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Protective-restoring to maintain self integrity : a grounded theory of the human experience of dog relinquishment

Mary Ellen Elizabeth Edwards
Edith Cowan University

Edith Cowan University

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Protective-Restoring to Maintain Self Integrity: A Grounded Theory of the Human Experience of Dog Relinquishment

Mary E. E. Edwards

BA (Psych) Hons, Grad Dip Health Promotion

Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

Edith Cowan University

Western Australia

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Abstract

Dog relinquishment or 'getting rid of the dog' is common practice in Australia and other countries where dogs are kept as pets. Each year thousands of dogs are relinquished for a variety of reasons. While losing a pet through death can be as devastating for some people as the death of a loved human, little is known about the human impact of losing a dog through relinquishment. This qualitative study sought to explore the experience of dog relinquishment from the perspectives of a Western Australian sample of 21 relinquishers, 10 adults who had experienced dog relinquishment in childhood and 15 animal welfare workers. Data, collected via semi-structured interviews, were transcribed verbatim and analysed in accord with Straussian grounded theory methodology, an inductive, interpretative methodology, utilising the constant comparative method. The substantive grounded theory of 'protective-restoring to maintain self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience' that was generated from an interpretative analysis of the data, describes the human experience of dog relinquishment as one of psychological, social and moral conflicts that challenged participants self and social image. The theory proposes that those who experience dog relinquishment personally or professionally experience a disturbed self integrity (i.e., a sense of cognitive and emotional unease). Five conditions, identified as threats to self integrity, were found to contribute to participants' sense of unease, namely the culture of relinquishment, a crisis of conscience, a fear of losing face, losing faith and losing the dog. Variation in participants' experience was accounted for by individual and social conditions that influenced the type, intensity, frequency and duration of their unease. Participants' experience of dog relinquishment was characterised by one or more of three types of unease, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief, which were dealt with through a process identified as protective-restoring. The continuous four phase process of protective-restoring involved recognition, identification, assessment and counteraction of threats to self integrity. Its aim was to protect participants from further threats and to restore their self integrity. Six types of strategies were identified that participants employed during the counteracting phase of the protective-restoring process, namely, self enhancing, blaming, impact reducing, emotional management, avoiding and blocking. Strategies employed were not always successful and in some circumstances increased rather than reduced the unease of participants. Further the strategies sometimes contributed to the unease of others. These findings indicate that the human experience of dog relinquishment is multidimensional

and complex. Further, given its potential to detrimentally impact the mental health and wellbeing of large numbers of adults and children, dog relinquishment is an experience that should not be trivialised or ignored. As well as contributing to the human-animal interaction body of knowledge, the substantive theory that has emerged from this research could be used to inform the development of a screening tool to identify those who are likely to be negatively impacted by dog relinquishment. Further, the theory could also be used to inform the development of interventions that could be used to assist adults and children to deal with the negative impact of dog relinquishment.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Introduction

Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the current study and sets out the parameters of the thesis. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section begins with a brief overview of human-canine interaction followed by an introduction to the issue of dog relinquishment. Relinquishment is defined in the context of the current study. It is then described and explained in terms of its nature, and reasons for its practice. Section two reviews the limited literature pertaining to the psychosocial impact of dog relinquishment. Due to the dearth of psychological literature in the area of human-animal interaction (HAI), literature from other disciplines as well as psychology was reviewed for this chapter and Chapter 2. While the focus of this thesis is human-canine interaction, much of the HAI literature concerning companion animals has focused on pets as a group rather than one particular species. Notwithstanding this, even though distinctions are generally not made between different animals in the analysis, participants are often required to indicate the type of pet they have, or are referring to. Generally dogs followed by cats are the most indicated type of pet by participants. Given the lack of differentiation in the HAI literature, for the purpose of the current study the term 'pets' has been used when referring to studies of companion animals in general and 'dogs' has been used when referring to studies that either had a specific focus on dogs within the study or focussed solely on dogs. Section three describes and discusses dog relinquishment in Australia in general and in Perth specifically. Section four describes and explains the background to the current study. Section five outlines the current study, including its significance, aims, research questions and methodology. Finally, section six outlines the structure of the thesis, including a brief summary of each chapter and definitions of terms used throughout.

Human-Canine Interaction

Humans and dogs have a long history of association and interaction spanning many thousands of years, with the ancestor of the modern dog (*Canis familiaris*) thought to be the wolf (*Canis lupus*) (Clutton-Brock, 1995). Over the years humans have sculpted the dog according to human needs and desires, sometimes to the detriment of the dog (Herzog, 2010; Serpell, 1995), so that today approximately 400 breeds of dogs exist from lap dogs to working dogs, ranging in sizes, temperaments, colours, coats, and behavioural predispositions (Clutton-Brock, 1995).

2 Dog Relinquishment

Dogs are the most utilised animals in terms of providing assistance to humans. As working dogs they are employed in a variety of roles including: herding of farm animals; guarding premises; detection of explosives, food, drugs and people; assisting physically impaired people; and providing therapeutic assistance to people. In some countries they are a source of food (Batson, 2008; Herzog, 2010; Podberscek, 2009) but the most common role of the dog in western countries is that of a pet.

The keeping of dogs as pets in western societies can be traced back at least to the time of the ancient Greeks (Menache, 1998). Writers of the time such as Homer and Plutarch bear witness to the merits of the dog; and artefacts such as vases, paintings and sculptures graphically portray the dog in both a utility role and a companion role (Menache, 1998). Today dogs are one of the most popular pets and are kept in many countries around the world (Batson, 2008). For example, in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia estimated ownership rates are 77.5 million, 8 million and 3.75 million dogs respectively (APPMA, 2010; Petcare Information & Advisory Service, 2010).

That dogs are a popular pet, is not surprising given the characteristics of the dog that encourage human interaction, including its responsiveness to humans in terms of affection, its loyalty and devotion, its playfulness and the tactile nature of its coat (Hart, 1995). Indeed interacting with dogs can be psychologically, physiologically and socially beneficial for humans (Friedmann & Son, 2009; see Chapter 2 for more on the benefits of pets). For many, a dog is not simply a pet, as Sanders (1993) commenting on the findings of interviews with dog owners explains:

> based on routine intimate interactions caretakers come to regard their animals as unique individuals who are minded, empathetic, reciprocating and well aware of basic rules and roles that govern the relationship. Caretakers come to see their dogs as consciously behaving so as to achieve defined goals in the course of routine social exchanges with people and other canines (Sanders, 1993, p. 207).

Part of the Family

Research across several studies has found that up to 97% of pet owners considered their pets to be 'members or part of the family'[1] (Anderson, 1985; Cain, 1985; Franklin, 2007; Risley-Curtiss, et al., 2006; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2007; Salmon & Salmon, 1983; Sanders, 1993). Dogs in particular are frequently assigned family membership. They are endowed with humanlike qualities and incorporated into family

[1] A survey of 750 Australian adults independently commissioned by Readers Digest found that pets were ranked 4th after partner, mother and close friend, as those most trusted in everyday relationships. They outranked child, father, brother/sister, in-laws, colleagues, Doctor, neighbours and boss (Krause & Waterson, 2010).

life, sharing living spaces with their owners, including sleeping on their beds (Sanders, 1993). Some celebrate their dog's birthdays as they would other members of the family and take them on vacation (Sanders 1993; Voith, 1983). In many homes dogs are integrated into the family system (Cain 1983; Carmack, 1985; Soares, 1985); a system in which "the roles and functions of all family members are interdependent, and family members influence one another both directly and indirectly" (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006, p. 381). Research suggests that dogs affect (Cain, 1983; Serpell, 1996; Tannen, 2004) and are affected by the dynamics of the family system (Cain 1983; Smith, 1983), providing support for the notion that they are perceived as family members.

Cain (1983) for example, carried out a content analysis of 62 questionnaires (representing 60 families) and found that pets had a positive and negative effect on the family system. Some of the positives reported by respondents were increased closeness arising from pet care, playtime with pets, increased happiness and decreased arguing. Some of the negatives reported by respondents were more time spent with the pet than other members of the family and arguments over pet care and rules. Many respondents reported that their pets were sensitive to anxieties within the family, resulting in some pets displaying behavioural changes, illnesses, drawing closer to family members or distancing themselves from family members (Cain, 1983). Ten examples were given by respondents of how pets impacted on family dynamics in terms of triangling behaviour (defined in the study as "a process in which two persons (or pets) transfer the tension or intense feeling between them onto a third person (or pet)" (Cain, 1983, p. 79). Seven were related to dogs, of which three are listed next:

- Husband sweet-talks the dog instead of his wife (husband and dog are in a close, togetherness position, and the wife is in the outside, distant position).
- Mother is angry with the daughter but yells at the dog instead (conflict moves and then is between mother and dog, and the daughter maintains the more comfortable outside position)
- Father is friendlier to the dog than to his son (father and dog are in a close, togetherness position, and the son is in the outside, distant position; Cain, 1983, p. 79).

Further support for the notion that dogs are considered family members is provided by Barker and Barker (1988), who used the Family Life Space Diagram (FLSD) developed by Mostwin, to ascertain where dog owners located their pet in relation to their family. Participants who were described as dog enthusiasts (recruited from a dog show), typical dog owners (recruited from a veterinary clinic) and children (recruited from a school), were given a sheet of paper on which a large circle had been drawn. They were told that the large circle represented the family, although family

membership was not defined. They were first asked to draw and locate a small circle which represented themself, on the paper and label it as 'me'. They were then asked to draw and locate other family members in the same way but without labels. Finally they were asked to draw and locate a circle on the paper to represent their dog and label it as 'x'. It was noted that some participants had drawn a circle representing their dog prior to them being asked, as they had already included them among the family member circles (Barker & Barker, 1988).

To quantify the data in order to carry out statistical analysis the drawings were overlaid with graph paper and measurements of distances between self and family members and self and dog circles was taken. The authors reported that in over a third of the drawings, the dog circle was placed closer to the self circle than other family member circles, indicating that for some participants dogs were perceived as closer than human family members (Barker & Barker, 1988). These findings, however, warrant some caution due to methodological limitations of the study, especially in regard to the psychometric properties of the test used to measure the closeness of family members. The FLSD is a projective test and as such lacks validity and reliability (Lilienfield, Wood, & Garb, 2000), thus may not be measuring what it purports to measure and may not produce the same results consistently on different occasions.

Due to the disparity between human and animal lifespan many owners will at some point experience the loss of their dog due to death (see Chapter 2 for more detail). Many pet owners report grief experiences following the death of a loved pet, as similar to those experienced after the death of a loved human, including numbness, sorrow, changes to eating behaviours, and sleep disturbances (Carmack, 1985; Cowles, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991; Quackenbush & Glickman, 1983; Stewart, 1983). While pet death is inevitable relinquishment is not. Although large numbers of people experience relinquishment this type of pet loss and its impact has remained virtually unexplored in the psychological literature; a gap in knowledge that the current study, through its exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment, sought to address.

Dog Relinquishment

Dog relinquishment, more commonly known as 'getting rid of the dog', is common practice in countries where dogs are kept as pets. While relinquish has been defined as to "give up, let go, resign, surrender" (Turner, 1987, p. 583), in the context of the current study, it relates to the separation of owner (including family ownership) and dog via permanent and purposeful (voluntary or forced) removal of the dog from the household. There are several ways in which people relinquish dogs including rehoming

the dog with someone else, surrendering to an animal shelter, killing (i.e., euthanising) and abandoning. While people do not acquire a dog with the intention of relinquishing it, large numbers of dogs are relinquished every year. For example, in the United States it is estimated that animal shelters take in three to four million relinquished dogs per year (Luescher & Medlock, 2009). As well as being relinquished to animal shelters, unknown numbers are sold, given away, killed[2] or simply abandoned.

New et al. (2000) reported, that from a sample of 1726 people giving reasons for their dog leaving the home in the past year, 29.4% said the dog died or was killed, 26.5% had the dog killed, 12.5% had given the dog away, 6% said the dog had disappeared, 4.4% had relinquished the dog to an animal shelter, and 2.5% had sold the dog. Based on these findings, taking into account the dogs that are given away and sold, relinquishment to animal shelters only accounts for approximately a third of the numbers of dogs relinquished. This suggests that the numbers of dogs being relinquished are grossly underestimated and that far more people experience dog relinquishment than estimations suggest. Contributing to the underestimation of dog relinquishment figures is its nature.

Nature of Dog Relinquishment

The nature of dog relinquishment is such that it is both hidden and visible. The visible aspect of dog relinquishment can be seen in the work of organisations such as the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and other rescue groups. The hidden aspect of dog relinquishment relates to the dogs that are given away, sold, killed or abandoned. This is the side that society is generally unaware of, or does not associate with relinquishment.

Relinquishers (i.e., those that get rid of the dog) and relinquishment are viewed negatively by those in the animal welfare sector (Arluke, 1994; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Rollin, 1987) and to some extent by society in general. The social stigma associated with relinquishment was likely a factor in studies that reported people denying relinquishment (e.g., Hsu, Severinghaus, & Serpell, 2003; Patronek, Beck, & Glickman, 1997) or denying ownership of the pet they were relinquishing.[3] While, in the Hsu et al. (2003) study criminal penalties for abandonment were probably a factor in

[2] While killing (i.e., euthanasia) is generally associated with veterinarians, owners also kill their dogs. A report by the WSPA (Batson, 2008) identified other ways in which owners killed their dogs including shooting, drowning, poisoning and hitting over the head.

[3] Some of the animal welfare worker participants in the current study spoke of people relinquishing 'stray' dogs. However the AWWs reported that it was obvious from the dog's reactions to the person, that the relinquisher was actually the owner of the dog.

underreporting, there was no apparent reason for a 93.2% denial of relinquishment in the study by Patronek et al. (1997).

Although socially frowned upon, relinquishment of a pet is considered a legitimate practice, as evidenced in the quote below from a popular American cartoon series 'The Simpsons", which is credited with providing social commentary on American/ Western culture. The main character Homer (the father in the household), calls a family meeting in response to their dog eating Homer's giant cookie and destroying his new running shoes, as well as his wife's heirloom quilt. When the son comments that they "never had a family meeting before" Homer says "we never had a problem with a family member we can give away before" (Vitti & Reardon, 1991). The reason behind the suggested relinquishment given here is problem behaviour, but that is not the only reason why dogs are relinquished.

Reasons for Relinquishment

There are many reasons why a dog might be relinquished, dispelling the myth that only 'bad dogs' (i.e., dangerous or destructive dogs) are relinquished. Seventy one reasons were identified in a US survey of 3,772 owners, across 12 shelters that were relinquishing dogs or cats (Salman et al., 1998). Other studies from the US, Australia and Italy report similar findings, with commonly cited reasons as: owner moving, pet behaviour problems and allergies to pet (Diesel, Pfeiffer, & Brodbelt, 2008; DiGiacomo, Arnold, & Patronek, 1998; Irvine, 2003; Miller, Staats, Partlo, & Rada, 1996; Mondelli et al., 2004; Salman et al., 2000). A recent Canadian study by Labrecque and Walsh (2011), identified another reason not generally mentioned, that of homeless people entering shelters where dogs are not permitted. They reported that of the 51 women interviewed at a homeless shelter, 34 (67%) had relinquished their pet due to their homelessness. In addition another reason identified (although not reported by relinquishers), is as a punishment for children (Raupp, 1999; Raupp, Barlow, & Oliver, 1997).

Similar reasons for relinquishment are cited around the world. For example, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA; Batson, 2008) undertook a global study of pet ownership and trade that encompassed 66 countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Europe, North America, South America and Oceania.[4] They found that reasons for relinquishment ranged from not wanting the dog (45%) to too little time

4 USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand were excluded from the data collection as animal welfare issues in these countries were already known to WSPA and were to some extent being addressed through animal welfare agencies in the countries.

(1%). Moving which is one of the most common reasons given in the US and Australia, however, was not cited as a reason for relinquishment. There may be several reasons for this finding. For example, moving might be a more acceptable reason for relinquishment in some countries, rather than the real reason, which might be that the dog is unwanted; people who do not cite moving as a reason may be more likely to take the dog with them or they may live in a country where people do not relocate often and /or landlords of rental accommodation may be more pet friendly.

Factors that have been reported to contribute to the relinquishment of dogs can be categorised into animal, human and external (New et al., 2000). Animal factors include behavioural problems, which are often the result of owners not meeting the needs of the dog in terms of exercise, socialisation, mental stimulation and training (Batson, 2008; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Houpt, Honig, & Reisner, 1996; Miller et al., 1996; Mondelli et al., 2004; New et al., 2000; Salman et al., 1998); young age of dog (i.e., less than 2 years; Patronek et al., 1996; New et al., 2000) and physical problems (e.g., sick and/or elderly dogs; Batson, 2008; Kass, New, Scarlett, & Salman, 2001). Human factors include health issues such as allergies (Batson, 2008; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Irvine, 2003), ageing (Marston, Bennett, & Coleman, 2004), not wanting the dog (Batson, 2008; Murray & Speare, 1995), not enough time to care for the dog and ignorance of normal dog behaviour, leading to unrealistic expectations of the dog (Houpt et al., 1996; Irvine, 2003; Marston et al., 2004). Further, there is a propensity for people to react to media reports of dog attacks, sometimes resulting in all dogs of a particular breed being classified as dangerous (Herzog, 2010; Serpell, 1995), and therefore liable to forced relinquishment. External factors include accommodation issues such as moving, landlord not allowing pets (DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Salman et al., 1998), shelter accommodation not allowing pets (Labrecque & Walsh, 2011) and caretaking costs (Marston, Bennett, & Coleman, 2005).

In one of the few Australian studies, Marston et al. (2004) found that whilst 34.26% gave no reason for relinquishment, the two highest reasons were owner factors 31.92% and dog behaviour 10.82%. The most common reason cited from the owner related category was moving accounting for 40.42%, followed by dog takes too much work/effort 17.65% and owners' health 13.44%. In the behavioural category, the dog escaping accounted for 24.26%, followed by dog hyperactivity 20.41% and barking 10.36%.

With the welfare of the animal taking priority, so as not to dissuade those who are relinquishing their animals to the shelter, animal shelters collect minimal data from

relinquishers (often one word answers), thus reasons given for relinquishment often belie the complexity of the decision (DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Irvine, 2003). In addition, the reason given for relinquishment may be one that the relinquisher thinks is more acceptable to the shelter workers and portrays themselves in a better light (as in the case of relinquishers denying ownership of the pet), than the real reason. For example, DiGiacomo et al. (1998) explained that one participant in the study, cited her granddaughter's allergies to the cats as the reason for relinquishment. On further questioning, however, it was revealed the reason for relinquishment was that the cats were urinating and defecating in the bathroom. The participant revealed that if the problem could be solved, she would keep the cats (DiGiacomo et al., 1998). Similarly some people claim to be relinquishing the animal because of allergies, yet still have another animal in the home (Irvine, 2003; Scarlett, Salman, New, & Kass, 1999).

Although most reasons given by relinquishers are modifiable (Irvine, 2003; Jagoe & Serpell, 1996; Miller et al., 1996; Mondelli et al., 2004; New et al., 2000; Patronek et al., 1996), the reluctance to try other options and the apparent ease of the relinquishment option, suggests that the family dog is in a tenuous position. Behaviours that condemn a dog to relinquishment are not deviances, but behaviours that are found in other dogs that are not relinquished (New et al., 2000), suggesting that any dog given the right mix of circumstances is at risk.

It has been suggested that people who relinquish their pets voluntarily, have a low level of attachment (Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Kidd & Kidd, 1980), have never had an attachment or have a broken attachment (see Chapter 2 for a discussion on attachment and pets). However, research suggests otherwise as some struggle with the decision to relinquish (DiGiacomo et al., 1998), with some even returning to reclaim their pets (Marston et al., 2005). For example, Patronek et al. (1996) reported that 55.8% of relinquishers compared with 85.3% of controls (dog owners), carried or displayed a picture of their pet and 44.5% of relinquishers compared to 79.3% of controls strongly agreed that their dog was a member of the family (both considered measures of attachment in the study). Although the percentages are lower for relinquishers than dog owners, these findings suggest that many people who relinquish have an attachment to their dogs.

Further, Marston et al. (2005) reported that one tenth of relinquishments to an animal shelter were dogs that had been discovered tied up somewhere, often with notes and provisions asking that someone care for them. This is interesting because if they really did not care about the dog then they could just let it go somewhere, but although

they are abandoning the dog in one sense, they remain concerned about its welfare, hence leaving a note and provisions. Marston and Bennett (2003) also suggest that the fact that relinquishing owners often present their dogs in a favourable light indicates that the human-canine bond has not been completely broken. An alternative suggestion may be that the owner is presenting the dog in a good light so that the shelter will take it. It should also be noted that these studies have looked at relinquishment to a shelter, the fact that owners are relinquishing to a shelter rather than just leaving the animal to fend for itself, suggests some level of bond and/or some level of moral responsibility for the dog's welfare.

Section Summary

In summary, people and dogs have been interacting for thousands of years for utility and companionship purposes. Dogs continue to be among the most utilised animals in terms of assistance to humans in a variety of ways. Large numbers of households in Australia and other countries keep dogs as pets, with many owners considering them to be a part of the family. As an integral part of the family, dogs can affect and are affected by family dynamics. Losing the dog through death can result in a grief experience similar to that experienced after the death of a human. However little is known about the impact of losing a dog through relinquishment.

Relinquishment is the permanent removal (voluntary or forced) of a dog from the household via a variety of methods including rehoming with friends, relatives or strangers, surrendering to an animal shelter or killing (i.e., euthanasia). It is common practice wherever dogs are kept as pets. Although a socially legitimised practice, it is generally abhorred. It has been suggested that the extent of relinquishment is far greater than is assumed, but because of social stigma remains largely out of public awareness. Some commonly held perceptions about relinquishment were found to be false. For instance, the most common reason offered by relinquishers for relinquishment is moving, dispelling the myth that only 'bad dogs' are relinquished. Another perception, that relinquishers have no bond and/or do not care about their dog, also may be false as research indicates some people exhibit behaviours that suggest otherwise. The next section considers the impact of dog relinquishment on human wellbeing.

The Psychosocial Impact of Dog Relinquishment

Little is known about the psychosocial impact of dog relinquishment on humans, due to a dearth of literature in the area of pet relinquishment. In addition, the literature that is available, for the most part emanates from an animal welfare perspective and focuses on relinquishment to animal shelters, covering factor such as reasons for

relinquishment (e.g., Kidd, Kidd, & George, 1992; Marston & Bennett, 2003; Miller et al., 1996; Mondelli et al., 2004; Murray & Speare, 1995; Salman et al., 2000), the perspectives of relinquishers (e.g., DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Labrecque & Walsh, 2011), shelter workers (e.g., Arluke, 1994; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Reeve, Rogelberg, Spitzmuller, & DiGiacomo, 2004; White & Shawhan, 1996), veterinarians and veterinary nurses (e.g., Black, Winefield, & Chur-Hansen, 2011; Rohlf & Bennett, 2005;) and outcomes for the pets (Marston et al., 2004). The available research suggests that for some pet relinquishment is cognitively and emotionally distressing (Anderson, 1985; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Labrecque & Walsh, 2011), particularly for animal welfare workers involved in the killing of animals (Arluke, 1994; Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Black et al., 2011; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Hart & Mader, 1995; Reeve et al., 2004; Sanders 1995; White & Shawhan, 1996). No literature was identified that pertained to children's experience of relinquishment.

Cognitive and Emotional Distress

Relinquishers report that the decision to relinquish is a difficult one. In a study of relinquishers surrendering their pets to a US animal shelter that practised euthanasia, DiGiacomo et al. (1998) found that relinquishers reported that the decision to relinquish was not made lightly and it was a decision in many cases that they had put off for as long as possible. The study reported that many of the relinquishers had looked for alternative methods of relinquishment, such as looking for a home for the pet. However, it is unclear if it was the decision to relinquish to the animal shelter or if it was the decision to relinquish per se, that took some time, given that participants reported negative perceptions of animal shelters and the potential risk of their pets being killed at the shelter.

While some researchers suggest that the decision to relinquish is not made lightly (e.g., DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Voith, 1983), others (e.g., Irvine, 2003; Mondelli et al., 2004) argue that relinquishing appears to be an easier option than seeking out alternative solutions.[5] Irvine (2003) provides an example of a relinquisher who relinquished his large dog because it pulled when being walked on a leash. The relinquisher and his family had given up trying to walk the dog, resulting in the dog spending days confined to the yard. The family had decided that the dog was not right for them so they had relinquished it. The relinquisher was asked whether he had tried to train the dog to walk on a lead or sought out any help with the problem, he replied that

[5] This is a view that was reported by several of the animal welfare worker participants in the present study, who suggested that relinquishment was too easy. They perceived that rather than a last resort, it was the first option taken.

he had not (Irvine, 2003). There may be some truth in both views. It may be that respondents in the DiGiacomo et al. (1998) study had a strong emotional bond with their pet, thus making the decision difficult; while the example given by Irvine (2003) may be one of a relinquisher that had little or no emotional bond with their dog (see Chapter 2 for discussion on the emotional bond between humans and dogs).

Voith (1983) reported that the decision to relinquish is most likely made when the owner perceives the costs of the pet to outweigh the benefits. A study by Miller et al. (1996) however, does not support this contention. Miller et al. (1996) found that relinquishers, when asked about the daily benefits and costs of their dogs (where 1 = a little and 2 = quite a bit), indicated that the benefits outweighed the costs (benefit 1.9, cost 1.4). Also Cain (1983) found that less than half of the 35% of participants that reported not liking their pet and wanting to get rid of it, actually did. Interestingly, although similar reasons were given for wanting to get rid of the pet, participants that kept the pet cited more reasons for getting rid of the pet than participants who did get rid of the pet. This provides support for the existence of emotional connections between some people and their pets and/or that they may have difficulty with the psychological, social and moral implications of getting rid of the dog.

One of the few studies that investigated pet relinquishment from the relinquishers' perspective found that they experienced emotional distress. Anderson (1985) surveyed 184 US military families in relation to their pet status after relocation to another area. She found that 29 families brought their pet with them, 55 left them behind (i.e., relinquished), and 100 families did not have a pet at transfer time. One of the questions posed to participants that had relinquished their pet was "what were the effects on at least one member of the family of leaving the pet at the last duty assignment" (Anderson, 1985, p. 271). This question had five possible responses: (1) Long-term saddening for at least one family member-more than two weeks; (2) Temporary saddening for at least one family member-less than two weeks; (3) Made happier; (4) No effects noticed; and (5) Other, please explain (Anderson, 1985, p. 216). Of the 55 who had left their pet behind, 45 indicated that there was long-term saddening of more than two weeks for at least one member of the family; eight indicated that there was temporary saddening of less than two weeks for at least one member of the family; one indicated that they were happier and one indicated no effect on family members (Anderson, 1985).

There are several limitations in the reporting of this study: although it is reported that some were still experiencing saddening at the time of the interview, it is not clear

from the study how long the saddening endured, as there is no indication of when they left the pet; also there is no indication of which member or members of the family experienced saddening. While this study indicates that people experience emotional distress on relinquishing a pet, as a survey design, it does not allow for the participants to express their perspective of the experience in their own words. Apart from saying that the participants felt sad, it does not provide any information about other thoughts and feelings they may have had, for example did they experience any other emotions? Did the experience affect family relationships?

In another US study (mentioned earlier) DiGiacomo et al. (1998) interviewed 38 relinquishers at an animal shelter that had just relinquished their pet (cat or dog). The interview focussed on the pet's background, reasons for relinquishment, the possibility of euthanasia and their views of the shelter and staff. They found that contrary to commonly held shelter views, the decision to relinquish was not easy and took some time. This resulted in cognitive conflict and/or emotional distress for relinquishers. For example, some relinquishers expressed concern over the possibility of their pets being killed and two relinquishers (whose pets had been killed immediately) were so distressed, that they were unable to complete the interview.

Another study, Labrecque and Walsh's (2011) phenomenological study of women's experience of living in homeless shelters in Canada, touched on the impact of pet relinquishment, providing further support for the notion that relinquishment can have a negative impact on humans. The authors reported that " those who had given up their pets in exchange for shelter spoke of the pain, trauma, and negative effects that relinquishing a pet had on themselves and their children" (Labrecque & Walsh, 2011, p. 90). Emotional distress was also apparent in a small percentage of relinquishers in a study conducted by Salman et al. (1998). This distress resulted in them not being able to take part in interviews. Further, Frommer and Arluke (1999) reported that some relinquishers when faced with the possibility of their pet being killed experienced guilt.

While the aforementioned studies considered relinquishment from the perspective of the relinquisher, a glimpse of the perspectives of practitioners (i.e., veterinary allergists -VA) was reported by Baker (1988). Baker, also a VA, posed the following question to fellow VA's in relation to their clients, "have you observed guilt feelings, emotional reactions or psychological trauma following forced elimination of pets?" (Baker, 1988, p. 102). Baker reported that more than half (55%) answered yes. In addition they also reported the following reactions amongst their clients:

- emotional reactions, psychological trauma and guilt feelings in the patient and other family members;
- depression;
- aggravation of the allergic state[6];
- temporary feelings of deprivation of love and support, at least until medical benefit was evident;
- resentment of the allergic child by siblings;
- response as to the loss of a family member (Baker, 1988, p. 102).

It should be noted that Baker's findings are not based on an empirical study. Rather, they were reported in an article about pet loss and client grief and apart from the reported findings, no other information about the survey or study was presented. However, while the survey by Baker is not an empirical study and is based on subjective observations and self report of the client, it nonetheless offers insight into how veterinarians perceive the impact on their clients and also how relinquishers perceive the impact on themselves and their family.

Apart from the few studies relating to relinquishers, most of the literature relates to the impact of relinquishment on animal welfare workers, in particular in relation to the impact of killing (i.e., euthanising) pets. Rollin (1987, p. 118) suggests that the killing of healthy animals can result in "moral stress" for those who care for animals. This results from the cognitive disequilibrium between the workers' views and attitudes towards animals and their actions (i.e., they work in animal welfare because they care about and want to save animals, yet they are killing them). Arluke (1994) describes this situation as a 'caring-killing' paradox. In his 1994, seven month ethnographic case study of an animal shelter that practised euthanasia, Arluke found that the killing of animals, particularly healthy young animals was cognitively and emotionally troubling, leaving animal shelter workers feeling uneasy as it called into question their sense of themselves as people who cared for animals. Further, he found that in order for shelter workers to be able to continue in their line of work, they had to develop strategies that made sense of their paradoxical situation.

Several other studies provide support for the contention that the killing of healthy animals is a major stressor for those who work in animal welfare. For example, White and Shawhan (1996) surveyed 244 employees (200 shelter workers and 44 managers) from selected US animal shelters with regard to their experience of euthanasia. Employee participants were asked to write down their thoughts and feelings about euthanasia. Participants reported sadness, conflict surrounding deciding which

[6] This suggests that the pet was not the cause of the allergy. As causes of allergies are notoriously difficult to identify many pets may be being relinquished unnecessarily.

animals are to be killed, guilt, anger, frustration, and some reported no emotional response to euthanasia. Three[7] reported seeking professional counselling outside of employer assisted counselling or support groups to deal with euthanasia. Two reported the use of medication to treat their depression that resulted from having to kill animals and one animal shelter worker was reported to have attempted suicide. Others sought help for coping with euthanasia by attending euthanasia related workshops and seminars (White & Shawhan, 1996).

The first empirical study to investigate the impact of euthanasia related work on the wellbeing of 335 animal shelter workers was conducted by Reeve, et al. (2005). Two hundred and twenty animal shelter workers that had involvement with the killing of animals and 115, who had no involvement, were recruited from two animal care conferences and surveyed. Questions covered a range of factors, some of which included attitude to euthanasia, health and well being, and job satisfaction. The findings of Reeve et al. (2005) supported Rollin's (1987) contention that euthanasia related stress was separate from general work-related stress and resulted in a negative impact on workers wellbeing. Significant differences were found between the two groups, specifically, those involved in killing animals had higher levels of general job stress, conflict with family resulting from work related matters, somatic complaints and lower levels of job satisfaction. Reeve and associates concluded that involvement in the killing of animals produces stress above and beyond the normal job related stress of the shelter environment (Reeve et al., 2005).

Some have suggested that euthanasia related work can result in traumatic stress (Arluke, 1992; Rohlf & Bennett, 2005; White & Shawhan, 1996). For example, Rohlf and Bennett (2005) used the impact of events scale revised, to assess levels of perpetration-induced traumatic stress (PITS) in a sample (n = 148) of people whose work role included participating in animal euthanasia. They found that 50% of the sample experienced mild to moderate PITS related to the euthanasia of animals.

Even without the added stress from euthanasia, animal welfare workers may be at risk for burnout, defined by Pines and Aronson (1988, p. 9) as "a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations". They may also be at risk for compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is emotional depletion resulting from 'caring too much', that is, over empathising with those who have experienced suffering of some sort, in this case the

[7] Another participant wanted to get psychological help but did not have the financial capacity to do so.

animals (Figley & Roop, 2006; Mitchener & Ogilvie, 2002). Although generally associated with the human welfare field, there is growing recognition of its impact in the animal welfare field on those who are passionate about animals (Figley & Roop, 2006). Burnout and compassion fatigue may be factors that lead many to leave the animal welfare field.

Section Summary

In summary, little is known about the impact of dog relinquishment on human health and wellbeing. The available literature pertaining to relinquishers suggests that dog relinquishment can be emotionally distressing and cognitively challenging. No literature was identified pertaining to the impact of it on children. With regards to animal welfare workers, most of the literature pertains to the impact of killing animals rather than relinquishment per se, although euthanasia is often an outcome of relinquishment. While euthanasia related work has been associated with higher levels of reported cognitive and emotional distress than non euthanasia related work, the nature of animal welfare work and the workers is such, that workers may be at risk for 'burnout' and compassion fatigue'. Having discussed the impact of dog relinquishment on humans the next section provides an overview of dog relinquishment in the Australian context with a particular focus on Perth, Western Australia.

Dog Relinquishment in Australia

Even though pets are considered to be members of the family by the majority of Australian owners (Franklin, 2007), each year in Australia tens of thousands of pets (mostly dogs and cats) are relinquished (Marston & Bennett, 2003; Murray & Speare, 1995). Methods of dog relinquishment in Australia include: being surrendered to an animal shelter or pound; advertised for sale or free in local newspapers, on shop notice boards, in veterinary clinics and on the internet; given away to family or friends; killed by a vet and in some cases by owners; or abandoned. The majority of relinquishments are voluntary while some are forced (e.g., local councils have the authority to impound dogs deemed as dangerous, deemed a nuisance because of barking or dogs that are being neglected; and elderly people may have to give up their pet on entering a nursing home or hospital).

In 2008-2009 the RSPCA in Australia received 69, 383 dogs (44.30% of overall animal intake). Of these dogs 33% were reclaimed, 27.7% were rehomed, 31.8% were killed, 2.7% were transferred to other shelters, 3.9% were still at the RSPCA at the end of the financial year and the remaining 0.9% was either dead on arrival, escaped, in foster care or not specified (RSPCA, 2010). Although the RSPCA is the most visible of

the animal welfare organisations in Australia, there are also many other organisations that receive stray, relinquished and impounded animals. It is difficult to gauge the true figure for the numbers of dogs relinquished annually across Australia, as apart from the RSPCA no other official figures are available. There is no identified data available on the number of dogs sold, given away, killed by owners,[8] killed by veterinarians (apart from Murray & Speare, 1995, see later this section) or abandoned.

One Australian study that may give an indication of the numbers of dogs abandoned is that by Marston et al. (2004). Marston and associates analysed one year's data from three Melbourne shelters and found that 20,729 dogs were admitted, of which 83.80% were recorded as strays and 15.07% were relinquished. The high percentage of dogs recorded as strays suggests that either there are a lot of dogs running away from home or that a lot of these dogs are being abandoned by their owners.

Another Australian study (Murray & Speare, 1995) was identified that may also shed light on numbers of dogs being abandoned or killed by owners. In an attempt to protect pets from being abandoned or killed by their owners and to reduce councils' costs of dealing with abandoned pets, the local councils of two Queensland cities (one council in each) collaborated with 11 veterinary clinics and introduced a program offering free pet euthanasia. The premise of the program was that clinics offered pet euthanasia at no financial cost to their owners and the council disposed of the animals' remains at no cost to the clinics.

Murray and Speare (1995) compared data from the local RSPCA animal shelter and one of the veterinary clinics[9] gathered over a 12 month period (1990-1991). In that time 1,398 dogs were killed (1,218 at the RSPCA animal shelter and 180 at one veterinary clinic). Reasons cited for relinquishment were: injured (5.8%), aged (3.9%), unwell (24.8%), unwanted (43.2%), cannot keep (9.7%), dangerous (6.3%), nuisance (4.9%) and cost (1.5%). Most of the dogs 'not wanted' were relinquished to the RSPCA (73 dogs out of a total 89 overall). Overall it was estimated that over the 12 month period 2,533 dogs were killed at the RSPCA and clinics combined. Murray and Speare (1995) estimated this to be 12% of the dog population of the two cities.

Although these data are not recent and there are no comparison data on euthanasia rates from the previous year prior to the free euthanasia scheme, it still gives an indication of the numbers of dogs potentially being abandoned or killed by their

[8] Some participants in the current study reported that dogs were shot by owners.

[9] Data were not available from all clinics involved for the whole 12 months, so figures were estimated on a ratio of 1:1.08 shelters and vets respectively, based on the data from the shelter and one clinic.

owners, which would have gone unrecorded or not reported in relinquishment figures. This provides further support for the argument that the numbers of dogs being relinquished is far greater than official figures suggest.

Dog Relinquishment in Perth, Western Australia

Perth is the capital city of Western Australia, the largest state in Australia, and is located in the south west of the state (About Australia, 2010). Almost 1.7 million people reside in Perth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Dog ownership rates can only be estimated, as no one organisation collates the total figures for Perth. Each of the 31 local councils in Perth requires that dog owners register their dog or dogs, however, not everyone complies. Between them, the three councils with the largest populations in Perth (i.e., Stirling, Joondalup and Wanneroo) recorded 57,564 registered dogs in 2010 (Thomas, 2010).

Similar to difficulties in determining dog ownership rates, it is also difficult to determine the extent of dog relinquishment. While the RSPCA provides figures for the number of dogs received, it is not clear how many of them are relinquishments. Also, there are many other rescue groups in Perth apart from the RSPCA, as well as other methods of relinquishment apart from relinquishing to an animal shelter, for which no relinquishment data is available. As an example of uncounted relinquishments, data were collated over a twelve month period of dogs being advertised for rehoming (i.e., relinquishing owners seeking new homes for their dogs) in the Saturday edition of a local Perth newspaper.[10] The data revealed that during the period of Jan- Dec 2009, 236 dogs (an average of 4.5 per week) were listed for rehoming (The West Australian, 2009).

Shelters and Rescue Groups

The RSPCA is the public face of animal welfare in WA. The animal shelter is situated in Perth and cares for other animals as well as dogs. The RSPCA WA also provides pound services for some local councils. Dogs received by the RSPCA WA may have been surrendered, abandoned,[11] enforced seizures (cruelty and neglect cases or dangerous dogs) or picked up as strays by council rangers. In 2008-2009 the RSPCA WA received 2,042 dogs of which 621 were reclaimed, 1,045 were rehomed and 248 were killed (71 for medical reasons and 177 for behavioural reasons; RSPCA 2010).

[10] This number is probably an underestimation as another newspaper in Perth carries many more advertisements, as it is a dedicated trading post newspaper and advertising is free.

[11] Abandonment of an animal according to s20 (f) of the Animal welfare Act 2002 WA, "whether at the place where it is normally kept or elsewhere" is considered cruelty to an animal and carries a minimum penalty of $2000 and a maximum penalty of $50,000 and 5 years imprisonment.

No data were identified that gave a breakdown of the figures to ascertain what percentage of dogs received by the RSPCA, were relinquished by their owners.

Apart from the RSPCA, in Perth there are three other large animal shelters specifically dedicated to the welfare of dogs. There are also numerous smaller rescue groups and organisations, some breed specific and some that are operated from rescuers homes. In addition there are animal pounds run by the local councils.

Council (Shire) Pounds

Council pounds are facilities operated by local councils where impounded animals are housed. A perusal of the 31 local council websites showed that in 2010, 14 councils had their own animal pound facility; six used the facilities at one of the other animal shelters; three used the facilities at the RSPCA; two used the facilities at a local veterinary clinic; two councils shared a pound facility and three council's websites gave no information about pound facilities. While some councils accept surrendered dogs, most of the dogs at council pounds have been picked up as strays off the street, impounded from owners for issues of neglect, or have been picked up from people who have contacted council rangers to say they have found a dog.[12]

In addition, dogs can be impounded by rangers if there is a court order for its seizure. [13] Apart from dogs seized by court order, by law, councils are required to keep impounded dogs a minimum of three days (72 hrs) for reclaiming before they can be rehomed or killed (Dog Act, 1976). There are no available figures on the number of dogs that council pounds take in per year.[14] Other dog shelters and some of the smaller rescue groups when they are able [15] take dogs from the pound in an effort to save them from being killed.

Section Summary

In summary, dog relinquishment in an Australian context is similar to that reported in other countries in relation to its nature, methods and reasons for relinquishment. In Australia, relinquishment of dogs can be voluntary or forced; with local councils having the authority to seize dogs deemed as dangerous, a nuisance or

[12] There is also a possibility that some people ringing rangers to pick up a dog that they have found may in fact be the owners, as several of the animal welfare workers in this study commented that they have witnessed people lying about ownership of a dog they are relinquishing.

[13] Court orders can be issued if a dog has been deemed dangerous; if it is deemed a nuisance due to barking; or it is being neglected (see Dog Act, 1976). People have the right to appeal the impound decisions. If they fail, the council has authority to kill the dog.

[14] One of the rangers interviewed as part of the current study reported that around 2000 dogs per year came into the pound while another ranger at different council reported around 50 a week (2600 per year).

[15] According to participants in the current study the animal shelters and rescue groups are generally filled to capacity. When they can, they will take young dogs or dogs that they think can be rehomed quickly.

neglected. While the RSPCA is the most prominent animal rescue organisation, many other organisations also deal with dog relinquishment. The true prevalence of dog relinquishment is unknown, partially through lack of data and also because much relinquishment occurs outside of public awareness. Therefore, the number of dogs being relinquished is likely to be far greater than current estimations. Having discussed dog relinquishment in an Australian context, the next section explains the background to the current study.

Background to the Current Study

In trying to decide upon a topic for my PhD project I recalled an incident that had occurred following the adoption of my dog Rex, from an animal shelter in Perth, Western Australia. Rex, a five year old German shorthaired pointer, was adopted as a playmate for Meghan (18 month old flat coat retriever) who had been adopted 6 months previously from the same shelter. Rex had been relinquished because his owner had relocated, after a divorce, to smaller accommodation that was not suitable for a large dog.

A year after adopting Rex, while attending the annual open day at the shelter, I had asked the shelter worker who had recommended Rex (and who also personally knew the relinquisher), if they would like to know how he was going. The offer was declined. The shelter worker did not think that this was a good idea as one of the children, an adolescent boy, had not been able to speak of Rex since the relinquishment. This led me to think about how children felt about their dogs being relinquished. I wondered how they coped with losing their dog.

I conducted a literature search, in the first instance, to find out if the topic was feasible as a project and also to find out what was already known about the impact of dog relinquishment on children. The search identified several gaps in the literature. For example, most of the pet loss literature related to the death of the pet, there was very little literature pertaining to dog or pet relinquishment and no studies were identified that investigated the child's perspective of relinquishment; the only Australian study identified investigated relinquishment from an animal welfare perspective; a few US based studies investigated relinquishment from the relinquisher, animal shelter worker and veterinarian's perspective; all studies investigated relinquishment to an animal shelter; and no studies took a long term view of the impact of dog relinquishment.

Having identified gaps in knowledge, not only about the impact of dog relinquishment on children, but also on adults, I chose to expand the topic from children, to include adults that had relinquished and adults that worked in the animal

welfare field. The human experience of dog relinquishment, rather than the child's experience of dog relinquishment was chosen due to the potential difficulty[16] in recruiting child participants and to gain a wider perspective of the issue.

Justification

The exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment was justified on the following points:

- Little is known about the impact of dog relinquishment on adults (no literature was identified pertaining to the impact on children).
- The small amount known about the impact on adults suggests that it is cognitively and emotionally distressing.
- Given that large numbers of dogs are relinquished annually, the potential for a negative impact on human health and wellbeing is significant.

Section Summary

In summary, my exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment presented in the current thesis stemmed from a dog adoption experience, which provoked thoughts and questions about the issue, prompting a search of the relinquishment literature. The discovery that the human experience of dog relinquishment has remained relatively unexplored in the literature, yet has the potential to have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of adults and children, provided a justification for the current study. Having described the impetus and justification for an exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment, the next section outlines the current study, including its aims, research questions and significance.

The Current Study

The current study explored the human experience of dog relinquishment in a Western Australian sample. It focussed on the relinquishment of pet dogs, thus excluding other dogs that are also sometimes relinquished; for example, military service dogs (see McGraw, 2007 for the impact of forced relinquishment on Vietnam veterans). The current study utilised a qualitative retrospective design. A qualitative methodology allows for a "complex detailed understanding" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40) of an issue such as the human experience of dog relinquishment. The methodology utilised was Straussian grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), described in detail in Chapter 3. Grounded theory methodology [GTM] is appropriate for use in exploratory studies

[16] As parents are the gatekeepers of children it was thought that if relinquishment had impacted negatively on the child, then parents were unlikely to allow them to participate and/or it might put the child in a difficult situation.

when little is known about the issue under study and when the aim is to generate theory (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The current study is unique in that it is the first identified Australian study of the human experience of dog relinquishment and differs from others studies of relinquishment in the following ways:

1. It focused on one species rather than pets in general. Dog relinquishment as opposed to pet relinquishment was chosen for investigation for several reasons: selecting one type of pet provides a better focus for the theory as fewer variables are likely to be involved with one type of pet rather than a variety of pets; attachment levels are generally reported higher for dogs than other pets, therefore it is likely that relinquishing a dog has an impact; the dog by its nature and interactions predisposes it to an attachment relationship (Hart, 1995); dogs are the most common reported pets in households, with 47% of Australian households having at least one dog (Franklin, 2007) and large numbers are relinquished (The Humane Society of the United States [HSUS], 2006; RSPCA, 2010);

2. It explored the perspectives of adults who experienced relinquishment in adulthood or childhood (the few previous studies have only investigated the adult relinquishers' perspective). It also allowed for exploration of a wider group of those likely to be impacted by dog relinquishment (e.g., other family members);

3. It explored the professional experiences of a wider group of animal welfare workers in relation to dog relinquishment (a limited number of previous studies have explored the impact of euthanasia, oftentimes an outcome of relinquishment, on animal shelter workers, veterinarians and veterinary nurses);

4. It explored a range of relinquishment methods rather than just surrendering to an animal shelter, as in previous studies; and

5. It provides a longer-term perspective of the impact of relinquishment (previous studies [apart from the military study by Anderson, (1985)] have interviewed relinquishers on the day of the relinquishment.

Aims

The aim of the current study was to generate a substantive grounded theory that would describe and explain the human experience of dog relinquishment.

Significance

The current study is significant because it provides insight into an under researched area that has the potential to detrimentally impact the health and wellbeing of many adults and children. The findings from the current study

contribute to the body of knowledge and serve to inform researchers, practitioners, and the general community about the issue of dog relinquishment and its impact on human wellbeing.

The substantive grounded theory of 'protective-restoring to maintain self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience' that emerged from the data describes and explains how participants experienced dog relinquishment and their behaviour in response to that experience; it also has the potential to predict the experience of others. In addition, the theory may be useful for developing screening tools to identify those likely to be negatively impacted, as well as interventions that have the potential to assist those adversely affected by relinquishment. Finally the findings lay the groundwork for future research into an under investigated, but important area of human-animal interaction.

Research Questions

The overall research question of the current study was: "what is the human experience of dog relinquishment?" Supplementary research questions included: "what factors influence the human experience of dog relinquishment?" and "how do relinquishers, those who have experienced relinquishment in childhood and animal welfare workers, manage the dog relinquishment experience?"

Section Summary

In summary, the current study is a qualitative, retrospective exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment. It aimed to generate a substantive grounded theory, which describes and explains the dog relinquishment experience of relinquishers, those who have experienced dog relinquishment in childhood, and animal welfare workers. The study is significant because it has addressed an under-researched issue that has the potential to adversely affect adult and child wellbeing. Having outlined the current study, the next section describes the structure for the rest of the current thesis, including a brief overview of each chapter.

Structure of the Thesis (Chapters 2 to 8)

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Chapter two presents a review of the human-animal interaction (HAI) literature. Although grounded theory methodology (GTM) does not advocate the undertaking of a literature review prior to data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1968), a preliminary literature review was conducted as a requirement of the PhD proposal process. The literature review was undertaken in order to identify the extent of research into dog relinquishment and to provide a rationale for the current study. The literature

review in Chapter 2 is an extended version of the preliminary literature review and broadens the scope of the issue under investigation. While some of the literature review was conducted prior to data collection and analysis, much of it was conducted after data analysis in accord with GTM.

The review covers factors related to HAI that influence the human experience of dog relinquishment. The chapter begins with a brief history of the emerging field of HAI. Human attitudes towards animals are then described and discussed. This is followed by a discussion on human-pet interaction, in particular why people keep pets and the benefits to humans of this practice. The human-pet relationship is then discussed, with a particular focus on the close emotional connection that some people develop with their pet. Drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1981) it is suggested that the human-canine relationship holds a unique position, lying somewhere between the child/parent attachment and parent/child affectional bond.

Along with the benefits of pet keeping, costs are also discussed, particularly the loss of the human-pet relationship. Comparisons are drawn between the grief experience following the loss of a loved human and the loss of a loved dog. Disenfranchised grief, which accompanies losses that are unacknowledged and/or unrecognised by society, is also discussed. Suggestions are made that relinquishment is an unrecognised loss, that given its nature has the potential to have a detrimental effect on human wellbeing, greater than that experienced following the death (by natural causes) of a loved dog. The chapter concludes with a rationale for the current study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Chapter three describes and discusses the grounded theory methodology (GTM) utilised in the current study. The chapter begins by outlining the importance of declaring the philosophical underpinning that guides the research process. This is followed by a description of the philosophical orientation of the current study, which includes a post positivist research paradigm, consisting of a critical realist ontology, a modified objectivist epistemology, a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, and Straussian GTM. Following a discussion of the issue of reflexivity in qualitative studies, my role as researcher in the current study is described, along with my personal experience of dog relinquishment. The history and development of GTM (including its variations) is then presented along with a description of its methods and the issue of its evaluation. This is followed by a justification for the use of Straussian GTM as a methodology to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment. Finally, the research process undertaken in the current study is described in detail including: ethical

considerations; a description of recruiting methods utilised, as well as the sample procured; methods of data collection and analysis (including identification of the core category of 'protective-restoring'); and steps taken to ensure rigour of the research.

Chapter 4 - A Grounded Theory of the Human Experience of Dog Relinquishment

In chapter four, an overview and model of the substantive grounded theory of 'protective-restoring' to maintain self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience, which emerged from the analysis of the data of 45 participants in the current study is presented. The theory proposes that dog relinquishment threatens and disturbs the self integrity of all people involved, irrespective of their role in the relinquishment. The ensuing psychological unease, manifesting as one or more of the following types, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief, motivates people to engage in cognitive and behavioural strategies, aimed at protecting self from further threats and restoring self integrity. While some strategies were found to be adaptive some were maladaptive, resulting in further psychological unease for self and/or others. The type, intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease, varies as a result of individual and social factors, and the efficacy of strategies employed to protect and restore self integrity. The emergent theory was then compared with existing theory pertaining to self integrity and found to be similar, thus enhancing its trustworthiness and credibility.

Chapter 5 – The Psychosocial Problem

Chapter 5 begins the detailed reporting of the findings, which contributed to the theoretical framework of the emergent theory. In this chapter the core problem or main issue arising from the dog relinquishment experience for participants in the current study, is described and explained. The core problem was identified as a disturbed self integrity and described as a sense of cognitive and emotional unease (i.e., psychological unease). Three types of psychological unease were experienced by participants in the current study, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress, and grief. Each type of psychological unease is described in relation to how it is experienced and managed in the context of the psychological literature and the dog relinquishment experience. Participants experience of and management of the three types of psychological unease was found to be consistent with the psychological literature, thus providing support for the notion that the dog relinquishment experience is a threat to self integrity. Finally the intensity, frequency, and duration of the psychological unease, which varied according to individual and social factors and strategies used to alleviate the unease, is described and explained.

Chapter 6 – Causal and Intervening Conditions

In Chapter 6 the detailed reporting of the findings of the current study is continued. The factors that contributed to the psychological unease, as well as the factors that explained some of the variance in the experience are described and explained. Collectively identified as threats to self integrity, conditions identified as causal, resulted in participants experiencing a disturbed self integrity and led to the process of 'protective-restoring'. These conditions comprised inconsistencies between self perception and behaviours (of self and others), failures of self and others to live up to standards (own and others) and stressors associated with the relinquishment experience (e.g., loss of the dog, negativity associated with relinquishment, as well as the animal rescue environment). Five threats to self integrity were identified and conceptualised as the *culture of relinquishment*, a *crisis of conscience*, a *fear of losing face*, *losing faith* and *losing Rex*. Each of the five concepts is described and explained in turn. The five concepts serve to illustrate the way in which cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief were experienced by the participants of the current study.

Following a description and explanation of the causal conditions indentified in the current study, 13 intervening conditions are described and explained. These individual and social factors include *worldview; attachment; role; relinquishment history; coping methods; cultural attitudes to dogs; support; ritual; new knowledge; passage of time; time pressures; concurrent losses*; and *resources*. These conditions were found to contribute to variations in participants' experience of dog relinquishment via a positive or negative influence and also served to impede or enhance the protective-restoring strategies employed by participants.

Chapter 7 – The Psychosocial Process

Chapter 7 concludes the detailed reporting of the findings of the current study. This chapter describes and explains the psychosocial process of 'protective-restoring' that participants in the current study engaged in to manage their disturbed self integrity. This dual process of protecting the self from further threats to self and restoring the self integrity to an undisturbed state comprised a four phase continuous process involving recognition, identification, assessment and counteraction of threats. Participants attempted to counteract threats by way of six types of cognitive and behavioural strategies, namely, *self enhancing, blaming, impact reducing, managing emotion, avoiding* and *blocking.* In all, 44 different strategies were identified. Participants employed strategies according to their perceived needs; thus not all strategies were employed by all participants. Although the aim of the strategies was to protect and

restore self integrity, sometimes they had unintended consequences resulting in further threats to the self integrity of participants and/or others.

Chapter 8 - Overall Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. The chapter begins with a summary of the findings of the current study. Methodological strengths and limitations, as well as the contributions to knowledge of the current study are then discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings for policy and practice. Recommendations based on the findings of the current study are made, as well as suggestions for future research. Finally conclusions are drawn.

Definitions in the Context of the Current Study

The following list of words and terms appear in the current thesis and are defined here in the context of dog relinquishment.

Abandonment: Purposively leaving a pet (companion animal) to fend for itself.

Animal: Although it is technically inaccurate to separate humans and animals, as humans are animals too (both are included under the Animalia Kingdom- Eldredge, 2002), the term animal is used in this thesis to refer to animals other than humans because it is literary less cumbersome than using the terms 'other animals' or 'non-human animals'.

Animal Shelter: Organisation whose focus is the rescue and rehoming of animals (mostly companion animals).

Animal Welfare Worker: A person whose job (whether paid or voluntary), wholly or partially, entails some aspect of interacting with and/or caring for animals.

Companion animal: An animal that is kept as a pet; generally relates to dogs and cats.

Convenience euthanasia: A term used by veterinarians to describe the killing of a *healthy* animal by lethal injection at the request of the animal's owner.

Council pound: Animal holding facility that is operated by local councils for the purposes of keeping stray, abandoned, relinquished or council seized animals. Animals are held for three to seven days in which they can be reclaimed by their owners (excepting council seized animals), after which time they can be rehomed with new people or killed if no homes are found. Those not deemed rehomeable (e.g., due to illness, old age or aggression) are killed.

Euthanasia: The killing of a companion animal; usually carried out by a veterinarian via lethal injection, but also can be carried out by non-veterinarians using various methods (e.g., gunshot, drowning, hitting over the head).

Home based rescue service: A service run by animal welfare workers, from their own homes, who take in relinquished, abandoned and rescued dogs (from council pounds) with the intention of finding them new homes.

Human-animal interaction: The study of relations between humans and animals.

Pet: An animal kept for non utility purposes, usually a dog, cat, rabbit or bird but can include other animals.

Relinquisher: Person that purposively gives up a pet.

Relinquishment: Voluntary or forced permanent removal of a pet from its owner.

Surrender: Another term for relinquishment.

Chapter Summary

Following a brief overview of human-canine interaction, which demonstrated the longevity and nature of human-canine association, the issue of dog relinquishment, the focus of the current study was introduced. This widespread and common practice, occurring mainly below public awareness, was shown to have multiple methods and multiple reasons as to why it occurs. A lack of knowledge with regards to the human impact of relinquishment was identified. The limited literature on the psychosocial impact of relinquishment was discussed, suggesting that the experience was cognitively and emotionally distressing for relinquishers and animal welfare workers. No literature was identified in relation to its impact on children. Following the discussion on the psychosocial impact of dog relinquishment an overview of dog relinquishment in Australia, with a specific focus on Perth, WA, was presented. This demonstrated that the methods of and reasons given for dog relinquishment in Australia are similar to other countries. The impetus and justification for the current study was then explained. The impetus was explained as a response to a personal experience in relation to an adopted dog and the study's justification was based on the lack of literature and knowledge about the issue of dog relinquishment and its impact on human wellbeing. An outline of the current study including its aims, significance and research questions was then presented. Finally, the chapter structure of the thesis was outlined and definitions were provided for words and terms associated with dog relinquishment that are used in the current thesis. The next chapter presents a review of the human-animal interaction literature, to provide insight into factors that influence the human experience of dog relinquishment. The chapter concludes in a rationale for the current study.

- Chapter 2 -

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

In exploring the issue of dog relinquishment it is imperative to first gain some insight into the nature of human-animal relations. This chapter presents a review of the literature on human-animal interaction (HAI). The chapter is divided into six sections. In section one, the area of HAI is introduced and defined in terms of its history and scope. In section two, human views of, and attitudes towards animals, with a specific focus on dogs are described and discussed in terms of their origins and current status. In section three, human-pet interaction is discussed, including the benefits that humans derive from interacting with pets. This is followed by section four, which discusses the human-pet relationship. The contentious issue of the use of the term 'attachment' to describe the relationship is also addressed. Section five then discusses the costs to human wellbeing of human-pet interaction, with a particular focus on the impact of pet loss. Finally section six concludes the chapter with a rationale for the current study.

Human-Animal Interaction

The term human-animal interaction appears frequently in the literature, although no uniform definition was identified. Therefore, for the purpose of the current thesis it is proposed that HAI be defined as, the study of relations between humans and animals. HAI is a relatively new area of study, beginning in earnest in the 1970s, and initially promoted by veterinary scientists (Hines, 2003). While veterinary science has a strong representation in the field, currently interest and research in HAI continues to grow across disciplines and countries (Hines, 2003). Although the study of HAI does not have a long history, interest in the area is not new. For example, early promoters of the area include Konrad Lorenz, a noted ethologist and Boris Levinson. Levinson, a noted child psychiatrist, was ridiculed for suggesting that a dog could be a useful aid in helping children to relax and talk in a therapeutic setting (Levinson, 1978); a suggestion based on his own experiences of having his dog present in therapy sessions with children (Levinson, 1962).

The HAI research literature appears under several guises including human-animal relations (HAR; e.g., Franklin, 2007) and human-animal studies (HAS; e.g., Lloyd & Mulcock, 2007). Although the term HAI implies that the interaction between human and animal is bidirectional, much of the HAI literature is human centred and focuses on the benefits of HAI for humans. With the area of HAI lacking clear definition in relation to its composition, it is unclear whether all the literature that deals

with humans and animals is included under the auspices of HAI, or only particular areas. For example, a large part of HAI research literature focuses on interactions between humans and companion animals (i.e., pets), in particular the human-animal bond. However, this is only one aspect of HAI. HAI can occur without the presence of an emotional bond or relationship (e.g., abattoir workers would find their job very difficult if they formed an emotional bond with the animals they slaughtered) and people can develop emotional bonds with animals apart from companion animals (e.g., zookeepers and animal laboratory technicians; see Chang & Hart, 2002). Further, HAI can be positive or negative.

HAI is complex by nature and thus presents challenges to investigators in terms of research design (Wilson & Barker, 2003). While the multidisciplinary nature of HAI research broadens the scope of knowledge in the field, it also results in a variety of methodologies, of varying methodological rigour (see Wilson & Barker, 2003 for a summary of critical reviews of HAI research). Measures used by researchers can vary in terms of their psychometric properties. For example, measures of the relationship between humans and animals range from one word questions such as "how much do you care about your pet?" (Cummins et al., 2004) to the more sophisticated three scale, 28 item Monash Dog Owner Relationship Scale - MDORS (Dwyer, Bennett, & Coleman, 2006). Further, the majority of studies make no distinction between types of animal, which can also be problematic, as the interaction one can have with a dog is clearly different than the interaction one can have with a goldfish.

Barba (1995) conducted a critical review of 52 human companion animal relationship research reports (published in English), emanating between 1988 and 1993. The majority of studies were non experimental (43) and the other nine comprised six experimental and three quasi experimental. Although Barba (1995) acknowledged that the research had added to the body of HAI knowledge, she also identified problems with some of the research including: researchers generalising results from methodologies which did not justify generalisation; non reporting of reliability and validity of instruments used; researchers not stating theoretical frameworks; and sampling issues such as insufficient sample size for the chosen method of analyses and inadequate description of samples. These types of problems in research can undermine confidence in the findings. It should be noted that Barba's (1995) review centred on human-animal bond research (i.e., only one aspect of HAI) and was not comprehensive even of that area and therefore may not be reflective of other HAI research then or since.

Section Summary

In summary, HAI is a relatively new, but growing, area of research that studies the relations between humans and animals. Its multidisciplinary nature allows for a broad base of knowledge, but its complexity can prove a challenge in terms of research design. In addition, due to varied methodologies and methodological rigour some confidence in findings may be impaired. Having introduced and outlined the scope of the HAI area, the next section describes and discusses views and attitudes towards animals.

Human Views of and Attitudes towards Animals

Relations between humans and animals are complex (Bekoff, 2008; Herzog, 2010). Animals are demonised and idolised; loved and loathed; they are sacrificed and saved; some are eaten while others are not; and some provoke fear while others promote assurance. They are an integral part of human existence. The many ways in which humans use animals are too numerous to list, but a few examples include: as a food, clothing and upholstery source; a mode of transport; a source of income; they provide assistance in the workplace and therapeutic settings; they provide companionship, and they are a source of entertainment (e.g., movies and books about animals, rodeos, performing animals etc.).

Part of the complexity of HAR arises out of the differing views of animals that have been shaped over the centuries by culture, philosophy,[17] religions, science and personal experience. In the past few decades there has been renewed interest in the status of animals, in particular with regard to animal rights and human obligation. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to enter into the moral/ethical debate regarding the status of animals, readers interested in the history of and present thoughts about animals are directed to the following literature (see Armstrong & Botzler, 2003; Regan, 2004; Ryder, 2000; Singer, 2002; Sorabji, 1993; Sunstein & Nussbaum, 2004).

Two main opposing views of animals have prevailed over time: (1) animals are machine-like, incapable of emotion, reason and pain, having no intrinsic value; and (2) animals are sentient beings, capable of emotion, reason and pain, and have intrinsic value in their own right (Bekoff, 2008; Ryder, 2000). The mechanistic view of animals is generally accredited to Rene Descartes a 17th Century French mathematician, scientist and philosopher. Descartes, in his famous work 'Discourse on the method of rightly conducting the reason and seeking truth in the sciences' laid out what he believed to be

[17] See de Montaigne, (2003) and Descartes (2008) for an example of the polarised beliefs about animals that influence present day thought.

the main differences between humans and animals. He proposed that animals lack reason, and speech (Descartes, 2008). Their lack of reason presupposes a lack of self awareness and associated feelings such as joy, fear and pain.[18] Descartes philosophy has dominated over time and has been suggested as a reason for psychology's lack of interest in human-animal relationships (Melson, 2002).

The differing views influence the status of animals, as well as their treatment and can be a source of conflict, with the potential to negatively affect human wellbeing. For example, people ascribing to the first view (i.e., animals are not sentient beings) may experience psychological distress when animals are favoured over people, for instance in cases where a shark has killed a person and the shark is protected. While those who ascribe to the second view (i.e., that animals are sentient beings) may experience psychological distress when confronted by the behaviour toward animals of those who do not believe animals are sentient beings, for instance animal experimentation.

Attitudes to Animals

An attitude is defined as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution or an event" (Ajzen, 2007, p. 3).[19] The animal kingdom is large and varied, containing many species, including humans (Eldredge, 2000); thus attitudes to animals are complex. They can vary according to animal characteristics, human characteristics and cultural factors (Serpell, 2004). The same person can hold a positive attitude toward a dog and a negative attitude toward a cat. They can eat cows, pigs and sheep, but would be abhorred at the thought of eating their dog. In some cultures particular animals are held to be sacred (e.g., cows in India), while the same animal is deemed a food source in others (Herzog, 2010).

Researchers have sought to identify the motivations underlying human attitudes to animals. In a large scale five phase study conducted on behalf of the United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Kellart and associates surveyed US adults (Kellart & Berry, 1980) for their knowledge of, and attitudes towards wild and domesticated animals. They identified nine categories that described differing attitudes towards animals:

- Naturalistic - primary interest and affection for wildlife and the outdoors.

[18] Cottingham (1988) argues against the idea that Descartes proposed that animals did not have feelings, however his arguments are refuted by others including Harrison (1992).

[19] It should be noted that if one does not view an animal as an object, then animals are precluded from the above definition.

- Ecologistic - primary concern for the environment as a system, for interrelationships between wildlife species and natural habitats.
- Humanistic - primary interest and strong affection for individual animals, principally pets.
- Moralistic - primary concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals, with strong opposition to exploitation or cruelty toward animals.
- Scientistic - primary interest in the physical attributes and biological functioning of animals.
- Aesthetic - primary interest in the artistic and symbolic characteristics of animals.
- Utilitarian - primary concern for the practical and material value of animals or the animal's habitat.
- Dominionistic - primary interest in the mastery and control of animals typically in sporting situations.
- Negativistic - Primary orientation an active avoidance of animals due to indifference, dislike or fear (Kellert & Berry, 1980, p. 42).

Kellert and Berry, (1980, p. 43) acknowledged that "the scales are admittedly a crude approximation of the underlying attitude types, and only in the broadest sense measure their true prevalence and distribution". Notwithstanding their comments, Kellert and Berry (1980) found that the most common held attitudes of the sample from the nine attitude types, (of which people could identify with more than one), were humanistic (35%), moralistic (20%), utilitarian (20%) and negativistic[20](37%).

Based on the findings that many of the attitude dimensions correlated with each other and that some of the attitudes rated poorly percentage wise in terms of population prevalence (e.g., scientistic 1% and dominionistic 3%), Kellert (1980, p. 89) suggested that the attitude structures could be simplified into two themes, namely, 'affection for animals', containing the diametrically opposed humanistic and negativistic attitude types, and 'exploitation of animals', containing the diametrically opposed moralistic and utilitarian attitude types. The two extremes of these attitudes are responsible for much of the conflict surrounding the treatment of animals, as those with a humanistic attitude are interested in the intrinsic worth of animals, while those with a utilitarian attitude are interested in their extrinsic worth.

Other researchers have also proposed a similar, simpler attitude structure. For example, Hills (1993) proposed a three dimension attitude structure consisting of instrumentality (i.e., usefulness of animals), empathy/identification (i.e., empathy for animals) and values-expressive (i.e., theories, values and beliefs about the status of animals). The proposed model was utilised to identify the attitudes, via a survey, of a

[20] Negativistic attitude type comprised 2% negativistic plus 35% neutralistic. The negativistic attitude type also encompassed a neutralistic type, of which the primary interest was passive avoidance of animals (Kellert & Berry, 1980).

West Australian sample of 51 farmers, 55 animal rights advocates and 54 members of the public. Hills (1993) found significant differences between the three groups. In comparison to the other groups, farmers had high instrumentality, low empathy and high (dominance) values-expressive; animal rights advocates had low instrumentality, high empathy and high (equality) values-expressive; while the members of the public had moderate instrumental and empathy, and low (close to neutral on equality-dominance) value-expressive.

Similar to Kellert and Berry (1980), Serpell (2004, p. 146) proposed a model consisting of two dimensions, namely, "*Affect* – people's affective and or emotional responses to animals" and "*Utility* – people's perceptions of animals' instrumental value". Each dimension has a positive and negative polarity such that affect ranges from "love, sympathy, identification to fear loathing, disidentification" and utility ranges from "beneficial to human interests to detrimental to human interests" (Serpell, 2004, p. 147). The dimensions are interdependent, and can be modified by variables such as animal characteristics, personal characteristics and cultural factors.

Findings from research investigating the attitudes of different groups suggest that: generally women lean more towards the affective dimension and less towards the utility dimension than men (Kellert & Berry, 1980; Herzog, 2007; Hills, 1993); childhood attitudes to pets can influence adult attitudes (Kidd & Kidd, 1989; Poresky, Hendrix, Mosier & Samuelson, 1988); generally those employed in farming animals have utilitarian attitudes, those employed or involved in animal welfare and/or rights have humanistic attitudes (Hills, 1993; Signal & Taylor, 2006), while those involved in animal experimentation vary between utilitarian and humanistic (Koski, 1988); and family members may not necessarily hold the same attitudes towards animals (Risley-Curtis et al., 2006). It should be noted that much of the research into attitudes has been conducted in western countries such as the US, UK and Australia and may differ from attitudes held by those in non western countries. Further, instruments used varied and may limit the findings, as most animal attitude instruments are not animal specific and people may be thinking of a specific animal when responding to questions, rather than animals in general (Miura, Bradshaw, & Tanida, 2000).

The attitude a person holds towards animals not only influences their behaviour towards animals, but it is likely that it can also serve as a protective or risk factor in relation to psychological wellbeing. For example, those who work in roles that involve the killing of animals may be protected from psychological distress if they hold a utilitarian attitude, but at risk if they hold a humanistic attitude. Thus the 78% of

veterinarians and veterinary students surveyed by Crowell-Davis, Crowe and Levine (1988), who held the view that animals were sentient beings, may be at more risk for psychological distress when practising euthanasia (especially of a healthy animal) than would the 22% that did not believe animals were sentient beings. This may be a factor in the several studies of animal shelter workers that have found varying levels of psychological distress associated with the killing of animals (Arluke, 1994; Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Reeve, et al., 2004; Sanders 1995; White & Shawhan, 1996).

Attitudes to Dogs

The popular image of dogs as 'man's best friend' belies the reality of the views of dogs that are held by people. While some people laud dogs, others despise them. The contradictory views of dogs held by people are illustrated in the following comments:

> For an increasingly large sector of the population, the dog is now perceived as a dangerous and dirty animal with few redeeming qualities: a source of vicious and unprovoked attacks on children, fatal or debilitating disease risks, and unacceptable levels of organic pollution in our streets and public parks – a veritable menace to society....At the other end of the spectrum, an even larger constituency of dog lovers exists for whom this animal has become the archetype of affectionate fidelity and unconditional love. To the members of this group, dogs are more human than animal. They are given human-sounding names, like George or Mary, they are spoken to and treated like junior family members, and most of the time they are unconsciously assumed to have virtually the same thoughts, feelings and desires as people (Serpell, 1995, p. 2).

As with attitudes to animals in general, attitudes towards dogs vary according to animal characteristics, personal characteristics and cultural factors (Serpell, 2004). They can range from humanistic to utilitarian and can be positive or negative. As explained earlier, few studies focus solely on dogs in their investigations, rather they are included in studies of attitudes towards animals or pets in general. Two studies identified that specifically investigated attitudes to dogs were Selby and Rhoades (1981) and Miura et al. (2000). These two studies demonstrate the multidimensional aspect of attitudes to dogs.

In the Selby and Rhoades (1981) US study, adult attitudes towards cats and dogs as pets were investigated. For the dog section of the study, pet owners (n=585) and non pet owners (n=325) were given a likert type self report questionnaire containing 44 items assessing attitudes to dogs. Participant responses were subjected to a principal components analysis in which 39 of the attitudinal items loaded onto six independent factors, accounting for 60% of the variance. The factors, from one to six respectively,

were: feeling of importance/vanity; inconvenience of dog ownership; emotional needs; companionship/entertainment; negative characteristics of the dog; and protection/security (Selby & Rhoades, 1981, p. 131-132).

Selby and Rhoades (1981) reported that age and gender of the participant, as well as whether they liked or disliked dogs influenced their attitudes towards dogs as pets. For example, younger people (i.e., less than 30 years) more than older people agreed that their dog made them feel important, as well as protected; females more than males felt protected by their dog; those who disliked dogs were more likely to view dog ownership as inconvenient; females more than males agreed that dogs contributed to their emotional needs and companionship/entertainment was valued more by those who liked dogs than those who did not.

The cross cultural study conducted by Miura et al. (2000) found more similarities than differences between the attitudes towards dogs of 229 Japanese and 212 British university students. A separate PCA was conducted on the responses of each group. Seven factors were identified from the Japanese students' responses and five factors from the British students' responses (see Table 1).

Overall, Japanese students held positive attitudes towards training, accepting dogs as equals and were tolerant of aggression in dogs. They held negative attitudes towards stray dogs and euthanasia, and were not interested in the usefulness of dogs. Overall, British students were not concerned about hygiene issues regarding dogs, they held positive attitudes towards training of dogs and the equal status of dogs, but negative attitudes towards freedom of access (i.e., they disliked restrictions on dogs) and stray dogs. The major difference found was in relation to euthanasia, with Japanese students holding more negative attitudes toward euthanasia than the British students who held more positive attitudes. A finding that Miura et al. (2000) suggested may be due to Japanese cultural attitudes with regards to killing, which is seen as cruel.

As well as positive and negative views and attitudes towards dogs being expressed by participants in research studies, they are also reflected in common discourse. For example, in Australia the word 'dog' refers to an animal that is described as loyal and dependable, 'man's best friend' yet 'dog' is also used in a derogatory form to denote an ugly person or object, and/or a worthless person or object.

Table 1

Major Factors Obtained From 46 Attitudinal Items on Dogs by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) from the Responses of Japanese and British Students

Japanese students	Examples of items occurring in both samples	British students
1. Unconcern/concern for hygiene & Freedom of access (α=0.91) 10 items	I wouldn't want to keep a dog indoors because they are unhygienic; I wish restaurants would allow dogs to enter with their owners	1. Unconcern/concern for hygiene (α=0.88) 9 items 2. Freedom of access (α=0.73) 4 items
2. Acceptance of dogs as equals (α=0.79) 6 items	I think that dogs have personalities like humans; I think that keeping a dog is a waste of time and money	3. Acceptance of dogs as equals (α=0.83) 10 items
3. Willingness to train (α=0.77) 4 items	I think that training dogs is cruel; I think that training dogs is a reflection of human arrogance	4. Willingness to train (α=0.72) 5 items
4. Intolerance/ tolerance of aggression (α=0.74) 2 items 5. Acceptance/ unacceptance of euthanasia (α=0.69) 5 items	I think that owners should keep their dogs (rather than get rid of them) even if the dog has attacked people; I think that euthanizing a dog is cruel; I think that it is justifiable to euthanize aggressive dogs	5. Acceptance/unacceptance of euthanasia & intolerance/tolerance of aggression (α=0.70) 5 items
6. Dislike of stray dogs (α=0.61) 4 items	I think that stray dogs are a problem in this country; I think that stray dogs tend to bite	
7. Usefulness (α=0.60) 6 items	I think that having a dog increase security; I think that a dog is 'man's best friend'	

Note. Adapted from "Attitudes Towards Dogs: A Study of University Students in Japan and the UK," by A. Miura, J. W. S. Bradshaw and H. Tanida, 2000, *Anthrozoös, 13*(2), pp. 83-84. Copyright 2000 by Berg Publishers.

A recent comment by the premier of Western Australia, in relation to a mining tax proposed by the federal government, demonstrates the use of 'dog' as a derogatory term and also illustrates the social acceptance of dog relinquishment.

> Western Australia will not agree to handing over GST revenues to the commonwealth. Mr Barnett said. My advice to Julia Gillard is: have a nice Christmas, a happy new year, sit down quietly and think about it and realise that this tax proposal is a dog. Just get rid of it (Franklin, 2010).

Section Summary

In summary, two major opposing views influence HAI. One view holds that animals are machine-like and incapable of reason, language and feelings while the other view holds that animals are sentient beings, capable of reason, language (i.e., animal language) and feelings. How animals are viewed influences people's attitudes and behaviours towards them. Human attitudes towards animals vary according to animal characteristics, individual characteristics and cultural factors (Serpell, 2004). They are multidimensional, can be positive or negative, and range from humanistic (i.e., animals, particularly individual animals are valued for their intrinsic worth) to utilitarian (animals are valued for their extrinsic worth). Human views of and attitudes towards animals can serve as protective or risk factors, in relation to mental health and wellbeing. In Australia, the views and attitudes towards dogs are also reflected in everyday language. Having discussed human views of and attitudes towards animals (with a focus on dogs), the next section describes and discusses human-pet interaction.

Human-Pet Interaction

The practice of pet-keeping has a long history, with evidence found from ancient Greece and Rome (Bodson, 2000). Today animals including dogs, cats, birds, fish, rabbits and small rodents are kept as pets, in many countries around the world (Batson, 2008), with the most popular and preferred pet being a dog (Daly & Morton, 2003; Kellert & Berry, 1980; Salmon & Salmon, 1983). Australia has one of the highest pet ownership rates in the western world with an estimated 68% of households keeping a pet (Franklin, 2007). In comparison estimated figures for the US and the UK are 62% (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association [APPMA], 2010) and 43% respectively.[21] Studies have found that there is little difference between the numbers of males and females that report keeping a pet (Marx, Stallones, Garrity, & Johnson, 1998; Melson, 1988; Parslow, Jorm, Christensen, Rodgers, & Jacomb, 2005; Poresky & Daniels, 1998). From dogs to mice (including a myriad of other animals in between), it is clear that many humans like keeping some animals as pets.

[21] For global figures on pet ownership see Batson (2008).

Why Do People Keep Pets?

According to Lorenz (1952/2002, p. 57) "the wish to keep an animal usually arises from a general longing for a bond with nature." This notion is echoed in biologist Edward Wilson's proposition of the concept of biophilia. Biophilia is "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms" (Wilson, 1993, p. 31). With growing support across disciplines, the biophilia hypothesis proposes that human beings are genetically predisposed such that they have a need and desire to associate with the natural world (Kahn, 1997). Kellert points out that:

> as highly social animals we crave intimacy and affiliation. With rare exceptions, we hunger for connection and kinship. The companionship of other creatures and even landscapes offers an invaluable source of friendship, relationship, and a means for expressing and sometimes receiving affection (Kellert, 1997, p. 107).

Although not all pet owners report companionship as the reason for having a pet, it is the most common reason cited (Batson, 2008; Franklin, 2007; McHarg, Baldock, Headey, & Robinson, 1995). Adults report that their pets provide them with companionship, friendship, love, affection, comfort, protection, enjoyment, and exercise (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Cain, 1985; Franklin, 2007; Harris, 1983; Kobelt, Hemsworth, Barnett, & Coleman, 2003; Mackay, 1992; Cohen, 2002; Quigley, Vogel, & Anderson, 1983; Salmon & Salmon, 1983; Savishinsky, 1985; Staats, Sears, & Pierfelice, 2006; Staats, Wallace & Anderson, 2007; Zasloff, 1995). Pets (mainly dogs), enhance social contacts and interaction (Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara, & Bosch, 2007); they can be friends, mates and substitute children (Turner, 2001; Veevers, 1985) and they are used to teach children responsibility (Cain, 1985; Fifield & Forsyth, 1999). For some adults, especially those living alone and/or elderly, pets can provide social support, a focus for nurturance, and a purpose (Ebenstein, & Wortham, 2001; Enders-Slegers, 2000; Levinson, 1972; Rew, 2000).

Similar to adults, children perceive their pets to be a confidante, a playmate, a friend, a member of the family; a source of support, a protector, a responsibility, a stressor, a stress reducer, and a source of pride (Covert, Whiren, Keith, & Nelson, 1985; Dise-Lewis, 1988; Kidd & Kidd, 1995; McNicholas & Collis, 2001; Morrow, 1998; Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley, & Anderson, 1983). As with adults, pets also play an important role in many children's lives. For example, when children are asked to draw their family (even in studies that make no mention of pets), children with pets invariably include them in the picture (see Cherney, Seiwert, Dickey, & Flichtbeil, 2006; Cooper, Garcia Coll, Thorne, & Orellana, 2005, Figure 9.4, p. 201; Morrow, 1998).

Benefits of Pets to Human Wellbeing

Adult pet owners believe that pets contribute to good health (Knight & Edwards, 2008; Staats et al., 2006; Staats et al., 2007; Wells & Rodi, 2000). Although pet owners believe that pets contribute to good health, research provides mixed results (Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knuiman, & Burke, 2007). Some studies report benefits such as stress reduction (Siegel, 1990); cardiovascular risk reduction, longer survival rates after coronary artery disease (Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch & Thomas, 1980; Friedmann & Thomas, 1995); increased exercise activity (Cutt et al., 2007); increased social interaction (Wood et al., 2005); fewer doctor visits than non-pet owners (Headey, 1999; Headey & Grabka, 2007), and decreased loneliness (Enders-Slegers, 2000; Rew, 2000). While others report no benefits to wellbeing of pet ownership (e.g., Cummins et al., 2004; Gilbey, McNicholas & Collis, 2007; Ory & Goldberg, 1983; Parslow & Jorm, 2003; Parslow, et al., 2005; Wells & Rodi, 2000). Some of the inconsistencies may be attributed to methodological issues as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Aside from the aforementioned inconsistencies, on the whole it is thought that interaction with pets can benefit humans physiologically, psychologically and socially across the lifespan (see Friedmann & Son, 2009 for review of health benefits literature).

Having a pet may have an even greater impact on children than on adults, as some suggest they are important in personality development. For example, Levinson (1978) proposed that pets can enhance children's self concept, self esteem, empathy, affection for others, competency, and impulse control. Pets can provide contact comfort, felt security and life lessons (e.g., birth, death; Levinson, 1972). Some empirical support for Levinson's suggestions has been found, for example, pets have been linked to the development of nurturance amongst boys (Melson & Fogel, 1996) and are believed to promote empathy in children (Poresky & Hendrix, 1990; Vizek-Vidović, Arambašić, Keresteš, Kuterovac-Jagodić, & Vlahović-Štetić, 2001). Although a later study by Daly and Morton (2003) of pet owning and non pet owning children found no significant differences between empathy scores between the groups.

Pets may also ameliorate the effects of parental conflict (Strand 2004), negative life events such as divorce (Bierer, 2000; Mueller, 2003) and homelessness (Rew, 2000). For example, a study of homeless American youths (ages 15 to 23 years) found that more than a third of the participants said that having a dog helped them to cope with living on the streets, as the dog provided protection, a focus for decision-making, warmth, love and helped to stave off loneliness (Rew, 2000).

Another study demonstrated the importance that children attach to their dog. McNicholas and Collis (2001) found that children included their dog as part of their social network. They asked 7-8 year olds to make a list of all the people and animals that were important to them. From this list the children were then required to select the ten most important. The children were then presented with eight hypothetical scenarios in which they would need to elicit aid from their support network. The children were required to select five people/animals from their list, in rank order, beginning with the person who would be their first choice to help them if they found themselves in the situation portrayed. A dog was ranked amongst the five selected for the scenarios of comfort when ill, comfort when scared, and confiding a secret. This finding provides further support for an attachment like relationship (discussed later in this chapter), as the scenarios selected in relation to dogs are akin to attachment theory's criteria of proximity seeking, contact comfort as well as safety and security. The researchers found that the children did not select animals when the scenario was beyond the capabilities of the animal (e.g., resolving a bullying problem), suggesting that children of this age have realistic expectations of their pet's role in their lives.

Several researchers have suggested that the child pet relationship is at its most beneficial during the preadolescence years (Davis & Juhasz, 1985; Levinson, 1978). In preadolescence children begin to navigate many contexts outside of the family and home (Bartko, 2005) and it is thought that pets may act as transitional objects (Robin & ten Bensel, 1985). Van Houtte and Jarvis (1995) sought to provide empirical support for the notion that the child pet relationship is at its most beneficial during preadolescence. In their study, 130 preadolescent American schoolchildren (aged 8 to 13 years) from across grades three to six were interviewed and completed questionnaires. The children were divided into non pet owning and pet owning, according to their reported status, and were matched on variables such as parental marital status, socioeconomic status and sibling numbers. It was found that pet ownership in preadolescence was linked with higher levels of autonomy, and higher levels of self esteem. A positive influence on self concept was also found for sixth grade pet owners (Van Houtte & Jarvis, 1995). Further, an empirical study conducted by Bierer (2000), compared dog owning and non dog owning American preadolescents and found that dog owning preadolescents had higher self esteem and showed more empathy than non dog owning preadolescents.

Section Summary

In summary, humans have a long history of keeping various animals as pets. Today pets are kept by large numbers of people around the world, with dogs being the most popular. A variety of reasons are given as to why people keep pets, ranging from a connection with nature to social support. It has been argued that human-pet interaction can have many physiological, psychological and social benefits for adults and children across the lifespan. It has also been suggested that preadolescent children have the most to gain developmentally from having a pet. Having discussed human-pet interaction the next section focuses on the relationship that many pet owners develop with their pet.

Human-Pet Relationship

Precisely why pets have a positive influence on human wellbeing is not fully understood (although one possibility is the biophilia hypothesis mentioned earlier or the placebo effect of the self belief that a pet is beneficial to human health). Originally it was thought that the mere presence of a pet in the home was beneficial, indeed some studies have found that the presence of an animal (whether it belongs to the person or not) can reduce stress in a stressful situation (Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, & Kelsey, 1991). However, Poresky and Hendrix (1990) argued that it was the nature of the relationship with the animal that bestowed the most benefits; a view that has gained some support from others (e.g., Bonas, McNicholas & Collis, 2000). This view may account for the findings reported by Headey, Grabka, Kelly, Reddy and Tseng (2002) that acquiring a pet did not confer immediate health benefits (i.e., health benefits accrued over time), but losing a pet had an immediate health cost. Suggesting that the relationship, which takes time to develop and can result in a grief response on loss, is an important factor in explaining the positive and negative (discussed later in this chapter) influence of pets on human health.

Emotional Connection

Many people report an emotional closeness to their pet (Cohen, 2000; Knight & Edwards, 2008). For example, 66% of 2,418 American adult respondents agreed with the statement “I have owned pets that were as dear to me as another person” (Kellert & Berry, 1980, p. 49). This response is not surprising given that Salmon and Salmon, (1983, p. 254) suggest that the human–pet relationship is based on the same factors as human relationships, that is, ‘trust, love and emotional support’. Some or all of these factors are reported by pet owners across numerous studies (e.g., Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Cohen, 2002; Franklin, 2007; Harris, 1983; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Kobelt et

al., 2003; Mackay, 1992; Quigley et al., 1983; Rew, 2000; Salmon & Salmon, 1983; Savishinsky, 1985; Staats et al., 2006; Zasloff, 1995). Further evidence for an emotional closeness between human and pet is provided by research that shows in abusive relationships or families, the abuser is able to manipulate others through threats of, or actual physical harm to the pet (Raupp, 1999; Raupp, Barlow, & Oliver, 1997); something they would not be able to achieve if an emotional connection did not exit.

It has been suggested that people become emotionally close to pets to compensate for lack of human attachment figures, either through physical or emotional absence of the figure (Bodsworth & Coleman, 2001; Melson et al., 1997; Robin et al., 1983; Rynearson, 1978). However, this may be a factor of the samples studied, rather than a finding that can be generalised to the population, as Bonas et al. (2000) found that levels of attachment to family members and pets were positively correlated, that is, those with high levels of attachment to pets also had high levels of attachment in their human relationships. In addition, other studies have also failed to find support for the compensation hypothesis (e.g., Cohen, 2002; Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009), suggesting that deficits in human relationships are not prerequisites for people forming close emotional relationships with pets.

Although large percentages of pet owners studied (up to 99% in one study) described their pet as 'part of the family' or a 'member of the family', likening them to children or siblings (Anderson, 1985; Cain, 1985; Franklin, 2007; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Patronek et al., 1996; Raupp, 1999; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2007; Salmon & Salmon, 1983; Sanders, 1993), do these commonly used terms mean what they imply? That is, do pet owners really consider their pet to be a part of the family? A study by Cohen (2002), suggests that they do. Two hundred and one randomly selected clients of a large US veterinary practice completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire measured pet owners' relationships with people and pets, their social fears and loneliness. A further subgroup (n = 16) of the original sample was selected to take part in an interview at their home, which included questions from a social network scale and some forced choice ethical/moral dilemma questions. Cohen found that participants, who ascribed family member status to their pet, really did consider them members of their family, stating that:

> This is not to say that even the most bonded person believes his or her pet is human. Pets seem to occupy an overlapping but different space from humans in the family. Even people who think of their pets as children know this is not literally true. In part they are identifying their pets as family members by the way in which pets function within the household (Cohen, 2002, p. 633).

The different space that Cohen refers to may partially explain how animal 'members of the family' are treated differently, for example, people generally[22] do not relinquish their children when moving or if the child has problem behaviours.

Attachment Theory and the Human-Pet Relationship

The emotional closeness that many people experience with their pet is often described in the HAI literature in terms of an attachment. Using the term attachment to describe the human-animal relationship has resulted in some criticism, because attachment as described in HAI literature is not necessarily the same as that defined in the psychological literature (Crawford, Worsham, & Swinehart, 2006). In the psychological literature 'attachment' relates to attachment theory (AT) which is:

> a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression, and emotional detachment, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise (Bowlby, 1979, p. 127).

AT proposes that infants are predisposed to form an attachment with a person that is available and responsive to them (Bowlby, 1981). The child feels safe and secure with this person and looks to this person for comfort and support when distressed or ill; separation from or loss of this person results in distress and grief (Bowlby, 1981a). This initial attachment relationship serves as a prototype for future relationships throughout the lifespan. In addition it also influences the developing self concept as the child develops an 'internal working model' of self and attachment figure (see Bretherton, 1985 for explanation of working models), to the extent that a child that feels secure in their relationship with their attachment figure is more likely to develop a positive self concept (Bowlby, 1981).

Interestingly Bowlby himself, in a footnote providing literature examples of disordered mourning, refers to attachment between a person and a pet, "the patient when aged three years had become deeply attached to a puppy..." (Bowlby, 1981a, p. 174). Forming attachments is not unique to humans and has been evidenced in other species such as apes and monkeys (Bowlby, 1981). Evidence for attachment between species has also been found, for example between monkeys and dogs (Mason, 1983).

Some researchers, (e.g., Kogan & Viney, 1998; Melson, 2002; Sable, 1995) have proposed using or have used AT (e.g., Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011) as a conceptual framework to study human-pet relationships. Others however disagree,

[22] Some parents do abandon their children or throw them out of home (e.g., teenagers with problem behaviours sometimes get thrown out of home).

citing difficulties with the comparability of the human-pet relationship and the human-human relationship (Budge, Spicer, Jones, & St. George, 1998; Crawford et al., 2006). For example, one of the problems in comparing such relationships is incongruence between instruments that have been developed to measure attachment in humans and those developed to measure attachments to pets (Crawford et al., 2006). Attachment instruments developed to measure human to human attachment, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (cited in Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1993) and Ainsworth's Strange Situation Test (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969) measure attachment based on the AT criteria; whereas instruments used to measure human to pet attachment only tap some aspects of AT.

Another problem with using AT to describe human-pet relationships is the focus on comparing the human-pet relationship with that of the infant-parent relationship. For example, Bonas et al. (2000) argue that while there are similarities in the human-human and human-pet relationship, the lack of a shared language means that the relationships are not comparable, as one cannot access the animal's perspective. However, one cannot access an infant's perspective either. Further, focusing on the primary attachment figure aspect of AT may be misguided. While the infant develops an attachment relationship with a principal or primary attachment figure, which lays the foundation for all other relationships, the child can also develop attachments to other subsidiary figures, such as grandparents or siblings (Bowlby, 1981; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007) and even those outside of the family that provide care (Howes, Rodning, Galuzzo, & Myers, 1988; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007).

Rather than an attachment between human and pet others have argued that humans develop an affectional bond to pets. An affectional bond is "a relatively long-enduring tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual and is interchangeable with none other," (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711). While an attachment is an affectional bond, not all affectional bonds are attachments (Ainsworth, 1989). For example, a mother's bond with her child, although considered an affectional bond, is not an attachment. Although the mothers bond to the child shares most of the characteristics of an attachment (e.g., wanting to be close to the child, distress on separation, joy on reunion and grief on loss), the bond lacks the secure base criterion. That is, the relationship with the child does not provide the mother with "the experience of security and comfort obtained from the relationship with the partner, and yet the ability to move off from the secure base provided by the partner, with confidence to engage in other activities" (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 712).

Bierer (2000) argues that the relationship between child and dog mirrors that of the affectional bond between parent and child, with the pet as child benefiting most from the relationship. The child-canine relationship however, contains elements of both the child parent relationship and the parent child relationship, lying somewhere between the affectional bonds of a parent and the attachment of child. The relationship is reciprocal and bidirectional, in that the child assumes a parental and child role in the relationship with the dog and vice versa. For instance, in the parent role the child nurtures the dog by feeding and caring for it, in the child role the child seeks the dog when ill or distressed, confides in the dog and looks to the dog for protection. Likewise in the child role the dog receives nurturance from the child and in the parent role the dog provides comfort and security for the child.

Similarly adult-canine relationships can also be reciprocal and bi-directional, with the adult playing a caretaking role similar to the parent-child relationship and the dog playing a parental type role in terms of security and reassurance. The parental type role of the dog has also been suggested by Archer (1997). Further support for the reciprocity of the relationship comes from dog owners who reported that their dogs were as much help to them as they were to their dogs (Cohen, 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests that such is the strength of the relationship between people and dogs that some dog owners go to great lengths to protect their dog, with some even risking their own lives to save their dog[23] (Hanrahan, 2007); while others are so distraught on the death of their dog that they take their own life ("Devoted dog owner", 2011). These responses to the potential or actual loss of the dog (and those listed later in this chapter pertaining to the grief experience) provide further support for the notion that people can develop attachment relationships to dogs.

Emotional Closeness Beyond Pet Ownership

For a variety of reasons, including views and attitudes towards animals, and characteristics of a particular pet, not all people develop an emotional closeness to their pet. Conversely, some people develop an emotional bond with other people's pets or animals. For example, some children who do not have access to a pet of their own form a friendship with a friend's pet or invent an imaginary one (Levinson, 1972; Meuller, 2003). Further, people who interact with animals on a regular basis, such as animal

[23] In 2008 a woman in Perth Western, Australia drowned while trying to rescue her dog from the ocean (Kelly, 2008) and more recently several incidents have been reported in the UK of people risking their lives (with one woman losing hers), entering frozen lakes in order to save their dog (" Grandmother found frozen", 2010; Macrae & Taylor, 2012; "Terrifying moment", 2011)

shelter workers, zoo keepers and animal laboratory technicians can also develop emotional bonds with the animals in their care (Herzog, 2010; Szita, 1988).

It is unclear if the emotional bond that some animal welfare workers develop with animals in their care is the same as that developed between pet owner and pet, as some aspects of the relationship differ. While the animal welfare worker is in a caretaking role similar to that of a parent to a child, the relationship lacks the bidirectional nature, in that the animal in the shelter or laboratory environment cannot provide security and they cannot provide the same sort of companionship as the pet in the home. This may be an area for future study.

Canine-Human Attachment

While it has been suggested that humans can form attachments to dogs, some researchers have suggested that dogs can become attached to humans. Several researchers have investigated the possibility of canine to human attachment (e.g., Palmer & Custance, 2008; Prato-Previde, Custance, Spiezio, & Sabatini, 2003; Topál, Miklósi, Csányi, & Dóka, 1998; Topál et al., 2005) using Ainsworth's Strange Situation test (SST- Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969). This laboratory based observational test was devised by Mary Ainsworth to describe attachment relationships between infants and primary attachment figure (commonly the mother). A child is placed in a room with its primary attachment figure (PAF), a stranger and some toys. Various scenarios then take place in which the PAF stays in the room with the child, leaves the child in the room with the stranger, or leaves the child alone in the room. Throughout the different scenarios the child's behaviour is observed (Bretherton, 1992). Children that are securely[24] attached to their PAF explore and play while the PAF is present but become distressed when he or she leaves the room, exhibiting behaviours aimed at getting him or her to return, such as crying and calling. Even though the stranger may comfort the child, the child is not fully at ease until the PAF returns, comforts the child and then, the child resumes play.

Researchers (e.g., Prato-Previde et al., 2003; Topál et al., 1998; Topál et al., 2005) have sought evidence for an attachment relationship between dogs and their owners by replicating the SST as near as possible to its original set up, with the dog in the role of the child. For example, Topál et al. (1998) found that dogs played more and explored more when their owners were in the room; they played more with the stranger when the owner was in the room; when only the stranger was in the room dogs tended

[24] Ainsworth has described different categories of attachment based on observations using the SST, including resistant (i.e., child resists the mothers efforts to comfort on return) and avoidant (the child avoids contact with the mother on her return) (Bretherton, 1985).

to wait at the door; and they greeted their owner enthusiastically on return. While Topál et al. (1998) suggested that these findings were indicative of the secure base criteria Prato-Previde et al. (2003) disagreed suggesting that there were insufficient observational data of attachment behaviour pertaining to 'security, proximity and comfort seeking' (p. 228). They suggested that the findings were more indicative of an affectional bond rather than an attachment.

In their own study investigating attachment in dogs Prato-Previde et al. (2003), found a similar pattern of behaviour as Topál et al. (1998), and even though they observed attachment behaviours related to 'security, proximity and comfort seeking' they reported that evidence for the secure base was not conclusive due to the order effects of the SST. That is, the order in which the different scenarios took place may have had an effect on the outcome. A more recent study (Palmer & Custance, 2007) counterbalanced the order of the SST procedure and still found that dogs played and explored more when the owners were present than when the dogs were left with the stranger or alone, providing evidence for the secure base characteristic of attachment. These findings provide tentative support for the notion that dogs can form attachment relationships to humans.

Further support for a dog-human attachment can be seen in anecdotal evidence of animals keeping vigil in the absence of owners or travelling great distances in search of their owners (Mackay, 1992). An example of the strength of a dog's attachment to its owner is illustrated in the documented account of Greyfriars Bobby. Bobby was a dog who lived in 19th century Scotland. After his owner's death he kept a graveside vigil for 14 years until his own death (Macgregor, 2002). As interspecies attachment can occur it is not implausible for a human to develop an attachment to an animal or vice versa.

Section Summary

In summary, it has been proposed that the main influence in the beneficial effects of human-pet interaction is the relationship that people develop with their pets. Some suggest that this emotional closeness is a result of deficient human relationships, others, however, disagree citing research that suggests otherwise. The emotional closeness reported by pet owners has been likened by some to an attachment relationship. This has resulted in contention amongst researchers, with some suggesting the use of AT as a conceptual framework to investigate the relationship; while others cite incompatibilities between human and animal that discount using AT.

It has been argued that people and dogs form attachment relationships with each other that are mutually beneficial. It has further been proposed that this relationship is unique, as it spans both the child-parent attachment and parent-child bond. It is a relationship that, anecdotal evidence suggests, people and dogs go to great lengths to try and preserve. Having discussed the human-pet relationship, the next section considers the cost of the relationship to human wellbeing.

Costs of the Human-Pet Relationship

Beyond the academic debate about AT and its relevance to human-animal relationships, many people with pets continue to report an emotional connection with them. While the relationship between human and pet can provide many benefits for humans it also has costs (Barker & Barker, 1988; Bryant, 1990; Dwyer et al., 2006; Mackay, 1992; Podberscek, 2006). These can be financial, psychological and psychosocial. For example, financial costs include the maintenance of the pet including food, veterinary bills, and pet accessories (Mackay, 1992; Podberscek, 2006). Psychological costs may arise in situations where costs of veterinary treatment exceed the pet owner's financial capacity. Further, psychological costs may arise from a negative impact on family dynamics, as other family members may feel neglected or rejected because of time and attention given to the pet (Barker & Barker, 1988; Cain, 1983; Carmack, 1985), or the pet being more attentive to one person than another (Dwyer et al., 2006). Psychosocial costs may arise from damaged relationships between neighbours in situations where a pet's behaviour becomes problematic (e.g., excessive barking, aggressive behaviour). Aside from the aforementioned costs, one of the most debilitating costs associated with the human-pet relationship, identified by both adults and children, is loss of the pet through death (Adams, Bonnet, & Meek, 2000; Brown, Richards, & Wilson, 1996; Bryant, 1990; Fudin & Chen, 1988; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2006).

Death of a Pet

Just as people experience grief over the death of a valued human member of their family, adults and children with an emotional connection to their pet also grieve their death (Adams et al., 2000; Archer & Winchester, 1994; Brown, 2006; Brown et al., 1996; Carmack, 1985; Covert et al., 1985; Cowles, 1985; Field et al., 2009; Fudin & Cohen, 1988; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Harris, 1983; Jarolmen, 1998; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Keddie, 1977; Planchon , Templer, Stokes, & Keller, 2002; Podrazik, Shackford, Becker, & Heckert, 2000; Quackenbush & Glickman, 1983; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Stewart, 1983; Toray, 2004; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). The poet, Lord Byron,

for example, went so far as to have a monument erected (with inscribed poem 'epitaph to a dog'), in memory of his dog, Boatswain, following its death from rabies (Classic Poetry Series, 2012; Kosloff, 1996).

Some people express surprise at the emotional intensity of their reaction to the death of their pet (Baydak, 2000); some are so distressed that they vow never to get another pet (Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Savishinsky, 1985); and some contemplate and or commit suicide (Mail Online, 2011). As well as impacting on individual functioning, the death of a pet can also impact on family functioning, particularly when there are differences in the grief response (Carmack, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991). For example, contention may arise between couples when one partner is insensitive to the other partner's grief.

The grief experienced by those who have lost a loved pet has been described as similar to that experienced on the death of a loved human (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Carmack, 1985; Field et al., 2009; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Podrazik et al., 2000; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Indeed, pet death has been recognized as a significant life event by some through its inclusion in some life events scales for example, it is item 92 of 102 on the Peri Life Events Scale (Dohrenwend, Krasnoff, Askenasy, & Dohrenwend, 1978) and item 5 of 125 on the Life events and Coping Inventory (a child generated list of items; Dise-Lewis, 1988). The higher ranking by children is noteworthy, it may be that children are less aware of the social status of animals and therefore may not be as embarrassed about grieving the death of their pet.

Although there are similarities between the grief experience following human death and pet death there are also differences (Adams et al., 2000; Archer & Winchester, 1994; Podrazik et al., 2000). For example, following pet death there may be less affective distress (Archer & Winchester, 1994) and pet owners who have their pet killed may feel responsible and or experience guilt over the death (Adams et al., 2000; Podrazik et al., 2000). Research suggests that the more attached a person was to their pet, the more intense their grief (Adams et al., 2000; Archer & Winchester, 1994; Brown et al., 1996; Carmack, 1985; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Further, Field et al. (2009) have suggested that the severity of the grief response is related to the human attachment style of the bereaved, with those having an anxious attachment style (i.e., overly concerned about being abandoned or rejected) being more greatly impacted by the loss.

While adults and children experience grief over the death of their pet, they respond in different ways. For example, Jarolmen (1998) compared the grief responses

and attachment levels of children aged six to ten (n = 106), adolescents aged thirteen to seventeen (n = 57) and adults aged twenty years and over (n = 270) following the death of a pet. A significant difference was found between mean grief score of children and adults, with children recording higher scores than adults. There are several possible explanations for this finding including that the adults may have had more experience with loss and grief than the children and were therefore better able to cope; it may be that the children were more emotionally affected by the death of the pet; and or the adults may have been reluctant to admit to grieving over the death of a pet.

For all age groups level of grief was not mitigated by the presence of another animal in the home; grief was highest in the first four months after the loss; a higher level of grief was experienced when the pet died suddenly as opposed to an anticipated death; and immediately replacing the lost pet did not lessen the grief experienced. Attachment levels were found to be the lowest in the first four months after the loss but increased at 5 to 8 months and 9 to 12 months. Jarolmen suggested that the reason that reported attachment was at its lowest in the first four months after death is consistent with the numbing/disbelief phase of Bowlby's (1981a) four phase model of grief. This would suggest that the bereaved were experiencing a numbing effect and were unwilling to comprehend the permanency of the loss. However, denying the death of the pet should not affect the feelings towards the pet. The lower reported level of attachment may be a psychological defence mechanism employed in order to lessen the effects of the grieving process. Alternatively, it may be a reflection of the validity of the attachment instrument as attachment instruments used in HAI research are not congruent with those used to measure attachment in human relationships.

While grief is a normal response to loss and varies in its intensity and duration for different individuals (Archer, 1998; Bowlby, 1981a; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987; Worden, 2003), problems may arise when people are either unable to or are prevented from expressing their grief (Bowlby, 1981a; Doka, 1989; Worden, 2003). Grief surrounding the death of a pet is generally not acknowledged by society and leads to many people 'suffering in silence' (Doka, 1989; Stephens & Hill, 1996; Stewart, 1983; Stewart, Thrush, & Paulus, 1989). Such is the societal stigma over grieving the death of a pet, that half of the 177 people surveyed by Adams et al. (2000) about pet death "felt like there was something wrong with them, because they experienced grief after their pet died" (p. 1305). Those grieving over the loss of their pet then may not reveal their feelings or emotions surrounding the death of their pet for fear of ridicule from others (Adams et al., 2000; Cowles, 1985); this can be apparent even within families (Baydak,

2000; Carmack, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991). Doka (1989) has termed this type of grief 'disenfranchised'.

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief is defined as "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Doka, 1989, p. 4). Rituals and support that are available to assist in the mourning process (e.g., funeral rites, bereavement leave and the opportunity to talk about their loss) are generally denied to those whose losses are considered disenfranchised; potentially resulting in an intensification of the emotions surrounding grief (Kollar, 1989). The pet owner is caught between their own feelings about the loss of their pet and societal norms, which dictate that a pet is not worthy of grief. Disenfranchised grief may be another factor contributing to the difference in the grief experience between human death and pet death mentioned earlier. Young children may be doubly disadvantaged when it comes to disenfranchised grief because as a group they are disenfranchised grievers (i.e., they are generally not thought to experience grief; Ellis, 1989) and many of their losses (e.g., friends and pets) go unrecognized (Lenhardt, 1997).

As well as societal disenfranchisement of grief, some pet owners can also be prone to self-disenfranchisement (Kauffman, 1989). Self-disenfranchisement occurs when pet owners experience embarrassment or shame about their grief reaction, which may result in them denying themselves the grieving process (Kauffmann, 1989). While some researchers have begun to call on practitioners to recognize and acknowledge the importance of pets and the impact of their death on clients (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Morley & Fook, 2005; Sharkin & Bahrick, 1990; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Toray, 2004) another loss that occurs more frequently than the death of a pet, has received little attention, namely, relinquishment (see Chapter 1 for description and discussion).

Relinquishment

Although loss through death and loss through relinquishment share some similarities, dog relinquishment differs on three key factors that may increase the risk of an adverse impact on human wellbeing. The first factor is social negativity surrounding dog relinquishment (see Chapter 1). As relinquishers and relinquishment are stigmatised, those experiencing relinquishment may not feel able to seek support if they are in need. It is essential that those experiencing loss have available support, especially if the loss is of someone who was relied on to provide comfort and support in times of distress (Bowlby, 1981a), as some dogs are (McNicholas & Collis, 2001; Selby

& Rhoades, 1981). Further, any support that children might get from their parents at this time may not be available to them due to parents possibly experiencing their own difficulties over the relinquishment. This may result in unresolved grief for children (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006), and adults, with the potential to lead to psychological problems such as depression.

The second factor is perceived culpability. Natural death of a dog generally does not involve culpability, whereas relinquishment may leave some feeling responsible, therefore adding to their distress. It may also result in others within the family or social network assigning culpability, which may lead to damaged relationships. Finally, the third factor is the nature of the loss. Apart from dogs that are killed, other relinquished dogs although physically lost to the person are not dead but living somewhere else. This may result in anxiety and worry for some, that the dog is not being cared for properly, or that the dog is not happy in its new home.

Section Summary

In summary, human costs associated with pet keeping have been identified, including financial, physiological, psychological and social. One of the most detrimental for those with an emotional connection to their pet is its loss. Many have described the death of their pet as comparable to death of a loved human. The grief experienced by pet owners is generally disenfranchised by others and sometimes self, resulting in the potential for adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing. While death of a pet is gaining recognition as a legitimate loss, no consideration has been given to the loss of pet through relinquishment. Although in both scenarios a pet is lost, several complicating factors associated with relinquishment make it potentially more harmful to human health and wellbeing. The next section presents the rationale for the current study.

Rationale

It is clear from the literature review presented thus far, that adults and children share a unique relationship with their dog. It is a relationship that if lost, can result in a grief response comparable to the death of a human loved one. Yet there is little or no social support for those grieving pet loss, as the relationship and the loss are given little legitimacy. While there is some acknowledgement among researchers of the potential for negative impacts to human wellbeing resulting from the death of a loved pet, relinquishment, another form of pet loss and one which occurs more often, impacting more people, has gone virtually unrecognised and unexplored.

As explained in Chapter 1, many people either choose or are forced to permanently separate from their dog. However, due to negative social perceptions of relinquishers and relinquishment, it is an issue that remains relatively hidden. As such, little is known about the psychosocial impact of this separation or even if it is considered a loss. With limited research available, apart from a few studies (many of which were conducted more than twenty years ago) that suggest that it is a psychologically distressing experience, gaps remain in our knowledge, leaving many unanswered questions, such as: what is the impact of relinquishment on children? Do individuals consider relinquishment a loss? Is grief a factor of the relinquishment experience? How do people deal with relinquishment?

Although little is known about the human impact of dog relinquishment it is plausible that those who have an affinity for dogs and those with a close emotional bond with their dog will be impacted in some way. Given the nature and high prevalence of dog relinquishment (described in Chapter 1) and the nature of the human-canine relationship (see this chapter), it is likely that large numbers of adults and children are exposed to a practice that has the potential to adversely affect their mental health and wellbeing. An exploratory study was therefore warranted to investigate the impact of dog relinquishment on adults and children.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the HAI literature in order to provide an understanding of factors that are influential in the context of dog relinquishment. It has been established that positive and negative views as well as attitudes toward animals, co-occur in the population and influence the way in which people behave towards and interact with animals. HAI, in particular the keeping of pets, has been shown to be both beneficial and costly to human wellbeing, with the most benefits and conversely costs thought to derive from the relationship between human and pet.

It has been shown that adults and children attach importance to their relationship with their dog, so much so that many dogs are assigned family membership status. The emotional closeness or connection that some people have with their dog has been likened to an attachment. Although there is contention in the literature over the use of the term attachment to describe the human-pet relationship, it has been proposed that the human-canine relationship should be considered an attachment as it shares elements of infant-parent attachment and the parent-child affectional bond.

Similar to the loss of a human attachment relationship, the loss of the human-pet relationship has been identified as one of the most detrimental costs to human wellbeing

associated with human-pet relations. Grief following pet loss is often disenfranchised, potentially resulting in adverse effects on mental health and wellbeing. Another potentially more devastating loss in terms of human health and wellbeing was identified as relinquishment. Dog relinquishment also results in permanent separation from and loss of a dog and occurs more frequently than death of a dog, yet little is known about the issue and its impact on human wellbeing. In addition, factors associated with relinquishment have been indentified, that can serve to increase the risk for adverse effects on mental health and wellbeing (e.g., social negativity surrounding the practice, perceived culpability for the loss and the nature of the loss). Therefore, there is a need to gain a better understanding of the human experience of dog relinquishment, so as to ascertain its impact on human mental health and wellbeing. The next chapter describes and discusses the methodology employed by the current study to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment.

- Chapter 3 -
Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter describes and explains the methodology utilised in the current study. The chapter is divided into four sections. In section one the philosophical underpinnings that served to guide the research process of the current study are outlined and described. In section two, the issue of reflexivity in qualitative studies is discussed. This is followed by a description of my role as researcher and a personal account of my own dog relinquishment experience. In section three grounded theory methodology [GTM] is described and explained in terms of its origins, evolution and methods, including the contentious use of literature. The appropriateness of the methodology to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment is also explained. Finally, in section four, a detailed description of the research process used to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment is presented.

Theoretical Assumptions

An important part of the qualitative research process is a declaration of the theoretical stance taken by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 2003; Greckhamer & Koro-Llunberg, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Koro-Llunberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith & Hayes, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005; Weed, 2009). This not only provides guidance for the researcher, but also allows research consumers to better appreciate the merit of the findings (Crotty, 2003; Koro-Llunberg et al., 2009; Ponterotto, 2005; Weed, 2009).

As a minimum, the epistemology (i.e., how we know what we know), theoretical perspective (i.e., philosophical worldview), methodology (i.e., research plan of action), and methods (i.e., techniques/strategies for conducting the research) should be outlined (Crotty, 2003). Some researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2007) also advocate outlining other aspects of the researcher's theoretical stance, such as the ontology (i.e., what is the nature of reality?), axiology (i.e., what is the role of values?), and rhetorical (i.e., what is the language of research?).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) frame the theoretical aspects in an inquiry paradigm. An inquiry paradigm is "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of methods but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). Four paradigms are identified by Guba and Lincoln (1994), they are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory (and related theories) and constructivism. The positivist and post-positivist paradigms are

most often associated with quantitative research, while critical theory and constructivism are most often associated with qualitative research, although, they are not exclusive to either methodology (Crotty, 2003). When choosing a paradigm the researcher should ensure that it aligns with the aims and research questions of the study and that ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects chosen support that particular worldview; otherwise research findings can be undermined (Crotty, 2003; Koro-Llunberg et al., 2009).

Inquiry Paradigm of the Current Study

The current study utilised a post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist paradigm recognises that even when using the scientific method, there is no assurance of truth and certainty in findings (Crotty, 2003). This paradigm was chosen for the following reasons:

- It is the paradigm purported to guide Straussian GTM, which was utilised in the current study (Charmaz, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Crotty, 2003; Hallberg, 2006).
- It is important to keep true to the chosen methodology's theoretical underpinnings and procedures so that the outcome achieved is in accordance with the aims of the methodology (Crotty, 2003; Greckhamer & Koro-Llunberg, 2005).
- It aligns with my present ontological and epistemological worldview.

Drawing on Guba (1990) and Crotty (2003) the post-positivist inquiry paradigm underpinning the current study is presented in Figure 1. Each aspect of the paradigm is outlined and described next.

Ontology

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (i.e., how we view the world). The post-positivist paradigm views the world from a critical realist perspective. Critical realism assumes that "reality exists but can never be fully apprehended. It is driven by natural laws that can be only incompletely understood" (Guba, 1990, p. 23). Post-positivist researchers recognise that human fallibility in relation to sensory and intellectual capacity necessitates the adoption of a critical stance to research (Guba, 1990). In adopting a critical realist ontology for the exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment, I acknowledge that the grounded theory generated from the study may not represent an ultimate truth, but may represent the participants' truth (based on an interpretative analysis) as I believe they saw it.

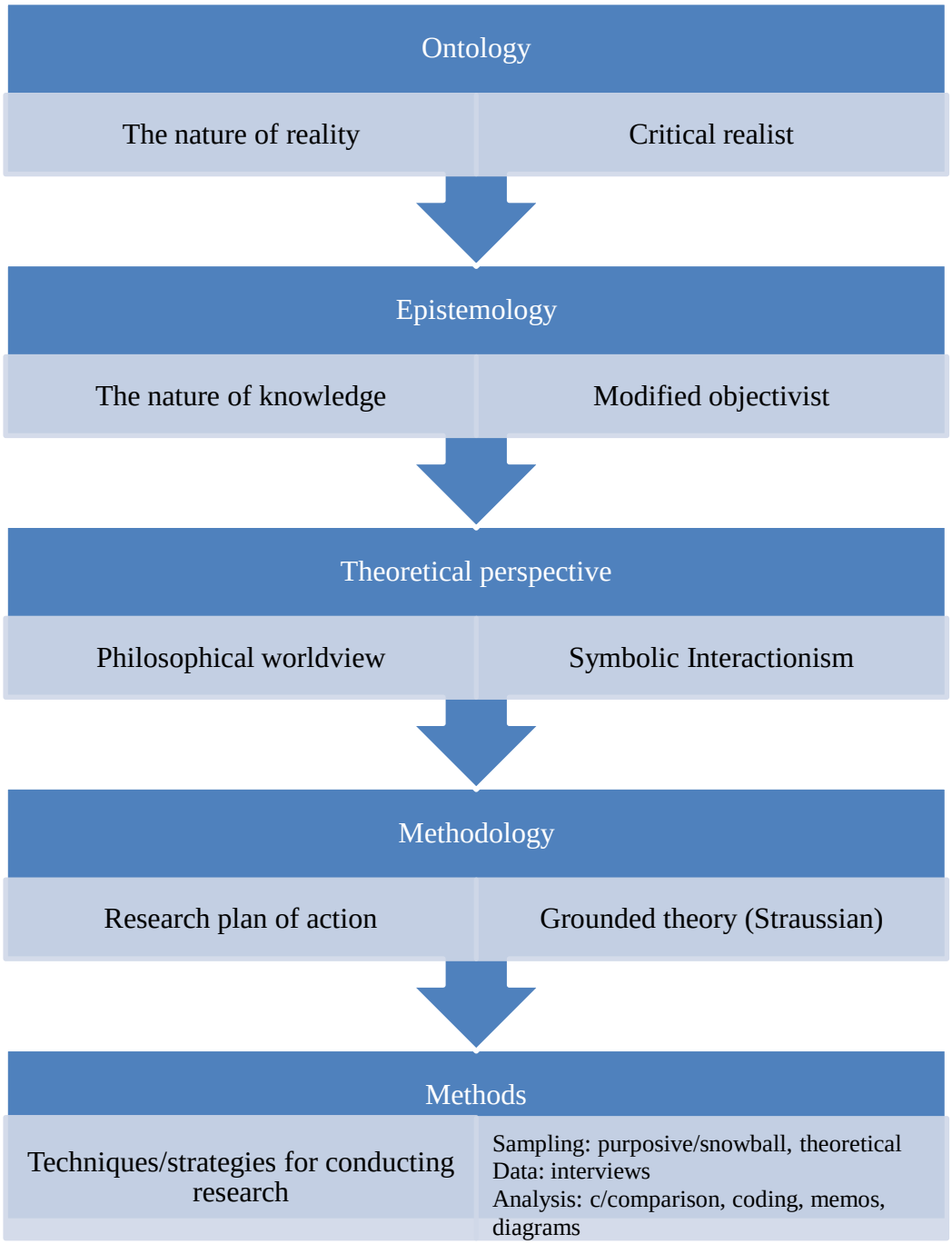

Figure 1. Post-positivist paradigm guiding the exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (i.e., how we know what we know). The post-positivist paradigm views knowledge from a modified objectivist perspective. Modified objectivism posits that "objectivity remains a regulatory ideal, but it can only be approximated, with special emphasis placed on external guardians such as the critical tradition and the critical community" (Guba, 1990, p. 23).

Post-positivist researchers recognise that true objectivity is an unobtainable ideal as no human is neutral. Modified objectivism takes this into account and while its aim is still one of objectivity, researchers must recognise and declare their own bias so that others can take this into consideration when examining findings (Guba, 1990). Researchers must also be aware of and keep in mind their own worldview while they listen and observe participants, to ensure that participants voices are accurately represented (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In keeping with a modified- objectivist epistemology for the exploration of the human experience of dog relinquishment, my own experience as a relinquisher is acknowledged later in this chapter. In order to maintain a self awareness of the potential for bias, my own thoughts and feelings in relation to the participants and their data were documented throughout the research process. Finally, to ensure accurate representation of participants' voices all interview data were transcribed verbatim and excerpts of interview data included in the current thesis are true representations of participants' voices.

Theoretical Perspective

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a social psychological perspective that has its roots in several philosophies, including pragmatism as espoused by William James and John Dewey (Crotty, 2003; Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975; Reynolds, 2003a). George Mead (1863-1931) is generally credited as the founder of SI, while Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's, is credited with giving SI its name (Musolf, 2003; Reynolds, 2003b). SI assumes that "nothing in the world, that is objects, people or events, has intrinsic meaning or inherent value in and of itself. Meaning is created by experience" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 5).

There are several variants of SI, each differing in the interpretation of its main ideas, with no consensus on exactly how many versions there are (Fine, 1993; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003; Stryker, 2004). Two of the main variants have been labelled the Chicago school, led by Herbert Blumer and the Iowa school, led by Manford Kuhn (Petras & Meltzer, 1994). Although both schools claim to follow Mead's philosophy, they differ in their research approach. For instance, the Chicago school, as opposed to the Iowa school, "emphasizes process not structure, sympathetic introspection not attitude scales, indeterminacy and emergence not determinancy" (Meltzer et al., 1975, p. 123). Grounded theory methodology (GTM), as utilised in the current study, draws on the Chicago school's version of SI, as this is where Strauss was based while developing

the methodology with Glaser (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). SI is underpinned by three basic premises as outlined by Blumer [25](1969, p. 2):

> 1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them *(e.g., a person who views their dog as part of the family would act differently toward their dog than someone who considered their dog, just a dog).*
> 2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows *(e.g., how a person views a dog is influenced by those around them such as family and culture).*
> *3.* These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters *(e.g., a person who has never had a dog and has learnt to view a dog as just a dog, might change their view if they got a dog).*

SI proposes that human behaviour is neither solely contingent on internal or external stimuli but rather on how, via a self reflective process, individuals interpret these stimuli (Meltzer et al., 1975). According to SI, individuals cannot be understood without understanding the society in which they live and societies cannot be understood without understanding the individuals who comprise them (Meltzer et al., 1975).

The Self in SI

Fundamental to SI is the notion that humans possess a self that develops through interaction with others (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Elliot, 2001; Fine, 1993). The self, according to Mead (1934), is a reflexive process rather than a structure, which enables people to perceive of themselves and interact with themselves, as they can with others (Blumer, 1969; Weigart & Gecas, 2003). For example, a person can question themselves about a particular action "how could I have done that?" The self interprets and assigns meaning to its environment as well as the actions and intentions of others (Meltzer, 1994). This means that rather than just responding or reacting to others as in a stimulus/response model, individuals process information and observations via the self and are then able to formulate and direct their response or action. For example, a relinquisher interacting with an animal welfare worker might observe that the animal welfare worker appears cold and abrupt. The relinquisher may interpret this as the animal welfare worker being judgemental of them. This interpretation may call into question the relinquisher's self concept and may result in a negative reaction from the relinquisher toward the animal welfare worker.

It should be noted that SI has been criticised for its emphasis on cognitive aspects of the self and its neglect of emotional and unconscious aspects (Elliot, 2001; Meltzer et al., 1975). Although GTM is underpinned by SI, emotional aspects of the

[25] The examples presented in italics are my own and are not attributed to Blumer.

self are considered in the analysis as is evidenced by Corbin and Strauss's (2008, p. 89) coding paradigm, which includes "inter/actions and emotions" as one of its components.

The Research Process and SI

Several stipulations are made by the SI perspective, when studying human behaviour:

1. The setting in which the interaction takes place should be analysed in order "to produce self and group definitions and shared meanings" (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 6). In addition to onsite data collection for the current study from an animal shelter and a home based rescuer, familiarity with the setting in terms of animal shelters was gained through my adoption of two dogs and attending annual fundraising events held at the shelter. Observations at the settings formed part of the analysis that resulted in the concept 'rescue environment'.
2. Researchers need to see the world as the participant sees it, as well as observing the participant in it (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Crotty, 2003). Being able to view the world from the participant's perspective was aided by my own personal experience of dog relinquishment, including having pets (cats not dogs) relinquished in my childhood and also being on a distribution list for dog rescue, as well as receiving regular newsletters from a dog shelter. Onsite data collection at an animal shelter, home based rescue and participants homes, allowed for observations of participants in their worlds.
3. Researchers must be able to convey their knowledge and understanding of the participants, in terminology appropriate to their own research discipline (Blumer, 1969; Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). My understanding of the participants' perspectives of the human experience of dog relinquishment has been described and explained in language familiar to the discipline of psychology.

Section Summary

In summary, declaring the theoretical underpinnings of a research study guides the researcher and assists consumers in their evaluation of the study's findings. It has been established that the current study is underpinned by a post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist paradigm consists of a critical realist ontology, a modified objectivist epistemology and a modified experimental/ manipulative methodology (Guba, 1990, p. 23). The methodology utilised in the current study is underpinned by symbolic interactionism, which stipulates particular processes that the researcher should undertake in order to remain true to the method, thus promoting confidence in the findings. In keeping with the notion of transparency of the research process, the next

section describes factors pertaining to me, the researcher, which research consumers should be aware of, in order to make an informed judgement about the findings of the current study.

Self Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves "an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research" (Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity contributes to the trustworthiness of the findings, as it promotes self awareness and self vigilance for potential problems arising from factors associated with the researcher that may influence the research process (Pillow, 2003). It also allows consumers insight into factors relating to the researcher that may have a bearing on the research process and its outcomes.

Positioning the Researcher

Describing the role of the researcher in a qualitative study is an essential element in enhancing the credibility of the findings (Koch, 2006; Rowan & Huston, 1997). As much as I would like to think that I am objective in the research process, the reality is that I am not. I brought to the study my own worldview (e.g., culture, attitudes, values, beliefs etc.) and life experience. For example, my cultural background is Celtic; I am a mother and grandmother, I grew up in a household with animals of one sort or another (including dogs, mice, rabbits, cats, fish, birds and chickens, although not all at the same time) and currently have three dogs. I hold the view that animals are sentient beings and that people can form close emotional bonds with dogs. I have had personal experience of pet relinquishment (cats in childhood) and a dog in adulthood, which is described later in this section. These values and experiences shape my perspective. While personal experience of the issue under study can aid in seeing matters from the participant's perspective (an aim of the SI perspective), it can also be a source of bias. Given my personal experience of relinquishment and my love of dogs I acknowledge the potential for bias in my interpretation of the data.

In an effort to minimise bias throughout the interview and analysis process I engaged in self reflection, an important part of the qualitative research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which involved being mindful of my thoughts and feelings about my own experience and how I felt and thought about the participants' experiences. For example, I found myself at times empathising with some and feeling judgemental towards others. Reflecting on these thoughts and feelings allowed me to be aware of this potential for bias and take it into consideration during analysis.

As the researcher, I conducted all interviews. I did not reveal my personal experience of relinquishment to the participants. I did reveal, to the few that asked, what had prompted me to embark on the study. I acknowledge that given the nature of SI, my interaction during the interview process may have impacted on the type of information that participants shared with me.

My previous research experience as a student of psychology has for the most part been quantitative in methodology and of a positivistic nature. GTM, therefore, presented a challenge to me. Not only because it is the antithesis of the methods to which I have previously used (i.e., inductive rather than deductive) but it was also very different to other projects in which I was involved, where I collected data via survey instruments, with very little actual contact with participants. The other projects also had no personal connection to my life experience.

Apart from learning a new methodology, the most challenging part of this study was that I had to once again, confront my own experience of relinquishment, something I have done my best to avoid. It should be noted that the following account of my personal experience of relinquishment has been influenced by insights about my own behaviour and experience as a result of conducting the current study.

Personal Experience of Dog Relinquishment

My experience of dog relinquishment began in 1986 when I had Sam killed because he had developed 'behavioural problems'. When I reflect back on Sam's behaviour I realise that much of it was a result of poor management on my behalf. Although Sam was well looked after in terms of food and housing (he was an indoor dog), he was not in terms of exercise and mental stimulation.

My husband and I got Sam from the local animal rescue centre. He was my first dog since leaving home. He was a golden/sandy and white short haired mixed breed, around 12 to18 months of age. We were given no information about his background. It soon became apparent that he did not like doors to be shut, they had to be open. He had also developed an obsession about chasing lights. This had started out as a playful game of chasing a beam of light from a torch shone on the floor, but had become generalised to any reflections of light. This became problematic, as the front and back doors of the house were glass and every time they were opened or moved they created a reflection that Sam chased. Sam was a very clever dog and soon learnt that he could create the reflections himself by moving the door back and forth with his paw.

Around family members, Sam was as gentle as a lamb and very loving, but to others he appeared aggressive. I am not sure when his aggressive behaviour started, but

it got to the stage that people could not come into the house because he would constantly bark at them in a threatening manner. I tried putting him in another room when people came but he would become frantic scratching at the door and barking. We took him to the vet to ask for some help with his aggressive behaviour. While behavioural training is advocated now, at that time it was not, and the vet suggested castration as a means of calming him. We followed the vet's advice and Sam had the operation. Unfortunately it did not alter his behaviour.

After Sam had been with us for around 12 months I became pregnant with my first child. Family members were voicing their concerns over Sam's behaviour and the risk to the baby. It got to the stage where I felt I could not cope with Sam's behaviour and my worries over the potential for harm to the baby. I reluctantly decided to return Sam to the animal rescue centre. I could not face taking him to the animal shelter myself, so my husband took him. I realised once Sam was gone that I could not go through with it and the next day sent my husband back to get Sam. I felt it was easier to put up with the behaviour than to relinquish him. I worried that somebody else taking Sam would not be as forgiving of his behaviour and would treat him badly. So Sam came back to us.

Sam's behaviour did not improve with time. While his aggressive behaviour did not seem to be a problem with my son (Sam was very gentle with him), his chasing of lights became the problem. Wherever the light landed he would try to get it. When he was chasing lights he would not listen to commands, he was so engrossed in trying to catch the light. He would jump up on the couches and run around them trying to catch the reflections on the walls. Sam was not a small dog, he was about the size of a Labrador, and I became increasingly worried that he might injure my son inadvertently when he was fixated on the lights. I felt pressured by others who had voiced their concerns over the potential for Sam's behaviour to cause physical harm to people and my own thoughts of what if he seriously injured my son. It culminated one day when I was feeding my son while he was sitting in a bouncer chair. Sam had suddenly caught sight of a reflection of sunlight through the door and had charged after the light knocking the chair that my son was in over. My son fell forward and split his eyebrow (which required stitches) on the edge of the coffee table. My worst fears had now been realised and the warnings of others resonated in my mind. I felt that I was in an unbearable situation. I did not want to relinquish Sam, but I also did not want to risk my son's safety. I then made the decision, one which I regret to this day, to have Sam killed.

At the time I felt killing was the best alternative. I could not bear to think of Sam being mistreated because of his behaviour. Even though at the time I thought I was doing this with Sam's best interests at heart, I realise now that it was my own interests that were paramount, I was protecting myself. Time has not eased the experience, if anything it has made it worse. I am still reduced to tears when I think about him.

For a long time I could not talk or even think about Sam, it was too painful, so I tried to put him out of my mind. When I did think about him it was to try and reassure myself that I had done the right thing. I convinced myself that it was his fault; that was probably the reason why he was in the animal shelter in the first place; I would not have to do it if he did not have problem behaviour. This belief provided me with some comfort and so convinced was I that after my dog Penny died (whom I got as a puppy); I was very reluctant to get a rescue dog from an animal shelter because I thought it would have behavioural problems. This belief was shattered with my two current rescue dogs that do not have behavioural problems and the accumulation of knowledge, over the years, acquired via TV programs and books about caring for dogs and managing behavioural problems. I came to the realisation that I contributed to the development of his problem behaviour. As well as blaming Sam, I would also try to make myself feel better by telling myself that if we had not adopted him he would have been killed (put down) at an earlier age. No matter how I try to reframe the situation, my feelings of guilt and regret over relinquishing Sam remain. I feel that I let him down and I let myself down.

As a result of interviewing participants for this study I have also realised that the whole time I had concentrated on my own thoughts and feelings about the relinquishment. Although I had thought about the impact on Sam, but had done my best to block these thoughts, I had not considered the impact on others. For example, the animal shelter workers when Sam was returned to the shelter or my husband who had taken Sam to be killed (because I could not face up to it).

Similar to some participants in the current study I have over the years employed many strategies aimed at alleviating the self disturbing sense of unease I have over relinquishing Sam. Many of these strategies have been aimed at protecting and restoring my self-integrity. While some of the participants in the current study have come to terms with the relinquishment of their dog and gained peace of mind, I have not.

Section Summary

In summary, this section has explained the importance of reflexivity as a means of enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings of a qualitative study. It has outlined my past experience of quantitative and qualitative research. Finally, the section has provided a personal account of my experience of dog relinquishment in relation to Sam, who was killed by lethal injection at a veterinary clinic. The next section describes the origins, evolution and methods of GTM as used in the current study.

Grounded Theory Methodology

GTM is an iterative process that utilises a constant comparative method, along with other strategies, to inductively derive a theory grounded in the data about an area under study, such as the human experience of dog relinquishment (Charmaz, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weed, 2009). Strauss & Corbin, (1998, p. 15), define a theory as "a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena". The aim of GTM is to "generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser, 1978, p. 93). In addition to contributing to knowledge of a phenomenon, raising awareness and understanding, a grounded theory also has the potential to influence policy makers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although GTM is generally referred to as an inductive methodology, Strauss (1987) stipulates that deduction and verification are also employed.

Origins of GTM

Originally developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, GTM has now become a widely used methodology across many disciplines, including psychology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Weed, 2009). Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to grounded theory as a methodology, not an approach or method as it has been described by others, as it encompasses "a set of principles for the entire research process" from beginning to end (Weed, 2009, p. 504). Using the term methodology also helps to make it distinct from the 'grounded theory' that emerges from the research process.

In developing GTM, Glaser and Strauss brought elements of their own research backgrounds and training. Glaser trained at Columbia University, which had strong quantitative and theory development traditions (Hallberg, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This background assisted Glaser to develop a qualitative system of analysis

similar to the approach used in quantitative analyses (Charmaz, 2004). Strauss, who trained at the university of Chicago, drew on the philosophy of American pragmatism (in particular the views of Dewey, Mead, and Pierce) and Chicago Sociology (in particular symbolic interactionism) (Charmaz, 2004; Hallberg, 2006; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Together they brought the following to GTM:

> the need to get out into the field, if one wants to understand what is going on;
> the importance of theory, grounded in reality, to the development of a discipline;
> the nature of the experience and undergoing as continually evolving;
> the active role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in;
> an emphasis on change and process, and the variability and complexity of life;
> the interrelationships among conditions meanings and action; and ....
> a well thought out, explicitly formulated, and systematic set of procedures for both coding and testing hypotheses generated during the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 24-25).

Several years after their collaboration, Glaser and Strauss went their separate ways resulting in modifications to the original methodology (Creswell, 2007).

Evolution of GTM

Since its original inception there have been several modifications to the methodology, much to the disdain of Glaser (Charmaz, 2004; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Glaser, 2002; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Golding, 1999; Greckhamer & Koro-Ljunberg, 2005; Hallberg, 2006) who is concerned that GTM's power is being diluted and moving away from its original purpose (Glaser & Holton, 2004). While some view the modifications as 'evolving method' (e.g., Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hallberg, 2006) others view it as 'eroding method' (e.g., Glaser & Holton, 2004; Greckhamer & Koro-Ljunberg, 2005; Hood, 2007). These modifications have resulted in three main versions of GTM concurrently being utilised by researchers, classic (i.e., Glaserian), Straussian, and constructivist (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Charmaz, 2003).

Although some differences are apparent amongst data collection, analysis techniques and epistemological underpinnings (Charmaz, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 2002; Greckhamer & Koro-Ljunberg, 2005; Heath & Cowley, 2004) all versions, as well as using the constant comparative method, utilise the following strategies outlined by Charmaz (2001, p. 677):

> Simultaneous data collection and analysis
> Pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis
> Discovery of basic social processes within the data
> Inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes
> Sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes
> Integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes.

Different versions produce different outcomes (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Glaserian and Straussian GTM are seen as objectivist (Charmaz 2000; Bryant 2003; Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005), resulting in one theory being produced from the data (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Constructionist GTM produces numerous meanings from the data resulting in numerous theories (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljunberg, 2005).

The widespread use and popularity of GTM has resulted in considerable variation in how the methodology is executed leading to several criticisms. Some of these criticisms are: researchers who purport to be using GTM when in fact they are conducting qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Hood, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); mixing of versions (i.e., not aligning with one version but using strategies from different versions (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Weed, 2009); and not reporting theoretical underpinnings (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weed, 2009).

Weed (2009), for example, conducted a search of four leading journals from the sport and exercise psychology field published in the years 2000-2008, for articles reporting the use of GTM. Twelve articles were located. Of the twelve studies reported, only two evidenced sufficient conditions[26] for GTM and only two discussed epistemological issues. Although Weed's search focussed on sport and exercise psychology, similar failings can be found across disciplines (Weed, 2009), potentially resulting in an undermining of the credibility of GTM studies. As Greckhamer and Koro-Ljunberg (2005, p. 746) point out "if grounded theory is used as merely a label or a concept without epistemological connections, grounded theory is not grounded anywhere or, alternatively, it is grounded everywhere. In this case, it becomes an empty method or a text without contextualized meaning".

GTM and the Current Study

GTM was chosen for the current study as little is known about the human experience of dog relinquishment and therefore an exploratory study was warranted (Creswell, 2007). GTM is particularly suited to study an area in which little is known

[26] Hood (2007) contends that in order to claim the use of GTM in a study the research process must include the 'troublesome trinity' (a term coined by Hood to describe the difficulties experienced by researchers in their understanding and application of the three elements). The 'troublesome trinity' consists of theoretical sampling; constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and; focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings (Hood, 2007, p. 163).

as it can provide basis for further study (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). While the phenomenological approach, which can also be used in exploratory studies, would have allowed for an understanding and description of the lived experience of participants, it would not have allowed for the generation of a theory, which described and explained the participants' experience (Creswell, 2007).

Having chosen GTM the next step was to decide which version to follow. An initial reading of the literature concerning GTM proved to be confusing, frustrating and exasperating: a not uncommon experience as attested by other researchers (e.g., Heath & Cowley, 2004). The debate around the various versions and their similarities as well as differences seemed to detract somewhat from the efficacy of the methodology. After much thought and consideration the Straussian version of GTM (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was elected. This version was chosen because a single theory was preferred; Strauss and Corbin's (1990) methodology provided more structure than Glaserian grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); and the more structured approach is advocated by a number of researchers (Creswell, 2007; Fassinger, 2005; Kelle, 2007).

Methods of (Straussian) GTM

Beginning with data collection, the main elements of the process of GTM include: coding, memoing, diagramming, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, theoretical sensitising, identification of a core category and integration of theory (Strauss, 1987). Although these are presented in a linear format below, the actual process is iterative (i.e., it goes back and forth, with some of the processes being conducted simultaneously). GTM advocates data analysis begin as soon as the first piece of data (e.g., interview transcript) has been collected and continues until a theory about the issue or topic under study has emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data collection. Data in GTM can take many forms. Some of these include interview data, observational data, and historical records, with some studies including multiple forms of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data collection ends when no new information is forthcoming that adds to the developing theory, that is, when no new categories emerge and the identified categories reach saturation in terms of properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

Coding. Collected data, such as a transcript of interviewee's words are analysed through a process of coding beginning with *open coding* - "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990, p. 61). For example, open coding involves close reading of the interview transcript whereby the researcher assigns a conceptual label to the text that explains that particular segment. Sometimes participants' actual words are designated as a conceptual label (known as an invivo code). For example, an invivo code of 'part of the family' was given to the following interview extract as it encapsulated the nature of the relationship *"Yes it is, because you view them like a child in a way, they're just part of the family" [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*.

Open coding is followed by *axial coding* - "data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate the use of a coding paradigm to aid with axial coding. Akin to Glaser's (1978) six C's coding family (i.e., causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions), Strauss and Corbin's (1990, p. 99) paradigm includes causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences. This model aids the researcher to think about and see potential links between categories.

Memoing and diagramming. During the analysis process memos are written. Memos are "written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197). They are an important and essential part of analysis. As Stern (2007, p. 119) points out "if data are the building blocks of the developing theory, then memos are the mortar." They are constructed throughout the process of analysing data and developing theory. They help the researcher to record thoughts about the data and research; they illuminate why and how particular decisions were made; and they detail relationships between concepts (Stern, 2007). They are also useful in later stages of analysis when they can be grouped and sorted to aid in theory development and integration.

Another strategy that can be used in conjunction with memos, to aid in analysis and theory building, is constructing diagrams. Diagrams are "visual representations of relationships between concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197). Initial diagrams in the early stages of analysis can be very basic, as analysis progresses they can be modified and built upon.

Theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is an important aspect of GTM and involves seeking out and collecting new data that will further develop the emerging theory, directed by what has been uncovered in the data already collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). The researcher seeks information that will add to their

knowledge of the emerging concepts and categories. This information can come from "places, persons and situations" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 144).

Constant comparison. The constant comparison method underpins the analysis process. Constant comparison involves comparing incidents within and between data, looking for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, comparing the multiple experiences of a serial relinquisher (i.e., someone who has relinquished multiple times) or comparing the experiences between relinquishers and children of relinquishers.

Theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity is an important aspect of doing grounded theory and involves being able to see beneath as well as beyond the surface data, gaining insight (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Several strategies useful for developing theoretical sensitivity are offered by Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 77-93; Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 69-85), including:

> asking particular questions of the data (e.g., what is going on in the data);
> the flip-flop technique, which entails looking at the extreme opposite of a concept (e.g., the practice of relinquishment is deemed too easy by some animal welfare workers, how would the experience differ if relinquishment was hard?);
> looking to personal experience of the issue (e.g., comparing my personal experience of relinquishment with that of participants);
> waving the red flag, (i.e., challenging taken for granted assumptions or beliefs through looking at possible alternatives); and seeking out the negative case (i.e., finding the case that does not fit in with the emerging theory).

Core category and integration of theory. The final process of analysis is the integration of theory. Theory integration begins with *selective coding* – "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). The core category relates to the overarching theme of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Corbin and Strauss, (2008, p. 105) outline five criteria, which aid in the identification of the core category:

1. It must be abstract; that is, all other major categories can be related to it and placed under it.
2. It must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all, or almost all, cases there are indicators pointing to that concept.
3. It must be logical and consistent with the data. Relate easily to other categories. There should be no forcing of the data.

4. It should be sufficiently abstract so that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory.
5. It should grow in depth and explanatory power as each of the other categories is related to it through statements of relationship.

Once a core category is decided upon the researcher then sets about generating theory by showing how the other categories relate to the core category. This can be aided by writing up the story (i.e., describing what is happening with regards to the participants); reading through, organising and ordering memos; and constructing diagrams (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The final step is refining the theory. This involves making sure that the theory is logical and consistent; getting rid of superfluous concepts that do not appear to fit with the theory; going back to the data to build up concepts or categories that appear to be lacking in density; and finally submitting the theory to validation to ensure its fit with the data. For example, presenting the theory to participants for their view of its applicability to their case or seeing how the theory fits to the raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Evaluating a Grounded Theory

In judging the merits of a grounded theory, four important factors are stressed: it should pertain to the area under study; it should be understandable to the participants studied and those involved in the area; it should be general enough that it has the flexibility to be altered to suit the differing situations in which it might be applied; and it should allow those using it, control to effect change (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Stern (2007, p. 114) sums up what a grounded theory should look like, “One essential quality of true grounded theory is that it makes sense; put simply, the reader will have an immediate recognition that this theory, derived from a given social situation is about real people or objects to which they can relate”.

Section Summary

In summary, it has been established that GTM was developed by Glaser and Strauss and has since undergone several modifications. It is a widely used methodology (sometimes incorrectly), that can be applied to generate theory, which will describe and explain people’s actions and interactions in relation to the issue under study. Straussian GTM has been shown to be a structured systematic method of data collection and analysis, which guides the researcher in the generation and integration of a theory that is grounded in the data of participants. A good grounded theory relates to the issue under

study, is understood by participants, is flexible and can be modified. The next section provides a detailed description of the research process undertaken to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment.

The Research Process of the Current Study

Design

The current study was qualitative in design and explored the human experience of dog relinquishment from the perspectives of adults who had personally experienced dog relinquishment (either in adulthood or in childhood) and adults who had experienced dog relinquishment via their employment in the animal welfare sector. A qualitative approach "provides insight into what people's experiences are, why they do what they do, and what they need in order to change "(Rowan & Huston, 1997, p. 1442). The qualitative approach utilised in the current study was Straussian GTM (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). GTM was considered the most appropriate methodology to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment, as little is known about the area and it allows for the generation of a theory grounded in participants' data that can describe and explain such a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Materials

Materials utilised in the current study consisted of semi-structured interview guides and a digital voice recorder with which to record the interviews. The interview guide for those who had personal experience of dog relinquishment (i.e., relinquishers and adults who had experienced relinquishment in childhood), began with a few simple demographic questions about the dog (e.g., name, age, length of ownership, from where the dog was obtained), and then progressed to a series of open-ended questions about the relinquishment experience (see interview guide Appendix A).

Similarly, the interview guide for those who had professional experience of dog relinquishment (see Appendix B) began with a few simple questions about the nature of the employees work role (e.g., type of work, length of employment in that role) and then progressed to a series of open-ended questions. The initial questions allowed participants to become comfortable with the interviewer and the open-ended questions allowed participants freedom of expression, as they were not constrained by the question (Keats, 2000). Probing questions were utilised in certain circumstances when meanings were unclear or where elaboration was needed (Keats, 2000). In keeping with GTM, the initial interview guides evolved through subsequent interviews (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008) guided by participants' responses and theory development, with some questions being omitted or new ones added.

Participants

Forty five[27] participants who had personal or professional experience of dog relinquishment were recruited for this study.[28] Forty four resided in Perth, Western Australia (WA) and one resided in a town outside of Perth. Participants with personal experience consisted of two groups (i.e., those that had relinquished a dog in their adulthood and those that had experienced relinquishment in childhood). Those with professional experience included those employed in the animal welfare/rescue field that were exposed to relinquishment through their work. This resulted in three groups of participants; relinquishers (R), those that had experienced relinquishment in childhood (CR) and those that were employed in the animal welfare/ rescue sector, that is animal welfare workers (AWW).

The R group (see Table 2) consisted of 21 participants (19 females and 2 males) with an age range of 22 to 70 years. Time at interview since relinquishment ranged from three months to 23 years. Six of the participants had also experienced relinquishment in childhood.

The CR group (see Table 3) consisted of 10 participants (7 females and 3 males) with an age range of 18 to 62 years. None of the CR participants were children of the R participants. Time at interview since relinquishment ranged from 6 to 50 years. One of the participants had experienced relinquishment in childhood more than once. One participant had voluntarily relinquished a dog as an adult; another had relinquishment forced upon her.

The AWW group (see Table 4) consisted of 15 participants (11 females and 4 males) with an age range of 23 to 78 years. Participants included shelter workers, rescue group workers, rangers and one vet. Although the veterinarians board had been approached by email requesting assistance with recruitment and 45 vets had been approached individually by mail, only one veterinarian agreed to participate. AWWs in the current study were involved in a variety of different roles, thus their involvement in animal welfare and exposure to relinquishment varied according to their role. For example, some witnessed/participated in animal killing and some did not. Some AWWs worked part time and others worked full time in their role, some were paid and

[27] The overall number of participants interviewed was 45, although, the number of participants across the groups totals 46. This is because one participant chose to be included in the relinquishment group (R-U) and the CR group (CR-I) as she had experienced both.

[28] Detailed table of participant demographics presented in Appendix C.

some were unpaid. For some, 100 percent of their role was dealing with animal welfare issues, whereas for others it was considerably less.

Table 2

Characteristics of Relinquisher Participants

ID	Age years	Sex	Voluntary relinquished	No of times relinquished	Relinquishment in childhood	Time since Relinquishment
R-A*	68	F	Yes	Once	No	21 years
R-B*	70	M	Yes	Once	No	21 years
R-C*	43	F	Yes	Multiple	Yes	2 years
R-D*	33	F	Yes	Once	No	11 months
R-E*	57	F	Yes	Once	Yes	16.5 years
R-F*	38	F	Yes	Multiple	No	15 years
R-G*	45	F	Yes	Once	Yes (> once)	23 years
R-H*	73	F	Yes	Once	Yes	5 years
R-I*	61	F	Yes	Once	No	3 months
R-J*	22	M	Yes	Once	No	6 weeks
R-K*	47	F	Yes	Once	Yes	11 years
R-L*	41	F	Yes	Once	No	6.5 years
R-M*	48	F	Yes	Multiple	No	16 years
R-N#	28	F	Yes	Once	No	11 years
R-O*	38	F	Yes	Once	No	2 years
R-P*	54	F	Yes	Once	No	3 months
R-Q*	50	F	Yes	Multiple	No	2 years
R-R*	57	F	Yes	Multiple	No	15 years
R-S*	50	F	Yes	Once	No	9 months
R-T*	39	F	Yes	Once	No	13 years
R-U#	39	F	No	Once	Yes	11 years

Note. * = Face to face interview # = Telephone interview

After learning of a term used by veterinarians to describe owner requested killing of dogs (i.e., convenience euthanasia) the recruitment flyer was changed to include this term, thinking that it might improve recruitment rates, but to no avail. It is not clear why veterinarians chose not to participate in the current study. It may have been that veterinarians could not spare the time to take part in an interview; it may be that their particular clinic did not encounter relinquishment or practise convenience euthanasia; it may be a reflection of the hidden nature of relinquishment or it may be

that they just did not want to participate. Veterinarians' experiences might be an area for future study.

Initially it had been planned to interview those employed in the human welfare sector as well, such as counsellors and psychologists, but as the interviews of participants progressed it became apparent that participants did not seek assistance from the human welfare sector. Coupled with the covert nature of relinquishment that was emerging from the study, it was decided that trying to recruit from this sector would not be worthwhile.

Table 3

Characteristics of Participants who had Experienced Relinquishment in Childhood

ID	Age years	Sex	Relinquished in adulthood	No of times relinquished	Relinquishment in childhood	Time since relinquishment
CR-A*	26	F	No	Zero	Yes	18 years
CR-B*	37	M	No	Zero	Yes	27 years
CR-C#	62	F	Yes	Once	Yes	50 years
CR-D*	44	F	No	Zero	Yes(> once)	34 years
CR-E*	20	M	No	Zero	Yes	15 years
CR-F*	51	F	No	Zero	Yes	41 years
CR-G*	18	M	No	Zero	Yes	6 years
CR-H#	47	F	No	Zero	Yes	33 years
CR-I#	39	F	Yes	Once	Yes	27 years
CR-J#	35	F	No	Zero	Yes	20 years

Note. * = Face to face interview # = Telephone interview

Ethical Considerations

The study was submitted to the Edith Cowan University Human Ethics Review Committee (ECUHERC) for approval prior to recruitment of participants. The submission outlined how the study would be conducted in an ethical manner in terms of protecting participants from potential harm. It was noted that participants would be provided with contact details of human welfare agencies on all information sheets, as the issue under study had the potential to be emotive for some participants. Details were also provided in regards to the security measures employed to keep the data secure, these included locked cabinets and password protected computer information. Any identifying information of participants was to be kept separate from interview transcripts. An alphabetised identifier that could not be linked with individual

information was assigned to each transcript for example RA, RB etc, indicating relinquisher number one and relinquisher number two. No identifying information was to be included in any written works that arose out of the study including the thesis. The information sheets and consent forms that were given to participants were presented to the committee for approval, as were the interview schedules. The study met the ethical requirements of the university ethics committee and was approved. All ethical requirements were adhered to in the conduct of the study.

Table 4

Characteristics of Animal Welfare Worker Participants

ID	Age years	Sex	Work Role	Personally relinquished	Relinquishment in childhood
AWW-A*	36	F	Rescuer	No	No
AWW-B*	29	F	Veterinarian	No	No
AWW-C*	37	F	Shelter worker	No	No
AWW-D*	23	M	Ranger	No	No
AWW-E#	52	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-F#	40	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-G*	39	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-H*	51	M	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-I*	26	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-J*	47	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-K#	78	F	Shelter Worker	No	No
AWW-L#	-	F	Rescuer	No	No
AWW-M#	-	M	Ranger	No	No
AWW-N#	64	M	Ranger	No	No
AWW-O#	-	F	Rescuer	No	No

Note. * = Face to face interview # = Telephone interview - = Unknown

Procedure

Sampling Methods

Three types of sampling were utilised in the current study, namely, purposive, snowball and theoretical. Initially a purposive sampling method was utilised (i.e., participants with the characteristics under study were recruited (de Vaus, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposive sampling was used in conjunction with snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves asking participants to inform other people about

the study, that are known to them and that fit the criteria, in the hope that they too will participate (Biernacki, 1981).

As data collection and analysis progressed, theoretical sampling was utilised as part of theory generation. This involved targeting data collection (based on data already collected) to people, places or incidents that would add to the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, one R participant reported a negative response from animal welfare workers at a particular animal shelter. Data was then collected from that shelter in order to gain some perspective on attitudes towards relinquishers.

Criteria for Inclusion

The inclusion criteria for R and CR participants were: minimum age 18 years, male or female, residing in Perth, Western Australia, with personal experience of dog relinquishment in either adulthood or childhood. These criteria had the potential to capture actual relinquishers, other adults in the household who had not been directly involved in the relinquishment and also adults who had experienced relinquishment of a dog in their childhood. It was decided at the outset to recruit adults who had experienced relinquishment in childhood rather than recruiting children because of: a) the potential difficulty in recruiting children (e.g., parents might be reluctant to give consent for participation, especially if children had a negative experience of relinquishment) and b) the potential distress that might be caused to children had the experience been traumatic.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of relinquishment that was included on recruitment flyers was defined at the outset as, ‘ voluntary or forced removal of a dog from a person’s home through selling, giving away, leaving with family or friends, surrendering to an animal shelter or impounding by local authority’. Guided by a few people who had responded to the call for participants, a further criterion was added once the study had commenced. This criterion was euthanasia (but not euthanasia because of old age or illness). Euthanasia was not originally included as a method of relinquishment on the flyer because as it resulted in the death of the dog it was thought to be too similar to loss through natural pet death. It also may have been because of my own experience, which I did not wish to revisit. No time limit was set on when the relinquishment had occurred. This allowed for inclusion of adults who had experienced relinquishment in their childhood and also had the potential to explore any long term impacts of relinquishment; something not previously researched.

The criteria for inclusion for AWWS were: minimum age 18 years, male or female, who had professional experience of dog relinquishment (i.e., currently or

previously employed (paid or voluntary) as animal shelter/animal rescue workers, veterinarians or council rangers residing in Perth, Western Australia.

Participant Recruitment

Relinquisher (R) and Childhood Relinquishment (CR) groups: Recruitment of participants began once ethics approval had been gained from ECUHERC. Several avenues were utilised over time in an effort to recruit participants with personal experience of relinquishment. Initially an advertisement inviting participation in the study was placed in the local community paper (see Appendix D). Letters or emails were also sent to animal shelters, veterinarians and local libraries listed in the Perth telephone directory and on the internet, asking for assistance in recruiting participants through information on their websites and flyers displayed at their premises. Flyers were also displayed on ECU campuses.

With regard to theoretical sampling as the study progressed, other avenues were used in order to recruit particular participants. For example, an advert was placed in a newsletter of an organisation specific to older people, an advert was placed in a newsletter of a local animal shelter and the ECU School of Psychology and Social Science research participant register was also utilised in an effort to recruit younger participants. The ECU research participant register comprises contact details of undergraduate students from the school of psychology and social science who have expressed an interest in research participation. Students are able to choose which, if any, research studies they participate in. If they choose to participate they are given a raffle ticket each time they participate that has the potential of winning them $50 in the end of semester draw. In addition, a notice targeting those that had experienced relinquishment in childhood was placed on students' electronic notice boards.

Animal Welfare Workers (AWW) group: Employers of AWWs were approached by letter where possible (see Appendix E) or email (with letter attached) requesting permission to approach employees for recruitment. AWWs targeted for recruitment included veterinarians, animal shelter workers, council rangers and animal rescue groups. Information sheets inviting potential participants to make contact with me were then sent by email to agreeable employers for distribution to their employees (see Appendix F). The snowballing technique was also utilised here, whereby emails were passed onto people from other rescue groups that were personally known to some of the participants. Some people, who did not fit the criteria and therefore could not participate themselves, still passed the email on to others whom they thought might participate.

Informing Participants

All methods of recruitment invited potential participants to contact me by phone or email if they wished to participate in the study or wished to discuss the project. Interestingly, several emails were received from people expressing their feelings over the recent loss of their dog through death. Even though this was not the topic of the current study they still wanted to express their feelings. This may have been because they felt safe in expressing their feelings to someone who was researching a topic about people losing their dogs, as research shows that people are reluctant to talk about their feelings regarding the death of their dog for fear of ridicule by others (Cowles, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991). It may also indicate a need for an avenue of expression for people who are grieving the loss of their dog. These emails were responded to by thanking the people for their interest in the study and wishing them well in coping with their loss.

On contact, an information sheet (see Appendix G) was sent out by email or post to interested individuals. The information sheet provided basic details about the study in terms of what it was about; who was involved; that participation would involve one interview that would be audio taped; that it was voluntary and that all information would be kept confidential and that their anonymity would be assured. As the topic of study had the potential to cause emotional distress, contact details of a helpline and the Edith Cowan University psychological services clinic were provided should participants need assistance (Breakwell, 2006). An interview date (time and venue) was then arranged that was convenient.

The Interviews

Interviews were the main method of data collection for the study. This method of data collection is consistent with a post-positivist paradigm and GTM (Creswell, 2007). The interviews conducted were semi-structured and in-depth in nature, so as to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experience than would be afforded by simply asking pre-determined questions. Semi-structured interviews were used rather than structured or unstructured interviews for this study as they provided some guidance, but also allowed for pursuit of emerging issues during the interview (Breakwell, 2006; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). This is important in GTM, for as data collection and analysis proceeds interview questions become targeted to the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2001).

Although initially interviews were to be conducted face to face, as the study progressed it proved difficult to obtain sufficient numbers of participants, so the

ECUHERC was approached for permission to include telephone interviewing as a method of data collection. This request was granted. This enabled the recruitment of participants who preferred to be interviewed by telephone rather than face to face. Telephone interviews are considered comparable to face to face interviews in the data that is collected, although they tend to be shorter in duration (Breakwell, 2006).

Interviews were conducted between June 2008 and May 2010. Thirty three face to face interviews were conducted at a variety of venues: nine participants were interviewed in their home, five were interviewed in their workplace, 18 were interviewed at ECU, and one participant was interviewed at a city park. Twelve participants were interviewed by telephone. Interviews ranged in length from 17 minutes to one hour (with an average of around 35 minutes) and were audio recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder. Telephone interviews were generally of a shorter duration than face to face interviews.

Apart from the interview held in the park, all face to face interviews were conducted in quiet, comfortable environments with no other people present other than the participant and me. A few of the participants did have dogs present. Interviews conducted over the telephone took place from an office at ECU or from my home office. These were done at a time when no one else was present in the home. Telephone contact was made from me to the research participant.

On making contact with the participant (either face to face or by phone), I engaged in establishing rapport with the participant through light conversation. " 'Rapport' is the term given to that comfortable, cooperative relationship between two people in which there are maintained both feelings of satisfaction and an empathetic understanding of each other's position" (Keats, 2000, p. 23). Establishing rapport is an important aspect of interviewing as it helps the participant to relax and feel comfortable in speaking with the interviewer (Keats, 2000). Establishing rapport was easier in face to face interviews. For example, one participant had a painting that was clearly in progress, on an easel in the living room. Positive comments were made about it and I talked with the participant a little about the work. Establishing rapport over the telephone was a little more difficult as some participants were on a tight schedule (especially those who were at their workplace); nevertheless an attempt to establish rapport was still made.

Once initial introductions and conversation were completed each participant was given a verbal explanation of the study and his or her involvement in order to establish informed consent. They were asked if they had received and read the written

information sheet. If they had not or had misplaced it, they were given another sheet. It was explained to participants that they did not have to participate if they did not want to; that they had the right to stop the interview at any time; that they may choose not to answer any question that they did not want to answer; and that even after participating they still had the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Participants were also made aware that interviews would be audio taped and that their confidentiality was assured. Following the explanation of informed consent issues, participants were asked if they still wished to participate, all agreed to participate and were given a consent form to sign (see Appendix H).

Consent forms for phone interview participants were sent out by mail with a reply paid envelope for their return. Prior to phone interviews verbal consent was also elicited and recorded before the interview began (just in case consent forms were not returned or lost in the post). Only one phone interview consent form was not returned. However, the interview data were included, as I had recorded verbal consent to the study and no indication came from the participant after the interview requesting withdrawal.

During the interview, participants were provided with an opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions about their experience of dog relinquishment. At the conclusion of the interview the participants were thanked for their participation and were given an opportunity to ask questions about the research and about any concerns they might have had. Although some interviewees became quite emotional, by the end of the interview they had calmed and appeared well composed. All participants expressed satisfaction with the interview and some expressed an interest in the results. A one page summary of the findings was sent out by mail or email to those individuals who had requested it.

Following the interview some participants expressed surprise at the emotion they had experienced during the interview (e.g., they did not think that they would become upset when talking about the dog); some asked the reasoning behind the choice of dog relinquishment as a topic of study; some participants raised other issues surrounding relinquishment (e.g., how some women in domestic violence situations will not leave because they cannot take their animal with them to the refuge shelters); others told of how they or their partners had not originally been fond of dogs, but after living with one had experienced an attitude change, and some talked of their concerns about animal abuse.

Data

The main data in the current study were derived from transcripts of audio taped interviews. Data collection continued until data saturation was evident. Data saturation occurs "when a researcher has explored each/category/theme in some depth, identifying its various properties and dimensions under different conditions" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 148).

In addition to the interview data, other forms of data were also collected, in order to gain a wider appreciation of the issue of dog relinquishment. This collecting of secondary data is encouraged in GTM (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, as described in Chapter 1, the Saturday edition of "The West Australian" newspaper was collected over a twelve month period (Jan 2009-Dec 2009), in order to gauge some idea of how many dogs were being relinquished through the newspaper in the pets section. As well as providing information on numbers of dogs being relinquished, information on reasons for relinquishment was also gleaned from some advertisements. Articles and letters to the editor concerned with relinquishment were also collected from the local community paper and the 'West Australian'.

While recruiting participants, I was added to an email distribution list for some dog rescue groups and regularly received emails about dogs that were in need of rehoming. I was also introduced, by a participant, to an online forum for dog rescue based in WA. Along with my own personal experience of relinquishment, these other data helped to provide me with an understanding of the participants' perspective, which is a necessary part of a research process underpinned by symbolic interactionism.

Participant Data Not Included in the Analysis

The data of two participants were not included in analysis. These participants were also not included in the participant count. The first of these participants had initially accompanied another participant to the interview (they were work mates). Once in the office he had also agreed to participate. After the consent form was signed he was called away by his employer, as he had to pick up a dog. The second participant whose interview data were not included in the analysis was excluded from the study, as her experience did not fit the criteria specified. Even though the participant had indicated that her experience fitted the criteria, it became apparent during the interview that it did not, as she had had her dog killed due to illness. On discovering this, the interview was allowed to continue, as I did not feel comfortable in just ending the interview abruptly as the participant appeared keen to relate her experience and was quite emotional. Although this interview data were not used in the analysis they

provided a good means of theoretical comparison with regards to the difference between losing a dog through death and losing a dog through relinquishment.

Theoretical comparisons are a good way of sensitising the researcher to an aspect of the analysis that seems unclear (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, in the current study I was puzzled as to why some participants were not expressing much emotion in terms of the loss of the dog, even though they appeared to care for their dog. It was initially thought that this may have been due to a lack of in-depth information being elicited. However, after interviewing the participant who had lost her dog through death rather than relinquishment, it became apparent that the loss of the dog, although still an aspect of the experience, was not the main issue for participants who had experienced relinquishment. Even though the participant‘s dog had died 5 years previously, she appeared to be still grieving the loss of the dog, whereas relinquishment participants appeared to be dealing with the impact of the decision and act of relinquishment, with the loss of the dog being a secondary factor.

Data Analysis

Interview data were initially managed with the assistance of the NVivo 7 (QSR) software package. This software allows the researcher to code, memo, construct models, search among the data and extract information. Features of the program utilised were coding, memoing, journaling and retrieving. Diagramming was carried out via Microsoft Visio and Microsoft Word. Computer software packages specifically designed for qualitative data analysis are becoming more widely used and can provide a lot of assistance during the analysis but they are still only tools and the conceptual and theoretical analysis still falls on the researcher (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Gibbs, 2002).

I transcribed audio interview verbatim and analysed as soon as possible after each interview. While every effort was made to begin analysis of interview data after each interview, as stipulated in GTM (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this proved impossible at times when multiple interviews were conducted on the same day. Prior to analysis each interview transcript was carefully read through in order to get an overall feel for the data, this was augmented by listening to the audio file whilst transcribing the interview. Coding of data then began and followed the Straussian version of GTM as described previously in this chapter. Interview transcripts were explored line by line, while asking questions of the data such as ‘what is this?’ and ‘what does this represent? This assisted with opening up the data and identifying concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Segments

of data relating to the participant's experience were highlighted with a mouse click and were then coded (i.e., assigned a label based on the researchers interpretation of the interviewees words) as free nodes.

NVIVO uses the term nodes rather than concepts. Free nodes are concepts that have not been grouped into categories and represent the initial stage of open coding. For example, the following excerpt of data was coded as 'best interests of the dog':

> *But my reasons, my reasoning and people said "I couldn't have done it, how could you do it?" And I said "because I had to do what was best for the dog" [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*.

Some segments of data were coded with more than one free node. For example, the previous excerpt of data was also coded as 'reactions of others'. Open coding resulted in 245 codes.

Concepts were further broken down into properties and then dimensions. Properties are "characteristics that describe and define concepts", while dimensions are "variations within properties that give specificity and range to concepts" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). For example, the concept 'sense of judgement' which was grouped under the category 'fear of losing face', had properties of 'judging self', 'judgement from family', 'judgement from professionals', 'judgement from friends' , with dimensions of 'positive-negative'.

As the analysis progressed free nodes that appeared related to one another were grouped together and designated as tree nodes. A tree node in NVIVO is equivalent to a category. A category is a "higher-level concept under which analysts group lower-level concepts according to shared properties" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). For example, the concept 'best interests of the dog' was grouped with similar concepts and placed under a sub category of rationalising/justifying, as they all related to how participants rationalised/justified their decision. The sub category of rationalising/justifying was then placed under the category of 'saving face' with other sub categories that all related to self enhancement.

This identification of relationships between categories was further developed thorough axial coding using Strauss and Corbin's paradigm (1990). For example, the category identified as a 'crisis of conscience' was explored in relation to what caused it; what was its context, what factors influenced participants' experience of a crisis of conscience; what did participants do to deal with it and what were the consequences for the participants of the way in which they dealt with it.

Throughout the analysis process the constant comparison method was utilised and theoretical sensitivity was enhanced by reflecting on my own experience of relinquishment, asking questions of the data, the flip flop technique and waving the red flag as described earlier in this chapter. The coding process was supplemented by the writing of memos to keep track of thoughts and decision-making, and the construction of diagrams to aid with theory integration.

Integration of Theory

"Concepts alone do not make a theory" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 103), they are akin to the spokes of an umbrella without its covering. In order for the umbrella to function effectively the spokes must be covered. That is, each category or concept should be complete in terms of their properties and dimensions and related to other categories or concepts in order to become an integrated theory.

Theory integration began by identifying the core category. In a grounded theory study the core category symbolises the overarching theme to emerge from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All other categories identified in the data are able to be subsumed under this one category and together they form the framework of a theory that explains the gist of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This process involved rereading some interview transcripts, discussions with supervisors, the construction of numerous diagrams, sorting through memos, further memo writing, moving some concepts and categories around, renaming of some concepts and categories and writing up storylines. Four major categories emerged from the data that informed the storyline of the dog relinquishment experience, namely, (1) 'a change in circumstance: the threatened self, (2) 'between a rock and a hard place: the disturbed self', (3) 'softening the blow: protecting self', and (4) 'living with the decision: restoring self (an uneasy peace).

Identifying the core category for the participants was a gradual process in which several avenues were pursued. No one category was able to account for participants' behaviour across the whole experience. Initially the data seemed to point to participants reducing harm to themselves and others. This then progressed to a focus on conflict, dealing with psychosocial and moral conflict. It then moved to protecting themselves from psychological pain. Finally the focus moved to the self and how participants tried to maintain their self integrity in the face of the dog relinquishment experience which disturbed their sense of self. This resulted in a core category of 'protective-restoring'

which explains how the participants continually managed their main issue or concern which was identified as a disturbed self integrity.

Once the core category had been decided upon, selective coding began in which only categories that were related to the core category were retained. In order to attain theoretical saturation categories were fully developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. This involved, in some instances, going back to the data and some further data collection. In addition Strauss and Corbin's paradigm (1990) was used to develop the theory by identifying what conditions led to participants 'protective-restoring'; what strategies participants used in "protective-restoring'; what other factors served to impede or enhance the strategies used; and what were the outcome or consequences for participants and others of the use of the strategies.

Establishing Rigour

Establishing rigour in a research study is an important part of the research process as it adds credence to the findings (Koch, 2006, Lincoln & Guba, 1985); but what constitutes rigour? After an unsuccessful search for a definition of what is meant by rigour in research Davies and Dodd, (2002) proposed that:

> rigor encompasses detachment, objectivity, replication, reliability, validity, exactitude, measurability, containment, standardization, and rule. It becomes clear that inherent to the conception of rigor is a quantitative bias. Furthermore, rigor is the authoritative evaluation of good research and the unspoken standard by which all research is measured (p. 280).

Establishing rigour according to quantitative criteria, however, becomes problematic for qualitative research whose nature goes against many of the criteria (Davies & Dodd, 2002). While rigour in the quantitative sense may not be achievable in qualitative research, some degree of rigour is necessary in order to demonstrate the quality of the research.

Some researchers have proposed that qualitative research should be evaluated in the same way as quantitative, but not by the same criteria (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Fossey et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is, both should be evaluated against their specified research paradigm and aims, but using criteria that is appropriate to the methodology employed (Fossey et al., 2002). For example, Lincoln and Guba, (1985, p. 328) proposed that rather than validity and reliability qualitative studies should be evaluated in terms of their 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability' to establish the 'trustworthiness' of the research.

Weed (2009), disagrees with trying to mimic the quantitative criteria when evaluating GTM, suggesting that "quality criteria should be those intended for grounded

theory, namely, fit, work, relevance and modifiability, or similar appropriate concepts derived from these criteria. They should not be variants of the concepts of "validity" or "reliability" aped from other research approaches" (p. 509). However, this approach appears only to evaluate the interpretive rigour (i.e., how well the researcher has interpreted the data) and not the research process. While Weed (2009) focuses on interpretive rigour, Fossey et al. (2002) emphasise methodological and interpretive rigour. They state that "the principles of good practice in the conduct of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of the interpretation of information gathered are both essential to judgements about its quality" (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 731).

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the emergent theory the following strategies were utilised in the current study to establish methodological and interpretive rigour. Methodological rigour was addressed through a detailed description of the research process and procedures provided earlier in this chapter, which includes a description of sampling criteria and methods; recruitment methods; participant characteristics; materials utilised, methods of data collection and the process of analysis. Providing a detailed description of the research process and procedures gives research consumers the opportunity to determine whether or not similar findings could be had in similar circumstances (Creswell, 2007).

In addition an audit trail was kept, which consists of audio recordings; interview transcripts; newspaper cuttings; reflexive journal of my thoughts and experiences during data collection and analysis; memos outlining and describing decision making related to coding, categorizing and theory development; and diagrams depicting theory development. An audit trail provides evidence of the research journey and analytical processes and is an important part of establishing rigour (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006, Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2001).

Interpretive rigour was addressed through the provision of sufficient excerpts of participants' verbatim data within the thesis, to enable research consumers to judge the fit of the participants' voices to the interpreted concepts and categories that went into the theory's development. In addition, triangulation of methods was employed, where possible, to aid in the establishment of interpretative rigour (Patton, 1999). This included gaining multiple perspectives of the relinquishment experience (i.e., three groups of participants) and sourcing other data such as newspaper articles, electronic discussion boards, animal welfare/rescue websites, as well as the psychological and HAI literature. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state "generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are

systematically worked out in relation to the data in the course of the research.....By contrast the *source* of certain ideas, or even "models", can come from sources other than the data" (p. 6). A search for negative cases was also conducted. Negative cases are ones that do not seem to fit in with the others; providing an explanation for them strengthens the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). No negative cases were identified in the current study.

Finally, the emergent theory was compared with participants' data to ensure that it was a fair representation of the data. In addition the theory was presented to three participants (individually) to ensure that it fitted with their perception of their experience (all agreed it did). One participant provided feedback, which resulted in a minor modification to the model presented in Chapter 4. Extensive member checking was not deemed necessary as researchers (e.g., Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006) have suggested that member checking is not needed when utilising GTM, as the simultaneous collection and analysis of data serves to verify the researcher's interpretation.

Use of Literature

The use of literature in GTM is a contentious subject. Both Glaser and Strauss caution against an in-depth review of the literature before beginning the study, as this can stifle emergence of the theory from the data, due to researcher's preconceived notions of concepts (Glaser, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The use of the literature is advocated later in the study as the theory emerges, for means of comparison between extant theories and the emerging theory. However, this stance on the early use of the literature is not compatible with the experience of a PhD student in an academic institution, who has to submit a proposal that must include a literature review of the area under study in order to demonstrate a rationale for conducting the study. Chenitz (1986) states "the question is not if the literature is reviewed or not, since it is essential to review literature to write a proposal, but how and for what purposes the review is done" (p. 44). Rather than just a one off review prior to beginning the study, reviewing the literature in a grounded theory study is an ongoing process that is guided by the emerging theory (Chenitz, 1986). Chenitz advocates the following use for a literature review: "(1) to use literature as a source of data to verify and elaborate categories; (2) to elaborate on the structural conditions; (3) to learn more about the area's structural conditions...; and (4) to discover and learn about related subjects as they arise..." (Chenitz, 1986, p. 45).

As there is a dearth of literature surrounding the area of dog relinquishment the initial literature review addressed the topic of dog relinquishment and focussed on human animal interaction in terms of attachment and loss of the relationship. As the analysis progressed, it became apparent that loss of the relationship was not the major concern of the participants, but rather how the relinquishment impacted on their notions of self. As different concepts emerged literature was accessed as suggested by Chenitz (1986) to assist with verification of categories. The literature was also accessed at the end of analysis in order to compare and contrast the emergent grounded theory with extant theories.

Section Summary

In summary, this section has provided a detailed account of the research process undertaken to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment. The current study utilised Straussian GTM to generate a grounded theory of the human experience of dog relinquishment. Forty five participants recruited via purposive, snowball or theoretical sampling, took part in semi-structured interviews face to face or by telephone. Interview data were collected over a two year period and were audio recorded as well as transcribed verbatim. Other non-interview data were also collected to gain a wider perspective on the issue of dog relinquishment. Interview data were analysed in accord with Straussian (GTM). Through utilisation of the constant comparative method, coding, memoing, diagramming, theoretical sampling and theoretical integration a theory grounded in the data of the participants emerged that describes and explains the human experience of dog relinquishment (see Chapter 4 for model and overview of theory).

Rigour of the research process and quality of the findings were established using several strategies that addressed methodological and interpretive rigour. These included a detailed description of the research process, the keeping of an audit trail; inclusion of excerpts of participant's data; triangulation of data; a search for negative cases; comparison of theory to raw data and presentation to three participants. Finally the contentious issue of the place and use of literature in GTM was discussed. As indicated, rather than a comprehensive literature review prior to a study as in quantitative methods, a preliminary literature review was conducted at the proposal stage of the current study, which was later supplemented by comprehensive review as the analysis progressed.

Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed account of the research process undertaken in the current study in order that consumers can better assess the

trustworthiness and credibility of the reported findings. A post positivist paradigm consisting of a critical realist ontology, a modified objectivist epistemology, a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective and a GTM was identified as the guiding framework for the current study. Issues of reflexivity were discussed and my own personal experience of dog relinquishment was described.

A qualitative design was employed utilising Straussian GTM, a variant of the original GTM which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). GTM is a well developed and widely used methodology, which can be used to investigate underexplored issues and areas as well as develop theory. The dog relinquishment experiences of 45 participants, consisting of relinquishers, adults that had experienced relinquishment in childhood and animal welfare workers in Perth, WA were elicited via semi structured in-depth interviews. The interview data were analysed in accord with Straussian GTM through an iterative process of coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, memoing and theoretical integration. The analysis process resulted in the generation of the grounded theory 'protective-restoring' to maintain the integrity of self, in the face of a self disturbing experience, which describes and explains the psychosocial impact of dog relinquishment on the participants in the current study and the psychosocial process they undertook to deal with its impact. The trustworthiness and credibility of the generated theory was addressed through a description of methods utilised to establish methodological and interpretive rigour. Having described in detail the research process of the current study, the next chapter presents the grounded theory that was generated from analysis of participants' data.

- Chapter 4 -

A Grounded Theory of the Human Experience of Dog Relinquishment

Chapter Overview

Having presented a detailed description of the methodology utilised in the current study in the previous chapter, this chapter presents an overview of the substantive grounded theory that was generated from an interpretive analysis of the participants' data. A substantive theory is one that "evolves from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context. A formal theory, on the other hand, emerges from a study of a phenomenon examined under many different types of situations" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 174). The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, an overview and model of the substantive grounded theory is presented. A more detailed description and explanation of the components of the theory are presented in Chapters 5 to 7. In the second section, the new theory is related to existing theory of self integrity and its maintenance. The theory has been presented at this stage in the thesis, rather than after the findings, so that the reader can approach the detailed description and explanation of the individual components, with the overall theoretical framework in mind.

'Protective-Restoring' to Maintain Self Integrity, in the Face of a Self Disturbing Experience

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of the current study was to generate a substantive theory, grounded in the data of relinquishers, adults who had experienced relinquishment in childhood and animal welfare worker participants, which would describe and explain the human experience of dog relinquishment. Research questions that guided exploration of the issue and generation of the theory included "What is the human experience of dog relinquishment?" "What factors influence the human experience of dog relinquishment?" and "How do relinquishers, those who have experienced relinquishment in childhood and animal welfare workers deal with the dog relinquishment experience?"

Analysis, in accord with Straussian GTM, of the interview data from a Western Australian sample of 45 participants who had experienced dog relinquishment in their personal or professional life, resulted in the generation of the substantive grounded theory 'protective-restoring' to maintain self integrity, in the face of a self disturbing experience. An overview of the theory, including a diagrammatic model, is presented next.

Psychosocial Problem

A disturbed self integrity was identified as the main issue of concern for participants in the current study. Self integrity has been described as "a phenomenal experience of the self (self conceptions and images) as adaptively and morally adequate - that is, as competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes...." (Steele, 1999, p. 373). A disturbed self integrity in the context of the dog relinquishment experience was described and explained as a sense of cognitive and emotional unease (i.e., psychological unease). Three types of psychological unease were identified, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief. Participants experienced psychological unease when their own thoughts and/or actions, or others' actions threatened their sense of the person they believed themselves to be; when they perceived the multiple stressors associated with the relinquishment experience as stressful and when they lost a loved one (i.e., the dog). Although all participants experienced a sense of psychological unease to some degree, the type, intensity, frequency and duration of the unease varied according to individual and social factors, as well as the strategies they employed to alleviate it.

Conditions Influencing the Psychosocial Problem

Two types of conditions influenced the extent to which participants self integrity was disturbed. These conditions were identified as causal and intervening. Causal conditions (i.e., the conditions that contributed to participants self integrity being disturbed) were identified as threats to self integrity and were categorised as inconsistencies between self image and behaviour; between self image and others behaviour; between self image and social image; failures to live up to own and/or others standards; and stressors associated with the culture of relinquishment and the loss of the dog. To aid in the description and explanation of how participants experienced a disturbed self integrity, threats were conceptualised as the 'culture of relinquishment', a 'crisis of conscience', a 'fear of losing face', 'losing faith' and 'losing Rex'. Although all participants experienced a disturbed self integrity, not all participants experienced each threat. For example, participants who were not attached to their dogs did not report a grief response and participants who did not find the experience stressful did not report experiencing psychological stress. The extent to which participants' self integrity was disturbed, varied according to intervening conditions described and explained in Chapter 6.

Thirteen individual and social factors were identified as intervening conditions, namely, worldview; attachment; role; relinquishment history; coping method; cultural

attitudes to dogs; support; ritual; new knowledge; passage of time; time pressures; concurrent losses; and resources. These intervening conditions positively or negatively influenced the type, intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease. For example, a person whose worldview (intervening condition) of dogs was that they were 'just dogs' would experience little psychological unease when relinquishing a dog compared with someone who cared about dogs. Someone with this worldview might only experience psychological unease in relation to how they were perceived by others, given that relinquishment and relinquishers are viewed in a negative light.

Intervening conditions also had a positive or negative influence on the strategies (described and explained in Chapter 7) employed by participants to alleviate their psychological unease. For example, a threat to self integrity arising from a fear of losing face could be counteracted by employing the strategy of rationalising/justifying behaviour to others. This strategy is more likely to be effective in saving face when others are supportive (intervening condition of 'support'), as opposed to non supportive of the relinquisher and their actions.

The Psychosocial Process of Protective-Restoring

The psychological unease that participants experienced motivated them to seek ways in which they could alleviate it. This involved attempting to protect themselves from potential or actual threats to self integrity and restoring their self integrity to an undisturbed state. In order to do this participants engaged in a four phase continuous protective-restoring process that involved (1) recognising the threat to self integrity (via the presence of psychological unease), (2) identifying the threat as to its type (i.e., cognitive dissonance, psychological stress, grief), (3) assessing the threat as to what type of action was needed, and (4) attempting to counteract the threat (via the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies specific to the needs of the participants). The 'protective-restoring' process was identified in all stages of the relinquishment experience, (i.e., pre-relinquishment, relinquishment and post relinquishment).

Consequences

While strategies employed by participants were aimed at defending and restoring self integrity, this was not always the outcome achieved. Some strategies employed by participants were maladaptive and resulted in increased psychological unease for the participant and others. For example, the strategy of 'keeping them in the dark', used by some parent relinquisher participants to counteract the threat arising from parental role conflict and/or to reduce the impact of the relinquishment on the children, contributed to the children's sense of powerlessness and in combination with the relinquishment, in

some cases damaged relationships between child and parent. Thus, depending on intervening conditions and effectiveness of strategies employed, the protective-restoring process engaged in by the participants in the current study could result in a restored self integrity (i.e., peace of mind) or a continued sense of unease at some level.

The emergent theory described here adheres to the criteria of 'fit, relevance, work and modifiability' that constitutes a quality theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theory *fits* the area under study as categories were derived from the data; the theory *works* as it explains and predicts the human experience of dog relinquishment; the theory has *relevance* as it focuses on the main issue of participants and the process involved in its resolution; and the theory is *modifiable* as it may change with the emergence of new data (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003).

A model of the grounded theory is depicted in Figure 2. The model portrays the multidimensional nature of the dog relinquishment experience, as well as the interrelatedness of the different components. Arrows depict the direction of the relationships between components, as well as the type of influence each has on the other. The conditions, psychosocial problem and strategies are shown encompassed by arrows that indicate continuous motion. This illustrates the continuous nature of the protective-restoring process, which continues as long as threats to self integrity are present. Encompassing the interrelated components inside the arrows reflects the importance of the process in the management of the dog relinquishment experience. Finally the consequences of the protective-restoring process are depicted as a continuum reflecting the notion that the status of participants self integrity varies according to their place in the process and the influence of all other components.

Section Summary

In summary, an overview and diagrammatic representation of the theory of 'protective-restoring' to maintain self integrity, in the face of a self disturbing experience, was presented. This theory was generated from the interview data of 45 participants who had either personal or professional experience of dog relinquishment. The theory proposes that those involved in dog relinquishment experience threats and disturbances to their sense of self, which results in one or more of three types of psychological unease, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress, and grief.

Figure 2. Protective-Restoring to maintain self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience: A grounded theory of the human experience of dog relinquishment.

The type, level, frequency and duration of the psychological unease will vary according to individual and social factors, as well as the strategies utilised to manage it. In order to deal with this uncomfortable state, those involved in dog relinquishment engage in a process of 'protective-restoring' aimed at protecting their sense of self from further threat and restoring their sense of self to an undisturbed state. The success or failure of the protective-restoring process depends on the efficacy of the strategies employed, as well as individual and social factors. The emergent theory adheres to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) criteria of a quality theory. Having presented an overview of the theory that was generated in the current study the next section relates it to existing theory to further enhance its trustworthiness and credibility.

'Protective-Restoring' and Existing Theory

Along with linking theory to data (see Chapters 5 to7), another way of demonstrating the trustworthiness and credibility of a generated theory is through comparison with existing theory (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The substantive theory of 'protective-restoring' describes how participants strove to maintain their self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience. Why is self integrity so important that participants in the current study went to the lengths they did in order to maintain it? To address this question the theory of 'protective-restoring' is compared to existing theory on self integrity.

The Concept of Self

Interest in the self is not a recent phenomenon, with discussions of self found in the ancient philosophies of the early Greeks and Romans (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999; Sorabji, 1999) and earlier eastern Chinese and Indian philosophies (Leary & Tangney, 2005). There were various views of the self in ancient times, for example, some thought of it as the physical body or person, others thought of it as being part of the soul (Sorabji, 1999).

The scientific study of the self is thought to have followed from 'The consciousness of self' a chapter from William James'[29] 1890 publication 'the principles of psychology' (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997; Leary & Tangney, 2005). James proposed that the self comprised two parts the 'I' (the knower- subjective self) and the 'me' (the known-objective self). James proposed that the 'I' was a "stream of thought" where "the thoughts themselves are the thinkers" and the 'me' was made up of the material, social and spiritual self (James, 1999, p. 77). The divided self and an emphasis on a

[29] See Gale (1999) and Johnson and Henley (1990) for discussions of William James's view of the self.

social aspect to the self was a departure from the contemporary thinking of the time (Leary, 1990).

Since James' publication psychology has witnessed a significant increase in research of the self, especially towards the latter half of the 20th century, much of which has focused on the objective self (Tesser, 2000a). While there has been, and still continues to be, great interest in the self, after more than a century and a vast amount of research there is still no universal definition of self (Baumeister, 1998; Leary, 2004; Leary & Tangney, 2005; Olsen, 1999). Olsen (1999) sums up the predicament for those looking for a singular, universal definition of self, "depending on who you believe, selves may be concrete or abstract, material or immaterial, permanent or ephemeral, naturally occurring or human constructions, essentially subjective or publicly observable, the same or not the same things as people" (p. 49).

Given the diverse range of interpretations of self across disciplines and within psychology, it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to present an exhaustive account of the 'self' debate. Therefore, in keeping with symbolic interactionism, which underpins the methodology used in the current study, the social psychological interpretation of self, which emphasises the interplay between the individual and others, is presented. Those interested in the wider debate of self are referred to the following references (see Baumeister, 1998; Hoyle, et al., 1999; James, 1890/1999; Leary & Tangney, 2005; Remas & Sihvola, 2008).

What is the Self?

Although researchers differ on an ultimate definition of self there is general consensus that the self is not a physical entity, but a multidimensional cognitive and social construct; compiled of knowledge about the person, gathered and interpreted through their own experiences of, and interactions with, others and their environment (Baumeister, 1998). It has three main aspects common to all people: reflexive consciousness, which allows a person to be aware of their own thoughts and feelings; interpersonal being, which relates to social interaction with others; and executive function, which allows people to execute control through decision-making, taking action and making choices (Baumeister, 1998). It is through the experience of these aspects that people gain an understanding of self. While these aspects of the self are common to all people, the experience of self is influenced by a person's culture (Baumeister, 1998).

As proposed by James (1890/1999), and further promoted through the symbolic interactionist perspective, a major influence in the construction of self is social

interaction. "Self is not an object that has inherent meaning, but is a construct that is given meaning through an actor's choices, mediated by the relationships, situations, and cultures in which she or he is embedded" (Fine, 1993, p. 78). Early interactionists, such as Cooley and Mead, proposed that people gain a sense of self from how others respond to them, that is, they see themselves as others see them, research has since found only partial support for this view (Rosenberg, 1981; Shrauger & Schoenemen, 1979). It is now thought that "it is people's perceptions of how they are viewed, not how they are actually viewed by others, that have the strongest impact on peoples' self-concept" (Tice & Wallace, 2005, p. 103).

Constructing Self

The construction of self is thought to begin in infancy, when a child first comes to the realisation that they are a separate person and not part of their primary caregiver, a process termed separation/individuation (Mahler, Fine, & Bergman, 1975). The self is constructed from information gathered through interpretations and experience of interactions with caregivers, others and the environment (Baumeister, 1998; Bowlby, 1981; Hoyle et al., 1999; Jacobs, Bleeker, & Constantino, 2003; Rosenberg, 1981). For example, a child who has a parent that is responsive to his or her needs in a caring and affectionate manner interprets these interactions as meaning that his or her parent loves and cares about him or her. This results in the child constructing a self image that comprises positive thoughts and feelings about himself or herself as a person (Harter, 2003; Jacobs et al., 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). The sense of self is further developed through play, wherein the child is able to take the role of others (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). As the child grows, cognitive maturation, life experience and interactions with others serves to shape and modify the self (Demo, 1992; Harter, 2003).

Two important dimensions of the self are the self concept and self esteem. The self concept is "a person's perceptions of him- or herself" (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982, p. 3). It is the sum of knowledge that a person holds about himself or herself (e.g., values, beliefs, morals, likes, dislikes etc.). Self esteem is an evaluation of the self (Tesser, 2000b) whereby a person measures their own competency and worth (Cast & Burke, 2002; Crocker & Park, 2005). It is defined as "a global evaluation reflecting our view of our accomplishments and capabilities, our values, our bodies, others' responses to us, and even, on occasion, our possessions" (Tesser, 2000b, p. 213). Self esteem can refer to evaluation of specific domains such as 'I am good at painting' or to an overall evaluation of self worth such as 'I am a good person' (Harter, 1999). From these dimensions a person gains an overall sense of self.

Importance of Maintaining the Integrity of Self

Maintaining a sense that one is a good, moral person, worthy of love and respect, and able to effect some control over important aspects of their life is crucial to psychological health and wellbeing (Aronson, 1968; Baumeister, 1998; Steele, 1999). Self theorists propose that people are motivated to self enhance (i.e., feel good about themselves); seek consistency (i.e., seek information and behave in ways that supports their self perception); self assess (i.e., seek accurate information about themself); and self improve (i.e., seek to make themselves a better person) as a means of maintaining self integrity (Baumeister, 1998; Hoyle et al., 1999; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). As well as being motivated to maintain a positive intrapersonal image of self, people are also motivated to maintain a positive interpersonal image of self (i.e., social image). This stems from a "need to belong" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499) and a fear of rejection and social exclusion (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Maintaining a positive interpersonal image of the self involves impression management by which a person tries to "control the impression others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34).

In the current study it was evident from participants' reports and the types of strategies that they used to protect and restore their self integrity, that prior to the relinquishment experience they considered themselves good people, who generally liked dogs (although differences in emotional closeness was evident) and did not like relinquishment. Prior to the change in circumstances, which prompted the decision to relinquish; participants' sense of self (i.e., self concept and self esteem) was that they were good caring people/parents, worthy of love and respect. Involvement in the dog relinquishment experience, however, resulted in their sense of self being challenged on an intra and interpersonal level, creating a psychologically unsettling state. The dog relinquishment experience was found to infringe on many of the criteria relevant to self integrity. The psychological, social and moral conflicts that arose from the experience resulted in some if not all of the participants perceiving social and moral inadequacy, a lack of control over outcomes, and the perception or actuality of no freedom of choice.

Findings of the current study are also consistent with the view that self integrity is an important factor in psychological wellbeing and that people are motivated to maintain it, as all participants engaged in efforts to restore self integrity. The psychological, social and moral conflicts that disturbed the self integrity of participants resulted in them engaging in efforts to not only restore their self integrity, but also protect themselves from further threats. Through this protective-restoring process

participants sought to maintain their pre-relinquishment positive self and social image. They sought to protect their self image via self enhancement (e.g., rationalising and justifying their behaviour) and they sought to protect their social (self) image via impression management, suggesting that they feared social exclusion and the rejection of others. This entailed talking up their positive attributes (e.g., the lengths they went to care for a dog) and playing down their negative attributes (e.g., the strategy of differentiating self from others in which they suggested others' behaviour was worse than theirs).

Threats to Self Integrity

The integrity of the self can be threatened when information arises and/or events occur that contradict a person's self concept and/or the self constructed image that they portray to others (Aronson, 1968; Baumeister, 1998; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Spencer, et al., 2001; Steele, 1999). For example, self integrity can be threatened in the following ways: when there are inconsistencies between a person's self concept and their cognitions and behaviours, such as believing oneself to be a moral person and then acting in an immoral way (Aronson, 1968; Higgins, 1987; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1999) ; when other people's behaviour results in inconsistencies between the self and social image, such as a non-racist being accused of racism and/or being shown to be a racist (Steele, 1999); when people fail to live up to their own or others standards (Aronson, 1968; Higgins, 1987; Sherman & Cohen, 2006) and when people experience psychological stressors such as losing a loved one (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). All of which can result in individuals questioning their sense of who they are (self concept) and their sense of worth (self-esteem).

In the current study multiple threats to self integrity including inconsistencies, failures and stressors, were experienced simultaneously by participants, arising from their own and others cognitions and behaviour. The finding that participants were exposed to multiple threats to self integrity as a result of the dog relinquishment experience suggests that real life experience of self integrity threats is much more complex than laboratory based studies[30] (which focus on a single threat to self integrity) suggest. Multiple threats add to the difficulty of trying to maintain self integrity for those experiencing dog relinquishment. For example, a person who maintains a connection to their dog through the keeping and displaying of memorabilia reduces the

[30] For examples of laboratory based studies see Sherman and Cohen (2006), as well as Thibodeu and Aronson (1992).

threat from the loss of the dog, but may increase the threat from being reminded about their or others actions.

Implications of a Threatened Self Integrity

Threats to self integrity can have a psychological and physiological impact and are not always negative; some may have an adaptive function and enhance physical and psychological wellbeing (Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2009). For instance, a behaviour change from a person accused of racism is likely to promote social inclusion and acceptance, fulfilling the need to belong. Generally, however, they have a negative influence resulting in a detrimental impact on psychological and physical wellbeing. For instance, psychological stressors have been identified as one group of stressors that can alter the levels (up or down) of many hormones that regulate the human body (Biondi & Picardi, 1999; Delahunt & Mellsop, 1987). While short term rises or falls in hormone levels may be adaptive, such as the increase in adrenalin levels when a person feels physically threatened which provides them with extra energy to either run away or to stay and fight (Delahunt & Mellsop, 1987), sustained levels of hormones above their normal levels can be detrimental to health (Marieb & Hoehn, 2007). For example, excessive amounts of glucocorticoids such as cortisol, a hormone that is responsible amongst other things for regulation of blood glucose levels and blood pressure, can impair the immune system and the body's response to inflammation (Marieb & Hoehn, 2007). Psychological stress has also been associated with depression and anxiety, as well as behaviours such as overeating and substance use, which can all have a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing.

The dog relinquishment experience was characterised by cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief. Both cognitive dissonance and grief can result in psychological stress, making the dog relinquishment experience a major source of psychological stress. Although it cannot be accurately ascertained if the psychological stress experienced by the participants resulted in physiological symptoms (although as mentioned elsewhere in the findings one participant attributed her illness to the stress of working in animal welfare), it is likely that some participants were impacted physiologically, especially those who experienced psychological stress frequently or continuously and /or over a long period of time.

Restoring Self Integrity

When self integrity is threatened people are motivated to counteract the threat in order to maintain an image of themselves as good worthy people (Steele, 1999). Thus, they engage in cognitive and behavioural efforts to reduce or eliminate threats and to

restore self integrity (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1999). A threatened self integrity can be restored via direct methods, such as reducing the threat or by reducing the perception of it. Self integrity can also be restored via indirect methods that reaffirm the integrity of self in other ways (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1999). For self affirmation to be effective in restoring self integrity, however, the self-image being affirmed must be on at least an equal footing as the self-image being threatened (Steele, 1999). Therefore, a pacifist who went to war would be unlikely to affirm their self integrity by being more helpful around the home.

In the current study participants used direct and indirect methods, not only to restore self integrity as proposed by self theorists, but also to protect the self from potential threats that might occur. For example, having a dog killed guarded against the threat of worry over the health and wellbeing of the dog had it been rehomed. In directly targeting the threats, participants presented themselves or others in a good light, blaming others or circumstance; they either avoided thinking about the dog and/or the relinquishment or they purposively tried to maintain a connection to the dog; they looked for and focussed on positives of the relinquishment experience; and they managed their emotions, with some blocking psychologically painful aspects of the experience. Participants indirectly targeted the threats through attempts to make amends, and reducing the impact on others. Making amends by rescuing another animal or replacing a child's pet with another was seen by some as a way of balancing their perceived bad behaviour with a good one; thereby affirming a sense of self as a good person/parent.

Section Summary

In summary, the description and explanation of the human experience of dog relinquishment provided by the theory of protective-restoring is consistent with the literature on self integrity. Self theorists propose that once a person has constructed their sense of self they strive to protect it from anything that could call it into question (i.e., threats to self integrity). Threats to self integrity cause a person to question their sense of self resulting in a sense of psychological unease. This aversive state prompts people to engage in cognitive and behavioural efforts to restore their self integrity. Consistent with this view participants' senses of self were called into question through their involvement in dog relinquishment. Maintaining their self integrity was deemed to be an important motivator for participants as evidenced by the types and numbers of cognitive and behavioural strategies (see Chapter 7) that they employed in order to protect and restore their self integrity. This finding enhances the trustworthiness and

credibility of the substantive theory of 'protective-restoring' that was generated from participants' data in the current study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the substantive grounded theory that was generated from the data of participants in the current study. The theory proposes that dog relinquishment disturbs the self integrity of those involved. The disturbed self integrity (manifesting as one or more of three types of psychological unease, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief) is the result of a person's sense of self being challenged by psychological, social and moral conflicts that are characteristic of the dog relinquishment experience. The psychological unease resulting from the dog relinquishment experience varies according to individual and social factors, with some people being more negatively impacted than others. As a disturbed self integrity is psychologically unsettling, people are motivated to protect and restore their integrity of self. A process of protective-restoring was identified in participants' data that explained how they tried to restore their disturbed self integrity. The cognitive and behavioural strategies used during the protective-restoring process were not always effective and sometimes served to increase psychological unease.

Support for the trustworthiness and credibility of the emergent theory was demonstrated through its comparison with existing theory pertaining to self integrity. In the social psychological literature, the self is viewed as a multidimensional concept which is constructed by the individual and influenced by social interaction. Self theorists propose that people are motivated to maintain a positive self and social image. When this image is threatened they engage in strategies aimed at restoring their self integrity. The theory of 'protective-restoring' to maintain self integrity in the face of a self disturbing experience is consistent with the psychological literature. The self concept (i.e., self and social image) of participants in the current study was disturbed by threats to self integrity emanating from their experience of dog relinquishment, resulting in psychological unease. This unsettling state motivated the participants to employ cognitive and behavioural strategies to attempt to restore their positive sense of self. Having presented an overview of the emergent theory and related it to existing theory, the next chapter begins the detailed reporting of the findings from the current study that formed the theory's theoretical framework.

Interpretive Findings and Discussion

Aside from presenting the emergent theory (Creswell, 2007), there appears to be no set criteria as to how the findings of a grounded theory study should be presented. Corbin and Strauss (2008) offer the following guidelines:

> It all goes back to answering the questions, "What was this research all about? "What were the main issues and problems that these informants were grappling with? Then there should be sufficient conceptual detail and descriptive quotations to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of these (p. 281).

In light of Corbin and Strauss's comments the following chapters (i.e., 5 to 7) present the detailed findings of the analysis from the current study that contributed to the theoretical framework of the emergent theory ; specifically, Chapter 5 describes and discusses the psychosocial problem; Chapter 6 describes and discusses the conditions that contributed to the psychosocial problem and led to 'protective-restoring'; and Chapter 7 describes and discusses the psychosocial process that participants engaged in to manage their psychosocial problem. The findings are supported by examples of participants' data and related to relevant literature. All participant quotes are presented verbatim apart from the names of dogs, which have been replaced by Rex (male) or Rexie (female) in order to protect participants' identities. Quotes containing ellipses indicate that some sections have been omitted. This was done in cases where the quote was overly long, but care was taken to not alter the context of the participant's words. Finally all quotes end with a participant coded ID (e.g., [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]). The ID consists of an abbreviation for their role in the relinquishment experience and a letter of the alphabet for order. For example, Relinquisher number 1 would be recorded as [R-A], A being the 1st letter of the alphabet, participants who experienced relinquishment in childhood were coded as CR and animal welfare workers were coded as AWW. As well as protecting participants' identities, this coding allows the reader to see the demographics of each quoted participant in tables, thereby adding to the research consumers understanding and appreciation of the findings.

- Chapter 5 -

The Psychosocial Problem

Chapter Overview

The aim of this chapter is to describe and discuss the main issue for participants in the current study that emerged during analysis of the interview data. The chapter is divided into three sections. In section one, the core concern for participants in the current study is described and explained. This was identified as a disturbed self integrity and described as a sense of psychological unease. Section two elaborates on the sense of psychological unease and describes and explains it in terms of its type (i.e., cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief). To further support the finding that these types of psychological unease are characteristic of the dog relinquishment experience the types and their management are first described in accord with the psychological literature and then described and discussed in the context of the dog relinquishment experience. Finally, section three further elaborates on the psychological unease through a description of its intensity, frequency and duration. Interpreted findings are related to relevant literature and supported by excerpts of participants' discourse throughout the chapter.

Core Problem-Disturbed Self Integrity

As explained in Chapter 3, 'protective-restoring' was chosen as the core category, as it provided the overall theme explaining how participants in the current study resolved their main problem (i.e., a disturbed self integrity) resulting from their experience of dog relinquishment. In the context of the dog relinquishment experience, a disturbed self integrity was described as a sense of cognitive and emotional unease (hereafter referred to as psychological unease). The term 'unease' was used rather than 'distress' as not all participants can be said to have experienced distress over the relinquishment. For some participants the experience was more one of a sense of unease. For example, the following R participant while not troubled by relinquishing the dog herself, did report that her husband was a little bothered by the relinquishment, and coupled with negative reactions from others, resulted in a sense of unease in relation to her social image, rather than distress:

> *It actually didn't bother me at all....* [In reference to the impact on her husband the participant reported] *maybe a little bit, yeah maybe a little bit, but not greatly....* [In reference to the reactions of others the participant reported] *Yeah actually quite a few people were surprised that we would be prepared just to give the dog to somebody else. [R-G, 23 years since relinquishment]*

The psychological unease experienced by participants related to how participants thought and felt about themselves (intrapersonal), how they thought and felt about others and what they thought others thought and felt about them (interpersonal). Three questions epitomised the sense of unease for participants in each group: R participants (and AWW's who were involved in the killing of dogs, whether through making the decision or carrying out the killing) questioned "how could I do that?"

> *But it's still quite an important thing that we'd made this decision to have this dog and then I've went back on it then. You know sort of really difficult and I'm a responsible person, I would think that I wouldn't do that. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

CR participants questioned "how could they (parents) do that to me?"

> *And I think that they were the feelings that I had, "how could they do this to me?" [CR-C, aged 11 years at relinquishment, 50 years since relinquishment]*

While AWW participants questioned "how could they do that to dogs?"

> *I couldn't understand it. Why would you give up, why you give up on a dog? Not just give up a dog, but why would you give up on a dog? [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

All participants in the current study experienced some aspect of threat and disturbance to their self integrity, resulting in psychological unease. In the context of the dog relinquishment experience, psychological unease consisted of three types, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief. While three types were identified, the influence of individual and social factors, as well as strategies employed to manage the dog relinquishment experience, ensured that not all participants experienced all three. The finding that the dog relinquishment experience involved three types of psychological unease increases the potential for a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing for those involved.

Next, the experience, as well as the management of each type of psychological unease is described in accord with the psychological literature and then in the context of the dog relinquishment experience. The similarities identified between the two, adds to the trustworthiness and credibility of the current study's finding that a disturbed self integrity is characteristic of the dog relinquishment experience.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable psychological state that arises from inconsistencies between cognitions, which people are motivated to reduce in order to restore consistency (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT- Festinger,

1957) proposes that people experience cognitive dissonance when they hold two thoughts, beliefs and/or behaviours that are incompatible. For example, a medical doctor who is also a smoker is likely to experience dissonance over the incompatibility between smoking and the knowledge that smoking is damaging to his or her health. According to CDT, the greater the dissonance the stronger the motivation to reduce it and to restore consistency (Festinger, 1957).

While Festinger (1957) proposed that dissonance arose from inconsistencies between cognitions, Aronson (1968) revised CDT by arguing that dissonance was not a product of inconsistent cognitions per se, but was rather a product of thought and/or behaviours being incompatible with the self concept (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992). Aronson argued that people strive to maintain a sense of themselves as "(a) competent, (b) moral, and (c) able to predict their own behaviour" (Aronson, 1999, p. 111), thus when a person thinks or behaves in a way which is inconsistent with the way they think of themselves dissonance is aroused (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992).

Cognitive Dissonance in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Findings from the current study reported in Chapter 6, provide evidence that aspects of the dog relinquishment experience resulted in cognitive dissonance for those whose self concept was challenged. Dissonance was aroused from intrapersonal factors (i.e., in and of the person) and from interpersonal factors (i.e., in and of the person in relation to others). Intrapersonal dissonance was characterised by inconsistencies between a participant's self concept and their behaviour (e.g., perceiving of oneself as a caring dog owner or caring about dogs and relinquishing the dogs; perceiving of oneself as a caring parent and hurting the child), and feelings of failure (e.g., feeling one has let oneself down by not living up to one's own personal standards; feeling one has let others down). Interpersonal dissonance related to interactions with other people and was characterised by the inconsistencies between a participant's self perception and others' perception of self (e.g., perceiving of oneself as a good person while others think of you as a bad person because you got rid of the dog).

The finding in the current study that dissonance also arose from a sense of failure supports Higgins's (1987) contention that incompatibility between areas of the self can give rise to dissonance. Higgins (1987) proposed that the self concept is divided into three areas that are perceived from two standpoints (own and others): the *actual* self (i.e., the person you or others perceive you to be); the *ideal* self (i.e., the person you or others would like you to be) and the *ought* self (i.e., the person you or others perceive you should be). Dissonance results when discrepancies arise between

the areas of self for example, a pacifist who voluntarily goes to war is likely to experience a discrepancy between actual/own and ought/own (Higgins, 1987). Participants in the current study that reported a sense of failure, feeling they had let themselves down and /or they had let others down (including the dog) experienced discrepancies between actual/own and ought/own, and actual/own and ought/others respectively. By failing to live up to their own standards and/or the standards of others, they had violated their own moral code, which resulted in a sense of unease including feelings of guilt, shame and for some, self contempt.

Dissonance Aroused by Others

CDT (Aronson, 1968; Festinger, 1957) focusses on intrapersonal cognitive dissonance (i.e., dissonance aroused because of cognitions and behaviours associated with the individual). In the current study, however, dissonance was also aroused by others behaviour. For example, CR participants experienced dissonance when their parents' behaviour (i.e., getting rid of their 'best mate') hurt them, which was inconsistent with the child's self concept of being loved by their parents. Dissonance was also aroused by others when the negative reactions of others conflicted with participants' own positive self views (e.g., being judged by AWWs as an irresponsible uncaring dog owner ,when one holds a self image of being the opposite and AWWs being judged by relinquishers as cold and uncaring, when they do not perceive themselves in that light).

Dissonance arousal from others has been identified by Steele (1999) as well as Nail, Misak and Davis (2004). For example, Nail et al. (2004) conducted a laboratory based experiment in which dissonance aroused by others was demonstrated. Participants took part in a hypothetical scenario, in which a person who was expected to turn up for a date did not show, and then when asked, provided either an inadequate justification (i.e., gone on a date with an old friend that had been arranged after the planned date, which the person had forgotten about) or an adequate justification (i.e., having to report to the police station and complete paperwork following a minor traffic accident, which resulted in them forgetting about the arranged meeting), as to why they did not turn up. As a measure of dissonance participants were asked if they still considered the person who had not turned up a friend and if they had been offended by them not turning up. Nail et al. (2004) found that dissonance was aroused in participants who received inadequate justification, as the friend's behaviour was inconsistent with how the person viewed themself. Participants who received

inadequate justification were more critical of their friend than those who received an adequate justification.

Further support for the notion that participants in the current study experienced cognitive dissonance is evidenced in R participants response to the question of what advice they would give to others contemplating relinquishment. Most did not advise against it, which was contrary to the response of CR participants. By supporting their original decision to relinquish, relinquishers reduced the dissonance arising from post decision dissonance (Festinger, 1957). If they advised against relinquishment then they would arouse dissonance by accepting that they had made the wrong decision, by not advising against relinquishment they are reducing dissonance as they are convincing themselves and others that they made the right decision. Dissonance reduction, as described and explained in the psychological literature and in the context of dog relinquishment is compared next.

Managing Dissonance

The unease provoked by cognitive dissonance motivates people to reduce, and try to avoid increasing the dissonance (Aronson, 1968; Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance can be reduced by altering cognitions (through cognitive or behavioural change) so that they are no longer in conflict. For example, a meat eating animal lover could reduce the dissonance by becoming a vegetarian or vegan; b) by seeking support for the cognitions in conflict for example, a meat eating animal lover could support the conflicting cognition through the belief that humans need to eat meat to be healthy; and c) by downplaying the importance of the conflicting cognitions for example, a meat eating animal lover could categorise animals into wild, farmed and companion animals and elect only to eat farmed animals (Festinger, 1957).

Managing Dissonance in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Consistent with Festinger's (1957) dissonance reduction methods, participants in the current study engaged in cognitive and behavioural strategies that were aimed at reducing and/or avoiding increasing the cognitive dissonance that arose from multiple sources. Some examples of dissonance reduction methods used by participants are presented next. Participants who experienced intrapersonal dissonance as a result of the conflict between believing themselves to be caring dog owners and getting rid of the dog, reduced dissonance by blaming others or circumstance and/or rationalising their behaviour. Participants who engaged in self blame may have altered their cognitions through changing their self concept to accommodate the notion that they were not caring dog owners. While CR participants who blamed their parents may have altered

their cognitions to include a self concept in which they were not valued by their parents. Some participants downplayed the importance of the conflict by believing their actions were in the best interests of the dog.

Although Festinger (1957) proposed reducing dissonance by directly dealing with the cause of the dissonance, two dissonance reduction strategies identified in the current study, namely, rescuing another animal and contributing to a solution, did not directly target the conflicting cognitions. These indirect methods of dissonance reduction were found to be consistent with self affirmation theory (Steele, 1999). Steele proposes that the dissonant state can be tolerated if the individual can affirm their self integrity in some other way, which affirms their global self worth (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1999). For example, a meat eating animal lover might be able to tolerate the inconsistency between caring for animals and eating animals by doing something not necessarily related to the threat, but which reaffirms that they are a good person, such as donating time or money to a charitable cause (Aronson et al., 1999; Steele, 1999).

Participants in the current study who tried to make amends for their perceived wrongdoing by rescuing another animal or by offsetting the numbers being killed by trying to reduce the numbers being relinquished, might have been able to tolerate the dissonance arising from relinquishment, as they were able to affirm to themselves and others that they were good people, even though they had done something considered by self and others to be wrong. The second type of psychological unease identified in the dog relinquishment experience, namely, psychological stress and its management is described next.

Psychological Stress

Stress is a concept that is not easily defined (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). To the layperson, stress is usually associated with the experience of feeling overwhelmed or under pressure. To those in the research community, the definition of stress differs according to the perspective of those studying it (Cooper & Dew, 2004; Singer & Davidson, 1991). One of the foremost psychological theories of stress, namely, cognitive stress and coping (CSC) theory proposes that stress is “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984, p. 21). The theory emphasises cognitive appraisal as the key component of the stress experience, as any potential stressor is only stressful if the individual perceives it to be so (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). People evaluate a

given situation or occurrence in relation to how it impacts them (Lazurus & Folkman, 1987), thus the same event could be deemed stressful by one person but not another.

The theory of CSC proposes that stress can result from harm/ loss (has already occurred) for example, death of a loved one; threat (potential for harm/loss) for example, living with a violent partner; and challenge (potential for anticipated gain after some adversity), for example undertaking a PhD study (Folkman, 1984; Lazurus, 1999). Stress may result from a range of events or occurrences including daily hassles, such as being late for work, to major life events such as the death of a loved one (Lazurus & Folkman, 1987). It can be short lived in response to single events such as following a house fire (i.e., acute stress) or it can be ongoing and ever-present, such as that experienced by a person living in a violent household (i.e., chronic stress- see Wheaton, 1997).

Symptoms of stress can be categorised into physical (e.g., headaches, nausea), cognitive (e.g., anxiety, worry), emotional (e.g., sadness, depression) and behavioural (e.g., substance use, avoiding social contact). Psychological stress can result in impaired health. It has been linked with detrimental changes to the endocrine system (Biondi, & Picardi, 1999; Haddy & Clover, 2001) and the immune system (Haddy & Clover, 2001; Kaplan, 1991). It can also impair health through behaviours that people may employ to cope with stress such as licit and illicit drug use (Stroebe, 2000).

Psychological Stress in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Based on the stress literature (e.g., Cooper & Dew, 2004; Folkman, 2008; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wheaton, 1997) findings of the current study suggest that the dog relinquishment experience is a major source of stress, exposing those who are involved to multiple psychological stressors of an acute and chronic nature, arising from actual harm/loss and threat of harm/loss. Although participants were not directly asked about stress some volunteered terms such as ‘stressed out’, and ‘stressful’, along with reporting a range of negative (and a few positive) stress related emotions. Participants in the current study were also not directly asked if the stress they experienced caused any health problems. However, several participants reported physical and/or psychological reactions across the relinquishment experience, which they perceived as resulting from stress including: having a breakdown; being prescribed medication to deal with stress resulting from the cumulative effects of downsizing and relinquishing the dog; onset of illness/disease; and feeling physically ill.

Aside from the stress associated with cognitive dissonance and grief, other potential sources of stress included factors associated with the culture of

relinquishment, the rescue environment and the circumstances leading to the relinquishment. Psychological stressors associated with the culture of relinquishment and the rescue environment included: negative interactions between relinquishers and AWWs; a sense of urgency (i.e., time pressures) experienced when trying to rehome dogs; powerlessness, voicelessness and lack of control over relinquishment and outcomes for the dogs; the final goodbye or the inability to say goodbye; witnessing the distress of others; ongoing concerns for the dog's welfare; witnessing and/or participating in the killing of dogs; having to turn people and dogs away, lack of resources; perceived unaccountability of dog suppliers and relinquishers; and apathy of those in positions of power (e.g., policy makers).

Many of the stressors listed previously applied to AWW participants, placing them at particular risk for chronic stress, burnout and compassion fatigue, due to the ever-present stressors associated with animal welfare and rescue work (Figley & Roop, 2006). Compassion fatigue may be a problem especially for those working in animal shelters that are caring for abused and neglected animals. Burnout and compassion fatigue can result in detrimental effects on the health and wellbeing of those affected (Figley & Roop, 2006). It can also lead to people leaving their job, which can impact on the organisation in terms of staff turnover and the staff left behind, who may have to carry an extra load if replacement staff cannot be found. Although not reported by AWW participants in the current study, other studies have found that the psychological stress associated with working in animal welfare can lead to substance use and family problems for some (Reeve et al., 2004; Sanders, 1995).

Aside from the stressors that were directly related to the relinquishment experience, some participants were also exposed to stressors related to the change in circumstance, which prompted the relinquishment including moving, relationship breakdown, and emigrating from their country of origin, all of which have been identified as major stressors in their own right (Haddy & Clover, 2001; Lazurus, 1999; Shuval, 1993). The cumulative impact of so many stressors and the chronic nature of some associated with the dog relinquishment experience, has the potential for a detrimental impact on the mental health and wellbeing of those experiencing the stress.

Even though the dog relinquishment experience and the context in which it took place contained multiple stressors, not all stressors were appraised as stressful by all participants. For example, participants whose preference was not to have their dog killed, but who ultimately had their dog killed because they could not find a new home, found the experience very stressful. While another participant who wanted her dog

killed, but did not get her desire was more stressed over the dog living, than the dog dying. This is consistent with appraisal being a key factor in the stress experience as proposed by the theory of CSC (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984). Stress management, as described and explained in the psychological literature and in the context of dog relinquishment is compared next.

Managing Psychological Stress

As the experience of stress is an uncomfortable psychological state people attempt to reduce or eliminate it through coping. Coping is a process of managing stress, and does not necessarily result in alleviation of the stress (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984). Coping can be problem focussed (attempts to address/or change the problem that is causing the stress), emotion focused (attempts to deal with the emotional fallout) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and meaning focussed. Meaning focussed coping is activated when coping efforts have been unsuccessful and involves people tapping into their inner resources (i.e., values, beliefs and goals) to help them find meaning in their experience (Folkman, 2008; Folkman & Mosowitz, 2004). Examples of the three types of coping are illustrated in the categories of coping identified by Folkman, Lazurus, Dunkel-schetter, Delongis and Gruen, (1986) and Folkman (2008) listed next. The first eight categories were obtained via a factor analysis of the responses of 75 married couples, given across a five month period, describing how they coped with various stressful situations.

> *Confrontive coping* (Scale 1) describes aggressive efforts to alter the situation....
> *Distancing* (Scale 2) describes efforts to detach oneself....
> *Self-control* (Scale 3) describes efforts to regulate one's own feelings and actions....
> *Seeking social support* (Scale 4) describes efforts to seek informational support, tangible support and emotional support....
> *Accepting responsibility* (Scale 5) acknowledges one's own role in the problem, with a concomitant theme of trying to put things right....
> *Escape-avoidance* (Scale 6) describes wishful thinking and behavioural efforts to escape or avoid....
> *Planful-problem solving* (Scale 7) describes deliberate problem-focussed efforts to alter the situation, coupled with an analytic approach to solving the problem....
> *Positive reappraisal* (Scale 8) describes efforts to create positive meaning by focussing on personal growth (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 995).

A further five categories related to positive appraisal were identified later, from other data, when it was recognised that the stress experience contains negative and positive emotions, these were: *benefit finding,* which involves looking for the positives in the stressful situation for example, a person might say that they are a wiser person after the experience; *benefit reminding*, which involves reminding oneself of the benefits that can

result from the experience; *adaptive goal processes*, which involves setting new goals or altering goals which have been threatened by the experience; *reordering priorities*, which involves a person changing what they believe is important in their life; and *infusing ordinary events with positive meaning*, which involves seeing ordinary events as extraordinary for example, a smile from another person becomes an uplifting experience for someone who is experiencing a stressful situation (Folkman, 2008, pp. 7-11).

How people cope with stress and whether or not they are successful in their attempts varies according to a range of individual, social and environmental factors (Lazurus & Folkman, 1984). For example, one person working in a stressful environment might use alcohol or other drugs to cope with the stress, while another might use exercise to cope with the stress. Either of these methods may alleviate stress or increase stress if used to excess.

Managing Stress in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Emotion focussed coping was the main method used by participants in the current study. Many of the strategies that were identified as being used by participants were consistent with the ways of coping identified by Folkman et al. (1986), providing further evidence that the dog relinquishment experience is psychologically stressful. The one category of coping listed by Folkman et al. (1986) but not identified in the current study was the deliberate seeking of social support to cope with stress (although social support was reported to have been given by others). This may have been because participants were ashamed or embarrassed to seek support, given the negativity surrounding relinquishment. While most of the strategies identified were consistent with the first eight categories, some participants also engaged in benefit finding (a category listed in the additional five) when they 'focussed on the good' (i.e., looked for the positives in the situation).

One group of strategies identified in the current study was not identified in the aforementioned ways of coping, namely, reducing the impact on others. This group of strategies could be said to be operating outside of conscious awareness, as the intent is to reduce harm to others, but the end result is that the individual reduces their own stress in relation to the actual or potential harm being caused to someone else.

While other studies (e.g., Reeve et al., 2004; Sanders, 1995) have reported the use of substances such as alcohol by AWWs, apart from one relinquisher who was prescribed medication for stress as a result of the many changes that were occurring in her life around the time of the relinquishment, no other participant reported the use of

substances to deal with their stress. It should be noted, however, that participants in the current study were not directly asked the question if they used substances to alleviate stress. The third type of psychological unease identified in the dog relinquishment experience, namely, grief and its management is described next.

Grief

Grief is a natural response to the loss of a loved one through death (Bowlby, 1981a; Stroebe, 2011; Worden, 2003). The grief response to the death of a loved one can include sadness, anxiety, anger, loneliness, insomnia, disbelief, confusion, tightness in the chest, and lethargy, to name but a few (see Stroebe, 2011 and Worden, 2003 for a comprehensive list of reactions). Similar grief reactions have been found following the death of a pet (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Carmack, 1985; Field et al., 2009; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). When compared to the non-bereaved, bereaved people are at increased risk for poor mental and physical health outcomes, including depression, infections and suicide (see Stroebe 2011 for review). Anecdotal evidence provided in Chapter 2, shows that a person's mental and physical health can also suffer following the death of a pet.

While grief is a universal response to loss of a loved one, the experience of grief is not, with a multitude of factors pertaining to the deceased (e.g., parent, child), the bereaved (e.g., age, beliefs), the circumstances of death (e.g., natural, traumatic) and the relationship between deceased and bereaved (e.g., level of attachment), influencing the grief experience in such a way, that each person's experience of grief is different (Bowlby, 1981a; Center for the Advancement of Health [CAH], 2004; Kristjanson, Lobb, Aoun, & Monterosso, 2006; Stroebe, 2011; Worden, 2003).

Although grief is generally associated with the death of a significant person it has been suggested that grief can accompany other losses such as divorce, loss of other significant relationships, loss of employment (Archer, 1998; Boss, 1999; Bowlby, 1981a; Doka, 1989; Worden, 2003), or forced changes to their sense of self (Archer, 1998). Some, however, disagree (e.g., Weiss, 2001), suggesting that losses other than that of an attachment figure, while distressing, do not constitute grief.

Grief in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Findings of the current study suggest that people who are emotionally close to a dog, experience grief when it is relinquished. Participants who reported an emotional closeness to their dog experienced a sense of loss, as well as sorrow and anger. These findings coupled with some of the strategies employed by participants to deal with the loss (see Chapter 7), such as maintaining a connection or disconnecting from the dog is

consistent with the grief response following the loss of an attachment figure, as illustrated in the following comment by Bowlby (1981) in reference to an attachment figure, “a threat of loss creates anxiety, and actual loss sorrow; both, moreover, are likely to arouse anger” (p. 257). Although Bowlby (1981) proposes that anger is directed at the person lost, in the current study, apart from those who blamed the dog, anger was generally directed at those believed responsible for the relinquishment and in the case of relinquishers; this was either directed at self or others.

Consistent with the grief literature (e.g., Bowlby, 1981a; CAH, 2004; Stroebe, 2011; Worden, 2003) participants in the current study varied in their reported grief response according to a range of factors, some of which included: how attached they were to the dog; what the dog meant to them; their role in the relinquishment; and the method of relinquishment. Grief responses of participants included sadness, heartbreak, anger, sorrow, shock, disbelief, bitterness and guilt.

For the most part, participants hid their grief (see Chapter 7). This is consistent with the experience of disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989) as described in Chapter 2. Relinquishment appeared to be recognised as a loss only by those who experienced grief and then it was in relation to their own loss. Other factors not identified in the grief literature and some possibly unique to relinquishment, also influenced the grief experience, namely, the nature of the relationship, the nature of the loss, and perceived culpability.

Nature of the relationship. As argued in Chapter 2, the relationship between human and dog shares aspects of the child-parent attachment and parent-child affectional bond. This dual nature of the relationship may compound the grief experience, as the grief response differs according to the relationship with the lost figure (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001; Weiss, 2001). For example, parents may experience guilt following the loss of a child, while a spouse may experience a sense of abandonment following the loss of their partner (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001; Weiss, 2001). Thus, a person who looked on their dog as a child (parent/child bond) and also as a source of comfort and protection (child/parent bond) may feel guilt related to the failure to protect the dog, and abandonment related to the loss of their comfort and security.

Nature of the loss. As proposed in Chapter 2 the nature of the loss may have influenced the grief experience. For those whose dog was rehomed, grief may have been complicated by the nature of the loss. Although rehoming results in the loss of the dog, the dog remains alive, but in most cases unavailable to the relinquisher (and other family members). This may result in uncertainty of feelings and may have accounted

for participants reporting mixed feelings over the loss and ongoing concerns for the dog's welfare. Boss (1999) refers to this type of loss as ambiguous and identifies two types:

1. Physically absent and psychologically present- in this situation the object of loss has no physical presence in the life of the person experiencing the loss but does have a psychological presence in thoughts and memories of the person lost. Some examples of this type of ambiguous loss are missing persons, relinquisher parents and adopted children (Boss, 1999, p.8)

2. Physically present and psychologically absent – in this situation the object of loss has a physical presence in the life of the person experiencing the loss but they have no psychological presence. Some examples of this type of ambiguous loss are people that have suffered a brain injury or disease that has resulted in changes to personality (i.e. they are not the person they once were) (Boss, 1999, p. 9)

Dog relinquishment is consistent with the first type of ambiguous loss, as those who have rehomed their dog have physically lost the dog, but psychologically the dog remains present in their thoughts. The ambiguity surrounding the loss may result in unresolved grief, as people are not being able to move forward, but remain locked in a sense of uncertainty about the person (or in this case the dog) that is lost (Boss, 1999).

Perceived culpability. As proposed in Chapter two, perceived culpability influenced the grief experience of participants in the current study. Culpability is not generally a factor in grief following the death of a pet through natural causes. While it may be a factor for relinquishers who opt to have their dog killed when it is terminally ill or severely injured, in relinquishment, it can be a factor even when killing is not involved. In the current study some participants who had previously experienced the loss of a dog through death, reported the loss of the dog through relinquishment as the same as, or worse than the dog dying of natural causes (no one reported that it was easier). This finding was related to the perception of control in relation to the decision (i.e., the death of a pet through natural causes was 'out of their hands' but the relinquishment was down to them). Feeling culpable for the loss may influence the grief experience as the person may not feel they have a legitimate right to grieve, given that they feel responsible for the loss.

Not all participants in the current study evidenced a grief reaction over the loss of the dog. Bowlby (1981a) considered absence of grief as 'disordered mourning' and therefore a risk factor for poor mental and physical health outcomes. The absence of grief in the current study may have been because some participants reported no

attachment to their dog or dogs in their care. This is consistent with AT, which proposes that the strength of the grief reaction is related to the strength of the attachment (Bowlby, 1981a). Thus, those reporting no attachment to their dog may not be expected to report a grief response.

Alternatively they may not have experienced grief because, as the relinquishment for many took place in a context of multiple losses (e.g., loss of family, friends, familiar places etc.), it is possible that dealing with those losses took priority over the loss of the dog. These participants may then be at risk for a delayed grief response, which may occur months or even years after the initial loss and can be disproportionate to the event, that is, the grief response may be more intense after delay than it would have been had it been experienced earlier (Worden, 2003). Another explanation for an absence of grief may be that some were still dealing with the dissonance over the dog being relinquished and had not yet begun to deal with the actual loss of the dog. As mentioned previously, those feeling responsible for the loss may not have felt they had the right to grieve.

Most people deal with loss without any major problems (Bowlby, 1981a; CAH, 2004; Kristanjanson et. al., 2006; Stroebe, 2011). However, the nature of the dog relinquishment experience is such that, not only has it the potential to increase the risk of adverse outcomes for those involved, but also those adversely affected would be unlikely to receive the support they may need, as dog relinquishment is not recognised as a legitimate loss. As explained in Chapter 2, non legitimised losses are subject to disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989). As well as the grief being disenfranchised, in some instances the griever will also be disenfranchised (e.g., others would not expect relinquishers to grieve as they got rid of the dog; animal welfare workers would not be expected to grieve as the dogs are not their own; and some parents may think that children do not, or would not, grieve over the loss, especially when death was not involved). Grief management, as described and explained in the psychological literature and in the context of dog relinquishment is compared next.

Managing Grief

There are many theoretical approaches and models, some general and some specific, that offer explanations for how people respond to and deal with grief. Bowlby (1981a), for example, proposed a model to explain how people deal with the loss of an attachment figure (for more examples of grief models see Kirstanjson et al., 2006; Stroebe, 2011). Bowlby's model proposes that individuals progress through the various phases (sometimes going back and forth between phases) until they ultimately come to

terms with their loss and are able to move on with their lives. Failure to negotiate the phases of mourning to completion can result in what Bowlby termed 'disordered mourning'. Mourning is considered disordered, if grief is prolonged and/or overly intense, or if there is an absence of grief, all of which can put people at risk for poor mental and physical health (Bowlby, 1981a). The four phases of Bowlby's model as described in (Bowlby, 1981a, pp. 85-100) are briefly outlined next:

(1) The numbing/disbelief phase. In the initial phase of mourning people can react with shock or disbelief that the loss has occurred. They may feel numb. Some may be unable to comprehend the loss, and carry on as though nothing has happened. Calm exteriors can give way to emotional outbursts. Some of the emotional responses associated with this phase include anxiety, fear and sadness.

(2) The yearning/searching phase. In this phase the individual fluctuates between recognising the loss and hoping for a reunion. This results in emotional distress including crying and sobbing (i.e., attachment behaviours aimed at drawing the attachment figure close). Thoughts about the lost person may dominant the individuals thinking during the day and dreams at night. Physical restlessness may be apparent. Individuals may begin to look for signs of reassurance that the person is not dead, for example 'seeing' them in a crowd (the person they actually see is not their loved one but someone who resembles them in some way) or 'hearing' them (e.g., a car pulling onto the driveway may be attributed to the lost person coming home). Searching behaviours may be conscious or unconscious. Anger may also be a prominent emotion at this time. Anger may be directed at those believed responsible for the loss and may also be a reaction to the lack of success in finding the loved one.

(3) The disorganisation and despair phase. In this phase the individual realises that the loved one has gone and will not be returning. People may struggle to find meaning in their life. Emotions during this phase can be intense.

(4) The reorganisation phase.[31] This phase involves acceptance of the loss. People begin to reorganise themselves and their lives. The loss is accepted as final and changes to self are made that reflect this. The individual starts to take part in life once more (Bowlby, 1981a).

[31] There is some contention in the literature over this phase in terms of disconnecting from the loved one. Some suggest Bowlby proposed that disconnecting from the loved one was a necessity in order to complete the process (e.g., Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen & Stroebe, 1993) while others disagree (e.g., Peskin, 1993) suggesting that Bowlby proposed people getting on with their lives but still retaining a connection to their loved one, as the final outcome of the grieving process.

Bowlby's and other similar theories have influenced people's perceptions about the grief experience. So much so that clinicians and laypeople have long been under the assumption that grief needs to be 'worked through' in order to avoid adverse effects on health; the grieving process takes place over a relatively short time period; it entails progression through a series of phases or stages; it is resolved when there is a disconnection from the deceased person and acceptance of the loss; and absence of grief is associated with pathology (Breen & O'Connor, 2007; Centre for Advanced Health, 2004; Stroebe, & Stroebe, 1991; Wortman & Silver, 2001). Research evidence, however, contradicts or fails to support these assumptions (CAH, 2004; Wortman & Silver, 2001).

Managing Grief in the Context of the Dog Relinquishment Experience

Death of the dog was not the outcome for all participants in the current study. However, as stated previously, losses other than death can provoke a grief response (Archer, 1998; Boss, 1999; Bowlby, 1981a; Doka, 1989; Worden, 2003). As participants in the current study were not asked directly about a mourning process it is difficult to ascertain if their mourning followed any particular order or pattern, or if they 'worked through their grief', nonetheless some aspects of their experience were consistent with Bowlby's (1981a) model. For instance, evidence of emotional distress was identified, with participants reporting varying degrees ranging from sadness to heartbreak. Shock and disbelief was indicated for those participants where the relinquishment was an unexpected occurrence. One participant (whose dog was rehomed) appeared to experience numbing, as she reported that it took her three months to cry over the loss (which occurred for the first time during the interview). Anger and bitterness was reported towards those perceived responsible for the relinquishment, while guilt was reported by those who felt responsible and/or ashamed. Anxiety was apparent in those who struggled with what they or others had done and in those who expressed continuing concerns over the dog's welfare. Some participants evidenced yearning in relation to missing the dog, describing a sense of loss and lamenting the loss of mental and physical interaction (i.e., tactile comfort) with the dog. A few participants evidenced despair describing the experience as devastating, and /or traumatic.

In relation to the final phase of Bowlby's model (i.e., reorganisation) there was evidence that some appeared to have completed the mourning process, as they were able to talk about the dog and their loss without becoming emotional. Others however, appeared to be still dealing with the loss (which for some had occurred many years

before), as they exhibited emotions such as crying, sadness, and anger during the interview. The prolonged duration of the grief experience is consistent with 'disordered mourning' but may not necessarily be related to failure to accept the loss as suggested by Bowlby (1981a). In the context of dog relinquishment the prolonged grief experience may be related to failure to accept the act of relinquishment, rather than the loss of the dog per se. That is, participants may have difficulty in coming to terms with what they had done or what others had done.

Although participants dealt with the loss of the dog in varying ways, two main methods emerged, namely, maintaining a connection to the dog or disconnecting from the dog. Maintaining a connection to the dog involved strategies that enabled participants to maintain a closeness to the dog, albeit psychologically rather than physically. The strategies used by participants such as the keeping of memorabilia and reminiscing about the good times with their dogs are amongst several strategies identified by Packman et al. (2012) in their study of bereaved pet owners who maintained a continuing bond with their pet. Disconnecting from the dog, on the other hand, involved getting rid of all things associated with the dog and trying to avoid thinking or talking about the dog. It should be noted that it is unclear if disconnecting from the dog was a strategy to reduce the pain of grief, or reduce dissonance or both. Those who maintained a connection to their dog appeared to be coping with the loss better than those who shut out all memories of the dog. Remaining connected to the dog is consistent with Bowlby's reorganisation phase where the person continues on with their life but still maintains a connection to their loved one.

Cognitive dissonance may also account for the finding that some participants who used avoiding strategies to deal with their loss also kept mementoes, and some participants who kept mementoes, also used some avoiding strategies to distract themselves from thinking about the dog. Alternatively it may have been that the use of both types of strategies indicated that participants were engaging in a dual process of coping as proposed by the dual process model of coping with bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). This model suggests that adaptive coping involves alternating between confronting and avoiding the loss and confronting and avoiding restoration (i.e., getting on with life), unlike Bowlby's (1981a) model, which focuses on the loss and proposes that avoiding the loss is maladaptive.

Section Summary

In summary, the dog relinquishment experience was characterised by three types of psychological unease, namely cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief.

The cognitive dissonance experienced by participants in the current study was found to be consistent with the experience of cognitive dissonance as proposed by CDT (Aronson, 1968; Festinger, 1957) and SDT (Higgins, 1987). Participants in the current study experienced two forms of dissonance, emanating from inconsistencies between their own actions and self concept and inconsistencies between others' actions and their self concept. Intrapersonal cognitive dissonance arose when they behaved in a way that conflicted with the person that they believed themselves to be. Interpersonal dissonance arose when they perceived other people's behaviour conflicted with the person that they believed themselves to be. Although dissonance resulting from other people's actions is not specifically identified by CDT and SDT, support was found for the finding in laboratory based studies conducted by Nail et al. (2004).

Consistent with dissonance based theories participants dealt with their dissonance directly and indirectly. Direct methods were found to be consistent with those proposed by CDT (Festinger, 1957) and included altering cognitions, seeking support for cognitions in conflict and downplaying the conflict in cognitions. Indirect methods were found to be consistent with SAT (Steele, 1999), which proposes that dissonance can be tolerated if self integrity is affirmed in some other way that is unrelated to the actual threat.

Aside from the psychological stress associated with cognitive dissonance and grief, the dog relinquishment experience contained many other potential psychological stressors. Consistent with CSC theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986), not all participants in the current study appraised all stressors as stressful, although most appraised some aspects of dog relinquishment as stressful. Some participants reported a psychological and/or physical impact on their health and wellbeing, which they perceived as resulting from the stress arising from the dog relinquishment experience. In dealing with psychological stress participants mostly employed emotion focussed coping methods that were consistent with the ways of coping proposed by Folkman et al. (1986) and Folkman (2006), further suggesting that the dog relinquishment is a psychological stressor.

The grief experience reported by participants in the current study who identified themselves as being attached to the relinquished dog or dogs was similar, as described in the literature, to that of those who had experienced the death of a loved human or pet. However, there were other factors associated with the dog relinquishment experience not identified in the grief literature that may adversely affect the grief experience. While the grief of some participants still appeared to endure, putting them at risk for

adverse effects on their mental health and wellbeing, it could not be established if this was a result of not being able to accept the loss, or if it was due to the influence of cognitive dissonance related to the relinquishment.

An absence of grief was evident in some participants and was attributed to having no attachment to the relinquished dog, or alternatively a delayed grief response due to multiple losses at the time of relinquishment or self disenfranchisement of grief. Finally, the way in which participants in the current study dealt with their grief was not wholly consistent with the model of grief proposed by Bowlby (1981a). While the grief response in relation to emotional distress was consistent and some appeared to have achieved the reorganisation phase, there was no evidence to suggest that participants' process of grieving followed any particular order or that they worked through their grief. Further, the grief experience for some was not of a short duration and absence of grief did not necessarily indicate pathology.

Having described the three types of psychological unease and their management in relation to the psychological literature and the dog relinquishment experience, the next section describes the intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease as experienced by participants in the current study.

Intensity of the Psychological Unease

The intensity of psychological unease experienced by participants in the current study varied among participants due to intervening conditions (see Chapter 6) and strategies employed to manage participants' disturbed self integrity (see Chapter 7). For instance, the intensity of psychological unease was greater for those participants who had reported an emotional closeness to and/or an affinity with dogs (i.e., intervening conditions of level of attachment and worldview), than those participants who did not report an emotional closeness and/or held a negative attitude towards dogs.

For some participants the intensity of the psychological unease lessened over time. For example, some AWWs reported a lessening of stress over the time period from when they first started in the job (which ranged from 18 months to more than 20 years), to the time at interview. This was not due to them appraising the situation as less stressful over time, but rather to the coping strategies that they had developed, which they reported were a necessity to staying in the job. It is assumed that those who could not adapt to the stress left the job. Similarly, the following participant who had relinquished his dog to a friend explained how he still experienced some level of psychological unease after 20 years, albeit not at the same intensity as initially experienced:

> *It's not as traumatic as what it was at that time* [nervous laugh]. *[R-B, 21 years since relinquishment]*

For others however the unease remained the same or became stronger:

> *I think it's actually grown stronger actually. And I don't know why that is. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

> *This is the first time since I actually handed them over that I've cried about it so. Other times when people have asked me about it I've been okay about it. So, I don't know if it's getting easier. [R-P, 3 months since relinquishment]*

Frequency of the Psychological Unease

As with the intensity of psychological unease, its frequency also varied according to intervening conditions and strategies employed to manage their disturbed self integrity. The frequency reported by participants in the current study ranged from the initial psychological unease surrounding the relinquishment process, to constant. For example, some R participants having gone through some psychological unease associated with deciding to relinquish, and then relinquishing, did not have any further unease about the experience (due to the success of the strategies that they had employed to reduce or avoid the unease and favourable intervening conditions); while others experienced some level of psychological unease on a daily basis, as the following AWW explained:

> *Sometimes you know you have, you have bad days and you have good days. Um and you sort of, I personally think that it makes you angry a lot of the time, what you see. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

For others the psychological unease was intermittent, as the following participants explained:

> *Like I said, it's like a nerve in a tooth. If I keep my tongue off it it's alright. Otherwise if I am worrying over it and thinking about it then it comes up sort of thing. You don't touch it* [laughs], *stay away from, it it's alright. Sometimes I get a bit miserable when I start thinking in depth about it, but that's been the same for the last 5 years, it doesn't really go away. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *You know, there would be days when we were a little bit upset. I can only remember maybe once talking to her* [participant's sister] *and um just talking about how we missed her. And um whenever you saw a dog as well you remembered your dog. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment*

Duration of the Psychological Unease

The duration of psychological unease as reported by participants in the current study, ranged from a short period of time to ongoing. For some, it began prior to the

relinquishment as they struggled with the decision. While some participants reported a short duration of psychological unease, others reported a long duration, continuing for many years. Some participants reported that they still experience some form of psychological unease.

> *Um a little bit sad.... And as I say I wasn't attached. So I was sad but not distraught. [CR-H, aged 14 years at relinquishment, 33 years since relinquishment]*

> *If it's really hard like it was with Rex that time. One of those little dogs that was the fence jumper that was really hard. So I didn't say a thing and that affected me for a few days. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *But the actual giving it up it's never, it never quite goes away. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

The duration of the psychological unease was also influenced by intervening conditions and the strategies employed by participants. For example, participants might 'block the memory' of the dog and/or relinquishment, thus shortening the duration of the psychological unease. This strategy may have only temporarily shortened the duration of the psychological unease, however, as there was the potential for it to recur at a later stage (see Chapter 7).

The finding that the psychological unease for participants in the current study ranged from a short period of time to many years adds to the body of knowledge, as previous studies (e.g., Anderson, 1985; DiGiacomo et al., 1998) have explored participants' perspectives immediately or a short time after relinquishment. This longer term impact suggests that dog relinquishment is likely to be more detrimental to the health of adults and children than the loss of a dog through death. Long term exposure to psychological unease increases the risk for a negative impact on people's health and wellbeing.

Section Summary

In summary, the intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease experienced by participants in the current study, varied according to individual and social factors and strategies employed to restore self integrity. Those who experienced long term psychological unease were at a greater risk for a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing, than those who experienced it over the short term.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified the core problem that arose from the dog relinquishment experience as a 'disturbed self integrity'. All participants, to some

extent, experienced a disturbed self integrity, which was described and explained as a sense of psychological unease. Three types of psychological unease were experienced by participants in the current study that corresponded to cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief as described in the psychological literature. The three types of psychological unease resulted from intra and interpersonal moral, social and psychological conflicts and stressors. Further support for the finding that these particular types of unease were experienced by participants in the current study, was found in the way participants managed their psychological unease, which was consistent with the management of these types of unease as described in the psychological literature.

The type, intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease varied according to individual and social factors identified as intervening conditions and the strategies used by participants to manage their disturbed self integrity. Thus, not all participants experienced all types of psychological unease at the same intensity, frequency or duration. It was suggested that long term exposure to the types of psychological unease was more detrimental to health and wellbeing than short term exposure. Having established that the main issue of concern for participants in the current study was a disturbed self integrity, the next chapter describes and explains in detail, the conditions that contributed to the psychosocial problem, as well as the conditions that helped to explain the variation in participants' experience.

- Chapter 6 -

Causal and Intervening Conditions

Chapter Overview

It was established in Chapter 5, that the psychosocial problem or main concern of the participants in the current study was a disturbed self integrity, which manifested as one or more of three types of psychological unease. In this chapter, the factors that contributed to the disturbance, leading to 'protective-restoring', are described and discussed, as well as the intervening conditions which accounted for variance in participants' experience of dog relinquishment. The chapter is divided into six sections, with the first five each describing one of the aspects of the dog relinquishment experience that contributed to disturbing the self integrity of participants. It will be shown that the causal conditions correspond to factors identified in the literature which have been recognised as threats to self integrity. The final section describes and explains the 13 intervening conditions identified in the data. These conditions help to explain some of the variance that was identified between participants' experience of dog relinquishment. Interpreted findings are supported by excerpts of participants' data throughout the chapter.

Threats to Self Integrity

Five causal conditions were identified that contributed to the psychological unease of participants in the current study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify causal conditions as "events, incidents, happenings that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). To better reflect the aspects of a disturbed self integrity in the context of the dog relinquishment experience, the causal conditions were conceptualised as the 'culture of relinquishment', a 'crisis of conscience', a 'fear of losing face', 'losing faith' and 'losing Rex'. The causal conditions identified corresponded to inconsistencies, failures and stressors, which Sherman and Cohen (2006) have identified as threats to self integrity. The integrity of the self can be disturbed when something happens that causes the individual to call into question their sense of self, that is, their sense of who they are (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Spencer, Fein, & Lomore, 2001; Steele, 1999). All three types of threats were identified in the current study including: inconsistencies between self concept and behaviour of self and others; failures to live up to self and others standards; and stressors associated with the loss of the dog. Each one of the five conceptualised threats to self integrity is outlined next. The concepts are broken down into characteristics (see Table 5) that describe and explain individual aspects of the threat.

Table 5

Characteristics of Causal Conditions of a Disturbed Self Integrity following Dog Relinquishment

Conceptualised threats to self integrity (Causal Conditions)	Characteristics
Culture of relinquishment	Victims and villains Rescue environment
Crisis of conscience	Sense of wrongdoing Blood money Parental role conflict
Fear of losing face	Losing the respect of others
Losing faith	Sense of failure Questioning the values of others
Losing Rex	Emotional impact The final goodbye Death vs. relinquishment Sense of loss Sense of control Impact on others (including the dog) Ongoing concerns

Culture of Relinquishment

Culture is defined as "a set of ideas, beliefs, and ways of behaving of a particular organization or group of people" (Culture, n.d.). The concept indentified in the data as a 'culture of relinquishment' related to the context in which the experience of dog relinquishment took place. As described in Chapter 1, relinquishment is socially legitimised and generally morally abhorred, resulting in a practice that can be both overt and covert. The negativity surrounding relinquishment contributed to how participants were perceived within the relinquishment culture and was a major contributor to the psychological unease experienced by participants. Types of psychological unease related to this aspect of the relinquishment experience included cognitive dissonance and psychological stress. In relation to the current study, 'culture of relinquishment' was characterised as *victims and villains* and *rescue environment* each of which are described next.

Victims and villains. Within the culture of relinquishment, relinquishers are generally perceived by others as villains (indeed, some of the relinquisher participants

reported that they had perceived relinquishers in a negative light, prior to their own experience of relinquishment). Although perceived by others as villains, relinquishers generally perceive themselves as victims (e.g., apart from two,[32] all R participants in the current study perceived themselves as victims of circumstance even though they relinquished their dog or dogs voluntarily).

Children, if considered (i.e., some parents do not think about an impact on children, possibly because they are consumed by their own psychological unease over the relinquishment) are perceived as victims due to their powerlessness and lack of control over the relinquishment. While AWWs and dogs, are perceived as victims or villains depending on the perspective of the perceiver. These commonly held perceptions were evident in the current study.

While some AWW participants in the current study were sympathetic to the situation of some relinquishers and discerned between 'genuine' and 'non-genuine' reasons for relinquishment, relinquishers were generally viewed as irresponsible and held accountable in the minds of the AWW participants for the plight of dogs. As indicated in the following data excerpts, some AWW participants were of the opinion that relinquishment was an easy option for people who could not be bothered seeking alternative solutions to their problem.

> *There are* [sic] *the odd genuine case, but most of the time, I just really would like to slap them* [laughs]. *They put it on you as your responsibility, we can help or if we don't help they will get rid of this animal one way or another. You know that a year or 6 months later they're just going to go out and buy another animal and they're going to do it irresponsibly. They're not gonna get one from us to start with, they're gonna go to a pet shop and just create another problem or you know.... They don't, they just don't think about it. They do it and it's for selfish reasons and then they just want to make it everybody else's problem and then they're just gonna go away and do it all over again. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

> *Um it depends, everyone's different. I've had ones that have made me cry when they've handed their dog over, because they didn't, they don't want to hand their dog over; they do because they have no option. And there's other ones that I think, piss me right off! And basically they just want us to take their problem, that their taking no responsibility for. And they want it gone there and then, they're really quite selfish. And they think that we can um do, we can make miracles happen and fit dogs in whenever they say so. And they don't want to do anything to help the dog whatsoever and then they blame it on everyone else bar themselves saying "it's not my problem and all this sort of thing this dogs stressing me out and that". Well it stresses us out, it's inconsiderate to say that because it stresses us out. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

[32] One participant acknowledged that it was her choice to move into a retirement village that did not permit dogs. The other participant's dog was killed without her consent while she was away.

> *They just want a valid excuse to make them not feel guilty. Whereas they are guilty and they are irresponsible and they, they should be accountable. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

This negative view of relinquishers impacted on the experience for R participants in their interactions with AWWs, contributing to cognitive dissonance by threatening their self and social self image.[33] In the following excerpt a participant describes her experience of returning a dog to the animal shelter from which she had originally rescued the dog, because her other dog and the rescued dog were constantly fighting. The example also illustrates how the participant's interactions with the AWWs contributed to her negative perceptions of them.

> *So I made the decision that I would take Rexie back to the animal shelter ....Well, the reception I got when I got there was gobsmacking. For one, I couldn't believe how I was being treated. I was trying to explain to them that the reason I'm doing this is because, for Rexie's sake. It's not fair like every single minute she moves Rex beats her up. She has no freedom and in fact, her turning to the point where she did turn terrified me. If she'd actually laid down I think and submitted, it would all have been over, but because she didn't submit, she was gonna, she wanted to be the dominant dog and that was gonna happen until one of them died. And I wasn't willing to have that happen. I couldn't manage it. I explained that I had the behaviouralist's out and I had spent a lot of money, I wasn't just giving up. They were dreadful....So I was just left feeling like a terrible person, that I gave this dog up, when I did give her up but it wasn't a spur of the moment, it was months, it was months of training and lots of money. And just the thought of coming home and finding one of them dead, it just wasn't an option for me and I think it was reality. I think I probably would have come home and found, if not dead, then you know seriously injured, you just can't do that, that's not responsible ownership. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

The previous example illustrates the threat to self integrity arising from inconsistencies between how the participant viewed herself and how she perceived the AWWs viewed her. While this reported episode threatened the self integrity of the R participant, it also threatened the self integrity of the AWWs, as a dog that had been adopted was now being returned. The reactions of the AWWs may have been because the returned dog was now at risk of being killed, as dog aggression is one of the factors on which a dog can fail the temperament test.

It also highlights the difference between AWWs and relinquishers perceptions of responsible ownership. Relinquishment is considered the antithesis to responsible

[33] It should be noted that another R participant did not report a negative experience with AWWs. The participant relinquished her dog to an animal shelter and reported that the AWWs were sympathetic and helpful to her.

ownership. Yet there are some cases in which an owner relinquishing a dog can be considered to be behaving responsibly (e.g., that relinquishers are surrendering to a shelter rather than leaving the dog to fend for itself denotes some semblance of responsible ownership). In addition the aforementioned relinquisher considered herself to be a responsible owner because she was protecting both dogs.

The negativity expressed by some AWW participants towards relinquishers could also impact on other AWWs as the following participant explained:

> *Some people* [AWWs] *were very abrupt and I found that quite difficult for the people who were relinquishers. Yeah, if I could hear it, I'd be inwardly cringing and thinking "Oh God this is terrible". Because I think it was almost like you know they felt like they were being blamed, but that was that persons coping strategy. Um I think most people tended to be like me, but I do remember one person in particular who, beyond that, out of that situation, she was fine you know, she was perfectly able, but in that situation she was very abrupt, but I think that was her coping strategy. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

The aforementioned comments made by participant AWW-C in relation to coping strategies is consistent with Irvine (2003) who suggested that the negativity expressed towards relinquishers was one of the ways in which AWWs dealt with their stressful work.

While relinquishers were generally perceived as villains, similar to AWWs, CR participants in the current study were generally powerless and voiceless, positioning them as victims. This lack of control over the relinquishment posed a threat to the self integrity of CR participants and contributed to psychological stress, as having some control over important aspects of one's life is an important factor in self integrity (Baumeister, 1999; Steele, 1999). Apart from one CR participant who had been involved in the decision-making, CR participants reported no involvement in the decision-making concerning the fate of their dog. Indeed many were kept in the dark (i.e., not told about the relinquishment) as the following excerpts demonstrate.

> *But no, didn't really get consulted. I think that just added to the confusion at the time. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *No, they just said the dog was going, the dog had to go. That was all. [CR-F, aged 11 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

> *There was no discussion, no nothing. I woke up one morning and um there I was walking my own dog to the ranger. [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

One CR participant, who had initially been told that her dog was being brought over from another state, later found out that this was not going to happen. Her powerlessness is illustrated in her following comments:

> *We'd actually been over here, from my memory a few months, before she told me that she thought it was a better idea that he stay there. And so then we discussed it and I wasn't that happy about it. I was never really that happy about it. I just ended up accepting it. It was something I couldn't control. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

In contrast, another CR participant who had been involved in discussions and decision making did not have the same issues over control.

> *There was discussion around that one. He put it to us, whether we really felt that we could look after it. And as a family we were really sad to see it go, but we decided at that time we were all too caught up in our own lives to really give the dog what it needed. So we all agreed that we should let the dog go. [CR- I, aged 13 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

Having a voice as in the case of [CR-I] appeared to be less of a threat to self integrity for the participant; although it should be noted that the participant did not report a strong emotional connection with the dog. The lack of a strong attachment to the dog may have been a factor in the decision by her parents to discuss the relinquishment with her. Alternatively some parents might not discuss the relinquishment with children who were not attached to the dog, as they may think it would not bother them. Although, in the current study R participants who used the strategy of keeping children in the dark, were doing so because they perceived they were protecting their children (who they perceived as being attached to their dogs) from being hurt.

Another aspect related to the powerlessness and voicelessness that contributed to disturbances to self integrity for some CR participants, was not being or feeling able to talk about the dog once it had been relinquished. Some CR participants felt silenced by their parents as the following participant reported:

> *I don't remember asking about him. I remember being like, I remember being really confused and um. And I remember like them, you know not wanting to talk about him. His name just sort of never got mentioned again, it's just like he's gone. [CR-F, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

Another CR participant told of how his father who had instigated the relinquishment:

> *Never spoke about it ever since.... I think my wife was the first person I ever spoke to about it. [CR-B, aged 10 at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

This silence surrounding relinquishment is an aspect of the culture of relinquishment that contributes to it being out of public awareness. Relinquishment becomes the 'elephant in the room', people know the practice exists but they choose to ignore it, or do not talk about it. Even in the pet loss literature the issue of the deliberate discarding of a pet by the owner is very rarely broached.

As the practise of dog relinquishment is not encouraged, there is very little information available in terms of what to do in the event that a person wants to or has to relinquish. The only information available has to be sought out and is usually in the form of verbal communication. The uninformed nature of the practise of relinquishment likely contributes to negative impacts on humans and dogs. Another aspect of the culture of relinquishment, which contributed to the psychological unease of participants in the current study, was the rescue environment.

Rescue environment. The rescue environment encompassed the physical, social and political environment of rescue related work and was the source of much psychological stress for participants, particularly AWWs. Aspects of the rescue environment that contributed to the psychological unease of AWW participants included: the noise; dogs being enclosed in cages; distressed dogs; distressed relinquishers (including children of relinquishers); abusive relinquishers; limited kennel space (so dogs have to be turned away); limited financial resources (most animal welfare organisations are dependent for their survival on donations from the public); contentious workplace policies (e.g., a dog's life depended on them passing a temperament test); lack of cooperation between AWW groups; and apathy from government departments.

While the physical aspects of the rescue environment, such as the noise and smells associated with keeping large numbers of dogs locked up in enclosures were sometimes distressing for workers and dogs, they were also distressing for some R participants and in some cases were the reason given for not relinquishing to a shelter (see *rehoming* in Chapter 7). Other aspects of the rescue environment that contributed to the psychological unease of R participants included negativity of AWWs towards them and the risk of the dogs being killed.

By its nature animal welfare and rescue work is stressful and distressing for people who care about animals as the following quotes illustrate.

> *Seeing the animals coming in, like skinny or mistreated, stuff like that. Some of them come in and they're emaciated, really really skinny, that can be quite confronting. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

> *You know we have picked up dogs who are suffering. Quite skinny, you know got mange, looks like they may have been involved in accidents, not vet cared, there could be worms you know. [AWW-N, Ranger]*

> *Like the really bad ones don't come around that often um but when they do it's horrific. The starved dogs and you know beaten and just abandoned as well. I mean I just find that completely gutless. So they're the hardest bits, but they don't luckily come around every day or anything like that, but you are faced with surrenders every single day. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

In addition to being confronted with animal abuse and neglect, AWW participants reported being under constant pressure to find new homes for the thousands of dogs that are relinquished each year in Perth, WA. This constant pressure to take in dogs or rescue dogs from being killed at the council pounds, created a sense of urgency as the following AWW participants related.

> *We probably get about seven or eight calls a week, people wanting us to take in dogs and we can't. You know that again is very heartbreaking. Um we do what we can, we ring some of the other refuges but they're all so terribly full. Everybody's in the same situation, you know sometimes they do, but not very much. [AWW-K, Shelter Worker]*

> *I got two, an English setter cross and a pure bred female staffy into* [name of animal shelter] *at the very last minute. They were being put down on the Friday. They should have been put down Thursday, but the vet couldn't make it. And I phoned up and the ranger said to me that the English setter was a lovely dog, but the Staffy female was beautiful, he said the most beautiful nature and he said they are being put down at 10am tomorrow. And I just couldn't find anywhere for them to go, anywhere, no organisation, everyone was choccablock full. And I contacted a friend and a friend contacted the manager of* [name of animal shelter] *after hours and I sent the photos from the website and I sent the phone number of the ranger I spoke to, and she phoned the ranger and the ranger confirmed that both dogs had beautiful temperaments so they took them in on the Friday morning. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

Many of the home-based rescue workers told of the pressures of being constantly bombarded by emails or phone calls from people wanting them to take their dog. With limited funds, staff and space many dogs often had to be turned away. The following AWW participants described how it made them feel:

> *Crap, absolute crap it stresses me out to the max and I worry about what's going to happen to that dog. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

> *And one of the worst things was actually turning people away because you couldn't take the dog. And whereas it was a no kill shelter, you knew that other shelters weren't, and so you knew that they were possibly going to go to another shelter. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

While not being able to take dogs was distressing for AWWs, it was also distressing for relinquishers. Some R participants rang breeders or rescue groups only to be told they could not take their dogs because either they did not rescue dogs or they were full to capacity. This led to a sense of urgency amongst R participants and for some who had exhausted all other avenues (e.g., family, friends, advertising for new owners) resulted in them having their dogs killed, as was the experience for the following two participants.

> *Um it still makes me feel, actually it still makes me feel quite physically ill and quite emotional and quite angry, because there wasn't, I couldn't find another solution. Um and on the other side of the coin is, I still think that in the circumstances I did the best thing, but the emotional part of me says no you didn't, you know you could have, you could have, surely you could have found some solution other than that, yeah. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

> *I tried to take him to an animal shelter and they told me that they wouldn't accept him because I was the owner. Um and the only way that they would accept him would be if I found him as a stray. This was back in 92, 93? Um I don't know if I was young they were feeding me a line, um but I took it, whatever it was and so I thought that was my only option. Um yeah, I hadn't thought about that before, in retrospect I think I probably should have tried again or tried a different animal shelter. I remember thinking that um I should take him there and tie him up to the gate at night time, but because they had met the dog, cos I took him with me when I went, um I thought they'd find me* [laughs] *track me down. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

It is interesting to note that the aforementioned participant (R-F) had considered abandoning her dog at the shelter by tying it to the gate. One AWW participant reported that this did happen occasionally. While AWWs condemn this behaviour, from the relinquisher's perspective it might be an act of desperation (and although not condoned, perhaps understandable) in that they cannot find a new home, they do not want to have the dog killed, and they feel that they have no other option. For some who fear recrimination, it also may be an easier option than facing AWWs.

As well as the pressures of trying to rehome dogs other factors that contributed to psychological unease for AWW participants related to witnessing the distress of others (also see impact on others later in this chapter) as the following participant's comments illustrate:

> *It's very difficult and you can see the distress that it's causing those people.... This is what you do you know, you fill all these bits of paper in, and then you know you get all the information you can and then they sign off and then you take the dog back there, and the reality was it wasn't that simple. You know you always have to hear people's life stories, you know. And people wanted to justify why they were actually bringing the dog. And in terms of me, it would have made it an awful lot easier if they just, there you go you know, sign that bit of*

> *paper and walk. But you kind of took on everything that they, you know and some days you don't know why you're feeling absolutely terrible. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

As the above excerpt (AWW-C) demonstrates, trying to be understanding and compassionate to the relinquishers sometimes resulted in more emotional distress for AWW participants. This may be one of the reasons why many AWW participants blamed and demonised relinquishers, as it may have been less distressing for AWWs to cope with the situation in that way.

Policies within the animal welfare organisations also threatened the self integrity of AWWs through their contribution to feelings of powerlessness. For example, the following AWW participant reported a lack of control as contributing to her emotional distress:

> *Um, but previously when I was working with the um the other rescue, I felt that I was a lot more upset because I had no control basically. Um and I wasn't in agreeance with the way things were going, there was no support there. Then I went out and set up on my own. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

Policy issues relating to killing were particularly troubling. For example, dogs relinquished to some animal shelters had to undergo temperament/behaviour testing to assess their suitability for rehoming. If the dog failed the test they were killed. Dogs could be failed for aggression towards humans and aggression towards other dogs. Two participants told of how behavioural assessment of the dogs was troubling for them and others.

> *Yeah and it caused a lot of friction. Um there were, there were some staff who, who realised it wasn't the right thing to do, you know and they used to give them like a couple of days perhaps to settle in. But a dog whose experienced something quite traumatic, whether it's just the trauma of going into the shelter or what's happened at home first, they're in a, you know, a really nervous state. But they're still temperament tested then and you know, I mean the temperament testing is, it's ridiculous, you know going right up to a dog. Well dogs have personal space just like humans so it, you know if you're gonna be. It's very confrontational, so they would, they would go right up to them, they would you know try the stroking, and well that in itself is confrontational as well, and then they'd face them with another dog, well if that dog's had a bad experience, it's going to automatically go on the defensive. So actually it caused you know quite a bit of tension. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

> *And the other thing is obviously dog aggression as well. That's the one I struggle with the most. Cos I think about my dog at home and I think Geez you know what, my dog would probably fail. My other dog would be fine, but my Shepherd would probably fail. And even the assessors with their dogs have sort of said yeah there's a chance mine would too. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

Returned dogs were also killed if they kept escaping from their new homes, as they were deemed to be a liability through the threat of danger they posed to people (e.g., running on the road in traffic etc.). The following AWW participant related an example of such a situation:

> *You know, like the little fence jumper, gosh if we'd got him on a farm or something he'd be having a ball, you know racing around after sheep and having a great time. And you know he didn't have to be put to sleep, but at the end of the day we have to abide by the rules and he had to go to sleep. So it still guts you though. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

Another factor within the rescue environment that contributed to psychological stress for AWW participants was the perceived lack of cooperation between some rescue groups. This lack of cooperation resulted in frustration and bewilderment for some, as reflected in the following AWW participant's comments:

> *Um I've got some good, I've got one really good friend at the other shelters, there's a couple that we email around and they're good and that sort of thing, um but a lot of them just want to work on their own. And I don't understand that, because when we started off in one pound, and this pound gets very full, um and I started off there and they used to be putting dogs down twice a week. And now they've gone back to maybe once a month or something, or once every two months that they put you know three or four dogs down that they just can't rehome and we can't rescue or whatever. Um you know its and that's because we are working with, rescues working together as a team but that's only, there's only a very about three or four um rescues that communicate. And I set up a forum for all rescues to communicate and none of them have joined basically. So you know and that's, and I find, I don't understand that at all, because at the end of the day it should be, that we should all be working together to save as many dogs as we can. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

In addition to the above mentioned psychological stressors AWW participants were sometimes confronted with verbally and/or physically aggressive relinquishers. For example, the following AWW participant reported:

> *I mean luckily I haven't had too many aggro people lately. But we did have a series of people that um, I mean obviously it's quite emotional for them to do this, and then when they find out that you know we can't take the animal straight away. Umm yeah they do get very angry. And they get very, I've been called every name under the sun because we can't just take their animal straight away. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

For rangers whose job sometimes entailed seizing dogs from owners, there was the added stress of the potential for physical aggression as the following participant explained:

> *Oh it can be extreme and usually is, so we have to, we normally get the police to accompany us. The people that are sort of in that situation are usually connected with other crime and they are dangerous people, some aren't, but the majority are*

> *so we are very careful in those situations. We make sure we've got all our paperwork processed properly, so there's no technical hitch attached to it .... So, you know it can get a bit nasty. Sometimes they co operate, sometimes they don't. And that gentleman he didn't cooperate, you know he refused to let us gain entry, under the warrant we can use force. Um but what he did was he just said that the dog wasn't on the property, which it was. He went and got the dog and threw it over the fence onto a main road and so we had to go and rescue the dog from there. [AWW-M, Ranger]*

It is unclear if the actions of the aforementioned dog owner were an act of desperation, in that he did not want the dog taken, or it was just intended to frustrate the ranger. The ranger perceived the actions as being those of someone who could not care less about the dog, else why would he put his own dog in danger.

Working in such a stressful environment can negatively impact on the physiological, as well as the psychological wellbeing of AWWs (Arluke, 1994; Black et al., 2011; Figley & Roop, 2006; Rollin, 1987; White & Shawhan, 1996). Indeed two AWW participants' comments provided an illustration of the physiological and psychological impact of working in the rescue environment.

> *It was awful, in fact it probably sounds ridiculous, but I and my husband, we almost feel that my illness was caused by that. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

> *Um well, I can say that I've had a few breakdowns in the past. Um some, basically these days I've pretty much, you get hardened to it a bit. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

In addition to the psychological stressors previously identified, another potential contributor to threatened self integrities was the negative language used to describe the rescue environment. For example, some AWW participants from animal shelters used terminology that is reminiscent of the penal system. Language such as 'death row' (pertaining to the kennel section where dogs due to be killed were housed), and 'lockdown' (pertaining to the situation where no dogs were allowed in or out of the shelter as a result of an infectious disease being detected) served to reinforce a negative connotation that is often associated with animal shelters. This type of language can be counterproductive as it gives the impression that the dogs are guilty of something and are to blame for being in the shelter environment. This may then reinforce the misconception that all shelter dogs are 'bad' dogs and dissuade people from adopting dogs from shelters.

Section Summary

In summary, the culture of relinquishment threatened and disturbed the self integrity of participants in the current study. The culture of relinquishment was found

to foster negativity as a result of the covert aspect of relinquishment, its assignation of victim and villain roles, and its perpetuation of negative discourse. This negativity influenced how relinquishers and AWWs perceived and interacted with each other. The physical, political and emotional aspects of the rescue environment also contributed to psychological stress through the witnessing of distressed dogs and sometimes people; smells and noise, lack of resources, associated negative imagery, lack of cooperation between AWW groups and contentious policies. The next section describes and explains the threat to self integrity identified as 'crisis of conscience'.

Crisis of Conscience

'Crisis of conscience' is defined as "a time when someone is worrying because they think that they have done something unfair or morally wrong" (Crisis of conscience, n.d.). The concept identified in the data as 'crisis of conscience' related to a sense of wrongdoing that was experienced by some participants. It was a major source of inconsistencies between thoughts, behaviours and self concept, giving rise to psychological and moral conflict resulting in cognitive dissonance and psychological stress. For example, R participants in the current study struggled with the knowledge that they had relinquished their dog. This caused them to question their self perception, for example, how could I, a person who cares about my dog, do that? Similarly AWW participants involved in killing dogs struggled with the knowledge that they were party to something that went against their worldview (i.e., beliefs and values).

There were three aspects of a 'crisis of conscience' that contributed to participants' disturbed self integrity. The first was a sense of wrongdoing and associated feelings of guilt and responsibility emanating from either making the decision to relinquish the dog or being complicit in the relinquishment. The second was a sense of betrayal emanating from accepting money for the dog and the third was a parental role conflict for those participants who were parents. All of these factors gave rise to psychological, social and moral conflict, as participants struggled with the disparity between their perceptions of self and their behaviour. The concept 'crisis of conscience' was characterised as a *sense of wrongdoing*, *blood money* and *parental role conflict*, each of which are described next.

Sense of wrongdoing. R and AWW participants who were morally opposed to relinquishment perceived themselves to be making the right decision, but doing the wrong thing. That is, it was the right decision in that it provided a solution to their problem (in the case of AWWs they were acting under instruction from others), but in

acting on the decision they were doing something that they and others perceived to be morally wrong.

> *Oh that was pretty tragic, cos I didn't think I'd have to do that to any of my pets.... It was pretty tragic having to think that you'll have to give up your dog. So I'd only had it for 2 years, but you still create a bond with your animal. It's like having children to me, you know once you have an animal you have it for life, that pretty much stemmed from how I grew up, we always had our dogs until they died, so we never even contemplated giving them away. [R-T, 13 years since relinquishment]*

> *It was definitely the job you didn't want. You know, nobody wanted to do it, but it had to be done, even if you disagreed with it. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

The sense of wrongdoing was exacerbated for those who could not realise their preferred method of relinquishment (a strategy described in Chapter 7). For example, two R participants in the current study who had tried in vain to rehome their dogs eventually ended up making the decision to have their dogs killed, which as the following R participant's comments reveal contributed to her psychological unease:

> *Yeah, talking about it just makes me feel awful. Yeah, I took that dog's life because I didn't want to look after him, it was too hard. Um, yeah now that I'm older and more disciplined with dogs, I realize that the dog was unruly because I didn't train it properly. Um so there's all sorts of guilt associated with that yeah, it doesn't get easier I put an animal down that didn't deserve to be put down, yeah. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

While AWWs were not the owners of the dogs being killed, their passion and commitment to caring for and saving animals contributed to psychological unease when they were confronted with making the decision to, witnessing and/or participating in killing dogs on a regular basis. Not all of the AWW participants in the current study were exposed to the killing of dogs. Only two of the rangers, the veterinarian and some of the shelter workers at one animal shelter reported witnessing or participating in the killing of dogs. The following excerpts of data illustrate their distress.

> *Um the worst part is signing off on a euthanasia. And then I mean I sign off on nearly all of them and I'm there for lots of them too. So I mean, that must be the hardest part for a lot of people here too, because they do get attached to the animals that come in and if they don't pass their health check or their behavioural assessment we have to euthanise them, because we can't put them out in the public. That must be, that's the hardest bit I guess. [AWW-J, Shelter Worker]*

> *Um not very pleasant that's for sure, especially you know if it's young dogs, you know pups.... I try to keep my mind, I don't know, I don't know how to describe it, uh when I've gotta do that. Um I know it's necessary, you just keep that going between knowing it's, knowing it's part of the job and not letting your emotions run away with you without becoming like a cold, horrible person. You*

> *obviously feel, feel some emotions about it, but you just got to keep it in check, because if you you're doing it regularly you'd end up like I said quite a mess. [AWW-M, Ranger]*

Although killing animals is a part of veterinary work and veterinarians are regularly called upon to kill animals that are suffering due to disease and pain, the killing of an animal for the 'convenience' of the owner was harder to deal with.

> *Um, it's hard because you kind of, a lot of the time it's not the dog's fault. [AWW-B, Veterinarian]*

The comments provided by participants who were the decision makers, had witnessed or participated in the killing of dogs provides support for Arluke's (1994) caring/killing paradox and Rollin's (1987) moral stressor hypothesis. While Rollin suggested that killing of an animal was a moral stressor for those whose roles were directly involved with the care of animals, the current study demonstrated that it can be extended beyond these, to include those on the periphery of animal welfare work. For example, only a small proportion of the rangers' role is dedicated to dealing with dogs, yet two out of the three rangers interviewed expressed distress over their involvement of the killing of dogs. The third ranger was employed by a council that did not run their own pound, so therefore was not exposed to killing dogs.

For CR participants the concept of a 'crisis of conscience' did not appear to be as big a factor as it was for Rs and AWWs. This was not surprising since relinquishment was usually instigated by parents, with no involvement from the children. However, there were two CR participants that may have experienced a 'crisis of conscience' due to their perceived involvement in the relinquishment. For example, the following CR participant describes how he felt a about having to hand his dog over to the ranger after his dad had said *"it's time to be a man, take your own dog, get rid of your dog" [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]:*

> *Oh they came in a vehicle to my house and I had to then get the chain and hook her up and take her down and meet the people.*
> Interviewer: *And how did that make you feel?*
> *Um quite shit at the time, Like I don't know what dad was expecting of me back then. It's the type of thing you know, you buy animals and that for children usually around that age too I would imagine, and not expect them to have to give one up. So it kinda had a pretty big impact on me. There and then and after, even now you know every time I think of dogs, I've never had a dog since. [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

Even though as a child he did not make the decision, he was instrumental in handing the dog over. Although not explicitly reported by the participant this may have led to a sense that he was betraying himself and his dog.

Blood money. A further moral conflict that added to the 'crisis of conscience', and related to a sense of wrongdoing, was the acceptance, or paying out of money for the dog. This only related to R participants. They appeared to have a reluctance to accept money in exchange for their dog. This may have been because they did not want to be seen to be profiting from doing something that they (and society in general) perceived as wrong. Those with an emotional connection to their dog may have felt that they were betraying them in some way and may be one of the reasons dogs are often advertised 'free' to a good home.

The following R participant recounted an episode in her life where someone had offered her money for her dog. Although this incident had occurred several years before, and was unrelated to the relinquishment experience (as this participant had actually given her dog to a friend), it illustrates the association between the acceptance of money and a sense of betrayal.

> *He was part of our family and the funny thing was I was out walking and a couple stopped and they wanted to know if he was for sale. I said no and she offered me a thousand dollars for him. I said no, I said I don't sell part of my family. That was a lot of money back then. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

The acceptance of money related to a 'crisis of conscience' and to 'fear of losing face' (another threat to self integrity), as not only were R participants engaged in a behaviour (i.e., relinquishment) that was viewed as negative by themselves and others, but they were also seemingly being rewarded. Based on their own negative views of relinquishers and relinquishment, the acceptance of money in such a situation participants believed, would lead to others perceiving them in an unfavourable light. Whether it was the case that others actually perceived them in a negative way is unknown, but participants' self integrity was threatened because the participant thought that they were perceived in this way. This provides support for the notion that it is not what others *actually* think of them, but what they *think* others think of them that impacts on the self (Tice & Wallace, 2003). For example, the following R participant appeared to be concerned about what she thought the people to whom she was selling the dog would think of her.

> *I took a token amount I think it was about $150-$200. I was trying to express to them it's not the money. I mean the dog cost me six fifty* [650] *and we bought it*

> *everything under the sun and had the microchip and everything. [R-D, 11months since relinquishment]*

Further evidence was provided for the reluctance to accept money, as most of the dogs from the current study that were rehomed were given away freely to friends or relatives, or to shelters where the owner had to pay to relinquish the dog. The few R participants that did ask for money for their dogs were doing so on professional advice from breeders that they had contacted, as illustrated in the following participant's comments:

> *But she said to me, do not give her away in the papers, you sell her and you ask for good money because that way you will attract a good buyer. Someone you know, who if they're gonna fork over four hundred dollars then they're going to be a caring person. Where they were saying someone who just would take her if it was free, whoever would respond to those ads might not have the same um care for the dog, the same investment in the pet. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

The notion that putting a reasonably high price on the dog is more likely to attract a better type of owner has some support in the relinquishment literature, where it has been reported that dogs gained freely or for little money were at higher risk of relinquishment later on (New et al., 2000). However, one AWW participant's comments appeared to contest this:

> *People don't have to think about it, and these days money is nothing to anyone. I mean money's just something you throw out, cos every one gets in debt and like six hundred dollars for a puppy basically these days is nothing. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

Increasing the cost of dogs as a way of reducing relinquishment numbers may have unintended consequences, as it also makes breeding dogs more profitable. This may be one of the reasons for the emergence of the so called 'puppy farms' in recent years, where large numbers of dogs are bred (often with little concern for the dog's welfare) and sold to pet shops and the public.

While the acceptance of money in exchange for the dog was troublesome for some R participants, the payment of money for someone to take the dog, also gave rise to psychological unease. As most of the animal shelters and rescue groups rely on public donations for survival a fee is usually charged to relinquish a dog. These monies go into the care and welfare of the animals at the facility (e.g., food and veterinary costs.). Although several R participants in the current study had surrendered their dogs to a pound or animal shelter, only one R participant that had paid money to an agency to find a home for her dog, made mention of it. This was only after she had reflected on

her actions during the interview and may have been related to 'fear of losing face' that is not wanting to look bad in front of me, the researcher.

> *But just looking back I don't know, it just seemed a really simple process. We just phoned the* [animal shelter] *up they gave us this number, I paid a fee and they did it. That sounds really callous, pay them a fee and they just. [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

Parental role conflict. R participants who were also parents faced an added threat to their self integrity stemming from the conflict arising out of an inconsistency between their self concept as a caring parent and their behaviour. The parental role is assumed to be nurturing, whereby the parent cares for and protects the child from harm, the parent is assumed to be reliable and trustworthy, and is thus the source of the child's felt security (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). Conflict arose for parents who perceived themselves to be harming their children by separating the child and dog, especially a child that had an emotional bond with the dog. The following mother alluded to her parental role conflict:

> *I had to sit and talk to her and say look we just can't keep your dog, I'm sorry. So the pain.... I think the part of relinquishing that dog that was hard for me was, I was in mother role and that was. I missed the dog, I hated having to upset two children in my family um yeah that was all, that was all a bit too much really. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

Section Summary

In summary, the threat to self integrity identified as a 'crisis of conscience' threatened and disturbed self integrity via cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance was aroused as a result of an inconsistency between participants' self concept that they were caring dog owners or carers and their behaviour of getting rid of the dog. Some also experienced dissonance over the moral conflict of accepting money, which provoked an inconsistency between the perception of being a moral person and acting in an immoral way. In addition, parent relinquishers experienced an inconsistency between being a caring parent and doing something that would hurt their child (i.e., getting rid of the dog). The next section describes and explains the threat to self integrity identified as a 'fear of losing face'.

Fear of Losing Face

To 'lose face' is defined as "to no longer impress people or be respected by them" (Lose face, n.d.). The concept of 'fear of losing face' identified in the data from the current study related to a fear of losing the respect of others. People generally strive to present a good image of themselves to others in order to gain acceptance (Baumeister, 1999), participating in something that is perceived by self and others as negative, risks

rejection and social exclusion, as well as a negative perception of self. 'Fear of losing face' gave rise to psychological and social conflict. Further, as it involves aspects of evaluation by others, it also has the potential for a physiological impact through increased levels of the stress hormone, cortisol (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004). Types of psychological unease related to this aspect of the relinquishment experience included cognitive dissonance and psychological stress. For participants in the current study 'fear of losing face' was characterised as a *fear of losing the respect of others*, which is described next

Fear of losing the respect of others. As mentioned previously, being part of a society that both sanctions and dislikes relinquishment, participants were aware of the negativity associated with relinquishment.

> *When I read stories about people relinquishing their pets, I always had a negative view of that. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

> *When I first started, I think I had very preconceived ideas about people that relinquished dogs. You know, "they must be hard faced, they must be uncaring". [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

With one of the motives of the self being to maintain a positive image (Aronson, 1968; Baumeister, 1999; Steele, 1999), doing something that is perceived as negative threatened participants self and social image. That participants feared being perceived as 'bad' people, was evident during the interview process, in which they seemed to be at pains to convey, that even though they had relinquished their dog (or in the case of some AWWs had been involved in killing), they were good people. Some of them engaged in self enhancing strategies (see Chapter 7) such as differentiating themselves from others. For example, they would talk of how well they had looked after their dog, how much money they had spent on it and they would reinforce this with examples of the mistreatment of dogs by other people.

Having others not perceive them, as they perceived themselves, was problematic for some R participants, as illustrated in the following examples.

> *I'm a real animal person and animals love me and I love animals. And it's you know always kind of, I feel this affinity or simpatico you know, this thing that you have um. So to be treated as I was treated, like you know I was Jack the Ripper or you know some mad animal killer, um to be treated like that when in your mind you're aware or you know that you love animals and you want to do the best for them, but then to be faced with that treatment it it um it was really. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

> *One of my friends, he reckons, he calls me well he doesn't actually call me the dog relinquisher, but he goes "so have you still got that mutt?"* [laughs]. *I say*

> [friends name] *you're horrible leave me alone" he goes "come on how many have you been through again?" Because he's had two dogs forever and they're his kids and so when he's run out of things to tease me about he goes back to that. And sometimes I do feel a bit like that, I feel a bit um oh what's the word? You know people talk about a disposable society. It's a bit like oh they got inconvenient we'll move them on kind of, let's bring in the new puppy and the new life and the new this and the new that and we'll just add a bit of texture here but or I'm sick of the texture we'll just chuck it out. Um it's not like that, it's not like that at all. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

For R participants who were parents there was the added difficulty of not wanting to lose the respect of their children. For example, the following excerpt illustrates a mother's concern over the impression she was conveying to her daughter. The excerpt also provides evidence of cognitive dissonance, as the participant can be seen to be not practicing what she preaches (Aronson, 1999) and failing to live up to her own standards (Higgins, 1987):

> *It was my own guilt that I felt, and making it look so easy to my daughter, like "oh yeah you can give the dog away." Whereas I'm not, if you commit to something then you see it through till the dog dies you know.... I didn't want her to just think that we could just flippantly get rid of this little dog, because you know I'm not like that, or so I thought, and uh that she's not to be like that either. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Another example of a parent not wanting to lose the respect of their children is provided by the following R participant, whose dog had been scheduled to be killed, but had been rehomed by the veterinarian instead. The conflict arose for the participant, as she found herself in a situation of still wanting the dog killed, but not being able to, for fear of the children's reactions to her if she did.

> *You know the kids were fond of the dog as well, so how could I then say no I want him put down. And it was just the worst thing I think I've ever, not the worst thing I've ever had to deal with, but it was up there, it was absolutely up there. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

For CR participants, the concept of 'losing face' did not appear to be as much of an issue as for relinquishers. This may have been because they were not directly asked about concerns over how others perceived them and therefore may have not mentioned it, or it may be that it was not an issue for them. Only one CR participant reported concerns over 'losing face' and this was related to the perceptions of his friends. When asked about friends' reactions to the relinquishment the male participant who had handed his dog over to the ranger, responded:

> *P: Um I think for starters I didn't tell them.*
> *I: Why did you not tell them?*
> *P: How do you, how do you tell someone that? How do you tell other people,*

> *your friends and you know what friends are like at that age, they can be your friend or they can be really cruel, I guess, you know, so why would you tell them that?[CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

This participant may have feared being judged or socially excluded by his friends for his part in the relinquishment. He also may have feared ridicule from his friends for showing emotion over the loss of his dog. A reluctance to express feelings over the loss of a pet for fear of ridicule has also been found by other researchers (e.g., Baydak, 2000; Carmack, 1985; Cowles, 1985; Gage & Holcomb, 1991).

For AWW participants 'fear of losing face' related to a fear that the image that they presented to others would be misconstrued. For example, one participant feared that her coping strategy would make her appear cold to others:

> *Um when I first started I found it really, it was very difficult. Um I used to get very wound up with it and um I used to take it on board quite a lot, get very frustrated. Um now I've just learned to basically put up a brick wall. I just don't show any emotion with it. I've had people complain that I never showed any emotion when I was dealing with them and they thought I was being rude, but that's the way I've got to deal with it. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

Section Summary

In summary, the concept 'fear of losing face' was identified as a threat to self integrity. It epitomised the fear that participants held with regards to losing the respect of others. This threat to self integrity related to inconsistencies between self concept and social self image. This fear contributed to cognitive dissonance (aroused from others actions) for R participants who resented feeling judged by others and being portrayed as 'bad' people, which was inconsistent with their self concept of being caring dog owners. It was also dissonance producing for R participants who as parents, were not seen to be demonstrating the values and behaviours that they were trying to instil in their children. For AWW participants, dissonance arose from the fear of being wrongly perceived as rude and unfeeling people, which was inconsistent with their self image of being caring people. Only one CR participant demonstrated 'fear of losing face' in relation to his friends, which appeared to be related to his role in the relinquishment. The next section describes and explains the threat to self integrity identified as 'losing faith'.

Losing Faith

Faith is defined as a "strong belief in or trust of someone or something" (Faith, n.d.). The concept identified in the data as 'losing faith' related to a loss of belief in oneself or others. It related to the self integrity threat of failures, as a loss of faith in

oneself can result from failing to live up to one's own expectations or standards, while a loss of faith in others results when others fail to meet ones expectations. Types of psychological unease related to this aspect of the relinquishment experience included cognitive dissonance and psychological stress. For participants in the current study the concept of 'losing faith' had two aspects; a loss of faith or trust in themselves, characterised as a *sense of failure*, and a loss of faith or trust in others, characterised as *questioning the values of others*, each of which are described next.

Sense of failure. Participants spoke of failure in terms of letting themself down, letting others down and letting the dog down. This finding is consistent with disparity between actual self and ought self as described by Higgins (1987). Relinquishers were not living up to their perceptions of who they believed they were (actual self) and they were not living up to their perceived obligations to the dog (ought self). For example, the following participant appeared surprised that she had failed to live up to her own standards:

> *But it's still quite an important thing that we'd made this decision to have this dog and then I've went back on it then, you know sort of really difficult and I'm a responsible person I would think that I wouldn't do that. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

While some R participants thought they had let themselves down, others thought they had let the dog down.

> *I cried, I remember crying um and uh feeling like I had failed as well. That I had taken on the responsibility of this dog and um not being able to fulfil it, yeah so I felt like I had let him down. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

> *I wasn't coping with the dog. They could see it actually made me sadder to think that I was letting this animal down. I was letting our pet down. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

For AWWs a sense of failure arose out of not being able to save or rescue animals some of which, as mentioned earlier, relates to the rescue environment and its lack of resources. For example, the following participant when asked what the worst part of her job was replied:

> *The worst part is when we fail. So it's like a dog comes here in a bad way and we have had them in the past, emaciated dogs and you go okay lets we're on five six meals a day. And we're sitting there and puppies as well and you feed them up and you put so much into it and they don't make it it's like "Aw bugger" you've spent all that time and energy and you've really put so much love into it and then, it's like. Parvo, Parvo* [i.e., Parvovirus generally a fatal disease in dogs] *comes through and you lose a whole litter of puppies and they're this big* [participant demonstrates with her hands how small they are] *you know they're five weeks old, you lose them all, horrible. Um and the other thing too, is having to euthanise*

> *dogs, you know that's that's hard, cos at the end of the day like I said before it's our fault, it's human's fault that the dogs are the way they are, so that would be the downside. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

Although not directly reported by CR participants, a sense of failure may have been experienced with regards to failing to protect their dog. For example, one CR participant (whose dog was killed, while he thought it had been rehomed) made the following comment:

> *If I knew he was going to be killed. I would probably have kicked up a bit of a fuss. [CR-G, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

Questioning the values of others. Another aspect of 'losing faith', which impacted on the self integrity of participants, was a loss of trust or faith in others who failed to meet their expectations. For R participants, others related to AWWs and family members; for CR participants it related to parents and for AWW participants it related to potential and actual relinquishers, dog breeders, pet shop owners, and government.

Failure to have their expectations met resulted in frustration and anger for relinquishers in the current study and contributed to greater levels of psychological unease for some. For example, the following excerpt came from a participant who had instructed a veterinarian to kill her dog; she found out later that the dog had been rehomed:[34]

> *I got back to Perth and I was still really upset about it. And I contacted the veterinary surgeon place and asked them who was it that took the dog. And of course, because they just said a vet, and of course they said oh well none of the vets here took the dog. And I was like well who took the dog," oh it was some student that we had down here and I was like you know, where is a number or where is, you know what on earth is going on here. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Not being able to achieve her 'preferred method' (i.e., killing), her strategy to reduce psychological unease, resulted instead in increased psychological unease for the participant.

Another R participant was distressed over the hostile reaction that she had received from AWWs at an animal shelter.

[34] There is no identified data on how often this occurs, but in an unrelated case, a charge of unprofessional conduct was brought against a principle veterinary surgeon at the state administrative tribunal of WA in 2009, for failing to carry out killing as instructed by an owner. The owner had brought in the dog to be euthanised and the veterinary staff had rehomed the dog. The case was dismissed against the veterinarian as he had been away and had left instructions for his staff for the killing to be carried out (Lucas vs The Veterinary Surgeons' Board of Western Australia, 2009).

> *But I really think it would be good if they could look at their processes. And um I do understand that they have to deal with lots of bad stuff, but I think somewhere in that process and within the communication there's also got to be something for the person who's relinquishing. And some empathy or empathy yeh just like you know walk a mile in my shoes stuff and so it shouldn't have been, I don't think as bad as it was. And I still don't understand why I couldn't know where she was. I mean I wasn't going to stalk them* [Laughs]. *[R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

The following R participant who had struggled to care for her dog with regards to exercise, questioned the values of her ex husband who had been very involved with the dog while they were together:

> *I spoke to my ex about it and he, his first reaction.... he said put her down and I sort of, are you insane this was your pet. And he moved into a unit just renting so he couldn't take the dog at all. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

She went on to say:

> *The ex wiped his hands of everything to do with the house, including the dog which um amazingly enough about three months after I sold her he said I really miss the dog , and I thought you're a jerk. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

For CR participants, the concept of 'losing faith' was a source of cognitive dissonce and one of the main factors that threatened their self integrity. When the values being questioned were related to their parent or parents, the felt security of the child was threatened. Children feel secure in their relationship with their parent when the parent is responsive to the child's needs, is loving and supportive of their autonomy, is reliable and trustworthy (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007); when a parent does something that children perceive as contrary to their expectations of the parental role, it may undermine their felt security and trust in their parents. For example, the following participant whose dog had been left with the veterinarian after sterilisation related her disbelief at her parent's actions and also voiced the question that epitomised the sense of unease for CR participants:

> *And I think that they were the feelings that I had, "how could they do this to me? Don't they even know who I am? .... So I really couldn't get over it. And I talked to my dad and it was about finances and I couldn't believe that they would put a dollar value on my dog that I really loved. [CR-C, aged 11 years at relinquishment, 50 years since relinquishment]*

Dissonance resulted from the inconsistency of holding the opposing cognitions of 'my parent loves me and my parent hurts me'.

In addition taking away a loved dog, especially if the dog is considered a 'part of the family' may cause children to question their own place and security within the

family. The following quote from a participant whose dog was shot by her father described her fears:

> *I was completely sort of like confused and also I was very scared. My father's rifle was stood behind the bedroom door and it was kinda of very scary to have a gun in the house... I was probably one of the closest, but we were all absolutely terrified of him in lots of regards. You just didn't um, he never actually uh spanked uh touched us...but he would threaten and he was quite aggressive and um would fly off the handle at the least thing, so I guess we were all very scared and I was certainly scared and I used to find the thought of a gun behind the door behind my parents bedroom door absolutely terrifying. [CR-F, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

Some parents, perhaps in an effort to protect children and also protect themself, did not tell children the truth about what had happened to the dog. However, as the following participant reported, children sometimes saw through the lies potentially further undermining their trust in their parents:

> *Yeah they said they were going to give him away to another family, but I'm pretty sure that he was just killed. [CR-G, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

Not all CR participants in the current study provided evidence for the notion of an undermining of felt security, but this may have been because of the success of strategies implemented by them to protect and restore their self integrity (see Chapter 7).

Losing faith in relation to questioning the values of others was a major issue for AWW participants in the current study and contributed in a large part to their psychological unease. Much of their loss of faith originated from their interactions with relinquishers or potential relinquishers, whom they came into contact with in a variety of ways (e.g., face to face, by telephone or email). One AWW participant told of her disbelief on finding out that her neighbours who had rescued a dog three years previously (and had spent some time getting the dog settled and in good health after it had come from an abusive home), had now returned the dog to the shelter because they were moving interstate:

> *I would say to them "aw you could never take her back" and they kept saying "oh no even if we go back to England we're taking her with us" and the husband was saying he could never put her back in that situation. They did!! I was absolutely horrified because if they hadn't of said that to me you know you'd think well you know you live and learn. I understand where* [name of another AWW] *is coming from with you know being cynical. But they actually said, both parents said to me "oh we'd never do that" and I think. I don't believe anyone any more. How can you trust what people say? [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

Another participant also referred to losing trust in people:

> *I personally think that it makes you angry a lot of the time, what you see um and you, there's less trust of people and that sort of thing. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

AWW participants reported that they also lost trust in people when they believed they were being lied to.

> *They say oh they found this one you know running down the highway. Well you can tell it's not a stray because it knows them and for various reasons they think we are more likely to take them in if they're strays. We just had one, this was about a month ago, I wasn't there, but somebody brought this sort of 5 month old Doberman X puppy. And his legs were like sausages, he was so swollen he could hardly walk and they said he was a stray. Anyway the supervisor really tackled this young woman eventually she said that oh no he wasn't a stray, she'd been given him three weeks before. [AWW-K, Shelter Worker]*

While on the aforementioned occasion, in the previous excerpt, participant AWW-K believed that the relinquisher was lying so that the dog had a better chance of being taken in, an alternate explanation could have been that the relinquisher was trying to avoid 'losing face'. Whatever the case, being lied to by relinquishers resulted in AWWs losing faith.

The loss of faith experienced through interactions with relinquishers and potential relinquishers served to reinforce the negative image that some AWW participants had of relinquishers. For example, some participants reported that relinquishers tried to emotionally blackmail them into taking dogs.

> *But I'll usually, initially get the emails from the people and they make it our problem. It's not, you know "can you help me" but it's "if you don't do something, if you don't take this dog from me then I'm going to have to have it put down and it's gonna be your fault" and they just put it all on to us. It's just you're an animal rescue organisation, therefore you have to fix this problem for me ....Yeah and it's it's like they've contacted us and then that absolves them from any responsibility. And if the dog has to be put down that's because we're not helping them, not because they've created this situation, so no responsibility whatsoever. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

Although interactions with actual and potential relinquishers were the main contributors to participants losing faith, some of the AWW participants in the current study were also very critical of those who they perceived to be contributing to the problem of relinquishment through apathy and a lack of accountability (e.g., unscrupulous breeders, pet stores and government). Some of the AWW participants saw these groups as being able to affect change, which could result in a reduction in relinquishment rates. Pet stores in particular, came under criticism as some participants

believed they promoted backyard breeding (leading to an oversupply of dogs), impulse buying and that they were not particular about who they sold the dogs to.

> *They sit in pet shops; they don't get the socialisation they need. They don't get the care that they need and they get homed to whoever wants one basically....And they don't sterilise their dogs and they don't microchip them or anything they just vaccinate them and then chuck them out to whoever wants one basically. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

While no data have been identified about the outcomes for pet shop bought dogs in Australia, there seemed to be a consensus among AWW participants (based on the types of dogs that they see being relinquished), that a lot of dogs bought from pet shops end up being relinquished.

> *A lot of the dogs that we get in here are from a pet shop. Um so basically as long as they've got the money in their pocket they can have whatever dog they like from a pet shop. So um we find a lot of working breeds, so heelers, kelpies that look really cute as puppies in the pet shop. And nothing goes into educating the people about the breeds, so um a majority of those come to us because they can't handle them anymore. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

Exploring the role of pet shops and their possible contribution to relinquishment[35] might be an area for future study.

Another aspect of 'losing faith' which contributed to disturbing the self integrity of AWW participants pertained to people's attitude towards and treatment of their dogs. AWW participants were saddened and angered by those who abandoned their dogs and those who relinquished old dogs.

> *No the sad thing is we do get older dogs. Um so um I mean five years isn't old, but in the scheme of things you know it is getting older. Um we've had some even up to 12 years old, which isn't fair on the dog. Um they don't cope in a kennel situation at all. They just completely shut down. And because they don't interact with anyone, then it's even harder for them to be readopted. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

The relinquishment of old dogs may be more distressing for AWWs than young dogs for several reasons. Old dogs are harder to rehome, therefore they tend to spend more time at the shelter (which also increases the chance of AWWs becoming attached); they may be more distressed by the shelter environment, especially if they have come from a good home; and they are at higher risk of being killed if not rehomed.

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[35] While the assumption is that many dogs relinquished by owners have been bought in a pet shop another question to be asked in terms of contribution to relinquishment rates is what happens to dogs that are not sold? Pet shops sell puppies which are generally housed in small glass enclosures. If one considers the shelf life of the product speaking in retailer terms, puppies grow quite rapidly in their first few months, thus there is a time limit on their sale as they will eventually become too large for their enclosures and also they will lose their puppy appeal (i.e., they will no longer look like puppies which is their selling point).

Section Summary

In summary, the concept of 'losing faith' was identified as a threat to self integrity. It represented a loss of faith in oneself and others, which contributed to disturbances of self integrity for participants across the groups. R participants felt a sense of failure in not being able to live up to their own standards in relation to maintaining ownership of their dog throughout its lifetime. CR participants struggled with a loss of faith in their parents resulting in cognitive dissonance, which threatened their felt security in terms of the parent child relationship and AWW participants were frustrated, angered and saddened by the perceived apathy of others in relation to the welfare of dogs. The next section describes and explains the threat to self integrity identified as 'losing Rex'.

Losing Rex

Loss is defined as "the state of no longer having something because it has been taken from you or destroyed" (Loss, n.d.). The concept identified in the data as 'losing Rex' related to issues surrounding the physical relinquishment and actual loss of the dog that contributed to a disturbed self integrity. Types of psychological unease related to this aspect of the relinquishment experience included psychological stress and grief. The concept of 'losing Rex' was characterised as the *emotional impact* of the relinquishment, *the final goodbye, death vs. relinquishment, sense of loss, sense of control, impact on others (including the dog)* and *ongoing concerns* for the dog's welfare, each of which are described next.

Emotional impact. The emotional impact of relinquishment showed some variation across groups. Emotions common to all groups of participants were feelings of anger, sadness, upset, devastation, and mixed feelings (happy/sad).

> *So there's a lot of frustration, I think. Some anger, a little bit if sadness, um sometimes you just kinda shrug your shoulders and sigh, you get a little bit toughened to it, I suppose too, um a bit desensitised. I suppose, you have to, yeah cos it's constant. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

> *My initial feeling is again, depending on the reason, is extremely sad, and uh a lot of the time angry too ....Um well if you speak to some of the vollies* [volunteer workers] *they'll probably tell you that um, I mean after the customers are gone obviously I can lose my temper. But uh a lot of it comes out but, I do a lot of crying, there's a lot of tears. [AWW-E, Shelter Worker]*

> *This very minute I'm actually feeling quite sad about it, um generally I'm really happy because they've got a good place and the people love them and I couldn't wish for anything, a better result. [R-P, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *I think just mixed emotions, um very confused. I didn't understand. I couldn't grasp why she couldn't come with us. I was really, really upset. Really, really sad you know. Um yeah, she was just so, we were so attached to her you know. She would sleep with us and all these sorts of things. And then just to all of a sudden being told that she wasn't going to be coming or we had to leave her it was devastating as a child I think. I mean even now I think I would be devastated, but um, you know this friend that you've always had and then suddenly "nuh you can't, she's not coming" and it was like* [participant makes crying sound], *so I was crying. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

Five R participants and three CR participants were visibly upset (i.e., teary) during the interview process. The following participant recalled the family's sadness on having to relinquish their dog:

> *So the three of us made a good pair, well four, we were all crying. One was howling and the rest of us were crying....No, it was awful leaving. We're a hopeless bunch* [laughs] *we love somebody or something we do yeh, no holds barred. And it's still very hard, I mean he's well and truly dead now, but he was just special. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

The difference in emotions reported, was attributed to participants' role in the relinquishment, their worldview and their emotional closeness to the dog or dogs (see intervening conditions, Chapter 6). In addition to the common emotions expressed across the groups, R participants also reported feeling sorrowful, heartbroken, traumatised, emotionally drained, and guilty; CR participants reported feeling confused, bewildered, and scared; while AWW participants reported feeling frustrated, gutted and sympathetic toward some relinquishers.

One CR participant described the experience as cruel. Another used the example of her daughter whose cat had died, to express her feelings as a child about her dog:

> *But I've got this picture of* [daughters name] *she's 10 or 11 I think and she looks like, she looks so sad. And she looks like she's been bashed around, she just cried and cried and cried. And she's in the front yard and its near where we buried* [cat's name]. *And she just looks so sad and I think that's what I looked like when I was a kid you know it's really awful* [participant cries]. *[CR-F aged 10 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

Two CR participants did not really express emotions either way with regards to the loss of the dog; this may have been because they reported not feeling 'attached' to their dogs.

While AWW participants were not necessarily losing their own dog, some of them (in particular those working in animal shelters or home based rescue groups) reported having formed attachments to dogs in their care and did experience an

emotional reaction to the loss when the dog was rehomed or killed. For some, the unexpected nature of the relinquishment (similar to some CR participants) contributed to their psychological unease.

> *But it is, it's like you get a special attachment ....I tell my staff, "do not get attached to any dog that hasn't had a behaviour assessment, because you don't even know if it's going to pass". And I tell myself that every day and that's fine and if they do fail you can switch off. You don't get attached, but every so often you get caught. I was caught a couple of weeks ago and I fell in love with this dog, who was like an American Staffy, fantastic dog, and then I had no idea, I didn't even have an inkling that he would fail the behaviour assessment and he did. So that was, I was gutted ....So I guess I just wasn't expecting that at all, he was a nice dog, everybody loved him and then bang he was euthanised pretty soon afterwards, because my boss knew of my attachment, so he didn't want it lingering for days. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

The final goodbye. The final goodbye related to the actual physical parting or separation from the dog. Most of the participants did not talk about this aspect of the experience. There are several possible explanations for this: it may have been because they were not directly asked the question; it may have been that to them, it was not an important aspect of the experience; or it may have been too painful an aspect to discuss. The few that did speak about the final goodbye, reported that it was a painful experience as the following examples illustrate.

> *We decided that it would be better if they came to our house to collect him, rather than us driving all the way there. And we decided, well my husband decided, because he knew I would be a wreck. My husband was you know, men are not as emotional about these things generally and um he decided it would be a good idea to invite a whole heap of people to say, have goodbye drinks with a preconceived idea that I wouldn't break down in front of all these people* [laughs]. *So I can remember they came and got him. And they said "oh hello" you know, and he was wagging his tail cos he obviously realised, I don't think he knew what was going on, he knew that he'd been to their house, but I don't think he realised he was you know going for good. Well they say dogs have no concept of time do they. So I don't, but um, so he went and I remember I just sat at the front window, just kneeling on the settee looking out of the window and just watching the car lights you know go down, thinking ohhhh. [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

> *I can honestly say through, I mean leaving a country and starting anew and leaving friends and family behind, that the traumas of children starting a new schooling system, I think one of the biggest traumas was saying goodbye to my animals. That was the hardest. [R-L, 6.5 years since relinquishment]*

> *The worst part was having to leave my dog. Definitely, I found, I did feel like an abandoning mother, I really did. And I still do really, when I think about it, I still feel like I abandoned him. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

> *The goodbye was horrible. I can remember, every time I think about it, I see her, it's so real like I can't believe like I'm 26 and I was eight and I can still remember it like it was just yesterday....We were leaving the house and I can't remember who was there, but there was one of , I think it was my uncle was there and we were actually leaving the house and we were gonna stay at my dad's parents house for the weekend cos we were flying out within the next couple of days. And so she was there and she was laying right next to the front door and she was just, she was just really sad* [participant wipes tears from eyes], she was just really sad [participant teary]. *That was horrible and I think like I said it was just the fact that she was so, so alive. She was such a, I don't know, she was just human the way she was* [laughs]. *I don't know she was so bubbly and then to yeah to see her like that I think ....Yeah like I said I just saw her on the ground, she just, she just, I don't know it was almost like she looked dead, she was alive but she just didn't have any life in her. And um yeah so I kneeled down and I was cuddling her and she was just looking, she just remained still the whole time and the only thing that moved was her eyes and so that was really strange. Um it was I don't know thinking about it now, analysing it now as an adult I'm thinking that maybe she was um, she was that devastated she couldn't move because the only thing she could move was her eyes ....Yeah it was just really um, I don't know just, just this break in, you know something got broken. It was sad. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

The two previous excerpts of data from CR participants provide additional information about the experience. For example, participant CR-J's comments referring to a mother role provide an illustration of the child as parent in the human-canine attachment relationship, as discussed in Chapter 2. While the description of the final goodbye provided by participant CR-A whose dog was left with relatives, illustrates how the passage of time (an intervening condition described in Chapter 6) can contribute to disturbances of the self integrity many years after the event, as the adult participant analyses a childhood memory.

Some CR participants, for various reasons, were denied the opportunity to say goodbye to their dogs, which contributed to their psychological unease. For some, the dog was relinquished when they were not at home, for others relinquishment occurred by default. For example, one participant's dog was taken to the veterinary clinic for sterilisation and was never picked up.

In contrast to R and CR participants, apart from killing, which was reported as distressing, for most AWW participants parting with the dogs was a happy occasion, as it meant the dogs had a new home to go to. For some home based rescuers who took dogs into their own homes, however, parting was tinged with sadness when an emotional bond had been formed with the dog as the following participant's comments illustrate:

> *I couldn't part with the first one, but he's very special,* [Alluding to a dog that the participant ended up adopting]. *There was a bull terrier bitch that I had. I had her from; well she was maybe six weeks old til she was about three months or so. And she was a ratbag and I hated her to start with and by the time she went I was absolutely besotted with her. I sobbed, I took her to her new home, which was just the next suburb and I just, I took my staffy with me and I sobbed all the way home. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

Sense of loss. Another aspect of 'losing Rex' related to a sense of loss experienced by some participants. R and CR participants in the current study that had expressed some degree of attachment to their dog reported a sense of loss after the dog was relinquished. Although some AWW participants had reported becoming attached to some dogs they did not report a sense of loss. There may be several reasons as to why AWWs did not report a sense of loss: it may have been because they were not directly asked the question; they may not have had the same relationship with the dogs as did owners; they would not have the time or the energy due to the numbers of dogs they dealt with, to dwell on the loss of each individual dog; and their use of protective-restoring strategies (see Chapter 7) may have counteracted any sense of loss that they might have experienced.

The sense of loss experienced by the R and CR participants related to physical (i.e. loss of the dog) and emotional loss (i.e., loss of the relationship). One R participant, who had her dog killed before moving into a retirement village, lamented the loss of the tactile interaction with her dog. She reported that she had purchased a soft toy so that she had something to hug. Irrespective of method of relinquishment chosen, many of the participants described a sense of loss, similar to that experienced after loss through death.

> *Oh it was heartbreaking, yeah I was devastated. He was he was my constant companion.... He was my protector, so yeah I felt very scared and very lost without him. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment].*

> *Oh that was devastating like....I felt like a little bit of me died. Cos it was just like, I've always had him there, he's always been with me, like he's been there for six years. [R-J, 6 wks since relinquishment]*

> *I think you just feel like something was missing. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *You know we just missed him and he wasn't there anymore and you know he's gone to heaven.... I was like a little bit sad. And I think my mum used to miss him, because you know she used to talk to him in the day, she was afraid of dogs, but she liked Rex and she used to talk to him outside and so like she used to miss talking to him. [CR-D, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 34 years since relinquishment]*

Death vs. relinquishment. In order to gain some perspective of the comparability between the experiences of death of a dog (i.e., due to natural causes) and relinquishment, participants who had experienced both were asked to compare the experience (AWW participants were not asked this question as none had reported personally experiencing relinquishment). Participants reported that the main difference was responsibility or control over the loss (i.e., they had no part in the death of a dog through natural causes, but did play some part in the relinquishment). For example, some participants thought that relinquishment was worse than death because 'they had a hand in it':

> *Um yes, I think when you leave an animal you yourself feel responsible that you've let the animal down. But in a situation of death where you got no control its natural causes and it's more easily acceptable. So to have left my animals in the hands of other people and abandon my animal was worse, you know, no that was definitely worse, definitely. [R-L, 6.5 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um I think I cried. I did cry a lot more when Rex 2 died* [Relinquished dog] *but I was more involved when um Rex 1 died. I was more involved with the death you know, with the death and the dying of Rex1 and it wasn't my decision. You know the decision of Rex 1 dying was out of my hands, whereas it was my decision to relinquish Rex 2 and to have him killed. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

While other participants considered it the same:

> *It's in a way it's the same thing isn't it. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

CR participants did not speak of responsibility or control as relinquishers did, when comparing death and relinquishment, but they mostly spoke of the unexpected nature of the loss. Most CR participants reported that relinquishment was worse than death.

> *Look I have to say that relinquishing is more painful. Well maybe that's not the right word to use. I think it's harder to get over. I think you accept that you know death is a natural course of events, eventually when the dog gets to a certain age that's what happens.... But yeah, I think the worst part was having to leave my dog. [CR-J, aged 15 years at time of relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

> *Maybe it was different, in the sense that I knew Rex 1 was dying, because for a very long time he was dying um and maybe I felt a bit more prepared. But to be honest when the day came I was a complete mess for at least a month. Whereas with Rex 2* [Relinquished dog] *it happened all of a sudden and the pain was really sudden as well. [CR-A, aged 8 years at time of relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *Natural death is kind of. I was sad that Rexie died but it was always really nice going to dad's place and seeing her, because she was an old childhood dog kind*

> *of thing and she was allowed to live out until she was so old. And it was his decision whether he put her down or whether she was just allowed to live to old age, sort of thing, but she just died comfortably in her sleep. I think if he'd have thought she was suffering he probably would have taken her out the back of the block and put a bullet in her head too. But it wouldn't have been such a bad thing you know. But it just feels like, I mean I feel like I don't know I can't remember Rex* [Relinquished dog] *I can't remember events properly, so it feels like there was real, like a cut, like a gap. Like it just feels like I've lost memories because this dog was just snatched away. [CR-F, aged 8 years at time of relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

While in the previous excerpt, participant CR-F referred to not remembering events properly, it was not a reflection of an inability to remember events that happened some years ago, because other things that occurred around the same time were remembered quite clearly. It was only memories of the dog that were troublesome. This may have been a coping mechanism (discussed in Chapter 7) to deal with the traumatic way in which the dog was relinquished (i.e., the participant's father shot the dog). Another aspect related to the concept of 'losing Rex' that contributed to participants' disturbed self integrity was a lack of control.

Sense of control. Having or perceiving control over important outcomes is necessary for self integrity (Steele, 1999). Having no control over important aspects of one's life can result in "feelings of futility and despondency as well as to anxiety" (Bandura, 1982, p. 140). Although all (apart from one) of the relinquishers had freely chosen to relinquish their dog or dogs, changes in the planned relinquishment led to an undermining of control for some. For example, one R participant had elected to have her dog killed by a veterinarian, only to find out later that the veterinarian had rehomed the dog. The participant describes her feelings in the following excerpt:

> *My friend took him to the local vet. And um I made the decision to have him put down and asked to have him put down. And then the next day when we went to the vet to pay the bill, um they said that one of the veterinary students wanted to take the dog. And I was gutted and so distraught because I'd already made that decision, that really hard call and now my decision was being undermined and more or less taken out of my hands. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Another R participant also reported that lack of control contributed to her psychological unease, after her dog had been taken to the vet to be killed, without her consent, while she was away:

> *I suppose that Rex was the hardest one for me, but that was more because I didn't get to make that decision. That decision was taken away from me and so I was completely unprepared for it. That one was really hurtful. [R-U, 8 years since relinquishment]*

The experience of participant R-U in the previous excerpt is similar to the experiences reported by CR participants, who also had no control over the situation as reported in Chapter 5. Lack of control was also an issue for some AWWs in terms of killing. While veterinarians have the final say on whether they will or will not kill a dog that has been brought in by its owner, animal shelters that practice killing are governed by policy and regulation. Shelter workers therefore have little or no control over the killing.

Impact on others (including dog). A perceived impact on others also contributed to participants' disturbed self integrity. Not everyone perceived an impact on others. For example, of the five R participants who had had dealings with animal shelters, only one made comment about the impact on AWWs, and that was in the context of trying to make sense of her perceived bad treatment.

> *I mean I can understand that they see some bad stuff, you know, and I think that they must get really tired of it and um fatigued day in day out of hearing these dreadful stories. But what they need to do, is to be able to listen to what's being said to them and then make the decision, don't judge me. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

As R participants were not directly asked the question about impact on AWWs it is unclear whether this was a deliberate strategy to protect themselves or they genuinely did not think that relinquishment impacted on AWWs.

For those that did, seeing the impact of relinquishment on others, especially children, added to participants psychological unease.

> *The day that we decided to go ahead and do that my daughter twigged to what was going on and she was only about four. She was the one who became quite distressed, now I don't know if I asked her now if she would actually remember that, um but probably her pain actually got to me more than my own. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

Some were surprised by the impact.

> *It was horrendous at the time because and I didn't realise how much it affected her until obviously the weekend she went. We cried for the whole weekend, but for months later we'd find, cos we stayed in our home and we finally moved out in December. So we had you know from the March to the December and we'd find a ball and it'd start us all off again and we'd end up crying." [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

One mother reported a positive and a negative impact:

> *Well the child that got bitten* [laughs] *was ok about it and he said why did we ever get such a dog. Um they* [the other children] *were upset, they were upset. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Some participants reported the impact on other family members. For example, the following participants' comments refer to a husband, a mother, a grandchild and a husband, respectively.

> *Um its weekends he notices it, he's so busy with work, um he sort of comes home and doesn't think too much about it but you know weekends.... He just got up and rang the lady* [that the dog had gone to] *on Saturday morning and I said "what did you ring about Rexie for" and he said "oh its three months since we gave her to. I thought oh yeah, yes it's closer than you know you like to think. [R-I, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *I think mum was not, mum was not really happy about it either, I remember her being quite sad, but not overtly upset or anything. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

> *But when our grandson came for the school holidays, he was, he's six um he said "I can't find Rexie". So I said you know, that Rexie had gone and she'd gone to another house and was with other dogs and happy and everything like that. But it took him a couple of days to get over it. He cried and he wasn't happy. [R-I, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *I think because it was so traumatic, you'll most probably find it bonded us for when we came here. There was a very very deep bond. And yes, I think to see my husband who was so, it was his dog. I got the Border collie for his birthday. So he was, I never thought he would be so cut up, but he was so cut up about leaving his dog behind, gee so to see that raw emotion. [R-L, 6.5 years since relinquishment]*

The previous excerpt and the following also dispel an apparent misperception held by some, that only females are emotionally affected on losing their dog.

> *Yeah, and I've seen situations where one person and not always the woman has been very very upset at relinquishing the dog. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

While the focus of AWWs is centred on the dog, some participants reported feeling distressed over witnessing the emotional distress of others. This related to relinquishers who were distressed at relinquishing their dog, or children who had accompanied their parents to the animal shelter as explained in the following excerpts.

> *And, the actual, I always found the signing the papers the hardest. Yeah it seems silly, but you know you have to go through the paperwork and they're very upset. And I was trying to always remain professional, but I'm not very good at it you know. And.... you're dealing with people who are really emotionally charged, and it's you know they say, you got to separate yourself, but it's very difficult to do that. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

> *I only get upset if, like the only time I've really got upset this older gentleman, he was a doctor. He had a little dog and he was told if he didn't get rid of the dog out of the retirement area he was in, he was going to lose his home. And that was the only person that made me upset, because he got really, really upset. You know, some of the people that come in seem really cold and they don't have*

> *any emotion. Other people get really really upset. I can handle most of them, until the kids cry. Then you just think oh poor things.... A lady brought her grandson with her when she surrendered their dog and I've had a lady bring in two daughters and made them stand there while she filled in the paperwork and the dog went away and they were crying their eyes out. [AWW-J, Shelter Worker]*

> *I do know that people get really really upset when they do relinquish their animal. It is quite emotive for them. They've built an attachment to that animal. The girls in reception have to deal with that on a regular basis, grown men crying and children crying in reception there because their animals getting surrendered. It can be quite difficult. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

While perceiving or witnessing a negative impact on others contributed to participants' psychological unease, some participants also perceived or witnessed a negative impact on the dog. Most of the R participants did not report an impact on the dog. This may have been because they did not perceive that the dog had been affected or it may have been that they chose not to think that the dog had been affected, thereby protecting their self integrity. Alternatively it could have been because some R participants had deliberately tried to minimise the impact on the dog, a coping strategy described in Chapter 7. The following participant believed that her dog had not been affected.

> *I don't think the dog's any wiser. She was quite young as well, we got away with that I think. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Whereas another R participant who had relinquished both of her dogs, one to a couple and one to a resident at the retirement village where she had been employed as a live in caretaker (where she herself was not allowed to have dogs), thought her dogs had been affected.

> *One night I heard this scratching at the door, went down and there's Rexie 1 there. I felt absolutely terrible because her and Rexie 2 were mates, really good friends they really missed each other. And you know the fact that she'd got across* [name of road] *without getting run over. She was only little, she was dark, she had no traffic brains at all. Rexie 2 would have managed, she had sense, but not Rexie 1 for traffic. Yeah I often felt, I really missed her. She was a lovely little dog and I felt bad about Rexie 2. [R-R, 15 years since relinquishment]*

Later in the interview the participant went on to say:

> *Rexie 1, I always, you know they're your baby and you feel that parting. And I often wonder how long did she live and did she feel deserted. And the fact that she made the effort to come all the way from up there down to us. I felt awful taking her back and Rexie 2 was so happy to see her cos they were, we'd had them both from little puppies and they were, it would be like separating those*

> *two* [pointing to two dogs in the room that she was looking after for someone]. *[R-R, 15 years since relinquishment]*

As explained previously, not all CR participants witnessed or were present at the relinquishment of their dog and therefore some participants could not report any reactions. The following excerpt taken from a larger quote above *"I'm thinking that maybe she was um, she was that devastated she couldn't move because the only thing she could move was her eyes"* [CR-A], also included the participant's perception of the impact on the dog. Perception is the key word here, as it is irrelevant whether the dog was actually devastated or not, what contributed to the participants disturbances to self integrity was how the participant interpreted the impact.

Participants employed in animal shelters in particular, witnessed firsthand the impact of relinquishment on dogs and had a different perspective of the impact on the dog than that of R participants. AWW participants reported that dogs vary in their ability to cope with separation from their owners and the added stress of the shelter environment.

> *Um they don't cope, they don't cope that well. Um yeah, basically as soon as they come in it's terrifying for them. So the first thing you get is, you can get aggression. You know they'll be brought in here and they'll seem fine. We've had dogs in here and we've put them straight into one of the kennels and then they turned aggressive. And it's not that they are necessarily aggressive animals, it's just that they are terrified. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *But this man came with his two children and a lady to the gate and they had a golden retriever about 10, a bit bad on the hips. The children were crying and gripping to the dog, they had him from being six weeks old. But he was divorced or his wife had died, I'm not sure, but he was remarried and the woman with him, his wife to be, didn't like dogs. Anyway do you know it poured and poured and poured and poured.... And it just lay outside of the gate for days and days wouldn't eat, wet through, it was just awful, waiting for them to come back. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

Witnessing or perceiving an impact on dogs is particularly distressing for AWWs, especially as sometimes dogs are so distressed that they have to be killed.

> *We had a beautiful dog surrendered, absolutely gorgeous. Um he completely shut down. He wasn't coping and we had to put him to sleep on humane grounds, because he just, it was heartbreaking to see what he was like. And um yeah, I mean people have got to see that side of things. It's not fair, I think once they see all the nice happy bit at reception and we'll take their dog, but you don't actually see the dog in the kennel, just the way they look it's just so "what is going on". In the kennel block we've got at least 20 other dogs and you've got four other kennel blocks of barking dogs, all these smells, it's such a high tension area. Some dogs will just take it and they are fine, but there's a lot of dogs that don't and they just curl up and that's about it, they just shut down, which is really sad. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

One AWW participant from a rescue group that kept dogs at her own home reported that the dogs were a bit wary for the first couple of days, but then they seemed to settle down. It may be that the shelter environment contributes to the distress of the dog or it may be that the dogs that cope well have either come from neglectful home environments or had no attachment to their owners. Another aspect of 'losing Rex' that contributed to psychological unease was ongoing concerns for the dog's welfare.

Ongoing concerns. This related to worries that participants may have had in relation to how the dog was being cared for and if the dog was settled after relinquishment. Only a few participants expressed ongoing concerns for their dog's welfare. The fact that more did not express ongoing concerns might have been because some participants had left dogs with relatives and remained in contact; others engaged in strategies such as wishful thinking (i.e., only thinking of positive outcomes for the dog) and others had specifically chosen killing as the method so that they would not have to worry about the dog being mistreated. Those that did express ongoing concerns tended to be those who had no contact with the new owners.

> *The loss was always there you know. You always wondered what she was like and if she's okay. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *The unknown of where is my dog, is she okay, is she dead, you know what's happened to her? Are people looking after her? You know and I just didn't know and I think that kept it going for longer. [CR-C, aged 11 years at relinquishment, 50 years since relinquishment]*

The following R participant relinquished to an animal shelter, which for confidentiality reasons are not permitted to divulge the identity of the new owner.

> *What I did say to them was "here's my mobile number, when she has new owners, would you please give them my number, and say that I'm more than willing to talk to them". You know, because her behaviour um was quite challenging and when she was here the first day, she pulled every single thing off the washing line and buried it. And um so she wasn't she was very challenging* [laughs] *funny, cute you know, but when you go out and see your Egyptian towels* [laughs] *buried in the sand no um. And I thought well if someone rings me and says "aw look she's just done this", I could say "well that's exactly what she did and this is how I managed it" or, or "no that's new behaviour but have you thought about". You know, just like because I didn't, it wasn't as if I cut her dry. I mean I still really cared about her. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

AWW participants did not directly report having ongoing concerns about dogs' welfare. This may have been due to the sheer numbers of dogs that they have to deal with and the coping strategies that they employed (see Chapter 7).

Section Summary

In summary, the concept of 'losing Rex' was identified as a threat to self integrity. "Losing Rex' related to the separation from and loss of the dog resulting in grief for some and psychological stress. Aspects of the dog relinquishment experience related to 'losing Rex' that disturbed the self integrity of participants included: the negative emotions experienced; the psychological pain of saying goodbye to the dog or for some not having the opportunity to say goodbye; a sense of loss experienced by those with an emotional connection to the dog; a lack of control; witnessing a negative impact on others (including the dog); ongoing concerns for the dogs welfare; and a sense of responsibility for the loss. For some losing the dog through relinquishment was deemed worse than losing a dog through death. In the next section factors that helped to explain some of the variation in participants' experience of dog relinquishment are described and explained.

Intervening Conditions

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 103) define intervening conditions as the "broader, structural context pertaining to a phenomenon". Thirteen individual and social factors were identified as intervening conditions in the current study, namely, worldview; attachment; role; relinquishment history; coping method; cultural attitudes to dogs; support; ritual; new knowledge; passage of time; time pressures; concurrent losses; and resources. These conditions had a positive or negative influence on how participants experienced a disturbed self integrity in terms of type, intensity, frequency and duration. They also had a positive or negative influence on the way in which participants managed their disturbed self integrity, by influencing the types and efficacy of the strategies utilised (see Chapter 7). Not all intervening conditions applied to all participants, but each participant's experience of dog relinquishment was influenced by at least one. Each one of the 13 intervening condition is briefly described and explained next. Excerpts of participants' data are also provided in some instances to illustrate the explanation.

1. Worldview

This condition related to participants' self image (i.e., what type of person they perceived themselves to be) as held prior to the relinquishment. Participants' worldview also included their cultural values and beliefs about animals in general and dogs in particular, as well as their attitudes towards dogs, relinquishers, and relinquishment; all of which had been formed over time and influenced by family, society and past personal experience. Although none of the participants expressed

negative attitudes towards dogs there were differences apparent between those with country backgrounds and those from the city. For example, in the following excerpt the participant refers to an aspect of her worldview concerning dogs which alludes to the difference between country and city attitudes:

> *It um challenged an ism that I thought that I had about myself. So you know my ism of you know being brought up on a farm you know if an animal is not doing it's job it will be shot and you know an animal that bites is gonna be shot. And I always thought that I would stick to that rule hard and fast, yet I didn't. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

The participant's worldview was a key factor in how participants experienced dog relinquishment as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> *No I couldn't do it* [referring to relinquishing a dog]. *Um I just um. I think I would try my best to take the dog with me because um I really love dogs, like I love dogs and they just make me so happy and I go stupid over dogs. Some people go stupid over babies you know just to give you a description, I'm like that with dogs. I just wouldn't want to leave a dog.....I dunno it's just sometimes the way us humans believe it's like dogs or animals don't feel...[CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*.

> *We've always been brought up you, you know your animals are for life. Doesn't matter what sort of animal, like problems anything like that um I'd go homeless before I had to give up my animals. I couldn't do it, even if I grew allergies, severe allergies, I'd go on medication for life. I just can't. I think what makes it hard is I could not fathom ever, ever giving up my animals, so it makes it hard for me that people can make such an easy decision to give up theirs. And I think that's why I get worked up by it. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

Along with worldview, another intervening condition identified that influenced how dog relinquishment was experienced by participants was 'attachment'.

2. Attachment

This condition related to the emotional closeness that participants felt towards their dog or dogs. Some argue (e.g., Burgess-Jackson, 1998; Lorenz, 1952/2002; Russow, 2002) that an emotional connection with an animal bestows a higher degree of moral responsibility. As Russow (2002) explains "if I kick a strange dog for no reason, I have done a morally bad thing because I have inflicted unnecessary pain. If I kick a familiar dog that willingly comes when he is called and expects praise, that action, I believe, is morally worse" (p. 35). This suggests that the stronger the bond with the dog the greater the moral conflict and the greater the degree of psychological unease.

R and CR participants in the current study varied in their reported emotional closeness to their dog or dogs, using terms such 'best mate', 'like a son', 'just a dog' and 'part of the family' to describe their relationship with their dog. Although AWW

participants did not describe a relationship with the dogs in their care they did acknowledge that they became attached to some dogs. The following excerpts of data illustrate the range of emotional closeness reported by participants:

> *And he was like having a son in a way. And wherever we went he went. We never left him. Um we went in the car, he was in the car. We went for a walk, he was with us. If we went down the beach, he came to.... And if he was sick he went to the vet, just like we went to a doctor. It sounds, maybe sounds a bit silly, but that's how we viewed him. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

> *It was just a pet really. He wasn't, I didn't kinda form a really special attachment to him. [CR-G, aged 12 at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

> *Me, having a dog when I was eleven, he was more than just a pet. He was my friend. When I got home, when I was actually alone I didn't feel alone because I was with him. He was very defensive, whereas I couldn't imagine if I didn't have that dog. I would have been in a new house, in a strange house actually, a strange environment away from where my other family was, cos it was actually the farthest distance that I lived from my other house with my extended family um and I felt very isolated. So having him there was I just couldn't imagine not having him there. My life would have been completely different. So it was major when mum said were leaving and coming over here because I was giving up, yeah he wasn't just a dog he was my friend and company. He was, I don't know, he was, he provided some safety and some security and stability in my life and all that. So it was and you kind of think well that's something I can take with me, it's like having a brother or sister because I'm an only child. [CR-J, aged 15 at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

One participant reported feeling closer to her dog than to people:

> *Oh, all my animals meant to me more than people.... I've got much stronger feelings about animals. But they have been, they're very much a part of my life. And when I have a pet um like I said I don't believe in this thing of "they're just a dog and they've got to behave". It's really a one to one sort of thing; they're part of my life. And consequently I've always had very good dogs everybody always thought they were wonderful and that sort of thing. Um it's sort of not quite a communication thing but I just sort of feel I'm very attached to animals. I get very close to them. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

Evidence for differences in emotional closeness between family members was also found in the data, as the following examples indicate:

> *And then* [younger sisters name] *had to say bye. And that was pretty bad because it was; it was her dog, because she was the little one. She always wanted a dog, so it was harder I think it was harder for her. And so she, she kinda got to say bye to her, last. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *Yes well we're all; we were all attached to the dog. Um but more so me, because the dog attached itself to me you know. I mean and the dog would go with the boys and do things but only for a short period of time and then it'd be looking for me, where was I? So in that sense, you know, not as close an attachment, but you*

> *know it was certainly and it was huge it was really huge at the time. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

Differences in levels of attachment had the potential to impact on the effectiveness of strategies employed by participants. For example, a person within the family who was not particularly close to the dog might not be understanding of another's feelings with regards to the dog and may appear insensitive as the following example illustrates:

> *I was really upset about that when they told me. I said "aw what happened" and they said "well when you guys left, when she came here she was really depressed" and my cousin laughed. Cos my cousin, um my aunt loves dogs, like she's got like seven dogs and she really feels and you know my cousin just laughs he goes ha ha Rexie was depressed* [sarcastic tone]. *[CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

The finding that many of the R participants reported an emotional closeness to their dogs, supports Marston et al.'s (2004) contention that relinquishers were not relinquishing because the bond had been broken. The finding that participants who reported a strong emotional connection to their dog, still relinquished, suggests that high levels of attachment may not be the protective factor against relinquishment suggested by some (e.g., Chumley, Gorski, Saxton, Granger, & New, 1993). Along with the emotional closeness that participants felt towards the dog another factor that influenced how participants experienced dog relinquishment was their role in the relinquishment.

3. Role

This condition related to participants involvement in the relinquishment. Participants had either a direct or indirect role. Those with a direct role were responsible for making the decision to relinquish and/or directly involved in the relinquishment (e.g., relinquishers and AWWs - involved in killing dogs). Those with an indirect role did not make the decision and did not take part in the relinquishment (e.g., CR and AWWs - not involved in killing dogs). Participants with an indirect role in the relinquishment were less likely to experience cognitive dissonance over the relinquishment than those with a direct role. In addition, strategies used to deal with the psychological unease such as blaming others may not be as effective when used by a person with a direct role as it would be if used by a person with an indirect role. That is, it is harder to blame others when one feels directly responsible for something. Another individual factor that had a bearing on how participants experienced dog relinquishment was 'relinquishment history'.

4. Relinquishment History

This condition related to participants prior experience of relinquishment. For some R and CR participants the relinquishment experience was not new, as they had experienced relinquishment before. For those in the animal welfare field it is an ongoing experience.

Although participants may have experienced relinquishment previously, each experience brought with it a new set of variables (e.g., method of relinquishment, role, level of attachment etc.), that resulted in a different experience on each occasion. Thus, strategies utilised to manage the relinquishment experience on one occasion, may not be as effective on a different occasion, under a different set of circumstances. For example, the following excerpts of data from one participant illustrate the difference in psychological unease experienced, both in terms of type and duration. On the first occasion the participant was able to achieve her 'preferred method of relinquishment', a strategy described in Chapter 7, and on the other she was not.

> *Um I did, I missed him and I felt sad. And um, but I still knew what was happening to him. And the fact that he had gone to such a good home um was huge comfort. So yeah I didn't feel devastated for an extended period of time. [R-F, 15 years since last relinquishment]*

> *Um it's horrendously different. I still feel guilty, incredibly guilty about this poor dog... It doesn't get easier. I put an animal down that didn't deserve to be put down, yeah. [R-F, 15 years since last relinquishment]*

As well as previous exposure to relinquishment another condition that influenced how participants experienced dog relinquishment was their 'coping method'.

5. Coping Method

This condition related to the way in which participants dealt with their psychological unease. Participants who were children at the time of relinquishment were at a disadvantage in terms of coping strategies compared to adults, who due to their age and life experience would have had a greater repertoire of coping strategies to draw on. Strategies utilised to alleviate psychological unease were enhanced when people utilised the same types of strategies. For example, in a family situation when all members utilised avoiding strategies, such as disconnecting from the dog (i.e., they did not talk about the dog, did not keep memorabilia etc.) then it was easier to deal with the relinquishment experience. However, problems arose when family members utilised conflicting strategies to deal with the relinquishment experience. For example, some preferred to maintain a connection to their dog through talking about the dog, keeping mementoes etc., while others preferred to disconnect from the dog. This was an issue

reported within families, but also within the animal welfare environment, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *But we did get a vet once, it was very strange. We'd all worked together for quite a while and we'd developed like a team coping strategy I suppose, even though we all dealt with it in our own way. And we got a new vet and he was from Ireland. I'll never forget him. And his coping strategy was humour. It just didn't fit in with us and it was just it was terrible. And it caused you know, real problems at first. And we had to sort of say you know "we can't cope with that, you know that's not our coping strategy and it's actually making us worse you know, because you're being light hearted about it". So, but that was his coping strategy and I think he changed his strategy, he realised "well it's upsetting this lot so". [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

The use of humour as a coping strategy for veterinarians was also reported by Sanders (1995). In addition to the aforementioned individual factors, social factors also influenced how participants experienced dog relinquishment, one of which was 'cultural attitudes towards dogs'.

6. Cultural Attitudes to Dogs

This condition related to the attitudes of others to dogs (i.e., people that participants interacted with and their community in general). As explained in Chapter 2, attitudes to dogs vary (even within families), from humanistic to utilitarian, positive to negative. Some consider a dog 'just a dog' that is, it is no different from any other animal. It is not afforded any rights, it is akin to a commodity and is disposable (utilitarian attitude type). Others consider a dog a member of their family, akin to a child or sibling and while some still may not afford the dog any rights, they believe the dog to be a sentient being (humanistic attitude type). One AWW participant alludes to the differences in attitudes in the following excerpt:

> *Um you know friends of mine have got dogs, but you know a dogs a dog to them you know. I don't think they think that they bleed like us; they feel the cold like us, tooth ache like us, ear infections you know. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

Strategies employed by participants to protect and restore self integrity could be undermined when there were differences in attitudes, as the following example demonstrates, in which the participant as a child is chastised for crying about the loss of her dog:

> *You know, we'll get another dog; that was the sort of attitude. And then because my dad was very much like "it's only a dog" and you know "don't be so stupid". [CR-D, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 34 years since relinquishment]*

In the previous excerpt the child's strategy of expressing her sadness through crying is undermined by the parent's attitude towards dogs. This may result in the child hiding their hurt and not getting the emotional support that they might need to deal with their loss.

Another example of a strategy that can be undermined by 'cultural attitudes towards dogs' is 'contributing to a solution'. This strategy utilised by AWWs, involves engaging in activities aimed at reducing the rate of relinquishment. Cultural attitudes towards dogs can be a barrier to implementing interventions or programs that might lead to reductions in relinquishment when utilitarian attitudes towards dogs are held by those with the power to support the programs. 'Cultural attitudes' was related to another intervening condition, namely, support.

7. Support

This condition related to how supportive others in the participant's environment were. The reactions of others positively or negatively influenced the participants' experience of dog relinquishment. Supportive reactions aided in participants' coping as indicated in the following comment from a relinquisher:

> *Um well they understood the circumstances that I had to do, why I had to do it. And of course they were sad because they are all dog owners. One of the ladies that I work with, one of the ladies actually relinquished one of her dogs and knew how I felt so. [R-P, 3 months since relinquishment]*

Negative reactions from others, however, contributed to psychological unease by undermining strategies aimed at restoring self integrity. For example, R participants trying to restore their self and social image through self enhancing strategies were undermined by negative reactions and treatment from family, friends, and animal welfare workers as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> *Um, disapproval from my mother. She thought I'd been irresponsible. Yeah that was sort of the main reaction. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

> *People were very disapproving. People, who did know were very disapproving of the fact that I was actually taking him to the vet to have him killed. And they couldn't understand that. How I could do that. And yet they were the same people whose advice was you know, just do what everyone else does.* [Participant is referring to people leaving their dogs to fend for themselves on the side of the road in the hope that they would join the dogs in the local Aboriginal camp]. *So that didn't make sense to me. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

Support impacted on strategies such as 'maintaining a connection' and 'contributing to a solution'. Full support aided the effectiveness of these strategies, while lack of support undermined them. For example, in order for participants to be

able to maintain a connection with the relinquished dog, new owners had to be agreeable to the contact. While most that preferred to remain in contact were able to, those that relinquished to an animal shelter were not, due to confidentiality policies as mentioned previously.

While attempts at 'contributing to a solution' were undermined by cultural attitudes towards dogs they were also undermined by level of support, which although related, also differed (i.e., support could be offered irrespective of attitude towards dogs). For example, AWWs were undermined when the education department or schools were not supportive of the implementation of education programs and veterinarians were not supportive of their work as the following AWWs report:

> *I've been involved in programs in schools, but without it being part of the curriculum it's very hard to get a program established in the schools. Whether it's a responsible dog owners program or a dog bite prevention program .... Um it's very hard to sustain it. You have to have teachers that will allow it in. And um I've been involved in some, in one particular program which was being funded and driven by the Australian Vets Association and that one flopped after a while too, because of the difficulty of trying to get it into schools. [AWW-M, Ranger]*

> *My personal opinion is they, they don't want to lose money or they don't want to do things at cost price. That's the only reason I can think of why they don't want to help out with rescue. Um because a lot of the vets charge an arm and a leg and you'll find those are the vets that don't want to help with rescue. The ones that are really on the cheap side and are in it for the dogs more than anything, um will definitely help out. And you can get really good discounts with them. Um, I don't know why that is but that's just the way it is and very rarely do you find vets that are willing to come and help. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

> Another condition identified in the data that influenced the participants experience of dog relinquishment and which was related to cultural attitudes towards dogs was 'ritual'.

8. Ritual

This condition related to practices associated with the loss of the dog. When someone loses a loved human they are generally supported in their grief by others and can gain some solace from rituals associated with death such as funerals, and graves (Fristad, Cerel, Goldman, Weller, & Weller, 2001; Kollar, 1989). When a loved dog dies the same level of support may not be available, as generally people do not equate the two losses as the same, resulting in grief being disenfranchised (Doka, 1989; Kollar, 1989). However, people may still have some ritual available to them. For example, they may bury their dog in their garden or they can utilise the services of organisations

(if they are financially able) that specifically deal with pet burial and cremation, with some of them allowing animal graves onsite.

Ritual associated with relinquishment, however, is more complex. While relinquishers who have their dog killed can avail themselves of similar rituals as those surrounding natural death, some may choose not to observe ritual, as a grave, for example, would be a constant reminder of their actions. For AWWs that are exposed to the killing of dogs, rituals associated with death are not available (see AWW-C's comments that follow). Some participants lamented a lack of ritual when there was an opportunity for it to be observed, as the following excerpts illustrate:

> *I: Did they bring the dog home to bury?*
> *P: No, there was no closure for me at all. [R-U, 8 years since relinquishment]*

> *Yeah and you know you'd get gowned up and even that was stressful, the getting gowned up you know, coz you knew what you were gonna go and do. Um but they tell you to do them in, that you might do four together. So you'd get gowned up and yeah it was very stressful. And then someone would come and take the dogs away and that in itself was stressful you know, coz you'd just given, my strategy was to pamper the dog and then it's just got to go. Whereas I mean when my dog died, I had it cremated and everything. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

For those who rehomed their dogs, rituals associated with death such as funerals, memorials and graves do not apply as the dog is not dead. Ritual then can positively or negatively influence the psychological unease of participants through its presence or absence. The ninth intervening condition identified in the data was 'new knowledge'.

9. New Knowledge

This condition relates to the acquisition of new information about the dog or the relinquishment. New knowledge caused participants to reassess what they thought they knew and had the potential to contribute to or alleviate psychological unease, depending on whether the new knowledge was positive or negative.

New knowledge can result from increases in knowledge about dog behaviour from the scientific community and new information about the outcome for the dog. For example, those who employed the strategy of wishful thinking, in order to alleviate ongoing concerns for the dog's welfare, could have their illusions shattered with the acquisition of new information that was negative. For instance, one R participant discovered her dog was being used as a guard dog at a commercial property, rather than as the family pet that she was led to believe. This resulted in her again, having to engage in the protective-restoring process (see Chapter 7) as her peace of mind had been shattered by the new information, resulting in her self integrity again, being threatened.

Several other participants' self integrity also came under renewed threat after acquiring new information. For example, one participant discovered her dog had been sold on to someone else; one discovered that her dog had been rehomed when she had requested the dog be killed; and another participant (see following excerpt) who had experienced relinquishment in childhood discovered her dog was not as happy as she had been led to believe.

> *But I recently went back, um and this time I actually got to spend more time with my aunty. Um and yeah I got a little, I got told a little bit more about Rexie. So my grandma was telling us she's okay, but when I went back, this is years after I finally get told she wasn't okay and I was really upset about that.... My aunt started talking about her and she was quite upset she goes "aw she wouldn't eat, she was depressed, she wouldn't get up and she lost a lot of weight and then she got really sick um" And then you know I think it took her a good six to eight months they said for her to recover you know. And when I heard that, I was really, really upset.... So at the time, yeah we were told yeah she's fine and now I find out no she wasn't. She wasn't fine and she died. And who knows, I mean and apparently they said she was happy towards the end, but she never fully recovered my aunt said, she never fully recovered. [CR-A, aged 8 years at 18 years since relinquishment]*

While negative information served to impede strategies, positive information enhanced strategies. For example, the following participant was helped by information she received from her vet:

> *But the biggest bonus, I suppose you could call it, out of that, was on the night it was after the surgery closed um and the vet gave him the injection. And I thought it was quite quick, you know, but he said "no', he said "that was a bit slow and I would say he is getting, developing a heart murmur". And I said "aw come on you're only saying that to make me feel better" you know and he said "no, no I think this is why". Apparently if that's the case the injection doesn't work quite as quickly. I mean to me it only seemed; it was only a difference of seconds or something like that. From that, first as I said you're only making me feel better or something like that and he said " no, no I'm telling you". So I thought well again, it added to the thing of he was going to start deteriorating anyway. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

Along with new information, another intervening condition that influenced participants' experience of dog relinquishment was 'passage of time'.

10. Passage of Time

This condition was in some respects related to the intervening condition of 'new knowledge' and also to maturation of participants. The passage of time could both heal and wound. Generally (excluding degenerative brain impairment) over time, people mature not only chronologically but also cognitively. This resulted in hindsight becoming a problem for some. For example, one participant that had relinquished a dog

while in her twenties because it had behavioural problems, now with hindsight and maturity (and the acquisition of new knowledge about dog behaviour) had come to the realisation that she had been instrumental in the development of the problem behaviour. Her strategy of blaming the dog, which she had utilised to help her cope with the relinquishment, had been undermined and had become ineffectual. This participant continues to experience a sense of unease as the following comments illustrate: *I still feel guilty, incredibly guilty about this poor dog. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

Another participant who had blocked the memory of her dog's relinquishment had the strategy of memory blocking undermined when some years later an event occurred, which as she relates triggered her memories of the relinquishment:

> *And I remember saying, telling him that this had happened and* [sister's name] *wouldn't have this dog put down. And I was saying, "well you bloody shot my dog and now you know this dog, my dog that did nothing and this other bloody dog that came from nowhere has savaged my child, she had puncture marks on her face and ripped off an ear and you haven't said anything".* [Sister's name] *won't put it down and you're not saying anything to* [sister's name] *about getting rid of this dog. And so I remember being really pissed off. [CR-F, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

Some of the CR participants had gained a greater understanding of the position of their own parents in the relinquishment experience, when they themselves became parents. This resulted in some becoming more sympathetic towards their parents, potentially leading to a reduction in the psychological unease that they had experienced over the relinquishment, as the following participant recalls:

> *We got this dog and it got run over and it smashed its pelvis and did some other damage and look I didn't have a penny to my name. And I had to decide to put the dog down because I could not afford. And you know I look back at mum not being able to afford picking my dog up, my first dog Rexie and I guess that's when I got a sense of "oh you know this is what happens in life sometimes" I think I let go a lot of the feelings that I had around it of utter disbelief. [CR-C, aged 11 years at relinquishment, 50 years since relinquishment]*

For others, the passage of time, in relation to cognitive maturation, increased their psychological pain, as the following participant recalls how she had taken her son to the vet with her to have her cat killed because it had a terminal illness:

> *So my son came with me and he helped while she was euthanised. And he was only young, but he was so good. He didn't, he wasn't scared and it was like, it was such an easy thing and uh comfortable thing to do. And I thought children are really competent and capable of dealing with this. And he didn't feel scared, he didn't get distressed. I just remember him holding her and talking to her until she stopped breathing and he said oh she's gone, you know she's stopped you know she's dead now. And here's this young little boy. So it makes me very sad that you know, dad could have given my dog to someone else, or we*

> *could have had him sterilised or he could have had him put down, but he didn't have to take him out and brutally shoot him. [CR-F, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

AWW participants sometimes benefitted from the passage of time, as it allowed for the development of strategies that, in some respects, desensitised them to the issues they were confronted with and allowed them to manage their psychological unease more effectively.

> *Um when I first started I found it really, it was very difficult. Um I used to get very wound up with it and um I used to take it on board quite a lot, get very frustrated. Um now I've just learned to basically put up a brick wall. I just don't show any emotion with it. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

Another time related factor identified as an intervening condition, which influenced participants experience was 'time pressures'.

11. Time Pressures

This condition related to the sense of urgency experienced by some R and AWW participants. Participants experiencing a sense of urgency felt pressured by a lack of time. This sometimes led to strategies aimed at managing their psychological unease, not being able to be utilised. For example, one R participant could not achieve her preferred method of relinquishment because she did not have enough time to find a new home for her dog. Consequently she had the dog killed. Having the dog killed increased the psychological unease that she experienced as a result of relinquishing the dog because she would have preferred to have the dog rehomed.

> *I didn't have time either, because I'd had to um. One day I'd had to pack up and get everything sent to Perth. And I had to send the children up to my sister to stay for awhile and I had to fly down to Perth the next day. So I'd left it until the last possible chance that I had um to find an alternative for Rex and but I couldn't so that was the last thing that I did before I left town. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

Similarly, the intervening condition of time pressures could also impede AWWs strategy of rehoming as the following participant reported:

> *For us it's on a Thursday if it's gonna happen. And in between that Thursday, like the Monday and the Thursday, the way we work is we have two different shifts here because we work one week on and one week off, so when the new shift comes on, on Monday the shift before tries their hardest to rehome or sell dogs or get them back to their owners. Or whatever we can't will be left over, they keep them for 7 days if no one's claimed them in that time* [they are killed] [AWW-M, Ranger]

As well as time related issues, another condition identified as intervening that influenced the dog relinquishment experience was 'concurrent losses'

12. Concurrent Losses

This condition related to other losses that occurred around the same time as the relinquishment. For the majority of R and CR participants the reasons for relinquishment of the dog or dogs were related to a change in circumstance (e.g., moving and/or relationship breakdowns). These changes in circumstance brought with them other losses, including loss of relationships, homes, and moving countries.

One of the most common reasons reported for relinquishment identified in the literature is moving (Diesel et al., 2008; DiGiacomo et al., 1998; Irvine, 2003; Miller et al., 1996; Mondelli et al., 2004; Salman et al., 2000). This finding was borne out in the current study. Various reasons for moving were given by participants in the current study, including moving into employer provided accommodation where dogs were not permitted; moving interstate; moving into a retirement village where dogs were not permitted; moving into rental accommodation where dogs were not permitted or that was much smaller than their previous accommodation; and moving back home where there was not enough room for the dog. As well as moving within Australia several of the participants in the current study moved to Australia from another country and did not bring their dog with them, either because the journey was deemed to be too stressful for an old dog (i.e., 10 years or more), the financial costs involved, or because the dog was seen as an extra burden in the uncertainty of moving to a new country.

Moving can result in multiple losses for people. For example, those migrating to Australia as well as leaving their dogs also leave behind their old way of life, their jobs, their families and their homes. Even for those who are just moving house, they may be losing friends and family. Also some of the moves were a result of relationship breakdowns or divorce where participants found themselves having to move into smaller accommodation or accommodation where the dog was not permitted. In cases of relationship breakdown or divorce where children are involved, in addition to losing their dog, some children may feel they are also losing a parent.

All of these losses occurring at the time of or leading up to the relinquishment may serve as a protective factor in the short term, as people are to a certain extent preoccupied with dealing with the other losses, as the following participant illustrates when asked if the children asked about the dog which she had relinquished without telling them:

> *Um yeh, but it was a very traumatic time because they'd never lived in the city. They were going to a new school totally. You know they couldn't even catch a bus. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

However, over time, once the other losses have been dealt with, the loss of the dog may resurface and their self integrity may be threatened. The final intervening condition identified in the data was 'resources'.

13. Resources

This condition related to availability of resources within the animal welfare environment. Several of the strategies implemented by AWWs to manage their disturbed self integrity depended on the availability of resources such as finances, foster carers and space. Apart from the rangers, the vet and one animal shelter which received partial funding from government and had to find the rest themselves, all other AWWs interviewed as part of the current study worked for organisations that were either self funded or dependant on charitable donations and fundraising for their survival. The nature of animal welfare and rescue work is such that it is often lacking in resources such as people, space and money. This impacted on several strategies. For example, lack of people such as volunteers and foster carers hampered strategies aimed at 'reducing the impact on the dog', such as placing the dog in a foster home out of the stressful shelter environment. Lack of space resulted in dogs being turned away. Financial constraints hampered efforts to 'contribute to the solution' via education of the public, with some programs having to be cancelled due to lack of funding. Financial constraints also hampered measures of support. For example, some of the larger workplaces offered support services such as access to counselling, while smaller organisations could not.

Section Summary

In summary, the individual and social factors identified as intervening conditions accounted for some of the variance found in participants' experience of dog relinquishment. These conditions had a positive or negative influence on the type, intensity, frequency and duration of the psychological unease and were found to help or hinder participants' attempts to manage their disturbed self integrity.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described and explained the conditions (causal and intervening) under which the self integrity of participants in the current study was threatened and disturbed, leading them to engage in protective-restoring. Causal conditions were identified as threats to self integrity and involved inconsistencies, failures, as well as stressors. Five threats were identified that related to different aspects of the experience, namely, the 'culture of relinquishment', a 'crisis of conscience', a 'fear of losing face', 'losing faith' and 'losing Rex'.

The ‘culture of relinquishment’ was described as being imbued with a negativity that influenced the perceptions as well as actions and interactions of those involved throughout all aspects of the relinquishment experience. All participants perceived themselves as victims, while others’ perceptions differed. Relinquishers were generally perceived as villains as were some AWWs, while CRs, other AWWs and dogs were perceived as victims. The rescue environment, which was ensconced in the culture of relinquishment, was a major source of psychological stress, particularly for AWWs who were exposed to individual, social and environmental stressors on a daily basis.

A ‘crisis of conscience’ was described as a sense of wrongdoing and epitomised the psychological, social and moral conflict that some participants experienced. Cognitive dissonance and psychological stress resulted from the incompatibility between being a caring dog owner or carer and getting rid of a cared for dog; being a caring parent and upsetting or harming the child or children by getting rid of the dog; and accepting money for a deed perceived socially as abhorrent.

A ‘fear of losing face’ was described as a fear of losing the respect of others, potentially leading to rejection by others and social exclusion. It contributed to the psychological stress experienced by participants in the current study who feared losing the respect of family members, friends and members of the wider community as a result of engaging in dog relinquishment.

‘Losing faith’ described how participants lost faith in themselves and/or others. It contributed to cognitive dissonance and psychological stress. R participants lost faith in themselves when they failed to live up to their own self standards. CR participants lost faith in their parents and themselves when the ‘felt security’ of the child parent relationship was undermined by their parents’ actions and AWW participants lost faith in others as a result of apathetic attitudes in relation to the welfare of dogs.

The final threat to self integrity, ‘losing Rex’, described how participants experienced separation from and loss of the dog. This threat contributed to psychological stress and grief. Many participants described this aspect of the experience as painful. Although AWWs did not report experiencing a grieving process those who developed attachments to the dogs in their care did report distress at their loss. For all participants the experience of losing the dog was exacerbated by not having the opportunity to say goodbye; witnessing or perceiving the distress of others (including dogs); experiencing a sense of loss; a lack of control over the situation; and having ongoing concerns for the dog’s welfare. Not all participants experienced psychological unease related to all threats, but all participants were impacted by at least

one. Each threat resulted in one or more types of psychological unease (i.e., cognitive dissonance, psychological stress, grief), resulting in an experience that for many, was psychologically painful.

This chapter also described and explained the 13 intervening conditions indentified in the participants' data that helped to explain how some participants were less impacted by the experience than others. These individual and social factors were shown to have a positive or negative influence on how participants experienced dog relinquishment. The next chapter describes and explains how participants managed their disturbed self integrity.

- Chapter 7 -

The Psychosocial Process

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter described and explained the conditions under which participants in the current study experienced their psychosocial problem of a disturbed self integrity, which manifested as psychological unease. This chapter describes and explains how participants dealt with this problem. The chapter is divided into seven sections. In section one the psychosocial process participants engaged in to deal with their psychological unease is described and explained. This process involved recognition, identification and assessment of threats to self integrity; as well as their attempts to counteract them. In sections two through seven, the cognitive and behavioural strategies that participants employed in an attempt to counteract threats to self integrity are identified and described. Each section details one type of strategy. The way in which strategies were used and the consequences for participants and others, of their use, is also explained. Interpreted findings are related to relevant literature and supported by excerpts of participants' verbatim discourse throughout the chapter.

The Protective-Restoring Process

It was established in the previous chapter that the main issue for participants in the current study was a disturbed self integrity, arising from the causal condition of threats to self integrity. The resulting psychological unease produced a disturbing state for participants, one from which they were motivated to seek relief. When the integrity of the self is threatened people respond by trying to play down or eliminate the threat through cognitive and/or behavioural changes (Steele, 1999). The way in which participants sought to escape the unpleasant state of a disturbed self integrity was identified in the data as a process of 'protective-restoring'. Protective is defined as "having the quality, character, or effect of protecting someone or something; preservative; defensive" (Protective, 2007). While restore (of which restoring is the action) is defined as "to bring back (a person or thing) to a previous, original, or normal condition" (Restore, 1989). 'Protective-restoring' was therefore defined as the continuous process of defending the self against threats and restoring the integrity of the self to an undisturbed state.

'Protective-restoring' was identified as a continuous four phase dual process of recognising, identifying, assessing and counteracting threats to self integrity (see Figure 3) that took place across all three stages of the relinquishment experience (i.e., pre-

relinquishment, relinquishment and post-relinquishment). The process is considered dual because participants not only deal with actual threats to self integrity, but are also alert to potential threats. The process was identified as continuous, as new threats to self integrity could arise after the original threat or threats had been counteracted, due to intervening conditions described in Chapter 6. For example, a person who had rehomed their dog might restore their self integrity and achieve peace of mind over their relinquishment experience, only to be confronted with 'new information' (e.g., finding out that their dog is being mistreated) at a later date that creates a new threat to self integrity. This new threat to self integrity would result in the person re-engaging in the process of protective-restoring. The outcome of the protective-restoring process is depicted as a continuum in Figure 3, to reflect the complexity of the experience and the reports of some participants who had achieved partial peace of mind, but were still experiencing some unease over aspects of the experience.

The first phase of the 'protective-restoring' process involved recognition of an actual or potential threat to self integrity, as evidenced by the presence of psychological unease. The second phase involved identification of the threat in terms of its type (i.e., cognitive dissonance, psychological stress, grief) and magnitude. The third phase involved assessment of the identified threat to determine whether action needed to be taken and if needed, what type of action (i.e., restoring cognitive consistency and/or global self worth). The fourth phase involved counteracting the threat through the employment of cognitive and behavioural strategies aimed at alleviating psychological unease and restoring self integrity. This phase is explained in more detail next.

Counteracting the Threat

Forty four cognitive and behavioural strategies were identified in the data that were employed by participants to deal with the culture of relinquishment, avert a crisis of conscience, save face, restore faith and deal with the loss of the dog. These were grouped into six types, namely, self enhancing, blaming, impact reducing, managing emotion, avoiding and blocking. The large number of strategies identified supports the notion that the dog relinquishment experience is complex in nature. As explained in Chapter 5, the types of strategies used by the participants in the current study are consistent with those described in the literature to defend against threats to self integrity such as cognitive dissonance, (e.g., Aronson, 1968; Festinger, 1957; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1999), psychological stress (e.g., Folkman, 2008; Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1993) and grief (e.g., Bowlby, 1981; Stroebe, 2011; Worden, 2003), thus

providing support for the notion that the dog relinquishment experience threatens self integrity.

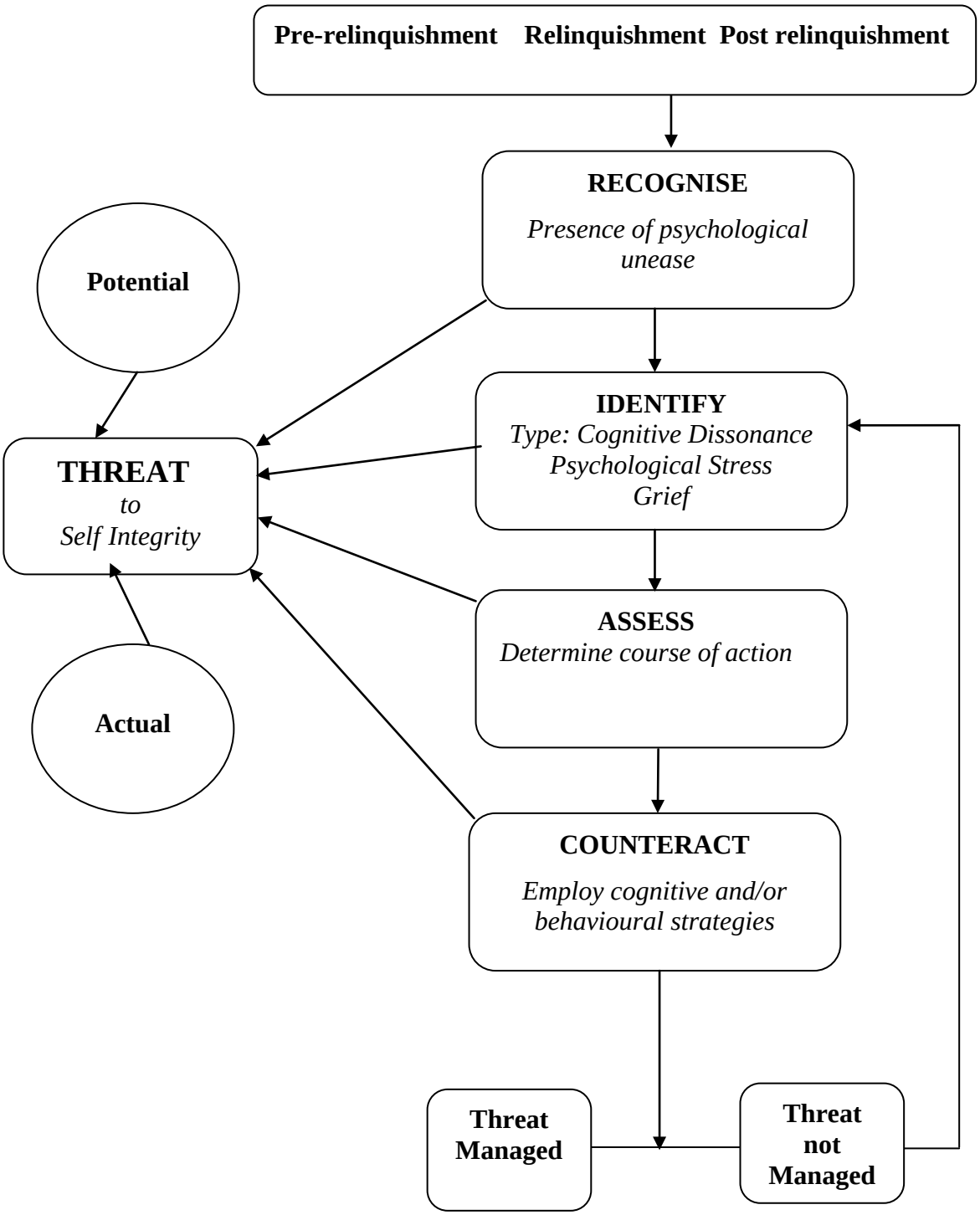

Figure 3. The dual process of 'protective-restoring' employed by participants throughout the stages of the relinquishment experience.

Strategies utilised by participants differed according to participants perceived needs, and were influenced by intervening conditions (described in Chapter 6) such as worldview and role in the relinquishment. Thus, not all strategies were employed by all participants and some groups of participants used more strategies than others. For example, participants that were children at the time of relinquishment did not report using as many strategies as relinquishers. Aside from the difference in roles in the relinquishment, this may have been because they did not have as much recourse to coping behaviours as adults, due to less life experience in relation to coping, their immature cognitive abilities, and their lack of power and control in the situation (Kliewer 1991). An alternative explanation as to why fewer strategies were reported by adults who had experienced relinquishment in childhood, may be a failure of memory given the length of time since the relinquishment. That is, the adults may not be able to recall in detail how they coped with the relinquishment as a child.

The strategies utilised were identified as defensive and coping mechanisms. Defensive and coping mechanisms are strategies that aim to protect the individual from psychological distress (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998; Cramer, 1998, 2000; Kramer, 2010). Coping mechanisms are intentional and operate at a conscious level while defense mechanisms are non-intentional and operate at an unconscious level (Cramer 1998, 2000). That is, an individual manually activates coping mechanisms when they consciously recognise the cause of their distress, whereas defense mechanisms are automatically activated unbeknownst to the individual, when the unconscious self recognises the cause of distress. Kramer (2010) however suggests that the unconscious/conscious divide is not clear cut with coping mechanisms sometimes operating at an unconscious level.

Section Summary

In summary, a four phase continuous dual process of ‘protective-restoring’ was indentified in the data, which explained how participants in the current study dealt with the psychological unease resulting from the dog relinquishment experience. The process of recognising, identifying, assessing and counteracting threats to self integrity was aimed at defending against potential and actual threats to self integrity, as well as restoring their disturbed self integrity. The counteracting acting phase of the process involved cognitive and behavioural strategies, identified as defence and coping mechanisms that were categorised into six types. The number and types of strategies employed were based on participants perceived needs. Having described the protective-restoring process, the next section describes and explains the strategies identified in the

data that were employed by participants in the counteracting threats phase of the process.

Strategies Employed to Counteract Threats to Self Integrity

As explained previously, forty four cognitive and behavioural strategies (see Table 6) were identified in participants' data that were used in the counteracting phase of the 'protective-restoring' process. Some of the strategies helped participants to make sense of their own and others behaviour by providing answers to the self posed questions that puzzled them, namely, 'how could I do that?', 'how could they do that to me?', and 'how could they do that to dogs?' For example, by blaming others or circumstance for the relinquishment R and CR participants could make sense of what they (or their parents) had done. Similarly, by demonising relinquishers, AWWs could conclude that relinquishers could do that to dogs because they were irresponsible. Not all participants used all strategies, but all participants used some.

Each strategy is described and explained next, in terms of the way in which it was utilised and the consequences of its use. As well as being grouped according to type of strategy, strategies are also grouped according to the concept that best describes their purpose. Some strategies related to more than one concept, but were only included under one, in order to avoid confusion. However, mention was made of their relation to other concepts when appropriate. Although the aim of the strategies was to protect and restore self integrity, the consequences did not always match the intention. As will be shown, some strategies contributed to, rather than alleviated the psychological unease of participants and/or others.

Self Enhancing

Self enhancement is motivated by a need to maintain and present a positive image of oneself (Baumeister, 1999; Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). As explained in Chapter 6, aspects of the dog relinquishment experience threatened participants self (i.e., how they perceived themselves) and social (self) image (i.e., how they perceived others perceived them). In an attempt to counteract the threat, participants engaged in self enhancement aimed at restoring a positive self and social (self) image. By enhancing their self image they were able to think and feel better about themselves (or others) and present a positive image of self to others. Eight self enhancing strategies were identified in the data and were grouped under the concepts of 'good people in bad circumstances', and 'making amends', each of which is described next.

Table 6

Cognitive and Behavioural Strategies Utilised by Participants during the 'Protective-Restoring' Process according to Type and Concept

Strategy Type	Concept	Strategy
Self Enhancing	Good people in bad circumstances	Differentiating self from others Rationalising/Justifying Reason differentiation Accepting their limitations Free to a good home
	Making amends	Righting a wrong Self punishment Contributing to the solution
Blaming	Shifting blame	Blaming circumstance Blaming dog Blaming others
	Accepting blame	Self blame
Impact Reducing	Sugar coating	Positive euphemisms Reframing the situation Focussing on the good Wishful thinking
	Preferred method	Rehome Surrender Killing
	Maintaining a connection	Contact comfort Memorabilia Sense of ownership Remembering the good times
	Softening the blow (others)	Keeping others in the dark Replacing Rex Comforting others Self silencing
	Softening the blow (dog)	Finding a *good* Home Taking dogs Home Special attention Killing
Managing Emotion	Letting it out	Sharing thoughts and feelings Shedding tears
	Keeping it in	Self silencing Hiding the hurt Masking face

Table 6. (continued)

Strategy Type	Concept	Strategy
Avoiding	Distraction	Keeping busy Don't dwell on it Wishful thinking Focussing on the good
	Detachment	No memorabilia No contact comfort Not becoming attached
Blocking	Putting up defences	Memory blocking Steeling oneself Not taking it on board

Good People in Bad Circumstances

R and AWW participants were threatened by the inconsistency between their self perception that they were good caring people and the fact that they had participated in relinquishing (including killing) a dog or dogs. In order to protect and restore their self and social (self) image participants had to convince themselves that they were still good people and had to reassure others that they were not 'bad' people for doing what they had done. Five self enhancing strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'good people in bad circumstances', namely, *rationalising/justifying, differentiating self from others, reason differentiation, accepting their limitations* and *free to a good home* which are described next.

Rationalising/justifying. Participants who had experienced a crisis of conscience and those who feared losing face (as a result of the villain label perpetuated within the culture of relinquishment) wanted to perceive themselves, and portray themselves as 'good people in bad circumstances'. To achieve this they rationalised and justified their actions in an attempt to excuse their behaviour. From their perspective they had legitimate reasons as to why they engaged in the behaviour. Some of the reasons given by participants included, 'it was in the dog's best interests', 'the dog was a potential legal liability in terms of biting or jumping', 'could not cope with dog', 'it was part of the job' and 'could not find an alternative solution'.

> *But my reasons, my reasoning and people said "I couldn't have done it, how could you do it?" And I said "because I had to do what was best for the dog". I knew I couldn't bring him here* [participant lives in a retirement village where dogs are not allowed] *and by then he was 10 years old. He'd be long gone now anyway you know sort of. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *My mum was just being practical saying well you know, all what the RSPCA had said. He was too old. He wouldn't have withstood the journey. You've done the right thing. He's gone to a good home. And that's what I just had to keep saying to myself to get through it really. I've done the right thing um yeah, he really didn't have long left and he really didn't because he died within 2 years so, yeah. [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um you've just got to realise that it's part of the job. As is when it comes to the dogs that aren't claimed, or the ones that are sick or aggressive and we can't rehome that they have to be euthanised. And that's all part of it and if you can't accept that then you're probably the wrong person for the job. [AWW-M, Ranger]*

> *I tend to, I try and justify it by thinking if a dog's not going to have someone to take care of it properly, then its better off being euthanised. [AWW-B, Vet]*

Apart from one participant mentioned in Chapter 6, a crisis of conscience did not appear to be an issue for CR participants; their main issue was a loss of faith in their parent/s in terms of their felt security. In order to maintain their felt security participants had to provide an explanation to themselves and others as to 'how their parent/s could do that to them?' They did this by portraying their parents as good people in bad circumstances, through rationalising and justifying their parent/s behaviour as illustrated in the following comment:

> *Well I can see why my parents had to do it, but I don't know what I would have done. If I had to make the choice differently, I'd make it the same really, it's not a very nice thing to do but who wants to take a dog that kills animals. [CR-G, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

Three CR participants did not rationalise or justify, but rather condemned their parents' behaviour. This may have been because they did not have a sense of felt security to begin with as suggested in the following two excerpts.

> *I was probably one of the closest, but we were all absolutely terrified of him in lots of regards. You just didn't um, he never actually uh spanked uh touched us, but my mother did um. So but he would threaten and he was quite aggressive and um would fly off the handle at the least thing. So I guess we were all very scared and I was certainly scared and I used to find the thought of a gun behind the door behind my parents bedroom door absolutely terrifying. [CR-F, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

> *Well I don't get on with my mother. And um for most of my life I've had difficulty with women because my mother was very neurotic, she was always on some sort of medication and attempting suicide. [CR-C, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 50 years since relinquishment]*

Participants also used the strategy of differentiating self from others, as a way of convincing themselves and others that they were not 'bad' people.

Differentiating self from others. This strategy involved downward social comparison, (i.e., comparing oneself to someone who is perceived to be inferior on some aspect in order to enhance one's self regard; Baumeister, 1998; Wills, 1981). Participants gave examples (see following excerpts) of abusive and neglectful dog owners as a comparison to enhance their self and social image and to affirm to themselves and others, that what they did was not as bad as what others had done.

> *So I did that. And um we came across Rex who was a Red Heeler. And he was 7 or something and his owner had died of old aged. And I just thought, oh you poor thing. And the family had brought the dog in to the RSPCA and I couldn't understand how they could do that. I thought what sort of unloving family does that you know. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

> *My sister is one of those people who won't, who's an animal lover and gets sucked in by vets. And she had a most beautiful Doberman called Rexie who some idiot ran over and didn't kill. But, but Rexie got caught on the exhaust and got the most horrific burn and the vet kept saying let me try this let me try that. And they kept Rexie alive for something like 3 years. And she was terribly like, she couldn't walk because the burns were so horrific and they healed with such scar tissue. And her complete nature changed because she was in so much pain constantly. And my sister couldn't make the decision, at any point along that, to have you know, to have Rexie killed. And she was quite, she was not happy about the dog suffering, but the vet kept wanting to experiment with ways of working on these burns. And it was, it was really horrific actually ....They had to have her, they had to have her euthanised because she got so nasty that she was snapping and biting at anybody who came near her and it wasn't the dog's fault you see, because she had been a beautiful, beautiful natured dog.... My sister didn't want to make the decision to have the dog destroyed. And to me that was, on both their parts it was really really cruel and unnecessary. Mmm and it sounds as if I'm trying to justify my own* [laughs] *decision. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

While R participants differentiated between themselves and abusive or neglectful dog owners, AWW participants differentiated between themselves and relinquishers. For example, they reported instances of how they had kept their dogs under similar circumstances where others had relinquished theirs; reinforcing the notion for some AWW participants that relinquishers were 'bad people'.

> *I did lose, believe it or not a brand new black leather lounge to a puppy. And it wasn't that long ago. There's a big hole in it. And I left her inside when I went to, I only went down to get some petrol and then came back. And guess what, there's a big hole in my leather lounge. And I've still got all my dogs. So it's a normal behaviour, they just had a time with my leather lounge. [AWW-J, Shelter Worker]*

> *I mean, I've got a dog at the moment, who has got so many mental problems, I have spent probably a couple of thousand dollars on behaviour modification um drugs, um vet bills because she mutilates her tail and stuff and it's like I still wouldn't ever consider it .... I mean, my cat, one of my cats is 8 years old and it's shat on the floor since it was a kitten. What do I do about that? Well every morning I pick up shit* [laughs]. *And I've tried everything, we've tried every single litter, we've tried every single litter tray, we've even tried the astro turf and nothing works. The cat likes poohing on the floor. Fine, but I wouldn't surrender him because he poohs on the floor. You deal with it. It's your responsibility. If your kid wet the bed, what are you gonna do try to take it back, ask for a refund, you know take it back to PMH "my kids still wetting the bed, he's sixteen" You wouldn't would you ....I mean I put myself through University and I was on 2 minute noodles my dog still ate. You know he ate before I did. Um obviously yeah that's maybe the difference between me and other people, some people. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

The reporting of similar circumstances to relinquishers served to reinforce to themselves and others that they were not like them. Relinquishers were in control of the situation, whereas AWWs were not; when AWWs were in control of the situation they did not relinquish their animals, when they were not in control they did what they did (i.e., euthanising animals) because it was part of their job. This strategy was also identified by Frommer and Arluke (1999) in their study of relinquishers and animal shelter workers and termed 'taking the moral high ground', although they deemed it a blaming strategy.

AWW participants also used another differentiation strategy to deal with the threat from a loss of faith in people over their treatment of dogs and their attitudes towards relinquishment. This strategy was identified as reason differentiation.

Reason differentiation. This involved making a distinction between a genuine reason for relinquishment and a non genuine reason (i.e., an excuse). Although AWW participants differentiated between reasons, there did not appear to be a consensus on what type of reason was genuine or non-genuine. For example, some AWW participants thought that moving was not a genuine reason, as the relinquisher could look for somewhere that dogs were permitted, while others did consider it a genuine reason. While AWW participants generally held relinquishers accountable for the plight of the dogs, discerning between reasons meant that not all relinquishers were perceived as people who considered dogs to be disposable commodities; only those whose reason for relinquishment was deemed non-genuine.

> *Oh look I'm sure that the majority of them have valid reasons. And look they're here trying to do the right thing. So I don't frown upon them. Um sometimes it's difficult to understand why they're doing it; um some of the reasons are*

> *what you perceive to be inappropriate reasons for surrendering the dog. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

> *Um there are some very um good reasons why people need to relinquish their animals. Some are due to the economic climate, um just simply can't afford to keep their animals anymore, um there's a few through marriage break ups or people are moving to a different rental property and they can't take animals with them. Um there are also quite a few I think that are a bit stupid reasons basically um "I'm pregnant" or "I've just had a baby", therefore the animals are ousted. Basically if they'd done the training with the dog to start with then there wouldn't be an issue. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

> *I'm just not a big fan of them giving them up unless it's a very good reason. Obviously sometimes people get a dog, say they'll go and adopt a dog and it just turns out to be an absolute terror. It's very violent and aggressive and they've tried and they can't do anything about it, then I can understand that. If there are circumstances that call for it then you can understand it you know. Usually when it comes to that stage they're very upset about it themselves and they haven't taken it lightly and that's, I mean, what do you do about that there, nothing you can say, that's fair enough. But people that just can't look after them they say aw, I've had people ring up and say "aw it chews the couch and digs up the lawn I wanna get rid of it". It's like well you know what did you expect it to do, it's a dog, you gotta train it, they're not all perfect, they're just like little kids you got a teach them to do the right thing, but yeah I'm not a big fan of that. [AWW-D, Ranger]*

In differentiating between non-genuine and genuine reasons AWW participants were able to perceive of some relinquishers as good people in bad circumstances, thereby helping to restore some of their faith in people. Another strategy used by participants to perceive of themselves as 'good people in bad circumstances', was 'accepting their limitations'.

Accepting their limitations. This strategy involved focussing on what participants were able to do, rather than what they could not. Given the numbers of dogs being relinquished, for AWW participants perceiving that they had done their best may have served to counteract feelings of failure, inadequacy or powerlessness.

> *It's really hard, um but all we can do is just do our best....There's masses of dogs out there, you just can't save them all, you can only do your best. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

For CR participants accepting their limitations was also related to their powerless position. Whether this was utilised at the time or on later reflection is unclear, but accepting that they had no control over the situation may have alleviated any feelings of failure they may have had in terms of not being able to stop the relinquishment.

> *I don't think I realised at that point that they just had him killed. It was only later when I was older and wiser um that I think I realised it.... I'm not sure if I knew he was going to be killed I would probably have kicked up a bit of a fuss. [CR-G, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

The final strategy related to the concept of good people in bad circumstance was 'free to a good home'.

Free to a good home. This strategy involved accepting little or no money for the relinquished dog. As reported in Chapter 6, R participants appeared to take offence at the notion of accepting money for their dog, as though accepting money made the deed worse. By giving their dogs away, rather than selling them, participants alleviated any sense of betrayal they may have felt in receiving (blood) money for their dog and made them appear less mercenary to others (i.e., they were not seen to be profiting from a perceived bad deed).

However, this strategy may result in unintended consequences, as indicated by Irvine (2003), who reported that unscrupulous people posed as potential owners getting dogs advertised freely in the paper and then on selling them for profit[36] (some to experimental laboratories). While accepting little or no money for their dog may have made participants feel easier about their decision to relinquish, giving the dogs away had the potential to endanger the very dogs they cared about.

In addition to portraying themselves as good people in bad circumstances, as illustrated in the previous strategies, participants who perceived a sense of wrongdoing tried to make amends, in an effort to manage their disturbed self integrity.

Making Amends

Making amends involved attempts by participants to try and make up for their perceived wrongdoing so that they could still feel good about themselves. Three strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'making amends', namely, *righting a wrong, contributing to a solution,* and *self punishment,* which are described next.

Righting a wrong. Although participants could not undo their actions they could still affirm to themselves and others that they were good people through the strategy of 'righting a wrong'. This involved making amends for a perceived sense of wrongdoing by rescuing an animal in need of a home. By saving another animal they could restore their global self worth (Steele, 1999). This strategy was utilised by four

36 Selling the dog on for profit may have occurred with one of the R participants in the current study [R-D] who sold a pedigree dog for a small amount and then found out not long after that the dog had been sold to someone else.

participants, but only self indentified by two, as a specific attempt to redeem themselves from a perceived sense of wrongdoing.

> *I mean after Rex I went to the RSPCA and um kept going back there and looking at different dogs cos I thought it was sort of like a payoff. I think I relinquish mine* [laughs]; *I'll get someone else's see if I can make it all right* [laughs]. *Universe that sort of thing* [laughs]. *Ying and Yang. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

> *I did get a cat from the pound, yeah. And it's interesting actually when I talk about it. The cat was one that was going to be put down that night if a home hadn't been found for her yeah. So sight unseen ....I'm probably compensating, I'll save this soul, as I couldn't, I wouldn't save that one. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

While making amends by adopting another animal served to restore self integrity, it had the potential to result in future threats to self integrity, if the only reason for doing so was to make themselves feel better about relinquishing the previous one. Dogs that are acquired for reasons other than they are wanted in and of their own right, have a higher likelihood of being relinquished (DiGiacomo et al., 1998).

'Righting a wrong' was not a strategy used by AWWs who were involved in relinquishment, even though they may have perceived a sense of wrongdoing. This may have been because they did not feel direct responsibility for the killing. Instead they enhanced their self image through the strategy of 'contributing to a solution'.

Contributing to a solution. This strategy involved being proactive in trying to reduce the incidence of dog relinquishment and was also a strategy identified by Arluke (1994) in his study of animal shelter workers. 'Contributing to a solution' ranged from advising would be relinquishers on alternative solutions to their problem, to educational programs.

> *Um we've actually just started a post adoption workshop, which we are going to do on an ongoing basis. So what I'm basically getting at is education. And in that post adoption workshop we tell people that you know generally after a month we'll ring them or three or four weeks after we ring, we'll say look there's a post adoption workshop if you're having any problems with your dog. And it is, I do focus on dogs because we have more problems with people returning dogs than cats but it can be people with cats as well. "Um you can come along to the workshop, uh ask any questions. Um the trainer will impart their knowledge to you" and hopefully you know there's less chance of them returning their animals. In the last one that we did there was probably three people who were going to actually return their dogs and they didn't, so that actually worked quite well. So that's sort of one way we're trying to tackle the problem. This is more for, it can be anyone can come to these workshops but it is more for people who have actually adopted animals from us and we don't want them to actually bring the animals back, which happens on a regular basis. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

Rollin (1987) stated, in reference to the moral stress experienced by those involved in euthanasia, "there is really only one way to deal with this stress, and that is to feel that one is expending every effort to make one's own job obsolete" (p. 120). Thus, being proactive through contributing to a solution may have helped participants to counteract feelings of powerlessness or failure by giving them an element of control (a necessary requirement of self integrity) in a situation over which they generally had no control. Further, it may have served as a buffer to some of the stressors they experienced working in the animal welfare area. While some participants tried to make amends through righting a wrong or contributing to a solution, others engaged in self punishment.

Self punishment. This strategy involved the use of negative euphemisms to describe the relinquishment and/or self denying ownership of another dog. Self punishment appeared to be employed by participants that felt guilty about having their cared for dogs, killed. Self punishment has been described by Nelissen and Zeelenberg (2009) as the 'Dobby effect', [37] brought about by guilt it is "a public sign of reconciliation that occurs if actual reconciliation (by compensating the victim) is impossible" (p. 121). Participants utilising this strategy may have perceived the dog as the victim, and as they were unable to compensate the dog (as it was dead), they may have engaged in self punishment to atone for their perceived transgression.

Those engaging in self punishment may have been experiencing shame. While guilt stems from the sense that a person feels bad about an action or behaviour, shame stems from a sense that the person feels they are a bad person for engaging in the behaviour (Fisher & Exline, 2006). The fact that most participants did not report or appear to be experiencing shame may have been because of the effectiveness of strategies they had implemented, such as thinking of themselves as good people in bad circumstances and shifting the blame.

Self punishment was a little used strategy and was only identified in the data of three participants (two R's and one CR participant). This may be attributable to the use of effective protective-restoring strategies by participants or that they did not feel responsible for the relinquishment. Participants engaging in self punishment described the relinquishment in negative tones suggesting that they were angry with themselves. For example, rather than say that they had the dog put to sleep or euthanised, they said

[37] The 'Dobby Effect' in reference to a submissive elf character in the Harry Potter novels who is driven (by a magical force) to engage in self punishment when he does anything in opposition to his masters' will.

they had the dog killed. They also denied themselves ownership of another dog. Whether participants that engaged in self punishment were aware that they were self punishing was not clear.

> *I decided then that I would have Rex killed. I'd take him to the vet and have an injection you know.... They* [the participant's children] *did keep saying that they wanted pets and it wasn't until I bought the house. Um, I couldn't I couldn't face having another dog, actually and haven't been able to since but I did get a I did get a cat.... But I miss, the company of a dog, is very different to the company of a cat yeah very* [laughs] *and a dog is much more um satisfying and responsive* [laughs] *than a cat. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

Although the strategy of 'self punishment' may be an adaptive strategy when arising out of the pursuit of self forgiveness, as it is thought to have a positive impact on psychological well being; it may be maladaptive when underpinned by self condemnation, as self condemnation is thought to negatively impact psychological wellbeing (Fisher & Exline 2006).

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found in the data that participants in the current study engaged in self enhancement as one of the ways to manage their disturbed self integrity. Self enhancement enabled participants to counteract the negativity associated with their role in the relinquishment, through maintaining and projecting to others an image of themselves as good people. In an effort to self enhance participants engaged in rationalisation and justification, differentiating themselves from others, reason differentiation, accepting their limitations and not taking money for the dog. They also tried to make amends for their sense of wrongdoing through righting a wrong, contributing to a solution, or self punishment. While some of the self enhancement strategies helped to protect and restore self integrity, some had the potential to exacerbate psychological unease. In addition, some strategies that contributed to protecting and restoring the self integrity of participants, had the potential to threaten the self integrity of others. The next section describes and discusses participants' use of blaming strategies to protect and restore self integrity.

Blaming

A second type of strategy that participants employed to defend against threats and to restore self integrity was identified in the data as blaming. Blaming strategies identified in the current study were related to self enhancing strategies in that their aim was also to present (and/or perceive) a positive self and social image. Blaming strategies were utilised by some participants to avert the crisis of conscience over the relinquishment and to save face, by affirming to oneself and others that this behaviour

(i.e., relinquishment) was not typical of them as a person, but rather was a result of factors beyond their control. In relation to CR participants blaming strategies were used to maintain felt security (i.e., restore faith) in their relationship with parents. Four blaming strategies were identified in the data and grouped under the concepts of 'shifting blame' and accepting blame'.

Shifting Blame

Rather than accept responsibility for thinking or doing something that was morally unacceptable to themselves or others, some participants tried to shift the blame to someone or something else. Shifting blame served to protect and restore self integrity by reallocating culpability away from the participant, potentially alleviating negative feelings of guilt, shame and/or anger.

Blame displacing strategies have been identified elsewhere in the relinquishment literature as a means of dealing with thoughts and feelings that arise from relinquishing/euthanising an animal (e.g., Arluke, 1994; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Irvine, 2003). For example, Frommer and Arluke (1999) conducted an ethnographic study of ten relinquishers and eight shelter workers at an American animal shelter that practiced euthanasia. They suggested that participants' use of blame displacing strategies was to cope with the guilt they experienced over the potential for or actual euthanasia of the animals surrendered to the shelter. It was reported that relinquishers blamed other people, they 'passed the buck' (i.e., blamed the shelter or animal shelter workers if the animal was not rehomed) and they blamed the animal; while shelter workers blamed the relinquisher, took the moral high ground (i.e., pointed out how they were not like relinquishers and would never relinquish an animal) and blamed the animal.

In the current study similar blame displacing strategies were utilised by participants, however, unlike Frommer and Arluke's (1999) contention that blame displacing strategies are the 'master-accounting scheme' this current study found that blame displacing strategies were one of several types of strategies employed by participants to deal with the relinquishment experience. Further, participants in the current study employed blame displacing strategies even when euthanasia was not an issue (i.e., the majority of relinquishers did not surrender their dogs to an animal shelter and some of the AWW participants worked in shelters or rescue groups where there was a no euthanasia policy). This suggests that the experience of guilt may not be associated with the risk of euthanasia per se, as suggested by Frommer and Arluke (1999), but is rather associated with some other aspect of dog relinquishment such as a

sense of wrong doing. It also suggests that factors other than guilt may have motivated the use of these strategies. Three strategies were indentified in the data that related to the concept of 'shifting the blame', namely, *blaming circumstance, blaming Rex,* and *blaming others* which are described next.

Blaming circumstance. This strategy involved placing blame for the relinquishment on physical and/or socioenvironmental factors. This strategy allowed participants to abdicate responsibility for their actions, as the following examples illustrate:

> *My circumstances were that we were married, two kids and in July, so she was older than 18 months she was nearly two in July of last year (2007), my husband and I separated. And um it was very stressful and he took well we decided that he should have the kids one week and I have the kids the other so we went from being a household of four to every second week a household of one and I just couldn't manage with the dog. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

> *Uh I was pregnant. I became pregnant and I was a single mother. So I was fairly young I was only 26 and um compared to now, a fairly younger version and um yeah so and I owned my own business. So I found it was really quite difficult for me to look after her. [R-T, 13 years since relinquishment]*

While some participants blamed circumstance others blamed the dog.

Blaming Rex. This strategy targeted threats arising from a 'crisis of conscience' and 'losing faith' in parents. It was mainly used by R participants, although CR participants who did not want to blame their parents used the strategy to rationalise their parents' behaviour. It generally related to what participants identified as problem behaviours in the dog, as illustrated in the following examples:

> *Rexie's problem was I'd never had a dog before when I had kids. Now that's really interesting to have a puppy and kids, the reactions between them makes them much more hyper, I'd suggest puppies are a lot more hyper around kids then when they are around adults. Rexie was gorgeous but she had this habit of jumping up so every time friends came around to play I was always mending their clothes before they went home because she would pull holes in them and I thought she just needs to grab a face, she wasn't the least bit vicious but couldn't get her out of it. You know I said (son's name) we just can't run the risk of her hurting someone's face we'll be in awful trouble. [R-R, 15 years since relinquishment]*

> *It wasn't very nice but I mean, we tried to stop him killing chickens, but he just kept doing it so, there wasn't really much we could do....Well I can see why my parents had to do it....it's not a very nice thing to do but who wants to take a dog that kills animals. [CR-G, aged 12 at relinquishment, 6 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um he used to chase cars, this was the only reason, you know mum and dad loved him, um he just chased cars. If he was out in the garden and saw a car, you know it was like a magnet to him and he would literally run in front of the front wheels. And dad said he couldn't bear it any longer because he just didn't want to see the dog get run over so he took him back to the pound....We were just on tenterhooks we every time we were out in the garden, the doh had a thing for cars, he had a death wish for cars and we couldn't handle it. [CR-H, 33 years since relinquishment]*

Although blaming the dog may have helped relinquishers to cope with the psychological unease resulting from the relinquishment, it angered AWWs, as they continually see dogs being relinquished for behaviours that can be modified or changed. As the following AWW participant's comments illustrate:

> *Now people also get border collies, because they're nice looking dogs, not realising they need exercise and they'll dig up the lawn. And they'll get a dog and it'll dig all their lawn and dig up their fence. Well train them! I had one; I took it for a walk before I went to work in the morning and when I came home at night. If you don't exercise a dog, it can be a poodle, a dachshund; they'll dig or destroy because that's what happens. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

The third strategy identified as relating to the concept of shifting the blame was 'blaming others'.

Blaming others. This strategy involved attributing the blame for the relinquishment to someone else. R participants who utilised this strategy implied that although they had made the decision to relinquish, it was someone else who had forced their decision. This is illustrated in the following examples, whereby relinquishment of the dog is blamed on the neighbours and on a participant's husband.

> *Um we moved here to Western Australia, we got approval to bring her over from the people we were renting from. Um the people in the next door unit objected to her and made life very difficult for the first week we were there. They didn't let her settle in or anything and um it just got to the point where we felt we had to do something. So we took her to the RSPCA. [R-I, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *I've always wanted a dog. My husband's allergic to them and um things weren't so well for us and I ended up getting a, went and rescued a dog, not a puppy because I didn't want the whole puppy issue. If my husband had said yes let's get a dog and give it a go I wanted to maximise the potential for success shall we say. So having a puppy wasn't going to be such a good example because of the whole wet carpet thing and all of that. And that it just became, he never really facilitated that from the day that the dog arrived in our home it was always a tension, just added to our problems, and so in the end I said look I can't take this and so I said that I would rather have the dog put down than have it rehoused because I would never know its history and that to me was a kinder thing to do. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

By shifting the blame away from themselves, participants were better able to cope with their crisis of conscience by counteracting threats arising from inconsistencies between their self perception and their behaviour. They could alleviate feelings of guilt and/or shame that they might be experiencing. They could redirect any anger they felt about the relinquishment by perceiving themselves as good people who had been forced into the action they had taken.

CR participants also used the blame shifting technique to blame others rather than their parent/s. They followed their parents lead and accepted the reasons that the parents gave for the relinquishment. This ensured their felt security in the child/parent relationship remained intact because the parents were not deemed at fault; instead others caused the relinquishment. While the intent of shifting the blame was to absolve parents from culpability, three participants did blame parents, but only one parent, thus retaining some aspect of felt security. The blame was levelled at the parent that was perceived to be responsible for the relinquishment.

> *Mum thought it was wrong, mum thought it was wrong, it was like um, like dad, dad had the money to keep her, you know, dad had control of the finances and I couldn't see any reason why she had to go. [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

AWW participants directly blamed relinquishers for the relinquishment. By holding relinquishers solely responsible for the plight of the dogs, AWW participants had someone to direct their anger at (which may have served to protect themselves from internalising the anger). Those involved in the killing of dogs could offload some of the responsibility and/or guilt that they may have felt, as if relinquishers had not relinquished the dog or dogs, they would not have to participate in the killing. While blaming relinquishers served to protect and restore the self integrity of AWW participants, it contributed to threatening the self integrity of relinquishers, as it perpetuated the negative image of relinquishers and thus influenced potential future interactions between the two.

> *The dogs that are here, are here through no fault of their own whatsoever, it's all the owners fault. Whether it's not training, not socialising um not thinking of the particular breed. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

> *People have no idea. It's quite disturbing actually that people just have this money they go "yep I'll have that one, let's buy all this stuff, we're going to be great". Never had a dog before, don't know what to do and they end up getting surrendered, because they're too much hard work. And it's generally you know really lovely, sweet dogs that have had not an ounce of training in their life, um*

> *they haven't been sterilised and um yeah it's never the dog's fault, it's always the people's fault, it's always the owners. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

> *I suppose you do sort of feel sorry for some of them because it's not their fault. Half of the time they've got these behavioural problems, it's the people that owned them before this or the situation that they were in before they came in here. They've never had training. They've never had any love, any socialisation. So they don't know how to act around dogs, they don't know how to act around people. So it's not their fault half the time. Sometimes it's breeding, but sometimes it's just the training and socialisation that hasn't happened that they ended up in a bad way. [AWW-J, Shelter Worker]*

Although blame shifting strategies may have been an adaptive strategy for R participants in the current study, it has the potential to contribute to serial relinquishment, as was evidenced by some R participants who had used it and had relinquished several dogs over time. Those who accept no responsibility for the relinquishment and instead shift the blame are unlikely to feel remorse or regret, thus they are more likely to relinquish again as shifting the blame relieves their psychological unease. While R participants may be able to restore their self integrity after each relinquishment they are contributing to the psychological unease of others (e.g., animal welfare workers and family members). While most R participants tried to protect and restore their self integrity by shifting the blame, some R participants accepted the blame.

Accepting Blame

On the face of it accepting blame does not appear to be aimed at alleviating psychological unease. However, accepting responsibility for a perceived wrongdoing can be the first step in self forgiveness, defined by Enright (1996) as "a willingness to abandon self–resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself" (p. 115), which can lead to a restoration of self integrity. One strategy was identified that related to the concept of 'accepting blame', namely, *self blame*, which is described next.

Self blame. This strategy involved participants accepting responsibility for their actions and may be related to the strategy of self punishment mentioned earlier. Two participants directly acknowledged responsibility for their actions.

> *It was my choice to come in here.... It wasn't something, I suppose you get other cases where it is forced on people like moving, divorcing or whatever but this was just straight out coming into an aged care facility or village where you have no option. If you want to come in, you have no pets. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *It was my decision to relinquish Rex and, and to have him killed. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

By acknowledging their part in the decision participants ran the risk of recrimination from others, but there was also the potential for others to judge them more favourably than those who did not accept responsibility (Gold & Weiner, 2000).

Although CR participants were not responsible for the decision to relinquish, one participant whose dog was relinquished because his parents told him it was making him ill may have accepted some blame for the relinquishment. Although he never specifically attributed blame to himself, his response to the question about what he would do as an adult if he were in the same situation as his parents alludes to the notion that he may have felt some blame.

> *I guess some way to get him or her to understand that if I do get rid of the dog it's not because it's anything he or she did wrong or because I just want to. [CR-E, aged 4 years at relinquishment, 14 years since relinquishment]*

By engaging in self blame, the participant absolved his parents from any blame thus maintaining felt security, however in doing was likely to have contributed to his own psychological unease by blaming himself for the relinquishment.

The following comment from a parent R participant, who relinquished her dog after it had bitten her son, provides further support for the notion that some children may take on some blame for the relinquishment.

> *But he thought he made his sister sad. Like he kind of thought that it was his fault. So he was a bit not so much the dog, more that it was his fault somehow, he probably took some blame for it, that wasn't owed him. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found in the data that participants across the groups in the current study utilised blaming strategies as one way of counteracting threats to self integrity. This was achieved by attributing the blame to others, circumstance or self. Whereas AWW participants blamed relinquishers, R participants generally blamed circumstances, the dog and /or others. Although shifting the blame appeared to alleviate some of the psychological unease it has the potential to lead to more relinquishments in the future and contribute to the psychological unease of others. Those participants accepting responsibility for the relinquishment (i.e., self blame) may have been contributing to their own psychological unease; alternatively they may have been restoring self integrity by way of self forgiveness. Finally, CR participants shifted the blame from their parents in order to maintain felt security in the parent/child

relationship. It was suggested that the few who did blame parents possibly had little or no felt security in their relationship to begin with. The next section describes and discusses participants' use of impact reducing strategies to protect and restore self integrity.

Impact Reducing

A third type of strategy that participant's employed to protect and restore self integrity was identified in the data as impact reducing. The use of this type of strategy suggested that participants across the groups perceived that relinquishment had the potential to be psychologically and/or physically harmful not only to self, but to others as well. Through reducing the impact of relinquishment, participants sought to protect themselves and others.

Nineteen impact reducing strategies were identified in participants data and grouped under the concepts of 'sugar coating', 'preferred method', maintaining a connection', 'softening the blow to others' and 'softening the blow to dogs'. The strategies were aimed at reducing the potential or actual harm to self and others (including the dog) resulting from the relinquishment experience. Although some strategies were clearly directed at reducing the impact on self, ultimately, even the strategies aimed at reducing the impact on others, resulted in reducing the impact on participants. The first group of impact reducing strategies, namely, sugar coating is described and explained next

Sugar Coating

Sugar coating (i.e., making the experience more palatable or acceptable to themselves and others) was one way in which participants tried to reduce the impact of relinquishment. Although these strategies were categorised as impact reducing, they were also related to self enhancing strategies in that they were aimed at making participants feel better about themselves. Two impact reducing strategies were identified in the data that were related to the concept of 'sugar coating', namely, *positive euphemisms*, and *reframing the situation*, which are described next.

Positive euphemisms. This strategy involved using positive terms/language to describe the practice of relinquishment. Evidence for the use of this strategy was found in participants' data from across the groups, with terms such as 'putting down', 'left with family', letting the dog go', and 'rehousing' rather than 'killing', 'getting rid of' or 'destroying'. The use of positive euphemisms helped to counteract some of the negativity associated with the culture of relinquishment and also deflected participants thoughts away from the harsh reality of the relinquishment (especially in relation to

dogs that were killed). Although, as the following example shows, sometimes even positive euphemisms were capable of causing distress:

> *Other people tried to shut, you know shut it off. And we didn't, we actually had an acronym PTS* [put to sleep] *so we didn't actually, nobody sort of said the words type of thing. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

Another way, in which the relinquishment experience was made more palatable, was through the strategy of 'reframing the situation'.

Reframing the situation. This strategy served to deal with the negativity of the culture of relinquishment and was also an attempt at saving face. It was only identified in R participants' data and involved participants altering their perspective on the relinquishment in such a way that the relinquishment became a positive rather than a negative event. This may have alleviated feelings of guilt over the relinquishment and eased their mind with regards to any perceived negative impact on the dog. For example, one participant spoke of the dog retiring and another spoke of the dog growing up and leaving home.

> *But we knew that she would have him because she really loved the dog. And the little boy, well he was a chap about fifteen he loved the dog too, so he had his retirement with them. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

> *He was a lovely dog and I have really fond memories of him. And I guess I still sort of miss him, as I miss any animal that I've lost, cos I do tend to take that they're my children, but it's kind of like he grew up and got his own career* [laughs] *he's alright. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

As well as sugar coating the experience participants also tried to reduce the impact of the relinquishment through their choice of method, which is described and explained next.

Preferred Method

The concept of 'preferred method' related to participants preferred method of relinquishment. There are four main methods of relinquishment, namely, surrendering to a shelter or rescue group, personal rehoming, abandonment, and professional or personal killing. Although some participants reported witnessing abandonment, it was not a method reported as being used by participants in the current study. It is also likely that people would be reluctant to admit to abandonment, given the added social disapproval it would incur. Two CR participants reported that their parents had killed their dogs, while all of the R participants who had not rehomed their dogs had taken them to a veterinarian to be killed.

Very few R participants reported seeking out information about relinquishment, suggesting that participants preferred methods were based on past experience, and/or on their own values and beliefs. The method chosen appeared to be a direct attempt to alleviate the psychological unease resulting from the crisis of conscience and was based on what the participant perceived they could live with.

When participants were able to achieve their method of choice they appeared to be better able to cope with the relinquishment experience. Not being able to achieve their preferred method contributed to their psychological unease.

> *What was interesting was the people that were, I was with at the time. Cos I was camping with some friends and another family member, um they couldn't understand why I was so devastated. I mean I cried, howled for like two days because he wasn't put down and they couldn't understand that. They couldn't understand that that was more painful for me. It was more painful for me to know that this dog, who was so dedicated to me, he didn't know what was going on, he didn't know what he had done and then he had to go and live with someone else, to God knows what. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

While achieving their preferred method may have helped restore participants' self integrity, it had the potential to threaten the self integrity of those whose preference differed from the chosen method. For example, while having the dog killed may have helped to alleviate some of the psychological unease for those who preferred this method; it is likely to have contributed to psychological unease for veterinarians that had to kill the dog and other family members whose preference was to rehome. Three strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'preferred method', namely, *rehoming, surrendering,* and *killing* which are described next.

Rehoming. This strategy involved participants finding a new home for the dog. Although not directly asked the question, it appeared from the data, that the majority of the participants across the groups in the current study had a preference for rehoming.

> *We so desperately wanted to bring him with us. He was in all our plans to bring him and when we realised it wasn't going to be beneficial for his health, we just felt you know it's just going to be so cruel. And I couldn't bear the thought of having him put down when he was still healthy. I just couldn't bear that thought. I didn't really know what to do, that's why we contacted the RSPCA, cos we thought you know, what do we do? [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

Rehoming was seen as giving the dog a second chance and alleviated some of the guilt associated with relinquishing the dog; knowing that the dog would be able to continue living, albeit with a new family.

Similar to the findings of DiGiacomo et al. (1998) for most R participants in the current study, surrendering to a shelter was not their first choice; rather they tried to

rehome their dog themselves through family, friends or advertising. Reasons given as to why dogs were not surrendered to a shelter included, a perceived risk of euthanasia and negative past experiences of animal shelters as the following examples illustrate:

> *Um no, because I thought with things like that the chance if no-one takes the dog, it could get destroyed. So that wasn't an option for me. I would, I mean she was too lovely a dog to risk you know you take them to* [animal shelter] *and then if in two or three weeks they haven't found a home and I'm sure she would have, but I wasn't going, I wasn't prepared to risk that. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

> *I mean times have changed now, but when we got our first family pet, I don't think we got him from the RSPCA but we got him from some kind of a dog shelter. And um I can really vividly remember, I was only about six or seven, and it's one of my strongest childhood memories, of going into this real dark and dingy smelly um stable like building, that was really cold and there was just all sort of cages with all these dogs. Really beautiful dogs that had been found and everything and right at the very end of the corridor was this scruffy flea bitten mangy old mutt and of course we wanted that one, cos we felt sorry for it. And my dad was saying no we're not having that flea ridden mutt in the house. And the man who owned it was like a really stereotypical grumpy old, "oh you can bloody take that thing, I don't want it, I'm glad to get shut of the thing" any way that was our family pet that we took to the vets, bathed him and he turned out to be a wonderful dog .... I just had this vision of this smelly dirty old barn type thing and there was no way my dog was gonna go into one of those things just waiting for the right family to come along. So no I couldn't envisage him at all in fact I'd probably go as far as to say, that I'd rather put him to sleep peacefully than envisage him in one of those horrific little cages. [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

Although rehoming the dog can alleviate some psychological unease, it also has the potential to contribute to threats to self integrity at a later time through the intervening condition of new knowledge (see Chapter 6). For example, one participant found out that her dog was being mistreated and three other participants in the current study found that the people they had relinquished their dog to, did not keep the dogs and relinquished them to someone else. This finding is consistent with New et al. (2000), who reported that dogs obtained from animal shelters and friends were at increased risk of further relinquishment. This may result in more people being impacted by relinquishment and further distress for the dog. While the majority of R participants preferred to rehome their dog themselves, the method of choice for others was surrendering.

Surrendering. This strategy involved relinquishing dogs to an animal shelter. Reasons given by participants for surrendering to an animal shelter were that they thought the dog would have a better chance of being rehomed into a *good* home, as

animal shelters had experience of rehoming dogs and from the participants' perspective were better at identifying *good* owners.

> *I figured the* [animal shelter] *would have a better way of deciding who to give a dog to than I have. I thought the chance of someone, of the dog getting a good owner was probably better going through* [animal shelter] *than for me to put her in the paper, because I can't vet them as well as they do. [R-S, 9 months since relinquishment]*

While this strategy may have eased participants mind over ongoing concerns for the dog, relinquishing to a shelter added to the distress of AWWs, as they just saw another dog being relinquished (although two AWWs reported that it was better that the dogs were relinquished to the shelter than abandoned). The strategy of rehoming to an animal shelter could also be maladaptive for those who wished to maintain a connection to their dog, as for reasons of confidentiality shelter policy forbids contact between old owners and new owners. The third strategy related to the concept of preferred method was 'killing'.

Killing. This strategy was also related to the concept of 'softening the blow to dogs' (described later in this chapter), which encompasses ways of reducing the perceived or actual negative impact of relinquishment on the dog. This strategy was utilised by the following two participants who chose to kill rather than rehome their dog. Although this strategy was mainly aimed at alleviating worry over the outcomes for the dogs, these participants also perceived that they were reducing the impact on the dog, as it would not be at risk of being placed in a neglectful/abusive home.

> *The vet was not very happy because it was a young dog and the dog could have been rehoused. But I said no, I didn't want to not know where he was and what was happening to him. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

> *I thought I couldn't bear to think of him sort of, even if somebody took him if I advertised him, not many people are going to want to take a 10 year old dog. Um and he could be pushy. I mean he always wanted to have his head on your knee to be patted and you know I thought if people were impatient with him or anything like that I'd be worrying the whole time about that sort of thing. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

Another participant whose preferred method was rehoming, but was unable to find a new home for her dog relates how other people had advised her to abandon her dog, but rather than this she chose to have the dog killed.

> *I mean their solution was exactly that, to leave, that they could see nothing wrong with people, and they were government workers, um they could see nothing wrong with leaving him on the side of the highway near the Aboriginal camp. So that you know he would either you know as if he would make up his*

> *own mind whether he'd survive or not and so it was, that didn't make sense to me. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

While this strategy protected participants from worry and anxiety over the dog's wellbeing it did not protect them from the cognitive conflict over having the dog killed. They found themselves caught 'between a rock and a hard place' in that they did not want the dog dead, but they could not bear to think of the dog being mistreated. Another way in which participants tried to reduce the impact of relinquishment on themselves was through maintaining a connection to the dog.

Maintaining a Connection

Maintaining a connection has been identified as a way of coping with grief from the death of a pet (Packman, Carmack, & Ronen, 2011). Although relinquishment does not always involve the death of the dog, some participants likened the loss of their dog to a death. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 5, some of the strategies used by participants to maintain a connection are similar to those used by bereaved people maintaining a connection to their dead loved one. The use of strategies similar to those used following the death of a human provides support for evidence of a grief experience.

While not all participants chose to maintain a connection, it appeared to be an important way of dealing with the stressors associated with the loss of the dog for those participants who had expressed an emotional connection to their dog and for AWWs involved in rehoming. Four strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'maintaining a connection', namely, *contact comfort*, *keeping memorabilia*, *remembering the good times*, and *retaining a sense of ownership*, which are described next.

Contact comfort. This strategy involved participants remaining in contact with the new owners of the relinquished dog. Generally, this involved non physical contact such as receiving updates on the dog including photographs, telephone calls and emails, but for some participants involved visitations with the dog. Participants, whose dogs had been rehomed with family members or new owners willing to remain in contact, were comforted by being able to keep some contact with them. It helped to allay any ongoing concerns they may have in relation to the dog's welfare and for some participants eased some of their guilt over the relinquishment, as the following excerpts illustrate:

> *I don't think I stayed sad for particularly long because I still sort of had contact with him. Um I did, I missed him and I felt sad and um, but I still knew what was happening to him. And the fact that he had gone to such a good home, um was huge comfort. [R-F, 15 years since relinquishment]*

> *And that alleviated my guilt that she was having a much better life with* [friend's name] *in Italy. So yeah maybe in different circumstances I maybe wouldn't have eased my guilt so much. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

> *I always was asking about him and in the meantime I got sent a couple of photos from my family. They posted me photos and things like that. Um yeah I was always in touch to see how he was going.... He seemed happy though and I know he had a very good life after I left....I know that he went on very long walks every single day, he got a lot of attention, my family just loved him to death, they were wonderful so you know that's where I get my peace of mind from I guess, that he was with them so. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

> *It was um yeah comforting, knowing that she was, she was with a good family and a good person....The loss was always there you know, you always wondered what she was like and if she's okay. Yeah, but knowing that she was fine, I think helped. [CR-A, aged 8 years at 18 years since relinquishment]*

Keeping in contact though was not always beneficial and could contribute to psychological unease, particularly in terms of visiting the dog as the following examples illustrate:

> *We used to see him about a couple of times a year. And he always looked terrific. [R-A] Then we decided not to go any more because it was too heartbreaking for me* [nervous laugh]. *[R-B] Yeah it was and it was upsetting him, he knew who we were, he never forgot us, so it was better not to. [R-A and R-B* [married couple] *21 years since relinquishment]*

> *We did, we kept in touch for a long time and then I felt as though I was imposing because it had now become their dog and I was still carrying on as if it was mine, so I sort of pulled back. [R-L, 6.5 years since relinquishment]*

> *Over the years I travelled back and got to see him when I travelled back until he died so. But that was more painful I have to say, going back to see him. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

While it was impractical in terms of time and energy for AWWs to stay in contact with all rehomed dogs, participants welcomed emails and photographs sent to them by new owners. Receiving this feedback helped to allay any concerns over the dog's welfare, it also provided impetus for participants to continue in their role.

> *Um, I think it makes you feel better. It does make you feel better. I mean we do have contact with them for the two weeks while they're in the trial period and we do get the odd email and that, so that definitely does help. It definitely makes us feel better knowing that, you know, seeing the dogs and they're happy and all that sort of thing. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

> *Yeah we ask them to, um we ask them to send us an email, photos and stuff like that and that's fantastic. The email goes around to all the staff, they write a bit*

> *about them and send photos and that just, it makes your day, it really does it reminds you of why you are here. That is what we are all here for, is to get these animals new homes. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

Some participants were not able to maintain a physical or social connection to their dog, either because they did not know the new owners or the dog had been killed. In these situations participants could still maintain a connection via memorabilia.

Keeping memorabilia. This strategy helped participants to remain connected to their dog and alleviate some of their grief arising from their sense of loss. It involved keeping mementoes of the relinquished dog such as photographs, personal belongings of the dog and/or objects that reminded participants of the dog, some of which were kept on display.

> *Even now, still I find that I have things that he's damaged* [laughs]. *Like I have a tatty old address book that the corners been chewed off, that he did as a puppy; and I so desperately need a new address book, but I won't let it go cos I know that he chewed that corner, stupid* [laughs]. *[R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

> *I kept her choker, I've always had her choker and I've always like just put junk on it. Like I've got this choker that weighs about probably seven or eight kilos of key rings on it, why I did that I don't know, but I've always just hung up key rings on it. [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

> *Everybody's different, but for me, it was not to try and forget him you know cos we still have lots of photos of him and everything. [R-K, 11 years since relinquishment]*

Another way in which participants maintained a connection to their dog was through 'remembering the good times'.

Remembering the good times. This strategy involved participants fondly recalling and relating happy moments and episodes, about their dog. This strategy appeared to provide some comfort for participants, even though for some, it was bittersweet as they still struggled with their decision to relinquish.

> *Um, mostly when I think about him I laugh, because the first thing that comes to mind is what a clown he was and the funny, you know the funny things he did. Um I don't think I even think about the times when he made me angry with some of his antics* [laughs]. *You'd sort of go outside and he'd pulled apart some sort of wildlife sort of, which the other dog never you know, which the other dogs had never done apart from snakes and yet Rex never, never noticed snakes* [laughs]. *[R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

> *Mum loves to watch those, so sometimes he's actually sometimes in the videos ....And we do talk about it sometimes, I do miss him, obviously it's the attachment you have, but yeah we do talk about him sometimes, more often than not now, rather than when I was young. [CR-E, aged 5 at relinquishment, 15 years since relinquishment]*

Although the strategies related to maintaining a connection were beneficial for participants who employed them, as people differ in their methods of coping they also had the potential to adversely impact other family members. For example, being reminded about the dog would be distressing for those whose method of coping was to avoid thinking about the dog.

For some participants retaining a 'sense of ownership' was another way in which they were able to maintain a connection to their dog.

Sense of ownership. This strategy involved participants holding onto the belief that they were still the owner of the dog, even though the dog had been rehomed with someone else. The following participant's comments provide evidence for a sense of ownership. The first excerpt relates to a participant that had adopted a dog as a companion for her own dog, from someone who was relocating. She later relinquished her own dog and the adopted dog back to the adopted dog's original owner. Her choice of the word 'fostering' when referring to her own dog suggests a temporary arrangement (even though she had stated that she was moving interstate and would not be able to have a dog in her accommodation), suggesting she still retains a sense of ownership.

> *Knowing that they have gone to a good home and people that love them because Rex 1's gone back to his parents and now they're fostering Rex 2 so I. I am quite happy about where they've gone. I've found the right place for them and they're totally spoilt, I couldn't wish for a better place for them. [R-P, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *And um whenever you saw a dog as well, you remembered your dog, cos she was still our dog as far as I was concerned. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

Although participants were not directly asked about a sense of ownership, one participant reported that he no longer had a sense of ownership over his dog:

I don't feel it's my dog anymore. [R-J, 6 weeks since relinquishment]

Interestingly one participant when asked if she had anything else she would like to say commented that she thought *not* having a sense of ownership lessened the impact of the loss for her.

> *I was wondering does it affect. I don't think it does but, the dog was seen as belonging to my brother and you think well why wasn't it the family dog. You know why didn't it belong to all of us and it didn't seem to bother us that it was* [brothers name]. *But sometimes I think it's a bit sort of strange that if it was seen as my dog then would I be more affected. And I think because it wasn't seen as our dog, the family dog and seen as* [brothers name] *dog, I think he would be*

> *more affected....It was like he just shared our back garden, but was like a friend but yeah it was always like oh but he's* [brothers name] *dog. So he had the responsibility well for all the emotional side of it as well. [CR-D, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 34 years since relinquishment]*

This suggests that a sense of ownership, aside from level of attachment, may be an important factor in human-animal relationships and might be an area for future study.

Softening the Blow to Others

Along with reducing the impact of relinquishment to self, participants also tried to reduce the impact on others. As will be shown, reducing the impact on others sometimes also indirectly reduced the impact on the self. Four impact reducing strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'softening the blow to others', namely, *keeping them in the dark, replacing Rex, comforting others,* and *self silencing* which are described next.

Keeping them in the dark. This strategy involved not telling others (particularly children) that the dog was being, or had been relinquished. While not specifically stated by R parents, this strategy although on the surface may have been an attempt to protect children, may also have been an attempt to counteract the threat from parental role conflict.

> *I didn't discuss it with the children and I regret that now because they don't ever talk about Rex.... I'm sure they know, but that's not something they've ever raised with me and it's not something that I'm courageous enough to actually bring out into the open with them. [R-E, 16.5 years since relinquishment]*

As illustrated in the previous excerpt, although at the time the strategy may have helped alleviate psychological unease related to parental role conflict, in the long term it may contribute to threatening self integrity. Further, while parents may have believed they were protecting their children from harm by not discussing the relinquishment and in some cases not even telling them, as some CR participants reported in Chapter 6, being kept in the dark contributed to their psychological unease. For example, as a result of being kept in the dark some CR participants were denied an opportunity to say goodbye to their dog and some were just left wondering about what had happened to the dog. Another way in which R parents tried to reduce the impact of relinquishment on children was to get another pet (although the new pet was not always a dog).

Replacing Rex. The strategy of getting another pet may have alleviated some of the parental role conflict and could be perceived as trying to make amends for hurting the child by relinquishing their dog.

> *But the one that it affected the most was definitely* [younger sisters name], *definitely* [younger sisters name] *because it was her dog and she had this special*

> *attachment with her. And you know she didn't stop talking about her and so what my parents did, well they just bought her a dog, because they thought that that was just gonna make her feel better. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *They missed the animals very much. Um but when we arrived, we arrived here in December we took three we took literally 10 days to find a house. And we moved into the house, into our new house on the third Feb, we got the cat and a week later we got the dog. So I think the animals helped us settle very very quickly. And I never thought they were a replacement, they were just you know animals to love. [R-L, 6.5 years since relinquishment]*

Although in the previous excerpt participant R-L specifically states that the new pets were never a replacement for the relinquished ones, the children may have held different perceptions.

The strategy of replacing Rex may have also been used to lessen the sense of loss, as one participant who could not have a replacement pet commented:

> *Again I think it's because there's no replacement. I think the biggest thing with losing a pet whether its relinquishment or old aged euthanasia is you know, if you do have an option eventually to have another pet. That pet fills your life and it takes the place, it doesn't negate the previous ones that you've had but that becomes the new sort of thing in your life and you know if you've got 10, 15 years so you know it moves on. But I think it's just the void you know of not being able to have one. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

Participants also tried to soften the blow to others through the strategy of 'comforting others'.

Comforting others. This strategy involved trying to allay others' fears or concerns over the dog, as the following participants reported:

> *But when our grandson came for the school holidays he was, he's six; um he said 'I can't find Rexie". So I said you know that Rexie had gone and she'd gone to another house and was with other dogs and happy and everything like that. [R-I, 3 months since relinquishment]*

> *I remember my brother sort of coming in and saying oh that's done now. And then my mother saying "oh he'll be grand"* [laughs] *and yeah he was fine and that was alright. [CR-D, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 34 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um I remember talking to Mum about it once um saying you know. I remember her saying "are you okay? What's wrong." "I just miss Rexie" and she was like aw* [reassuring voice] *Rexie's fine blah, blah, blah". [CR-A, aged 8 years at 18 years since relinquishment]*

Some AWW participants also used this strategy. Although generally AWW participants held relinquishers responsible for the relinquishment, some of them did

report feeling sympathy for relinquishers who appeared distressed over the relinquishment. In adopting this strategy AWW participants tried to comfort those showing distress. In the following excerpt the AWW participant explains how she comforts distressed children:

> *Like if they're upset we stay calm and just keep telling them that the dog is going to be fine. That we are going to do the best we can for it, that it'll find a nice home. And then you keep reassuring them the whole time that they are there, that the dog will be looked after. [AWW-J, Shelter worker]*

The final impact reducing strategy related to the concept of 'softening the blow to others' was identified as 'self silencing'.

Self silencing. This strategy involved deliberately choosing not to talk about the dog and/or the relinquishment in order to protect others. Although not directly reported, self silencing may have been used by R (parent) participants, as a means of not upsetting a child and by CR participants who did not want to upset a parent, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> *I think mum was not, mum was not really happy about it either. I remember her being quite sad but not overtly upset or anything. I remember her being, it was difficult for her to tell me what she had decided and difficult for her to talk about it with me. And um I think she was um she didn't want to see me get upset not having my dog coming to stay and coming to live with us, so I think it was hard for her....I often think about Rex, but then you know I leave it at that. I don't really mention him, I mean I've mentioned happy things about him to my mum, happy memories about how he used to do this and that, but that's about the extent of the conversation really. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

The strategy of self silencing was also related to the concept of 'keeping it in' (described later in this chapter) and was used as a way for some participants to control their emotions about the relinquishment experience. It was apparent during interviews that some participants, when reminiscing about their dogs, were not forthcoming with information about the actual relinquishment, unless specifically asked. One R participant had said she had not talked about the relinquishment since, with her kids (who are now adults). This was supported by evidence from CR participants. For example, one CR participant when asked if his father had spoken to him about the dog or the relinquishment after the event responded: *Never spoke about it ever since. [CR-B, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

Although participants utilised self silencing in order to cope with the relinquishment experience, sometimes it failed in its aim and led to further psychological unease as illustrated in the following examples.

> *So there are days where I'll either go one of two ways; I won't say a word and I'll clam up and it's when I get home into the shower that I cry or as soon as my other half picks me up from work it's chat, chat, chat, chat the whole time....So I go one of two ways, normally I talk, normally I get it all out. If it's really hard like it was with Rex that time, one of those little dogs that was the fence jumper, that was really hard. So I didn't say a thing and that affected me for a few days, but then you just gotta say okay I've gotta forget about that now. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *Well I've noticed while we've been talking that I probably, I've had long patches in my life where I haven't, I haven't probably um talked about my dog and maybe I should have* [laughs]. *Maybe that would have made it a little less painful. Maybe that would have made it a little bit easier and I think that you know sharing some stories about him which I have done on occasion, but just doing a little bit more or just sort of thinking about him a bit more and having him where I can see him might just keep it a more positive um happy feeling rather than sort of every time I think of him I feel a bit sad. Maybe doing that would make it a little bit easier and it would be less painful. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

While some participants deliberately chose to self silence, others may have had no option, because they may have felt prevented from talking about the relinquishment as illustrated by the following participant:

> *But he would threaten and he was quite aggressive and um would fly off the handle at the least thing, so I guess we were all very scared.... I remember being like, I remember being really confused and um and I remember like them you know not wanting to talk about him, his name just sort of never got mentioned again. [CR-F, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

It was not clear if self silencing by CR participants was because others in the family never spoke about the dog (or relinquishment), whether as mentioned previously it was an attempt at reducing the impact on others, or if it was a deliberate strategy on their part to shut out the experience. Not feeling able to talk about the dog and/or relinquishment may have contributed to psychological unease for those who would have preferred to have expressed their emotions.

Softening the Blow to Dogs

As well as the potential to harm other people, some participants perceived that relinquishment had the potential to be psychologically and/ or physically harmful to dogs. This was evidenced by comments such as "*I often wonder how long did she live and did she feel deserted" [R-R, 15 years since relinquishment]*, as well as participants attempts to minimise harm. By trying to minimise the potential for harm to dogs, participants also alleviated some of the psychological stressors associated with relinquishment, such as ongoing concerns for dogs' welfare, and for some, guilt over

the relinquishment. Four impact reducing strategies related to the concept of 'softening the blow to dogs' were identified in the data, namely, *killing* (described earlier in 'preferred method'), *finding a good home*, *taking dogs home*, and *special attention* which are described next.

Finding a 'good' home. This strategy involved participants being particular about the homes that the dog was going to. For some, this involved letting the new owners know the dog's likes and dislikes, meeting with potential owners and /or seeing the premises where the dog would be kept.

> *I vetted a lot of people who rang up....I wanted to meet the people that would come to my house or at least have a good long conversation and ask them. I asked them the size of their yard, do they work from home all those sort of things and then I sort of felt like I had a little bit of a say in where she ended up. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

> *I wanted you know, I wanted to make sure that she wasn't going to be left on the street. So yeah the next people that came through were really happy with her and said they were going to walk her on the beach and I took her kennel around to their home and made sure that she was all settled in. [R-T, 13 years since relinquishment]*

> *Yeah we went round and saw* [friend's name] *and her husband. They said they would love to have him but they want to know all his little quirks. I said well he has supper, he has black tea, because milk is no good for him and toast about nine o'clock every night, just one piece of toast and his mug of tea. And that's what they did. They did everything that we did. And they put the kennel on the big back verandah for him so he didn't even have to get his feet wet....You've gotta have somebody you know that's literally going to do what you did. And take him where they went and treat him like we did.... It's for the animal's benefit, because they are used to that, you take that away, it's bad enough you're going, but if you take away all their little habits too, um you cause more problems. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

> *No I'm very fussy about who my dogs go to. It's not about being fussy, as in the sort of home they go to, it's matching the dog up to that home, and most of my dogs end up in everyday households. You know the main thing I look for is that they're inside dogs and that's why my dogs, I think my dogs don't come back because they're inside and they're happy and that's where you get less behavioural problems. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

Participant AWW-L (previous excerpt) went as far as to remove a dog from a home where it had been rehomed, because in her opinion it was not right for the dog. By placing the dog where they believed it was going to be looked after, participants alleviated guilt over the decision to relinquish (in the case of relinquishers) and protected themselves from worrying about the dog's welfare. This finding was also

evidenced in a study by Arluke (1994) where animal shelter workers were also particular where or with whom they rehomed animals.

One of the downsides to this strategy, in relation to AWWs finding a good home, is that potentially good owners may be denied a dog due to subjective measures of those making the decision. As the following AWWs comments about one shelter illustrate:

> *Their rehoming is very different; you know appearance, what car you drive, if you say the wrong thing.... Depending on which supervisor you have depends on whether you get a dog. You can see that, a friend of mine I got to take a pure bred Lab that had been there, beautiful, beautiful, for about 18 months from being a puppy. Now I got him to go on a particular night because his Lab had died about six months earlier. They, they live in* [high socioeconomic area], *they have a house down south, they are wonderful owners and they feed them Eukenuba you know the expensive dog food. But one of the* [workers] *believed in cooking meat and cooking the food every night, she doesn't believe in just dry food. So if he'd had gone on the Saturday, he would not have got the Labrador, but he went on the Friday and you know a supervisor that I know who just wants to get them good homes and he went to this wonderful home. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

Although the AWW mentioned in the previous excerpt may have felt that she was looking after the dogs best interests, being too particular may result in dogs missing out on a good home and staying in shelters longer than needs be, contributing to psychological unease of AWWs in the shelter/rescue groups and to the distress of dogs. Another way in which AWW participants tried to reduce the impact of relinquishment on the dogs was to take them home temporarily.

Taking dogs home. This strategy was aimed at reducing the stress on the dogs arising from the shelter environment and/or to free up some space so that others dogs could be taken in.

> *What people used to do was actually start taking dogs home, the staff. I mean I've taken dogs home just to try and get you know a free pen. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

Some participants reported that they had permanently adopted dogs from the shelter at which they worked.

> *I worked here for nearly two years before I actually took an animal home from here. So I mean everyone says "how do you work here and not take them all home". And I went; it took me two years to fall in love with a dog that came in here. And the situation was strange she had um, we had Parvo here at the same time and she had really really bad legs and I took her home for a foster, then she stayed. I applied to have three dogs and I've kept her so you know it's just like, and that's the only dog that I've actually ever went "I'll keep her", there's just something about her. [AWW-J, Shelter worker]*

> *We've never had a dog that doesn't go in the end. So eventually some volunteer will take them, including me. I think I've had 23 old ones since I started. [AWW-K, Shelter Worker]*

While taking dogs home in foster situations may help alleviate some of the psychological stress for AWWs arising from witnessing a distressed dog, unless they can keep the dog until it is rehomed, it is only a short term solution. This may result in further distress for the AWW and dog when the dog has to be returned to the shelter as the following participant reported:

> *But we do have dogs, um we had one come back yesterday. He's a gorgeous little thing and he was, he's very scared in the kennel and he was just scared about everything and we put him out to foster care and he came back yesterday and he's just amazing, completely different dog. So if we know we can change that dog if we think that that is the best thing for them. But sometimes it can be worse. They've gone and got comfortable in a home situation and then come back here it can set them back and they just go back to being like they were. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

In addition, taking dogs home can result in AWWs becoming more attached to the dog, which may lead to emotional distress for the AWW when the dog is found a permanent home. As well as taking dogs home to reduce the impact of relinquishment some AWWs reported employing the strategy identified as 'special attention'. This was a strategy also employed by R and CR participants.

Special attention. This strategy involved making the most of their remaining time with the dog and/or giving the dog special treats. For AWWs, this strategy was usually employed for dogs that were due to be killed, as the following participants comments illustrate:

> *When you know, occasionally you do get dogs that fail, the staff are advised so that they can spoil the dogs rotten, unless they're human aggressive and then those dogs are padlocked and that's the end for them. But if they're dog aggressive, I think it's a nice thing to do that the staff are aware. The kennel hands are aware, the adoption officers are aware, this is what's happened, they can read on the chart F you know it's failed. Um if you want to bring in chocolate cake bring in chocolate cake for the dog, if you want to bring him in a T-bone steak bring it in, if you want to take him out for a walk, take him out for a walk and spend some time with him....When the process is when the actual euthanasia is happening like with the dog last week make it as pleasant experience as you can for him. So if I'm in there with him he's getting treats, he's getting me doing this on his head* [makes stroking gestures]. *I'm talking to him you know I'm breathing, I'm blowing on his nose so it's me that he's concentrating on not this needle. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *My coping strategy was to sort of I suppose in a way pamper the dogs. Yeah you know and make what I could the best for them you know for perhaps those few hours. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

By focussing on reducing the impact on the dog, AWWs may have been able to alleviate some of the psychological unease resulting from their crisis of conscience in terms of the caring/killing paradox and their lack of control over the situation. Focussing on making the experience less frightening for the dog may have distracted them from thinking about what was actually happening to the dog, thus making the experience a little less distressing for themselves. Giving 'special attention' to dogs that were designated for or about to be killed was a strategy also identified as being used by shelter workers in Arluke's (1994) study.

R and CR participants who employed the strategy reported making a fuss of their dogs in the time leading up to the actual relinquishment.

> *For six months just to have that time with the dog you know it was just great. Getting up and not going to work, just pottering around and so that was costly but that was what I chose to do because I knew at the end of I knew what I was going to do with him you know. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *We did say goodbye. We gave him a bow which we put around his neck and a nice big bone and made sure that he'd had a bath and spent a bit of time with him that week to say goodbye. [CR-I, aged 12 at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

'Special attention' was another strategy, which although aimed at reducing the impact on the dog, also reduced the impact on the participant, as giving the dog special attention may have alleviated any guilt that the participant might have been experiencing.

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found in the data for the use of strategies aimed at reducing the impact of relinquishment on self and others. The use of such strategies suggests that participants, who employed them, perceived that dog relinquishment was a potentially psychologically and/or physically harmful experience for themself, others, and the dog. Participants attempted to reduce the impact on themselves and others by making the relinquishment appear more palatable to themselves and others; choosing a method that they could live with; maintaining a connection with the dog after relinquishment, and by trying to reduce harm to others, including the dog. While some strategies appeared to be effective in reducing psychological unease others increased or had the potential to increase it, resulting in further threats to self integrity. The next

section describes and discusses participants' use of emotional management strategies to alleviate their psychological unease.

Managing Emotion

A fourth type of strategy identified in the data that participants employed in the counteracting phase of the protective-restoring process was managing emotion. Emotional management strategies related to the way in which participants dealt with the emotions that arose from cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief resulting from the dog relinquishment experience.

A range of emotions were reported by participants, which were mostly negative including anger, frustration, guilt, sadness, mixed emotions (relating to good outcome for the dog) and sorrow. Negative emotions are associated with an increased risk for poor health outcomes (Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002). Some of the emotions were experienced for a short period of time (e.g., sadness) and some appeared to be ongoing (e.g., the anger and frustration experienced by AWW participants; anger and sorrow experienced by some CR participants; and the anxiety and sorrow experienced by some R participants). Emotional management strategies served to control emotional expression (see Gross, 1998 for review of emotion regulation). Four emotional management strategies were identified in the data and grouped under the concept of 'letting it out' and 'keeping it in'.

Letting It Out

For some participants the outward expression of emotion appeared to help them cope with negative emotions that resulted from the relinquishment experience. Two strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'letting it out', namely, *sharing thoughts and feelings*, and *shedding tears*, which are described next.

Sharing thoughts and feelings. This strategy involved participants disclosing their thoughts and feelings about the impact of the relinquishment to others. It was aimed at alleviating negative emotional arousal. One AWW participant, when asked if she had anything else to say at the end of the interview, commented:

> *No, I think I've got everything out now, I feel much better, it's very cathartic. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

Aside from one participant (R-H, see following excerpt) who had been prescribed medication to deal with her life circumstances at the time of the relinquishment, no other participants in the current study reported seeking professional help to deal with their thoughts and/or feelings about the relinquishment.

> *So that was basically it. I mean it wasn't a lot of complications. I don't know, it did necessitate me taking, the doctor gave me some sort of tablets because I was very sort of stressed about the whole move, you know just coping with um selling all the stuff and the whole sort of thing of that time....I'm not taking anything like that now just some Sipronal it's not like Serapax it was just a mild relaxant sort of thing because I was you know really uptight with coping....No, I can't say I went out and it was a like therapy thing that I've got to talk about to get it out of my system, I just took a Sipronol* [laughs]. *I mean I was fairly busy when I came in here with settling in and all that sort of stuff. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

It was not clear whether this was because participants felt the experience did not warrant getting professional help or participants were embarrassed or ashamed to seek it, for fear of ridicule or recrimination. Those participants who did report talking about the dog and/or the relinquishment generally spoke with supportive friends or family members.

> *Um I suppose I was pretty good at expressing my emotions. I talked to people about it, my parents especially. And uh my mother and uh um we had a good sob at night I suppose to release. And then I was also very fit, I like exercise so I'd go and exercise as well. Yeah make sure I release and not just hold it in. And that was in yeah the starting time of my um being aware of letting go. So yeah cos it's the first time I'd really had to let go of something that close. [R-T, 13 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um I used to, but I find that a lot of people aren't interested to be honest. Um you know friends of mine have got dogs. But you know a dogs a dog to them you know. I don't think they think that they bleed like us, they feel the cold like us, tooth ache like us, ear infections you know, those are my friends. Now I have a friend who has been in dog rescue probably all her life, 40 years or more. Um I do talk to her, um but she's very, she is fantastic, she's one of these ladies who will go out there at three in the morning like if a Doberman been tied up to a pole, do you know what I mean. [AWW-O, Rescue Worker]*

The previous excerpt by participant AWW-O makes mention of others' attitudes to hearing about the dogs. While talking about thoughts and feelings in relation to the relinquishment may be cathartic for some, it may be unsettling for others with an affinity for dogs. This may be one reason why some people do not want to hear about it and may result in some who prefer to express their emotion in this way, having difficulty in finding someone willing to listen.

Shedding tears. Another way in which participants across the groups outwardly expressed their emotions was through crying (several R and CR participants cried during the interview, suggesting that they still experienced some unease over the relinquishment).

> *Yeah she broke her heart.... she was only about 13 and they were good mates. So the three of us made a good pair, well four, we were all crying, one was howling and the rest of us were crying. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

> *It was horrendous at the time because, and I didn't realise how much it affected her* [referring to her daughter], *until obviously the weekend she went. We cried for the whole weekend. But for months later we'd find, cos we stayed in our home and we finally moved out in December, so we had you know, from the March to the December and we'd find a ball and it'd start us all off again and we'd end up crying. [R-O, 2 years since relinquishment]*

> *I mean after the customers are gone, obviously I can lose my temper but uh a lot of it comes out but, I do a lot of crying there's a lot of tears. [AWW-E, Shelter Worker]*

While crying as a form of emotional release may be beneficial for participants in alleviating some of the emotional unease, as reported earlier it may be distressing for others who witness the tears. Not all participants preferred to openly express their thoughts and feelings about the relinquishment. Some participants, whether by choice or circumstance, contained their emotions.

Keeping It In

'Keeping it in' involved the suppression of emotion. While potentially useful in the short term, suppressing emotion may be detrimental to mental health and wellbeing when used long term due to physiological effects on systems of the body (Gross, 1998; Gross & Levinson, 1997; Richards & Gross, 1999). In addition, by suppressing emotions participants ran the risk of others mistakenly perceiving that they were okay, resulting in them not receiving support they may need (Gross & Levinson, 1997). Three strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of 'keeping it in', namely, *self silencing (*described earlier under the concept of 'softening the blow to others') , *hiding the hurt,* and *masking face* which are described next.

Hiding the hurt. This strategy involved participants purposely hiding their thoughts, feelings and emotions relating to the relinquishment experience, from public view. There are several fear based reasons why participants may not have wanted to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions publicly including: the fear of ridicule by others, for some this may have been related to their social image in not wanting to appear 'weak' by becoming emotional over a dog; R participants may have feared recrimination from others (i.e., fear of losing face) and may have felt that they did not have a legitimate right to openly express sadness or sorrow, given that they were instrumental in the loss, potentially resulting in disenfranchised grief; and some

participants, especially those who were children at the time of relinquishment, may have felt unable to openly display their feelings for fear of upsetting others (e.g., parents), or may have feared the reaction of their parents. The following excerpts provide examples of participants' attempts at emotion suppression.

> *Some of the guys here just keep it all in. And you know they're upset and you look at them sideways and you can see a tear and its like yeah. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *This one friend who sent me your leaflet said "aw you're so brave and sad". I didn't think I was sad, particularly not in front of other people.... But I just made a point of talking about him quite naturally sort of you know every time his name was mentioned. I didn't sort of* [imitates crying sounds] *you know that was more in the middle of the night* [participant appeared a little emotional at this point] *um do doot do doot. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *Um I mean I'm very emotional. So I would be, even though I try and keep it down, I would be you know, I'd try and be quite professional and do the paperwork and everything. And I think it's like a coping mechanism isn't it. [AWW-C, Shelter Worker]*

The strategy of hiding the hurt may have a detrimental impact on participants, especially if they prefer to openly express their hurt. Further, as mentioned earlier, it may also result in missing out on support from others, as others may believe they are coping well with the relinquishment. Another strategy utilised by AWW participants that was related to the concept of keeping it in and the strategy of hiding the hurt was *masking face*.

Masking face. This strategy involved participants hiding their true feelings (usually relating to anger) and presenting themselves as friendly and helpful when sometimes this was the opposite to how they felt, as the following participants explained:

> *I get very, I get quite cross and you have to be polite because you're representing the organisation, when really I just want to smack them* [laughs]. *[AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

> *We are very polite. You know we could never really express it because they might turn around on their heels and say you know, we won't bring the dog in, we'll advertise it for free in the Quokka* [local free trade paper]*or something. They don't mind where the dog goes. [AWW-K, Shelter Worker]*

> *I bite my tongue. I do, I bite my tongue.... I mean obviously, in my position, I have to be seen to be doing the right thing. If I can't handle a situation I will walk away ....So I just have to go yeah and just walk away because if I say what I really thought. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

Although this strategy was helpful in avoiding confrontations with relinquishers, it did not appear to alleviate psychological unease for AWWs; instead it may have contributed to it. This finding is consistent with Hart and Mader's (1995) findings that animal shelter workers experienced psychological stress over having to hide their true feelings. Although not reported in the current study, children of relinquishers might also employ this strategy to hide their true feelings about the relinquishment in front of their parents (especially if they feared their parents' reactions).

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found for the use of emotional management strategies by participants in the current study. These strategies appeared to help participants deal with some of the emotional stressors associated with relinquishment. Some participants reported talking about their feelings to family or friends and/ or releasing their emotions through crying; while others preferred to contain their emotions and hide their hurt. While outward expression of emotions appeared to be beneficial for participants who utilised this strategy, it had the potential to contribute to psychological unease of others in their family or community who preferred not to hear or talk about issues related to dog relinquishment.

Those who preferred to keep their thoughts and feelings contained may have alleviated psychological unease in the short term, but may be putting themselves at risk for negative impacts on health and wellbeing later. In addition, they may have been denied emotional support from others, who mistakenly believed them to be coping well with the relinquishment. The next section describes and discusses participants' use of avoiding strategies to protect and restore self integrity.

Avoiding

Avoiding strategies were related to impact reducing strategies in that they were utilised as a means of limiting the psychological unease resulting from thinking, hearing or talking about the dog and/or relinquishment. The use of avoiding strategies suggested that for some participants, the experience of dog relinquishment was psychologically painful. Again, as with suppressing emotions, the use of avoiding strategies may have been beneficial in alleviating psychological unease in the short term, but may be detrimental to psychological wellbeing with long term use (see Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000). Seven avoiding strategies were identified in the data and grouped under the concepts of 'distraction', and 'detachment'.

Distraction

Participants who felt uncomfortable being reminded of their failures and not wanting to revisit the painful experience tried to distract themselves from thinking about the dog and/or the relinquishment, in an effort to avoid psychological unease. Four strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of distraction, namely, *not dwelling on it, keeping busy, focussing on the good, and wishful thinking,* which are described next.

Not dwelling on it. Dwelling on the experience (i.e., going over and over the negative aspects of the relinquishment in their mind), ran the risk of prolonging participants psychological unease, as explained by the following participant:

> *But um I can still; I mean if I wallow and let myself think about the dog you know, I can get upset. But again it's just sort of after the fact. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

In order to avoid this, participants tried to distract themselves from thinking about the dog and/ or the experience.

> *And like that day with the dog that was put to sleep, I was devastated. So I went and I just had to get out. So I took the little golf buggy thing and I whizzed around here for a while. I was out for about 10 minutes then somebody made me a cup of tea by the time I got in there and they're like "are you okay, are you right" you know. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *I'm so busy that I guess I don't really have time to dwell on it too much. With work and my dogs and everything I'm doing for* [animal rescue group] *and other commitments I have outside of that, I don't really have time to dwell on it. You just get on with it really cos what else can you do? You help the animals that you can help and yeah you can't save them all. [AWW-A, Rescue Worker]*

While this strategy may alleviate psychological unease it is only a temporary measure, as deliberately choosing not to think about something requires conscious effort, which may prove difficult to maintain over the long term. Related to the aforementioned cognitive strategy of not dwelling on it, was a behavioural strategy identified as 'keeping busy'.

Keeping busy. This strategy involved participants engaging in activities that took their mind of the dog and/or the relinquishment experience. Some participants were kept busy by getting on with life and focussing on other things.

> *That was um a very busy time for me. I had my business, a baby, so my thoughts didn't dwell on her too much. Initially the first six months was probably the hardest; yeah um, but I coped with it pretty well and uh yeah, I was busy, really really busy. So yeah, so I was actually trying to get back on track, yeah, and adjusting to a new family situation so my priorities weren't on pets. It was*

> *mainly on my new daughter, yeah, get a little system happening there. [R-T, 13 years since relinquishment]*

> *I was pre teen so I was kinda of caught up in my own life. Yes pets were always in my life but it wasn't necessarily, like it wasn't all about them. [CR-I, aged 12 years at relinquishment, 27 years since relinquishment]*

> *But my sort of semi cure for it I suppose is I go pet minding....This is just how I handle the relinquishment you know. I've got this very nice group of people who ...do lots of overseas trips and things. I've been doing this for about four years now and the same group because they know they can rely on me. So this is how I get my doggie fix. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

While keeping busy may not have been a deliberate strategy in some cases (e.g., see previous comments from participants R-T and CR-I), it nevertheless may have served to alleviate psychological unease brought about by the relinquishment. Similar to the downside of not dwelling on it, the strategy of keeping busy may only serve as a temporary measure to alleviate psychological unease, as participants may be reminded of the dog and/or the relinquishment by factors beyond their control (e.g., seeing a dog on the street or in the media that reminds them of their dog). Another way in which participants across the groups distracted themselves from the negative aspects of the experience was by 'focussing on the good'.

Focussing on the good. This strategy involved indentifying and focussing on positive aspects of the experience. For some participants this involved focussing on the positive outcomes for the dog.

> *But the biggest bonus, I suppose you could call it, out of that was on the night. It was after the surgery closed. Um and the vet gave him the injection and I thought it was quite quick, you know. But he said "no'. He said "that was a bit slow and I would say he is getting, developing a heart murmur". And I said "aw come on you're only saying that to make me feel better" you know. And he said "no, no I think this is why". Apparently if that's the case the injection doesn't work quite as quickly, I mean to me it only seemed, it was only a difference of seconds or something like that. From that, first as I said you're only making me feel better or something like that and he said "no, no I'm telling you". So I thought well again it added to the thing of he was going to start deteriorating anyway. [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

> *I was told she was happy and that made me happy. So I guess after coming here you know the pain kinda healed a bit cos I thought at least she's taken care of. My aunt is really good with dogs, obviously she loves them, she takes good care, so I felt comforted by that fact. [CR-A, aged 8 years at relinquishment, 18 years since relinquishment]*

> *But we were happy that he was going to a good home; relieved our mind, cos we would never have been able to put him down. [R-A, 21 years since relinquishment]*

For others it involved focussing on the positive actions that they perceived others had taken.

> *Um it was pretty devastating to leave. And I do remember having to leave him and that was awful because just, like I said I was really lucky and he was really lucky that he was with my family. I mean the house that he stayed at was the house I grew up in um I knew he would be okay and I was able to leave him for that reason. I don't think I know how I would have gone if he just went to someone I didn't know. But I don't think my mum would ever have done that. I couldn't imagine her doing that. [CR-J, aged 15 years at relinquishment, 20 years since relinquishment]*

Although participant CR-J was not happy about the decision to relinquish, she was able to offset some of the potential damage to the parent/child relationship by reassuring herself that her mother cared enough about her and the dog to not leave him with strangers.

Some participants focussed on positive outcomes of the relinquishment. For example, the following R participant was offered her relinquished dog back after two years but was unable to take her. In order to make herself feel better about this new threat to self integrity (i.e., the dog is being passed onto someone else, which is not what the participant had envisioned for the dog), the participant found solace in focussing on what she perceived as a positive outcome of the relinquishment.

> *I said look I'd love to have her but I'm just not allowed to. I'm not allowed to have her. So they actually gave her to someone else; which I felt really bad about. But the issue was they said look this is good friends of ours they got these two little boys and one boy was about 10. And they said he's a very withdrawn shy boy. He gets on fabulously with that dog and that dog was really bringing him out of himself. So I felt it was a positive step for her to go there and it was good for that. [R-R, 15 years since relinquishment]*

Focussing on the good aspects of working in the animal welfare environment helped AWW participants cope with the threats to their self integrity that arose from the rescue environment.

> *There's a lot of tears. But, and what I say to the people I work with is, it's like you've got to weigh up the good and bad. You've got to remember the good over and above the bad. So remember dogs that come in here in a mess and then remember the day they walk out with their new family. You try to really forget about the downsides. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *You've just got to sort of focus on the good that you can do and when they go out to their new homes and how happy they are. [AWW-E, Shelter Worker]*

While the strategy of focussing on the good appeared to be useful for alleviating psychological unease for R and CR participants, it may have been necessary for AWW

participants who work in a highly emotional environment that is not conducive to worker retention, as the following participant pointed out:

> *It's an emotive industry.... I've got a really good team at the moment and have retained them for quite a lengthy period of time. Prior to that, yes a huge turnover of staff. So I guess it's a matter of finding the right team, keeping the lines of communication open. I think that's huge just knowing when to deal with things and being able to give the right information to that person to be able to deal with it. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

The fourth method of distraction identified as an avoiding strategy was 'wishful thinking'.

Wishful thinking. This strategy involved choosing only to focus on a positive outcome for the dog, thereby protecting themselves from ongoing concerns for the dog's welfare. R participants who rehomed their dogs with strangers or to an animal shelter tended to engage in 'wishful thinking' to guard against worrying about how the dog was, (e.g., if it was being well cared for or mistreated).

> *No more of a wistful, is that even a word? Um more a, there's a warmth to it, like I hope she's okay kind of. It's not a, just a cold curiosity, it is a curiosity but as I say it's a bit more than "oh I wonder" I wonder and I hope she's okay. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

> *But yeah, I don't know what happened to Rex and I don't think I'd ever follow it up now. Um, but I like to think that you know something good whether that be the big sleep or maybe he is okay. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

AWW participants were likely to engage in wishful thinking when they rehomed dogs to new owners that did not keep in contact and in instances where they could not take a dog in, as the following participant reported:

> *And if they take it* [advice], *they take it and if they don't you know there's not much we can do. But it happens every day sort of thing you know. We can only hope that they've found a home for that dog and they eventually say well I've got to do something about this myself then. Just hope they haven't taken it to the vet to put it down, just because they don't want it anymore. [AWW-L, Rescue Worker]*

Apart from the following CR participant (CR-H), wishful thinking was not generally reported by CR participants in the current study.

> *Um I just hope he went to a good home and had a happy life, where there were no cars. [CR-H, aged 14 years at relinquishment, 33 years since relinquishment]*

This may have been because some dogs had been rehomed to family members so there was opportunity to remain in contact, some dogs were dead and as mentioned

previously (see 'comforting others') parents may have helped allay concerns over the dog's welfare.

Although wishful thinking can be a useful strategy for relinquishers and AWWs it is also a strategy that poses risks for dogs and potentially contributes to the distress of others, particularly when used by those who abandon dogs. For example, one R participant recalled how when she lived and worked in Northern WA, she would often see abandoned dogs on the side of the road, where the owners had left them believing that they would join the dogs that were at the local Aboriginal camp. However, as the participant recalled the reality was that the dogs were more likely to be run down and killed by the large work trucks that traversed the highway. The participant reported that witnessing this carnage was deeply distressing to her. It is likely that seeing these types of consequences from dog abandonment would also distress others in the community who had an affinity for dogs. Another way in which participants attempted to avoid the psychological unease arsing from dog relinquishment was through detachment.

Detachment

The concept of detachment encompassed avoiding strategies that related to severing emotional ties with, or not becoming emotionally attached to the relinquished dogs. While some participants employed strategies to remain connected to their dogs, others employed avoiding strategies to keep a distance between themselves and the dogs. For those with an emotional attachment to the dog this involved detaching or disconnecting themselves from the dog. For those who worked in animal welfare this involved not forming emotional connections to the dogs in their care. Three strategies were identified in the data that related to the concept of detachment, namely, *no memorabilia, no contact comfort,* and *not becoming attached,* which are described next.

No memorabilia. This strategy involved not keeping anything that would serve as a reminder to the participant, of the dog. Having physical reminders of the dog such as bowls, collars, photographs etc., served as a constant reminder of what relinquishers had done and reminded them (and others) of their loss, which contributed to psychological unease. By removing all physical reminders of the dog participants using this strategy were better able to cope with the relinquishment and the loss, as suggested in the following participant's comments:

> *But it was more just, I thought yeah this is a nice family and um so off they went. They took everything I had, the bowls everything. I just wanted, like Rexie's gone and just clear up. I didn't want dog stuff scattered around cos that would depress me. [R-D, 11 months since relinquishment]*

While this strategy helped those who wished to forget about the dog, in a family situation it would have added to the distress of those who wanted to remember the dog. Another way of detaching from the dog identified in the data was the strategy of 'no contact comfort'.

No contact comfort. This strategy involved avoiding all contact with the dog or dog's new owners, even though there was an opportunity to maintain contact, as contact did not comfort the participants. Participants employing this strategy were comforted by having no contact. They instead preferred to engage in wishful thinking about the dog, or tried to avoid thinking about the dog at all. This strategy, similar to no memorabilia, served to try and keep the dog and/or the relinquishment out of their thoughts. As the following participant reported, keeping in contact may have undermined her 'wishful thinking':

> *I think for me I couldn't* [keep in contact] *because I was still tussling with the actuality he shouldn't be here. I made that decision and so he shouldn't, this shouldn't be an issue you know. And the reason why in the past I have had other dogs put down um is for that reason for that you know. I didn't want, cos you don't know if it's gonna be good, bad or indifferent. And how will you deal with it if it's bad, you know, and you can't guarantee that a dog's gonna have a better life with someone else. [R-C, 2 years since relinquishment]*

This strategy also has the potential for a negative consequence as others might perceive not wanting any contact as a lack of interest in or care about the relinquished dog. Thereby contributing to the negative perception of relinquishers perpetuated in the culture of relinquishment. Another strategy within the concept of detachment that was identified in the data was 'not becoming attached'.

Not becoming attached. This strategy appeared only to be employed by AWWs and was a deliberate strategy to avoid forming an emotional bond with dogs in their care. This strategy was aimed at protecting themselves from psychological distress, especially in cases where there was risk of the dog being killed.

> *Um it was much harder in the beginning and I've toughened up a bit. It's almost like internally with me it's almost like a switch. It's like I love all the dogs. They all come in and you have special attachments to certain dogs. Until they have had that behaviour assessment I kinda don't get, I try not to get too attached. Then if they fail it's almost like I go click, fine I'll still feed you, I'll still pat you, I'll still make a fuss of you but I've got no connection to you. [AWW-G, Shelter Worker]*

> *Um, semidetach. Um I've become very good at that over the nine years I've worked here. Um occasionally you get caught out. Um you know when you think an animal's going to go through without and going to pass all the behavioural assessment and the vet checks and things like that and you'll occasionally get caught out when they fail one of those and will need to be*

> *euthanised. But yeah semidetach is all you can do. You just cannot get emotionally attached to the animals otherwise you would find it very difficult to actually work here because you would be an emotional wreck. [AWW-H, Shelter Worker]*

Not becoming attached however, was difficult to maintain, especially given the affinity that AWW participants had with dogs and the length of time that some dogs were in their care. Suppressing their affinity for the dogs, likely aroused cognitive dissonance, as AWWs behaviour was inconsistent with their values.

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found in some participants' data for the use of avoiding strategies to ease the psychological unease resulting from relinquishment. Participants distracted themselves from thinking about the dog and/or the relinquishment by not dwelling on it, keeping busy, focussing on the good and wishful thinking about outcomes for the dog. Some tried to disconnect themselves from the relinquished dogs by not keeping memorabilia, not maintaining contact with new owners and for AWW participants not becoming attached to dogs in their care. While avoiding strategies may have appeared useful as a means to ease participants mind in the short term, in the long term they had the potential to be detrimental to participants' psychological wellbeing, due to the effort required for conscious avoidance of anything related to the dog and the relinquishment. Further, avoiding strategies may also contribute to the psychological unease of others. The next section describes and discusses the final type of protective-restoring strategy used by participants in the current study, namely, blocking.

Blocking

The sixth type of strategy that participants employed to protect and restore self integrity was identified in the data as blocking. Blocking strategies were employed as a way of defending the self from a perceived painful experience or situation. Some of the blocking strategies were purposely employed (i.e., coping mechanism) with the intention of blocking out psychologically distressing memories associated with the relinquishment or to defend against perceived psychological harm; while others appeared to be employed at an unconscious level (i.e., defense mechanism). Three blocking strategies were indentified in the data and grouped under the concept of 'putting up defences'.

Putting Up Defences

The concept of putting up defences related to blocking strategies that participants employed to protect themselves from their own and others psychological unease resulting from the relinquishment experience. Three strategies were indentified in the data that related to the concept of 'putting up defences', namely, *memory blocking*, *steeling oneself*, and *not taking it on board*, which are described next.

Memory blocking. This strategy involved consciously or unconsciously shutting out memories of the dog and/or the relinquishment. Only two participants in the current study appeared to employ the strategy of memory blocking. Their use of the strategy suggested that their experience of dog relinquishment was psychologically painful as indicated by the following participant:

> *I tend to be a person who goes okay that's happened and that you know. I go into denial more than anything else.... So I'm, if it's too painful I can kind of shut that away. I didn't arrange for like a grave or anything like that. [R-M, 16 years since relinquishment]*

While the above participant [R-M] appeared to deliberately try to block the experience, the following CR participant had been unaware that she had blocked out the memories. For this participant, blocking the memories was likely an attempt to protect herself from what she had perceived as a traumatic experience.

> *But it just feels like. I mean I feel like I don't know. I can't remember Rex. I can't remember events properly, so it feels like there was real like a cut like a gap like a, it just feels like I've lost memories because this dog was just snatched away....I don't know whether I actually saw the dog being shot or I just knew the dog was being shot. And I just don't remember it because, I remember, like I can remember I can almost feel like I'm at* [neighbours] *place. I can feel the coolness under the trees like that and I can almost smell the scents in her garden. But I can't remember things about this dog at home. It's like all that's gone* [participant cries]. *[CR-F, aged 10 years at relinquishment, 41 years since relinquishment]*

While consciously or unconsciously blocking memories of the dog and/or the relinquishment may have served to protect participants in the short term, they run the risk of the strategy being undermined by intervening conditions (see Chapter 6) in the long term. For example, at any point in the future the blocked memories may be triggered by an incident, a person or a dog, which may lead to memories of the dog and/or the relinquishment resurfacing and threatening their self integrity. Another way in which participants blocked aspects of the experience was through 'steeling oneself'.

Steeling oneself. This strategy involved mentally preparing oneself for an anticipated unsettling experience. One R participant who had her dog killed describes

how she 'steeled herself' in anticipation of the emotional distress that she perceived was likely to result from her actions:

> *I mean it had to be done. I had to cope with it. Um I think it's no good worrying about it now and wallowing in it before it sort of happens because it's going to have to happen. And I wasn't too sure how I would be afterwards you know, because I knew I would be always upset. But you know you learn to live with it.... As I said I think it was just, I'd sort of steeled myself that it had to be done! [R-H, 5 years since relinquishment]*

Several AWW participants reported that the only reason they were able to continue working in the job was because they had learned to block out some of the negative aspects. They spoke of 'hardening their heart', 'steeling' themselves and one participant spoke of 'putting up a brick wall'.

> *You got to, you got to sort of um try and protect yourself from that. I find I do anyway, because if you get emotionally involved with every single dog that comes through here you'd be a basket case. And you'd just be you know, forever in tears. So you sort of have to have, not a coldness, but you have to have a bit of I don't know. You have to be reasonably hard in that you don't allow yourself to succumb to all the emotions of everything that's involved with the animals that come through. [AWW-M, Ranger]*

> *Now I've just learned to basically put up a brick wall. I just don't show any emotion with it. I've had people complain that I never showed any emotion when I was dealing with them and they thought I was being rude. But that' s the way I've got to deal with it. If I have 5 surrenders in a row and they're all beautiful dogs and cats and they're just idiotic, stupid reasons um people will be quite nasty about the whole thing as well um, I can't take that on. If I took that on I'd be in therapy every day of my life and being an animal lover it really pulls on your heartstrings. You just get very upset by it but I've learnt you just can't take it on. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

> *You probably find that you can you steel your body* [participant spells out the word] *s t double e l. Steel your body with that you know that as I said its part of your job and your acting in the best interest of the animal by far. And we exhaust all avenues we possibly can to rehome the dogs through about one of about 40 animal rescue groups, and in the situation where the dog is a danger to the public and we can't let it out. So you summarise all those up and think well yes, I've done everything possible that I can; now I have to do this part. And as I said we lead the dogs into a vet room and it is the vet and the vet nurse that do the euthanasia. I will stay there myself personally and hold the dog, um help them hold the dog, um some dogs get a bit nervous, most of them don't they just pop in, the vets very good. [AWW-N, Ranger]*

An unintentional consequence of the use of the strategy of 'steeling oneself' is that other people may perceive the participant to be a cold uncaring person, which then leads to a mismatch between a person's self image and their social image resulting in a

threat to self integrity. The final blocking strategy related to the concept of 'putting up defences' was not taking it on board.

Not taking it on board. This strategy was used by AWWs as a means of protecting themselves from witnessing the distress of others and also from other stressors within the rescue environment. One AWW participant when asked how she dealt with emotional side of dog relinquishment responded:

> *Um you just have to let it fall off you, that's all I have to do. [AWW-J, Shelter Worker]*

Another participant told of how she deals with the stressors associated with interacting with relinquishers:

> *Um sometimes if you've had a big morning of surrenders, you know you sort of think "why am I here?" It is very frustrating I find that I've just got to shut down when I'm speaking to people, when I'm taking in their animals because if I take it all on I think I'd be a mental case. [AWW-I, Shelter Worker]*

By 'not taking it on board' AWW participants were able to protect themselves from psychological harm arising from some of the stressors within the rescue environment.

Not taking it on board may also have been a strategy used by some R participant parents who reported no impact of the relinquishment on their children. While it may have been the case that there was no observable impact on the children, it could also be that parents chose not to see an impact in order to protect themselves.

Section Summary

In summary, evidence was found in the data for the use of conscious and unconscious blocking strategies by participants in the current study. The aim of the blocking strategies was to defend participants against perceived or anticipated pain resulting from psychological stressors inherent in the relinquishment experience. In utilising blocking strategies participants appeared to construct a barrier to protect themselves from the psychological distress that they perceived would result from the relinquishment experience. Participants employing these strategies deliberately tried to block out memories of the dog and/or the relinquishment, while one participant had blocked out aspects of the experience without realising she had. In attempting to block psychological pain participants 'steeled' themselves and tried not to take on board the emotions of others. While blocking strategies may be useful as a means to ease psychological unease in the short term, in the long term they have the potential to be detrimental to participants' psychological wellbeing.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described and explained how participants in the current study engaged in a process identified as protective-restoring in order to manage their disturbed self integrity. This dual process of protecting self integrity from further threats and restoring the self integrity to an undisturbed state took place throughout the stages of relinquishment. The process involved recognising, identifying, assessing and counteracting (via cognitive and behavioural strategies) threats to self integrity arising from the dog relinquishment experience. The types and overall number of strategies used by participants in the protective-restoring process demonstrate that the human experience of dog relinquishment is self threatening and complex in nature.

Strategies that participants in the current study used to deal with the cognitive dissonance, grief and psychological stress that arose from the dog relinquishment experience included, enhancing self concept, blaming others or self, trying to reduce the perceived harm to self and others, managing emotions, and avoiding as well as blocking thoughts and emotions that cause psychological pain. Not all strategies were used by all participants. Strategies used were particular to participants' own perceived needs. Many of the strategies used by AWW participants corresponded to those identified in other studies of animal shelter workers (e.g., Arluke, 1994; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Hart & Mader, 1995; Irvine, 2003). Those who had experienced relinquishment in childhood reported the least number of strategies used. Although this might suggest that the experience was less disturbing for them, it was more likely to be related to their lack of cognitive maturity and coping resources.

The cognitive and behavioural strategies employed by participants were found to correspond with strategies in the literature identified as defensive and coping mechanisms, providing support for the notion that the dog relinquishment experience threatens and disturbs self integrity. Although the strategies employed by participants were aimed at defending against threats and restoring self integrity, thus alleviating psychological unease, some strategies actually did or had the potential to increase it. In addition, some strategies that served to protect and restore the self integrity of participants, contributed to the psychological unease of others. The next and final chapter of this thesis provides an overall discussion of the findings of the current study and draws conclusions.

- Chapter 8 -

Overall Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter Overview

Having presented the theory and provided a detailed description and discussion of the interpretative findings of the current study in Chapters 4 to 7, this chapter presents an overall discussion of the current study, and draws conclusions. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a summary of the findings, of the current study. The second section discusses the methodological strengths and limitations, as well as the contributions to knowledge of the current study. In the third section, implications of the findings for policy and practice are discussed, recommendations are made for reducing the impact and occurrence of relinquishment, suggestions are made for future research and finally, conclusions are drawn.

Study Summary

At the outset of this study, little was known about the psychological impact of dog relinquishment. The available literature was limited in volume and narrow in focus; concentrating on relinquishment to animal shelters, the impact of killing animals on animal welfare workers and a few studies of relinquishers' perspectives. The literature suggested that relinquishment or 'getting rid of the dog' could be cognitively and emotionally distressing for those involved. The current study, which had a broader focus than previous studies, found that not only is the experience cognitively and emotionally distressing for those involved (including a wider range of people than previous studies), but it challenges the very core of a person (i.e., their sense of self).

Whether directly or indirectly involved with the decision (or actual relinquishment), participants experienced dog relinquishment as a threat to how they viewed themselves and how they wanted to be perceived by others. The unsettling experience began when an incident or event (e.g., moving, dog failing temperament test) caused a change in circumstances, which served as a catalyst for the decision to get rid of the dog. Participants (R and AWWs) were faced with a paradoxical situation. Relinquishment (including killing) was seen as the solution to the problem, but this opposed their self concept of being morally responsible, good, caring dog friendly people. For R participant parents there was the added conflict of perceiving oneself as a good parent, yet doing something that could hurt their child; while CR participants were challenged by their parent's behaviour in relinquishing their dog, causing them to question their sense of felt security.

The context in which the experience took place also contributed to participants' sense of unease. For some participants, the change in circumstance that prompted the decision to relinquish was also accompanied by other stressors, such as moving and loss of relationships; thus the cognitive and emotional unease resulting from the relinquishment added to an already stressful time. Some changes in circumstances also created a sense of urgency for R and AWW participants, as they felt pressured by time to find a new home for their dog, or risk euthanasia.

In addition, the stigma associated with being a relinquisher in a society that condones relinquishment but condemns those who relinquish, challenged the positive social image that they wanted to portray to others. The negative reactions and interactions with animal welfare workers, family and friends that many participants experienced left them feeling judged. Equally, many AWW participants were left feeling used by relinquishers, whom they believed sought to offload their problems (i.e., the dogs) on them.

The rescue environment, another aspect of the dog relinquishment context, also contributed to an overall sense of unease. Stressors within the environment included lack of resources (e.g., money, space, and people), contentious policies, the risk of euthanasia, and the physical environment (e.g., noise, smell, cages etc.). While these mostly impacted AWW participants, those relinquishing were also impacted as some participants felt uneasy about relinquishing to a shelter because of the perceived risk of the dog being killed and/or the perceived conditions in which the dog would be kept.

Aside from the unease felt over the relinquishment of the dog and the contributing factors associated with the context, participants also felt uneasy about perceived human culpability in the loss of the dog, resulting in some participants feeling that getting rid of the dog was worse than the dog dying. Perceived culpability and the ambiguous nature of the loss, as well as society's reaction to pet loss, resulted in disenfranchisement of participants grief, leaving many hiding their hurt and dealing with their loss, alone.

All participants were so caught up in trying to alleviate their own unease that they generally failed to see the impact of their actions and interactions on others. For example, some parents did not tell their children about the relinquishment, leaving the child without an opportunity to say goodbye to their dog and/or worrying about what had happened to their dog. Those that had the opportunity to say goodbye were able to draw some comfort from this, while those who could not were left without a sense of closure. The way in which some parents handled the relinquishment resulted in damage

to child parent relationships (e.g., lack of trust, dislike), leaving some CR participants feeling bitter and angry long after the event.

Participants dealt with their psychological unease in a variety of ways. For example, some of those involved in the actual relinquishment drew comparisons between their own behaviour and those whom they perceived as engaging in a worse behaviour (e.g., cruelty and abuse of animals). They justified their behaviour on the grounds of the best interest of the dog or others; and some shifted the blame for the relinquishment to others. Some of those not involved in the actual relinquishment also blamed others for the relinquishment. Some participants tried to avoid or block aspects of the experience that they found unsettling, while those that perceived a relinquishment impact on others sought to reduce it.

In dealing with their thoughts and feelings arising from the dog relinquishment experience some participants kept them hidden, while others expressed them, but generally out of the view of others. Some participants found support amongst family, friends and co-workers. Others found no support and instead were confronted with negative responses from family and friends. None of the participants sought professional support. This may have been because they did not feel the need, or they were embarrassed or ashamed. It is also likely that had they sought support, they would not have found it, given that dog relinquishment is not recognised as a loss.

In dealing with the loss of the dog, participants either sought to maintain a connection to the relinquished dog or sought to disconnect. Maintaining a connection to the dog was sometimes dependant on the goodwill of others. Difficulties arose for those participants in environments where coping strategies were not shared (e.g., one person wants to stay connected and the other does not).

While the majority of R participants in the current study appeared to be coping with their unease, some aspects of the experience still troubled them. For example, many were happy that dogs had a ‘happy ending’ (i.e., new homes had been found). Most had convinced themselves that they had made the right decision in relinquishing the dog, although a few engaged in second guessing. Some had sought and gained redemption for their perceived wrongdoing by rescuing other animals, while some still struggled with their perceived culpability. Similarly, CR participants that did not blame their parents appeared to be coping with unease relating to the relinquishment, although some aspects still bothered them (e.g., not being able to say goodbye to the dog or being lied to about the dogs welfare). CR participants that blamed their parents, however, continued to feel bitterness and anger towards them. For AWW participants that deal

with the consequences of dog relinquishment on a daily basis, a sense of unease was ever present. The strategies that they had developed to cope mostly ensured that they were able to control the unease, enough for them to continue in their position.

That participants volunteered to talk about an issue that was unsettling for them and that attracts social stigma, suggests that dog relinquishment is an issue of importance for people. Further, the emotional response to dog relinquishment that was evident during participant interviews and the length of time since the relinquishment (20 years plus for some), demonstrates that it is an experience that continues to impact people long after the event. Given the many reasons cited for 'getting rid of the dog' (many of which can be addressed by means other than relinquishment); that an emotional connection to a dog is not a protective factor against relinquishment (as evidenced in the findings of this current study); that relinquishment is a legitimate practice, then unfortunately dog relinquishment will continue. Further, several factors suggest that in Australia it is likely to increase, putting further pressure on already overstretched animal shelters and rescue groups. For example, moving and anti-pet landlords have been given as reasons for relinquishment, thus the increasing housing affordability crisis in Australia will likely lead to more people requiring rental accommodation, as well as a more mobile population. Further, the lack of regulation over the supply and sale of dogs likely contributes to supply exceeding demand, creating a surplus of dogs. In the next section methodological considerations, which have a bearing on the reported findings of the current study, are outlined and discussed.

Strengths and Limitations

No matter how well designed a research study is, inevitably it will have its strengths and limitations, which should be considered when evaluating the findings. One of the strengths of the current study is its use of GTM to explore the human experience of dog relinquishment. This was an appropriate choice given the lack of knowledge about the issue. Compliance with the Straussian method of grounded theory ensured a systematic and rigorous process of data collection and analysis, resulting in a substantive theory that has fit, relevance, workability and is modifiable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Further the provision of a detailed description of the research process enables transferability of the findings to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A limitation of the current study was lack of empirical measurement (e.g., arousal, cortisol levels, and measures of grief) to ascertain the accuracy of the finding that participants experienced cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief. However, the experiences of the three types of psychological unease as reported by the

participants in the current study were found to be consistent with those described in the empirical literature.

Another identified strength of the current study is related to the sample. The three groups of participants provided a broad perspective of the experience encompassing those who had personal experience, those who had professional experience and those who had childhood experience of dog relinquishment. A variety of ages and nationalities were included in the sample. In addition, although participants were residing in Western Australia when interviewed, some experienced relinquishment in other states and countries, thus further broadening the perspective of the dog relinquishment experience.

One of the limitations related to the sample was an over representation of females across the three groups. Although this might indicate that more females than males relinquish dogs, other studies have found equal numbers of males and females relinquishing dogs (e.g., Salman et al., 1998). More females in the animal welfare group may be indicative of their higher representation in animal welfare organisations. Alternatively the over representation of females might because females feel more comfortable participating in interviews than males.

The use of in-depth interviews can be viewed as a strength and a limitation. While in-depth interviews are appropriate for collecting data to provide a deeper understanding of the issue of dog relinquishment, the use of interviews as a data collection method is open to bias from participant and researcher effects (e.g., participants may lie, they may provide information that they think the interviewer wants to hear, they may distort the information so that it makes them look good; Breakwell, 2006). Although these aspects were beyond the control of the researcher, attempts were made to try and guard against them. For instance, data were collected from a range of participants with different experiences of dog relinquishment, two participants (a married couple) were interviewed together, and support for the experiences reported was sought and found in the literature. In addition, researcher effects were minimised by one researcher conducting all interviews.

Another potential limitation related to the use of interviews concerns self reporting and retrospective reporting. From a scientific perspective, self reporting and retrospective reporting have been criticised as unreliable data collection methods (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993: Lazurus, 1999). However, self report as a form of collecting data about an individual's thoughts, perceptions and emotions, is no more unreliable than observing the person and then inferring from their behaviour what is

occurring in their mind (Lazarus, 1999). While retrospective self reporting of experience, especially adult recall of childhood events has been criticised in terms of its reliability and accuracy, accuracy in detail has not been the objective of the current study, but rather the subjective experience of the individuals (Brewin et al., 1993). Further, the dog relinquishment experience fits the criteria of being 'unique, consequential and unexpected' which has been found to be associated with accuracy of recall (Brewin et al., 1993, p. 87).

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

One of the aims in exploring the human experience of dog relinquishment was to increase knowledge of the area. The current study has made several contributions to the dog relinquishment and HAI body of knowledge:

1. It has explored the perspectives of relinquishers who rehomed their dogs to family, friends, strangers, animal shelters and had their dogs killed (previous studies have only included relinquishers surrendering to an animal shelter). Findings show that the cognitive and emotional distress experienced by those relinquishing to animal shelter, can also be experienced by those using other forms of relinquishment.
2. It has explored the perspectives of relinquishers covering a wider time frame since relinquishment, for example, a few months up to 25 years; previous studies have interviewed relinquishers on the day of relinquishment, with one study (i.e., Anderson, 1985) surveying relinquishers a few weeks after the relinquishment.[38] Findings show that the negative impact of relinquishment can be short-term or long-term.
3. It has explored the perspectives of adults who have experienced relinquishment in childhood (no other studies were identified that explored the perspectives of children or those who had experienced dog or pet relinquishment in childhood). Findings show that children can be negatively impacted by dog relinquishment.
4. It has explored the perspectives of a range of animal welfare workers (previous studies have only included animal shelter workers, veterinarians and veterinary nurses, most of which were in relation to the impact of euthanasia). Findings show that all animal welfare workers are susceptible to the same types of psychological unease as shelter workers, veterinarians and veterinary nurses.

[38] A study by McGraw (2007) also found that relinquishment had a long term impact (see later this chapter).

Further psychological unease occurs irrespective of the threat or actuality of witnessing or participating in animal euthanasia.

5. As a result of the current study the first substantive grounded theory of the human experience of dog relinquishment has been generated. The theory proposes that the dog relinquishment experience threatens the self integrity of all those involved. Potential uses of the theory include assistance in developing screening instruments for use by employers to identify those likely to be adversely impacted by dog relinquishment and assistance in developing psychological interventions to assist those likely to be or presently adversely impacted by dog relinquishment. What these findings mean for policy and practice are discussed next.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Service professions

The findings of the current study have implications for those involved in the service professions in relation to their views and attitudes about the human-pet relationship. Morley and Fook (2005) have argued that the service professions fail to recognise the importance of pets to people, due to the pathologising of the human pet relationship within the literature. Service professions need to view pet loss, in whatever form it takes, as a legitimate loss and deal with it as they would other losses. Adults and children in need of support may then be more amenable to seeking help.

Animal welfare organisations

The findings of the current study have implications for animal welfare organisations in relation to workplace stressors and the health and wellbeing of employees (including volunteers). The focus of much of the research around animal welfare workers has been on the impact of having to kill healthy animals (i.e., euthanasia). While the current study supports the findings that the killing of healthy dogs is a source of psychological stress the study also found that many other factors associated with animal welfare work contribute to the stress of workers. While some organisations provide their employees with access to employee assistance programs (EAPs), many do not because of a lack of financial resources. Although some have access to EAPs findings of the current study suggest that AWWs rely primarily on each other for support. This may be a result of workers not wanting or needing to discuss their feeling s with EAPs or alternatively a reluctance on the part of AWWs to engage EAPs for fear of losing their jobs. Further, if practitioners in the EAPS have no

knowledge of the impact of relinquishment and/or do not recognise relinquishment as a loss then they are unlikely to be of assistance to the workers.

The study also has implications for animal welfare workers (including veterinarians) in their interactions with potential and actual relinquishers. It is acknowledged through the findings of other studies (e.g., Arluke, 1994; Frommer & Arluke, 1999; Reeve et al. 2006; White & Shawhan) and the current study, that working in animal welfare is a major source of psychological stress. The current study has also shown that the animal welfare environment is also a source of stress for those wanting to or actually relinquishing. Finding a balance between protecting self and not contributing to others' stress in this environment may be difficult to achieve, although not impossible as evidenced by the reports of some participants in the current study.

Local councils

The findings from the current study have implications for local councils who practice and advocate dog seizures for various reasons. For example, an extreme policy was recently introduced in Victoria in response to the fatal mauling of a child by a pit bull breed of dog. This "search and destroy" policy gives the local council powers to seek out and destroy any unregistered dog deemed as a pit bull (Dowling & Perkins, 2011). The problem with these types of policies is that the breed as a whole is demonised because of the actions of a particular dog. Those charged with identifying and removing the dog are not experts in breed identification, even veterinarians sometimes have difficulty in identifying the breed of a dog. These types of policies can result in anxiety for dog owners, as it has been reported that worried owners have been contacting the RSPCA over their concerns that their dogs would be classified as pit bulls and seized (Dowling & Perkins, 2011). In addition, the killing of dogs who have been deemed dangerous, not because of any behavioural assessment, but because they have been identified as belonging to a particular breed that belong to owners who do not comply with the dangerous dog rules, is distressing for those in the animal welfare field.

Policy makers

The findings of the current study also have implications for policymakers who are involved in crisis management. Every year in Australia many people are affected by severe weather events and natural disasters such as cyclones, severe flooding and bushfires that are part of Australian life. When people have to evacuate their homes as a result of such events they are often forced to choose between staying to protect their dogs and other animals (as most emergency shelters do not permit animals), thereby putting their own lives at risk, or leaving their animals behind to fend for themselves.

The theory of 'protective-restoring' proposes that people who leave their animals behind will experience a disturbed self integrity potentially adding to the psychological trauma that they would experience as a result of the many losses that accompany such events. As shown in the current findings of those who migrated to Australia, the psychological distress of leaving their animals behind can remain for many years, long after the initial events.

The findings of the current study also have implications for policy makers within the military. Military personnel who work with military dogs in overseas war zones are sometimes forced to leave dogs behind [39] when they return (Pullman, 2012; Reynolds, 2012). Military working dogs not only bring their skills of detection that protect the military, but they also serve to bring some comfort to personnel who are separated from their families and are often working in harsh as well as sometimes brutal environments. As well as military working dogs, military personnel sometimes adopt stray dogs that they encounter while on deployment (Rabiroff, 2010). Adopted dogs too, provide comfort and security to military personnel. Breaking the bonds that develop between the military personnel and dogs will likely intensify the mental health problems that some personnel develop after being on active duty in war zones. For example, McGraw (2007) conducted a phenomenological study of the relationship between military dog handlers and their dogs during the Vietnam War. She found that the soldiers developed strong bonds with their dogs. When the Americans withdrew from Vietnam the military dogs were either euthanised or left in Vietnam to an uncertain fate; leaving the dogs behind caused great distress to the dog handlers, with some still feeling the impact at the time of the study, some 35 years after the event.

Aged care and retirement homes

The findings of the current study also have implications for retirement villages and retirement homes that forbid ownership of a dog. Many older people have to relinquish their pets when entering these establishments. Some may delay entering these establishments for this reason, possibly risking their own health. For some of these people their dog may have been their only companion and may have been with them for many years. Having to rehome the dog or have it killed is likely to have an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing. Some provision could be made either for

[39] In 2000, the then US President Bill Clinton, oversaw the passing of an Act (H. R. 5314) to enable military working dogs suitable for adoption, be adopted by those able to look after them, rather than euthanised. However this law only applies to official military dogs and does not cover adopted dogs.

these people to remain in their own home (if health permits) with some assistance provided or let the dog (especially older dogs) remain with the person until it dies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, including suggestions from some participants, the following recommendations are made. As dog relinquishment is a complex issue these recommendations serve as an initial step to reducing the psychological unease of those who experience dog relinquishment and to preventing or reducing dog relinquishment.

Reducing psychological unease

Given the lack of literature in the area of dog and pet relinquishment, it is likely that service professions are unaware of the risk to adults and children's mental health and wellbeing that dog relinquishment poses. For example, no introductory psychology texts were identified that broached the subject of human-animal interaction; the literature that service professions are generally exposed to in their training and professional life deals with the benefits of human-animal interaction, neglecting the costs. It is recommended that human-animal interaction be included in introductory psychology texts. In addition any literature pertaining to human-animal interaction should include the costs as well as the benefits to human wellbeing.

The findings of the current study have major implications for parents, especially those who believe that getting rid of the family dog has no impact on children. Getting rid of the dog (especially one that was loved and cared for) may undermine the child's sense of security and lead to confusion and fear (especially in younger children) that they too may be at risk of being removed from the home. Due to the self threatening nature of the dog relinquishment experience parents, in protecting themselves, may not be aware of the full extent of the impact on their children. Further, many of the protection strategies that parents used in the current study were shown to have a detrimental impact on children. In addition, children may hide their thoughts and feelings, as reported by some in the current study, making it even more difficult for parents to assess the impact. A further complication for parents is that research suggests they are not good at assessing what events or occurrences children perceive as highly stressful (Bagdi & Pfister, 2006).

It is recommended that parents be educated on the impact of dog relinquishment so that they can be alert to potential problems that children may experience. Being informed of the potential impact of dog relinquishment on their children and other family members beforehand may lead to them making better choices with regards to

reducing the impact on their children and themselves. It may also cause some to reconsider relinquishment thereby reducing relinquishment rates and the potential for harm to human and animal wellbeing. Similarly the community in general should also be educated so they can be better informed about the potential risks.

Animal welfare workers in the current study reported that they had received little or no education or training on what to expect and how to deal with the psychological unease that results from relinquishment. It is recommended that this type of information and training be incorporated into the formal training regimes of Veterinarians, veterinary nurses and council rangers. For those who work in animal welfare that receive no formal training, the development of a resource kit is advocated. This could be made available in hard copy and online, for access by all AWWs irrespective of their organisation or its size, to aid in coping with the psychological unease that accompanies working within the animal welfare environment.

Reducing relinquishment

While raising awareness to the impact of dog relinquishment may result in some reduction more needs to be done in terms of supply and demand. The media could exert greater responsibility in their promotion of dogs in advertising and movies. Dogs are frequently depicted as 'part of the family' in advertisements on TV and in printed material. This promotes and reinforces a stereotypical image of the family (i.e., mum, dad, two kids and a dog), which may lead some people to get a dog not because they particularly want a dog but rather in order to fit the image. Indeed one participant alluded to this in the following comment:

> *I mean we got the dog as a young family, in the middleclass suburb and you know we had the cat, we had the two kids, we had the big house, let's get the dog. [R-D, 11months since relinquishment]*

There needs to be greater control over the buying and selling of puppies and dogs. While this is a significant task and full control is unlikely, given the many ways in which puppies and dogs are bought and sold, some initial steps could to be taken. Puppies and dogs should not be sold in pet shops, or local markets. This eliminates, to a certain extent, the impulse buyers who do not put much thought into the long term aspects of dog ownership. The mass breeding of dogs for commercial gain (i.e., puppy farms) could be outlawed. Some of these supply pet shops, so stopping the sale of dogs in pet shops may serve to reduce the numbers of these.

Several AWWs in the current study reported that dogs were being relinquished for what relinquisher perceived as 'problem behaviours', which were actually natural

behaviours of dogs (e.g., digging and chewing). Dog owners and potential dog owners could be educated on the identification of genuine problem behaviours and natural dog behaviours and be given advice or training on how to manage such challenges.

One of the criticisms of older people made by AWWs in the current study was in regard to them getting a puppy or young dog when they themselves are of an advanced age (e.g., 70+). AWWs reported that they are often asked to take in dogs from older people who have entered nursing or retirement homes where dogs are not permitted or from family members when the older person has died. People could avoid or be discouraged from getting a puppy or young dog as they enter their later years. An alternative might be to adopt an older animal as some animal shelters have programs where they match older pets with older people. If they do get a dog then they should nominate a person who will keep the dog should anything happen to them (i.e., entering a nursing home, hospital or death).

Suggestions for Future Research

While the current study has shed some light on the dog relinquishment experience, some areas warrant further research. The current study identified a negative attitude towards relinquishers and relinquishment in the study population; a larger scale survey of the attitudes of the general population would ascertain if these are indeed attitudes that are generally held, or just specific to the study population.

The current study investigated the dog relinquishment experience in relation to the impact of the relinquishment. Little information was gleaned in relation to the actual decision making component of the experience. Understanding the decision making process may shed further light on the dog relinquishment experience.

As well as relinquishers and animal welfare workers the current study explored the experience of adults who had experienced dog relinquishment in childhood; future studies might explore the experience of children to ascertain if present day children's experience is the same as reported by the adults who had experienced relinquishment in childhood. Finally, it is suggested that the substantive theory of 'protective-restoring' be empirically tested to further validate the findings of the current study.

Conclusion

This current study was proposed and undertaken in order to shed light on an underexplored area of human-animal interaction, namely, the human experience of dog relinquishment. The perspectives of relinquishers, adults that had experienced dog relinquishment in childhood and animal welfare workers in Perth, Western Australia were explored through in-depth interviews in an effort to answer the question "what is

the human experience of dog relinquishment?" The qualitative analysis of the 45 participants' data using Straussian GTM resulted in a substantive theory which provides a conceptual framework describing and explaining how participants experienced dog relinquishment and how they managed its impact.

Findings of the current study revealed that the dog relinquishment experience threatened and disturbed the self integrity of all participants to some degree. A disturbed self integrity in the context of the dog relinquishment experience consisted of three types of psychological unease, namely, cognitive dissonance, psychological stress and grief. The type, frequency, intensity and duration of the psychological unease varied according to individual and social factors, such that the dog relinquishment experience differed between and within people (i.e., the experience can differ for the one person on different occasions). As a disturbed self integrity was psychologically unsettling, participants attempted to alleviate their psychological unease through a process of protecting themselves from actual and potential threats and restoring their self integrity to an undisturbed state. The cognitive and behavioural strategies that participants utilised as part of the protective-restoring process, although aimed at maintaining self integrity were not always successful and in some instances served to increase rather than reduce psychological unease.

The findings of the current study have shown that the experience of dog relinquishment is multidimensional and complex in nature. It is characterised by multiple threats to self integrity, including multiple losses including the loss of the dog, loss of a sense of self (i.e., loss of the person they thought they were) and loss of faith in other people. Dog relinquishment is widespread and commonplace, occurring more often than people realise. It does not occur in isolation impacting only the relinquisher, but rather can be felt at an individual, family, and community level. It can have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of adults and children and can lead to damaged relationships.

It is clear from the findings of the current study that dog relinquishment can be much more than a difficult decision or a little sadness or sorrow on the loss of a dog as reported in previous literature (e.g., Anderson, 1985; DiGiacomo et al., 1998). Rather, the experience has the potential to negatively affect adults and children's sense of self in terms of how they view themselves and how they think others view them.

The findings of the current study are important for several reasons: first they raise awareness of a common practise that has the potential to detrimentally affect the health and wellbeing of large numbers of adults and children. Second, they demonstrate

that the impact of dog relinquishment is felt by adults and children, as well as further afield than those directly involved. Third they demonstrate that you do not have to have an emotional connection to a dog to be negatively impacted by dog relinquishment. Fourth, they demonstrate that relinquishment is not a neutral event, whose impact should be trivialised or underestimated, rather it has the potential to detrimentally impact a person's fundamental sense of self. Getting rid of the dog, it seems, is a decision that may come back to bite you.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview guide: Personal experience of dog relinquishment

Thankyou for allowing me to talk with you today. I would like to talk to you about your thoughts, feelings and experience of parting with your dog. Let me first remind you that the things you say will be treated in the strictest confidence and you won't be identifiable in the final report. I am particularly interested in your thoughts, and feelings so please answer questions in your own words.

Questions about the individual

Please tell me a little bit about yourself.

- Age; occupation, postcode
- Do you currently have pets?
  If so, what type/s? How long have you had them?

Questions about the relinquished dog

That's great now I'd like you to tell me a little bit about the dog that was relinquished

- The dogs name, type, sex, age?
- Where did you get (*dogs name*)?
- How old was (*dogs name*) when you got him/her?
- How long did you have (*dogs name*)?
- Where did *(dogs name)* sleep?
- Who looked after *(dogs name)* (e.g. feeding, exercising, grooming)?
- How did you feel about (*dogs name*)? What did you like about (*dogs name*)?
- What didn't you like about *(dogs name)?*
- Tell me about some of the things you did with *(dogs name).*

Questions about the relinquishment

That's great. Now I have some questions about relinquishing (dogs name).

- How old were you when *(dogs name)*was relinquished
- Please tell me about the reasons/s for relinquishing *(dogs name)?*
  If adult was child when dog was relinquished- Why do you think the dog was being relinquished?
- How and where was the dog relinquished/why that method/place?
- Who was involved in the decision making/ how long did it take?
  If not involved in the decision making How were you told that *(dogs name)* was leaving?
- Please tell me how you felt when you knew that *(dogs name)* was leaving.
- Please tell me about the day *(dogs name)* left (thoughts, feelings, reactions).
- What were your thoughts and feelings (reactions) about *(dogs name)* in the weeks after the relinquishment?
- Did you talk to anyone about how you were feeling?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the relinquishment now?

- Were there any reactions from your other family and friends to the news you were giving away *(dogs name).*
  If Yes: Please tell me about other family and friends reactions

  If Child when relinquished: Did you tell your friends about *(dogs name)*

  leaving?

  If yes: what did you tell them?

- What has been the best part and the worst part of giving *(dogs name)* away
- Would you relinquish a dog in the future?

Questions about the impact of the loss

- Please tell me your thoughts and feelings about *(dogs name)* now.
  (if relevant ask if them if they know the outcome for the dog)
- Do you think that losing *(dogs name)* has affected you or your family?
  If yes: In what way?

  If negative effects from relinquishment have they sought any outside help?
- Please tell me what you have learnt from your experience?
- What would you say to other people who were going to give away their dog?

We've come to the end of my questions. Are there other questions you wished I had asked you or anything else you wish to talk about?

Thank you for your time. You have been really helpful.

Appendix B

Interview guide: professional experience of dog relinquishment

Thankyou for allowing me to talk to you today. I would like to talk to you about your thoughts, feelings and experience of people who have relinquished their dog. Let me first remind you that the things you say will be treated in the strictest of confidence and you won't be identifiable in the final report. I am particularly interested in your thoughts, and feelings so please answer questions in your own words.

I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about you

Age/Occupation

- What does your job involve
- How long have you worked in your present job?
- What do you like about your job
- Do you have any pets?

If yes, what sort, how many?

- Have you ever relinquished a pet or had a pet relinquished?

Professional experience of relinquishers

- What do you know about dog relinquishment?
  Extent of dog relinquishment

  Who relinquishes

  Reasons for relinquishment

  Outcomes for dogs/people

  Support for relinquishers? Is there any?

- In your role as (*employment role*) have you had experience with people who have relinquished dogs.
  If yes, please tell me about it.

We've come to the end of my questions. Are there other questions you wished I had asked you or anything else you wish to talk about?

Thank you for your time. You have been really helpful

Appendix C: Participants Demographics

ID	Age	Sex	Education Level	Occupation	Personally relinquished	No of times relinquished	Relinquishment in childhood	Time since relinquishment
R-A*	68	F	Leavers	Home Duties	Y	Once	N	21 yrs
R-B*	70	M	X	Retired	Y	Once	N	21 yrs
R-C*	43	F	Tafe	Student	Y	Multiple	Y	2 yrs
R-D*	33	F	BA	Researcher	Y	Once	N	11 mths
R-E*	57	F	PhD	Public Servant	Y	Once	Y	16.5 yrs
R-F*	38	F	Post grad	Student	Y	Multiple	N	15 yrs
R-G*	45	F	Yr 11	School Officer	Y	Once	Y (> once)	23 yrs
R-H*	73	F	Yr 12	Retired secretary	Y	Once	Y	5 yrs
R-I*	61	F	Leavers	Retired Book keeper	Y	Once	N	3 mths
R-J*	22	M	HSC	Student	Y	Once	N	6 wks
R-K*	47	F	BA	Student	Y	Once	Y	11 yrs
R-L*	41	F	Yr 12	Accountant	Y	Once	N	6.5 yrs
R-M*	48	F	Yr 12	Student	Y	Multiple	N	16 yrs
R-N#	28	F	Tafe	Ment Health Worker	Y	Once	N	11 yrs
R-O*	38	F	BA Hons	Business manager	Y	Once	N	2 yrs
R-P*	54	F	Yr 12	Education assistant	Y	Once	N	3 mths
R-Q*	50	F	Yr 11	Admin Assistant	Y	Multiple	N	2 yrs
R-R*	57	F	BA	Quality assurance	Y	Multiple	N	15 yrs
R-S*	50	F	MSc	Nurse	Y	Once	N	9 mths
R-T*	39	F	Yr 12	Student	Y	Once	N	13 yrs
R-U#@	39	F	Bed	Home duties/ student	N	-	Y	11 yrs
CR-A*	26	F	Post grad	Research Associate	N	-	Y	18 yrs
CR-B*	37	M	Tafe	HD Fitter	N	-	Y	27 yrs
CR-C#	62	F	Tafe	Counsellor	Y	Once	Y	50 yrs
CR-D*	44	F	Diploma	Student	N	-	Y(> once)	34 yrs
CR-E*	20	M	Diploma	Student	N	-	Y	15 yrs

CR-F*	51	F	PhD	Research Associate	N	-	Y	43 yrs
CR-G*	18	M	Yr 12	Student	N	-	Y	6 yrs
CR-H#	47	F	Yr 12	Author	N	-	Y	33 yrs
CR-I#@	39	F	Bed	Home duties/student	N	-	Y	27 yrs
CR-J#	35	F	Diploma	Admin	N	-	Y	20 yrs
AWW-A*	36	F	Yr 12	Rescue Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-B*	29	F	Bsc	Veterinarian	N	-	N	-
AWW-C*	37	F	Post grad	Shelter worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-D*	23	M	BA	Ranger	N	-	N	-
AWW-E#	52	F	Yr 10	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-F#	40	F	Yr 11	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-G*	39	F	BA	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-H*	51	M	Yr 11	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-I*	26	F	Yr 12	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-J*	47	F	BSc	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-K#	78	F	Diploma	Shelter Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-L#	X	F	X	Rescue Worker	N	-	N	-
AWW-M#	X	M	X	Ranger	N	-	N	-
AWW-N#	X	M	X	Ranger	N	-	N	-
AWW-O#	X	F	X	Rescue Worker	N	-	N	-

Note: R = Relinquisher CR = Childhood Relinquishment AWW = Animal Welfare Worker

* = Face to face interview # = Telephone interview @= Participant that wanted to be included in the adult relinquisher category and the childhood relinquisher category x = Unknown

Appendix D: Media Release

[Date] For Immediate Release

Dog Relinquishment Study

Mary Edwards a PhD candidate at the School of Psychology and Social Science, Edith Cowan University is exploring the human experience of dog relinquishment.
Mary is inviting people who have lost of their dog through relinquishment (either as an adult or child) to talk to her about their experience. You may have relinquished the dog yourself or had your dog relinquished by someone else. Methods of relinquishment include giving the dog away (including leaving with family or friends), selling, surrendering to an animal shelter or impounding by a local authority.
Findings of the study will provide insight and greater understanding of the impact of this type of pet loss on people. The findings will also aid in the development of interventions that will be able to help other people in this situation.

Participating involves an interview of approx 1 hours duration. All participants will remain anonymous.

If you are 18 years or older, English speaking and have parted with your dog through relinquishment and would like to take part in the study, or would like further information please contact

Mary Edwards. Tel: 6304 5549 Email m.edwards@ecu.edu.au

Appendix E: Letter to Employers of Animal Welfare Workers

JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive,
Joondalup Western Australia
6027 Telephone 134 328
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257
CRICOS 00279B
ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you to request permission to approach employees at your establishment to participate in a study that I am conducting. My name is Mary Edwards and I am a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The title of my research study is: Relinquishing Rex: The human experience of dog relinquishment. This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at ECU and has been approved by ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee. The purpose of my research is to raise awareness about this type of pet loss and develop an in depth understanding about its impact on individuals.
Please see information letter, which with your permission I would like to distribute to your employees.

Please feel free to contact me on 6304 5549 or email m.edwards@ecu.edu.au to discuss this proposal further.

If you would like to talk to someone else about this research please contact my research supervisors Dr Eyal Gringart and Dr Deirdre Drake:

Dr. Eyal Gringart,
School of Psychology & Social Science,
ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5631
Email: e.gringart@ecu.edu.au

Dr. Deirdre Drake,
School of Psychology & Social Science,
ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5020
Email: d.gdrake@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time in considering this research.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours faithfully

Mary Edwards

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet (Professional Experience Group)

JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive,
Joondalup Western Australia
6027 Telephone 134 328
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257
CRICOS 00279B
ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear potential participant

I would like to provide you with some information about the research I am conducting into the experience of those who have parted with their dog either through selling, giving away, leaving with family or friends, taking to an animal shelter, been impounded by a local authority or euthanised (not due to illness/old age). My name is Mary Edwards and I am a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The title of my research study is: Relinquishing Rex: The human experience of dog relinquishment. This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at ECU and has been approved by ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee. The purpose of my research is to raise awareness about this type of pet loss and develop an in depth understanding about its impact on individuals.
The project involves talking to people who have experienced the relinquishment of their pet dog and those who are employed in the human and animal welfare sector.

As an employee in either the human or animal welfare sector I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation would involve an interview which should take no longer than 1 hour, which will be audio recorded and later transcribed to paper. You will be given the opportunity to speak about your experience of those who have relinquished their dog, in a friendly and supportive environment. Interviews can be conducted in your home, at Edith Cowan University or your workplace (with employer permission).

Please be aware that talking about your experience may result in some emotional discomfort; however it is also possible that you may benefit from the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings about your experience. Contact details are provided at the end of this letter for some counselling services that may be able to assist you should the need arise.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any time with no penalty. You may choose not to answer particular questions. All information provided during the interview will remain strictly confidential which means no identifying information (i.e. name, address) will be linked with any information provided. All information provided will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at ECU. All audiotapes and paper transcripts will be destroyed after the required amount of time as set down by the NHMRC (i.e. 5 years).

The collected information will be written into a final thesis document, which will be available at the ECU library. The findings of this research may be published or presented in verbal format; the identity of participants will remain confidential at all times.

If you would like to participate in this research please contact me on Ph: (08) 6304 5549 or Email m.edwards@ecu.edu.au to arrange an interview.

If you would like to talk to someone else about this research please contact my research supervisors Dr Eyal Gringart and Dr Deirdre Drake:

Dr. Eyal Gringart,
School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5631
Email: e.gringart@ecu.edu.au

Dr. Deirdre Drake,
School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5020
Email: d.gdrake@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time in considering this research.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours faithfully

Mary Edwards

Lifeline Tel: **13 11 14; ECU Psychological Services Centre Tel**: **9301 0011**

Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet (Personal Experience Group)

JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive,
Joondalup Western Australia
6027 Telephone 134 328
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257
CRICOS 00279B
ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear potential participant

I would like to provide you with some information about the research I am conducting into the experience of those who have parted with their dog either through selling, giving away, leaving with family or friends, taking to an animal shelter, been impounded by a local authority or euthanased (not due to illness/old age). My name is Mary Edwards and I am a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The title of my research study is: Relinquishing Rex: The human experience of dog relinquishment. This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at ECU and has been approved by ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee. The purpose of my research is to raise awareness about this type of pet loss and develop an in depth understanding about its impact on individuals.
The project involves talking to people who have experienced the relinquishment of their pet dog and those who are employed in the human and animal welfare sector.

As a person who has experienced the relinquishment of your dog I would like to invite you to talk to me about your experience. You will be given the opportunity to speak about your experience of losing your dog, in a friendly and supportive environment. The interview can be conducted at ECU, a local library or your home. The interview should take no longer than one hour and will be audio recorded and later transcribed to paper.

Please be aware that talking about your experience may result in some emotional discomfort; however it is also possible that you may benefit from the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings about your experience. Contact details are provided at the end of this letter for some counselling services that may be able to assist you should the need arise.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any time with no penalty. You may choose not to answer particular questions. All information provided during the interview will remain strictly confidential which means no identifying information (i.e. name, address) will be linked with any information provided. All information provided will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at ECU. All audiotapes and paper transcripts will be destroyed after the required amount of time as set down by the NHMRC (i.e. 5 years).

The collected information will be written into a final thesis document, which will be available at the ECU library. The findings of this research may be published or presented in verbal format; the identity of participants will remain confidential at all times.

If you would like to participate in this research please contact me on Ph: (08) 6304 5549 or Email m.edwards@ecu.edu.au to arrange an interview.

If you would like to talk to someone else about this research please contact my research supervisors Dr Eyal Gringart and Dr Deirdre Drake:

Dr. Eyal Gringart,
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Ph: (08) 6304 5631
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Dr. Deirdre Drake,
School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5020
Email: d.gdrake@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Thank you for your time in considering this research.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours faithfully

Mary Edwards

Lifeline Tel: **13 11 14; ECU Psychological Services Centre Tel**: **9301 0011**

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form

JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive,
Joondalup Western Australia
6027 Telephone 134 328
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257
CRICOS 00279B
ABN 54 361 485 361

Relinquishing Rex: The Human Experience of Dog Relinquishment.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

Please read the information below carefully and then sign and date the form.

I ……(print full-name)

hereby consent to participate in the research and verify that;

- I have received a copy of the information letter outlining and explaining the research
- I have read and understand the information provided in the information letter
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction
- I have been given the opportunity talk to alternative people and given their contact details who have knowledge of the research
- I understand that the interview will be audio taped
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that no personal information (i.e., name) will link me with information provided
- I understand that the information provided by me will be used for the purposes of this research only
- I understand collected information will be used to generate a final thesis and that the findings may be published but that I will not be identifiable
- I understand that all information collected will be kept for five years in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council rules and then destroyed.
- I understand that I can gain a summary of the findings upon request
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without any explanation, questioning or penalty
- I freely agree to participate in this research and understand what I am being asked to consent to

Participant signature: ……. Date: ……