

## Chapter 2

# Gender Role Conflict Theory, Research, and Practice: Implications for Understanding the Human–Animal Bond

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In December 2014, the Jesuit pope, Francis made comments that suggested that animals have souls and would be welcomed in heaven. This single comment activated a 150-year-old debate in Vatican on whether animals have souls like humans and has significant implications for theology and anyone bonded to a pet. If animals have souls and human beings bond with them, then the animal bond has significant spiritual–religious dimensions. In this way, animals become not only agents of psychological growth and soothing for people (Blazina et al. 2013) but spiritual partners like human beings. In this context, the animal–human bond becomes more than fringe topic but a critical one that needs to be more vigorously studied.

Men’s relationships with dogs deserve study because limited knowledge exists on how gender role socialization affects men’s intimate relationships with animals. “Men’s Best Friend,” an endearing way to capture people’s relationship to dogs suggests that there is something special about the human–dog connection. What this special connection means and how dog bonds mediate men’s intrapersonal and

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interpersonal processes deserve analysis and theorizing. In this chapter, we explore how men's gender role socialization and gender role conflict (GRC) may interact with men bonding with dogs.

First, GRC theory and definitions are presented to provide a theoretical perspective on how men's attachment to animals can be understood. Only a brief summary of GRC is given here to contextualize the animal–human bond. In-depth description of the GRC concepts is found in previous publications (O'Neil 1981a, b, 1990, 2008a, b, 2015; O'Neil et al. 1995). After the theory is presented, a new GRC conceptual model is described that depicts how GRC relates to men's psychological problems with both human and animal bonding. The model depicts 15 contextual concepts that explicate how human and animal attachment relates to men's GRC and to a gender role transformational process. Next, how GRC is measured using the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS, O'Neil et al. 1986) is discussed and a summary of the GRC research is presented in 16 areas where GRC has been correlated with men's intrapersonal and interpersonal problems.

In subsequent sections of the chapter, criticism of the GRC construct is summarized and new theoretical conceptualizations are presented elucidating how GRC may relate to the man–dog bonding process. How GRC is operationalized as real experiences in men's lives are presented next by defining the gender role journey phases, gender role transitions and schemas, and the gender role transformation process. Next, the chapter integrates human attachment, GRC, and psychosocial development in the context of mastering developmental tasks and resolving psychosocial crises. In order to fill a conceptual gap between men's GRC and animal bonding, two questions are posed at the end of the chapter related to how human and animal bonding are different and how the patterns of GRC may stimulate bonds with animals. The chapter concludes with research areas that need exploration and an initial dog assistance curriculum that can be used to help men transform themselves.

## **Gender Role Conflict Theory and Definitions**

GRC is defined as a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others. It occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in personal restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or oneself (O'Neil 2008a, b). The ultimate outcome of this kind of conflict is the restriction of the human potential of the person experiencing it or a restriction of another person's potential. GRC has been operationally defined by four psychological domains, three situational contexts, and three personal and interpersonal experiences. How this definition, the domains, contexts, and experiences of men's GRC relate to the animal–human bond is the primary focus of the chapter.

The psychological domains of GRC imply problems that occur at four overlapping and complex levels—cognitive, emotional (affective), behavioral, and unconscious—and are caused by restrictive gender roles learned in sexist and patriarchal societies. These same domains are part of the animal–human bond dynamics

because thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and unconsciousness dynamics operate when humans enter the animal world. Furthermore, GRC is conceptualized as occurring in four general contexts (or categories) that give the construct a simple explanation and form. These contexts are defined as GRC within the man (intrapersonal), GRC expressed toward others (interpersonal), GRC experienced from others (also interpersonal), and GRC during gender role transitions. All of the contexts have relevance to understanding how GRC is a relevant construct to understand how men bond with animals.

The intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that contribute to men's GRC are explained in three contexts that affect men's relationship with themselves and others. The first of the three personal contexts is gender role devaluation. Such devaluations are negative critiques of oneself or others when conforming to, deviating from, or violating stereotypical gender role norms of masculinity ideology. The second of the three personal and interpersonal experiences is gender role restriction, which implies that sex-typed gender roles and GRC confine the man or others to stereotypical norms of masculinity ideology. Gender role restrictions also result in attempts to control people's behavior, limit their potential, and decrease human freedom. Gender role violations represent the most severe kind of GRC. They occur when men harm themselves, harm others, or are harmed by others because of destructive gender role norms of masculinity ideology. To be violated means to be victimized and abused, resulting in emotional and physical pain and, sometimes, gender role trauma strain, which can result in severe, negative outcomes for psychological functioning.

Gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations are the personal and interpersonal experiences of GRC and are critical to understand how men become conflicted with their gender roles and may find comfort bonding with animals. In sum, men who have experienced gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations may find bonding with animals safer than bonding with humans.

## **Restrictive Masculinity Ideology**

Restrictive masculinity ideologies predict GRC and cause it. Masculinity ideology is a cofactor of GRC that describes how men are socialized to masculine stereotypes and has been operationalized by the concepts of masculine norms and roles (Levant et al. 1992; Thompson and Pleck 1986) and masculine conformity and nonconformity (Mahalik et al. 2003). Masculinity ideology represents the primary values and standards that define, restrict, and negatively affect boys' and men's lives (Levant et al. 1992; Mahalik et al. 2003; Pleck 1995; Pleck et al. 1993). Masculinity ideology also refers "to beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behavior" (Pleck 1995, p. 19) and involves "the individual's endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity and male gender, rooted in the structural relationships between the sexes" (Pleck 1995, p. 19). Masculinity ideologies are primary ways that boys and men live out patriarchal and sexist values and have negative

consequences in interpersonal relationships (Levant and Richmond 2007; O'Neil 2010, 2012, 2015; O'Neil and Crapser 2011). The negative outcomes of adhering to or deviating from culturally defined and restrictive masculinity ideologies can produce distorted gender role schemas and patterns of GRC that are potentially damaging to men and others (Mahalik 1999a, b; O'Neil and Nadeau 1999; O'Neil 2008b; Pleck 1995). How men's masculinity ideologies impact bonding with animals or cruelty toward them has not been explored in the social science literature. This chapter contributes initial ideas about how masculinity ideologies relate to the animal–human bond.

## **Fear of Femininity (FOF)**

The fear of femininity (FOF), is a strong, negative emotion associated with feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors and regarded as inferior, inappropriate, and immature—in short, a devaluation of all that is feminine (O'Neil 1981a, 1982). Jung (1953) believed that men's difficulties with femininity were archetypal, passed down over the centuries, and outside the consciousness of the man. Despite the prominence of the subject in the psychoanalytical circles in the early 1900s (Connell 2005), the centrality of femininity in men's lives has been limited in psychology and only recently it has been conceptualized and discussed (Blazina 1997a, b; Kierski and Blazina 2009).

The FOF is endorsed by patriarchal societies that profit from it (Kierski and Blazina 2009; Norton 1997; O'Neil 2015) and is learned during early childhood socialization, when gender identity is being formed and in later years by physical maturation, developmental changes, and life events. FOF develops in men before, during, and after experiencing GRC and can be conscious or unconscious affecting gender role identity and a man's masculinity ideology. Boys learn to avoid most stereotypical feminine qualities in response to both peers and parents' displeasure at their deviation from masculine norms. The rejection and repression of the feminine parts of their personalities from an early age can produce a lifelong aversion to any quality perceived as feminine; a constant striving for the ways to be masculine; a male image that prohibits open expression of feelings and feminine characteristics; and an emotional and physical distance among men because of feared homosexuality. The unconscious aspect of FOF and its relationship to GRC are critical issues in understanding men's gender role socialization, GRC, and the animal–human bond.

## **Patterns of Gender Role Conflict**

Four patterns of GRC have been empirically derived and the *Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS)* has documented that these patterns relate to men's psychological problems in many studies (O'Neil 2008a, b, 2015). The pattern

of Success/Power/Competition (SPC) describes personal attitudes about success pursued through competition and power. Restrictive emotionality (RE) is defined as having restrictions and fears about expressing one's feelings, as well as difficulty in finding words to express basic emotions. Restrictive affectionate behavior between men (RABBM) represents restrictions in expressing one's feelings and thoughts with other men and difficulty in touching them, and conflict between work and family relations (CBWFR) reflects the experience of restrictions in balancing work, school, and family relations, resulting in health problems, overwork, stress, and a lack of leisure and relaxation. The four patterns of GRC predict men's psychological and interpersonal problems as well as attachment problems that may explain men's closer relationships to dogs rather than humans.

### **Measuring GRC: The *Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS)***

The *GRCS* has been developed to assess four patterns of GRC through item generation and reduction, content analysis of items, factor analysis, and tests of reliability (O'Neil et al. 1986; O'Neil 2008a, b, 2015). Four empirically derived factors of GRC have been determined with higher scores on the *GRCS* indicating greater degree of conflict regarding the GRC factors. The four factors are: Success, Power, Competition, (SPC), 13 items, e.g., "I worry about failing and how it affects my doing well as a man"; Restrictive Emotionality (RE), 10 items, e.g., "I have difficulty expressing my tender feelings"; Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men (RABBM), 8 items, e.g., "Affection with other men makes me tense"; and Conflict Between and Family Relations (CBWFR), 6 items, e.g., "My work or school often disrupts other parts of my life: home, health, or leisure."

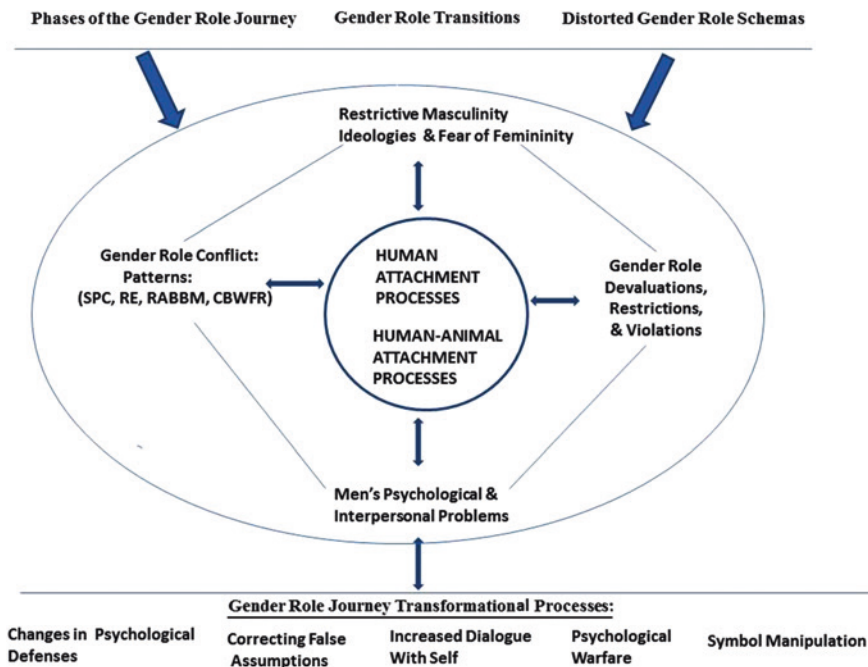
The *GRCS* uses a six-point Likert scale of highly agree to highly disagree with higher scores on the *GRCS* indicating greater degree of conflict regarding the GRC factors. Research results indicate that the *GRCS* has good construct, divergent, and convergent validities. Twenty-four factor analyses have been completed on the *GRCS* to document its factorial validity (O'Neil 2015) and overall, the factor analyses with American college students and diverse samples of men living in the United States and all over the world have supported the early GRC model (O'Neil 1981a, b, 1982; O'Neil et al. 1986).

There have been three adaptations of the *GRCS* that have increased its validity or made it more useful to younger boys or women. The Gender Role Conflict Scales for Adolescents was developed (GRCS-A, Blazina et al. 2005) and a short form of the scale was developed in 2012 (GRCS-SF, Wester et al. 2012). A slightly altered version of the *GRCS* has been developed for women (O'Neil 2015). These adaptations of the *GRCS* allow the measure to be used with a variety of samples of humans who might bond with animals.

## Conceptual Model Linking Human and Animal Attachment to Gender Role Conflict and Men’s Psychological and Interpersonal Problems

The primary theoretical model used to summarize the premises of GRC dates back to the early 1980s (O’Neil 1981a, 1990, 2008b; O’Neil et al. 1995). Figure 2.1 depicts a newer model that shows gender-related contexts and men’s psychological problems related to human attachment and the human–animal attachment. This new model also shows the process-oriented factors of men’s attachment as well as how transformation can occur. A brief description of the new model provides a summary of ideas about GRC in the context of the animal–human bond.

The human and animal attachment processes are shown in the circle in Fig. 2.1. Fifteen contexts are depicted on the outside of the circle. At the top of Fig. 2.1 are shown three precursor processes that affect gender role development over the life span including being in a certain phase of the gender role journey, experiencing gender role transitions, and having distorted gender role schemas. As shown with the bold arrows at the top, these processes affect the human and animal bonding and interact with a man’s gender role socialization. At the bottom of Fig. 2.1 is shown the gender role transformation process. These processes are changes in



**Fig. 2.1** A model to understand men’s human and animal attachment in the context of gender role conflict

psychological defenses, correcting false assumptions, increased dialogue with self, psychological warfare, and symbol manipulation. These processes represent how the transformation and growth can occur for men whether the bond is with human or animals.

On different sides of the circle are shown gender-related contexts including the patterns of GRC, restrictive masculinity ideologies, the fear of femininity, and gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations. Also shown are men's psychological and interpersonal problems. These contexts are connected by straight lines implying that they theoretically relate to each other. Each of these contexts are also shown with bidirectional arrows implying that the gender-related contexts and men's problems have a reciprocal relationship with both animal and human attachment processes. What is unknown is how both human and animal attachments relate to men's psychological and interpersonal problems in the context of GRC and restricted masculinity ideologies. The concepts in Fig. 2.1 represent an advance organizer for the rest of the chapter as well as a depiction of the theoretical, research, and practical issues related to men and their animal bonds.

## **Review of GRC Research: What Has GRC Been Correlated with?**

Thirty years ago the first authors' assertion was that: "...men are also oppressed and restricted by rigid gender role socialization that limits their potential to be fully functioning and whole human beings" (O'Neil 1981a, b, p. 205). What empirical evidence exists that men's human potential has been negatively affected by restricted gender roles? Over the last three decades, the GRC research program has provided evidence (over 350 studies) that men's psychological problems do relate to restrictive gender roles. A man's restricted thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about masculine gender roles predict significant psychological and interpersonal problems.

Table 2.1 lists 16 areas where GRC has been correlated with men's psychological or interpersonal problems. The intrapersonal categories are: (a) depression, anxiety and stress, low self-esteem, shame, and guilt, (b) alcohol and substance abuse, self-destructiveness, hopelessness, and suicide, (c) help seeking and stigma. GRC in an interpersonal context (expressed toward others) is shown in the following areas: (a) attachment, family individuation, intimacy, self-disclosure, relationships, and fathers, (b) marital satisfaction, family dynamics, and couple relationships, (c) stereotyping, attitudes toward women, equalitarianism, homophobia, and racial bias, (d) negative attitudes, interpersonal and sexual violence toward women and others. For GRC from others the categories are: (a) perceived racism, internalized homophobia, internalized heterosexism, perceived discrimination, internalized oppression, (b) attachment, bonding, and family individuation. Only brief summaries of the 16 research areas are summarized and more extensive



**Table 2.1** GRC studies correlated with psychological and interpersonal problems by problem category

Dependent variables significantly correlated with GRC	Number of studies
Depression	34
Anxiety and stress	9
Help seeking attitudes	35
Low self-esteem	35
Alcohol and substance abuse	15
Shame and guilt	7
Stigma	6
Intimacy, self-disclosure, and relationship with father	15
Marital dissatisfaction, family dynamics, and couples’ GRC	12
Discrimination and internalized oppression	6
Negative attitudes, abuse, and violence toward women	23
Attachment, bonding, family individuation	15
Hopelessness, self-destructiveness, and suicide	6
Traditional attitudes toward women	5
Stereotyping and sex role egalitarianism	10
Bias against sexual and racial minorities	6

discussion of the studies is found in previous publications (O’Neil 2008a, b, 2015; O’Neil and Denke 2015). Specific references for each category that documents the psychological problems in Table 2.1 can be found on the Gender Role Conflict Research Web Page (jimoneil.uconn.edu) in the file “O’Neil and Denke references Table 3 citations and references.”

GRC’s relationship to depression has been assessed in 34 studies. All of the patterns of GRC have significantly correlated with depression and RE has been the most consistent predictor suggesting that restricted emotions may be a marker for a depressed man. These results have been found for diverse groups of men including men of color, gay men, and men from different cultures. Stress and anxiety have been significantly correlated with all the patterns of GRC in 32 studies. Even with these studies, the specific situations and interactions that link GRC to stress and anxiety remain unknown. Twenty-one studies have assessed self-esteem and GRC and 90 % of them have shown low self-esteem significantly correlated with all of the GRC patterns. Furthermore self-esteem has been negatively correlated with GRC across seven diversity groups including: White, college American students; Japanese, Korean, African American, Mexican American, Asian American men, and gay men. Seven studies have assessed GRC’s relationship to shame or guilt. In these studies, all the patterns of GRC significantly correlated with shame with RE and CBWFR being the most strongly correlated. Fifteen studies have assessed the relationship between men’s GRC and substance use and abuse and eleven of these studies showed significant relationships. The overall results of these studies indicate that problems with increased alcohol use or substance abuse are significantly related to SPC, RE, RABBM, and other variables. Thirty-five



studies have found that men's negative help-seeking attitudes significantly relate to GRC with adult men. Like with depression, these results have indicated that men of different races, nationalities, and sexual orientations report GRC to be significantly correlated with negative attitudes toward help seeking. Negative attitudes toward help seeking may explain why men seek solace with dogs that cannot talk back but provide unconditional regard without the control and power dynamics inherent in most human relationships. All of these studies have relevance to the animal-human bond because depression, anxiety, shame/guilt, substance abuse, and negative attitudes toward help seeking may contribute to men's decision to distance themselves for human relations and seek comfort with animals.

Attachment to parents and GRC has been investigated in fifteen studies. All the patterns of men's GRC have significantly correlated with attachment problems to both mothers and fathers. The initial studies on attachment suggest that GRC is complexly related to bonding and separation from parents. Eleven studies have found both college age and adult men's GRC to be negatively related to intimacy. Becoming close to others is difficult if the man has restricted emotions or problems with power, control, and vulnerability. Twenty-three studies have assessed whether GRC relates to men's negative or violent attitudes toward women. Collectively, these studies indicate that GRC has been significantly correlated with sexually aggressive behaviors, likelihood of forcing sex, abusive behaviors, coercion, threats and intimidation, dating violence, hostile sexism, hostility toward women, rape myth acceptance, positive attitudes toward and tolerance for sexual harassment, and self-reported violence and aggression. What is unknown is whether higher levels of GRC predict men's animal abuse and can be an area to be explored in the future. Finally, six studies have found that GRC correlates with internalized homonegativity, internalized homophobia, heterosexist discrimination, and negative feelings about being gay. All of these empirical relationships between GRC and interpersonal variables could be related to men's decisions to bond with animals and avoid the complexity of human contact.

## **Gender Role Devaluations, Restrictions, and Violations**

Psychological problems that have significant relationship to *GRCS* subscales (SPC, RE, RABBM, and CBWFR) defined as gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations have been assessed. Sixty-six specific psychological problems have been empirically correlated with SPC, RE, RABBM, and CBWFR (O'Neil 2013, 2015). Forty-seven of the psychological problems relate to men's possible self-devaluations, restrictions, and violations. Another 19 problem areas relate to men's devaluation and violation of others. With violations of others, as reported earlier, GRC has been correlated to 13 ways to hurt other human beings including violence against women, sexual harassment, sexually aggressive behavior, likelihood of forced sex, hostility toward women, dating violence, hostile sexism, rape myths, abusive behavior, and coercion.

A review of the studies also found that self-devaluations, self-restrictions, and self-violations were significantly related to negative psychological outcomes for racially and ethnically mixed groups of males, men from five countries, and also gay men. In 26 studies, 19 psychological symptoms were correlated with gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations. Five symptoms that defined self-devaluations were correlated with GRC including: internalized homonegativity and heterosexism, negative feelings about being gay, racism-self-hate, depression, low self-esteem, and shame. Self-restrictions correlated with GRC and psychological problems were coping, anxiety, stress, alexithymia, hopelessness, limited intimacy, and negative attitudes toward help seeking. There were fewer studies that related GRC to self-violations for diverse men but correlations were found with eating disorder symptomology, substance abuse, chronic self-destructiveness, suicidal attempts or risk behavior, and coercion.

## Summary of Empirical Evidence Related to GRC

The research indicates that GRC significantly relates to men's psychological problems, is experienced in both the intrapersonal and interpersonal contexts, and has relevance for men's home and family life. The psychological domains of GRC (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and unconscious) have empirical support. Substantial support exists relating GRC to men's cognitive and affective processes. The affective aspects of GRC are evident from significant correlations with men's reports of anxiety, depression, homonegativity, negative identity, anger, and low self-esteem. The cognitive aspects of GRC are evident by significant correlations with traditional attitudes toward women, stereotyping, antigay attitudes, homophobia, and low sex role egalitarianism. In the behavioral domain significant correlations exist between GRC and hostile behavior, spousal criticism, sexually aggressive behaviors, and health risk behaviors. The unconscious domain of GRC has gone unexplored. All of the GRC results may influence men to avoid human connections and seek comfort with animals.

Additionally, the situational contexts of GRC have been supported by research indicating that GRC is related to intrapersonal processes (within the man) and in an interpersonal context in families and couple relationships (Alexander 1999; Breiding 2004; Breiding et al. 2008; Rochlen and Mahalik 2004). There is also evidence for men's personal experiences of GRC (gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations) (O'Neil 2013). The research also indicates that GRC relates to men's potential to restrict, devalue, or violate themselves and others.

Overall, the empirical research provides support for the GRC constructs developed over 30 years ago. There is now considerable empirical research indicating that men's psychological problems relate to conflict with restricted gender roles. The research findings support new directions for future study and more elaborate

GRC theory and research paradigms in new contextual domains including the human–animal bond. New directions for GRC have been recommended by past critics of the research program as described below.

## **Past Criticism of the GRC Paradigm and the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS)**

Over the years much critique has shaped the GRC paradigm (O’Neil 2008a, b) and produced revisions and adaptations of the *GRCS* (Blazina et al. 2005; Wester et al. 2012). Extensive criticism of the GRC construct is found elsewhere (O’Neil 2008a, b, 2015) and only critiques relevant to this chapter’s topic of situational GRC are presented here. The fundamental question is whether any of the past criticism supports studying how GRC relates to men’s bonds with animals. First, the research program has failed to assess GRC longitudinally by identifying development tasks and contextual demands that interface with men’s socialization and psychosocial development (Enns 2000; Heppner 1995; Smiler 2004). Without developmental perspectives, how GRC occurs and can be changed remain unknown. Furthermore, the research program has not assessed how GRC impact others and how it is experienced from others (Rochlen and Mahalik 2004). For example, does men’s GRC result in animal bonds and how do animals mediate men’s GRC? Additionally, there has been criticism that the *GRCS* measures a limited number of behavioral domains and does not assess important areas like men’s sexuality, performance, homophobia, and health issues (Thompson and Pleck 1995). The critics are correct about the limited number of behavioral domains and therefore further scale development is needed as well as exploring the situational dynamics of GRC both theoretically and empirically. Furthermore, the *GRCS* has been described as a trait base construct and measure that is limited in implementing situational and contextual research (Addis et al. 2010; Jones and Heesacker 2012). The definitions of GRC do not imply innate traits and whether the *GRCS* is trait-based measure is controversial and complicated (O’Neil 2014).

Two major critiques of the GRC research have occurred (Addis et al. 2010; Jones and Heesacker 2012) and both are important in expanding the options for researchers to study the contextual and situational GRC. Addis et al. (2010) describes the previous GRC research as limited and recommends a gendered social learning approach and Jones and Heesacker (2012) make a case for micro-contextual research with GRC (see Chap. 3). Both Addis et al. (2010) and Jones and Heesacker (2012) are suggesting similar directions for masculinity research in the future. Using different terminology, they are arguing for research that is contextual, micro-contextual, situational, and studying environmental cues and factors that affect GRC or men’s behavior. We agree with this analysis and encourage research where GRC is the dependent variable. All the criticism suggests expanding the GRC theory to include a macrosocietal, developmental, and situational perspectives.

## New Theoretical Assumptions About Men's GRC

Bases on these critiques, the new GRC theory was summarized in a single text (O'Neil 2015) with fourteen new GRC assumptions that explain how restricted gender role may affect men's lives. The new GRC assumptions are summarized here to provide a theoretical basis for the understanding of men's animal bond in a situational context. First, descriptive and situational contexts can explain men's GRC and possibilities for healthy positive masculinity. This assumption implies that there are situational precursors and contingencies that can activate men's GRC or help resolve it. Second, healthy development and GRC are hypothesized to occur over the life span during gender role transitions and when mastering developmental tasks and psychosocial crises. From this perspective, psychosocial theory needs to be integrated with GRC theory and research. Furthermore, the theory states that journeying with gender roles is part of resolving GRC and seeking positive and healthy masculinity. These first three assumptions convey that contexts for GRC can be negative, situational, developmental, and positive but how restricted gender roles are part of these processes has not been conceptualized.

The new theory also assumes that society (the macrosocietal context) is based on patriarchal values that foster stereotypes and sexist ways of thinking that cause GRC and psychological problems for men, women, and children (Enns 2000, 2008). Furthermore, restricted gender roles and GRC are theoretically connected to patriarchy, sexism, restrictive stereotypes, oppression, social injustices, and the differential socialization of boys and girls to sexist masculinity and femininity ideologies. Acknowledging the relationships between these social/political realities can put men's problems in a new and provocative light. Moreover, gender role identity can be negatively affected by the macrosocietal contexts and many other situational contingencies creating contextual complexity in understanding men. The perils of sexist and patriarchal societies are assumed to interact with a multitude of indices that produce dysfunctional psychological health for men. Whether men's bonds with animals can mediate these macrosocietal influences is an important empirical question.

Furthermore, the new theory enumerates gender-related contexts that negatively affect men's gender role identity including restrictive and sexist masculinity and femininity ideologies, fears of femininity, distorted gender role schemas, patterns of GRC, defensiveness, and vulnerability to gender role devaluations, restrictions, and violations. All of these contexts emanate from macrosocietal level and men's restrictive gender role socialization in families and can cause internalized oppression, psychological and interpersonal problems, social injustice, and violence, and therefore are critical mental health issues for both sexes. The gender-related contexts represent important dimensions of the animal–human bond focused on in this chapter.

Another theoretical assumption is that micro-contextual and situational contexts of men's lives need to be studied to document more specifically the outcomes and consequences of GRC. For example in this chapter, the situational context is

men's bonds with animals and discussed later in the chapter. Finally, therapeutic and psychoeducational interventions need to be developed for boys and men experiencing GRC. The use of dogs to help men cope with their interpersonal problems and trauma is commonplace but has not been fully researched.

A more extensive explanation of these assumptions is found elsewhere (O'Neil 2015) and for this chapter these premises provide a theoretical foundation for studying the animal–human bond in the context of men's GRC. For this study to be advanced, more information is needed about how men experience GRC as psychological processes and these issues are discussed below.

## **Explaining GRC Processes: The Gender Role Journey, Gender Role Transitions, Gender Role Schemas, and the Gender Role Transformational Process**

### *Gender Role Journey Transformation Processes*

How men experience GRC in situational contexts is a current topic in the psychology of men (Addis et al. 2010; Jones and Heesacker 2012). Very little is known about how men are gender role conflicted during their psychosocial development. In order to understand the animal–human bond, concepts are needed to explicate how men respond to sexism, GRC, and restricted gender roles. In this section, we provide conceptual information that gives insight into how GRC is experienced and worked through.

### **The Gender Role Journey**

The gender role journey is metaphor that helps people understand how restricted gender roles, sexism, and adherence to gender role stereotypes may negatively affect their lives personally, professionally, and politically (O'Neil and Egan 1992a; O'Neil et al. 1993a, b). The gender role journey provides a framework for evaluating thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about gender roles, sexism, and GRC by promoting a retrospective analysis of early family experiences with gender roles, assessment of how sexism is currently experienced, and decision-making about how gender roles will shape one's behavior in the future.

Three empirically derived phases of the gender role journey are: (a) acceptance of traditional gender roles; (b) gender role ambivalence, confusion, anger, and fear, and (c) personal and professional activism (O'Neil et al. 1993a, b). Part of the journey is gaining an understanding of which phase you are in and how GRC and distorted gender role schemas develop in the family as well as identifying gender role transitions that occur across the life span (O'Neil and Egan 1992b, c; O'Neil

and Fishman 1992; O'Neil et al. 1987). Journeying with gender roles and bonding with people and animals are usually complexly related and deserve analysis and explanation.

For example, men who have attachment problems may endorse Phase 1 (acceptance of traditional gender roles) because it is the expected, easily explained, and psychologically familiar even though it is restrictive and limits options. The gender role journey in Phase 1 may be attractive to men who need the sexist structure to survive and avoid emasculation. Men who learn distorted gender role schemas (i.e., power, control, emotionality, winning), their interpersonal relationships maybe more likely to bond with animals and endorse Phase 1.

Furthermore, unattached men may also vacillate between Phase 1 and 2 of the gender role journey. Phase 2 of the journey is experiencing ambivalence, confusion, anger, and fear related to gender role issues. For men who insecure attachments or unresolved GRC, gender role ambivalence, confusion, anger, and fear may contribute bonding with animals to avoid the complexity of human interaction.

Phase 3, personal and professional activism means changing oneself by resolving the conflict and making commitments to reduce sexism in one's own life as well as doing something to reduce sexism in other people's lives. Personal and professional activism occurs when there is the positive attachment to oneself and others and attachment to dogs can promote both types of activism. Using dogs to improve or soothe yourself is now well established in therapeutic circles (Blazina et al. 2013; Blazina 2011a, b). Becoming an animal rights activist, by protecting animals from harm is an example of the last phase of the gender role journey (references here). The overall theoretical premise is that men consciously and unconsciously journey with their gender roles when bonding with animals.

## Gender Role Transitions

Gender role transitions stimulate GRC and can facilitate resolving issues during the gender role journey. Gender role transitions are events in a person's gender role development that produce changes in his or her gender role identity and self-assumptions. Understanding gender role transitions across the life span by journeying with them is one way to understand GRC and develop the healthy positive masculinity. In the midst of them, men and women demonstrate, resolve, reevaluate, or integrate new or old conceptions of masculinity and femininity—as West and Zimmerman (1998) put it, they are “doing gender” or “redoing gender.” Our position that is explored later in the chapter is that bonding with animals is a gender role transition that affects gender role ideologies and schemas played out during psychosocial development.

Gender role transitions are also hypothesized to relate to mastering developmental tasks and resolving psychosocial crises. The most salient gender role transitions relevant to this chapter are human attachment or the human–animal attachment.

Bonding can produce positive growth or confusion, anxiety, and despair but failure to resolve gender role transitions may stimulate GRC and other emotional problems.

A major inhibitor of gender role transitions is the fear of femininity (FOF), a strong, negative emotion associated with feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors, which are regarded as inferior, inappropriate, and immature—in short, a devaluation of all that is feminine (Blazina 1997a, b; Kierski and Blazina 2009; O’Neil 1981a, 1982). FOF is primarily learned during early childhood socialization, when gender identity is being formed by input from parents, peers, and societal institutions and also occurs in later years through physical maturation, developmental changes, and life events. How the FOF relates to men’s bonding with animals has not been discussed in the previous literature and therefore we discuss it in later sections of the chapter.

A second inhibitor to men’s gender role transitions is homophobia and the presumed relationship between feminine values and homosexuality. Homophobia is the fear of homosexuals or worries about appearing to be homosexual. In our dualistic culture, femininity and homosexuality and masculinity and heterosexuality have been erroneously linked. If you are male and act feminine, the assumption is you are not a real man. If you are not a man, you are like a woman, and this means you are a homosexual because stereotypically gay men are viewed as feminine.

This illogical reasoning is the source of destructive heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativity. Homophobia is a form of sexism that inhibits men from exploring their femininity and masculinity and completing gender role transitions over the life span. Homophobia contributes significantly to distorted gender role schemas and hypermasculine attitudes and behavior. How the FOF relates to men’s bonding with animals has not been discussed in the previous literature and we hypothesize that bonds with animals can be gender role transitions or they can facilitate them as men evaluate and redefine masculinity ideology.

## **Gender Role Schemas and Distorted Gender Role Schemas**

Other theoretical constructs that promote our understanding of GRC and animal–human bond are gender role schemas and distorted gender role schemas. Personal changes and modifications in gender role values are not completed in a vacuum and thoughts and feelings that get demonstrated, resolved, reevaluated, or integrated is the critical question. In order for boys and men to complete gender role transitions, there are usually cognitive and affective processes operating that facilitate for the completion of the transition. With human–animal bonding the cognitive and affective processes at both the conscious and unconscious levels are just beginning to be explored by scholars. One hypothesis is that these gender role transitions are experienced in the context of certain gender role schemas.

Gender role schemas are cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness that organize and guide an individual’s perception of masculinity and femininity based



on sex and gender roles. Examples of salient gender role schemas are control, achievement, personal worth, communication, sexuality, intimacy, performance, dependence, and power to just name a few. Gender role schemas relate to the person's self-concept and are used to evaluate his or her personal adequacy as male or female. The issue of personal adequacy to meet the demands of restrictive gender roles schemas is part of the gender role strain and conflict that both men and women experience. Gender role schemas are considered when boys or men demonstrate, resolve, reevaluate, or integrate masculinity and femininity during gender role transitions. On a cognitive and affective level, gender role schemas are what men struggle with during gender role transitions. The gender role schemas with animals are hypothesized to be the same schemas that men experience with humans, but very little information exists on this topic.

Many men have learned gender role schemas that are distorted and based on sexist stereotypes. Distorted gender role schemas are exaggerated thoughts and feelings about masculinity and femininity as applied to major life issues. The distortion occurs because of perceived or actual pressure to meet stereotypical notions of masculinity, resulting in fears and anxieties about not measuring up to traditional gender role expectations. These distorted gender role schema are part of the man's restricted masculinity ideology that produce GRC and may contribute to precarious manhood (Vandello and Bossom 2013; Vandello et al. 2008). Example of distorted gender role schema for competition is "I have to always win to feel good." For power the distortion is "Without my power, I am less of man." How distorted gender schemas affect men's relational capacities and bonding with animals has previously gone unexplored and therefore we hypothesize that gender role schemas and distorted schemas as well are "in play" when men bond with animals. For example, a distorted schema might be: "I have to be a provider because others depend on me and dogs help me fulfill this role by giving me comfort and a sense of control."

## **Gender Role Journey Transformational Processes**

The critical question is how to journey with gender roles, resolve GRC and gender role transitions, and effectively redefine distorted gender role schemas to enrich one's life. This process is challenging and relates to transformations that include men's attachment to humans and animals. Gould (1978, 1980) defined transformation as expanding one's self-definition to produce inner freedom without conflict or anxiety, thereby internalizing a maximum sense of personal security. Likewise, gender role transformation can produce a redefinition of masculinity and femininity, decreased gender role conflict, greater freedom with gender roles, and increased self-confidence. Gould posited four processes of the transformation process that have relevance to explaining the internal dynamics of the gender role journey including (a) changes in psychological defenses, (b) facing and dealing with false assumptions, (c) increases in internal dialogue with self, (d) internal

psychological warfare. Journeying with one's gender roles and managing gender roles and transitions follow these same processes in both intrapersonal and interpersonal realms.

## Gender Role Journey Transformational Processes

A bond with an animal can be part of man's transformational process with their masculinity. The critical question is how to journey with gender roles, resolve gender role transitions, and effectively redefine distorted gender role schemas to enrich one's life. This process is challenging and relates to transformations (See the bottom of Figure). Gould (1978, 1980) defined transformation as expanding one's self-definition to produce inner freedom without conflict or anxiety, thereby internalizing a maximum sense of personal security. Likewise, gender role transitions can produce a redefinition of masculinity and femininity, decreased gender role conflict, greater freedom with gender roles, and increased self-confidence. Gould posited numerous properties of the transformation process that have relevance to explaining the internal dynamics of gender role transitions and the gender role journey including (a) changes in psychological defenses, (b) facing and dealing with false assumptions, (c) increases in internal dialogue with self, (d) internal psychological warfare. We add to this list manipulation of symbols as central to transforming ourselves. Each of these is elaborated in the context of men's gender role transitions and the animal-human bond.

When people struggle to change their fundamental conception of gender roles, the defensive structure of their personality may need alteration to foster more functional and expansive ways to live. Many men have a defensive posture in relationships because they fear losing control and power and therefore appear invulnerability and tough. At various points in a man's life the established defenses may no longer function fully and new psychological mechanisms are needed to enhance coping and promote the transformation. Defensive structures vary greatly, but repression, projection, regression, and reaction formation are quite common. The essence of most defense mechanisms is the inability to face emotions and feelings and therefore an emotional leveling or shutdown. Emotions relevant to one's gender role identity can be intellectualized, denied, repressed, and projected in anger and hostility toward others. Therefore, gender role transitions may require a fundamental change in men's psychological defense system and new ways of experiencing deep emotions as part of the gender role journey. When men cannot change their defenses in human relationships, they may turn to animals where fewer, if any, are needed. Having no defenses in animal relationships, the man can discharge emotions, be himself, and be human in ways that may ultimately transfer to human relationships without their defensiveness.

Furthermore, false assumptions or illusions about gender roles may help maintain a defensive posture. Before the transformation occurs, false ideas about gender role stereotypes from childhood consciousness usually establish the functional

boundaries of a sexist self-definition. These stereotypes are usually internalized at an early age to establish men's and women's gender role identities. These functional boundaries are maintained until the false ideas are disconfirmed and the stereotypes are disconfirmed. For example, beliefs that real men always have to be strong, successful, powerful, unemotional, and in control of all relationships are gender role illusions that reflect societal stereotypes. The insecurely attached man may extend these stereotypes by concluding that no one can be trusted and getting close in relationship is risky. Animals may be a safe alternative to having one's intimacy needs met. Willingness to challenge these false ideas may depend on obtaining new information, deep emotional awakenings, and political awareness that sexism violates women and men in a capitalist society. Animal relationships may be a stimulus to reevaluate long held stereotypes that keep men distant and unfulfilled in human relationships.

More important, gender role transitions stimulate an internal dialogue in the context of the new, emerging gender role identity. This internal dialogue may inhibit transformation, since the false ideas may produce anxiety and feelings of psychological regression. Usually, the false self-assumptions prohibit the gender role transition process and maintain personal anxiety and gender role conflict. If men and women can face these false assumptions and feel support, they can begin the internal dialogue necessary to deconstruct gender roles and prompt gender role change. Communing with animals can be a safe place to have this internal dialogue that promotes psychological and interpersonal growth.

This internal dialogue may bring about psychological warfare between the person and their external world or between the old self and the new, emerging human identity. During gender role transitions, "enemies of the self" are sometimes identified from the intense emotions, especially anger and fear. Yet, who these enemies are may be unclear. Women, other men, parents, children, and institutional structures may be targeted as the enemy to be attacked or avoided. Men may identify a weakened sense of themselves as the enemy, in terms of their self-imposed restrictions, devaluations, and personal limitations. Identifying the "enemy within" usually produces low self-esteem, anxiety, anger, and defensiveness that destabilize the person. Again, animals may be positive mediators of this war with man by providing nurturance and hope for better human relationships.

Adding to Gould's definition of transformation, gender role transitions may require a manipulation of symbols and the use of metaphors for change and healing. Cherished masculine stereotyped success, status, control, and power can be replaced with transformative myths, metaphors, symbols, and images. Past interest in mythology (Campbell 1988; Johnson 1986) represents an evolving person's desire to use symbolic representation to find greater meaning in life. Johnson (1986) indicated that the "most rewarding mythological experience you can have is to see how it lives in your own psychological structure" (p.x). Myths offer us the truth about ourselves and dispel the hardened illusions that we have based our lives on.

The use of metaphors, images, and symbols gives men an opportunity to redefine their gender perspectives. In gender role journey workshops (O'Neil 1996, 2015; O'Neil and Roberts Carroll 1988), I have seen the power of symbols and metaphors

in promoting transformation. For example, if the symbols (i.e., stereotypes) of power and control have been rigidly internalized as money, status, authority, and power over others, then a new conceptualization of power and control can be developed. Power could be redefined as the symbolic and real activity of empowering others. The symbol of “power over others” becomes transformed to “conscious empowerment of others” through service, leadership, and nurturing support.

Helping men manipulate symbols related to masculinity and femininity requires facing the illusions of gender role stereotypes. For gender role transitions to occur, the artificiality and illusions of gender role stereotypes need to be assessed through the deconstruction process. For example, one illusion is the value of highly sex-typed behavior and masculine and feminine stereotypes as a basis for healthy self-definition. For an evolving person who is seeking transformation, stereotypes no longer have the same power or utility in coping with life events. Men can recognize that stereotypic masculinity and femininity are not synonymous with health. This recognition represents a significant breakthrough toward a more substantial understanding of gender and human identity. The past gender role stereotypes are exposed as shallow and as not sustaining the person on a deeper, internal level. The illusions of the stereotypes need exploration if real growth is to occur over the life span. This process involves capturing deep emotions about masculinity and femininity and finding new meaning in them. Whether animals can be helpful to men in creating metaphors or manipulating symbols can be operationalized through future research.

A person who has an insecure or disorganized attachment will have difficulty trusting their transformative process and altering their defense mechanisms and rethinking their false assumptions about gender roles. Furthermore, self-processing and having useful positive dialogues with oneself and resolving psychological warfare may be more difficult if human bonding has not occurred. Whether, movement between the gender role journey phases and the four transformation processes can be altered by the man’s attachment to animals is a critical and empirical question.

The GRC concepts discussed above provide a theoretical foundation to raise questions about men’s relationships with animals in the context of gender roles. Speculation is needed on how animals and men have relationships and in the next section more theoretical and empirical background is provided that connects GRC with men’s bonds with animals.

## **Filling the Conceptual Gap Between the Psychology of Men and the Human–Animal Bond**

Theorizing that men’s restricted gender roles affect their human relationships has been widely discussed for decades. Overall, the consensus is that restricted gender roles (i.e., GRC) limit men’s behavioral repertoires in friendships, close relationships, and parenting roles. As reported earlier, the research also indicates that GRC is related to significant problems in men’s lives. What has gone unexplored

is how men's problems might relate to men's bonds with animals. Theoretical concepts are needed to help both practitioners and researchers theorize about how the human–animal bond might relate to men's gender role socialization. In the next sections, psychosocial concepts are presented to help connect GRC with how men bond with animals.

## **Psychosocial Theory and Attachment: Male Developmental Tasks and Psychosocial Crises**

A new GRC assumption states that men's GRC needs to be studied in the context of psychosocial theory, specifically developmental tasks and psychosocial crises (O'Neil 2015). Developmental tasks elucidates the animal–human bond in extensive ways and are defined as “a set of skills and competencies that contribute to increased mastery over one's environment and what is healthy, normal development is at each age in a particular society” (Newman and Newman 2012, p. 11). The developmental tasks occur during sensitive periods when an individual is ready to acquire a new set of abilities that promote gains in physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and/or emotional skills that all affect a man's self-concept. The person needs to master specific developmental tasks to move on to the next stage of development and psychosocial growth. Many of the developmental tasks have implications for our relationships with animals, but in this chapter, we focus on one: human attachment. In infancy, attachment is the major developmental task and relevant to a child's and adult's intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. Without human attachment, trusting others and oneself are compromised and many times resulting in withdrawal and delayed development. A brief review of attachment theory is provided here to explain how GRC is related to men's bonding with animals.

Attachment spans the life span just like gender role issues do. At each stage of development, attachment plays a different role because different psychosocial tasks and responsibilities are encountered. Bowlby's theory of attachment stresses children's expectations about their caregivers and also that the parental bonding can contribute to children's interpersonal security during the early years and later in life (Kobak and Madsen 2008). Attachment styles are developed in infancy when a child is reliant on a caregiver for nurturance and security. Based on experiences with their caregivers, a child may develop a secure or insecure attachment style. Securely attached children have positive expectations about the availability of their caregiver and are hopeful about finding satisfaction in human contact (Kobak and Madsen 2008). Insecure attachment styles are expressed either as avoidant or ambivalent style. Children with avoidant styles expect rejection from their parents, while children with ambivalent styles are uncertain about what to expect from their caregivers (Kobak and Madsen 2008). A third pathological style is disorganized style of attachment where the child may learn to perceive their caregiver as frightened or frightening (Kobak and Madsen 2008). If the child's fear in an attachment relationship can be worked through, an increased sense of

security can occur, particularly if basic needs are met. However, if the fear is left unresolved or left for the child to resolve it on their own, a child's functioning in emotional or interpersonal domains may be negatively impacted. Children and adults with attachment problems may seek bonds with animals to find their meaning, identity, and personal security.

Attempts to master developmental tasks produce a "psychosocial crisis" at each stage of development (Newman and Newman 2012) and these challenges are need to be resolved for growth and development to continue. Psychosocial crisis refers to a normal set of stressors and coping strategies associated with exerting psychological effort to adjust to the conditions of a new level of maturity and growth. The individual makes the adjustment by integrating personal needs, skills, and social demands that vary from stage to stage. At the end of each stage, the person resolves the crisis by translating the societal demands into personal change, producing a state of tension that is experienced in terms of polarities or opposites—for example, trust versus mistrust or autonomy versus shame. Both polar ends foster development, but the tension between them must be reduced for the person to proceed to the next stage and meet new challenges.

Problems with attachment may inhibit the resolution of psychosocial crises needed for ongoing growth and development. When secure attachment is not accomplished, the psychosocial crises of trust versus mistrust in infancy may not be resolved with parents, resulting in infant withdrawal, lost mutuality with a caregiver, and limited hope for psychosocial growth and intimacy with others (Newman and Newman 2012). Furthermore, early attachment problems may contribute to not resolving the psychosocial crises, autonomy versus shame/guilt in toddlerhood, inferiority versus industry in middle childhood and identity issues that can cause alienation in early and late adolescence (12–22 years). These early problems may affect interpersonal communication, sensorimotor intelligence, emotional development, and the subsequent mastery of developmental tasks of toddlerhood, early school age, middle childhood periods. Furthermore, psychosocial delays with attachment during these formative years may affect capacities for intimacy and positive relationships in adulthood.

Men who have attachment or relational deficits with humans may bond with animals to help master developmental tasks and resolve psychosocial crisis. Furthermore, efforts to master the developmental tasks and resolve psychosocial crises can activate GRC consciously or unconsciously. Animal bonds can help men master developmental tasks and resolve psychosocial crises, specifically when human bonds are difficult or threatening. Attempts to resolve tasks and crises can promote psychosocial growth but failed attempts to connect with animals can also result in animal abuse, loneliness, and greater isolation.

Finally, boys and men who bond with dogs can experience positive psychosocial growth that facilitates mastering the developmental tasks. How attachment problems and psychosocial development contribute to boys and men's problems in interpersonal and intimate relationships is a critical topic to be explored in the future. For example, knowledge and research about men's attachment and GRC can help provide information on men's bonding with animals.

## Summary

Psychosocial theory postulates that human attachment is a developmental task of infancy and for this bonding to occur there must be mutuality between the parent and child. The result of this bonding is hope for the child and being able to trust others. Without attachment, trust, and hope the child is vulnerable to withdrawal and social detachment. If attachment and trust of other human beings are difficult or impossible, bonding with objects and animals may be the only way to define oneself and have positive self-esteem.

Psychosocial development can be enhanced by the animal–human bond because the canine relationship can be a laboratory for positive attachment, mastering developmental tasks, and resolving psychosocial crises. Mastering developmental tasks with animals can provide confidence and beliefs that learned skills can be used in human relationship and developmental delays can be reversed and changed. The psychosocial development of humans through animal bonds represents an exciting new area for theory development and empirical research.

## Attachment and Gender Role Conflict Theory and Research: What Is Known?

Little evidence exists to support gender-specific theories in attachment, but Grossmann et al. (2008) report that child–mother attachment plays a role in young children's behavior. They found that securely attached children were found to behave in less gender-stereotypic ways than insecurely attached children (Grossmann et al. 2008). This result could suggest that parents who conform to rigid notions of masculinity and femininity, engage in sexist parenting. Restrictive views of masculinity and femininity by parents can influence boys and girls to endorse in restrictive gender roles themselves promoting insecure attachment to their caregiver(s).

Attachment, bonding, and family individuation problems have conceptualized in the psychology of men using concepts like disidentification with the mother, the fragile masculine self, and a traumatic abrogation of the early holding pattern (Blazina 2001; Blazina and Watkins 2000; Pollack 1995a, b). Researchers have argued that early parent–son dynamics impact male bonding that contribute to problems with attachment, separation, individualization, disidentification, and conflictual independence (Blazina and Watkins 2000; DeFranc and Mahalik 2002; Fischer and Good 1998; Schwartz et al. 2004).

Very few studies have assessed the relationship between attachment and men bonding with animals but attachment to parents and GRC has been investigated in 15 studies (Blazina et al. 2008; Blazina and Watkins 2000; Cachia 2001; Covell 1998; DeFranc and Mahalik 2002; Fischer 2007; Fischer and Good 1998; Griffin 2011; James 2006; Land et al. 2011; Napolitano et al. 1999; Schwartz et al. 2004; Selby 1999; Siffert 2012). All the patterns of men's GRC have significantly



correlated with attachment to both mothers and fathers. Siffert (2012) found autonomy from parents and affective attachment to be correlated negatively with RE, RABBM, and CBWFR. Six studies used either canonical correlations or structural equation modeling to assess GRC's relationship to attachment (Blazina and Watkins 2000; DeFranc and Mahalik 2002; Fischer 2007; Fischer and Good 1998; Napolitano et al. 1999; Selby 1999). Complex and significant findings were found between GRC and measures of attachment, separation, individuation problems (Blazina and Watkins 2000), affective attachment (Siffert 2012), attachment quality (Fischer 2007), attachment styles (Blazina et al. 2008; Cachia 2001; Schwartz et al. 2004; Selby 1999), perceptions of father's GRC (DeFranc and Mahalik 2002), conflicts with mothers (Fischer and Good 1998), and identity development (Napolitano et al. 1999). For example with a sample of college men, Blazina and Watkins (2000) found that as GRC increases, so do problems of attachment, separation, and individuation with parents. In another study, higher levels of SPC, RE, and RABBM were significantly related to fearful and avoidant attachment styles (Cachia 2001) and increases in GRC predicted higher attachment avoidance scores. Siffert (2012) found autonomy from parent and affective attachment to be correlated negatively with RE, RABBM, CBWFR. He also studied self-object dimensions and found that maladaptive self-object orientation was associated with the gender role conflict patterns. Land et al. (2011) found the GRC total score GRC negatively predicted maternal bonding care and parental bonding and that GRC did not mediate the relationship between maternal bonding care and adult attachment avoidance. Finally, with African American men's all GRC patterns were related to unhealthy attachment styles (Blazina et al. 2008). Finally, a nonsignificant mediational effect of GRC on the relationship between attachment insecurity and sexual compulsivity was found by Griffin (2011).

The initial studies on attachment suggest that GRC is complexly related to attachment and separation from parents. The overall results of these studies do support greater attention to the developmental aspects of gender roles being studied in the context of GRC. More study is needed to explore how early parent-child bonding affects gender role development and GRC. Theory on how psychosocial issues affect developmental tasks and psychosocial crises could be useful to future researchers and practitioners helping men.

Moreover, there is very limited information about how human attachment to animals develops and the reasons why. A more comprehensive view of how attachment, GRC, and the animal-human bond are needed and in this chapter a new conceptualization is presented. Furthermore, we argue that men who have few attachment problems can increase their relational competency by their bonds with animals. How attachment problems and psychosocial development contribute to boys and men's GRC in interpersonal and intimate relationships is a critical topic to be explored in the future.

Exactly what happens in the animal-human attachment has not been extensively studied and even less is known on what role gender roles play in the bonding. Our overall premise is that animal-person bond is a significant focal point for men to journey with their gender role. As discussed earlier the transformation

process of journeying with gender roles includes changing psychological defenses, facing false assumptions, increasing internal dialogue. Boys and men who have insecure or disorganized attachment may have difficulty working with this transformation process and forming effective interpersonal relationships. Resisting or avoiding transformation can produce maladaptive coping and psychological problems (such as GRC) that can restrict behavior and stunt psychosocial and interpersonal growth.

Specifically, when important attachment and gender roles issues go unresolved, distorted gender roles schema can be played out causing GRC and significant psychological costs to the man and others. Skewed schemas related to personal worth, control, power, communication, safety, and interpersonal competence may affect relational capacities of men to manage the complexity of interpersonal relationships. Distorted gender role schemas may need to be corrected and if they are not, men are likely to bond with animals. We hypothesize that corrective animal–human bonding may increase a man's capacity to communicate with humans.

## **Closing the Conceptual Gap: Between Animal–Human Bond and GRC**

We theorize that the animal–human bond, psychosocial development, and the journey with gender role conflict are intimately connected. Two critical questions help focus the connection of these concepts (a) how does men's bonding with people differ than their bonding with animal? and (b) how do men's patterns of gender role conflict (SPC, RE, RABBM, and CBWFR) cause interpersonal problems and stimulate intimate bonds with animals? The other way also.

Regarding the first question, relationships with animals may not be perceived by men "as gendered" or if they are, it is usually not in a negative or threatening way. Second, homophobia or threats to gender role identity usually do not operate with the animal bond; sex and sexual orientation are not driving dynamic in the human–animal bond as they might be in human relationships. Third, with dogs, men do not have to prove their masculinity and their authentic sleeves, transcending the norms of the restrictive patriarchal structure. Furthermore, as noted earlier, masculinity ideologies and norms may be suspended or altered with animal interactions, since the threat to one's gender role identity is nonexistent or significantly lessened. Fears of femininity (FOF) and worries about emasculation may be inoperative in the human–animal bond and the degree of GRC may be less or nonexistent with animals compared to humans. Moreover, the powerful gender role schemas operative in most human relationships (power, control, safety, esteem, and intimacy) may have different meaning with animal interactions. Distorted schemas can be altered, corrected, and redefined in positive and functional ways with animals. Finally, animals can be safe objects/subjects to project on, without any negative consequences.

In summary, the differences in human versus animal bonds provide a theoretical foundation for asking more focused questions related to men's relationships with dogs. Examples of these questions are addressed later in the chapter and more elaborate conceptualizations are found in this chapter of this volume.

The second question is how do the patterns of gender role conflict (SPC, RE, RABBM, and CBWFR) cause interpersonal problems for men that may promote intimate bonds with animals? As presented earlier in the chapter, much empirical research shows that GRC is correlated with men's depression, low self-esteem, shame and guilt, attachment problems, marital dissatisfaction, intimacy problems, and negative and abusive attitudes toward women. What is missing is research that links GRC to men's intimate connection with animals. To begin to answer the question of why and how men bond with animals, we speculate on how SPC, RE, RABBM, and CBWFR may theoretically relate, moderate, or mediate both the human and animal bonds.

For SPC the issue is how men seek success, power, control, and competition to stabilize their human masculine identities rather than human qualities like mutuality, cooperativeness, emotionality, compassion, honesty, admitting error, sharing power, and vulnerability. Overall, men who are obsessed with SPC objectify others and subordinate them in interpersonal relationships to prove their masculinity. Without human qualities, the man has a restrictive behavioral repertoire that restricts interpersonal communication and can cause stress and conflict. Many men who have unresolved interpersonal conflicts either withdraw to avoid the conflict or lash out with abuse or sometimes even violence. Either way their relational needs go unmet and isolation and loneliness are many times the outcome. Bonds with animals can fill this relational void in men's lives since the power, control, and competition issues with animals are different and unlikely to stimulate the same degree of GRC as in human relationships (more elaboration).

When men have high restrictive emotionality (RE) interpersonal relations can also be problematic. Specifically, when men view emotions as feminine rather than human qualities, feelings can become a source of conflict and pain. Rational problem solving and intellectualization have their limitations in solving life's problems and many times emotional expression is needed for resolutions and breakthroughs to occur. If the man has no outlet for his emotions, then feelings are repressed, many times causing depression, stress, and substance abuse. Dogs can be "the go to" relationship where emotions can be expressed without the fear of being emasculated or appearing feminine. Animals do respond to human affect (need some sources here) and are primary sources of emotional support for many people. In this way, animals can be corrective experiences for men who have repressed their emotions their whole lives because of fears of femininity and potential emasculations from others.

RABBM is another pattern of GRC that constrains men's interpersonal and human capacities. Affection is a positive and intimate way to communicate one's care and affirmation of others. Unfortunately, expressing affection can be experienced as letting down one's competitive guard with other men. The risk is that your affection might not be accepted, reciprocated, or stimulated a change of

power in the relationship. For some men, affection and intimacy may become confused with sexuality and therefore touching other men may activate a distorted schema around touch that implies sexual attraction or desire. In these situations unresolved homophobia is activated; better not to touch or show affection, fearing that it will be construed as making a sexual advance. Even though this makes no logical sense, these processes exist probably at an unconscious and intrapsychic level.

Restricted affectionate behavior with women may operate because touching will be construed as making a sexual advance or come on. These days touching anybody is risky business because of the widespread realities of sexual harassment and sexual abuse. In this way, GRC dehumanized both men and women and represents how affection as a human quality has been ruined by patriarchal values and misinformation. This unfortunate development requires constant education about the differences between sexuality, human intimacy, and affection. With both sexes, many men decide to inhibit their positive affection both verbally and physically because it is too risky which only contributes to increasing dehumanization that plagues our violence-ridden world.

Men's affection with animals is a completely different dynamic. Men pet and hug animals in highly emotional ways and get their relational needs met through the animal bond. There is a striking difference between how men show affection to animals versus humans and some of the difference has to do with GRC and masculine gender role socialization. Recently, the first author was discussing the human–dog bond with a colleague and she described how her husband is highly emotional, affectionate, vulnerable, and intimate with their dog. She said: “I wished I could get more of that from him in our relationship; I need that too!”

Many men have CBWFR as they balance competitive work situations, providing for their families, and managing family dynamics. Feeling stressed and sometimes out of control with many unresolved problems with both family and work is common for many men. Actually taking care of an animal can add to the CBWFR because pets do require care and attention. When there is conflict and particularly marital stress from the problems, animals can be the mediators of men's stress and a safe haven to sort out the issues with limited negative consequences or further loss of control. It is unknown how often men discuss their stressors, think about their problems with their animals, or project their problems onto their pets to find comfort and soothing. Our view is that these conversations are frequent but only research can verify our hypothesis.

## **Future Research Directions, Hypotheses, and Perspectives**

Research questions need to be generated to promote a more empirically informed understanding of the animal–human bond and GRC. Both quantitative and qualitative research are needed to assess how bonding with dogs can enhance men's lives and relationships. One of the first research priorities can be qualitative interviews

with men about the meaning of their relationships with dogs. These interviews could identify topics that can be operationalized through empirical research. For example, how does a man's GRC predict the probability of developing an animal bond and how do these relationships affect his capacity to have human bonds? How does the human–animal bond mediate or moderate GRC? Moreover, what actually happens in the animal–human bond that mediates GRC and other psychological problems? Does the animal–human bond reduce men's GRC and what mechanism operates to make this happen.

Are there precursor conditions that promote men's bonding with animals? For example, do insecure attachments to humans promote the animals bond? How does failure to master major developmental tasks like attachment predict closer bonds with animals compared to humans? Does unresolved loss promote men's bonding with animals or help them recover from the grief and enhance attachment to humans? Do animal bonds help men who have a fear of intimacy or help men who have been dehumanized by trauma, discrimination, and violence. How do the patterns of GRC and masculinity ideologies relate to men's bonding with animals? Additionally, are restrictive norms of masculinity ideology suspended or altered when men bond with animals?

What are men's emotional experiences with animals and how do these experiences differ than in human interaction? For example, do men have less RE in animal interactions and if so, does this help men experience, express, and discharge emotion in human relationships? Does affectionate and petting animals help men with their restricted affectionate toward humans? Can men learn to be more emotionally intelligent and empathic because of their relationships with animals and can this learning impact developing more functional human relationships? Can bonds with animals help men correct distorted gender role schemas and resolve patterns of gender role conflict (SPC, RE, RABBM, CBWFR)?

## **Implications of GRC Theory for Practice with Men and Dogs**

Animal bonds and GRC are fertile ground for helping men understand how sexism has negatively affected their lives and attachment to dogs can be part of the healing process. In this section of the chapter some psychoeducational approaches are discussed to help men who have bonds with their dogs. The heuristic value of a theory is demonstrated by its application within an applied setting. GRC theory can be used by practitioners to deepen both their bonds with animals and human beings.

Animal assistance professionals can use the premises of gender role journey therapy (O'Neil 2015) when working with men and their animals. With gender role journey therapy, deepening (Rabinowitz and Cochran 2002) and transtheoretical perspectives (Brooks 2010) are integrated with the three phases of the gender role journey. With this kind of therapy, a man's readiness to change is one the most

critical diagnostic categories as specific processes in each phase guide the man as he makes changes and solves his problems. Readiness for a man's change is complex and beyond the scope of this chapter, but critical transformational processes (See bottom of Fig. 2.1) are discussed. A complete summary of gender role journey therapy is discussed elsewhere (O'Neil 2015).

Rather than specifying how to implement a **complete animal assistance program**, a broader psychoeducational curriculum is presented using the contextual variables in Fig. 2.1. The practical question of any dog assistance curriculum is how do men change to achieve healthy masculinity and positive psychological growth? How men change has rarely been addressed in the psychology of men and few empirically validated interventions exist that help men transform themselves (Cochran 2005). Research has documented that men have gender role-related problems (O'Neil 2008a, b, 2015), but the contextual conditions that help men change are still mostly unknown. Animal bonds, as a contextual condition for changing men, deserve psychoeducation experimentation and research. Six curricular areas to help men deepen their dog bonds and understand their gender role conflict are discussed.

## **Psychoeducational Information and Setting Positive Expectancies**

Many men need information on how to recover from their sexist gender role socialization and recognize that animal bonding can liberate them from restricted gender roles. Printed information, mini lectures, self-help books (Blazina 2008;), and DVD documentaries can provide the necessary background on the challenges growing up male in America. Moreover, many men are unaware of how dogs can facilitate their gender role transformation and improve their human relationships. Imbedded within the present volume are examples or case studies of how animals have helped males across the life span. Chapters also present new research demonstrating the value of animal-assisted interventions impacting males in positive psychological ways. However, these results are preliminary and it is prudent to be critical of any intervention that professes to gain men's confidence.

Positive expectancies can be established about how the animal bond can bring greater pleasure in life without the burdens of restricted gender roles. In very simple terms, men can be told "if you talk to your dog, you are likely talking about yourself in some way and therefore the animal relationship is an opportunity for your own growth and personal self-exploration." However, the further value of the human-animal bond for men's well-being may lie in the relational context of the man and dog interaction; the bond may promote men's health, or at least, be more free of gender role restraint.

## **Gender Role Vocabulary: Gender Role Journey and Patterns of GRC**

A bond with an animal can be explained as a journey with one's gender roles where gender role transitions can occur that prompt significant questions about psychosocial growth and opportunities for improved intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships (unclear). Many men will need a gender role vocabulary to begin thinking about how gender role socialization has affected them. One way to introduce this vocabulary could be to administer the GRCS or the Gender Role Conflict Checklist or the Gender Role Journey Measure for a quick assessment of how restricted gender roles operate in the man's life. The results could be important but maybe what is most important is that the man begins to think about how gender roles affect his life. Knowledge about the phases of the gender role journey or the patterns of GRC (SPC, RE, RABBM, CBWFR) can expand how a man sees his masculinity identity and help him ask significant psychosocial questions.

### **Defensiveness**

Another important psychological concept in the curriculum could be human defensiveness. Defenses could be explained as helping people feel safe or avoid uncomfortable emotions. Defense mechanisms could also be defined as both conscious and unconscious and examples could be given so that the man begins to understand his own defensive postures. How defenses are functional could be explained but also how defenses can inhibit growth and development would be emphasized.

One critical question is whether there are differences in men's defensiveness with humans versus animals? Do most men drop or suspend defenses when interacting with animals? This question can stimulate further exploration about how defenses operate in human relationships and whether it really promotes safety or inhibit his interpersonal growth and development? The goal of discussing defensiveness is to find a portal to men's deeper processing of their emotional life (Rabinowitz and Cochran 2002). Likewise, the human–animal bond may provide a means of accessing men's inner worlds.

### **Increased Self-Dialogue and False Assumptions**

When a man understands that he is not defensive with his dog and has greater human vulnerability in its presence, then there can be increased possibilities for self-dialogue, self-processing, and overall communication. This change can be invigorating and exciting as new dimensions of the man's interior self become apparent.

With less defensiveness and increased self-dialogue, the stage is set for possible discussions about the false assumptions of masculine and feminine stereotypes



and the lies about the benefits of high sex-typed behavior including control, power, competition, and restrictive emotionality. Sexist and distorted gender role schemas are analyzed and new definitions of what it means to be human can be explored. When this happens with animals, the parallel processes with humans can follow with significant implications for greater intimacy.

## **Consciousness About Differences in Human and Animal Relationships**

An important part of the process is observing any differences in how the man communicates with animals compared to humans. For example, numerous questions occur when differences are observed. Does the man express more emotions with his dog or show greater affection and vulnerability than in human relationships? If there are differences, then the question might be “what do these communication differences mean?” For example, “Is it less risky to be your authentic self with animals than with humans and if so, why? Are there differences in masculine roles, control, and power in the two relational contexts?” Do gender role schemas or distortions operate differently in the two situations and if so, why? If the man is freer with animals, can he conceptualize his emotional and interpersonal problems as they relate to restrictive gender roles and GRC?

## **Psychological Warfare and Symbol Manipulation**

All of this deconstruction of gender roles may create insecurity in the man as the old self is diminished to make room for the new self, free from the shackles of sexist masculinity. The man may experience psychological warfare from his new consciousness that collides with the sexist values of the patriarchal world. The man may experience psychological warfare as his masculine identity and sense of self-change. He may feel a weakened sense of self (the enemy within himself) that produces low self-esteem, defensiveness, anxiety, and anger and the ultimate goal is to turn these negatives into positives. The animal bond and safe places are where these issues can be sorted out and continuing the transformative process.

Sometimes symbols and metaphors emerge that help the man redefine his masculinity ideology and face his GRC that blocks his future growth. When the sexist values of masculinity ideology are deconstructed and the illusion and artificiality of gender role stereotypes are known (and rejected), there is a “meaning gap” that can be filled with myths, metaphors, and symbols that bring powerful new way to find meaning in life. These metaphors and symbols help us tell the truth about ourselves and dispel the illusions that have been erroneously thrust into our lives. Animals can be part of the symbols and metaphor making because animals represent authentic relationships that men can trust.

## A Final Word

The curricular issues described above represent just one way to explain how men may journey with their gender roles in the context of their bond with dogs. Other creative approaches could be developed and since every man is different much experimentation is recommended. This might include the human–animal bond as being rich in symbolism in traditional therapist settings, helping to address males’ issues of attachment and loss. The bond may also be present in more structured animal-assisted interactions/interventions that men may not be fully aware that personal and greater gender role transformations are occurring amidst the development of the bond with an animal companion. Practitioners’ tasks involve helping to become more aware of these processes and integrating them into the sense of self.

In conclusion, from the gender role journey workshops completed over three decades (O’Neil and Roberts Carroll 1988; O’Neil 1995, 2015), what is apparent to us is that change occurs most frequently when men see their self-interests are “at stake” in terms of living fuller life. Second, change occurs when the social injustices against women, men, and sexual minorities are understood as occurring from sexist and patriarchal values in society that are oppressive. A caring, social conscience develops and anger at how society oppresses people is expressed and many times results in personal and professional activism. When conscious raising from deconstructing distorted gender role stereotypes occurs, finding equity with women and closeness with men becomes an attractive option compared to restricted gender roles that deaden the human spirit. Bonds with animals can be a stimulus for this kind of gender role journey. Men come to realize that the bond is an asset within their lives.

Put another way, when consciousness is raised and men see that the sexist society sets them up to be oppressed, confused, and conflicted about gender roles, breakthroughs and transformations become a real possibilities. With this single insight, men can stop blaming themselves and others for their GRC, sexism, and other oppressions. Men can let themselves off the “sexist hook” and consider how to recover through personal growth and societal activism. Bonds with animals can be stimulators of personal transformation and that is why the chapters in this book are so important to men, women, and children.

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