**BACKGROUND**

General: Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is defined as inclusion of an animal in a treatment plan for the purpose of alleviating mental and physical problems (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007); animal-human interaction (AHI) is defined as routine pet ownership or everyday interactions with animals (Athy, 2006).

Benefits of AAT and AHI: effective in lowering BP, stress levels, depressive symptoms (Folse, Mexican, Aycock, & Santamaria, 2007), reducing anxiety (Smithe, 2003), and providing college students with social support and companionship (Ohio State University, 2008).

Typical demographic focus: primarily on the elderly (Baum & McCabe, 2000), mentally handicapped (Nathans-Barile, Feldman, Berk, Modai, & Silver, 2005), young children (Athy, 2006), and traumatized individuals (Yorkes, Adams, & Coady, 2008).

Current focus of investigation: the focus of this study was to understand the relationships between adjustment to college and how our histories with pets (and animals in general) may be related in a non-clinical sample.

**PURPOSE & HYPOTHESES**

We sought to uncover the relationship between college students' past histories with animals and their sense of adjustment, as through sense of community and social support. We investigated the correlations among attachment to pets and past experiences with animals (e.g., positive/negative) to depression and anxiety as well sense of community, and sense of social support.

Based on previous research, we expected that:

- individuals who have had positive experiences with animals and who are high in past experiences with animals, attachment, and past experiences with animals were less likely to have depression and anxiety as well as show a better sense of social support and sense of community.

**METHOD**

Participants (N = 242 Kenyon College students)

- Age range from 18-23, mean age = 19.38
- 56% had at least one pet while growing up (75% dog, 58.5% cat, and 42.7% rodent)
- Number of pets owned: mean = 3.55, SD = 1.96
- Racial composition: 88.8% Caucasian, 3.3% Asian, 4.4% African American, 4.4% Hispanic, 0.5% Native American, and 5.4% ‘other’ (includes mixed race)
- 66.2% female
- 65.6% grew up in suburban areas, 18.5% urban, and 15% rural

Measure:

- Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1987)
- State-trait Anxiety Inventory (Spilberg, 1983)
- Sense of Community Scale (Chavis, Florin, & Wandersman, 1987)
- Community we were interested in was Kenyon College.
- Social Support Scale (Steinhard & Dolbier, 2000)
- Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (Johnson, Garry, & Stallones, 1992)
- Experience with Animals Inventory (Folse, Mexican, Aycock, & Santamaria, 2007)

PROCEDURES

- The study was approved by the Kenyon College Institutional Review Board (IRB).
- Participants were recruited through emails sent to all Kenyon psychology classes and all student emails requesting participation. Informed consent was obtained through an online consent form on surveymonkey.com. After agreeing to the informed consent, participants were provided a link for the survey.

**RESULTS**

**Reliability**

- Cronbach’s alpha was used to calculate the internal reliability of the past animal experiences subscales. An alpha score above .70 was acceptable reliability.
  - Positive Experiences with Animals: $\alpha = .701$ (reliability was acceptable)
  - Negative Experiences with Animals: $\alpha = .591$
  - Amount of Experience with Animals: $\alpha = .692$
  - Dog Experiences: $\alpha = .117$
  - Cat Experiences: $\alpha = .172$

**Correlations**

- Scores on the LPAS were positively correlated with scores on the Positive Experiences Subscale ($r = .665$). This provided evidence of validity of the Positive Experiences with Animals Subscale.
- Depression (BDI) was positively correlated with both state anxiety ($r = .580$) and trait anxiety ($r = .215$). State anxiety and trait anxiety were highly correlated with each other ($r = .744$).
- Social support was positively correlated with sense of community ($r = .422$). Sense of community scores were negatively correlated with depression ($r = -.428$), state anxiety ($r = -.368$), and trait anxiety ($r = -.541$).
- Overall, our hypotheses were not supported. There were no significant associations among past experiences or attachment, depression, anxiety, social support, or sense of community.

**Table of Scale Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trait Anxiety</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Anxiety</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Social Support</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trait Social Support</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
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<td>Attachment to Pets (Beta)</td>
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<td>1.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience with Animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog Experiences</td>
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<td>Cat Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Types of Animals</td>
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</table>

**REFERENCES**


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