PAWsitive Outlook:
The Effects of Human-Animal Interaction on Incarcerated Women Participating in a
Prison-based Animal Program.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

PAWsitive Outlook:

The Effects of Human-Animal Interaction on Incarcerated Women Participating in a Prison-based Animal Program.

By

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Mater of Arts in Sociology

This study investigates the effects of human-animal interactions, bonds and relationships on incarcerated individuals through their involvement in a prison-based animal training program. The context of the study provides a unique opportunity to examine human-animal interaction in a situation of relative human isolation. The incarcerated women participating in the animal program work with cats and dogs in boarding, grooming, foster care, obedience, and service training. These individuals not only work with cats and dogs daily, but also cohabitate with the animals they train in their living quarters in the prison. The theories of Symbolic Interactionism (Mead 1964), Dramaturgy (Goffman 1959, 1961), and Interaction Ritual Theory (Collins 1981; 2004) are used to frame the study; and the study is informed by research into the human-animal bond and the sociology of emotions. The investigation is largely qualitative and ethnographic and draws on observations from within the prison and its animal training facility, as well as on in-depth interviews with the 14 participants and 5 prison staff involved in the
program. Results of the study suggest that human interaction with animals in a context of relative social isolation can provide an important basis of socio-emotional support. The study suggests that interaction with animals not only provides self-esteem and self-efficacy for incarcerated women, but it also suggests that humans and animals can develop rich emotional bonds. The social relationship developed between animals and humans can create important therapeutic assistance to both humans and animals. These results also have important implications for the theories of Symbolic Interactionism, Dramaturgy, and Interaction Rituals, and push us to rethink the social circumstances of incarcerated individuals and their social relationships.
INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the effects of human-animal interactions, bonds and relationships in incarcerated individuals through their involvement in a prison-based animal program. The research questions for the study are as follows: 1) What are the roles that animals play in the socio-emotional lives of human beings? 2) How are animals a source of comfort, support, and love to people? 3) Is the sense of identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy of human caretaker affected by the companion animals for which they care? The sample includes 14 women who are incarcerated in, and 5 members of the prison staff of, the Washington Corrections Center for Women, a minimum, medium, close, and maximum security prison. The women that participate in the prison-based animal program work with cats and dogs in boarding, grooming, foster care, and obedience and service training. The individuals that are part of the prison-based animal program not only work with cats and dogs daily, but also live with the animals they train or foster in their living quarters. Program participants were interviewed regarding their experiences in the program and working with animals. The staff of the program were also interviewed on the overall experience of the women in the program and their perceptions. Using qualitative research methods, this study examined the relationship between the women and the animals, the effects of their relationship, and what roles, if any, do animals play for their caregivers.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Attachments and Bonds

With the growth of urbanization, the need for farm animals has declined, yet the practice of animals in the home as the family companion has survived (Staats, Wallace, and Anderson 2008), where they serve as a source of comfort, support, and love (Britton and Button 2005). Animals cost money, time, and care; yet, people elect to have pets and show high attachments to their animals. This voluntary act of keeping animals as companions is a testament to the suggestion that animals meet the need for human friendship (Staats et al. 2008). In surveys of Americans, respondents report intimate bonds with their companion animals—“bonds strong or stronger than those developed with friends and family members” (Cerulo 2009:541). Respondents overwhelmingly report viewing their companion animals as “fully interacting members of the family” and claim that they understand their animals’ own language, and believe that animals understand human language (Cerulo 2009). The intimate bonds between individuals and their companion animals can be perceived to be as strong as those between parent and child (Woodward and Bauer 2007), and in some cases, these relationships can be considered as substitutes for children (Belk 1996). The connection between caretakers and their companion animals can be so strong that the death of the pet could result in mourning similar to the death of a family member (Belk 1996). It is no wonder that in the last two decades, veterinarians have noticed the dramatic increase in emotional attachment clients have with their animals (Serpell 1996).

It has long been believed that how one treats an animal is reflective of one’s treatment of people (Moneymaker and Strimple 1991). For instance, those who commit
violence against humans often commit violence against animals (Moneymaker and Strimple 1991). To caretakers, companion animals are often seen as extensions of themselves (Belk 1996; Flynn 2000). Consequently, that bond could lead the animals to become the objects of control within abusive households (Belk 1996; Flynn 2000). As children are used as a form of controlling one’s partner, abusers target companion animals for the same purpose. A study of spousal abuse has shown that 71% of victims reported that companion animals have been threatened, abused or killed by their violent partners (Flynn 2000). Women in abusive situations have delayed seeking shelter and leaving their abusers because they fear for their companions during their absence (Flynn 2000). These women view their companion animals as part of the family and attribute the same worry and attachment to them as would their children (Flynn 2000). In the same regard, the abusers do the same through their attempt to control and hurt the companion animals, seeing the animal as an extension of their partner (Belk 1996; Flynn 2000). This strong bond can be exemplified during natural disasters, during or after which people refuse to evacuate or leave their animals behind (Knight and Herzog 2009). This example of the human relationship with animals shows that companion animals can assume a surrogate role for both abuser and victim, taking the place or substitute role during human interaction (Flynn 2000).

**Love, Support, Comfort**

Animals can provide support and companionship that are akin to human relationships. Staats et al. (2008) have found that their respondents described loneliness as one of the prime reasons for having a companion animal, because they knew that animals could provide love and support. In addition to what appears to be their unconditional love, a
companion animal’s loyalty is highly valued by their caretakers, so much so that caretakers often consider their companion animal’s loyalty more reliable than their human friends (Belk 1996). Animals can provide human beings with similar love, support, and comfort to that commonly found in human-human relationships, in various degrees. What makes the animal-human bond unique from human-human bond is that animals are indifferent to our strivings, environment, time, or fortunes (Beck and Katcher 1996). Animals’ indifference to the world’s (human) problems and their ability to remain consistent in love and loyalty keeps human caretakers grounded. Animals love their caretakers no matter what—rich/poor, young/old, ugly/attractive, unsuccessful/high achieving. The variability in human qualities does not waver companion animal’s affect for their caretaker; only the human presence is important (Beck and Katcher 1996). Human beings, however, absorb the troubles of their day and environment and often allow these feelings to transmit to family members where “anticipation, blame, or demands color most human greetings” (Beck and Katcher 1996:29).

In a way, understanding why people choose to have pets brings us closer to learning what qualities animals add to the lives of human beings. In the study by Staats et al. (2008), researchers asked young and older subjects their reasons for having a companion animal; respondents from both samples described the perceived social support from their companion animals as a primary factor. Furthermore, the participants in this study saw their animals as part of the family, and believed that their companion animals gave them strong emotional support, and had even helped them through tough times (Staats et al. 2008). The perceived emotional and social support people gain from their animals is important for people to maintain their sense of worth. As Beck and Katcher
(1996) describe, “when people face real adversity—disease, unemployment, or the disabilities of age—affection from a pet takes on a new meaning. The pet’s continuing affection is a sign that the essence of the person has not been damaged.” When animals continue to show unconditional and consistent affection and love during trying circumstances, they show their human companions that they’re still worthy to receive love. With this ability, animals continue to play important treatment roles for vulnerable populations (Beck and Katcher 1996) as animals will remain nonjudgmental while providing unconditional attention and affection, especially in times where other relationships have failed (Serpell 2011; Levinson 1969).

**Therapeutic Benefits**

Prior research has shown that people have companion animals to help alleviate social isolation and for the love and support they provide (Furst 2006a). Considering the benefits, animals have been introduced in clinical and non-clinical settings for both children and the elderly (Beck and Katcher 1996; Furst 2006a; McCardle et al. 2011). Such therapies utilizing human-animal interactions are generally termed as animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted intervention (AAI), or animal-assisted activities (AAA) (McCardle et al. 2011). Animals are employed in hospitals to aid recovery and have also been successful in psychiatric populations (Furst 2006a; Lee 1987). In one instance, Lee (1987) studied the effects of companion animals as a therapeutic tool in a state hospital for the criminally insane; one wing of the hospital had animals and the other did not. The ward with animals had patients with less medication, reduced violence, and no suicide attempts; the ward without animals had 8 documented suicide attempts during the same year (Lee 1987). Based on the results of this study, animals can be
applied to various institutional settings where their presence can be beneficial to others. In such institutions, animals can have a positive impact where “there is so much loneliness and rejection… when a patient becomes very depressed there is something non-threatening for them to turn to” (Lee 1987:232). Likewise, animals in prison settings can provide similar support system to inmates, where “prison is a metaphor for isolation and loneliness” (Beck and Katcher 1996:152). The inherent difficulties connecting with other people or lack of opportunity to socialize in prisons is suggested by the high number of poems written by inmates regarding the importance of animals (Johnson and Chernoff 2002).

Caretakers routinely describe their interactions with animals as “authentic,” as they see their companion animals as subjects that are capable of social interaction and reciprocal relationships (Sanders 1993). The therapeutic benefits of human-animal relationships can be illustrated by the role that companion animals might play for isolated or institutionalized individuals. For incarcerated individuals, expressions of care, acceptance, affection and gentle touch are absent; however, animals can simulate these kinds of actions and responses (Beck and Katcher 1996). Therapeutic properties of animals can result from something as little as the mere sight of an animal (Furst 2006a). There are a number of studies that reinforce this point. Studies have shown that being touched by or petting an animal can have physiological calming effects for humans with significant decrease in blood pressure, and a significant increase in beta-endorphin, oxytocin, and dopamine (Baun et al. 1984; Jenkins 1986). Similar results have been found in Morgan’s (2008) study of comforting effects of interacting with humans versus a dog while exposed to a speaking task. The findings showed that participants had high
anxiety when alone or in the company of a friendly person; in the company of a dog, however, participants were significantly less anxious (Morgan 2008).

**Prison-Based Animal Programs: An Overview**

Animals in prisons play an important role for incarcerated individuals. The rationale behind animals in prison settings is consistent with the literature and previous research that supports the benefits of human-animal interactions (Furst 2006a). Prison programs that utilize human-animal interactions are generally described as Prison-Based Animal Programs (PAPs). There are various PAP designs across the country: visitation programs, wildlife rehabilitation programs, livestock care programs, pet adoption programs, service animal socialization programs, vocational programs, community service programs, and multimodal programs that uses design combinations (Furst 2006a). Prisons that operate PAPs use various animals: small domesticated animals such as cats and dogs, wild and domesticated horses, wild animals, and farm animals (Bachi 2013; Cushing and Williams 1995; Furst 2006a). Unlike AATs in clinical or therapeutic settings, PAPs approach the human-animal interaction differently. PAPs primarily focus on the vocational and community service design and are implemented without clinical consideration (Furst 2006a; Mulcahly and McLaughlin 2013). Incarcerated individuals participating in a PAP have the opportunity to interact with a living being that has no interest in their past actions or human identities and frailties (Furst 2006a). Inmates are often isolated without affection or touch from other people; those that have animals to care for can simulate the kind of love and affection that is commonly missing (Beck and Katcher 1996; Furst 2006a). For individuals without social or family support, the unconditional love and trust provided by animals can be significant (Furst 2006a).
As found in patients participating in a AAT, participation in a PAP also shows therapeutic benefits for inmates: improving self-esteem, increasing self-confidence, as well as reducing staffs’ stress levels (Frust 2006a). Animals can provide individuals with socio-emotional support and comfort that can help alleviate the effects of isolation, and participants of prison-based animal programs have reported reduced feelings of isolation and frustration (Furst 2006a). Participants of animal programs have also reported improved outlook toward others, increased self-worth, and feelings of achieving greater goals in life (Furst 2006a; Moneymaker and Strimple 1991). Overall, many PAPs are designed to provide inmates with vocational skills or servicing the community; many result in therapeutic benefits providing inmates with “meaningful experiences…during which many important life lessons are learned” (Deaton 2005:47).

Cusack (1988) emphasizes the importance of animals, finding that “pets seem to bring out the best in us. If there is a capacity for affection, compassion, for empathy, or tenderness overlooked by our human fellows, a pet has an uncanny ability to ferret it out” (p. 33). As Beck and Katcher (1996) suggest, animals have the ability to remain consistent and are unwavering with the troubles of the world; their presence can make a significant difference for inmates. Having animals in prisons that readily show affection and provide unconditional love regardless of the crime these individuals have committed can have a positive impact on the social and emotional health of those incarcerated. PAPs can allow “incarcerated individuals to feel human again—a first step towards healing and change” (Deaton 2005:47).

Participants in a PAP in New Mexico have reported higher self-esteem, self-worth, pride in the work they accomplish, and a decrease in depression (Cushing and
that is consistent with other results in the literature. This PAP in New Mexico began in partnership with New Mexico Bureau of Land Management (NMBLM) and the New Mexico Department of Corrections. In response to the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 where wild horses were removed from rangelands due to overcrowding, NMBLM and the New Mexico Department of Corrections created the PAP opportunity for the inmates to train and tame the horses in a humane way (Cushing and Williams 1995). The PAP was initiated at Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility for men, called the Wild Mustang Program (WMP). The WMP entrusted participants to tame wild horses by working on their own, giving them a sense of challenge and accomplishment, and a valuable sense of autonomy (Cushing and Williams 1995). The program allowed participants to be their “own boss”; they reported autonomy to be highly valuable, especially coming from working in remedial prison jobs in the past (Cushing and Williams 1995). In addition to the reported benefits, the general population has observed decreased aggression and expressions of happiness and calmness in the participants, eliciting interest and later volunteering for the program themselves (Cushing and Williams 1995; Wash and Merton 1994). Findings from the WMP showed that rehabilitation was a common experience of participants, and those that were involved in the PAP felt that they had decreased disciplinary reports as a result (Cushing and Williams 1995). The PAP’s staff responded that WMP “provided an opportunity for development of a positive relationship with another living creature, as well as other humans, and an opportunity for positive ‘parenting’” (Cushing and Williams 1995:103).

In the prison environment, where nurturing or parenting roles are absent, PAPs provide inmates the ability to care for and provide affection to a living being (Cushing
and Williams 1996). Much like Wild Mustang Program, Moneymaker and Strimple (1991) found similar positive outcomes of the People, Animals and Love (PAL) program at a correctional facility in Virginia. Unfortunately, I learned that the PAL program no longer operates out of prison during a phone conversation with the organization’s headquarters in Washington DC. Further, despite positive findings, WMP also ended its program in 1992 (Cushing and Williams 1996).

In Louisiana, a PAP called Pen Pals, Inc. emerged after Hurricane Katrina ripped through the state displacing over 50,000 animals with no shelter, food, or water. According to the Dixon Correctional Institution’s website, the prison responded by building a shelter and taking in some animals to be cared for by their male inmates as rescued and abandoned animals were overwhelming the shelters in the state. With the success of the emergency response, Pen Pals, Inc. permanently operates out of Dixon, a medium-security prison for men, in partnership with the Humane Society and the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine. With this partnership, Pen Pals offer students of veterinarian medicine invaluable experience as well as promoting education, training, and rehabilitation to the incarcerated individuals involved in the program (“Dixon” N.d). In addition to providing shelter in emergencies and operating as a shelter for adoptable animals, the veterinary school sends their students to Dixon as part of their rotation. Participants of Pen Pals work with animals in training, grooming, care, and aiding veterinary students in clinical care (Cima 2013). Veterinary students have reported that Pen Pals participants are highly helpful and knowledgeable, even providing better clinical services than other shelters (Cima 2013). Participants of the PAP reported that the program has taught them patience and the benefits of giving—one participant
stated, “when you get here, the softer side comes out, the compassion for the animals” (Cima 2013:1496). Another participant of the program, who will be released in 2016, hopes of continuing his work with animals, reporting that he “loves the program’s work to rehabilitate dogs and cats for adoption, even though he has become attached to a few of the dogs” (Cima 2013:1496).

Specific recidivism figures were not readily available for each DOC facility within Washington; however, less than 5% female offenders that have been released from Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) after participating in the Prison Pet Partnership (PPP) program have returned to a DOC facility (Polyakov 2015). WCCW’s low recidivism rate for the women that participate in their PAP is consistent with previous research and literature on the suggestion that PAPs reduce recidivism (Bachi 2013; Furst 2006b; Moneymaker and Strimple 1991; Strimple 2003; Turner 2007). Given that the country’s recidivism rate (prisoners reoffending and returning to custody post release) is alarmingly high, programs aimed at rehabilitation for incarcerated individuals while serving time are of great importance. The Bureau of Justice Statistics looked at prisoners that have been released in 30 states. Of the released, within 3 years 67.8% have returned state custody; within 5 years 76.6% have returned to custody (Cooper, Durose, and Snyder 2014). Studies on recidivism are often difficult due to differing definitions across various institutions—some institutions define recidivism as a return to a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility within 3 years, some within 5 years (Evans 2010). To account for this, the Washington State DOC redefined recidivism to match the Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Washington now defines recidivism as “a return to DOC facility by an offender for either a new conviction or a violation
revocation within 36 months after being released from prison” (Evans 2010:2). With this new definition, Washington State’s recidivism rate is currently around 28.7% (“Fact Card” 2014).
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociological theory has historically been silent or dismissive of animals in human-animal interaction. This stance can be traced back to George H. Mead, in discussing the (human) mind, he created a barrier for studies of human-animal relationships in Sociology and Social Psychology (Irvine 2004). With this divide, Mead had separated humans and animals; with animals on one side and humans on the side with consciousness with language capabilities (Irvine 2004). Due to this separation between human and animals, Sociological discourse continued to keep animals in a separate camp. With recent development in human-animal interaction studies, many researchers have bridged two camps by taking on the position that self is not dependent on language (Myers 2003). The theoretical framework for this study begins with Mead’s perspective in order to expand on its core ideas as well as recognize its limitations. Given what we’ve learned from the body of knowledge of human-animal studies, Mead’s ideas should be revisited—especially considering, since Mead’s published works, some animals have acquired human language (e.g., Koko, a gorilla that has learned a large catalog of American Sign Language signs that have been adapted for gorillas) (Irvine 2004; Myers 2003).

Mead: Animals and Humans

While companion animals seem to have an emotional connection to their human caretakers, in the classical tradition, Mead drew a firm line between humans and animals and their abilities to communicate. Mead believed that due to the absence of spoken language in animals, they lacked in mindedness. Mead repeatedly stated that self-consciousness in communication is mediated by language between an individual and
another. Mead used traditional verbal language as the tool to separate humans from animals. According to Mead (1964):

We, of course, tend to endow our domestic animals with personality, but as we get insight into their conditions we see there is no place for this sort of importation of the social process into the conduct of the individual. They do not have the mechanism for it – language (P. 182).

Mead’s stance on animals is that of projection; that humans attributed personality and mindedness onto the animals. Mead used the example of animals quite frequently to differentiate the behaviors of human intelligence versus animal intelligence. One of the ways Mead has characterized the difference between animal intelligence and human intelligence is through each of their individual abilities. A dog can identify and find the source of an odor; however, unlike humans, the dog lacks the verbal communicative ability to relay the same information to another dog. Humans, with the use of reflective intelligence and language, “may tell how to identify another man…. that ability absolutely distinguishes the intelligence of such a reflective being as man from that of the lower animals, however intelligent they may be” (Mead 1964:171). Again, it is due to the animal’s inability to verbally communicate to others that Mead cannot give reflective intelligence to animals.

In addition to communication through the use of language, Mead believes that humans have intelligence because we are able to selectively pick our ideas from our thought processes, test out the solution, and determine the resolution. (Mead 1964). Like impulses, once humans are met with a problem that breaks our habitual environment, we test out the problem mentally and settle upon the solution. For example, consider problem solving—when faced with a problem of crossing a puddle, humans mentally test out solutions of crossing that puddle. Humans use imagination and the benefit of prior
experience with similar stimuli to test each idea of crossing the puddle; we imagine the various ways in which crossing the puddle could be accomplished based on similar past experiences and once our imagination finds a plausible solution to the problem of crossing the puddle, we act on it. This process of the mind is another one of Mead’s examples of communication—humans communicate with themselves. In conjunction with decision-making capabilities, Mead states that intelligence is the ability to solve problems using past experiences and considerations of the future involving memory and foresight (Mead 1964). Though Mead himself provides an example of animal behavior that involves future consideration (such as squirrels securing food for the next day, like humans and groceries), he quickly discredits provident action by framing this ability as “blind impulses”—an impulse that is without human intelligence (Mead 1964:181).

Mead considers language as a method to symbolically communicate with others as well as an ingredient for mind and thinking. It is through the individual’s ability to talk to themselves and others by responding in the same communicative code that constitutes thinking. Language is also a key component in self-consciousness, where even humans at infancy cannot have self-consciousness until they develop the ability to communicate through language. Human children do eventually develop a self; they become self-conscious as soon as they are able to take the role of the other during play. Animals, however, never develop self-consciousness, according to Mead (1964):

We have something that suggests this in what we call the play of animals: a cat will play with her kittens and dogs play with each other…. But we do not have in such a situation the dogs taking a definite role (P. 214).

While play behavior is recognized, for Mead there are no indications of the cat or dog taking the role of the other during their games. Thus, animals exhibiting role-taking
during play for Mead, the conversation of gestures is one of non-significant gestures. For Mead, symbolic interaction occurs during the conversation of gestures where the meaning of the gesture has the same significance to both parties, allowing for mutual understanding (Blumer 1969). While symbolic interaction consists of interpretation of the gestures based on shared meaning given off through the gesture, non-symbolic interaction occurs when humans react to gestures without reflexivity (Blumer 1969).

Though spoken language may be required for Mead, Sanders (1993) has observed that dogs, including his own, who interact with humans partake in a process that is described as “wordless” communication. Those that have studied animal behavior argue that interactions between caretakers and their companions meet the prerequisites of symbolic interaction regardless of language (Jerolmack 2009). Even ethnomethodologists Schutz (1967) and Garfinkel (1967) contended that intersubjectivity cannot be confirmed but that it is not required for interaction (Jerolmack 2009). According to Alger and Alger (1997), animals’ ability to interact symbolically is dependent on the specific relationship they have with humans. This is found to be the case for human and horse interaction. Unlike cats and dogs, the language system used by both human and horse is with body language where communication is done through body-to-body contact (Brandt 2004). In the case of horse and human relationships, both groups are able to learn each other’s body language that allowed them to communicate through complex movements, working together toward a mutual goal (Brandt 2004). Considering that animals communicate without the use of spoken language, Myers (2003) stresses that successful communication between human and animal is dependent upon the quality of the human-animal relationship. Without the limitation of verbal language, we can create a space where
human-animal interaction through body language can be understood as symbolic interaction (Brandt 2004). This wordless communication space can also be expanded to include emotional language.

**Interaction Rituals and Emotional Energies**

Mead created a divide between humans and animals where only humans held the abilities of conversations of significant gestures, internal conversation, and cognition (Collins 1989). Furthermore, Mead claimed that animals live in the present with no sense of time (Collins 1989). This theoretical perspective has been challenged and expanded by more recent theorists of social interaction. Modeled after Durkheim’s situational interaction for rituals and Goffman’s ritual of the everyday life, Randall Collins created Interaction Ritual Theory, “a theory of encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters” (Collins 2004:3). Bringing the ritual to the everyday world, “it provides us with a very generally applicable theory by which to show how much solidarity, how much commitment to shared symbolism and to other features of human action, will occur in a wide variety of situations” (Collins 2004:15). Goffman’s everyday ritualistic interaction, such as simple greetings or compliments of verbal interaction can have a ridged structure. For instance, the greeting of “how are you” and “I’m fine” can be a mundane interaction that are taken for granted until someone violates the ritual by answer in a negative or a “too much detail” response (Collins 2004). Depending on the individual’s personal relationship, if a “too much detail” response occurs after the greeting “how are you” when walking across someone you know can result in different meanings (Collins 2004). Goffman shows us how minor conversational rituals can influence forthcoming
relationships or even marking the current personal relationship between the individuals (Collins 2004). Based on these simple yet loaded interaction rituals outlined by Goffman, Collins (1989) suggests that these types of small interaction rituals occur without intention, thus terming them “natural rituals.”

Collins’ (1989) “natural rituals” have five premises: 1) at least two people are physically assembled; 2) established boundary to outsiders; 3) common focus of attention on the same object or action; 4) common mood or emotional experience; 5) symbolized relationship. When applying the “natural rituals” to animal-human interaction, you begin with at least two species that are physically assembled with established boundary to outsiders. Alger and Alger (1997) observed family routines that were organized with the same focus of attention on objects or action, the caretakers and cats had created a shared reality of bedtime routines, which the authors argue as an example of symbolic interaction with direction to social goals.

Sanders (1999) found that dogs displayed mutual focus of attention by directing their gaze. Sanders describes looking off in a direction, and observes that his dogs follow the general direction of his gaze. He describes this situation as an indication of the dogs taking “his point of view,” “a clear indication of their elemental ability to put themselves into my perspective” (Sanders 1999). Studies of caretakers and companion animals all noted that their animals had an understanding of emotions, either by exhibiting the shared emotions or with an understanding of their caretaker’s need for support during emotional periods (Alger and Alger 1997; Cerulo 2009; Flynn 2000; Sanders 1993, 1999; Staats et al. 2008). Symbolization of the relationship occurs as caretaker and companion animal engage in ritual interaction; those symbols remind them to reconnect the relationship.
(Collins 1989). This symbolization can be found when a play object or a play area that becomes a shared object of meaning for both human and animal, where returning to the toy object or area can engender another interaction.

Emotional energies emerge upon success or failure of previous interactional ritual (IR) chains, resulting in high or low emotional energies depending on the IRs (Collins 1981). The emotional energies gained from successful IRs produces solidarity, confidence, social warmth and enthusiasm that fuel the individual with the resources to reproduce the positive emotional energies in future IRs (Collins 1981). Interaction with animals can provide humans with high positive emotional energies due to the inherent dominant/subordinate relationship between humans and animals. According to Collins (1981), two ingredients are necessary for a conversational ritual: common conversational or cultural resources and common emotional tone. Collins (1981) adds that successful participation in both ingredients can also be stratified, separating the group into one that brings forth the cultural resource and the other as the listener as well as emotional leaders and followers. The dominant group, the one that has cultural capital or is an emotional leader, gains positive emotional energies, while the subordinate group gains little emotional energies from this interaction. When applied to human-animal interaction, these two ingredients place the human in the dominant group, allowing him/her to gain high positive emotional energies from the interaction. While humans are placed as the dominant actor, animals can also carry the dominant position by ending the interaction abruptly, where humans gain little to no emotional energies.
Animals as Emotional Beings

Animals, specifically companion animals, are perceived as empathetic; they not only exhibit a wide range of emotions but are able to sense emotions from their caretakers which they respond to appropriately (Sanders 1993). Companion animals and their caretakers have an emotional connection, and together with shared history and their natural interaction rituals, symbolic interactions can occur (Alger and Alger 1997). The emotional connection between human and animals is revealed in Flynn’s (2000) study of battered women where companion animals served as important emotional support and coping. Sanders’ (1999) respondents support this relationship, understanding their dogs to be emotional creatures, where their thinking processes run on emotion and they respond with emotions. Myers (2003) refers to Max Weber, who described animals to have, not only the understanding of commands, but also a myriad of expressions of emotions that aren’t purely attributes of natural instinct that can be consciously meaningful.

The companion animals described here feel sadness, anger, fear and happiness and respond appropriately to these emotions. Similar to the dogs discussed by Sanders (1999), caretakers of cats also viewed them to be highly emotional with the ability to sense their caretakers’ emotional state (Alger and Alger 1997). Caretakers defined their intimate relationship with their animals based on shared emotions (Sanders 1993). Having keen awareness of moods of the situation and people around them, dogs were illustrated as being empathetic and lending support, comfort, and unconditional love through their silent presence (Sanders and Arluke 1993).

Battered women also indicated that their companion animals were able to sense that something was wrong, even felt their fear and sadness and provided the comfort as a
response to their victimization (Flynn 2000). The companion animal’s perceived ability to see past any shortcomings to respond with unquestioning love is what gave the women comfort and strength during difficult times (Flynn 2000). In addition to companion animals providing comfort and “just knowing” when the women were feeling bad, many of the women described their companion animal attempting to protect the women when she was being abused (Flynn 2000). Caretakers routinely acknowledged that the love between caretaker and companion animal was based on mutuality (Belk 1996; Sanders 1993); and when they felt sad their companion animals were by their side (Belk 1996).

Cerulo (2009) considers this as an engagement in meaningful interaction:

When my dog sees me cry and comes to lick my tears or runs to the door when I grab his/her leash, my dog and I are engaged in meaningful social interaction – even though we have different mental orientations to the exchange (P. 544).

Animals in abusive homes also indicated emotional responses to their situation. Like humans, after witnessing a woman’s abuse, the animals exhibited stress symptoms such as shaking, shivering, cowering, hiding and urinating (Flynn 2000).

Companion animals are emotional beings that are highly attuned to their surroundings. Their emotional experiences ranged from happiness to sadness, embarrassment, loneliness and anger (Sanders 1993; 1999). A respondent in Sanders’ (1999) study saw her dog going through several emotions as a result of being left alone at home for too long, she recollects coming home and her dog kept barking at her in a different but distinctive bark that was indicative of anger. Companion animals were also perceived as feeling guilt, gratitude and embarrassment, which implies that they are aware of social rules or at least rules of the house (Alger and Alger 1997; Sanders 1999).

When companion animals violated rules, caretakers see guilt in their animals which was
indicated through their body language: “bowed head, tucked tail, ears down, sidelong
glances” (Sanders 1993:217).

These perceived emotions are examples of role-taking emotions which require
putting oneself in another’s position to take that perspective, much like Mead’s
generalized other (Shott 1979). Shott (1979) describes two types of role-taking emotions:
reflexive role-taking emotions are directed towards oneself as it considers how you
appear to others, such as, embarrassment, shame, pride, guilt, vanity; empathic role-
taking emotions are brought forth by placing oneself into the shoes of another and feeling
those emotions. The companion animals that convey embarrassment and guilt through
body language (Alg
er and Alger 1997; Sanders 1993; 1999) are taking part in reflexive
role-taking emotions. The behaviors that indicate that the companion animals were able
to “sense emotional states” or “knowing that something was wrong” (Alger and Alger
1997; Flynn 2000; Sanders 1999) were able to place themselves into another’s position in
emphatic role-taking emotions.

When applying animals and humans in Collins’ interaction rituals, Mead’s
exclusion of animals as minded actors is limited. Throughout history, people have had
social relationships with animals, deities, and the dead all around the world (Cerulo
2009). Constructing human identity occurs in relationships between human caretakers
and their companion animals (Sanders 1993; Alger and Alger 1997) and this same
behavior is found between caretakers and the disabled (Alger and Alger 1997). In order
to interact with the disabled where communication through language is absent, family
members partake in role-taking emotions and interact as if they had mindedness (Alger
and Alger 1997).
Application of Theoretical Frameworks

There are several ways that these theories can be applied to the present study. The women in the study were incarcerated at WCCW at the time of the research. Even before becoming institutionalized, these women had experienced sudden transformations of their identity through “status degradation ceremonies” (Garfinkel 1956:420). A successful degradation ceremony involves a formal ceremony that transforms the identity of the individual resulting in reduced rank or status (Garfinkel 1956). The women in the study have experienced degradation ceremonies in their arrest, trial, and subsequent conviction and prison intake. Each of these events are structured, formal, public, and results in a lowered status and dramatic change in identity. Once institutionalized, these women face their new identity of a convict, inmate, felon, etc.; lowered statuses that carry stigma.

Goffman (1963) is perhaps Sociology’s foundational theorist of stigma. In his classic work on the topic, he refers to stigma as:

An attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind—in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to be tainted, discounted one (P. 3).

The women in the study are surrounded by others that carry the same label and are currently serving time in prison. Given their current incarceration, their stigma is not concealable. Stigma has two perspectives: the “discredited” and the “discreditable” (Goffman 1963:4). While the study sample cannot conceal their stigma while incarcerated, both perspective may apply. While incarcerated, the individual is an “inmate” where she can assume her label is already known and evident considering her imprisonment, environment, ID badge, and uniform. She must deal with the plight of the “discredited” (Goffman 1963). If and when released, she will be able to conceal her label
where she can assume that others do not know of her stigma because it is not readily evident. She then needs to deal with the plight of the “discredible” (Goffman 1963). Literature on human-animal interaction shows that relationships with companion animals can provide love and support when human relationships fail (Levinson 1969; Serpell 2011) and receive non-judgmental affection (Beck and Katcher 1996; Furst 2006a). The women that participate in a PAP can regularly interact with their companion animal that are unwavering to their labels. During human-animal interactions, the women do not need to worry about the plight of the “discredited” nor “discreditable.”

Provided that the women in the study may interact with their animals without worrying about their stigma, they can engage in positive and transformative interaction rituals. Collins’ (2004) “natural rituals” can be readily applied to human-animal interaction, as they meet the conditions of successful IRs in the following ways:

1. PAP women are physically assembled with their animal(s)
2. they have established boundaries to outsiders (non PAP participants)
3. they engage in common focus of attention on the same object/action (through their sharing of common living spaces and through the rigorous obedience and service training).
4. they share common mood and emotional experience
5. their human-animal bond can be defined as friendships and/or parent-child relationships

Even with interspecies relationships, successful IRs can result in increased emotional energies. Emotional energies from IRs engender solidarity, confidence, and social warmth, in which each species continues to engage in future IRs to produce more emotional energies (Collins 2004). The women see the animals as emotional beings. Along with their program training and the bonds the women have created with their animals through successful IRs, the women are able to recognize non-verbal cues, gestures, and emotions of their animals. The women communicate with their companion
animals as if they had mindedness through emotional reciprocity and role-taking (Shott 1979), similar to how human beings “‘do’ the minds and selves” for individuals that cannot communicate through spoken language, such as infants and those with diminished cognitive capacities (Irvine 2004).

Along with the transformation of identity, sociological theories of emotion can help us understand the social, interpersonal, and organizational experiences of women who are incarcerated. For example, women in prison (including the women in the present study) routinely are required to apply “emotion work,” in varying degrees, in their daily interactions due to the development of new identities, their incarceration, and their participation in programs considered to be a privilege by the institution (like the PAP). Hochschild (1979) defines emotion work as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling…. ‘emotion work’ refers to the effort—the act of trying—and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful” (p. 561). There are three different components of emotion work: cognitive, bodily, and expressive (Hochschild 1979). Women who are incarcerated experience their daily lives in prison as a process of emotion management (Greer 2002). This monitoring of emotional expression is exacerbated among women who have children in prison (Enos 2001), as well as those living in prison with animals. Women in these nurturing situations display the techniques of emotion work when even for a moment, their feelings of atypical happiness do not match their surroundings. This mismatch of emotions and environment become the bases of the women’s need for space making, or redefining their social situations to accommodate new emotional experiences and identities. By engaging in emotion work,
the women become actors, as they create new performances and stages based on establishing safe environments where they can experience and exhibit their emotions. Goffman’s (1959) stages, like theatre, have a front stage and a back stage. Performances are given off in the “front stage.” These are acts or impressions that the actor wishes the audience to see. Similarly, the preparation for, or recovery from, performances is accomplished in the “back stage.” (Goffman 1959). For the women in the study, they’ve identified the “general population” (other inmates that are not in the PAP) as the audience and all locations accessible general population as the front stage. In the front stage, these women perform the expressions and emotions that are suitable for the for other inmates. In contrast to the front stage, in the back stage performers can be their own selves, drop their pretenses and allow their suppressed selves/emotions to emerge (Goffman 1959). That the PAP operates in a space remote from the general population, and that women are able to care for their animals in their cells (only if they are comfortable with their roommates), allows for women participating in programs like the PAP to create a back stage environment. Here the women can show their true emotions and expressions without fear of being seen by other inmates (the audience). In this back stage, other PAP participants become “team members” that are aware of the performance and the boundaries of the audience (Goffman 1959). This back stage is important because it allows women who are incarcerated to develop an identity and an emotional repertoire that is unique, and creates a novel environment where fundamental aspects of human-animal interaction can be examined.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the human-animal bond and to investigate how animals effect the daily lives of their human companions. This study looks to address three major objectives by examining the relationship between incarcerated individuals and the animals they care for:

R1: What are the roles that animals play in the socio-emotional lives of human beings?

R2: How are animals a source of comfort, support, and love to people?

R3: Is the sense of identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy of human caretaker affected by the companion animals for which they care?
METHODOLOGY

The present study utilized qualitative methodology. Incarcerated individuals from Washington State Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) that participated in the Prison Pet Partnership (PPP) program were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. Data collection took approximately 3 weeks and interviews were conducted in WCCW. The sample includes PPP participants, program staff, and PPP’s assigned Corrections Officer.

**Qualitative Interviewing**

To address the research objectives of this study, a semi-structured qualitative interview schedule was developed. One of the great advantages and benefits of qualitative research includes the ability to take accounts and experiences and provide commentary that goes beyond numbers and figures. Rather than noting “facts,” ethnographic description involves understanding and representing subtleties and meaning through interpretation (Emerson 2001). Qualitative methodology provides interpretations of individuals and their life-worlds (Berg 2009). Researchers that look to the life-word focus on natural language and meanings of individuals and their experiences, such as “emotions, motivations, symbols and their means, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups” (Berg 2009:16).

Qualitative interviewing allows both the researcher and interviewee to expand and elaborate beyond the rigidity of the questions that are asked. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews offer opportunities for side conversation and additional narrative which often lead to interesting and insightful information. Thus, in-depth interviewing provided the best option to gain subjective understanding of these women’s situation, experiences,
perceptions, and interpretation with their own words in an open-ended and limitless forum. Though this study engages a small sample, interviewing uncovers the effects of the relationship and interaction between incarcerated women and their animals in a descriptive and holistic fashion. The semi-structured interview is flexible, using an emergent technique that allows for ideas and accounts emerge during the interview that allows the interviewer to pursue a unique direction (Charmaz 2006). In-depth interviews are useful in addressing and unfolding individual experiences by exploring and expanding the participants’ experiences (Charmaz 2006). While qualitative researchers may rely on a set of questions related to the topic, there are few if any pre-set answers—participants may respond using their own words and are frequently encouraged to expand on their thoughts for greater explanations (Scott 2013). The core and primary questions within the semi-structured interview schedule questions each participant systematically, “but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions” (Berg 2009:107). Qualitative methods can be systemic and can be reproduced, though they may lack wide generalizability (Berg 2009). However, research that engages specific populations can benefit to a great extent from qualitative methods by providing rich descriptions of the population’s experiences and perceptions.

Sample

This study uses criterion sampling, also known as purposive sampling, where all cases with common quality that meet predetermined criteria are eligible for participation (Tatton 1990). Each sample had inclusion criteria that participants must meet before they were enrolled in the study. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) was pilot tested
with non-incarcerated individuals for applicable language, sequencing, comprehension, and to gauge time commitment for participants. Though the study sample would present its own set of unknown challenges due to the research setting and conditions of incarceration, the pilot allowed me to test the interview schedule to learn and adapt to the flow of conversation, where participants were most likely to digress, or opportunities for elaboration. Having this knowledge of the ebb and flow of the interview schedule before approaching the study sample was valuable for conversation building and rapport (see Appendix B and C).

Offenders in confinement with the Washington Department of Correction (DOC) are predominantly white (approximately 72%) (“Fact Card” 2014). Females make up 7.5% of offenders in confinement with the Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) and the average age is 37.8 years (“Fact Card” 2014). At WCCW, of the 17 PPP participants, 14 enrolled in the study and 1 participant withdrew. 4 PPP staff members and 1 Corrections Officer assigned to the program were also interviewed.

Program cats and dogs live with their inmate companions 24/7. Program dogs are typically with their trainers at all times excluding certain locations such as medical and the cafeteria. For the incarcerated women, the study’s inclusion criterion was to be a PPP participant. The study excluded anyone under the age of 18. For PPP, the program’s requirements are: to be major infraction free for 1 year; minor infraction free for 90 days; no crimes against: minors, elderly, disabled, or animals; have or work toward a GED or equivalent; complete the Pet Care Services Pet Care Technician Level 1 course and pass the exam at 75%; and interview with PPP. Once hired, they must remain drug free. Any major infraction of prison regulations results in automatic expulsion from the program;
and if removed from the program, the inmate may not apply for the program for at least 1 year. Also, any signs of mistreatment or neglect of program animals results in expulsion.

The study took place in the span of 3 weeks. At WCCW, PPP staff and the Corrections Officer were interviewed in their private offices. PPP participants were interviewed in the program’s classroom; interviews were conducted in a private setting, however, per prison regulations, the room had a large glass window so privacy was moderate. All interviews were audio recorded with individual permission from each study participant. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis, and recruitment took place without my presence or involvement. Before I arrived to the institution, the program coordinator pinned a sign-up sheet on her office door. Following prison regulations, incentives for participation were not offered. Study participants had the option to not be audio recorded, skip any questions that caused discomfort, take breaks, reschedule the interview, and end participation without any penalty or loss of privileges. Furthermore, the decision to participate in the study had no positive or negative consequences to the women with the prison or the program. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form and gave consent before they were interviewed. To protect participants from potential breach of confidentiality, verbal consent was obtained in lieu of signatures and last names were not documented or recorded. Additionally, study participants’ names as well as the names of their animals have been replaced with pseudonyms.
Research Site and the Prison-based Animal Program\(^1\)

In order to fully understand the methodological approach used in this study, it is important to understand the prison context in which the study took place as well as in which the women were incarcerated. There are a number of correctional institutions within the United States that have Prison-Based Animal Programs (PAPs). During the developmental stage of this research, several institutions were considered with the following criteria in mind: the institution must have a current PAP and the animals must live on site (i.e. companion animals live in the facility and are cared for by inmates). As a forerunning in a vocational PAP, Washington Correction Center for Women (WCCW) not only met the study’s short criteria but was an optimum candidate to examine.

WCCW, previously known as the Purdy Treatment Center for Women, is a maximum-security prison for women that holds approximately 850-900 female offenders in minimum, medium, close, and maximum custody. WCCW first opened in 1971 and currently serves as the intake center for all female offenders for Washington. The PPP program began in 1981 by Sister Pauline Quinn and Dr. Leo Bustad. Together, Sister Pauline and Dr. Bustad created PPP that is now considered one of the forerunners of PAPs, where its program design has been the model of numerous PAPs throughout the country (Furst 2006a; Moneymaker and Strimple 1991). PPP is considered a vocational program; its primary goal is to provide inmates with animal education, service dog training skills, and grooming skills. Though the program is vocational at its core, WCCW administrators were attracted to the program for its vocational and potential therapeutic

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\(^1\) This research was approved by the Standing Advisory Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Northridge and by the Research Review Committee at Washington State Department of Corrections.
benefits (Furst 2006b). There are several benefits for the women participating in PPP: participants of the program gained valuable skills leading to potential employment, once released, they experienced increased self-esteem, and earned college credit (Strimple 2003).

While there are clear benefits of the PPP, they are multifaceted. One the one hand, there are benefits to the women participating in the program; on the other hand, there are the benefits to others (e.g. the local community, people with physical and emotional ailments, and the animals). Through their excellent grooming and boarding services, PPP and the women working in grooming and the kennels have received recognition in the local news. In 2009, PPP was featured as one of the top 3 rated kennels based on quality and price serving the Puget Sound region. Puget Sound’s Consumers’ CHECKBOOK surveyed for customer service and satisfaction of local kennels for quality rating in response to the horror stories of kennels leading to injuries, illness, and infestations (Thompson 2009). Out of the 36 local kennels in the area, only 3 received top ratings for both quality and price (Thompson 2009), include the PPP.

One other unique property of PPP is that this program does not breed dogs for service, rather, they rescue homeless dogs, rescue from organizations, shelters, and pounds. Dogs that are selected for service requires high intelligence and specific temperament—it can get tricky as dogs can be extremely intelligent but cannot shake their prey drive. Programs such as PPP can dedicate extensive time training a capable dog only to find that the animal cannot shake their desire to run after a ball or squirrel. Given that this program does not breed dogs to select for service temperament, approximately one out of 15-20 rescues are selected for service training (“Prison Pet Partnership” N.d.).
Dogs that have play/prey drives or that are not selected for training are trained in obedience and then “paroled.” These paroled pets are available to be adopted out to families within the community. Since the program began in 1981, PPP has placed approximately 700 dogs with families or as service dogs aiding in physical assistance, therapy, and detecting seizures (Polyakov 2015). Rather than creating more dogs, these rescue dogs have been transformed and have been paired with companions to provide much needed services, or have or have been placed in loving homes. With these well-trained dogs, persons with disabilities not only have the loving comfort and support of companion dogs; with the assistance of service dogs, these individuals are able to lead more independent lives (Polyakov 2015).

The benefits of PPP extend beyond improvements in the quality of life of community members and the dogs, themselves. In addition to placing dogs with families or persons with disabilities, the inmates participating in these programs gain a variety of valuable vocational skills. These women learn employable skills in obedience and advanced service training, grooming, and Red Cross pet certification. With the program and their-hands on approach, the women learn work ethics and employable skills. They are able to grow personally and professionally, (Polyakov 2015) and most importantly, they are provided with a network of support if/when they are released. This support network can be highly advantageous for these women—especially if they don’t have the support of their families or friends. Additionally, women in the program gain helpful coaching in resume building and cover letter writing during their stay at WCCW from PPP board members and volunteers. When incarcerated individuals are released, their “to-do” list can be overwhelming. They need to find a place to live, they need to find a
Anne, a PPP’s staff member, helps those that are released keep their goals in mind so that they don’t make mistakes that halts them from progressing outside. Anne tries to make the transition as easy as possible. For example, one of the participants, Mia, will be released in less than 2 months. Anne will provide her with about 35 locations to stop in to solicit for a job. Anne will call about a third of the employers, not to convince them to hire Mia, but to soften the idea that the applicant used to be incarcerated. Anne believes the support network to be crucial in order for these women to succeed outside of prison, and when they don’t have it from family or friends, the women can look to PPP in various ways for support. She says:

The world has changed while the women have been in prison. Some women that have been here for 25 years, have never seen a typical touch cell phone, or even laptops. PPP makes sure that when released, [the women] have a circle of support around them to succeed or support when [they’re] down through [PPP’s] volunteers.

The combination of these benefits: rescuing animals, community service, and the prison vocational program is a win-win-win situation: it’s good for the dogs, often adopted from shelters where they’d otherwise be killed. It’s good for the disabled, who experience a new world of freedom with the dogs at their side. And it can forever change the lives of the inmates (“Inmates Learning” 2000).
RESULTS

The analysis of this research produced 4 primary themes: finding a new purpose, fostering relationships inside the prison, emotional changes, and the community. The women that participated in the PAP experienced many changes in their outlook, identity, and emotions. Many of the women underwent role, identity, and emotional changes when they became incarcerated. Revealed through the interviews, some women reported changes as a new PAP participant; many of which experienced changes while learning to work with animals. Experienced or veteran PAP participants experienced new orienting changes as they learned more about themselves in the context of their continued incarceration.

A New Purpose

The women participating in the animal program reported many changes in themselves. One of the changes they shared was that being in the program and caring for animals gave them a new purpose, for some, it was the first time since their incarceration that they felt a sense of purpose. The PAP gave them something to look forward to, the motivation to stay out of trouble, and a reason to keep going day by day. One of the goals for a successful pet program is to provide inmates with much needed diversion from normal prison routine (Lee 1987). Companion animals such as cats and dogs are highly relatable. Having these animals in the institution provides the women a diversion from their normal prison routine. It allows them to temporarily focus on their jobs, skills, and animals rather than the environment and their troubles. Cushing and Williams (1995) found similar results from the male inmates they studied where participating in an animal program made them feel they were involved in something that was productive and meaningful.
Staying out of Trouble

In their interviews, the women expressed many positive results of participating in the PAP. One such result was that the women had a new motivation of staying out of trouble. When institutionalized it is sometimes difficult to see the purpose of following the many rules of the prison—inmates can incur minor infractions for a range of acts and or behavior that are outside of the norm. Minor infractions can be something as simple as getting caught in a lie, something as natural as showing affection to another inmate with a hug or even holding hands. With so many restrictions and little to no rewards, incarcerated individuals can become indifferent to staying out of trouble. Many of the women that were interviewed reflected on how they felt about the rules and regulations of the prison both before joining the program and afterwards. Many women reported that the animals gave them motivation to follow the results and become good “organizational citizens.” Amber tells us how training dogs have, in a way, kept her out of trouble. She says:

I know that I am able to help a dog and go through whatever it needs to go through, see the success of them coming out the other side. Being able to do sit-stays and down-stays, from a dog who [is] just neurotic everywhere is exciting to me. It’s exciting every time. To see them succeed, it’s always exciting to me. For me, that desire is, makes me want to do it, make sure that I have all my ducks in a row and following the rules and doing all that.

Amber’s excitement comes from witnessing the breakthrough moment in working with a “neurotic” dog and seeing him succeed in his training. Seeing the dog that she’s worked so hard with learn commands shows her own success as a trainer and a caretaker.

Maintaining her eligibility to stay in the PAP, to continue her training, work and live with animals gives Amber the motivation she needs to keep all her “ducks in a row.” Much like in Giddens’s analysis of social structures, participating in the animal program helps
women like Amber to see the “enabling and constraining” aspects of social structure of the prison. Following prison rules don’t come easily, for both newly institutionalized as well as someone with several years under their belt, as they pose unique constraints to which the women are unaccustomed. There are more, and stricter, rules and regulations in prison than in the outside community. Learning all of the rules may be one obstacle, following them is another feat on its own. Institutions such as prisons, regulates the person’s identity and behavior; constantly sanctioning people until they accept conformity (Goffman 1961). In a way, adhering to the strict rules of the prison engenders a type of mortification of self in that these women must regulate themselves, physically and emotionally (Goffman 1961). For example, they must wear the clothing that have been provided, and they cannot express anger when they experience it. The PAP itself is a privilege. The women attempting to participate in the PAP must first demonstrate that they are able to follow the rules by being infraction free. Once in the PAP they must remain infraction free—in this way, the PAP induces conformity to potential participants as well as enforcing conformity to those that are in the program. Further, the PAP, as a privilege, may even stratify the women by creating privilege hierarchies.

Like Amber, Ellen further elaborates on how the program has served as motivator to keep her out of trouble as well as her future outlook:

It’s taught me patience. Definitely. Big time. Yeah, I think that it’s helped me a lot. In here, it’s helped me by keeping me out of trouble. It’s a huge motivator for me to stay out of trouble … In here, it’s not that easy to stay out of trouble. I mean the simplest thing can get you an infraction. So it really makes you watch what you’re doing in here and keeping yourself out of bad situations and people. For instance, I think of things, like with contraband, do I like that more than I like my job? No, so we’ll get rid of that. It’s not worth it. And I think that staying busy also helps you keep you going. Programs like these are good for prisons.
As previously discussed, incarcerated individuals can get an infraction for such simple transgressions. It is difficult to stay out of trouble and easy to transgress the rules. When you have an abundance of time, patience is hard to practice. When you have overwhelming opportunities to get in trouble, it’s hard to keep regulated. Ellen uses the program to keep herself motivated by weighing the costs versus benefits of situations that may get her in trouble. While the program creates a privilege system that induces conformity, it frees up the women to grown on individual level.

*Time and a Change of Focus*

As a result of participating in the program, the women express developing a new sense of purpose and motivation. For many, this new set of dispositions have helped to create a positive outlook while serving the time they have left, which for many women can be a considerable amount of time. It is important to note that all of the women participating in the PAP must have at least one year left in the institution. However, while the minimum may be one year, most of the women in the PAP have many years left to serve. For this reason, it is important for these women to have a meaningful and impactful job to hold on to as well as have something to look forward to on a day-to-day basis. Knowing that they are part of something important allows them to serve their years in a significant way, though this doesn’t come without challenges. During their interviews, many women discuss how the PAP and the animals have helped them stay out of trouble; but, staying out of “trouble” is more than just following the rules of the prison. Living in a prison environment naturally engenders drama.
Anna, a PAP staff member provides her insight on what it is like to live in a prison environment:

The thing that is really hard to remember about these women—and it is something I truly commend them for is—they all work together and then they all go home together to the same spot. That really adds a lot to the dynamic because you can’t get away from these people. You turn around to eat dinner, there they are; you try and go to the bathroom at night, there they are. That adds a different dynamic to them. Because they never have downtime, they constantly have someone around and they constantly have a roommate. Think about how much you and I like alone time, now think about how many women out of the 900 that wants alone time and they can’t get it. That would cause a lot of crazy making.

It truly is commendable that PAP participants are able to work with each other every day, live with one another without a break, and still manage to stay out of trouble and try to keep positive attitudes. These women are able to be high functioning individuals in a (relatively) dysfunctional environment. Tory, another veteran of the program describes how she deals with the day-to-day activities and dramas of living in a prison. She says:

You know we all work together, we all live in the same [place], we all share the same bathrooms. So, we’re always together. Everyone here. And this morning there was all this, “well I need the dryer, and my this, and my do that,” that kind of thing. And then instead of feeding into it, you just look around and there was Skipper [her current dog] and he was like, “Hey! How are you?” And I’m like, you know what? I’m good. Come on, we’re going to go out back for a minute. And they [the animals] keep you in the present moment.”

Both Anna and Tory speak to the difficulty of constantly being around the same people with few options for privacy, if any. Tory recounts the potential drama stirring that morning in the grooming room—just slight bickering, yet drama nonetheless—she turns to her golden retriever, Skipper, seemingly calm but with a positive attitude rubbing off on her. Seeing Skipper brought Tory back to the present moment, away from the daily drama of people, to the present, to the moment between herself and her dog, where the
bickering between other people wasn’t worth getting involved in. Tory explains how her dog’s perspective on life has influenced on her:

In a way, I think he is kind of training me in a good way to keep me like that. Because that’s how they live, right now, right now you’re touching him and that’s all they know. They’re not thinking about breakfast, they’re not thinking about dinner, they’re just thinking this is the best rub down I’ve had in my whole entire life! And they’re eating dinner, they’re thinking, this is the best meal I’ve ever had in my whole life! And I like that part of it.

Tory reflects on how animals live in the present—they don’t recall the past to hold on to grudges, and they don’t look into the future to where their lives would be—they know the present and likely the immediate future. They know that right now, they like napping by their companion’s feet and perhaps they’ll have fun when it is time to go outside later. Animals’ ability to provide love today, right now, regardless of what their companions did in the past or what they’ll do in the future brings comfort to many of these women. Tory believes that Skipper is teaching her as well, to live for the present, to enjoy what is happening now, and perhaps to save the worries for later.

Many of the women interviewed during this study described the importance of staying in the present moment as the passage of time can become a preoccupation. While the passage of time may be persistent, how we experience it is relative. An explanation of why when you’re having fun, time flies, when doing a monotonous and menial job, time feels like it is standing still. This distortion of time can also be attributed to the “flow” experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1991). “Flow” is connected to happiness and occurs when people are immersed completely in a captivating activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1991). Women in prison are thinking about time constantly. Counting time is how they know how long they’ve been in prison, and how much longer they need to serve. Their release from prison is truly one of the primary things these women look forward to. However,
some participants have many yeast left to serve, so much that holding onto that future
date may not be healthy. In an environment where options are limited, how you serve that
time can determine how you experience that time—fast or excruciatingly slow. There are
very few social opportunities, visitations, alone time, and high-skill work duty. All of
these women have had other work assignments before the program and, as a result,
understand how the different ways they occupy themselves can affect their temporal
experiences.

Reflecting on their past assignments, the women spoke about how time feels now
that they’re working in a vocation program with animals. For example, Caitlin is a new
PAP participant, who had been in the program for about 6 months at the time of her
interview. While she may be a new program member, she has been in the institution for
over five years. When she first arrived to the prison, she was very angry—going in and
out of segregation. After some time, she was moved to living quarters that housed PPP
members. Living in housing units that had animals brought Caitlin to consider the
program. She recalls what it was like living in the same unit with animals:

It was like a total different world. It just seemed like a hundred pounds had been
taken off my shoulders just to be a part of the room. She (PPP participant) had a
cat and two dogs so it was just a busy [place]… your focus is no longer on your
situation, your focus becomes on the animals and their needs. And I love cats, and
so being on the top bunk, that's where the cats go to get away from the dogs, and
so I instantly had a friend. It was just cool. It took your focus off of your situation.

Caitlin joined the program soon after:

It just took a big load off. I don’t know how else to explain it. Instead of focusing
on me and why I’m here and how long I have left to go, and I’m still climbing
uphill time-wise, I’m now focusing on the animals…. And the worst day that I
could have had, it is not so bad anymore because I've got a different focus. I've
got animals. So if I get disappointed about something, it's quickly gone, because I
have to focus on what's going on at hand, which is my animals. Does that make
sense? Where before I could possibly dwell on it for a minute. I don't have time for that now.

For Caitlin, having something to focus on, other than being in prison took a weight off her. Like many of the women here, Caitlin has many years left to serve, and it can be difficult to think and focus on something other than how to endure the number of years left. Focusing on the animals not only detracts thinking about time or situation, Caitlin describes that she is now able to shake off bad days. The worst day she can have, she says is not so bad anymore because she now has animals to draw her attention. She can face disappointment better because now she doesn’t have time to dwell on the negative; instead she is able to redirect her energy focusing on the animals. Similarly, Tory tries to focus on something else that is not associated with time. She talks about how time can fly when in the program. She describes how time changes …

Because you’re focused on… really, everything but you … Which is good, because you’re in this environment and all you have time to do is be analytical and over analytical [about] what you said, what you did. It’s just, your brain just doesn’t shut off that way. And my brain, now [with the animals], I gotta do this and get this done, and pretty soon a week is gone, and then a month, and oh my gosh, it’s been a year. I can’t believe it’s been a year. [This] versus, “oh god, it’s only tomorrow, oh my god.” I think your outlook on time, time is different [now, with the animals].

Both Caitlin and Tory have something external to their environment or their crime on which to focus. People routinely go over interactions or events in their minds; the brain replays the situation over and over again, on loop. Much like how Mead describes the constitution of the mind, people have conversations with the self, and through “thought” they interpret their experiences (Mead 1964). Women in prison have days, months, and years, to think about what they did to become incarcerated. They become preoccupied
with “what ifs.” Tory knows that her mind does this, knowing that you can’t shut it off. She finds that by focusing on planning for the program, time can fly by quite quickly.

Interestingly, Chloe who mentioned during the interview that she has been in prison for 23 years, and due to the length of time she’s served, the prison environment affects her differently than the newer inmates. She describes:

I’ve been in prison for 23 years, so what Megan [PPP staff] would call habituation, pretty much everything around me is white noise.... Now I have the animals around me, I have to pay attention to what they’re doing, otherwise I’m not going to know what they want. So, I pay attention to people as well now. Yeah, they have eliminated some of the white noise.

Chloe has endured the prison environment for a long time. As seen through the interviews with many of these women, in order to survive being in prison, the women need to change and transform a few times in order to find a fit that works. Many of the women have “shut down,” “harden up,” or become withdrawn. Many have tried and failed to remain who they are—they want to make friends or be nice, only to be faced with distrust or are taken advantage of. After so many years, Chloe has found her way of coping and it involves tuning out everything around her. She stopped paying attention, numbing and reducing the world around her into simple “white noise”. Yet, even though the white noise of the environment and the people around her, like the other program members, the animals almost demand that their companion caretakers break the barriers. It is the animals that the women describe as preventing them from staying a recluse, or why they needed to start engaging in conversations with other people, or why they couldn’t stay in their rooms all day and the like. Amber recounts her experience with the animals and how they’ve influenced her and have redirected her focus:

I would be living [in mental health] if I weren’t [in the program]. Not general population, it’s in the loony bin. So being able to work here keeps me sane. It
keeps me focused on being able to take care of the dogs and keeps me focused and you know, gives me reason to get up and take care of, this is what I need to do, I need to get up and take care of somebody, this is what makes me happy, that I’m able to do this…. I’m able to get up and take care of whoever I’m taking care of at the time. Getting up to take care of George [current dog] and making sure he has everything he needs and the room is clean and all that kind of stuff gives me a sense of purpose that I wouldn’t have if I were to be working in the kitchen.

Amber connects her sanity with working in the PAP and that without the program keeping her focused on taking care of the animals, she would likely live in the mental health units. While working in PPP is hard work and requires dedication, being able to live with the animals you are for provides so many benefits to the women as well as other inmates that are not in the program. The program women all have roommates; roommates that are not in a PAP that do not have the responsibilities of the job, but live with these animals. While everyone may complain about fur getting everywhere, living with animals while incarcerated is a bonus and benefit for both program women and those around them. The animals provide Amber something to focus on, to care for, a reason to get up, and bring her happiness. She focuses on getting up and caring for George, making sure he has everything he needs gives her the sense of purpose and accomplishment that other work duties, such as kitchen work cannot provide.

A Reason to get up

By participating in the PAP, these women have experienced a new found purpose, motivation, something positive to focus on, and a way to combat their depression and having a reason to get up and go on day-by-day. Almost all of the women have experienced at some point in their incarceration where they felt they could not face the day. They would stay in their cells as much and as long as possible. If they had low-level work assignments, all they needed to do is muster enough energy to show up for meals,
the count, and put in hours with their job. Some women have mentioned experiencing depression; some have been placed in segregation, and some, understandably, just had no reason to smile. Newly incarcerated or long-term sentenced, these women all share similar coping mechanisms. They may disengage, stay in their cells, lie down, and either “wallow” in their self-pity, or shut the world out.

Nora has been in the program for several years now. She has switched her focus to the animals, away from herself. She finds that while in prison,

You have to focus on somebody else, you can’t focus on yourself. There is something else you need to focus on. There is something there depending on you. It gives you something to do, it gives you something to be responsible for, look forward to, something that needed to be taken care of, something to love, you know. It gave me a purpose. I made crafts and stuff like that, but animals gave me a purpose. Gave me a reason to get up in the morning. Gave me reason to go on.

Nora speaks of having something to focus on mentally as well as physically. For her, she needs to be able to think about something other than herself and her situation. She needs something to do, to keep herself as well as her mind busy. Additionally, since the animals need caring for, it also gives her responsibility. That responsibility also gives her a purpose, and focus for her achievement. She does do something for herself during her downtime, she makes crafts. However, caring for the animals gave her “a reason to get up in the morning.” One important aspect of the animals is that, like children, they need attention, care, love, and nurturing to meet their basic needs. Even with extracurricular activities, such as crafting, when the women experience a bad day, these activities can easily be neglected and set aside for a better time. Animals cannot wait for their companions to have a better day; they need their caretakers now. The immediate needs of the animal are one of the reasons why so many of the women associate the PAP with providing them a new purpose and focus. Many of the women that have experienced
those days where they could not get up from bed. The animals not only depend on their companion caretakers to get up, but served as a good reason to begin each day with a purpose.

Emma echoes Nora’s experience suggesting that in caring for her dog, she also finds a newfound reason to get up:

So, before the program I’d be depressed and be blue and I would sleep till 12. Get up and munch on a big bag of chips. That kind of stuff, just kind of... and you don’t have time with a dog. I still have to get up at 7 in the morning to let my dog out to go potty. I still have to feed him; I still have to let him out and play. I can’t just wallow in my cell. I got somebody that needs me. They need us! They give you a kiss and wake you. Before maybe I just didn’t want to talk to anybody because I didn’t trust anybody with how I was feeling, just to unload on them, but with my dog, he listens.

She continues:

I know that when I get a dog, even though I want to lie in bed all morning and just be depressed about myself and stuff like that, I couldn’t be. I had to get up, and even if I was in a bad mood, my dog was making me happy. When I feel like, oh, god this isn’t worth it anymore, he’s like, “Oh yeah it is! Yeah it is! Come to mama!” They’re really great. It’s hard to explain this relationship aside from the fact that they’re great! They’re happy. They’re fun. Their love is unconditional. It’s rewarding, it’s rewarding when they’re training, and watching them grow. When they do something, it’s instant gratification. You feel it right then.

Emma has served a little over 14 years before joining PPP. Before joining the program, Emma describes herself as depressed; she would sleep until noon and then get up just to sit in her cell to wallow. She didn’t have any motivating force or need to shake her out of the dark cloud. Now, after being the program close to 3 years, she has her (self-described) neurotic dog to keep her company throughout the day. However neurotic her dog may be, current or past, she receives good morning kisses, has someone that needs her, and has a constant companion that she trusts and to whom she can talk. Emma didn’t trust the other women enough to talk to them about her feelings, but she talks to her dog
and claims he listens. Emma’s dog provides her the companionship that allows her to feel that she has an empathetic ear—one that she can trust. Even when she is with her dog, she can’t allow her dark days to swallow her. She might want to spend all morning feeling bad about her or her situation, but her dog still has needs. She interprets her dog’s expressions and interactions as someone that recognizes her current mood and interrupts her bad mood and feelings of it not being worth it anymore with, “oh yeah it is” and pulls her out of bed. Emma uses the unconditional love she receives from her dog and his fun, happy, spirit and disposition to fuel her on her bad days.

Like Emma, Alexis has been in the institution for almost 15 years, but is new to the program, having participated for about 6 months at the time of the interview. Alexis also describes experiencing the drive, motivation, and focus the animals other women in the program have described, even after only a short period of involvement. She says:

Well, before I had the dogs, I didn’t have to get up in the morning if I didn’t have to. I didn’t have to plan my day. I didn’t have to do anything if I didn’t want to. But they [the dogs] give you reason to. They give you a reason to get up and be productive. Whenever you’re helping them, you’re helping yourself. And I’m not generally a person that sleeps in, but I’d probably lie around awake if I didn’t have a dog. “Okay, let’s go outside, go say hi to the officers and go have breakfast, go back out and go for a walk…” There are tons of things you can do, when you have a dog.

Alexis’ not so distant past included spending most of her days in her bed or in her room, with no reason to get up or be productive. Minus the required activities of an inmate, she had no reason to do anything. She even says that while she isn’t the type of person to sleep-in in the mornings, before she received her dog, she would lie awake in her bed. Now, with her dog around, Alexis finds the drive to plan her day, have room for activities, to be productive. Other than playing with the animals under their care and being left out of their cells to take the dog out for quick walks, program women don’t
actually receive any additional privileges in terms of the institution. They still need to eat on schedule, they still need to oblige to their custody level, keep to out of bounds locations (areas that are restricted to inmates), as well as of all of the applicable rules and regulations of the institution. These women are still vulnerable to receiving any minor and major infractions. So it is interesting when Alexis names everything she was able to do before as the “tons of things” you can do when you have a dog. It is almost as if the same mundane things, like walking outside or saying “hi” to the officers, are now enjoyable. Before joining the program, she would rather stay awake in her bed, than walk outside. Now, she does the same with her dog and it is fun and productive. The simple activities she has described as “tons of things” with a companion has redefined her situation. Alexis now frames these activities in a positive light, as “things to do.” As discussed previously, many of the women found similar new or renewed perspective of typical prison routine and how working with animals has increased their self-esteem for interpersonal relationships within the prison.

Nora attributes her purpose and reason to get up every day to her animals:

Like it’s brought me out of my shell more. It’s, you know, given me, I’m not trying to be dramatic, but it’s given me reason to, for some mornings, to get up. Because I have somebody else that I have to take care of, I have something else I have to worry about. I can’t just hide and think of myself. It’s given me a purpose to keep going every day…. It has changed me; it’s given me a purpose. Yeah, it’s given me purpose; it is the reason I keep going. And I’m not trying to me dramatic, but it has given me reason to keep going.

Alike the women discussed in this section and most likely many of the women not participating in a PAP, Nora sums up that the animals give her a reason to get up in the mornings. Nora claims several times that she isn’t being dramatic, to stress that there are days where she feels the weight of being in prison and her situation that she finds no
reason to keep going. She gets up, goes to work, eats, and sleeps—this is all she needs to keep the prison routine going in a cyclical patter. The hours and days blur together without much variety in activities or opportunities for socialization. Nora gives credit to her companion animal to for bringing her out of her shell, to have a reason to get up in the morning, to have a purpose. She notes that this new purpose has changed her; she has a cat that she has to care for and to worry about. This special cat gives her purpose and a reason to keep going.

Sam is currently serving a life sentence. While Sam may not be counting down the days like some of the other women, she knows that while she is caring for an animal, she can’t spend bad days holed up in her bunk. She says:

Just the way they look at you with their big eyes and you know that they rely on you for every single thing. So it’s like, you wake up and you just don’t want to do anything, [but] you’ve got these eyes looking at you, so you have to get up, you have to go outside. It’s pouring down rain, it’s snowing, you still have to go outside … It takes the place of having your kids with you in here. And they’re needy, they’re demanding, they’re everything all wrapped in one! But they make it worth it.

Sam has been in the program for about 2 years at the time of the interview. A large number of women have in some way experienced days when they just didn’t care about anything. They didn’t want to go to work, they didn’t want to go out in the yard, and they didn’t want to get out of bed. However, working in a PAP, while they may still have those moments, they couldn’t acknowledge them—not when they had a dog that still needed to go potty, get fed, and need love and affection. Sam says that she just looks into her dog’s eyes and knows that she has responsibilities toward this dog. She needs to fulfill her role as a caretaker and “get up and go outside.” She describes the needs and demands of caring for her dog as reminiscent of caring for her children. This is another
important condition for the women in prison. Many of them are mothers who are without their children. For the women that have been separated from their families and their children, these animals fill the gaps imprisonment has creating in their mothering instinct. The dogs create a surrogate family situation for program women can once again care for living creatures that are dependent on them to learn, for love, and for support.

Nearly all of the women interviewed reported the experience of receiving a renewed sense of purpose from participating in the program. Why is it that these women now have a newfound purpose? There are other jobs in the prison, and there are other things toward which the women can look forward. Some of these women have families, or even their own children, outside of the prison from which they can derive a sense of meaning and focus. A new sense of focus may be derived from the PAP which combines vocational skill and animals. Through the PAP, the women in the program can experiences a newfound purpose through: socio-emotional motivation, pseudo-parent-child relations, marketable job skills, and unsanctioned physical contact.

It is important to remember that in the state of Washington, there are two prisons for women, WCCW and Mission Creek Corrections for Women, a medium-security prison. For all of the women that have been convicted of a crime in this State, they are remanded to either WCCW or Mission Creek Corrections for Women. These two prisons are separated by about 40 minutes. This means that all female imamates are relocated to this area. Not all families, children, partners, can make the trip to the facilities—and even if they do, it may not be frequent enough to maintain healthy connections and relationships with partners, children, and family. So what is it about this program that gives the women in the PAP “a reason to go on?” The PAP in this institution is impactful.
in several ways—in one work assignment; the women are exposed to responsibility and useful vocational skills in their job (grooming, boarding, training, and the daily care of the animals under their watch); they’re involved in community service (boarding/grooming community animals, training dogs to be paroled and adopted out, training dogs, and training dogs for service to those in need); and they receive animals to care for (a creature that provides unconditional love, a companion to trust, to talk to, to hold). All of these features come from one PAP. A low level job such as laundry, custodial, and kitchen jobs rarely provide any of the benefits and skills described above. For these women, the menial jobs can contribute to the purposeless days, where other than having to work to meet prison regulations, they don’t have any desire to perform well or be proud of their work. There are a few other high level jobs comparable to PPP, however, it may lack the lasting emotional component that animals fill. The presence of animals provides healing to those in the program as well as the correctional staff and other incarcerated individuals.

**Fostering Relationships Inside the Prison**

Undertaking healthy relationships inside a prison can be a difficult task. The inherent mistrust in others gives pause and hesitation when forming relationships with other inmates (Greer 2002). Further, as incarcerated women present their front-stage self by managing their emotional display, inmates may still distrust one another because they may perceive their emotional display as disingenuous which engenders suspicion (Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1979; Rosenberg 1990). Unlike male prisons, aggression in female prisons is relationship-based—women use rumors and gossip to sever relationships and ostracize others (Trammell 2009). Given these obstacles in fostering
relationships with other inmates, the women in the program discuss how the PAP and the animals assist in interactions and relationships.

Animals have a unique quality in that they are often catalysts for conversation for the people around them. While people can often walk around urban and suburban environments without interacting or socializing with others, that same person may encounter brief interaction or conversation from strangers if they’re walking with a dog. Strangers may look to the dog, talk to the dog, ask about the dog’s breed or his/her name, or ask to touch the dog. There is something about companion animals that calls our attention and promotes small and quick bursts of interaction. Dogs in particular are around their human companion’s on a short leash; because of this they’re different from their human counterparts and easily noticeable. Human beings can spot animals in a crowd of other people very quickly. These animals lure people into conversion; give people something to talk about who otherwise would have little in common, especially among strangers. They could have had companion animals when they were a child, as an adult, or have always desired one.

*Can I Pet the Dog?*

In a large prison compound, the program animals have the same effect on others; the animals assist in bringing people together as well as cultivate relationships with their physical presence. Most if not all of the women in PPP are paired with roommates that are not in the program. Inmates do not get to choose their cellmates, even if they are participating in a PAP. The program only gets involved in room assignments if the roommate is fearful of animals, allergic, has crimes against vulnerable populations (including animals), or overall if they’re not a good fit to be living with animals. Even so,
this doesn’t mean that the new roommate is handpicked by the program staff. Fostering relationships with other women while incarcerated can be tricky; women in the institution are often weary of others, and sometimes even their own roommates. Depending on individual schedules, some women may only see their roommates during “count” and when their roommates return to the room to sleep. It is quite possible to have a roommate that is always in the room, or never in the room.

Given the uncertainties surrounding these women’s schedules, they may have limited opportunities to develop rich relationships with their roommates. Some women may get along with their roommates like family or become good friends; others may simply co-exist with their roommates, or just tolerate them. Some of the women interviewed spoke about their relationship with their roommates and attribute the good relationship they have with their roommates to the presence of the animals that live with them. Fortunately, with one PAP member, both women live with animals. Having these animals gives them something to talk about, something do, something to touch and hug, watch, and play with.

Tory, an advanced trainer, has a program dog and an elderly cat that lives with her and her roommate. For Tory and her roommate, the animals are frequently topics of conversation.

It gives you something to talk about; it’s good. I think it bridges the gap, when you work down here, your day is full unlike a life without this program, living in the unit being a janitor and you’re in that unit all day or you’re in the yard. So you don’t have a lot to do or occupy your mind or talk about. Like here, I can talk to you about these animals…. And so when I get home, talking to the roommate is not about drama that’s going on in the prison: who went into the hole, who did this, she’s crazy, and this officer quit, all of this stuff, which is all negative. That just sucks the life right out of you. But if that’s the only feed you’re getting [and] you’re not getting out of the unit, it’s tough. It’s worlds apart and so being able to give someone some of that, I think is, I think that we all try to do that with people.
Tory’s life in PPP is 24/7. All of the women participating in the program with an assigned animal are responsible for the care and continuing training of that animal day and night. Tory believes that the animals give her and her roommate something positive to talk about. That talking point, the animals, the clients, or the job, allows Tory to connect her full life in the program with someone that is not. Being able to talk about topics other than prison gossip is important to Tory; she brings it up a few times throughout the interview. Tory prefers to return from work and talk to her roommate about something positive rather than the latest rumor mill or the daily drama, which she describes as negative that “sucks the life right out of you.’ She wants to talk about something lighter. Tory depicts her life in PPP and the lives of those in remedial work assignments as being worlds apart. Knowing this, she tries to share part of her world with her roommate and others in the living her unit.

Like Tory, Sam also has a program dog and cat living with her. Here she talks about how the animals have affected her relationship with her roommate:

They [the animals] provide a bonding element to your roommate and relationship too. Cause they live there, it’s like they’re theirs too. It almost makes it into a little family unit in a way. As corny as it sounds, I don’t think my roommate and I would have as a good relationship if the animals weren’t involved. It’s a common ground; it replaces something for her as it does for me, not being with her kids and with her family. You know the cat sleeps with her every night? She’s got something with her up there and I’ve got the dog down here with me. It fills a void. Our relationship would be a lot different if we were roommates and the animals weren’t there.

Sam has a good relationship with her roommate, though she gives that credit to her animals. By having the animals in the living unit, they’ve added something to bring the two women together, something to bond over. While Sam bears the responsibility of her animals’ welfare, in essence, the animals have become her roommate’s as well. They all
live together—the four of them are a “little family”, she says. Some women in the PAP have reported how they are now able to tap into their mothering role once again through the animals they’re charged with. This is the case for both Sam and her roommate. The animals “replace something” for both Sam and her roommate, both women not being able to be with their children and families. Both of these women have animals to care for, to give affection to, and to be loved in return. They both live with these animals, and Sam’s roommate is able to receive some of the benefits from the PAP without being directly involved in the program. Both of these women have something to bond over and they each cuddle up with an animal when they sleep.

In addition to how the animals have influence her relationship with roommate, Sam also describes how the animals affect her daily interaction with others.

I [used to be] closed off with people. What’s the word I’m looking for… I guess I’m more open to people I don’t know when I have an animal. Because they’re always like, “hey, can I pet the dog?” So I’ll start conversations with people that otherwise I would have never spoken to. [Interviewer: You socialize?] Yeah, social, that’s the word I was looking for, social. Well, when you don’t know somebody and you have a common denominator: they like dogs, you have a focal point to start a conversation, it’s easier. I mean if two people are at a bar, they can talk about drinks. It’s just, animals bring people together.

Sam has spent numerous years in the institution and is currently serving a life sentence. Reflecting back, she shares how she has been closed off with people but now, she carries conversations with people that she’s never spoken to before because she is walking with her dog. Rather than walking from point A to point B unnoticed, program women walk the same route with a dog on a leash. In between their destinations, people will stop them to ask about the dog. Like Sam reported, “hey, can I pet the dog?” Other women see the animal and are excited about their presence. Sam talks about how now that she has a program dog, she’ll have conversations with people that she never would have spoken to
or even strangers. With a simile of strangers at a bar discussing drinks, strangers in this institution can discuss the animals. With her dog by her side, Sam socializes in a new and different way. Like she says, “animals bring people together.”

Caitlin takes in long-term boarding dogs while getting trained and acclimated to PPP. Long-term boarding dogs stay with women in the program in their rooms rather than the kennels. Like Sam, Caitlin comments on how the animals facilitate interaction with other people. She says:

Everybody's like, “Oh you have a dog! What's his name?” It's just the way it is; people are drawn to animals. So yes, I say forced but it doesn't feel forced, but it is forced in the sense that I wouldn't be interacting if I didn't have a dog at the end of a leash.

People are drawn to animals—Caitlin calls it “forced” interaction even though “it doesn’t feel forced”. Though in a way, it does seem “forced” since neither of these women would be socializing or engaging in conversation if it weren’t for the dog. People see the animal first and the person holding the leash second. They instantly see the dog and want to know about him or her by engaging in a conversation with the woman with the dog. In a way, the animal “forces” the humans around them to socialize. Ellen further elaborates on what it is like for her when she walks around with her dog:

It’s cool to have a dog and have them do stuff and everyone likes to see them, you know, stuff like that. You become a popular person when you’re walking around with a dog and everyone wants to see them. It’s just nice having them around. Dogs are icebreakers, it’s just something people do, when people see a dog and say, “hi, how are you doing, what’s your dog’s name,” maybe they’re conversation starters, “hi, can I pet your dog,” you know, stuff like that. Because you know, when I’m walking around, people don’t come up to talk to me, but when I’m with a dog, “oh, what’s your dog’s name?”

Ellen describes the kind of attention she receives when she walks around with her dog. She says that you become “popular” walking around with a dog—people want to see the
dog, they want to touch the dog, maybe see the dog do some tricks. Interestingly, Ellen has been in PPP for 7 years, she has been seen with animals both cats and dogs longer than any other program participant. She describes how other people will flock to her or engage in conversations with her about the dog, but she also says, when she walks around alone, people don’t come up to her. This shows how powerful the presence of an animal is for these quick bursts of interaction. Perhaps seeing the person that they know care for animals is not enough to break people out of their daily routine. The animals themselves act as stimulants for interaction and conversation.

*Everything is Different*

PAP participants discusses their relationship with the staff and how that experience is different from other jobs that they’ve held in the past. Unlike how the animals have assisted the women in building relationships with other women, here, it isn’t about the animals. The women recount their experience in the program, their relationship with the program staff, as well as other prison staff. Being trusted enough to care for boarding and program animals was a running theme during the interviews with these women. The endowed trust and being given these responsibilities gave program women a sense of normalcy, similar to holding a job in the outside world. Even in the prison environment, they leave their assigned areas to go to work, they have an animal in the room, the staff talk to them about “outside” life rather than prison life and, most importantly, the women feel that the staff trusts them and treats them like people rather than felons or inmates.

As a new member of the PPP, Caitlin describes how she is now entrusted with the care and wellbeing of someone’s companion animal. At this stage in Caitlin’s training, she takes in long-term boarding dogs and cares for them in her living unit until the family
returns. During our interviews, I asked her what she liked about taking in long-term boarding dogs and her response focused on the responsibility that comes with caring for an animal. She talks about the confidence she gains by being endowed with trust by the program as well as the prison staff. She described in our discussion what she valued about participating in the program, and stated directly:

The accountability and the trust of taking care of somebody's pet. And even more so, that your boss allows you to take one of the animals home, that's like even more trust, and to have him so long in my room, nobody comes over and checks on me, they know I'm communicating with him, they see me in and out with the dog [Conner], so — it's just — I don't know, the responsibility that went along with having him, I guess. Just the way these animals interact with you, they build your confidence.

Caitlin speaks about how she is trusted with caring for someone else’s dog, Conner. Caitlin temporarily lives with Conner until his parents return. Other than training Conner for obedience and service, Caitlin cares for this dog 24/7 like a program dog. Though Conner has a home, Caitlin is responsible for everything—neither the program or prison staff check in on Caitlin in her room to micromanage her. She is trusted and held accountable. The responsibility and the trust that the program, prison, and the families that leave their animals with PPP extend to each program women is what Caitlin likes about this job. Additionally, she states that interacting with the animals help build her confidence. With the increase in confidence of knowing that she has taken good care of her boarder, she states that she’d want Conner’s parents to know that he had a good time. That if Conner could speak, she’d want him to say that his “human was good” and that they’d want to come back to PPP so that Conner “can be back into [my] room.” Caitlin wants to make sure that the boarders that she takes in feels at home when they’re away from their parents.
In order for the PAP to function successfully, trust is an important and necessary feature. The women must be responsible and trusted to care for the animal at all times. Caitlin continues to talk about being trusted by the PAP and how it gives her hope for the future:

I guess the whole label of being a violent felon … that fits on paper because I've been convicted of violent crime. It fits. But that's not who I am, and so to come into this program and to see opportunity and to not feel labeled by my bosses in any way, or I don't feel like any of the volunteers look down on me, it gives me hope for when I leave.

Caitlin is in prison for committing a violent crime and that label may follow her throughout her entire life. She talks about how, “on paper,” that description matches her conviction, but that’s not who she is. While she is still in prison serving her sentence, the program staff doesn’t make her feel like a felon. She is able to put effort into learning and caring for animals without feeling like she is being judged for her crime. Caitlin has mentioned that one of things she likes about the program is that the program trusts her enough to care for animals. The program trusts her enough to take someone else’s animal home with her. Caitlin finds hope for her future outside of prison from how she is treated by members of the PPP community. The families that happily bring their loved companion animals to be cared for in the prison, the volunteers of PPP, who don’t look down on her or focus on her label of “violent felon.” With the stigma of being a felon, Caitlin concerned herself with the plight of the discredited (Goffman 1963). Knowing that her stigma is readily evident. Despite her stigma, she experienced positive relationships with the PPP community. Through the PAP, she gains confidence with working with animals as well as confidence in herself—she is able to think about herself as more than a felon, that she is someone to be trusted.
Sam reports a similar experience with her relationship with the staff. Having already served over 20 years in the institution, Sam has held several work assignments. She mentioned very briefly during our interview that she has worked in the kitchen in the past, just quick enough to express the difference working in a PAP. Sam states that through the program, she experiences normal routine and is not treated as an inmate. She continues:

In this job, the bosses here, they treat us like people. They don’t, we’re not talked down to, we’re not screamed at, yelled at, you know, there is a level of respect unlike what you get with the prison staff. It’s a different new environment all together, you walk in and take a big breath and relax…. You’re treated like people, not like you’re in prison and it makes a big difference in the morale and the work you put out. People work down here because they care about what they’re doing and the animals and if you’re treated well by your bosses, all the better!

Coupled with what others have said about the staff trusting the women and providing some autonomy in their work, Sam states that staff also treat her and others like people. Sam considers PPP a whole different place, separate from the prison—a place where she can relax. She cites that working in PPP, the staff doesn’t yell at the women, talk down to them, rather they treat them properly and with respect. Neither Sam nor the other women discusses what it was like working in remedial jobs much. Sam mentions here she was treated like a person, with respect, and spoken to rather than yelled at. Additionally, she and other women mention frequently that the program gives them somewhere to go—PPP’s facility is not far from the building in which these women live. Other than jobs that require you to stay in the living units, like a janitor, other jobs like the kitchen or laundry would also give these women a place to go to work. It is as if the women are not speaking of a physical space, rather they have a mental space where they can go to escape the
typical prison routine and environment. This mental space can be a safe haven for the women to work, in a job they care about in a place where they are treated like people.

Sam continues about the job and the money she makes:

We make a little, but more than the other prison jobs, so we’re able to buy a little extra, we leave our areas, go to a separate area for work every day. So it’s like a normal routine. We’re not treated as inmates over here. It’s just, we’ve got it really good in this program and the animals are just a bonus.

Working in PPP may allow the women to connect to the outside life. PPP does pay the women a bit more than typical prison jobs, they’re able to purchase personal items from the commissary, go to a separate area for work, are not treated as inmates, and are able to have animals with them at all times. It’s important for Sam that the job at PPP provides for a “normal” routine—this routine may be the one that most resembles responsibility and autonomy of a job in the outside world. Through this normal routine, Sam is able to resemble the prison environment, at least Monday through Friday when she is at work at PPP. Combining all the elements of the job at PPP, including the job, contact with volunteers, working with clients, being treated well by the staff, Sam identifies how good she has it; so much that animals, a known privilege in a prison, are considered as “just a bonus.”

Much like how Sam has perceived the difference in the work environment and the relationship between the PAP participants and the staff, Tory recognizes similar differences. She says:

You also have a different relationship with staff here, whether it’s correctional officers or other staff like kitchen staff, school staff, because you’re talking about things that aren’t part of the prison. Maybe the cook is bringing in their dog to be groomed tomorrow, ‘you know how I like it.’ So it opens up doors really, that you can relate to people and you can talk to people about something other than, who wants to talk about some bickering girlfriends? You know what, it gets, it’s much different. Everything gets different.
With her connection to the PAP, the dynamics of Tory’s relationship with other prison staff has changed. For Tory, rather than carrying conversations about what is going on in the prison walls, the shift has moved to focus on topics of the outside life. Rather than fueling the drama, Tory now able to have conversations with other prison staff about her animals as well as their own animals. The program and prison staff routinely brings their own dogs to work—sometimes they sit quietly under the desk to keep their companions company, or they come in to get washed and groomed.

Like the women have described above, animals make great conversation starters, even more so when the animals are your own. People can talk about their own animals repeatedly; they’re cute, they’re funny, they’re grumpy, etc. These non-prison focused conversations are vital for the women to bring a little normalcy into their routine. It’s not surprising that these animals spark conversations. Animals, particularly cats and dogs have captivated their human audience. We talk about animals; we take pictures of animals, and can collectively spend countless hours watching animal videos on the Internet. A quick YouTube search for “funny cats” or “adorable puppies” will generate thousands of videos and many of them have millions of views. For these women, with limited options for activities or socializing, or having something to talk about, the animals fill that space in a positive way. They encourage the women to focus on something positive rather than reproducing the rumor mill or discussing the drama going about in the institution. Tory describes this as one of the benefits of the program—the program allows the women participating in the program to live with animals as well as work in conditions where they can exercise autonomy and enhance new marketable skills. By bringing the animals home with them, their roommates, and in smaller doses
the other women living in the unit building, receives the benefits of having the animals around them—to see them, talk to them, touch them, and to play and laugh.

*They Love You*

Incarcerated or out in the free world, people with pets view the animals as companion animals; animals that provide companionship to their human counterparts. Companion animals are often viewed as part of the family, or together with their humans, they make up a family. These animals greet their humans at the door, watches television, sleeps with them; and in turn, humans have someone to care for (Beck and Katcher 1996).

Domesticated animals need continued care and they remain dependent on their human counterparts. This not only makes animals members of the family; they take on the role of children, children that never grow up. Both children and pets provide attention, love and affection, however, when children become independent, access to their affection has boundaries while pets remain consistent (Beck and Katcher 1996).

In a way, we are all part of a “family”—we have combinations of friends, parents, extended family, siblings, partners, animals, and children. The women in this study are part of someone’s family and many of them are mothers. While the present study didn’t focus on familial support or whether the women had children, through discussing the relationships and bonds with animals, the topic of family and children occurred naturally. A few of the women in the study self-reported that they had children, though approximately 60 to 80 percent of incarcerated women are mothers (Bloom and Steinhart 1993; Henriques 1996). Through their work in the PAP, the mothers in the program are able to care for another living being, having something to dote on, to feed, clean after, and to teach. Much like human children, these dogs are dependent on their caretakers.
Caitlin speaks about her relationship with her animals and what she gets from it:

Companionship, that unconditional bond. You know? Maybe a sense of worth because you have something to take care of, something to care for. Like maybe that motherly thing that doesn't always get fulfilled, like in my situation, it’s not getting fulfilled in my children, so to a small degree it's getting fulfilled through this program…. Like with kids, they look up to you, they rely on you, they trust you. So it’s the relationship that gets built. Since coming here I haven’t had any contact with my kids, so that’s like filling that role.

Through the PAP, Caitlin has had the opportunity to build a bond with her animals, which in turn, provided her with positive outlook such as a sense of worth and efficacy in caring for an animal. She reports that since her incarceration, she has not had any contact with her children. By caring for her animals, she is able to mimic some of that nurturing and caring role, the “motherly” traits, as Caitlin mentions. By bonding and living with animals, Caitlin is able to provide care to them as she would to her children in some degree. Like Caitlin, Alexis shares a similar story as a mother in prison:

Before I came to prison, I was a mother, I was sister, I had a whole huge family and you have this connection. Coming here broke that connection and I’m by myself. My family lives very far away, they don’t come and see me. You have this closer connection [with the dog] because you can’t have a connection with the inmates here, it’s not the same, you’re always on your guard, it doesn’t matter how long you’ve known them, you’re just always on your guard. At least I am, not everyone is, but I am. So this is a chance for me to let my hair down and be able to feel connected.

Both Caitlin and Alexis are mothers without access to their human children. These women have the role and identity of a “mother,” but do have their counter role, “child.” Through the bonding with the animals in the PAP, both of these women are able to apply the meaning of “child” to the animals they care for, allowing them to re-establish the role and identity of “mother” and exercise that relationship as well as feeling the connection of a “family.” Alexis describes the connection she had with her family, she was a “mother” and a “sister.” She had these identities and connections that was severed when
she arrived in prison. She is describing the process in which she was stripped of her support system and identity. Without her identity and the family connections, her sense of self has been mortified by the total institution (Goffman 1961).

Alexis cannot trust the other inmates in the prison enough to form the connection she had with her family, so she has a closer connection with her dog than other people. She is not weary of forming a close connection with her dog because she knows that she is able to trust him wholly. Alexis describes the relationship with her dog as a chance to feel the connection without fear, she can relax, knowing that she doesn’t have to constantly be on her guard, that she can trust this relationship. The ability to trust animals/ the inability to trust other inmates is a continuing topic. As Chloe states simply, “you don’t ever have to worry about them repeating anything you say to them.” The program women find friendship in their animals because they are able to trust them—they can talk to their animals and confide in them knowing that the animals will not (cannot) betray their confidants. Because women in prison can use information to harm others, by spreading rumors, gossiping, or even lying (Trammell 2009), trusting their animals to keep their secrets are treasured. Ellen elaborates:

They’re really kind of your best friends in here. I mean, they’re the ones you can trust. I mean, you’re in prison, and you know, my dogs are the ones I can trust, my dogs, my cats, I can trust them with everything. You can tell your dogs all your secrets, they’re not going to run and tell somebody, they’re not going to rat you out or they’re not going to run and tell something personal to somebody else or anything like that…. You can trust what they’re going to do all the time. I mean, they don’t have another agenda. People, you don’t always know their agenda. Animals, they don’t hide things.

The animals become best friends for PAP participants—they listen to their companions, hold their secrets, but another important trait, they don’t have any secrets of their own. As the prison environment equates to distrct in others, women hesitate to confide in others,
show emotions, or share their feelings with others (Greer 2002). Essentially, the animals’ inability to speak human language turns them into perfect versions of friends in an environment where other humans are not trustworthy. This limitation in verbal language allows the women to attribute that animals do not have a hidden agenda, nor do they use the information gained maliciously.

The women in the program account strong relationships with their animals. The animals are loved like children, they are trusted as confidants, and in return, they provide the women unconditional love. Every PAP participant cited receiving unconditional love from the animals they cared for. Animals are perceived to have the ability to see past any shortcoming (Flynn 2000), which is important for incarcerated women with stigmatized labels such as “felon” or “convict.” Women that receive love from their animals despite their label can increase self-worth and confidence. Sam shares how her dog helps her through a bad day:

You know, you have days where you don’t feel like you’re worthy of anything, or you just don’t feel like you’re up to par or you just feel like you’ve let people down, but with the dogs it just doesn’t happen…. Say you got on the phone and you got into a fight with your family and they’re just telling you that you’re worthless, saying, you’re in prison, and you know, you start to just think that way. But you know, you go back to your room and the dog is there and there is a look on his face, the compassion that you get from the animal, it makes you re-evaluate yourself: “I can’t be all bad, you still love me,” that kind of thing.

Sam describes how she can have a bad day and it makes her feel as if she has let people down. People, including her family, can make her feel “worthless” reminding her of the label of being a “prisoner.” However, she goes back to her room and just the look on her dog’s face makes her re-evaluate the weight of her label and stigma. She receives love from her animal, a product of the bond they’ve created and the positive emotional energy. She says to herself, “I can’t be all bad, you still love me.” Sam’s relationship with her
dog and the unconditional love he has provided her, shows her that she is more than her label, that the label doesn’t define her nor does it mean she is not deserving of love.

Emma shows how the unconditional love she received from a new dog let her re-assess herself in a similar way. Emma says:

Like this dog doesn’t trust anybody, has never been around people, scared to death of people, and he just came and snuggled with me. What do you say? I mean, what about you… if you were some bad person they wouldn’t do that, and he just came and gave me love. It’s just like being, it’s like being with somebody. And it doesn’t matter, that dog loves you. They love you, even if you feel like nobody in the world [loves you], your dog loves you. They love you.

Because the program takes in dogs that are rescued from pounds and shelters, the dogs and trainers must slowly work on building a relationship and create a bond. The striking moment for Emma occurs when a scared dog that hasn’t learned to trust her nor had the opportunity to bond with, snuggles with her. Like Sam, Emma questions her label, if she was a “bad person” why would this dog love her? The love the dog provided shows Emma unconditional love, that labels don’t matter.

Being in the program and having the privilege of interacting with an animal on a daily basis have an affect on the women’s relationship within the institution. Walking around with a dog promotes conversation and safe interaction with other inmates. It gives them something to do and talk about that is not negative. Further, the women report having stronger relationships with their roommates given that the animals live with them as well. Interestingly, relationships with prison staff became less about the animals, rather, that the women were trusted and treated with respect. This, along with the animals providing the women positive senses of self through unconditional love, helped the women combat the feelings of self-loathing due to their environment and labels.
Emotions

Through the relationship fostered between PPP participants and the animals they work with, the women have experienced emotional transformations in varying degrees. For many of the participants, the emotional changes correlate with the amount of time in the animal program. The most commonly reported emotional change included breaking down of the affective barrier the women had built for themselves in order to survive incarceration and their environment. With an eclectic group of program participants, ranging from seasoned trainers with several years of experience to a new hire of mere months, these women paint a comprehensive portrait of their initial exposure to the animals on through living with a companion animal for years. In this section, the women discuss the emotional changes they’ve experienced while working with animals.

In looking into the effects of animal contact on the wellness of patients that were institutionalized in a state hospital for the criminally insane, Lee (1987) poses five overall goals for implementing an animal program. One of the goals for a pet program is to provide inmates with non-threatening, non-judgmental affection\(^2\) (Lee 1987). Throughout the interviews with these women, the emotional experiences of the animals become synonymous with unconditional love. The experience of living with, caring for, and eventually bonding with, the animals chipped away at the women’s emotional barriers. The animals encouraged emotional transformations for the women by providing impartial friendship with love and affection without judgment.

\(^2\) Language has been changed from “patients” to “inmates” for the prison context.
Being Tough and Shut Down

During their interviews, many of the women spoke about the necessity of emotionally shutting down due to their environment. This may be attributed to the amount of time they’ve been incarcerated, to protect themselves to stay safe or, oftentimes, both. Participants spoke about maintaining an “exterior” that wasn’t true to who they were; mainly they reported being “macho” or putting up a tough front, disengaging, or shielding their own happiness. The women created these “exterior” emotions and/or personalities in order to show other inmates in general population a front that was different from their true selves. In Goffman’s (1959) world of theatre, the “exterior” is akin to the performances of the “front” stage, where the women act for members of the audience (other inmates in general population). As many of the women reported, incarceration can take an emotional toll, and can cause women to shift their emotional state to fit their emotional culture of the prison. For instance, Caitlin, a new program participant began her interview by recounting her emotional state when she arrived at the institution:

When I got here I was really very angry and so I was in and out of segregation for quite a bit and I don't think I really started focusing on the program until about three years ago. My first two years I couldn't get my mind around it, even though I saw the dogs, but then when I got moved down to MSU [medium security unit], I lived in CCU [closed security unit], so when I got moved over to MSU where the dogs are, then it all started making sense. Then I had somebody ask me to move into her room and she was in the dog program, and it was total enlightenment.

Caitlin initially responded to institutionalization with anger, as she states, being in and out of segregation. What is interesting in Caitlin’s experience is that, even though she was aware of the animals on campus when she came out of segregation, she didn’t consider joining PPP. Possibly due to where she was at the time emotionally, she neither
considered nor pursued the program. She says it wasn’t until she moved in with a PPP participant that actually brought her awareness to animals. This was the moment for Caitlin, she says, it was “enlightenment.” When asked about what was “enlightening” about living with animals she says: “I didn't realize how shut down I was until I came to work here. So I've been down going on six years, and I've only been here like five months, and so I feel really raw just being in the program.” Caitlin describes the anger she felt when she first came to the prison as clouding her ability to notice the animals and the program. However, when she finally started to interact with her roommate’s animals and getting into the program herself, it made her aware of the emotional barrier she had constructed as a result of her incarceration. Interacting with animals helped Caitlin realize that she was “shut down.” With years of being “shut down” and not accessing who she is or how she feels, the program has pushed her emotions to the forefront. Caitlin has been in the program merely five short months, but this new experience has made her feel emotionally “raw” and vulnerable.

As a new program member, the emotional change Caitlin currently is experiencing, is something of interest. During the interview, Caitlin described being in the midst of this emotional transformation, unlike experienced or seasoned program members. Caitlin describes how and why she needed to “shut down”:

In order to get through day to day in this environment, you have to shut down. A lot of predatory type behaviors and people in the institution so, in order to not become a victim to that, I have learned that it's easier just to shut off. So... to come now into this program, to be with the animals, is not to be shut off, and so you're open and you're vulnerable, and it's not so easy to just shut down when I leave this place, to then go back to dealing with the humans.

To protect herself, Caitlin withdrew and shut down in order to survive her environment and the prison culture. From previous experience, she knew that avoidance yielded the
protection she needed from other inmates, though it comes at a price of needing to “shut down.” However, she now faces the challenge of being open and vulnerable, where she can’t wear the mask that she’s worn for years when interacting with animals. She finds the difficulty straddling the new “open” and “vulnerable” Caitlin to the one she is used to and prefers outside of the program, where she has to deal with the “humans.” What’s noteworthy here is that Caitlin is unable to stay withdrawn with animals like she was able to with humans. In order to interact with animals, she needs to be open, thus making her vulnerable in the broader prison environment. In turn, she describes her struggles going back to the general population of the prison, when she leaves the shelter of the program walls.

Like Caitlin, Alexis is also a new hire at PPP, the two joined the program around the same time. Similarly, Alexis is aware of the necessary barriers required to navigate the prison environment; however, this is still something that she to which she is still trying to get accustomed. Alexis explains her inability to open to others, the lesson she “never learned”:

I like to put up a hard exterior because that’s the environment I live in. And it seems like I never learned that lesson about extending myself out to people I shouldn’t. Like, I’ll have a relapse maybe once or twice a year, and it’s like, darn, why did you do that? I just don’t like being taken advantage of, but I like to help people….

Alexis’ experience with her “hard” front is consistent with responses from other program members as well as other inmates that have discussed the need for emotional barriers. “Hard” fronts are necessary in the prison environment due to the inherent mistrust in others, thus, many incarcerated women are weary of forming close relationships for fear of manipulation or betrayal (Greer 2002). Relatedly, in male institutions, prisoners put on
bravado and aggressive fronts to shake signs or associations of weakness or femininity (Crewe 2014). Given the environment she lives in, Alexis puts up the “hard exterior,” a front that she has built to protect herself, to ward off being taken advantage of. However, even with the intention of upholding the barrier, Alexis finds herself relearning this lesson in not extending herself to others. Based on her desire to help others, Alexis ends up getting herself in trouble, being taken advantage of, through her involvement with others. The repeated relapsing troubles her. She elaborates her discomfort:

It makes me crazy because I don’t want to turn into some softy, but I probably will [cries]. I’ll have to revert back to my soft nature and I don’t want to do that. I think it’s okay to be like that in some places but in here you can’t, it’s not safe. When I first got here I had to learn a lot of lessons about being taken advantage of and that wasn’t good. But now, I know better. I can’t believe I’m getting upset. Darn it, it’s kind of making me mad! Probably because I never talk about myself. I think I need to go back to being in touch with my feelings, I just don’t know…

During the conversation, Alexis became distressed when going deeper into the discussion on becoming “soft,” knowing that even though she recognizes the risks in extending herself, working with the animals will eventually make her a “softy.” Alexis reiterates the dangers of having a “soft nature,” and that she’s on the path of returning to it while still in prison.

Among all the conversations with the women, the interview with Alexis showed the greatest internal conflict—like other members of PPP, new or continuing, Alexis reported similar traits in the emotional changes she’s experienced since joining the program. However, she was the only participant in the study that exhibited worry and doubt in the changes in spite of her understanding of its positive effects. Though Alexis revealed how much growth she has experienced in the short time she’s been with PPP as
well as her love for the animals and the program, the emotional growing pains of participating in the animal program having an impact.

Contrast to Alexis and Caitlin’s newcomer perspective, Emma, having been with PPP for several years, reflects on her own feelings at the time she joined the program. She has gone through similar transformations and held comparable reservations regarding the program:

At first I think I didn’t join because you kind of have to keep that wall up, some kind of macho-ness or toughness you know, and I just wanted to keep that. But these guys [the animals], these guys are like our kids. Yeah, they’re our babies. So you get attached to something and they leave and it’s over! You’re crying and sobbing and… it’s ugly. With snot rolling down our faces.

While Emma had been in prison for over a decade and had knowledge of the program’s existence, she purposely didn’t join, knowing that being in the program meant that she could not maintain her “emotional wall.” Many of the women have described such need to build up their “macho” or “tough” wall or front when incarcerated. As Emma states, she wanted to keep her “macho-ness or toughness.” This type of emotion work, managing or acting to change an emotion or feeling, (Hochschild 1979) is necessary in this environment, particularly for safety. Either they practice this emotion work to avoid being preyed upon, or to be perceived as someone not to be messed with. After years in the program working with animals, regardless of wanting to keep any emotional wall, Emma shows her vulnerability openly. She has gotten so attached to her animals that they’ve become her “babies,” and now when her dogs are ready to leave; she is in an emotional state where she can openly cry without discomfort. Perhaps she is able to show her vulnerabilities openly without fear or reservation knowing that she is at PPP—the designated area for the program. The program building is akin to Goffman’s (1959)
“back” stage, where Emma as a performer can “step out of character” and allow her suppressed emotions or feelings to emerge (p. 112). At this stage, Emma no longer keeps the “macho” front a priority.

Like Emma, Alexis can already reflect on some positive changes she has experienced during the short time spent in the program. Despite the earlier discomfort of shedding the walls she has built, she believes it has helped her. Alexis describes:

It’s helping me be a better person I think. And maybe they’ll help me to... I just think when I get out, that my family will have a hard time relating to me. Because I feel like I have a hard time relating to them. So maybe the animals will help me in that aspect, not to be so guarded [laughs]. One of the officers came up to me and said, I never see you smile, ever. And you know what I said? I said, “I have back problems so you’ve probably seen me in pain.” Which at the time I did, but that wasn’t the truth.

While Alexis mentioned her frustrations and her discomfort with the idea of becoming a “soft” person, she does acknowledge that it has changed her in a positive way. She explains that being part of the program and working with animals has helped her become a better person. Alexis is excited by the possibility of the animals helping her to become less guarded. This was important to her as she laments the distance she has with her family due to the time she has spent away from them. Unfortunately, not only has the physical distance between her and her family affected her relationship with them, she fears that she will not be able to relate to them due to her time in prison. She hopes that the changes that she’s experiencing with the animals will aid her in relating to her family. Being guarded and protecting her inner emotions is something Alexis is still actively working on, as she quickly admits to the “lie” that she’s told regarding why she never smiles—that she has back pain, though that wasn’t the reason. For Alexis, at the time,
lying about why she doesn’t smile was easier and simpler than reaching into her true feelings.

Even so, with everything she’s been through, Alexis continues to speak about how the animals have helped her become a better person:

Already it has made me more caring. Actually, it’s bringing me back to who I was before. It’s funny how you don’t want to let go of something you build so hard for; it’s kind of funny. I haven’t really talked about it, just thinking about it because it’s been coming up a lot lately, so I probably have to deal with it. Being so hard. Maybe I should lighten up a little. I guess it bothers me more than I thought. [Interviewer: Loosening up?] Yeah, just everything is a matter of fact: don’t get emotional, don’t get attached… Yeah, I’d have to say this program is ruining that for me [laughs]. I’m being turned back into a softy. When I first got here, my roommate told me, I was a lot meaner. I guess it just makes me nervous falling back to being taken advantage of. I really hate that. I really hate being taken advantage of; it’s so easy for them [other women in the prison] to do it.

Alexis struggled throughout the interview when recalling her history within the institution and the difficult relationships between herself and the other women. She has experienced “being taken advantage of” and truly feels at risk of being preyed upon again due to her new “soft” exterior. Being close to and working with animals has brought out Alexis’ caring role, the person she was before incarceration. All the while, even though she has become more caring and closer to the person she used to be, she still holds concern with the prospect of being taken advantage of.

Several of the new program members revealed similar challenges to what Alexis describes: the difficult balance between unveiling their old selves, in Alexis’ case, her “soft” self, and managing their current environment. Even though new participants struggle with the breakdown of the walls and barriers they’ve developed, those walls don’t simply disappear. Due to their current surrounding, the women still need to maintain some emotional distance, especially when the women return to general
population at the end of the day. Ellen, an advanced trainer with over 10 years of experience, speaks of this balance:

Some people I’m close to I become really empathetic towards, [but] in here, it’s a prison, so you learn to put up boundaries. I have pretty strong boundaries so maybe so much empathy, but learning to deal with my dogs helps me deal with people better.

Throughout Ellen’s time spent in the program, she’s learned through working with animals, to be empathetic and even get close to people. She further explained that through observing Megan, the staff trainer in the program, and by learning how to train the dogs, she learned to uphold boundaries, her emotional wall. She is able to compartmentalize and manage the emotions in the program space and the prison environment. Recognizing that she’s still living in prison, Ellen has erected strong boundaries, but with the education of training dogs and working with animals, she’s learning how to work with and manage her human relationships.

*Open and Vulnerable*

Eventually through working with animals on a daily basis and living with a program dog or becoming the caretaker for a boarding animal, the women chip through the barriers that they have been tightly built. This process can be witnessed through the new participants of the program and the history of those that have stayed with the program through the years. Chloe has been in the program for about two years now, and she recounts this experience:

I think that, I’m more aware, I may be more vulnerable, but I’m also a little more open. So in what I’ve learned in a lot of different ways, it’s better for me to maybe go through a hundred people that will never be in my life to find the one person that will be in my life always. So it’s opened me up.
During her time in the program, Chloe’s transformation included awareness—this awareness allowed her to be more open without resisting feeling vulnerable. This openness allowed her to interact with people on a deeper level than she used to. However, this was and still is extremely difficult for her, considering she has transformed herself once before. Chloe knew early on that she had to change, to build barriers based on her new environment for her own safety. Now, two years into the program, the animals have made her vulnerable. Chloe’s personal growth in the program allows her to interpret this vulnerability in a positive way. Instead of fearing this openness and awareness, she trades in those fears for the opportunity of bringing more people into her life.

Amber, a veteran trainer, has a similar experience to that of Chloe. After being in the program for almost five years, Amber has learned how to manage who she is in the when she’s in the program’s space, and how she presents herself in the prison environment. Though Amber may manage the two spaces well, she describes a different challenge:

“I’m more open but you have to be guarded, you have to in this environment… that is the survival mechanism. I’m able to be closer to myself here in the program than I can with I step out the door. [About being closer to who she is] Sometimes not so comfortable but a little bit vulnerable I guess, I think that the part that makes me feel so vulnerable is, it’s quite open how much I do care about the animals, it’s quite out there so that’s a vulnerable thing for me, for people to know that about me. Cause you can be hurt by that. That’s something that can hurt me, you know.

Amber describes how she is now more open, resembling more of herself, while she is in the program space, all the while knowing when to be guarded. Though, being open in the program, Amber describes how being herself comes hand in hand with vulnerability. Without the barrier she used to have, she is now open for people to learn more about her.
For example, she expresses the love for the animals openly even though she believes that knowledge may be used to hurt her. She is self-aware of these susceptibilities:

That’s why I feel vulnerable. It can be taken away from me for whatever reason. Putting a cap on how many years we can work here from, you know, if you do something wrong, you can lose your job, you know. So there are things we have to do to be able to work here and so, if for whatever reason someone decides to drop a kite [slang: correspondence or message while incarcerated] on somebody and say you know, you can be held for investigation for whatever. You can end up stop working here while all that happens and stuff like that. So it’s always a constant thought for all of us that we can lose our jobs at any moment.

In addition to feeling vulnerable due to other people knowing how much she cares about the animals and her job, Amber also feels uneasy with the idea that it can easily be taken away from her. Many of the women interviewed described their discomfort and anxiety over the rumored cap on the number of years one may work in PPP. Interviews with inmates and PPP staff revealed that the prison administration have discussed potentially limiting the amount of years an individual may work continuously at PPP. While no final decisions have been made, women that have already put several years into the program fear that with the employment cap looming, they may have already maximized the allotted time into the program.

Despite the rumored cap in employment, PPP has retained many veterans throughout the years. Even though Ellen is PPP’s most senior employee, she still struggles with vulnerability due to the attachment she feels to the animals under her care. Being in the program for seven years, Ellen keeps her boundaries up and tries to keep the attachments to her animals to a minimum. She describes a situation where she allowed herself to give in when she thought a particular dog, Riley, was going to be with her until he would be adopted out rather than get “rotated.” Rotation is a practice where the dogs are moved from one trainer to another so that he learns to be comfortable with different
owners. This process is done to reduce separation anxiety when the dog becomes paroled or moves on for service.

One thing that I don’t really like is, she [Megan, PPP staff] does rotations. I understand the rotation and why we have to do that, I understand it, but it makes it hard for me to get comfortable with a dog. I won’t let myself get too attached with a dog because I know that eventually he’s going to get moved. So that makes it really hard. The last dog that I got really attached to was Riley because she said that she was going to stop doing the rotations so I let myself get pretty attached to him and then he got rotated. [Interviewer: so you let your guard down a little bit] Yeah, and then he got rotated. You know, I really miss him. I found myself missing him the other day. He’s one of the dogs that went out with the VA [Veteran Affairs]. But yeah, so it’s like, I let my guard down and let myself get comfortable with him and then, bam! She rotated. Really?!

Ellen recounts her experience with Riley in disbelief. Interestingly, unlike newer women in the program, Ellen’s balance with vulnerability and barriers occur within the program rather than externally.

Women that are new to the program struggle with balancing the vulnerability they may feel with other women in general population. They’re uncomfortable with allowing others know that they’re experiencing happiness or attachment to the animals. Here, with Ellen’s experience in the program, she has learned to keep some barriers up with the animals themselves because they are likely to be removed from her care. Every dog that enters the program will eventually move on, either by graduating to become a service dog, sent to other training services (e.g., the military or local police), or being paroled and adopted out to families in the community. Dogs being paired to serve, adopted to a family, or even moved to other training programs are expectant outcomes. PPP women expect these outcomes and even desire them for their “kids.” However, being rotated has a particular sting for the women that care for these dogs. Ellen expands further:

Parole/adoptions, I like. Losing them doesn’t bother me so much because they’re going to be happy and have a good life. Of course I’ll miss them but I’m happy
that they’ve got a home. The rotation is really hard for me because I built a bond with them and then I have to break it, I have to break it with them here. I have it break it and I have to watch him bond with someone else. You become protective, kind of like a mom having to give up a kid, and then having to watch it! That’s hard for me…. It’s hard for me to watch my dogs with other trainers. It hurts a little bit when they go. You know when they get adopted out, I know they’re going to a good home... [With a rotation] They’re still here and like I said, I have to watch it. When you break up with somebody, it’s better to go your separate ways, watching them with somebody else is like self-torture.

Many of the women in the program consider bonding with animals as one of the benefits and privileges of the program. Ellen who, of all the women interviewed, has been a member of the program the longest describes how, at times, bonding with animals can be emotionally taxing in a different way. Most of us bond with the intent that the person or animal we bond with will remain within our lives. If the program trainers take on the role of a parent and their dogs the children, then understandably graduation and parole are the equivalent of moving out and getting married. Rotations are, however, as Ellen describes them, like losing your child to another parent and then having to witness it from a distance. The emotional effect in rotations are evident as Ellen describes how hard it is to watch her dogs bond with other trainers. As difficult as it may be to have to do this once, as trainers must go through rotations as frequently as losing an animal through graduation and adoptions. While graduations, adoptions, and rotations are challenging and may be one of the most difficult outcomes of a PAP, the women gain positive ways to cope with the loss. By becoming more open and accepting of vulnerabilities, the women can express their happiness and sadness with their animal’s new chapter at their second life.

Even though Tory is one of the veterans of the program and has several years under her belt, she still feels uncomfortable with feeling good. She says:

I don’t feel sad about myself, it’s a good thing I just, you know it’s like the bad things that happen to us, they’re just so ingrained and we’re so accepting of those,
but when you start feeling good or okay, it’s uncomfortable. It’s kind of hard to explain but it’s not a feeling I’ve known for a long time, it’s new, it’s fresh, and it’s emotional. I’m glad I got here, at this time in my life, while I’m here.

The women in prison experience a roller coaster of emotions, on top of that, women in the PAP go through changes from the program that can be difficult. Balancing the emotional changes from participating in the program with going back to living units and general population can be a difficult task. Tory discusses the discomfort associated with these feelings and by doing so, she reveals something that is just as uneasy. She says that the bad things that happen are so ingrained that it is something that women in her situation accept readily. However, when the sense of being okay or good feelings arises, that is when she becomes uncomfortable. All the while, Tory doesn’t let that discomfort keep her down. She says soon after that even though the uncomfortable feelings come with the good feelings and though it is emotional, she is still glad she started this journey. Learning how to manage emotions is an important step when faced with working to be more open.

Caitlin, is now more open then she used to be. From their interviews, it is apparent that women like Caitlin work very hard on their emotion work—they try at all times to present themselves to be cold, tough, or “macho.” The women are constantly working to perfect their words, presentation, and maybe even how they interpret interactions to keep up their mask. She says:

I get, a sense of responsibility. Self-worth. I get all those emotions tapped into that make us human. I'm not a person who shows my emotions a lot, but I do now, like if an animal I have is sick, I will cry, I will show the tears, where [before] I don't cry out in the day room for any reason, ever. You know, it's just not going to happen.
Caitlin attributes responsibility, self-worth, and emotions from her relationship with animals. These are important traits for individuals for personal growth, but what’s unusual is that Caitlin is learning and growing in a prison. Prisons are total institutions, where its objectives are to deface individuality and mortifying the self (Goffman 1961). Total institutions do not foster growth or learning. Prisons allow inmates to perform minimum tasks for their needs to be met. Inmates must work, but they don’t need to seek job assignments that carry personal responsibility. They receive meals, medical, and a place to sleep. By no means is prison a luxury, however, prisons primary function isn’t to foster individual personal growth. Unless inmates carry the driving force and motivation to grow while incarcerated, at its core, the institution cannot carry the burden of fostering each individual. In the short amount of time, despite restrictions and limited opportunities in prison, Caitlin has increased sense of self-worth, responsibility, and emotions that “makes us human” through PPP. Before she spoke a lot about having to be shut down or tough in order to survive the environment, now, she says that she will openly cry if one of her animals is sick.

“New” Happiness

How do you find happiness in a place that is barren of the things, people, and events that used to bring you happiness? For incarcerated individuals that have been systematically stripped of their possessions, identity, direct social/familial roles and ties (Goffman 1961), they need to reframe happiness—to a “new”³ happiness. If everything that once

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³ During the data collection period within the prison I learned about “new” normal. In this institution, new normal was the state of normal operations after an event. If there was a commotion that departed from normal operations or restricted movement for any reason, after the recovery period, the prison alerted the inmates and staff that the disturbance or restricted movement was over by indicating that the prison is now in new normal operations. One of the staff members explained, much like the physics of time, we move forward but cannot go backwards. Hence, operations are now “new” normal, rather than “back” to normal.
brought you happiness is no longer within reach, how do you find “new” happiness? For these women, it was through participating in a PAP. The program allowed the women to find happiness again with a job that increased their self-esteem, self-worth, responsibility, positive outlook, and by providing them with animals that gave endless unconditional love.

Alexis was pretty firm at the beginning of her interview that she didn’t want to let go of her tough exterior. She didn’t want anyone to know what she was experiencing or what she was going through. Even though Alexis expressed confusion and concern regarding the protective shell that she’s created to survive her environment, she weighs in on the resulting happiness she feels. She describes how little by little, her happiness peaks through:

They’re always making me smile. Yeah. They just make you feel lighter, like everything is going to be all right. I think that I’m still hard-nosed to not get attached at this point but I do think that when I do get a program dog that will… I’ll probably go into the showers and cry. [laughs] That’s where I go when I want to cry. My face is already red and wet, who knows what I’m going through! And I can cry very quietly!

Having spent time with animals, Alexis says that they always make her smile and make her feel lighter. Right now, Alexis works in the grooming room and takes in long-term boarder dogs, where they live with her in her unit. Going in knowing that you have a boarder dog than a program dog makes it a lot easier to keep from getting attached (though not impossible). When the women know that they have a temporary dog that already has a family, it is easy to just enjoy the time and to say goodbye. When they receive a program dog, an animal that they a responsible for in every sense, the attachment grows deeper. Knowing this, Alexis is already planning on where she’ll cry when her (future) program dog is either paroled or graduates. Alexis, at this moment is
still weary of showing emotions in public, plans to cry in the shower—where her face
will already be red and wet. Even though she is trying to keep her emotional distance to
avoid becoming attached, she negates this plan by resigning to that fate. She knows it will
happen, so until she is comfortable with visible emotional expressions, she’ll hide in the
shower. Since she mentioned that the animals make her feel lighter, and that everything is
going to be all right, I asked her if she believes interacting with animals have changed
her. She responded:

Yeah, I have to be nicer [laughs]. I know that it keeps coming back to that, but it’s
just kind of what it is. I’ve been trying to be the tough girl for so long and they’re
[the animals] dragging it out of me somehow. I just hate to admit it, but it’s true.

Alexis knows that she can’t be tough with the animals, they won’t understand why or
what is happening. So even though she has tried for so long to be tough, the animals are
dragging out the nicer person she has hidden away. Right after Alexis responded, I
followed up with her, asking if she believes she has become nicer. She simply responded,
“yes, because I’m happier.” Alexis reconnects with the person she used to be before she
was incarcerated. Maybe it is slight, but it is peaking through. Earlier, she shared how her
roommate thought Alexis used to be a lot meaner. In a short time with PPP, even though
being open and vulnerable by showing happiness or sadness is worrisome to Alexis, the
animals are now dragging out the nicer girl inside. Alexis is now happy, or at least,
happier than she used to be.

Caitlin joined the program around the same time as Alexis. Caitlin is receiving
similar comments from people she knows in her unit regarding her changing attitude. She
says:

Yeah, people say in the unit that they can just tell that the job has made a big
difference in my life. Just, I feel like I smile all the time now. I like that. I’ve
always got a dog at the end of a leash, that's why I'm smiling, because that's my focus.

With a new focus, and a dog as her new charge, Caitlin now has a reason to smile—and she smiles all the time now. This is a big change for Caitlin, especially after such a short time in the program. Earlier Caitlin said that she was very angry when she first arrived in prison 6 years ago. She had been in and out of segregation, and after several years of being shut down, she smiles. She smiles with a dog at the end of the leash, and she likes it. She goes on further by saying that even people she didn’t talk to have noticed that she seems a lot happier. She says that they’ll come up to her and say, “You seem so much happier since you got in that program, I’m so glad you’re in it!” She was excited to share this interaction; she was pleased that people in her unit and general population have noticed her new outlook. She beams afterward and says, “The benefits are huge.” Like Alexis, Caitlin does not yet have a program dog assigned to her. However, she takes in long-term boarding dogs. With long-term boarders, because the dog’s owners are away for long periods, they live with new program participants in their units. This is a win-win arrangement, as the dogs are not cooped up in the kennels and new PPP participants experience what it is like to live and care for animals day and night. Caitlin described how having a dog at the end of the leash gave her reason enough to smile and how people thought that she looked happier now. She continues, sharing what she thinks people are interpreting:

I think people thought I was angry, but I was just shut down. People say “You seem so much happier now.” Well, I don't know that I was unhappy before, but I was just shut down to that world. But now it's like you can't shut it down, it flows over, because now it's not just from here to this building anymore, now it's in my room, now the dogs are with me all the time, it's 24/7. So you can't shut it off as easily, yeah.
Before the PAP, she was shut down and had no reason to come out of her shell. She, like many of the women, have shut down to survive the prison environment. Shutting down emotionally was necessary for safety. Caitlin thinks that maybe people misinterpreted anger with what she was displaying emotionally to others. With her boarder, she can’t shut down her emotions. When she first arrived to PPP, she was exposed to the program, the job, and the animals of the compound—it was confined to that special building with the animals. Now that she has to care for the boarder dog daily, like a positive halo, the dog follows her to her room, to the yard, to this building to another. She is with her dog 24/7 like a program dog. She knows that she can’t just shut off her emotions with she is with her dog and now that he goes everywhere with her, she smiles. With that, people she knows and strangers alike, have noticed her new disposition. 

Women participating in PPP have found happiness as a new program member, getting to experience a dog in their living unit, how exciting it is, how it makes them happy and smile. After serving 14 years in prison and several years in the PAP, Emma continues to express her happiness. She talks about how much she has changed with the program:

It’s crazy to just say a sense of worth and a sense of this, but that’s all you can say. A sense. Because you sense it. My dogs make me smile. They make me feel lighter. They make, like, it could be the most oppressing day feeling the world on your shoulders, and I just look at my dog and just smile. When I talk about them right now, I feel happy, I feel joy. I feel happy. 

Emma’s sense of self-worth has increased. During our interview, she spoke frequently about how her the animals under her care makes her feel worthy, makes her feel like she is someone to be loved. Emma is lighter, smiles, and is happy. Just talking about the animals makes her feel joy and happiness. The weight of these women’s situations and
environment can be crushing. Emma doesn’t doubt how these animals make her feel. Additionally, she is aware that the presence of the animals in the prison itself has an effect on others. A person being happy may not stimulate happiness on others, at least in this environment, but it seems that the animals have the capability influence others. She says:

You know, our dogs make other people happy too, you know what I mean, if someone is depressed… its like, “Oh! Look at the dog! Can I pet the dog?” And then they pet, and it makes them feel better too. I mean, who hugs and touches them? Nobody. But you can just sit on the floor and just love your dog and hug your dog, and pet them.

There are close to 900 women in this prison. At the time of this research, only 17 women were in the PAP. Not counting the dogs in the kennel for temporary boarding, there are least 17 dogs and about 4 cats living with these women in the prison. Seventeen women are impacted by these animals daily, and each time they walk around general population with these dogs by their side, the effect others. We also know that because of the rules and regulations, these women cannot touch affectionately. So when women see PPP members with their dogs, they’re excited, happy, and bring out their “inner child.” Emma reports that seeing the dogs can lift people that are depressed or experiencing one of the oppressive days in the institution. The animals may even bring a little happiness or create a small smile. They want to see the dog, pet the dog, and perhaps hug the dog, as it may have been some time since they have last received one. Most importantly, non-program women can benefit from the presence of these dogs. They can talk to them, love them, pet and hug them. Even without being in the program, other women experience the effects of the positive energy of these animals.
Sam has a program dog and a cat under her care. Walking around with a dog and living with both her dog and cat, she attracts both dog and cat lovers. She reports how the animals affect the people near her, how seeing them puts smiles on their faces as they do on hers. She says:

You can see a total change in a person from before and after the program. The whole unit, when the dogs come in, everybody is like, “can I pet the dog, can I pet the cat, can I hold it?” It puts smiles, the best way to describe it is it makes everyone smile.

PPP participants all account a change when joining the program. Painful or slow, they all experience it. While the present study did not look into the effects of the animals on those that do not participate in the PAP, through the experiences of program members, we know that the effect spreads.

*Identity*

The women participating in the PAP have gone through different types of emotional transformations during several stages of their incarceration and PAP involvement. Bearing in mind that program women are in prison, they continue to manage their emotions based on the space they occupy as well as perform for the audience they’re near. In addition to the emotion work and role management, incarcerated women go through rigorous cultural change that affect how one views identity. Roles and identities can be developed through a set of meanings one applies to the self to define him or herself in a given situation (Burk and Tully 1977). When these women entered a total institution, the meanings they’ve attributed to their self abruptly became null and they were stripped of the identities they’ve cultivated on the outside (Burk and Tully 1977; Goffman 1961). Incarcerated individuals are forced to assimilate quickly into a new culture and their self is systematically mortified (Goffman 1961).
One of the ways the women go through this mortification of the self occurs upon entrance of the institution. For the physical or visual self, we use “identity kits” to maintain or manipulate the personal front (Goffman 1961:20). For the personal front, an identity kit may include preferences and styles of: clothing, shoes, toiletries, scents, makeup, hair color/tools, etc. Upon entrance, personal identity kits are removed and replaced with the institutional identity kit. Incarcerated women are provided with a uniform and basic toiletries. Makeup may be purchased in the commissary, though selections are regulated and purchases are a privileges dependent on money they’ve earned in the institution. An internal mortification of self occurs during the time spent in the institution; where individuals take must take on roles and identities that are foreign (Goffman 1961). The most striking being “convict,” “felon,” or “prisoner.” These are new roles and identities and are often understood as it relates to their counter-roles (Lindesmith and Strauss 1956), i.e., “not-guilty” or “free.”

The women in the PAP discuss their roles and identities as they’ve transitioned in various ways; when they were in the outside world, in prison, and in the program. Ellen talks about who she was before she was incarcerated. Ellen chronicles who she was before her incarceration, her transition in prison, and how training dogs have affected her. She says:

I owned my own business. It wasn’t a booming business but I had my own little business and I worked and stuff like that. I was somebody, doing something. And then you come in here and you’re like, “I’m nothing.” You know? And worse than nothing, because I’m in prison. I’m a convict. So when those things happen [learning that her service dog helped someone in need], it helps. It really is good for your self-esteem and stuff like that to know you’re doing something. It’s really cool.
The meanings Ellen applies to herself before incarceration is a version of counter-roles; before she was a “business owner” and now she is not a business owner, she is “nothing.” Ellen had a role and identity of business owner which was stripped from her once she entered into the institution. Furthering her mortification of self, she became “nothing” and received a new identity, a “convict.” Despite this severe change in her environment, role and identity, being able to train dogs knowing that they’re helping someone in need increases her self-esteem. Ellen says that she is nothing but what is worse than that is that she is a convict. The label of “convict” may be perceived as worse because of the stigma that is attached to that identity. As Goffman (1963) describes in his discussion of stigma, this can be attributed to the plight of the “discredited.” Given that Ellen is currently in prison, her stigma of “convict” is visible and evident. Knowing that others can easily identify her stigma yet she is able to experience “good feelings” and increase her self-esteem while serving time in prison is also important.

Sam has been institutionalized for over 20 years. She describes her self on an emotional level before she joined PPP and after. She says:

Yeah, after so many years, you just lose your— I don’t want to say humanity [but] when I got here, there was nothing. I lost that [caring and nurturing] part of me and I think that makes you cold in a way. So I think you do lose a little of that humanity, but with the animals, it brings it back. And so it just replaces what you’ve lost, it just makes you look at things differently again and you start to reconnect with people where you haven't been [before].

Sam has spent a lot of years in the institution. She recalls at first arrival, that there was “nothing” and that along the way, she lost something akin to “humanity” which she describes as her ability care and nurture. Living in an environment that fostered “nothing” emotionally and losing what Sam believes to be features of “humanity” are her emotional aspects of her modified self. After so many years of being cold, Sam shows how the
animals have effected her. It is evident that being in the program and working with animals daily have had a significant impact for Sam. She attributes gaining back pieces of the identity that she has lost from incarceration to the animals. Emma has a similar story, she has served almost 15 years and the time spent in prison has changed her:

I’ve been here a really long time so… I don’t want you to think I’m a shitty individual, I’m not, but when you’ve been here so long, you act different…. I was pissy, I didn’t want to hear anybody. I was rude, just to be honest. A rude individual, I didn’t have time for anybody. Then I started to work with dogs and it has slowed me down. I learned how to synchronize, I don’t get mad, I don’t get angry. I’m not saying that I don’t get mad sometimes. But I mean, I’m slower to react.

Like Sam’s account of losing pieces of her humanity, Emma experienced a shift in her identity in that she began acting “different.” Emma believes she became a rude individual that didn’t want to listen or have time for anyone. Through her work with the animals, she encounters another shift in her self, she is able to slow down and reduces negative reactivity. Both of these women have companion animals that may now be part of their identity kit—a positive supplement to the standard issue of uniformity. The women travel with their companion animals affecting how they engage their environment and the people in it.

Sam and Emma discussed how their selves have changed from being in prison vs. in the program. Nora reveals how she was stripped of her identity even before incarceration due being trapped in a different institution: an abusive marriage. Nora shares her story before prison vs. in the program:

I spent 5 years in a severely abusive marriage and I was not the person that came out of that that I went into it. Mental, emotional, physical, verbal, sexual, all of it. People didn’t even know me; I was such a different person. And no self confidence, no confidence, no nothing…. Having the dogs and working with animals has brought me back to the way I used to be, more out going, talk to people, you know, stuff like that. Because I didn’t for a long time. People say that
I had no self confidence whatsoever, and no self-worth. None of that. And it’s brought me back to realizing that I can do things, I’m not a complete failure with everything in my life where I believed I was. I believed that I was a waste of oxygen and a waste of space and this has brought me back to, no I’m not…. I’m not as bad as I was told I was.

Even before arriving to the prison, Nora experienced a type of mortification of self that occurred during her abusive marriage that seemingly continued into incarceration. The defacement of her role and identity during her marriage was so great that she reports that she became a different person that people didn’t even recognize. She had no confidence or a sense of self-worth. A few years in working at PPP with animals, Nora reports feeling more like herself before her abusive marriage—she talks to people, is more outgoing, and has realized that she can be productive. Combined with her marriage, Nora has spent more than 10 years in an institution that stripped her of the meanings she has applied to her self. Involvement in the animal program has provided Nora with a familiar identity, the one she attributed to herself before prison and before the abusive marriage.

*Emotional Energies*

Identity transformations among women in the PAP program have changed them on an emotional level, particularly as a result of their caretaking of the animals. As a result of the relationships program women have built with the companion animals, they meet the Collins’ (2004) five conditions of successful IRs. Upon successful IRs, emotional energies arise, culminating to positive feelings, such as confidence and social warmth. Given that the women engage in IRs with their animals in their daily lives as well as work (e.g., obedience and service training), the positive feelings that emerge can range from simply feeling happy to experiencing high self-efficacy. Emotional energies are particularly salient for incarcerated individuals because of the lack of trust in other
inmates, preventing continuation of successful IRs. Further, emotional energies can assist in quicker recoveries during bad days or troubling times.

Emma provides a good example of how her animals have helped her during extremely trying and challenging days in prison:

Sometimes, you can feel like you’re just not good enough for anything. You can’t ever do anything right. Life in here sucks…. Like you feel worthless. We’re in here, we’re away from our families, it’s shitty. Prison life is shitty, it’s not great. [But] I can have the worst day and my dog can do something and, you know, it gives a sense of accomplishment. How do you explain a sense of worth? It’s a feeling, it’s very hard to explain that. If I feel just crappy you know, I might not have any self-esteem that day, I just don’t have any self-worth a damn, I’ve been yelled at all day from the officers or, I’ve had bad run-ins with co-workers or roommates or the people down the hall, my laundry got lost, I missed chow, I missed movement, I missed my doctor’s appointment… stuff happens around here. I can literally feel like nothing. And I go home, and then I’m something. Because my dog makes me feel that way.

In describing the darker days in prison, Emma shows how being in the PAP creates fluidity in the mortification of the self. The institution has mortified the self, however, involvement in the PAP reshapes that mortification into the identity that the women were stripped of. Emma at times felt that she was not good enough and even worthless. Nevertheless, after successful IR with her dog (i.e., dog learning a skill), Emma experiences emotional energies via a sense of accomplishment and sense of worth. She continues providing numerous examples on how her day can turn for the worse, again, making her feel like “nothing.” Though, because of the established bond between Emma and her dog and the continued IRs resulting in emotional energies, her dog makes her feel like “something.”

Emotional energy can also emerge when interactants are not actively interacting. Many of the women that have bonded with their animals through previous successful IRs
can experience emotional energy by quietly sharing a space together. Sam describes this positive feeling:

I don’t know, it’s almost like it releases happy chemicals in your brain [laughs]. It releases some endorphins to know that someone is there and that this dog cares about…. I don’t know, sometimes it’s nice knowing that someone relies on you…. And then the affection that you get in the end. I think it would be just really lonely if to come home to an empty house and have nothing there…. Just looking at them makes me smile, just having them makes me happier…. It’s someone else in the room taking in oxygen and breathing. You’re not by yourself.

Sam describes the happy feelings that she experiences by just sharing a room with her dog. Coupled with the bond that she shares with her dog and the emotional energies she’s experienced in the past engenders similar positive feelings during low level of activities. Sam even feels happiness by just looking at her dog. The comfort that Sam experiences sharing a room with her dog, just breathing together is a point of interest considering that Sam is almost never alone. Sam lives in a compound with almost 900 women and shares a small space with her human roommate; feeling an empty space and loneliness without her dog is a significant example of her bond and positive effects of emotional energies. Sam describes types of positive emotions and how she is not alone with she is with her dog—that it’d be lonely and empty with out the dog. Similarly, Amber discuss the same emptiness without her dog:

You can feel the energy like when [my dog] was gone, it’s a naked feeling, it’s empty, it’s an empty feeling when they’re gone. And like if [my cat] were gone it would be just so devastatingly empty. They bring in energy, not just being there, there’s just an energy and love and desire to be with you, to interact with you.

Like Sam, Amber describes the naked, empty feeling when her dog’s not around.⁴ Both of these women are describing the happy and positive emotional energies brought upon

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⁴ At various points during a dog’s training, volunteers take them outside of the prison to train them in situations that cannot be mimicked within the institution. For example, learning to use the escalator.
by low level activity such as sharing a room. Amber further explains what goes on during these quiet times: the animal isn’t just occupying the same room, they bring in the energy and love. Amber’s ability to feel that her animals bring this energy of love is how she is experiencing the emotional energy from successful IRs, no matter the level of interaction.

Alexis provides another good example of emotional energies: feeling good and connected. The animals provide Alexis with company that produces positive feelings. She says:

It’s just, you have company, I think it’s like a spirit. Because they’re animals that produce energy, I think animals are nurturing in that way whether they want to be or not. Whether they know that they are or not. If they’re balanced animals, you can’t help but feel balanced because of their energy. And they’re responding to your energy, even if you’re not having the right energy, they’re responding to you with right energy…. It’s just nice, to be connected and there’s nothing bad, it’s all good. That is nice. Feeling each other’s energy.

Here, Alexis is not only describing the emotional energy she receives from successful IRs with her animals, she is recognizing that her animals are emotional beings. She describes her energy and how the animals respond to that with the “right energy.” Animals have been reported as empathetic creatures that are able to sense the emotions of their human partners (Sanders 1993) as well as sharing an emotional connection through shared history and IRs (Alger and Alger 1997).

The women in the program have all experienced a transformative identity shift before they were institutionalized. At the time of their arrest and their trial, the women experienced degradation ceremony which reduced their rank or status (Garfinkel 1956) which formally gave them a stigmatized label (Goffman 1963) such as “prisoner,” “felon,” and “convict.” Additionally, once the women enter the prison, they are further stripped of their remaining roles and identity (Goffman 1961). Due to the prison
environment, the women set up emotional “walls” and “barriers” to manage their emotion as well as performing their front stage for other women to be perceived as “tough” or “macho.” Through the work at the PAP and interaction with the animals, the women experience important effects. They are provided the opportunity to shed their hard exterior, to open up emotionally, gain confidence and knowledge that their labels and stigma does not define who they are, provide socio-emotional support, happiness, and experience positive emotional energies.

The Community: Giving Back and Second Chances

The overall mission of the dog program is not lost on the women that train these dogs, especially because of their direct and unique connection to the dogs and the role that the dogs will play in helping others in need. During the course of the interviews, the concept of “giving back to the community” through their participation in the program emerged naturally in the women’s responses, especially considering that it was not a question included in the interview schedule. In our conversations, the women expressed being driven by the idea of helping others, especially those that were in need. They were especially highly motivated by the idea that they can make contributions to others, given their incarceration.

Knowing where the dogs go once they have completed their training is something that many women acknowledged as being a specific source of pride. Throughout the interviews, these women consistently connected what they do to the concept of giving back. Emma starts the conversation of giving back by stating: “We give back to the community a lot in here. Like we’re, enriching somebody else’s life, we train, we have these dogs with us all the time and we train them and we give them to somebody that
needs them.” The program offers services to the public by providing their boarding and grooming services, but it’s the clients that receive these dogs that strike a chord in Emma. She elaborates by stressing how meaningful she finds the experience of giving back. She describes her experience in this way:

I might have done some crappy stuff but these people [the clients], I’m really helping these people, these people that have multiple sclerosis or grand mal seizures or traumatic injuries, I mean people who were in the war, we’re sending our service dogs over there. We’re really helping people, and to be able to really help people that really need help, in the position I’m in and where I’m at, that’s something. That’s rewarding right there. And when they get their dogs, if you ever saw the graduation, everyone is crying. It’s insane, everybody is bawling. Because, we’ve made that person’s life so much better. And we saved that dog’s life. And they saved ours.

It is the very idea of Emma’s dogs going to people in need to change someone’s life juxtaposed to her own life in prison is where she finds her reward. She describes the cycle of helping people that are really in need, and in doing so, she is also able to “save” that dog’s life. Through the program, the animals get a second chance at life and a renewed purpose, further, the quality of life is improved of those that receive these dogs. Whether it is working with the animal or being able to help someone in need through the excellent training of these animals, Emma believes that her life has also been saved.

Being able to help in this capacity is significant for Emma, given her position. She recognizes that she is in prison, having done some “crappy stuff,” but despite her environment, and regardless of what she has done in the past or the label she may be branded with, she is still able to help someone. Turning over a highly trained service dog that will enhance someone’s life that is in need is her reward.

Other program participants have reported specifically seeking out the program in order to give back. Tory explains why she joined PPP:
The fact that they’re going to enhance someone’s lives is what really got my attention and that’s why I wanted to find out about this place. Having a successful placement and enhancing that life, and that kid [client] went back to school and the whole nine yards. I just love this dog. I’m just going to cry when they leave. Very rewarding, I love him, and I respect that he was able to come out of this, because not many dogs could.

Tory interestingly shows the same sentiment between the client that received a service dog and the dog that reached advanced service training. She shows respect for the client for being able to enrich his life by going back to school with the assistance of a service dog, and respect for the dog to be able to fulfill that role by surviving such rigorous training knowing how difficult it is for dogs to advance to become a service dog. Ellen share her story of her dog’s successful placement:

She didn’t realize and she came out of the bathroom and she told me, ‘ah shoot, I forgot the light!’ and Max just went over and flipped the light right on for her which is really neat, and that kind of stuff is really neat to where you will know you’ve changed someone’s life. Especially when you come in here [prison], and you really kind of feel like nothing when you come in here.

Hearing the story of Max’s abilities through the client, living an independent life due to her service dog is not only rewarding to Ellen, but also gives her a sense of worth that was stripped due to incarceration.

This study never had the intent of discussing participants’ crime or why they are incarcerated. Participants were not asked about these topics during the interview. However, some opened up about their crimes on their own, and connected their participation in the program as a way of making amends for past, criminal transgressions. For example, Chloe describes the importance of the program and attributes her involvement to the specific nature of her crime. She says:

We not only board and care for other people’s animals, but we rescue. We rescue dogs off of death row, we take animals that nobody else wants and we care for them. And, mostly I think for me, it is so rewarding because of my crime. My
crime is, I shot, I paralyzed somebody. So it has an extra impact for me. So I feel proud of this program, and proud to be a part of this program. It makes a difference. We’ve made a difference; we’ve made a difference in people’s lives. I’ve done a lot of damage in people’s lives, so it’s the reverse side of the coin for me now. Now I get to do something good, I get to do something I love, I get to do something that somebody needs [cries]. I get to help somebody.

Chloe also finds importance in rescuing unwanted and homeless dogs and give them a second chance by training them. Chloe also discloses the result of her crime voluntarily, sharing why the concept of giving back to the community through this program is important to her. Having been in prison for over 20 years for shooting someone that ended up being paralyzed, she has the unique opportunity to contribute to the particular community tied to her crime. Having committed this type of crime, she now finds herself on the other side, working to train dogs for those in similar need. Getting emotional talking about getting the chance to help someone, that she can help someone in need.

Following the theme of helping someone in need through the training of high trained animals, Alexis shares that it gives her a good feeling being part of the program. She says:

Still helping someone whether it’s helping the animal, it’s helping me, or whether it’s going to help the person that the animal is going to. I don’t know, it gives me a good feeling. I think deep down inside, we want to be a part of something important and training animals to assist people that have limitations is exciting and it’s worthwhile and it’s worth working hard for.

Alexis describes that the work she does, in all facets, give her a good feeling inside. To be a part or something is important and the type of work this program allows her to do for herself and the community is worth the effort put into it. This sentiment plays a greater role in other parts of the interviews where the women use the focus on giving back to stimulate their work ethic and keep themselves motivated for self-improvement.
There are several aspects that make PPP a unique program. The program operates out of a prison, all of the animals are trained by incarcerated women, and none of the dogs are bred for service. Typically, service puppies are handpicked from several generations of dogs that are bred for the specific purpose of becoming service dogs. Service animals are bred for several desirable features including breed, intelligence, and temperament—it takes a very special dog to become service dogs. Rather than breeding dogs or purchasing puppies, PPP takes in rescues dogs from shelters and pounds. Transforming dogs that were unwanted, neglected, or abandoned for a second chance at life resonates with these women’s personal stories. The women participating in the PAP saw themselves in the dogs that were rescued by the program. Some have made parallels between the dogs from the pound to themselves in prison. Emma makes a direct connection between the dogs and herself:

These dogs didn’t have a chance; we got these dogs from the pound. Most of them are going to get euthanized. I’m in prison, I’m stuck here. This is my last chance, or however you want to look at it. They’re in the pound, I’m in prison, you know what I mean? We meet up, and what happens? I’ve not only saved their lives but they really saved mine.

Emma sees her situation in the dogs that she trains. She makes a connection between the pound and prison; in a way, she also finds connection to PPP as a second space, the physical location of where both their lives are saved. Like Emma the dog was in animal prison, choice less. Both Emma and the dog are brought to the program where they’ve worked together in saving each other’s lives.

Tory also noticed how similar the animals’ experiences were when they first arrive to the institution. She says, “Megan [PPP staff] brings some dogs in and they get here and they’re usually in kind of rough condition. So we get to know them [and]
they’re kind of getting to know us.” These dogs may have been in the pound for some
time, their pound experience as well as the circumstances that led them there contributing
to the dogs’ “rough condition.” Tory connects that initial feeling of disorientation and
uncertainty to how some of the women may have experienced their intake in the prison.
She says, “You get here and you don’t know what’s going on, you don’t know what to
do, you don’t know how to respond, you’re trying to fit in, but you’re trying to fit in the
right way.” Tory describes what might be going through a newly incarcerated
individual’s mind. It is disorienting; at first arrival, she may be confused, scared,
overwhelmed, unsure of herself, overall, not knowing what to do or how. There are
hundreds of institutional rules and regulations as well as countless rules of prison culture.
As the women learn how to navigate this new environment, the animals seemingly go
through the same process.

The dog has to get to know the pack of dogs that we all have here, they have to
know about that. And we have to learn, how are we going to live together? We
have a roommate, we have people in the day room, I mean, you have to learn how
to get along with everyone and that’s a challenge, that’s the challenge of
everyday. And so when the dogs initially get here, I think it’s pretty much the
same for them. To understand the daily activities here: when meals are, when you
can do this but you can’t do that, you can’t come out of your room until 10
minutes till the hour, you can come in and out of your room, maybe you can only
go outside at a certain time, so it’s like all of these things. It’s a lot.

Tory describes how similar the first moments are for both the women and the animals
when they first arrive. This is one example of how the women see themselves in the dogs.

Many of the women have spoken about receiving a second chance through the
program, by being able to work in the PAP, caring for animals, and training service dogs
that will go on to help someone in need. When these dogs go on to serve someone in
need, it produces self-efficacy. Ellen describes how it makes her feel: “It’s a good
feeling, you feel really good about yourself and it’s really good for your self-esteem and it feels like you’ve done something. You’re not just sitting here rotting. You’re not rotting… just becoming better in the world.” While the PAP generates privileges (e.g., higher pay, marketable skills, and access to animals) the opportunity to give back to the community, in a way, make amends, rather than “rotting” in prison is another set of privileges.

The women see themselves in the dogs that the program rescues. Many of the dogs are scared, trying to adjust to a new environment, were not provided with the opportunity to flourish, have been neglected and abused, etc. Through working with these dogs, training them to learn to trust, accept love, as well as learning new skills, the dogs and the women follow the same path. The women see the community service aspect of this program to give back as their version of making amends. To be able to help someone in need, knowing that they have made a difference in their dog’s life, as well as the clients that receive them, despite being in prison is especially important.
DISCUSSION

This study has examined how interacting with animals effect the daily lives of the women participating in the prison’s PAP. Results of the study showed that the women experienced socio-emotional changes, as well as changes identity, overall outlook, and with their relationships inside the prison. Women in the program also gained a new purpose and the sense of giving back. Through working and living with the animals under their care, the participants were able to receive love, support, and comfort in ways that was absent before due to the institution’s social isolation.

Research Question 1:

What are the roles that animals play in the socio-emotional lives of human beings?

Results of this study suggest that relationships with animals provide humans with a form of social warmth that allows them to flourish emotionally. As an example, many of the women in this study discussed the emotional transformations they experienced since they joined the program; some realized just how much they have been emotionally closed off, or “shut down.” Through their work in the PAP and their regular interaction with the animals they care for, the women have been able to open up emotionally, in ways they have not done while incarcerated. These results parallel other studies that find that incarcerated women must employ emotion work (Hochschild 1979) to protect themselves, particularly given the conditions of total institutions (Goffman 1961) and the general lack of trust and the relational aggression such institutions engender (Trammell 2009). The segregation of the PAP building at WCCW, in a way, creates a safe space for the women working in the program to show a more authentic version of their feelings and emotions. Through interacting with animals, they can express sadness, happiness,
contentment, excitement, etc., without fear of being perceived as weak by, and within, the general population. In Goffman’s (1959) world of theatre, the women have created the space of the program as their “back stage” where they can let their hair down, relax, and deviate from their typical character as a “hard” inmate within the general population. In this space, where the women are able to express greater emotional ranges, they’ve discussed how they are more “open” than they used to be, or allow themselves to be vulnerable when they need to be. Much like participants of a PAP in a male institution have reported, “when you get here, the softer side comes out, the compassion for the animals” (Cima 2013:1496). There is not the same fear of being preyed upon or taken advantage of by the other women in the program. PAP participants are “team members,” (Goffman 1959) where they do not need to perform a “hard” exterior for each other.

With regular interaction with animals, the women have established “natural rituals” (Collins 1981). As the women have successful IRs with the animals, they experience emotional energies (Collins 1981), an increase of social warmth that they attribute directly to interactions with their animals. During one interview, one participant described how watching her dogs learn and grow throughout the training sessions makes her feel accomplished and smart. Others discussed how the animals make them smile, feel lighter and happier, and that it is “all good” that the animals have the “right energy.” Similar to other studies (Alger and Alger 1997), the results of this investigation illustrates that the positive feelings and emotional connections result from the cumulative impact of shared history and successful IRs based upon the bond between the animals and their human caretakers.
Research Question 2:
How are animals a source of comfort, support, and love to people?

The women in the study described different ways that their animals have played a role in their lives. The most prevalent role identified by the women is that they finally have someone in whom they can trust. Living in an environment full people that are perceived as untrustworthy, incarcerated women have a difficult time trusting others to foster friendships (Greer 2002). Furthermore, it is against the institution’s regulations to physically touch another person. Because human beings use physical contact as a primary form of showing affection, love and support, physical contact is often how we comfort someone in times of distress. Research has shown that gentle physical interaction such as grooming a dog had significant decrease in blood pressure (of both the human and the dog) compared to resting quietly (Odendaal and Meintjes 2003). What’s more, grooming also results in parallel and significant increases in beta-endorphins, oxytocin, and dopamine (Odendaal and Meintjes 2003). This study showed that interaction between human and animal was comforting, calming, and enjoyable for both species. Results of studies like these illustrate how important it is for incarcerated women to have contact with animals because, while incarcerated, they cannot engage in physical comfort with their human counterparts. In the context of a prison environment, animals are important for the women who are incarcerated as they are able to touch and hug another living creature to generate these types of comforting benefits (physiological and socio-emotional) without restriction. Given these challenges for incarcerated women, animals are a significant source of comfort, support, and love.
With the bonds and the relationships that the women have cultivated with their animals, they truly consider their animals as their friends. Some of the women in this study describe their animals as friends, confidants, and like their children. Because many of these women are also mothers who cannot rear their children, being able to dote on animals and love them, brings comfort to these women as they are able to feel as if they are mothers again. Previous research in PAPs showed similar results in that providing animals to inmates gave them an opportunity to parent (Cushing and Williams 1995). In addition, the women were especially appreciative of the animals’ ability to provide unconditional love. These women were highly aware of their stigmatized label, knowing full well that society has decided that they are “bad” people. Given this stigmatized identity, the women recognize and are appreciative of the fact that their animals, offer them unconditional love, regardless of their human caretakers’ incarceration status and conviction record. For these women, animals provided love without strings attached, without hidden agendas, or ulterior motives—those factors that prevent the women from fostering relationships with other inmates. Animals provide consistent love regardless of human qualities that others deem undesirable (Beck and Katcher 1996). Unconditional love is extremely important when we face adversity—for the women to receive unconditional love during trying circumstances, like incarceration, it reminds them that they are still worthy of love (Beck and Katcher 1996). As the results of this study suggest, the women in the program consistently describe their animals as nonjudgmental and unconditional.
Research Question 3:

Is the sense of identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy of human caretaker affected by the companion animals for which they care?

As the results of this study suggest, participants of the program reported increased purpose, autonomy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem through their work in the program and work with the animals. Much like other studies of PAP (Furst 2006a; Moneymaker and Strimple 1991), participants also reported higher self-worth and positive feelings knowing that they are worker toward greater goals. During their interviews, the women in this study often spoke about how their situation and being in the institution made them feel like “nothing.” Being in the PAP, however, combined with the emotional energies received from human-animal interaction and learning marketable job skills, the women felt like they became “somebody.” The program at WCCW provided the participants with the skills to work with animals and the opportunity to interact with members of the community. Participants worked regularly with PPP volunteers and the clients that would receive the dogs. This gave the women hope and a positive outlook in that they were able to feel like their stigmatized label did not completely consume their entire sense of identity. The program staff’s willingness to entrust the women to care for these animals also had positive effects on the women. One participant stated incredulously, that she was able to take a dog to her cell and no one checked in on her. This building of trust between program staff and participants was essential in that the women continued to self-regulate by staying out of trouble and holding themselves to higher behavioral standards and personal responsibility. These results are reflective of other PAP studies that also have found similar results, in that participants had a sense of accomplishment and valued their
ability to work autonomously, given that many inmates worked in remedial prison jobs (Cushing and Williams 1995). Similarly, many participants hope to further utilize their skills by continuing to work with animals after their release, a result found in other studies of PAP programs (Cima 2013).
CONCLUSION

Too many animals are homeless or in pounds and shelters looking for a family, but are in danger of being euthanized. With the amount of homeless dogs, it is irresponsible to breed more animals. For service dogs, even dogs that are bred for this purpose, are not all successful in working in this capacity. PPP as a model for PAP is a viable one that should be adopted in other institutions. WCCW’s PAP has been successful in producing highly trained dogs, placing their non-service dogs with families within the community, and providing the inmate trainers with marketable vocational skills resulting in their lower recidivism rates.

Results of the study suggests four primary themes that emerged in interviews with the women participating in the PAP, related to: a new sense of purpose, improved social relationships, stronger and more open emotional experiences, and an overall experience of a sense of community within the prison environment. Women participating in the PAP experienced emotional changes as a result of working in the PPP and living with their animals. Because these women reported living in an environment where others cannot be trusted, resulting in a hardening of their emotions, they made efforts to appear “tough” or “macho.” Continued interaction with animals have had an effect; some of the women show happiness, smile, and have describe themselves as feeling “lighter.” Working in an environment where the staff treat the women well, with trust and respect, coupled with the effects from working and living with animals, the women report greater sense of self-worth, confidence, and increased happiness. The employment at PPP also gives the women a greater sense of purpose. They found reason to get up in the morning, to hold themselves in higher esteem and with a greater sense of social responsibility.
Limitations of the Study

The study is not without its limitations in methodology and sampling. Qualitative interviewing with a small subject sample lacks wide generalizability. Though this study had high participant enrollment (14 women), the PAP itself only had 17 members in the program. The results of the study were consistent with past research and literature in prison-based programs. While the present study only had participants from one institution, lacking in participant and program variation, the study of participants of a single PAP will undoubtedly carry sampling bias. The potential for bias increases as a result of the institution’s self-selection of each woman; each woman is hand-picked for entry into the PAP. For consideration for the PAP, individuals must adhere to the strict rules, and be minor and major infraction free until they are admitted into the program. Additionally, this study did not have a comparison sample. Given that the results of the study show favorable outcomes based on the women’s accounts and perceptions, future research should account for this sampling bias. Though it is unlikely that prison administrators would allow for randomization in PAP enrollment, a control sample is warranted for comparison.

Directions for Future Research

PAPs are generally implemented into institutions, not for the benefits animals have on human individuals, but as a vocational program which embeds community service. While functionally, vocational program model can be highly successful, we should not forget the socio-emotional effects such programs provide for the inmates. These effects can greatly reduce tension within individuals and other. To gain greater understanding, future research should compare various PAPs. For example, comparing male and female
institutions with an animal program; programs that uses different animals (e.g., cats, horses, agricultural animals); programs in different countries. Additionally, longitudinal studies are also needed. Given the reported benefits of the PAP, we should also look to examine how it impacts individuals after release. Are the senses of greater purpose, improved relationships, sense of being part of and giving back to the community, emotional and identity, sustained, improved, or diminished?
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Pilot Sample – Adults with companion animals

1. In general, how do you feel about animals?
2. Why did you decide to get a pet? How many do you have?
3. Would you say you have a relationship with your pet(s)?
   a. How would you describe your relationship with your pet(s)?
   b. Do you think that your pet(s) has a relationship with you?
4. In what ways is your relationship with your pet(s) like that with a person?
   a. In what ways is it different? Better? Worse?
   b. In what ways is it limited? Or more open?
5. Has having a pet changed you?
   a. How has it done this?
      i. Did it make you more caring?
      ii. Self–reflecting?
      iii. Patient?
6. When you are not with your pet(s), do you think about him/her/them?
   a. In what ways?
7. Why do you think people have pets?
8. Do you think having pets makes it less lonely for people?
   a. In what ways?
9. Do you think having a pet makes it less lonely for you?
   a. In what ways? Can you give an example?
10. Overall, what do you think you get out of your relationship with your pet(s)?
11. What do you think your pet(s) gets out of their relationship with you?
12. Does your relationship with your pet(s) make you more able see the perspective of another?
   a. Can you give an example?
13. Do you feel a sense of comfort with your pet even when you’re not interacting with him/her?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX B

Sample 1 – Prison Pet Partnership program participants

1. In general, how do you feel about animals?
2. Why did you decide to join the program?
3. Would you say you have a relationship with your dog?
   a. How would you describe your relationship with your dog?
   b. Do you think that your dog has a relationship with you?
4. In what ways is your relationship with your dog like that with a person?
   a. In what ways is it different? Better? Worse?
   b. In what ways is it limited? Or more open?
5. Has having a dog changed you?
   a. How has it done this?
      i. Did it make you more caring?
      ii. Self-reflecting?
      iii. Patient?
6. When you are not with your dog, do you think about him/her?
   a. In what ways?
7. Why do you think people have pets?
8. Do you think having pets makes it less lonely for people?
   a. In what ways?
9. Does your dog make it less lonely for you?
   a. In what ways? Can you give an example?
10. Overall, what do you think you get out of your relationship with your dog?
11. What do you think your dog gets out of their relationship with you?
12. Does your relationship with your dog make you more able to see the perspective of another?
   a. Can you give an example?
13. Do you feel a sense of comfort with your dog even when you’re not interacting with him/her?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX C

Sample 2 – Prison Pet Partnership program staff

1. In general, how do you feel about animals?
2. How would you describe the relationship between the women in PPP and their dogs?
   a. How would you describe the relationship between the women in PPP and their dogs?
   b. Do you think that the dogs have a relationship with the women in PPP?
3. In what ways do you think their relationship is like that between two people?
   a. In what ways is it different? Better? Worse?
   b. In what ways is it limited? Or more open?
4. Do you think having a dog has changed the women in PPP?
   a. How has it done this?
      i. Did it make them more caring?
      ii. Self–reflecting?
      iii. Patient?
5. When they are not with their dog, do you think women in PPP think about him/her?
   a. In what ways?
6. Why do you think people have pets?
7. Do you think the dogs make it less lonely for the women in PPP?
   a. In what ways? Can you give an example?
8. Overall, what do you think women in PPP get out of their relationship with their dogs?
9. What do you think the dog gets out of their relationship with the women in PPP?
10. Do you think the women’s relationship with their dogs make them more able to see the perspective of others more easily?
    a. Can you give an example?
11. Do you think women in PPP feel a sense of comfort with their dog even when they’re not interacting with him/her?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?