational and Intersubjective successors – have used empathy and introspection to better understand the analysand’s subjective experience, clinicians who explore human-companion animal relationships with their clients can use these same concepts to inform clinical interventions, uphold the significance of diverse narratives, and increase their level of understanding of the unique meanings of these relationships. As Blazina (2011) writes in his review of the application of psychodynamic theories to companion animal loss:

“To *understand and explain* [emphasis original], as Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984) would argue, is a quintessential tool for the clinician aiding the client’s recognition and subsequent integration of an object in one’s life. It is important to explore and recognize the personal meaning attached to the loss of a pet companion” (p. 217).

By contrast, as the thesis has shown, Attachment Theory’s attempts to conceptualize the human-companion animal bond often appear formulaic or pathologizing; superimposing attachment patterns onto human-companion animal bonds, or dismissing and invalidating them as surrogate human relationships.

Brown (2002; 2004; 2005; 2007) addresses a number of limitations present in the Attachment Theory literature on human-companion animal relationships. To name only a few, the author acknowledges the importance of difference and heterogeneity in sampling, endeavors to examine a range of experiences in human-companion animal relationships, both positive and negative, and consistently attends to the particularities of these relationships. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, there is a significant dearth of qualitative data and exploratory methods represented in the human-companion animal bond literature. Brown directly addresses these gaps in her research and scholarship.

Most notably, as the thesis has endeavored to show, there is evidence that sociocultural identities, the oppressions based on them, and their intersections with human-companion animal relationships appear clinically and theoretically significant. Brown consistently shows a commitment to these factors in her research and writing. This honoring of subjectivity is inherent to Self Psychology, as well as to the social constructionist, feminist, and anti-racist paradigms that inform the thesis, making Self Psychology and Brown's scholarship the pillars of the current paper.

It is important to note that despite the dearth of scholarship on the phenomenon through the lens of Self Psychology, some research exists to support some facets of the theoretical lens outlined by Brown in the thesis. Let us return briefly to Blazina (2011), who offers a synthesis and review of the application of psychodynamic theories, including Attachment Theory and Self Psychology, to a particular aspect of human-companion animal relationships: companion animal loss. The author begins with Freud's drive model, particularly in the context of his seminal paper *Mourning and Melancholia* (as cited in Blazina, 2011, p. 204). The author defines this approach as the "standard psychoanalytic model of mourning," characterized by Freud's theory of *decathexis*, or the process of discharging feelings related to the lost object of love, and retracting psychic energy from this object (p. 204). Blazina argues that other psychodynamic theories, particularly Attachment Theory, Self Psychology, and object relations theories, all offer perspectives which "highlight ways of maintaining, and/or reestablishing a new tie with the deceased" in the context of companion animal loss (as cited in Blazina, 2011, p. 205). The author further argues for the efficacy of this "continuing bonds" approach to lost companion animals, as emphasized by these three theories. As such, like Brown (2004), Blazina posits that a comprehensive psychodynamic approach to companion animal loss helps explain the profound

and specific grief that some individuals experience following the death of animal, and thus underscores the clinical significance of these losses.

However, despite his inclusion of Attachment Theory, Self Psychology, and object relations theories in his formulation, Blazina's analysis seems to reflect the particularities of human-companion animal relationships captured most clearly in the Self Psychology literature on the phenomenon; especially, the unique and specific characteristics of human-companion animal relationships:

“For the person experiencing a pet companion as an attachment figure, a good object, or self-object (i.e., pet as a significant object), the psychological importance may seem similar to the contributions and connections of other generative persons (or pets) from the past. In this case, one object may have picked up in some ways where the other(s) left off. However, even with the perceived similarity with former relations, the client may experience the pet companion as a unique relationship in its own right. The pet companion is not only a generative presence like other important objects but also has his or her own distinctive contribution in one's psychic landscape” (Blazina, 2011, p. 215).

A Theoretical Synthesis:

A New Understanding of Human-Companion Animal Relationships

The thesis asks whether or not rural women's relationships with companion animals function as reparative relational or intrapsychic experiences that can be more fully understood beyond the framework of Attachment Theory, and argues that Self Psychology may add to a more holistic and coherent theoretical formulation of the woman-companion animal bond in contemporary rural and multicultural contexts. The following key points offer a synthesis of the theoretical analyses of the phenomenon in consideration of this hypothesis and research question,

and posits a new understanding of human-companion animal relationships.

Sociocultural Identities and Subjectivities

After review, the clinical and theoretical limitations of cross-cultural and cross-species application of Attachment Theory seem clear, as the literature suggests a marked inattention to issues of difference and sociocultural identity. Further, these criticisms seem to characterize Attachment Theory over time; historically, currently, and in its application to the phenomenon. By contrast, Brown's scholarship succeeds in directly addressing the salience of sociocultural identities with regard to human-companion animal bonds, and notes the limitations of cross-cultural application of Attachment Theory and attachment measurements. Further, Brown integrates some of the historical and contemporary themes regarding the human-companion animal bond outlined in the phenomenon chapter, like the utilitarian/anthropomorphic dichotomy, into her clinical approach to these relationships (Brown, 2002; Brown, 2005).

While also scrutinized for disregard of sociocultural issues and identities, Self Psychology has nonetheless earned accolades for its similarities and contributions to post-positivist, and by extension, anti-oppression epistemologies and approaches to treatment (Flanagan, 2008). Like Kohut, Brown (2004; 2007) recognizes the significance of a range of subjectivities with relation to significant selfobjects, as in the author's scholarship on the selfobject status of companion animals. The rich, expansive, and diverse narrative data acquired through this research suggests that the particular, multiple, and even spiritual meanings of human-companion animal relationships play profoundly vital roles in individual's lives, and thus warrant further investigation. With these points in mind, rural women's relationships with companion animals may function as potentially reparative relational or intrapsychic experiences.

Spirituality

Acknowledgement of the spiritual significance of the human-companion animal bond is crucial to our understanding of these relationships, as this facet of the bond extends to antiquity. Moreover, the spiritual and symbolic meanings of animals remain complemented by their role as a food source, just as they did 50,000 years ago (Braje, 2006). This underscores the weight, importance, and timelessness of the human-companion animal bond, and locates it far beyond the contemporary utilitarian/anthropomorphic dichotomy reviewed in the thesis.

Sax (2009) argues that the history of spirituality in women-companion animal relationships includes the gender- and species-based oppression found in accounts of the English witch trials of the 17th century, wherein older rural women were often persecuted for their relationships with animal familiars. The author hypothesizes that these oppressions impacted the shift to a more utilitarian/anthropomorphic perspective, subsequently contributing to the loss of spiritual and mythic connections to animals.

Where the Attachment Theory lens seems to bypass themes of historical and contemporary spirituality in the context of the phenomenon, Brown's (2007) scholarship on the human-companion animal bond through the lens of Self Psychology seems to embrace it. Her research reveals that women's bonds with companion animals remain steeped in spirituality, connection, and unique self/selfobject relationships, narratives which seem impossible to capture without the frame of Self Psychology, and the rich, narrative methodology Brown employs:

“Elizabeth: ...I do feel a spiritual connection and kinship with this horse, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you describe that?

Elizabeth: Once again, I could just go back to looking deeply into my eyes, both eyes, you know. If I look at him and he looks at me, he's looking into my soul, he's looking into my spirit as a connection there" (p. 338).

New Questions, Multiple Meanings

One of Brown's most important and compelling contributions relates to her views regarding measurement and the research questions found throughout Attachment Theory scholarship on the human-companion animal bond. In other words, the author argues that studying human-companion animal relationships does not necessitate their comparison to human attachments. Instead, Brown (2004; 2007) argues that assessment of the selfobject status of a companion animal highlights an individual's subjective experience of the relationship, and that this subjectivity remains more important than outsiders' attempts to explain it, devalue it, or conceptualize it as akin to a human-human relationship. Regarding this issue, Brown (2004) states:

"[t]hus the inner experience for the person (or self) is more important than any external realities of the situation such as the debate as to whether animals are capable of feeling emotions (Herzog & Galvin, 1997) or if it is possible or beneficial to have animal companions as substitutes for people (Serpell, 1996)" (p. 71).

It is difficult to overemphasize the power of this statement, as it acts as a crucial shift in scholarship on human-companion animal relationships: it offers new questions. Strikingly, this statement echoes this writer's hypothesis, and its urgent call for further engagement with the particular and unique qualities of the human-companion animal bond beyond the framework of Attachment Theory.

Moreover, this perspective allows space for exploration of multiple meanings of these bonds, as Brown interests herself in either the presence or absence of a selfobject function in the human-companion animal relationship, and the characteristics that lie therein. In this way, one individual may report a history of trauma related to companion animals, and one may report a transcendent, spiritual connection with them. Yet, using a Self Psychology approach, both people experience validation and consideration of their particular experiences with companion animals, and of how these experiences impact mental health and the self. In light of the thesis' attention to marginalized identities and voices, and their relative absence in the literature, this point cannot be overemphasized: those whose unique narratives and subjectivities are often drowned out, quantified, or silenced altogether deserve theoretical, practical, and scholarly consideration of their myriad relational experiences with companion animals.

Implications and Recommendations for Rural Social Work Practice and Policy

Rural life and rural social work practice requires flexible and innovative approaches to mental health. This includes a willingness to engage in both formal and informal service models and modes of treatment (Locke & Winship, 2005). Additionally, a review of rural social work literature reveals that rural is often equated with agriculture and farming, and thus, animals (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003). Given these conceptualizations of rurality, it follows that new strategies and interventions could engage with the multiple meanings and affects of existing relationships – including bonds with companion animals. Research suggests that human-companion animal relationships may build community, and contribute to the development and maintenance of rural identity and social bonds (Chitwood, et al., 2011; McPhedran, 2011).

The isolation and lack of services that often plagues rural areas, combined with the pervasiveness of gender-, race-, place-, and species-based oppression, demands new, creative,

and/or informal networks of support and treatment, and de-stigmatization of these approaches (Brown & Swanson, Eds., 2003; Coward et al., 2006; Lohmann & Lohmann, Eds., 2005).

Assessment of rural individuals and communities could include client history regarding companion animal interactions, selfobject status of companion animals, and attitudes toward companion animals. Whether or not responses about companion animals prove positive or negative, rural social workers and their clients in particular will benefit from engaging with information on the unique and multiple particularities of human-companion animal bonds. These areas require further research.

As the thesis has shown, rurality, interpersonal violence, and animal abuse are often linked (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Some research suggests that the insular quality of many rural areas contributes to the underreporting of animal abuse (Faver & Strand, 2003; Tallichet & Hensley, 2005). Ascione & Shapiro (2009) call for further study on their finding that “rates of animal abuse are higher in groups of abused children than in nonabused children, in samples of clinically distressed children than in normative samples, and in families experiencing intimate partner violence,” indicating the ways in which animal abuse may act as a red flag for clinicians (pp. 572-573). In addition, though many factors may contribute to rural womens’ choices to seek asylum from abusers, research suggests that concern for companion animal welfare may play a significant role in these decisions (Tallichet & Hensley, 2005).

Yet the thesis has also highlighted the impact of multiple oppressions on this “link,” and attempted to underscore that the impact of historic and contemporary racism and racist violence adds a new layer of tragedy and complication to this circle of harm (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Furthermore, additional anti-oppression approaches to these links can reveal crucial data about clients’ experience of both micro- and macro-level oppression. The interrelationships between

interpersonal violence, animal abuse, and interlocking oppressions, particularly in rural communities, deserves further attention.

For the reasons presented above, the thesis has endeavored to analyze and contribute to potential alternative constructions of human-companion animal relationships. The lens of Self Psychology, in tandem with community-based interventions, humane education, and anti-oppression work, can contribute to new formulations of the human-companion animal bond, and help foster the healing and positive potential of these relationships, thus contributing to rural social work policy and practice.

Limitations

As Brown (2007) notes, more research is required regarding the assessment of selfobject functions of companion animals, given the historical difficulty in measuring key Self Psychology tenets and structures like selfobjects. As such, the researcher recognizes that the thesis' argument and research question relies on variables that may be difficult to define in the context of empirical research. In addition, the small sample sizes represented in Brown's qualitative research clearly limits the generalizability of the data. Nonetheless, the researcher notes that the type of inquiry and methodology presented in the thesis aims to challenge the privileging of positivist paradigms and/or quantitative methodologies, as a reflection of the social constructionist, feminist and anti-racist paradigms which frame it.

Importantly, like Brown, the researcher hopes that the thesis has proven the need for further research on the intersections between sociocultural identities and the human-companion animal bond, particularly in the context of rural social work. However, the researcher recognizes that the limitations of the literature may also undermine validity. This point is perhaps made most obvious in the researcher's reliance on Brown's small body of work.

The researcher has attempted to hold an awareness of her own privileged and marginalized social identities in the framing of the thesis. This includes the researcher's attempts to avoid positive bias toward rural communities, rural women, and the human-companion animal relationships found therein, given the researcher's own sociocultural identities. By contrast, the thesis' focus on rural women, and rural People of Color of any gender particularly, points to the dearth of attention given to these oft-marginalized and -silenced voices in the literature, and the need for the inclusion and honoring of their narratives in future research.

Conclusion

Through a review of historical, contemporary, and mental health themes in the literature on the phenomenon and the two theories, the thesis has endeavored to show that an expanded theoretical perspective of human-companion animal relationships within a range of sociocultural contexts can help address gaps in literature and research, as well as inform rural social work policy and practice. Self Psychology offers an important perspective, and speaks to the essential themes of the thesis, specifically the unique, particular, and spiritual aspects of the human-companion animal bond, the importance of honoring diverse narratives and subjectivities, and the intersections between human-companion animal relationships and sociocultural identities. Instead of generalizing a theory of human-human relationships to the phenomenon, as in the case of Attachment Theory, Self Psychology asks new questions, and succeeds in honoring human-companion animal relationships as equally worthy of consideration in and of themselves, both in theory and in practice. The thesis has aimed to emphasize the importance of holistic, psychodynamic, client-centered, and anti-oppression approaches to these relationships, thus letting the companion animals and diverse, multi-faceted humans that care for them take the lead,

rather than forcing upon them a predetermined theoretical construct which, at times, seems to exclude them.

It is difficult to reach any definitive conclusions regarding the reparative relational and/or intrapsychic potential of human-companion animal relationships for rural women in historical and contemporary multicultural contexts, especially considering the dearth of literature addressing these intersections. Nonetheless, the clinical significance of these relationships – whether characterized as positive or negative; transcendent or traumatic – appears undeniable.

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