

PARENTING A COMPANION ANIMAL AS A PRECURSOR TO PARENTING A HUMAN
CHILD

by

Kasey A. Travitz

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Director of Thesis: Sandra Lookabaugh, PhD

Major Department: Human Development and Family Science

Participants were ten emerging adult (18-29), heterosexual couples who have had a companion animal for at least six months and have no human children. The present study evaluated parenting responsibilities associated with the companion animal including caregiving, expenses, and negotiation. Data were collected by a demographic survey and semi-structured interviews. Using a grounded theory framework, a self-created interview was conducted in-person with each couple. Overall, the results suggest that the parenting responsibilities associated with raising a companion animal are parallel to the responsibilities of raising a human child. The findings also suggested that the family developmental theory could be modified and adapted to relate to the addition of a companion animal into the family unit, and the developmental changes that occur. Understanding the roles, responsibilities, division of labor, and relationship dynamics when co-parenting a companion animal and how they link to the responsibilities associated with parenting a human child, could open a door to understanding how this trend could be an educational stepping stone for the transition to parenthood.

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CHILD

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Kasey A. Travitz
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Kasey A. Travitz

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: _____

Sandra Lookabaugh, Ph.D

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____

Eboni Baugh, Ph.D

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____

Sharon Ballard, Ph.D

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
AND FAMILY SCIENCE: _____

Sharon Ballard, Ph.D

DEAN OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL: _____

Paul Gemperline, Ph.D

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that animals are crucial to human survival, health, and healing (Rosenkoetter, 1991; Sanders, 2003; Walsh, 2009a). The connections between humans and animals has been highly valued throughout the world for many years. Throughout many cultures worldwide, animals have had a positive impact on humans. Konrad Lorenz, Boris Levinson, and Leo Bustad were three influential people who pioneered the term human-animal bond (Fine, 2010). There is a great deal of controversy over the definition of the human-animal bond. A bond is the forming of a close relationship (Fine, 2010). “The American Veterinary Medical Association’s Committee defines the human-animal bond as, ‘a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and other animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, other animals, and the environment’ (Fine, 2010; Journal of the American Vet Medical Association, 1998)”.

One of the most common roles that companion animals take on in families, is the role of a child. More specifically during emerging adulthood among couples. Emerging adulthood is defined as the period between the end of adolescence (18 years) to the entry of stable adulthood (29 years) (Arnett, Žukauskiene, & Sugimura, 2014). During this unstable time period, most young people experience a series of love relationships and frequent job changes (Arnett et al., 2014).

There is an extremely limited amount of empirical research conducted on parenting companion animals and how it could potentially prepare a young couple for parenthood. For this reason, this review will explore literature that focuses on parenting a human child, focusing on three key considerations: parental responsibilities and division of labor, financial considerations,

and legal issues. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine couples' perceptions of the similarities of caring for a companion animal and a human child. The following study seeks to contribute to existing literature by examining and investigating the following two research questions:

- How do couples share and negotiate the responsibility of the companion animal including acquiring the animal, responsibility for caring for the animal, expenses, and the future for the companion animal?
- How could raising a companion animal be similar to raising a human child?

History of the Human-Animal Bond

Throughout ancient history, the domestication and socialization of animals was an interactive process of mutual cooperation and coevolution based on a shared need for shelter, food, and protection (Walsh, 2009a). Specifically, dogs have fulfilled many roles throughout ancient history including herding, guarding, hunting, fishing, and serving as a loyal companion (Fine, 2010). Over 14,000 years ago, domestic wolves, which are ancestors of the dog, lived in settlements with humans. The men saw them as equal partners for hunting and fishing. They were also respected for being guardians, their intelligence, loyalty, and keen senses (Walsh, 2009a). Almost 9,000 year ago, both dogs and cats played a vital role in developing agricultural communities. Dogs were used for herding and farming, and cats were used to eliminate rodents that disturbed crops and brought disease. During this time, both animals became increasingly valued as companions (Walsh, 2009a).

In ancient Egypt, both dogs and cats were also treated with respect. The Egyptian pantheon was dominated by shamanic images of animal-headed gods and goddesses (Fine,

2010). They worshipped and honored cats, and dogs were viewed as loyal companions who were often times promoted to guides in the afterlife (Fine, 2010; Walsh, 2009a).

During the Greek and Roman empires, the gods and goddesses were less represented as animals compared to the Egyptians, but they still had the shamanic ability to transform themselves into animals to hide their true identity (Fine, 2010). Dogs fulfilled two important roles in the Greek and Roman cultures. They were seen as hunters and guardians, but also treated as loyal pets. The burials of animals in ancient Greece and Rome demonstrated the importance to human companions. Even ancient Greek literature discussed the dog's fidelity in *The Odyssey* (Sanders, 2003; Walsh, 2009a).

The Jewish culture placed a high importance on treating animals with respect. The Talmud, the Jewish sacred text, suggests that dogs be treated respectfully because they did not bark during the night the Israelites escaped from bondage in Egypt (Walsh, 2009a). Christianity began the ritual of 'Blessing of the Animals' on church steps (Walsh, 2009a).

Asian culture viewed purebred cats and dogs as prized possessions of rulers and aristocracy. Some breeds of cats and dogs were so valued that they were regarded as honored servants (Fine, 2010). In China, the dogs were bred very small so they were able to fit in the empress's sleeve. The dog was then carried around the palace with the empress. In Japan, the royal family kept dogs in their private quarters to warn them of intruders and keep them warm in bed (Walsh, 2009a).

In the seventeenth century, the public's perception of animals changed significantly from the early modern period. During the Medieval and Renaissance time periods, individuals began to become more sympathetic to animals (Fine, 2010; Maehle, 1994) as anthropocentric views (the notion that humans are the only primary holders of moral standard) began to decrease. The

threat of wild animals to human survival decreased, and the practice of pet-keeping expanded throughout the middle-class (Fine, 2010).

By the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, European and American culture began to view dogs very differently than previously. The upper class began to view animals as aristocratic, and very virtuous. Many viewed dogs as being morally superior to humans. The upper class felt as though dogs possessed human qualities, and would dress their dog in elaborate clothing (Sanders, 2004; Walsh, 2009a).

Current Trends

The term companion animal (CA) is considered to be a domesticated animal that is kept for pleasure and companionship, as opposed to utility (Hart, 2003; Walsh, 2009a). Recently, there has been a shift from the term ‘pet’ to companion animal, because it implies a psychological bond and a mutual relationship (Walsh, 2009a). Similarly, there has been a shift in training methods for animals. Humans have moved away from dominance based coercive training to positive reinforcement, rewards-based training (Walsh, 2009a).

In the United States, the importance of companion animals within the household has increased significantly in the past few decades (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Walsh, 2009a). Today, there are over 212 million companion animals living in more than half of American households (Albert et al., 1988; Brandes, 2009; Cain, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991; Gregory, 2010; Mills & Akers, 2002; Sable, 1995; Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009a). By 2014, companion animal expenses in the United States reached \$58 billion dollars (“Americans Spent,” 2015; “Pet Industry Market Size,” n.d.). Over half of that number was spent on the purchase of food, medicine, and sustenance items. An estimated 14 billion dollars was spent on veterinary care and an estimated 22 billion dollars was spent on food (“Americans spent,” 2015). The increase in advanced, costly

medical procedures, as well as merchandise and toys for companion animals, indicates the increasing money and attention these animals receive (Brandes; 2009; Vertesh, 2012).

According to Dosser, Mullis, Mullis, and Dosser (1986), Sanders (2003), and Vertesh (2012), companion animals are named, fed, groomed, photographed, talked to, kissed, hugged, protected, and mourned. Owners allow their companion animals in the master bedroom, and even allow animal companions to sleep with them. They throw them birthday parties and allow them to participate in other family ceremonies. Individuals leave elaborate directions for their companion animals' supervision when they must leave them alone, and care for them during illnesses.

Companion animals can take on various roles within the family, but according to Walsh (2009a), many owners regard their companion animals as their friends (95%) and/or family members (87%). Dogs are the most common companion animals with 44 million American households containing at least one dog. This is followed by cats, with 36 million American households containing at least one cat ("Pet Industry Market Size," n.d.; "U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics," n.d.). Although these are the two most common companion animals, families may enjoy a wide array of animals that they consider companion animals.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prior to discussing the role that companion animals play in the lives of families, it is important to describe the theoretical frameworks that guides this research. The current study utilizes family developmental theory, as well as attachment theory. Both theories will be used to further examine how companion animals are part of the family unit and the importance of attachment between humans and companion animals.

Family Developmental Theory

When examining the family and companion animal's role within the family unit, it is important to view the family across the life course. This may include the changes within individual family member's lives, as well as the family unit and to examine the stages of development the family goes through, and how a family companion animal is incorporated into these stages.

Family developmental theory emerged in the late 1940's, developing from the field of family science. It was one of the first family-focused theories that incorporated time and how time affected individual, and/or group change (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004; White, & Klein, 2008). The family-focused theory had a separate identity from psychology and sociology based family theories. Psychology-based family theories did not explain what happened in families with competing individual needs, and sociology-based family theories focused on society and culture. Therefore, family developmental theory emerged in order to tie the three fields together (Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

In 1948, Evelyn Duvall and Reuben Hill emphasized that families were social groups that were influenced by developmental process, in the same way that individuals were. Like individuals, families go through a process of birth, growth, maintenance, and shrinkage as a

dynamic unit, not merely a collection of individuals (Duvall, 1988; Hill, 1986; Ingolsby et al., 2004; White & Klein, 2008). This analogous process was known as the family life cycle and consisted of two major stages: expansion and contraction. During the expansion stage, children were born and raised, and during the contraction stage children left the family home (Ingolsby et al., 2004). Duvall and Hill presented the family life course, which consisted of tasks that were grouped into eight stages of development throughout the family life course (Duvall, 1988; Hill, 1986). These specific tasks were to be completed by both parents and children (Ingolsby et al., 2004). Rogers and White (1993) and White et al. (2008) define a stage as an interval of time within the lifetime of a family. The structure and interactions within the stage are distinctive enough from the times that precede and follow the stage, which constitutes it as a separate period. The tasks are responses to physical maturation, or cultural changes. The successful achievement of these tasks will lead to happiness and success in later tasks (Ingolsby et al., 2004; White et al., 2008).

The first stage of Duvall's model is the establishment phase, which focuses on courtship and marriage. This is termed the establishment phase because it focuses on the couple preparing for marriage, becoming a husband or wife, establishing a home base, and reprioritizing so the couple's interests are enmeshed as one. Common tasks for the couple during this stage include money management, establishing daily routines, and the division of labor within the house. Children may also be a focus during this stage. Tasks associated with planning for a child include developing family planning strategies, agreeing on the timing of pregnancy, arranging for care of the baby, acquiring knowledge regarding parenthood, and adapting the home to accommodate children (Duvall; 1977; Ingolsby et al., 2004).

The second stage of the life course model is childbearing families, families with infants. The arrival of an infant requires the couple to manage a new set of tasks. The couple must adjust to new physical and emotional demands. They each serve a new role as a mother and a father. The couple must negotiate the responsibilities for caring for the infant, as well as readjusting the household responsibilities. During this stage, a couple might struggle with the financial demand of providing for the new infant (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

The third stage of Duvall's model is families with preschool children. During this stage, families may begin to have more than one child and could be raising a toddler and an infant. There is an increased financial demand on the family during this stage. It is also important for the couple to continue to develop their relationship as a couple, in addition to their roles as parents (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

The fourth stage of the model is families with school-aged children. School is the first public encounter outside of the family for the child. This places new demands on the couple because their parenting skills and their child's behaviors are judged. New tasks for the parents include providing for the children's activities outside of school, developing relationships with teachers and coaches, and developing strategies for the children to accomplish tasks around the home. At this stage, the parents can also delegate household tasks to the children (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

The fifth stage of Duvall's model is families with adolescents. This stage is a period of rapid change and growth in the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Parent's must allow adolescents to establish their own identity, separate from the family's identity (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

The sixth stage of the life course model is families with young adults, the launching stage. This begins the contraction stage of children leaving the nuclear family. This stage is marked by the oldest child leaving home, and ends when the last child has left. Common tasks the family must adjust to include reallocating responsibilities, duties, and roles among the family members who remain in the household. Since the oldest child may be entering college, there is also a reallocation of financial resources for the couple (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

Stage seven of the model is the middle years. This is the time where all the children have left the home, but the parents have not yet retired. A daunting task during this stage is increasing retirement accounts to ensure security for the couple's future. Another common task during this stage is the formation of relationships with grandchildren. During this time, couple's report a great deal of stress in their relationship due to having to reestablish their relationship without children (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

Finally, the eighth stage of the life course model is aging family members. Many changes take place during this stage. These changes and tasks include adjustment to retirement and the decrease in financial income, illness, or physical limitation couples may face, and the death of a spouse, family members, or friends. The life cycle is complete when the last partner dies (Duvall, 1977; Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

While not all families may reach each stage of the life course model, it is important to recognize that the families that do progress through the stages, may not take the same path at the same exact time. The stages of family development are driven by ontogenetic development, and by the contexts in which the development occurs. Ontogenetic development is physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development that can be attributed to the environment and the experience the individual experiences within the environment (Lambert & Johnson, 2011). In

addition, the development of individual family members influences the family unit as a whole. Therefore, families are not static, but dynamic and change over time (Albert et al., 1988; Day, 2010; Duvall, 1977; Duvall, 1988; Ingoldsby et al., 2004; Rogers et al., 1993; White et al., 2008). Common, recurrent problem for families that are constantly reorganizing and facing role strain include: agreement and maintenance of the division of tasks, the allocation of resources, the levels of competence for family members to perform tasks, and the emergent needs of members (Hill, 1986).

There are also a variety of other factors that influence the family during the life course. A concept that contributes to how the family responds to the tasks is referred to as norms. According to White et al. (2008), norms are social rules that govern group and individual behavior. Norms are the cultural or social rules for how an individual should accomplish a task at different stages for the family and various ages for the individual (Rogers et al., 1993; White et al., 2008). Norms also correlate with family roles. Roles are defined as a set of expectations for behavior, or norms, that are attached to a familial position (Rogers et al., 1993; White et al., 2008). Like norms, roles can vary depending upon the society or culture. Similarly, roles can be stage-related, based on the interactional structure of the family, and age related based on the developmental period of the family members. Norms and roles can change over time as the family changes (Rogers et al., 1993; White et al., 2008). Another important concept of the family developmental theory is transitions. Transitions occur when a family moves from one distinct stage to another (Duvall, 1988). A transition is indicated by the event between the two stages. The process norms regulate the timing of the transition between stages (Ingoldsby et al., 2004; Rogers et al., 1993; White et al., 2008). As families transition from one stage to the next, their roles, behaviors, and tasks are adjusted in accordance with the new stage (Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

Companion Animals and the Family Developmental Theory. Companion animals and the family developmental theory demonstrate that as a family moves through the different stages of development within the family life course, the role of the companion animal changes, evolves, and adapts to the changes and needs of the family during the stages (Turner, 2005). Companion animals can enter the family at different developmental stages of the life course, and families have different goals, motivations, and intentions about how they are going to include the companion animal into their family. Turner (2005), stated the ownership of companion animals during emerging adulthood is relatively high compared to other stages of the family life cycle. A study conducted by Albert et al. (1988), found that nearly one-fourth of all pets are acquired during the establishment phase of the family life cycle. Albert et al. (1988) also found that there is a low rate of pet ownership among families who have young children. During this stage of the family life cycle, the couple's focus is on caring for infants and preschoolers, which may leave limited time and energy to care for a companion animal. They also found that there was a high rate of attention and affection for companion animals among divorced, never-married, widowed people, childless couples, newlyweds, and empty-nesters. This indicates that companion animals can provide an emotional substitute for family members, such as children and spouses (Albert et al., 1988).

According to Schvaneveldt, Young, Schvaneveldt, and Kivett (2001), the various dimensions of companion animal ownership are salient at different stages of the life course. The authors examined the roles of companion animals and how they change throughout the different stages of the life cycle. During the stage with infants and young children, companion animals are often acquired for touch, communication, and companionship for the young child. During the school-age stage, companion animals not only provide love and affection, but they also facilitate

cognitive development in regard to biology, responsibility, and identity (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). During the preadolescent years, the care of the companion animal is no longer the child's responsibility, the mother becomes main caregiver for the companion animal. This demonstrates the expressive roles of the mother and the instrumental roles of the father. The relationship between the preadolescent and the companion animal is viewed as a friendship (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). In the adolescent stage of the life course theory, companion animals are most suitable for companionship, as they are responsible for having fun, display of affection, and the promotion of social networks. During the developmental stages with adults, companion animals can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Companion animals can also promote feelings of self-worth and well-being during this stage. Adults view the animal as both their friend, and extended family members (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). For the last stage of the life course, older adults, companion animals fill a multitude of roles. Companion animals during this stage help promote life satisfaction, reduce personal and family despair related to deaths, serve as social and emotional anchors, promote health status, and reduce loneliness and isolation (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001).

The family developmental theory and life course framework not only demonstrates how families move and change throughout the life cycle, but also how a companion animal can be incorporated in to this family unit at different stages. Companion animals have an impact and react to many phases of the family life cycle.

Attachment Theory

An attachment is defined as an affectional tie that a human, or an animal, forms between himself and another specific one (Ainsworth, & Bell, 1970). Attachment theory, which was developed by John Bowlby, emphasized the need for humans to protect and be protected

(Bowlby, 1969). According to attachment theory, humans are predisposed to seek out and sustain emotional and physical connections to selective figures with whom they become familiar, and rely on for physical and psychological protection (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth et al., 1970; Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1982; Fine, 2010; Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2012; Sable, 2012). These relationships serve as a lifelong source of comfort and security in times of stress and are able to restore emotional balance (Rosenkoetter, 1991; Sable, 2012). An attachment bond may form if the attachment figure displays the four features identified by Mary Ainsworth. The first criteria is proximity maintenance. Proximity maintenance is when the attachment figure is near and its presence is enjoyable, especially in a time of stress or need. The second criteria is the attachment figure as a safe haven in times of distress, where the attachment figure provides comfort, assurance, and support (Ainsworth et al., 1970; Kurdek, 2008; Mano Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011., 2011; Mano et al., 2012; Rockett & Carr, 2014). The third criteria is using the attachment figure as a secure base. This indicates that the attachment figure provides a sense of security during times of exploration of the world and self-development. Finally, the fourth criteria are separation distress, where an individual longs to be with the object when one is temporarily away from the attachment figure (Ainsworth et al., 1970; Kurdek, 2008; Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011; Mano et al., 2012; Rockett & Carr, 2014).

Child Attachment. At birth, an infant is equipped with a set of behaviors that promote the infant to be in close proximity to a caregiver. The infant uses attachment behaviors such as crying, sucking, rooting, and smiling to differentially signal to the caregiver they want something (Ainsworth et al., 1970). At first, these behaviors are not directed at anyone specific, but as the infant gets older and begins to distinguish one person from another, they begin to discriminate their attachment behavior differently (Ainsworth, 1989).

At around six months of age, the infant begins to explore the world around them. As the child begins to move around, they begin to enable proximity-keeping behavior. The child determines who the key caregiver is, and has learned that the caregiver exists even when not in the child's view. At this point, the infant is able to form an attachment to the primary caregiver, as well as a few other familiar persons (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth et al., 1970; Bowlby, 1982).

Throughout the first year of the infant's life, they begin to formulate expectations of the caregiver. According to Bowlby (1982), at some point the child begins to internalize these expectations and the child begins to form "working models" of the physical environment, attachment figures, and himself or herself.

Adult Attachment. It is important to distinguish the differences between childhood attachment characteristics and adult attachment characteristics. Most attachment theorists focus on the importance of attachment bonds during infancy. While attachment during infancy is important, we also should consider attachment in adulthood. Research has demonstrated that early relationship experiences influence relationships later in life. In adulthood, the expectations of the self and others that constitute central elements of internal working models of attachment will play a vital role in formulating new relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Rockett et al., 2014). Like children, adults seek closeness and security from attachment figures during times of need, including stress, which helps reduce fear (Bowlby, 1982). Children tend to associate the attachment figure as stronger and wiser than they are, whereas adults are more flexible and accommodating to a variety of relationships and bonds. Furthermore, adults tend to have a stronger sense of inner security due to their ability to think abstractly, and their ability to tolerate separations for a longer period of time (Sable, 1995).

Companion Animal Attachment. In connection with this, the roles of human/companion animal relationships often parallel roles of human/human relationships (Barba, 1995; Fine, 2010). Companion animals contribute to an individual's physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Family companion animals have been found to provide an emotional bond attachment that provides an individual with a sense of security and well-being (Rosenkoetter, 1991; Sable, 1995; Vertesh, 2012). Companion animals are readily available and are responsive to their owner's moods, and are able to generate positive feelings of comfort (Rockett et al., 2014; Rosenkoetter, 1991; Sable, 2012). "The presence of a companion animal increases feelings of happiness, security and self-worth and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation on a daily basis and during separations or transitions" (Sable, 1995).

According to Mano et al. (2011), human-companion animal bonds meet the four criteria listed above for attachment relationships. Owners feel close to their companion animal, they view their animal as a safe haven, providing them with protection, support, and relief in times of need, and they also serve as a secure base when the owner pursues activities to explore the world (Mano et al., 2011). Just as young children rely on their parents, companion animals rely on their owners for continual care, protection from dangerous situations, and explanations due to their lack of language (Barba, 1995; Fine, 2010).

Literature

The large increase in companion animal ownership throughout the past several decades correlates with the rise in single-family households, individuals delaying marriage, and rising infertility rates (Brandes, 2009). Today, the varying degrees of companion animals within families demonstrates that pets are mediating between animals and humans (Vertesh, 2012). With the increasing number of childless couples and individuals who live alone, companion

animals can alleviate loneliness and provide protection. However, over time, the companion animal forms a strong attachment with its owner, and is viewed as more than just a pet (Brandes, 2009).

Owners often kiss, hug, pet, and show warmth and love to their animal (Vertesh, 2012). Since companion animals have such a large social and emotional contribution to the family, often owners view their relationships with the companion animal as humanistic.

Anthropomorphism, refers to giving the companion animal human characteristics by projecting human personality traits, motives, and qualities (Albert et al., 1988; Fine, 2010; Gage et al., 1991; Greenebaum, 2004; Rosenkoetter, 1991; Sanders, 2003). Humans anthropomorphize companion animals into family members, often assigning them the role of a child (Greenebaum, 2004; Sanders, 2003).

Companion Animals as a Pre-child/Child

One of the most common roles that companion animals take on in families, is the role of a child. When the companion animal assumes the role of a child, the humans assume the parental role (Power, 2008). Today, many emerging adults are delaying having children, therefore, research has demonstrated that companion animal attachment is common among young adult couples who do not yet have children (Greenebaum, 2004; Turner, 2005). During this developmental stage, having a companion animal is a way to enlarge a family without the difficulties of pregnancy, the interruption of schooling or a career, and high expenses (Vertesh, 2012). Caring for a companion animal demonstrates similarities of the demands and responsibilities of the roles of parents (Dossier et al., 1986). An animal may not be identical to a human baby, but can possess baby like characteristics that need care in a less complex and demanding way than what a human child would need (Vertesh, 2012). The roles and

responsibilities associated with caring for a companion animal is a way to practice for their future roles as parents with a human child (Turner, 2005; Vertesh, 2012), and can present a couple with a multitude of challenges and learning opportunities such as communication and problem solving skills. When co-parenting a companion animal, couple's may have to negotiate rules, roles, and boundaries (Dossier et al., 1986; Walsh, 2009b).

Companion Animals as a Child Substitute

With an increase in infertility rates and the choice remain childless, many couples get a companion animal in the place of a child (Brandes, 2009; Vertesh, 2012). Also, many empty-nesters who have launched their children out of their homes, choose to get a companion animal to fill the void of the loss of their parental role (Brandes, 2009, Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009b). According to Vertesh (2012), when a companion animal takes the place of a child, it offers the couple similar love and fulfillment that a baby offers, but without the investment and major lifestyle change. Raising a companion animal instead of a child can offer the couple the feelings of providing nurturance, affection, limit-setting, and concern for another living being (Walsh, 2009b).

Companion Animal as Friend

A friendship is a close relationship where the participants mutually shape and influence each other's behaviors and emotions. Friendships are emotionally enriching because the participants share companionships, provide mutual support, and enjoy shared activities. Owners frequently classify their relationship with their companion animal as a friendship (Sanders, 2003). The companion animal acts as someone with whom the individual can spend time with and share thoughts and decisions with (Turner, 2005). The owner maintains and sustains the relationship with the companion animal similarly to a human-to-human friendship. Like other

human relationships, human-animal friendships are characterized by commitment and ambivalence, rewards and problems, and connectedness and loss (Sanders, 2003).

Often, children associate a family companion animal as their friend, or a sibling. Children develop nurturing, caring friendships with their companion animal (Turner, 2005). It is not uncommon for children to display affection towards the companion animals such as petting, hugging, cuddling, and kissing (Triebenbacher, 1998). Triebenbacher (1998) found that attachment behaviors such as proximity seeking, initiating interaction, expression of affection, and thinking about the object of attachment were present between the child and companion animal.

As children begin to build autonomy, the companion animal may act as the child's companion and confidante, which provides the child with someone to talk to, confide in, and eliminate the feelings of loneliness (Power, 2008; Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009b). Like adults, animals can have a strong influence on a child's psychosocial development and emotional well-being. The bond between the child and the companion animal can contribute to a child's confidence, mood improvement, and greater empathy with humans, as well as teach children lifelong lessons about life, love, and loss (Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009a).

Considerations for Parenting a Companion Animal

It is important to understand how positive co-parenting and other partner relationship factors relate to parenting. The responsibilities associated with parenting a human child could have many similarities of parenting a companion animal. However, there is an extremely limited amount of research conducted on parenting companion animals and how it could potentially prepare a couple for parenthood. For this reason, this review will explore literature that focuses

on parenting a human child focusing on three key considerations: parental responsibilities and division of labor, financial considerations, and legal issues.

Parental Role Responsibilities and Division of Labor

Humans. Fathering and mothering is a period of the life course where gender magnification is most prominent. When a couple discovers they are pregnant, the months following are full of transitions that are engendered and gendered (Doucet, 2009). With the arrival of a new baby, mothers and fathers assume different parental roles when parenting the child. Due to the shift of family dynamics over the past 30 years, dual-wage earning families are not uncommon. Today, more women with children are entering the workforce. Although more males are participating in child care activities, women are still responsible for over half of the child care (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Rose, Brady, Yerkes, & Coles, 2009; Wille, 1995). While society encourages fathers to be involved in the care of their child, society does not encourage fathers to assume the primary caretaking role (Wille, 1995). Typically, the mother's role is seen as more traditional, who is responsible for the housework, and is the primary caretaker and nurturer of the infant. Fathers spend less time in caregiving activities, and more time participating in play with the child and meeting their material needs (Doucet, 2009; McHale & Huston, 1984; Wille, 1995). According to Doucet (2009), the reason fathers tend have a more physical approach to parenting is because it allows them to distinguish their caregiving from that of mothering.

Household labor tends to be gender specific among many couples according to what they have learned about appropriate gender roles as men and women (Batalova et al., 2002). As previously mentioned, housework and child care are primarily seen as a woman's duties. These tasks have become part of the woman's identity. Research conducted by Poortman and Lippe

(2009) found that women had a more positive attitude toward cleaning, cooking, and child care than men. They also enjoyed completing these tasks, sustained higher standards, and felt responsible for these duties.

Similarly, parental roles vary among mothers and fathers with transition to parenthood. Research has indicated significant differences between men's and women's parental expectations and responsibilities. According to Delmore-Ko, Pancer, Hunsberger, and Pratt (2000), women expressed concerns about their ability to parent and the lack of sleep they were going to get. Women were also expressed how they were going to cope about the immediate concerns of the physical and emotional demands of having an infant.

Father's involvement in caregiving was directly related to their pregnancy intentions. A study conducted by Tinkew, Ryan, Carrano, and Moore (2007), discovered that men who did not want the pregnancy showed less paternal warmth, whereas men who wanted the pregnancy demonstrated nurturing behaviors towards the infant. Also, men who did want the pregnancy contributed more to the caregiving activities of the infant (Tinkew et al., 2007). Delmore-Ko et al. (2000), discovered that men frequently talked about playing with their child and teaching their child about values. Men focused on their future roles as guides and teachers, and the impact they would have on their children as adolescents (Delmore-Ko et al., 2000).

While there are some differences in parental expectations between women and men, there are also several similarities in their views. Women and men both expressed concerns over finances once they have a child, the health of their baby, building a family together, role overload, and the effect of society on their child (Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Wille, 2000). Parents also expressed that they are both more confident in the mother's ability to care for the infant.

They agree that the mother is more sensitive, aware, and responsive to the infants needs (Wille, 2000).

In conclusion, the transition to parenthood is a normal developmental period that offers a multitude of costs and rewards. The decision to parent requires the couple to assume new roles with associated responsibilities, which may alter their lifestyle and relationship. Overall, the stressors of parenthood include a lack of sleep, less time for self and spouse, feelings of being overwhelmed, being tied down, having routines and plans interrupted, and concerns about marital relationships (Dosser et al., 1986). However, these stressors may be overlooked due to the exuberant amount of joy and fulfillment a baby can bring to the couple's life.

Companion Animals. Caring for a companion animal seems to closely approximate the demands and responsibilities of parenthood. Dosser et al., (1986), suggested that many couples, both consciously, and unconsciously, prepare for parenthood by taking care of companion animals. Caring for companion animals demonstrates similarities of the demands and responsibilities of the roles of parents. Dosser et al. (1986) highlighted many of the parallels that parenting a companion animal has in common with parenting a human child. Some of these include: tiredness due to less sleep from caring for the pet, feelings of increased responsibility because of the dependency of the pet, feelings of being tied down because the couple cannot leave the pet alone for an extended period of time, having routines interrupted, concerns about responding to the cues of the companion animal, concerns about diet and exercise, concerns over time and money spent on the pet, concerns that the couple is doing the right things, and concerns about providing the animal with appropriate toys. Dosser et al. (1986) also mentioned, as the companion animal continues to grow and develop, there continues to be similarities to a human child. The personality characteristics of a puppy match those of a young child such as

playfulness, persistence, demand for attention and affection, mischievousness, and the possibility for behavior problems.

Finances

Humans. Since 1960, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided estimates on annual expenditures on children aged birth through eighteen. The cost of raising a child has increased 23% from 1960 when it was \$198,560 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). Today, it will cost an average family nearly quarter-million dollars, excluding the cost of college, to raise a child from birth through the age of eighteen (Chokski, 2014; Hicken, 2014; USDA, 2013). It will cost a middle-income family approximately \$245,340 by the time the child is eighteen (Chokski, 2014; USDA, 2013), which is approximately a 2% increase from the year before (Hicken, 2014).

The costs of raising a child include housing, food, transportation, healthcare expenses, education and child care, and miscellaneous expenses (Hicken, 2014; USDA, 2013). The USDA explains each category in further detail. Household expenses include shelter, utilities, and house furnishings and equipment. It is estimated that of the quarter million dollars, 30% is spent on household expenditures. Which is the largest percentage of the quarter million dollars that is spent on children. The second largest category is food expenses, which is 16%. Food expenses consist of food and nonalcoholic beverages purchased at a grocery store, convenience store, dining at restaurants, and expenditures on school meals. Approximately 14% is spent on transportation costs. Transportation expenses include monthly payments on vehicles, down payments, gas and motor oil, maintenance and repairs, insurance, and public transportation. Clothing expenses include the cost of diapers, shirts, pants, dresses, suits, footwear, and clothing services such as dry cleaning and alterations. Nearly 6% of the quarter million spent on children

is spent on clothing costs. Health care expenses include medical and dental services that are not included through insurance, prescription drugs not paid by insurance, and health insurance co-pays that are not paid by an employer. It is estimated that of the quarter million dollars, 8% is spend on health care costs. Child care costs and education expenses consists of day care tuition and supplies, baby-sitting fees, elementary and high school tuition, books, fees, and school supplies. Public and private schools are both included in this category. This is the second largest category contributing to the quarter million dollars it takes to raise a child. Nearly, 18% is assumed for education and child care costs. Finally, miscellaneous expenses consist of personal care items, entertainment, and reading materials. This category accounts for 8% of the quarter million dollars (USDA, 2013).

The United States Department of Agriculture also examined the cost of raising a child at different ages and found that expenses were lower for younger age groups, and expenses increased as the child got older. The USDA estimated that a child from birth to two years old, a child costs \$12,940 to raise per year, ages six to eight costs \$12,800 per year, and ages fifteen to seventeen costs \$14,970.

Although the cost of raising a child can vary depending upon the region someone is in, their socioeconomic status, and their marital status the cost of raising a child can be a huge financial burden. Overall, the direct and indirect costs of raising children are considerable, however the benefits of children may outweigh the costs.

Companion Animals. The cost of owning a companion animal can vary depending on what type of animal one has and the size of the animal. Most owners underestimate the cost of owning a companion animal, and therefore assume they can afford the animal regardless of their budget (“Cost of Owning a Dog,” n.d.). It is also important for owners to understand that animals

are a big investment, not only in terms of money, but also time. When considering adoption of a companion animal, it is important to consider all the costs that are associated with the animal. For example, the initial costs of getting a dog or cat include: purchase price/donation to shelter or rescue group, collar, leash, litter box, crate, dishes, toys, beds, initial vaccines, food, spay/neuter, and possibly training. Annual costs for a dog or cat include: food, litter, toys, treats, flea and tick medication, grooming, vet visits, and potentially boarding fees (“Cost of Owning a Dog,” n.d.; “Pet Care Costs,” n.d.). According to the ASPCA, the average cost during the first year of owning a small dog is \$1,314; the average cost during the first year of owning a large dog is \$1,843; and the average cost during the first year of owning a cat is \$1,035 (“Pet Care Costs,” n.d.). On average, dogs can live anywhere from 10-15 years of age, and cats can live anywhere between 15-20 years of age. These numbers indicate the cost of owning the companion animal during the first year tends to be more expensive, where the initial costs may be more than the yearly costs. In conclusion, the cost of owning a companion animal over the course of many years is a large investment.

Legal Issues

Humans. Over the past 35 years, living arrangements for children following divorce have remained relatively stable (Kelly, 2007). For most of the twentieth century, after a divorce, the most common outcome for children was to live with their mother. This in part was because of gender norms, which suggested that the mother was a better caretaker of children (Cancian, Meyer, Brown, & Cook, 2014). In the 1980’s, the United States adopted the ‘best interests’ law where the caregiver guidelines became what was considered to be in the children’s “best interests”, without considering the psychological condition of the parents, the nature of their parenting, the intensity of conflict, or the history of the parent-child relationship (Cancian et al.,

2014; Fox & Kelly, 1995; Kelly, 2007). This law allowed frequent visitation and permitted shared physical custody.

Joint or equal custody, where each parent spends 50% of the time with the child, entitles both parents to make major decisions about their child including medical decisions and educational decisions (Cancian et al., 2014; Kelly, 2007). Unequal shared custody involves the child staying with one parent 25% to 49% and the remainder of time with the other parent (Cancian et al., 2014; Kelly, 2007). Finally, sole custody entitles one parent to have physical and legal custody of the child (Cancian et al., 2014; Kelly, 2007). Of the three custody types, joint custody has been found to be the most beneficial to children. Children have better psychological and behavioral adjustment and academic achievement when their mothers and fathers are involved in their lives on a regular basis (Kelly, 2007). However, joint custody tends to be more expensive. Therefore, both parents need to have the resources and finances to accommodate the child. Because of this, shared custody is more common among couples with a higher income (Cancian et al., 2014; Kelly, 2007).

There are multiple factors that can affect a child's living arrangements. Research has shown that custody is related to economic factors and the characteristics of children and parents. First, the age and the gender of the child could have an influence on which parent gets custody of the child (Cancian et al., 2014; Fox et al., 1995). Next, parental factors that could contribute to custody issues include race/ethnicity, educational attainment, marital and fertility histories, job status, earnings, and current health (Cancian et al., 2014; Fox et al., 1995). Also, maternal hostility towards the father at separation can have an impact on the father's involvement with the child following the divorce. Finally, the relocation of a parent can affect their custody situation.

When one parent relocates many miles away from the custodial parent, a pattern of diminishing contacts, and deterioration in attachments and closeness commonly occur (Kelly, 2007).

Three major types of post-divorce co-parenting relationships have been identified according to Kelly (2007). The first type is conflicted co-parenting relationships, which 20%-25% of couples are classified as this type. This relationship is indicated by frequent conflict, poor communication, and the failure of one or both former partners to disengage emotionally. Frequently, these parents have a difficult time focusing on the child, and fail to solve minor disputes (Kelly, 2007). The second parenting type post-divorce is parallel co-parenting, where more than 50% of divorced couple's fall into this category. Parents in this category are emotionally disengaged, have low conflict, and low communication with one another. They usually parent separately with little coordination of childrearing issues with the opposite parent (Kelly, 2007). Finally, the third co-parenting type post-divorce is cooperative co-parenting, which consists of 25% to 30% of divorced couples. This type of co-parenting is the most positive and effective. Parents typically joint plan their child's life, coordinate, and offer parental support to each other (Kelly, 2007).

The factors that promote resiliency and positive adjustment in children of divorced parents are of high importance. Children's contact with their non-resident parent can be influenced by a multitude of characteristics. As a result, guidelines should reflect the diversity of the child's best interests, the parental interest, and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Companion Animals. Due to the number of companion animals increasing in American households, the likelihood of companion animals being the subject of disputes between divorcing spouses is likely. Since many individuals consider companion animals to be family members, they believe the court should treat the animal like child custody and visitation rights, considering

the ‘best interests’ of the companion animal (Gregory, 2010; Mills et al., 2002). However, legally companion animals are considered personal property (Gregory, 2010; Hirschfeld, 2009; Mills et al., 2002). Separation agreements are agreements in which both partners agree on how their property will be distributed upon the termination of the relationship (Mills et al., 2002). Therefore, for the most part, courts follow the critical law classification of companion animals as personal property (Gregory, 2010; Mills et al., 2002). According to Mills et al., (2002), if a companion animal is classified as personal property, separation agreements can specify how the personal property will be distributed upon separation, and arrangements can be written in the separation agreement about the distribution of personal property. However, if the law ever classified domestic animals as being equal to children, partners would still be able to include residence arrangement regarding their companion animal in separation agreements. However, separation agreements may be used less frequently to work out residence rights regarding pets because the courts can overrule prior arrangements and residence arrangements for children (Mills et al., 2002).

If there is no separation agreement in place prior to the divorce, the family court judge can be involved in residence disputes regarding domestic animals whether the companion animal is considered property or a child (Mills et al., 2002). The court’s decision on who the companion animal goes to is based on whether the animal is material property or separate property. If the companion animal is separate property, it goes to the owner. If the companion animal is considered material property, the court can determine who the animal goes to (Mills et al., 2002). The court must also consider the welfare of the companion animal including how frequently it would be walked, any conflicts that could arise with other animals or children within that home, and humane treatment of the animal (Mills et al., 2002).

The issue regarding domestic pet law is that both children and animals are loved, capable of loving, and are capable of sensitivity, yet the laws regarding custody of children focus on the child's best interests, whereas the laws regarding companion animal custody focus on the animal being classified as personal property (Gregory, 2010; Mills et al., 2002). Because companion animals are considered personal property, they can be sold and bought in the market as a commodity (Mills et al., 2002). Therefore, family court judges should view pet custody laws like child custody, where the 'best interest' of the companion animal is taken into consideration (Gregory, 2010; Mills et al., 2002).

Companion Animals as a Precursor to Parenthood

Parenting a companion animal demonstrates many parallels of parenting a human child. Owners of a companion animal often play with their animals as parents would play with their children and talk to them in baby talk like parents would talk to a baby (Barba, 1995; Fine, 2010). According to an article published by the Huffington Post, the first few months of raising a puppy was an eye-opening experience for the couple. Interviews of two couples that decided to co-parent an animal prior to having a child, discovered that it deepened their commitment, and tested their ability to work together to nurture another living being ("How Your First Dog," 2015). One couple indicated that they had to wake up several times throughout the night to tend to their crying puppy. The couples found that parenting an animal allowed them to learn about their relationships with their significant other. Another couple stated that co-parenting an animal improved their communication skills, taught them patience, and allowed them to determine the responsibilities that each of them would assume as parents. The puppies also required the couples to coordinate schedules for care of the animals, and it required them to ask for help when needed ("How Your First Dog," 2015). When the couples finally had children, they felt that had

a good handle on random wake-up calls, nevertheless, a baby brought several new dimensions to parenting that the animal did not. The couple also indicated that the mother took most of the evening shifts of feeding the child and changing the baby's diapers, however, she was not responsible for cleaning up the dog's poop ("How Your First Dog," 2015).

Overall, parenting a companion animal has similarities to parenting a human child. Co-parenting a companion animal requires the couple to focus on many relationship factors, which helps them foster an environment where the living being can be nurtured and loved. The couple can learn shared responsibilities, communication skills, how to manage finances, negotiation, and planning when taking care of a companion animal. Thus, companion animals can provide a sturdy parenting foundation for couples who are preparing to have children.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This qualitative research study used a grounded theory method to seek a better understanding of how the roles, responsibilities, and expenses are negotiated for a companion animal, also how co-parenting a companion animal can be like raising a human child. The research study was submitted to the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) for approval at East Carolina University (ECU) (See Appendix A).

Sample

The larger sample was recruited using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling relies on personal networks to identify participants who would be appropriate for the study. When one person meets the criteria for the study, the researcher asks them to provide another individual in their network that may fit the criteria. Therefore, one research contact leads to another (Hesse-Biber, & Leavy, 2011).

The target audience for this study was emerging adult couples (18-29 years of age). The inclusion criteria were the couple must be married or have been cohabitating for at least a year, they do not have children, and they must have had a companion animal within their family for at least six months.

Procedures

After receiving approval, a pilot study was conducted. This allowed the researchers to determine if any modifications needed to be made to the demographic survey, interview prompts, or study overall in any way. The researcher modified the wording of three of the interview prompts.

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were asked to read the informed consent form (Appendix B), in which the individuals were informed about the nature of the study,

confidentiality, and their role in the research. Participation in the study was voluntary and no compensation was provided. After reading the consent form, the participants completed a brief demographic survey (Table 1) consisting of fifteen questions regarding the participant's age, ethnicity, gender, and a few questions regarding companion animals (Appendix C).

Nine interview prompts (Appendix D) were developed by the researcher specifically for this study based upon the literature of caregiving for a companion animal. Interview items addressed "parenting" responsibilities associated with the companion animal including caregiving, expenses, and negotiation, as well as a question that addressed the responsibilities associated with parenting a human child.

The interviews were semi-structured. The researcher relied on the specific interview questions, but allowed the participants to guide the conversation. Therefore, each interview was unique (Hesse-Biber et al., 2011). The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, or a location of the participant's choice. One researcher conducted the interviews with each couple. The researcher conducted the interview with each partner present to gain a better understanding of the relationship dynamics regarding the co-parenting process. Throughout the interviews, each partner's responses elicited more in-depth discussion, which provided the researcher with a better understanding of how the couple negotiated, considered, and interacted with each other. Each interview took approximately one hour.

Each interview was audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. After each interview, the audio recording was uploaded onto a computer to be transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used a program called F5 transcription to transcribe the interviews. F5 transcription is a program that allows an individual to manually type audio or video recordings with variable speeds, as well as a rewind option.

Table 1

Demographic Survey Questions

Demographic Characteristic	Description
Age	Participants were asked to enter their current age
Gender	Participants were asked to indicate if they were male or female
Race/Ethnicity	Participants were asked to identify their race or ethnicity based upon the 2010 census categories
Relationship Status	Participants were asked to state whether they were married or cohabitating at the time of “parenting” a companion animal
Housing	Participants were asked to select which type of housing they lived in
Work Schedule	Participants were asked to select which shift they typically work
Income	Participants were asked to select if their income was lower, equal, or higher than their partner’s
Childhood Companion Animal	Participants were asked if they had a companion animal(s) as a child, and if so what type
Type and Number of Companion Animal	Participants were asked to indicate the type of animal and how many they are currently raising
Attachment	Participants were asked to rate their attachment to their companion animal on a scale of one to ten
Photos	Participants were asked to select where they currently have pictures of their companion

Demographic Characteristic	Description
Sleeping	animal and who else is included in the pictures Participants were asked to select where their companion animal(s) sleep
Children	Participants were asked if they want to have human children in the future and when

The audio recording was uploaded into the F5 transcription program, and the researcher could adjust the speed and volume of the recording to transcribe it. The adjustable settings and audio recordings allowed the researchers to listen to the participant's responses as many times as necessary to transcribe the interviews. The researcher transcribed the interview verbatim. The transcribing did not include nonlinguistic observations such as facial expressions, pauses, body language, etc.

The researcher and graduate advisor coded the data using a grounded theory approach. The purpose of grounded theory method is to begin with the raw data and use it to develop a theory (LaRossa, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The researcher and graduate advisor followed Strauss and Corbin's paradigm model, which is an organizing scheme that connects subcategories of data to the overall central theme and allows the researcher to examine how the categories of data relate to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researchers followed their three-step coding process. The researchers began the coding process after the first four interviews were completed using open coding. Open coding focuses on dividing the data into segments, where they are closely examined for specific similarities and differences about the phenomena being examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; LaRossa, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The researcher and graduate advisor independently conducted a thematic analysis using open coding on the first four interviews and then collaborated to compare themes. After analyzing the first four interviews, the researchers determined how many more interviews needed to be conducted to reach saturation. Three more interviews were conducted, which were transcribed, open coded separately by the researcher and the graduate advisor, and then analyzed to determine the common themes. Since no new themes were discovered and saturation had been

reached, the researcher and graduate advisor chose to conclude the interviews. Thus, the study included a total of seven interviews.

The researchers then completed the second coding step, axial coding, where one category is specifically analyzed to determine the conditions that give rise to it and the context of it (Stauss & Corbin, 1990; LaRossa, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Axial coding focuses on the conditions that give rise to the category, the context in which it was embedded, and the action by which the processes are carried out (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Finally, the researcher's focused on the third step of the coding process, selective coding. Selective coding involves linking the categories and their interrelationships to create a story line about the phenomenon being examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; LaRossa, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed using SPSS. The descriptive statistics provided information about the sample demographics including age, gender, ethnicity, relationship status, housing, work schedule, and income. Thematic analysis was conducted for responses to open-ended questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The researcher conducted seven interviews with couples, who self-identified as heterosexual. The overall sample ranged in age from 22-28 years with a mean age of 25 (SD 1.83). The age range for female participants ($n=7$) was 22-28 with a mean age of 24.7 (SD 2.13). The age range for male participants ($n=7$) was 23-28 with a mean age of 25.3 (SD 1.60).

Thirteen of the participants ($n=13$) identified as white, with one participant ($n=1$) identifying as black. Five of the couples ($n=5$) were married, while two of the couples ($n=2$) were cohabitating. Two of the couples lived in an apartment, two couples in a single-family home, two couples in a townhouse or condo, and one couple lived in a duplex.

Many participants, 64% ($n=9$), worked 1st shift. Four participants ($n=4$) worked multiple or varying shifts due to school, work, internships, and other responsibilities. One participant identified working second shift. All participants were asked to state if their income was lower than their partner's, equal to their partner's, or higher than their partner's. Six participants stated that their income was lower than their partner's and six participants stated their income was higher than their partner's. The remaining two participants indicated their income was equal to one another's. All of the participants ($N=14$) reported having a companion animal growing up as a child and the majority of participants, 92% ($n=13$), had more than one companion animal growing up. Tables two through eight provide detailed demographic information about each unique couple and provides insight into the coding results. Pseudonyms were used in place of participant's real names to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Participants were asked to rate their attachment to their current companion animal(s) on a scale of one to ten, with one being not attached at all and ten being very attached. All the female participants ($n=7$) rated their attachment to their current companion animal(s) as a ten.

Table 2

Couple #1 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Ashley	Luke
Age	22	23
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Married	Married
Housing	Townhouse/Condo	Townhouse/Condo
Work Schedule	1st Shift	1st Shift
Income	Lower than your partner's	Higher than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 2 Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse: 2	Dog: 2
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Dog: 1	Dog: 1

Table 3

Couple #3 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Chelse	Brandon
Age	25	25
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Married	Married
Housing	Duplex	Duplex
Work Schedule	Multiple Shifts	Multiple Shifts
Income	Equal to your partner's	Equal to your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 1	Dog: 2 Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse: 3 Reptile: 1
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Dog: 1 Cat: 1	Dog: 1 Cat: 1

Table 4

Couple #3 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Sharon	Kevin
Age	24	24
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Cohabiting	Cohabiting
Housing	Apartment	Apartment
Work Schedule	Multiple Shifts	2 nd Shift
Income	Lower than your partner's	Higher than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 7 Cat: 20+ Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse: 8	Dog: 2
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Cat: 2	Cat: 2

Table 5

Couple #4 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Eboni	James
Age	24	26
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Married	Married
Housing	Single Family Home	Single Family Home
Work Schedule	1st Shift	1st Shift
Income	Higher than your partner's	Lower than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 1 Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse: 2	Dog: 3
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Cat: 1	Cat: 1

Table 6

Couple #5 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Sandy	John
Age	28	28
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Married	Married
Housing	Townhouse/Condo	Townhouse/Condo
Work Schedule	1st Shift	1st Shift
Income	Higher than your partner's	Lower than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 1 Cat: 1 Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse: 1	Dog: 1 Reptile: 1
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Dog: 1	Dog: 1

Table 7

Couple #6 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Elisa	Jake
Age	23	25
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Married	Married
Housing	Apartment	Apartment
Work Schedule	Multiple Shifts	1st Shift
Income	Lower than your partner's	Higher than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 3 Cat: 1	Dog: 3
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Dog: 3 Cat: 1	Dog: 3 Cat: 1

Table 8

Couple #7 Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	Susannah	Jason
Age	27	26
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White
Relationship Status	Cohabiting	Cohabiting
Housing	Single Family Home	Single Family Home
Work Schedule	1st Shift	1st Shift
Income	Lower than your partner's	Higher than your partner's
Type and Number of CA as a Child	Dog: 1 Cat: 4	Cat: 3
Type and Number of CA Currently Parenting	Dog: 2	Dog: 2

However, only three ($n=3$) of the male participants rated their attachment to their current companion animal(s) as a ten. Also, two of the male participants rated their attachment to their companion animal(s) less than a five. The remaining two male participants rated their attachment to their current companion animal(s) as a nine. The mean of attachment for females is $M=10$ (SD 0) and the mean attachment for males is $M=7.6$ (SD 3.1).

When asked where participants have pictures of their companion animal(s) displayed, all the participants ($N=14$) have pictures of the animal(s) on their phone, online, or on social networks. The majority, 92.3% ($n=13$), of participants also have pictures of their companion animal on their computer. Most participants, 64.3% ($n=9$), have pictures of their companion animal in their living room or family room. Participants were also asked to identify any other humans or other companion animals included in the photos with their companion animal. All the participants ($N=14$) stated that human companions are in the photos with their companion animals. Also, the majority, 85.7% ($n=12$) have photos of the companion animal alone. Less than half, 35.7% ($n=5$), have photos of their companion animal with other companion animals within their family.

Participants were asked to identify where the companion animal(s) sleep at night. The majority, 71.4% ($n=10$) stated the companion animal(s) sleep in bed with them and their partner. Half of the participants ($n=7$) indicated the companion animal(s) sleeps in a crate or kennel and 35.7% ($n=5$) indicated the companion animal(s) sleeps on the floor.

The final question on the demographic survey asked participants if they planned to have children in the future. All the participants ($N=14$) indicated they do plan to have children at some point in the future, with a majority, 66.6% ($n=8$), indicated they would like to have children within the next five years.

Coding Results

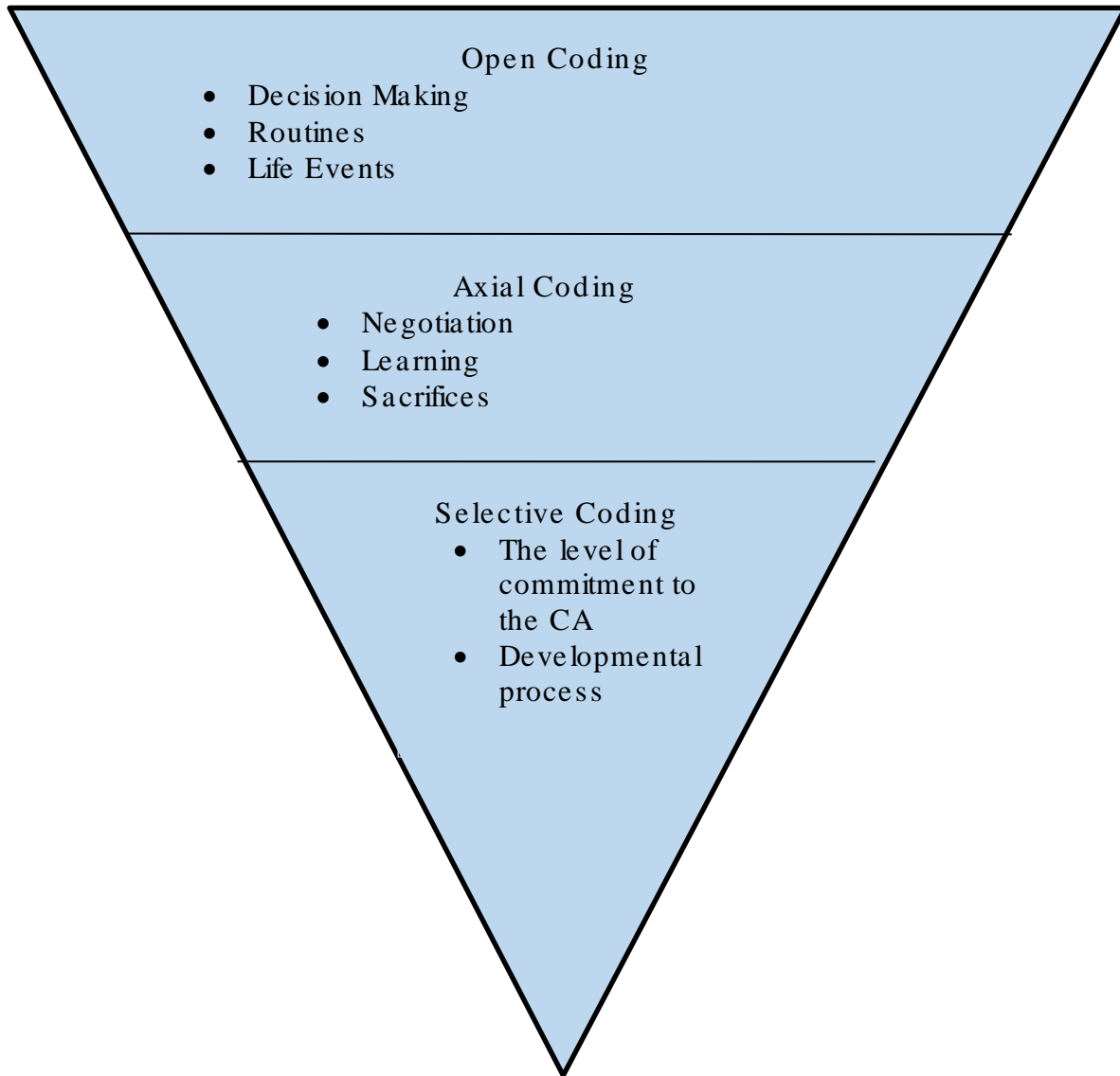
The following study was seeking to answer the following two research questions: (1) How do couples share and negotiate the responsibility of the companion animal including acquiring the animal, responsibility for caring for the animal, expenses, and the future for the companion animal? and (2) How could raising a companion animal be similar to raising a human child? All of the data was coded at the aggregate level to uncover the answers to the research questions, which occurred during the selective coding process. Figure 1 shows the overall themes discovered through each coding step.

Open Coding. The initial coding process was completed through the process of open coding, in which the initial raw data that was transcribed verbatim was labeled. The open coding of the raw data developed categories in which the following three themes were labeled: decision making, routines, and life events.

Decision Making. The decision-making theme derived from all the decisions that the couples make related to the companion animal included: (a) how the couple acquired the companion animal, (b) from where they acquired the companion animal, (c) how they decided to name the animal, (d) how the couple delegated responsibilities related to the animal, and (e) how the couple delegated animal-related expenses. Like Susannah and Jason, Chelse and Brandon also reported that their animals feeding schedule is based off of their schedule. Brandon stated, *“I mean really for both of them it just depends who gets up first and our schedule. Like if we are eating breakfast together we’ll feed Addie when we’re eating together and if we’re not, if Chelse gets up first she’ll feed Addie and the cat, but if I get up first I’ll feed them both. So it just kind of depends on the day.”* Sharon and Kevin also reported similar statements, *“As far as the*

Figure 1

Open, Axial, and Selective Coding Themes



times, it's pretty much whoever's around like in the morning. They get fed once in the morning and once at night so there's some days I wake up first and it's like around 6 o'clock or something and I'll go and feed them. If Sharon wakes up first, she'll feed them and then if she has night class when I get home from work, I'll feed them or if she gets home from work then she'll feed them. So, it's just kind of whoever is around."

Routines. The theme of routines was derived from the daily routines that the couple and companion animal go through including: feeding schedules, cleaning up after the animal, sleep arrangements, and playing and training the companion animal.

Life Events. The third theme, life events, was derived from the interview prompts that addressed significant events that could change how the companion animal is cared for such as: the birth of a human child, holidays, loss of income, one partner temporarily moving, or moving to a new home that did not allow animals.

Axial Coding. During the second level of the coding process, axial coding, the researcher and graduate advisor explored the relationships of the categories derived in open coding and the statements that were made by the participants to determine how they were interrelated. The three codes identified in axial coding were negotiation, learning, and sacrifices.

Negotiation. When acquiring and caring for a companion animal, many tasks and responsibilities require the couple to negotiate and communicate about their thoughts and opinions regarding the companion animal. Detailed quotes from the participants illustrates the themes that emerged through the axial coding process.

Chelse and Brandon discussed how they chose to name their dog. Prior to acquiring their dog, they had discussed baby names they had liked. Chelse stated, *"Actually, Addie was a girl baby name we had picked out, and for some reason when we got in the car I was like, 'Addison*

Marie it is,' and he even said, 'but, didn't you want that to be a future child's name?' Chelse and Brandon also discussed a tough medical situation their dog was suffering from that could require surgery, however the surgery was not guaranteed to fix it. They talked about how they negotiate what is best for their dog. Chelse said, "We struggle with that. Quality of life is what we always come back to. It's never happened to that point where it was bad. You can tell it's irritated and you can tell sometimes she doesn't want to get up and do stuff, but once you start taking care of it, she's perfectly fine again. So, it's kind of like do we really want to spend thousands of dollars on it?"

Another couple, Susannah and Jason discussed how they negotiated a feeding schedule for their animals and how they were going to feed the animals. Susannah said, *"We kind of got the idea offline. We feed them twice a day, once in the morning like at 7 or 9 and once in the evening usually when we're eating so around 5 or 6. We feed them separately. She's fed in her crate and he's fed where his bowl is normally next to the water bowl and we take their bowls away when they're done. Defined eating time."*

Eboni and James talked about how they split up the responsibilities of taking care of the cat.

Eboni: *"James gets home a lot earlier than I do most nights and then he leaves later in the mornings than I do, so in the morning is when the litter box will get cleaned and typically he does it, but if it were opposite I would probably do it. It's not that I don't like doing it, it's just I don't like doing it for time's sake."*

James: *"Yeah it's definitely not like a malicious thing. It's based on schedule. It's not like you have to do the cat stuff, but it's like that with most of the things around the house as well like cleaning, doing laundry. I just have more flexibility so I just do it and I don't mind."*

Many of the couples described their negotiation process regarding the companion animal surrounding a major life event that could change the dynamics of their relationship. For instance, Sandy and John discussed and made plans if they had a child and their dog was aggressive towards the child. Sandy said, *“We’ve talked about that. We’re a little nervous about that only because he has shown a little bit of aggression toward my niece. That’s the only person in the world we’ve seen him nip at so we’ve talked about the possibility of that not going well and my family has thrown out offers of taking care of him if one day that didn’t end up working out. But, we’re pretty convinced that he’s going to know that child is ours and it’s going to be fine.”*

Learning. The second theme derived from axial coding was learning. Through the decision making, routines and responsibilities, sacrifices, and negotiation processes of caring and raising the companion animal; the couples discovered many previously unknown qualities about themselves and their partners. Many of the qualities that the couples discovered from raising the companion animal could be applicable to raising a human child.

Sharon and Kevin discussed some qualities they have learned from co-parenting their two cats. Kevin stated, *“Divvying up responsibilities and just kind of figuring out how to treat misbehaviour. Our cats are pretty good but at the same time being able to be disciplinarian versus just letting them get away with whatever they want to. Remembering the whole idea of taking care of something else that’s a living being.”*

Sandy and John also discussed important qualities they gained from co-parenting their dog.

John: *“Remaining consistent and knowing that he’s a priority. That he can’t take care of himself is probably the biggest thing. Knowing he relies on us and adjusting our lives to allow for us to care for him and meet his needs.”*

Sandy: *“It’s a lot of responsibility and you feel that bond and that love for taking care of something.”*

Ashley and Luke also talked about what they learned and qualities that they think were important. Ashley said, *“It taught us responsibility and that it’s a lot of work.”* Luke said, *“We also learned about discipline and each other’s habits like Ashley being stricter, and apparently I’m a softie. It’s more work than what you would think or expect.”*

Sacrifices. The final theme, highlighted many of the sacrifices that couples experience while raising their companion animal(s). Many of the couples mentioned the companion animal required them to sacrifice their time, their sleep, and their plans. Susannah and Jason discussed how raising a companion animal required them to not only sacrifice their time, but also their sleep when raising a new puppy.

Susannah: *“Just last night we were talking about how we might have to wake up in the middle of the night because she’s been going in her crate because she just doesn’t have any bladder control.”*

Jason: *“I mean it’s just sacrificing sleep, sacrificing your time. I have a lot of hobbies that are usually at home. I don’t go anywhere. I’m a teacher in high school, so I don’t have work right now, so last summer I was able to take time every day and do stuff, but this past week I haven’t been able to do anything because I’ve been sitting around with the dogs making sure they don’t kill each other and cleaning up pee and poop everywhere and that’s just been my entire life the last week.”*

Sandy and John also discussed sacrifices they had to make for their dog. John said, *“Learning how to sacrifice.”* Sandy replied, *“And patience. Sacrifice is a big one because there*

are a lot of weekends we'll take him to the dog park because we know he's been cooped up all week or just little things we wouldn't do otherwise because it's for his benefit."

Another couple, Elisa and Jake, stated they felt as though when the dogs were younger they related more to a human child. Elisa said, "When Magnolia was little I had to wake up every hour to take her out to go potty."

Selective Coding. The final coding process, selective coding, encompasses the overarching themes. The universal themes discovered during this coding step were the level of commitment couples have towards raising a companion animal and the developmental process that the couple progressed through while caring for the companion animal.

Level of Commitment. Based upon statements that the participants made regarding the extreme measures they would take to provide for the animal, the level of commitment couples have towards their companion animals is extremely high. The decision making, negotiation, communication skills, dedication, and compassion that couples have for their companion animals accurately demonstrate their willingness to dedicate their time, attention, and love for the animal to carry out caregiving in a nurturing way.

Developmental Trajectory. As couples co-parent a companion animal, they progress through a trajectory of caregiving where they matured, gained important communication skills and other qualities, and learned selfless love for their companion animal. James discussed how, even though he did not really want an animal, the cat has taught him many things.

James: *"The biggest difference for me would be the emotional attachment to a child versus TipTip. If TipTip runs out to the middle of the road and a car is coming, I'm not going to jump out in front of a car to save TipTip, I love TipTip, but I'm not doing that. If my kid runs out in the middle of the road, I'm going to do whatever I can. If it comes time*

to making tough financial decision and it comes down between TipTip and a child it's obvious the cat's going to go. There are different variables that I don't have with TipTip so he hasn't really given me experience in that sense. As far as taking care of him, because the bulk does fall on me, I do feel like it's been a responsibility over a living thing that I've had to help feed, help take care of, and in that sense, it has been good."

In another instance, acquiring and caring for a companion animal opened the eyes and heart of a different participant. Susannah talked about how loving another species truly opened her up to adoption.

Susannah: "This is probably something you'll never hear from somebody and it might sound a little strange, but I most likely won't be able to have kids naturally, and I might have to adopt and when I first found that out, all I ever wanted to do was a be a mom, and I was kind of really against the whole adoption idea, but then he got me Oswald and I was kind of like, 'Good god if I can love something this much that's not even the same species as me.' That was a really powerful thing for me and I really became open to the idea of adoption, which is so strange because he's a dog. It really did help me open my heart to it because that's a real thing that might be what it is."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This is one of the first exploratory studies of its kind to examine how emerging adults co-parent companion animals. This scientific process of exploring a topic that is currently popular in lay literature, provided insight and valuable information that can contribute to future research on this topic. While co-parenting a companion animal(s), couples progressed through a developmental process of caregiving. During the first phase, negotiation, couples identified what needed to be done to provide for the well-being of the companion animal(s). Next, the learning phase, taught couples how the process of caregiving worked within their family. Finally, the sacrifices couples made allowed them to provide the caregiving in a nurturing way. Thus, this study illustrates the developmental trajectory of caregiving provided to companion animals.

Today, emerging adults are delaying marriage, as well as having children, therefore many of these couples are filling this void with raising a companion animal (Greenebaum, 2004; Turner, 2005). Raising a companion animal during this developmental stage allows the couple to assume a parental role, gain responsibility over another living being, and be presented with a multitude of challenges and learning opportunities with their partner without the high expenses associated with raising a human child (Vertesh, 2012). When co-parenting a companion animal, there are many relationship qualities that the couple must learn how to negotiate, adjust, or change. Many of the responsibilities and qualities that the couple learns from this experience could be applicable when the couple raises a human child.

Negotiation

When examining the negotiation process and how the couple shares the responsibilities, there were a variety of responses, however all the couples overtly stated how they delegate responsibilities. For some couples, delegation is based on their work schedules, while for others

it is based on equity and fairness, and one couple mentioned it is “just the way things worked out”. Ashley and Luke said, *“I believe the responsibilities are divided the way they are because we were trying to be fair to one another and it’s also based on preferences and priorities because each of us has our differences.”* Elisa and Jake said they negotiate and delegate responsibilities based on work schedules. Jake said, *“Mostly because of work.”* Elisa replied, *“Yeah our jobs. If you’re off that day, you generally do more than the person who works and if we’re both off, it’s whoever.”* Sharon and Kevin demonstrated that how they negotiated and delegated responsibilities was based on balance.

Kevin: *“I think it just kind of worked out and fell into place. We never said explicitly like this is what’s going to happen and this is how it’s going to go.”*

Sharon: *“I think it’s finding that good balance is the key. We found that just finding what works for us and kind of that organic, it kind of happens idea.”*

These responses demonstrate that there is no right or wrong way of negotiating and delegating responsibilities for the care of a companion animal. The negotiation process couples go through when co-parenting a companion animal is solely based on what does or does not work for them, their needs, and their schedules.

Expenses

Another controversial negotiation process in parenting a companion animal was the expenses associated with the animal. Married couples unanimously stated the expenses were shared because of a joint bank account to which they both contributed. Couples who were cohabitating typically took turns paying for the expenses or divided the expenses in half.

The interview prompt related to the future of the companion animal addressed significant events that could change the dynamics of the couple’s relationship such as end of the

relationship, one partner moving, the birth of a human child, loss of an income, and moving to a new house that would not allow animals. Some of the couple's ($n=3$) indicated they had not discussed what would happen to their companion animal, especially the end of a relationship or the birth of a human child. Sandy and John said, *"So we haven't had that conversation because we don't plan on any drastic changes."* Similarly, Chelse and Brandon also stated, *"I don't think we've ever talked about that."* However, the four couples that had discussed what would happen to the companion animal if the relationship ended indicated the companion animal would go with the female partner. This is an interesting finding because according to the literature on legal issues with children, during the twentieth century after divorce, the most common outcome was for the children to live with their mother based on gender norms (Cancian, Meyer, Brown, & Cook, 2014).

Future of the Companion Animal

Support from family members was a common theme related to changes in relationship dynamics. For example, of the couples who had discussed what would happen to the companion animal if there was a birth of a human child, participants indicated that if the companion animal was aggressive towards the infant, they would attempt training or give it to a family member. Ashley and Luke stated, *"If Staley didn't get along with the baby, we would probably give her to Luke's parents either temporarily or permanently depending on how bad it was."* Many of the participants also indicated that if a loss of income occurred, they would use their families as a resource to help pay for the expenses of the companion animal. Sharon and Kevin discussed how both of their families are great support systems. Sharon said, *"Yeah we'd still have them and I know my parents would instantly be like, 'Well here let us just send you more stuff' because they already do that knowing I'm in school and I'm not working currently, so I could see them"*

helping out still.” All of the couples in the study ($N=7$) indicated that moving into new housing that did not allow companion animals was not an option. Rather than surrendering the companion animal, over half of the couples ($n=4$) specified alternative options, demonstrating that they will go to extreme measures to provide, nurture, and love their companion animal. These findings and statements accurately indicate the level of commitment these couples have for their companion animals.

How the Companion Animal Relates to having a Human Child

During the interviews, all ($N=7$) of the couples indicated caring for a companion animal required taking on new roles, having additional responsibilities, a lack of sleep, and financial considerations and expenses, many of which are parallel to characteristics of raising a human child. According to previous literature discussing how companion animals are like raising a human child, couples had concerns about diet and exercise, time and money spent on the companion animal, appropriate toys, and overall that they were doing the right thing for the companion animal (Dosser et al., 1986). Dosser et al. (1986) also indicated that co-parenting a companion animal and parenting a human child are parallel due to the tiredness from a lack of sleep, feelings of being tied down, feeling as though you cannot leave the companion animal for an extended period of time, and having your normal routines interrupted. Many of these same issues were addressed by the participants in this study. Responses indicated that their companion animals demonstrated human-like qualities, which required a significant amount of attention and care. Susannah and Jason talked about how raising a puppy and having to wake up in the middle of the night could be like a baby.

Susannah: *“Just last night we were talking about how we might have to wake up in the middle of the night because she’s been going in her crate because she just doesn’t have*

any bladder control and I was like, 'Honey this is what we're going to have to do when we have a baby.' But then I was like ugh I'm going to have to get up and feed the baby and that's like life or death is this life or death? So, I mean it does because she cries during the night and I feel like babies do too."

Sandy and John said, *"Remaining consistent and knowing that he's a priority that he can't just take care of himself is probably the biggest thing knowing that he relies on us and adjusting our lives to allow for us to care for him and meet his needs. That's probably the biggest relation to having a child."*

Attachment Theory

To understand the value and importance of a companion animal in emerging adulthood, one can gain insight from examining attachment to companion animals during early childhood. Children often associate a companion animal with a friend and develop nurturing friendships with the companion animal. Triebenbacher (1998) found that attachment behaviours are often present between the child and the companion animal. The bond between the child and the companion animal can contribute to the child's psychological development and emotional well-being, as well as help teach life lessons about responsibility (Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009a). Schvaneveldt, Young, Schvaneveldt, and Kivett (2001), found that during the family stage with infants and young children, companion animals are often acquired for touch, communication, and companionship for the young child. During the school-age family stage, companion animals not only provide love and affection, but they also facilitate cognitive development in regard to biology, responsibility, and identity (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001).

Similarly, attachment theory demonstrates that early relationship experiences can have an impact in relationship experiences later in life (Rockett et al., 2014). Therefore, as adults we also

seek closeness and security from attachment figures. All the participants in the study ($N=14$) had one or multiple companion animal(s) as a child, therefore it seems intuitive that they would continue to have a companion animal as part of their lives into adulthood.

However, it is also important to examine the attachment of the two male participants who reported their attachment to their current companion animal as less than a five. One of the participants who rated their attachment low to both his companion animals indicated they grew up on a farm with many animals, therefore all his companion animals lived outside. Consequently, this could demonstrate that his attachment to his companion animals as a child was significantly lower than other participants, which could impact his attachment to his current companion animals. The second participant who reported their attachment as less than a five acquired the companion animal as a surprise for his wife. He indicated that he did not want the companion animal, however he was doing it to make his wife happy. According to the literature about men's pregnancy intentions Tinkew et al., (2007) discovered that men who did not want the pregnancy showed less paternal warmth, whereas men who wanted the pregnancy demonstrated nurturing behaviors towards the infant. The participant's low attachment and lack of desire for the companion animal coincides with the literature on men's pregnancy intentions and paternal warmth.

Family Developmental Theory

Consistent with family developmental theory, the transition of acquiring and co-parenting a companion animal throughout the life course, requires the couple to change their roles, behaviours, and tasks. The transition, or period of adjustment, causes disequilibrium allowing the couple to accommodate to the new stage, where they eventually reach an equilibrium. Similarly, the transition to becoming a parent, requires the couple to change their roles, behaviours, and

tasks to reach equilibrium within the new developmental stage. These transitions are important to consider as all the participants indicated they hoped to have children within the next five years.

Turner (2005), indicated that companion animal ownership during emerging adulthood is relatively high compared to other developmental periods in the life course. However, Albert et al. (1988) found that there is a low rate of pet ownership among couples who have young children. These two researchers highlight potentially conflicting results. Possibly, emerging adult couples did not have a companion animal to begin with, or they acquired a companion animal and were not able to transition into the new stage that included a human child, therefore had to surrender the companion animal.

This study used a grounded theory approach, which examines data to develop an overall theory from the data. The family developmental theory examines how a family unit progresses through eight stages of development beginning with families with no children continuing through aging family members. The theory examines how the family unit develops, changes, and adapts to the transition of adding children into the family unit. Like adjusting to these changes with a human child, a couple must learn to change and adapt to the addition of a companion animal into the family unit. Therefore, from examining the findings from this study, a companion animal developmental theory was created to demonstrate how the addition of a companion animal into the family unit requires change and adaptation. The six stages focus on the couple prior to acquiring the companion animal, integrating the companion animal into the family and adjusting roles and responsibilities, through the death of the companion animal. While the family developmental theory has eight stages, the companion animal developmental theory has six

Table 9

Companion Animal Developmental Theory

Human	Companion Animal
<p style="text-align: center;">Establishment Phase</p> <p>Focuses on the couple preparing for marriage, becoming a husband or wife, establishing a home base, and reprioritizing so the couple's interests are enmeshed as one.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Anticipation</p> <p>Time before the arrival of the companion animal. The couple discusses pros and cons of acquiring a companion animal and introducing into the family unit</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Families with Infants</p> <p>Arrival of an infant requires the couple to manage a new set of tasks, roles, and responsibilities while adjusting to new physical and emotional demands.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Acquisition/Introduction</p> <p>The process of acquiring the companion animal and introducing it into the family unit.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Families with Preschool Children</p> <p>Families may begin to have more than one child and could be raising a toddler and an infant causing more financial strain.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Settling In</p> <p>The addition of the companion animal requires the family to establish roles, responsibilities, and routines within the family unit to care for the companion animal. Also, the companion animal is adjusting to its role within the family unit.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Families with School-Age Children</p> <p>The family unit must provide for children outside of school activities. Parenting skills and child's behaviors are judged.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Maturity</p> <p>The companion animal is successfully integrated into the family system and the individuals within the family unit maintain their roles and responsibilities</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Families with Adolescents</p> <p>Rapid change of growth for the child socially, emotionally, and physically. Parents must allow the child to develop an identity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Golden Years</p> <p>The companion animal may decline in aspects of health and well-being which requires the individuals within the family unit to shift and adjust their roles, responsibilities, and routines to care for the aging companion animal</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Good-Bye</p> <p>The end of life for the companion animal. The family unit must adapt to no longer having the companion animal.</p>

**Families with Young Adults/Launching
Stage**

This stage begins the contraction stage causing reallocation of responsibilities, duties, and roles among the family members who remain in the household

Middle Years

All the children have left the home but the parents have not yet retired. The couple focuses on increasing retirement accounts and forming relationships with grandchildren.

Aging Family Members

Decrease in financial income, illness, or physical limitation. The family unit may experience death of spouse, family members, or friends.

stages due to the shorter lifespan of a companion animal. Table nine provides a comparison of the stages of the family developmental theory and the companion animal developmental theory.

Summary

The results of this study indicate the high level of commitment couples have to their companion animals. The couples' decision making, negotiation, communication skills, dedication, and compassion related to their companion animals accurately demonstrates their willingness to dedicate their time, attention, and love for the animal like what couples do for human children. This analysis also demonstrates the many parallels between raising a companion animal and raising a human child. This study revealed several relationship factors that were altered in order to foster a loving, nurturing environment for the companion animal.

Limitations and Future Research

While there are many strengths of this study, there are some limitations worth noting. Limits of the study were present in the demographic characteristics. The sample consisted of only heterosexual couples and had very little ethnic diversity. With interracial couples and marriages, as well as same sex couples more widely accepted, a more representative sample could have provided more diverse responses. While sample size may appear to be a limitation, the goal of this research study was not to generalize results to a broader population, but rather to gain in-depth insight about the process that couples experience related to the caregiving of a companion animal. Thus, the qualitative interviews offered a unique opportunity to examine and more fully understand the thought and emotions that surround the dynamics of "parenting" a companion animal. Consistent themes were discovered across the interviews. Finally, while

current literature documents that many Americans consider their companion animals to be family members, and treat them as such, researchers should be mindful not to anthropomorphize.

While co-parenting a companion animal during emerging adulthood seems to be, a growing trend based on social media posts and articles posted on websites such as Huffington Post, future research could focus on providing empirical research on this popular topic.

Empirical documentation showing how co-parenting a companion animal relates to raising a human child can validate why this is a developing topic and the importance of the connection between these two topics.

Implications and Conclusions

The findings from this study validate that emerging adults are undeniably using a companion animal, and the associated roles and responsibilities, in preparation for a human child. The literature on raising a human child indicates that the stressors of parenthood include lack of sleep, less time for self and spouse, feelings of being overwhelmed, being tied down, having routines and plans interrupted, and concerns about the marital relationship (Dosser et al., 1986). Similarly, Dosser et al. (1986), also discussed the stressors of raising a companion animal and indicated the couple could experience tiredness, increased responsibility, feelings of being tied down, having routines interrupted, concerns about money, and concerns about doing the right thing for the animal. Also, like a child, a companion animal could exhibit similar personality characteristics to a child including persistence, mischievousness, demand for attention and affection, and potential behaviour problems (Dosser et al., 1986). Many of these stressors, specifically tiredness, increased responsibility, and interrupted routines, were mentioned by the couples participating in the study.

For couples who are considering acquiring and co-parenting a companion animal important things to consider are: (1) Determine a schedule that works for you as a couple, (2) Discuss and negotiate roles and responsibilities prior to acquiring the companion animal, (3) Discuss and create a budget for the companion animal, (4) Create a plan for training the companion animal, and (5) Communicate.

Research has indicated that emerging adults are delaying marriage, as well as having children. Couples are filling this void with co-parenting a companion animal. While this may delay childbearing, the developmental process of caring for a companion animal is beneficial for the couple in the long run. By raising a companion animal, the couple is afforded a “practice round.” In the process, they learn how to communicate, delegate responsibilities, and negotiate.

Typically, prior to the birth of a child, couples go through parenting education courses that are taught by a trained professional, where they learn how to prepare for the child, what to expect, and how to properly care for the child. Thus, with the growing trend of co-parenting a companion animal, more resources should be made available to couples who plan to co-parent a companion animal. Couples who are planning to co-parent an animal could participate in a training class taught by a trained professional, like the courses parents take in preparation for the arrival of a child. These classes could teach the couple how to prepare for the animal, what to expect, challenges they could face, and how to properly care for the animal. Currently, there are trained professionals to teach both parenting education courses, as well as training classes for raising companion animals. Based upon the literature, as well as the findings from this study, the preparation, challenges, and delegation of roles and responsibilities for both co-parenting a companion animal and raising a human child are incredibly similar. Therefore, parent education

classes would be beneficial for “expectant” parents of companion animals to help educate them on the responsibility of caring for and raising a companion animal.

Similarly, relationship education courses about communication, roles and responsibilities, and negotiation could help make the transition of acquiring the companion animal go more smoothly. The parent education could be beneficial to help achieve the overall goal of successfully integrating a human child into an existing family unit that includes a companion animal. In using education to integrate children and companion animals, the need to surrender a companion animal with the introduction of a human child into the family unit would be greatly reduced.

The current study was able to provide new findings to contribute to the foundation of future literature on this topic. Understanding the roles, responsibilities, division of labor, and relationship dynamics when co-parenting a companion animal and how they link to the responsibilities associated with parenting a human child, could open a door to understanding how this trend could be an educational stepping stone for the transition to parenthood.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Kasey Travitz](#)
CC: [Sandra Triebenbacher](#)
Date: 3/4/2016
Re: [UMCIRB 15-002250](#)
Parenting a Companion Animal as a Precursor to Parenting a Human Child

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 3/4/2016 to 3/3/2017. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Appedix D Interview Prompt.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Demographic Survey.docx	Surveys and Questionnaires
Thesis Consent Form.docx	Consent Forms
Thesis Summary (IRB).docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

I am a student at East Carolina University in the Human Development and Family Sciences department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, "Parenting a Companion Animal as a Precursor to Parenting a Human Child"

The purpose of this research is to determine the similarities between parenting a companion animal and parenting a human child, and how it can prepare a young couple for parenthood. By doing this research, I hope to learn how couples share and negotiate the responsibility of the companion animal including acquiring the animal, responsibility for caring for the animal, and expenses and the perceptions of similarities of caring for a companion animal and human child. Your participation is completely voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because you fit our inclusion criteria for the study. The amount of time it will take you to complete this survey and interview is approximately an hour and a half.

If you agree to take part in this survey, you will be asked questions that relate to acquiring the animal, the responsibilities for caring for the animal, expenses, and the future for the animal and how you and your partner negotiate(d) or share these tasks.

This research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board. Therefore, some of the IRB members or the IRB staff may need to review my research data. Your identity will be evident to those individuals who see this information. However, I will take precautions to ensure that anyone not authorized to see your identity will not be given that information.

If you have questions about your rights when taking part in this research, call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (weekdays, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, call the Director of ORIC, at 252-744-1971

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, continue with the survey.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely, Kasey A. Travitz, Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Your current age _____
2. Gender: _____ Female _____ Male
3. Race/Ethnicity
 - _____ American Indian or Alaska Native
 - _____ Asian Indian: Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Other Asian
 - _____ Black, African American, or Negro
 - _____ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin: Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
 - _____ Native Hawaiian: Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, Other Pacific Islander
 - _____ White
 - _____ Some Other Race
 - _____ Prefer Not to Respond
4. Relationship status at the time of “parenting” the companion animal:
 - _____ Cohabiting
 - _____ Married
5. In what type of housing do you live?
 - _____ Single family home
 - _____ Apartment
 - _____ Mobile home
 - _____ Townhouse/Condo
 - _____ Other _____ (please describe)
6. What is your work schedule?
 - _____ 1st shift
 - _____ 2nd shift
 - _____ 3rd shift
 - _____ Weekends
 - _____ Other _____ (please describe)
 - _____ Choose not to answer
7. In relation to your partner’s income, is your income:
 - _____ Lower than your partner’s

_____ Equal to your partner's
_____ Higher than your partner's

8. Did you have a companion animal as a child (birth-18)?

_____ Yes
_____ No

9. If so, what type of animal?

_____ Dog(s) _____ #
_____ Cats(s) _____ #
_____ Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea Pig/Hamster/Mouse _____ #
_____ Horse _____ #
_____ Reptile(s) _____ #

10. Types/number of companion animals you and your partner are currently parenting?

_____ Dog(s) _____ #
_____ Cat(s) _____ #
_____ Rabbit/Ferret/Guinea pig/Hamster/Mouse _____ #
_____ Horse _____ #
_____ Reptile(s) _____ #
_____ Other (please describe)

11. In general, how would you rate your attachment to your companion animal(s)?

Companion Animal #1:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not attached at all Very attached

Companion Animal #2:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not attached at all Very attached

Companion Animal #3:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not attached at all Very attached

12. Where do you have photos of your companion animal(s)?: (please check all that apply)

- Kitchen
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Office/Study
- Living room/Family Room
- Phone
- Computer
- Wallet/Keychain
- Online/Social networks
- Other (describe) _____

13. Who else is included in the photos of your companion animal(s)? (please check all that apply)

- Human companions
- Other companion animals in the family
- Other companion animals outside of the family
- Humans and other companion animals (inside or outside the family)
- Companion animal alone

14. Where does your companion animal sleep?

- In bed with me
- In bed with me and my partner
- On the floor
- In a crate/kennel/cage
- Outside
- Other (describe) _____

15. Do you think you will have children at some point in the future?

- Yes (if yes, when?) _____
- No (if no, please explain) _____
- Not Sure

APPEDIX D: INTERVIEW PROMPT

In some instances, couples may practice their 'parenting skills' with a companion animal prior to having a human child. Please respond to the following questions if you and a partner are currently sharing the care of a companion animal.

1. Was the decision to acquire (companion animal's name) a long-term decision or was it a quick, rash decision?
2. Tell me about how (companion animal's name) became part of your family?
 - How was the decision made to name the companion animal?
3. As you reflect on the decision to acquire and care for a companion animal, for each of the following, describe the decision-making process, negotiation, and care for your companion animal between you and your partner?
 - a. How to initially train the companion animal
 - b. Rules and discipline for the companion animal
 - c. Feeding
 - d. Cleaning up after the animal (yard, litterbox, etc.)
 - e. Initiating play activities or providing exercise for the companion animal
 - f. Medical decisions (spay, neuter, surgery, medications, etc.)
 - g. Sleeping arrangements
 - h. Where the companion animal will spend holidays if not together
4. Why do you believe the responsibilities are divided this way?
5. Are you content with how these decisions were made? Why or why not? If you could modify the decisions or negotiation, what would you do differently?
6. Describe how financial responsibilities related to (companion animal's name) are negotiated?
7. Are you content with how these decisions were made? Why or why not? If you could modify the way the expenses are shared, what would you do differently?
8. If there were a significant event that could change the dynamics of your relationship what discussion have you had the impact it will have on the companion animal?
 - a. End of relationship between you and your partner
 - b. If one partner moves (temporary move/deployment)
 - c. Birth of a human child
 - d. Loss of income
 - e. Moving to a new house that doesn't allow a companion animal

9. In thinking about raising (companion animal's name), please describe how 'parenting' the companion animal may have provided insight into raising and parenting a human child.