

ONLINE SURVEY AS EMPATHIC BRIDGING FOR THE DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF OF PET LOSS

WENDY PACKMAN, JD, PH.D.

Palo Alto University

BETTY J. CARMACK, RN, ED.D.

University of San Francisco

RACHEL KATZ, MA, M.ED

Zen Hospice Project

FRANCE CARLOS, TND THÉRAPEUTE

Spécialiste en deuil animalier

NIGEL P. FIELD, PH.D.

CRAIG LANDERS, PH.D.

Palo Alto University

ABSTRACT

The current cross-cultural study investigated grief reactions of bereaved individuals following the death of a pet. We used qualitative methodology to compare, analyze, and report responses of U.S. and French Canadian participants to the last open-ended question on our online pet loss survey. We explored the degree to which our data illustrated pet loss as disenfranchised grief and asked whether there are differences and commonalities in the expression of grief between the two samples. Four major themes emerged: lack of validation and support; intensity of loss; nature of the human pet relationship; and continuing bonds. Findings confirm that, for both the U.S. and French Canadian participants, pet loss is often disenfranchised grief and there

are ways to facilitate expressions of grief. Many participants wrote that the survey was therapeutic. Our survey allowed participants to express their grief in an anonymous, safe way by serving as empathic bridging and a willingness to help others.

INTRODUCTION

I'm in such pain because of the loss that I can hardly function.

J'ai constaté que cette peine était aussi sévère et puissante que lorsque l'on perd un être humain, et ce, même si les relations ne sont pas les mêmes. Je trouve dommage que l'on ne soit pas compris par nos proches, ni supporté par eux quand de tels drames surviennent. [I have found that this sorrow was as severe and strong as when we lose a human being, and, even if the bonds are not the same, it's a shame that it is not understood by friends and family, or that we can't be supported by them when such tragedies occur].

While these statements could be true for grievers with various losses, they were said by respondents who had lost their beloved companion animals. Another respondent said, "No one understands your personal grief. They say things that they think mean well, but they hurt more." The death of a pet may not be fully validated or acknowledged by spouses, friends, or acquaintances. Disenfranchised grief results when a person experiences a grief reaction, yet there is no social recognition or validation that the person has a right to grieve or a claim for social support (Doka, 2008; Stewart, Thrush, & Paulus, 1989). Our findings confirm that pet loss is often disenfranchised grief and ways exist to facilitate expressions of grief.

Doka (2008) has proposed several broad categories of disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief occurs when the relationship is not recognized, the loss is not acknowledged, or the griever is excluded. Certain circumstances surrounding the death may disenfranchise grief or the ways a person grieves may not be recognized (Doka, 2008). This perspective has been described in relation to pet loss (Meyers, 2002; Packman, Carmack, & Ronen, 2012; Packman, Field, Carmack, & Ronen, 2011). Packman, Carmack, and Ronen (2012) write that the death of a pet may not be fully recognized or validated as a significant loss, resulting in grievers feeling isolated and lacking in support. Statements such as "You can always get another one" add to the isolation and distress bereaved pet guardians feel (Toray, 2004). Encouraging pet owners to get a new pet soon after a death is commonplace (Podrazik, Shackford, Becker, & Heckert, 2000.)

Rando (1993) has identified disenfranchised grief as a complicating factor in bereavement. Not only can "disenfranchising circumstances" intensify emotional reactions such as guilt and anger (Doka, 2008), but disenfranchised grief, by its very nature, precludes social support. Thus, although the griever has experienced a significant, profound loss, the "grief may have to remain private" (Doka, 2008, p. 235). The bereaved may not be entitled to time off from

work, receive sympathy from others, and therapeutic rituals may be either limited or unavailable (Doka, 2008).

Meyers writes of how society may disenfranchise grievers and their loss when participants in a relationship are not perceived as worthy of sympathy from others. Professionals themselves, by the way they sometimes minimize the importance of animals in our lives, disenfranchise human-pet relationships resulting in a “conditional tolerance of the relationship” (Meyers, 2002, pp. 252-253.)

Neimeyer and Jordan (2002) take the concept of disenfranchised grief and relate it within a broader pattern of empathic failure. They describe such a failure as one that “subtly or obviously invalidates the bereaved person, family, or community’s distinctive narrative of the loss” (p. 95.) They write of how one’s personal grief sensitizes that person to the degree to which his or her social support system validates the individual’s experience of grief (p. 95).

Empathic failure frequently occurs within the social support systems of those grieving the death of a pet. Empathic failure, or “the failure of one part of a system to understand the meaning and experience of another” (Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002, p. 96), exists in which people do not understand the depth of the human-pet relationship. Their social system fails to understand the meaning and experience of their relationship, which is typically based on unconditional love, continuing presence, support, and consistent companionship. Numerous authors have written about the strength and meaning of human-pet relationships (Carmack, 2003; Cowles, 1985; Stewart et al., 1989; Toray, 2004). The depth of responses to pet loss is often based on the strength and longevity of relationships individuals have had with their pets.

In the United States, in situations of pet loss, many people may not perceive the death as a cause for intense grief, yet, as shown above, scholars have demonstrated strong ties between pets and humans and profound reactions to loss (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Carmack, 1985, 2003). Because the human-pet relationship constitutes an attachment bond, a similar response to separation and loss of a pet has been found to that following the loss of a human attachment bond (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009; Packman et al., 2011). Indeed, the grief following the death of a pet manifests itself in similar ways to that experienced after human loss in terms of sleep disruption and social and psychological challenges (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Carmack & Packman, 2011; Quackenbush, 1985). Gerwolls and Labott (1994) assessed whether the loss of a pet was different from the loss of a human companion (parent, child, or spouse). At 2 and 8 weeks post-loss, the grief scores (Grief Experiences Inventory) of those who had lost a pet were similar to those who had lost a human companion. At 6 months post-loss, there were not statistically significant differences in grief scores between the two groups.

There has been a great deal of attention in the bereavement literature focusing on the function of a “continuing bond” in relation to coping (Field & Friedrichs, 2004; Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005) and adaptation following the death of a loved one (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). It is now accepted that despite the

permanence of physical separation, the bereaved can be emotionally sustained through a continuing bond to the deceased (Field, Nichols, Holen, & Horowitz, 1999). Resolving grief does not involve ending a relationship (detachment), but instead involves a reorganization of the relationship with the deceased (Field, 2008).

The phenomenon of continuing bonds (CB) has only recently been labeled as such in the pet bereavement literature (Carmack & Packman, 2011; Packman et al., 2011). In our initial pet loss study we examined and quantified the type of CB expressions that occur among bereaved pet owners ($N = 33$). The results confirmed that individuals experience dimensions of CB following the death of their beloved companion animals and emphasized that the majority of bereaved pet owners maintain ongoing, meaningful ties with their deceased pet. We also found an overall tendency to experience CB as more comforting than distressing.

Individual grief cannot be fully understood without considering culture (Klass & Chow, 2011). Cultures may influence how the emotions of grief may be expressed and how CBs are managed (Klass & Chow, 2011). With respect to the loss of an animal companion, in the United States, disenfranchised grief has been described in relation to pet loss (Meyers, 2002; Packman et al., 2011; Packman et al., 2012), resulting in grievers feeling isolated and lacking in support. In other cultures and areas, such as French Canada, clinical evidence strongly suggests that pet loss may not be fully validated as a significant loss (Carlos, 2008). A salient question is whether there are cultural variations in pet loss. In a review of indexes and tables of contents of recent publications about pet loss we found not one reference to cultural dimensions of grief either at the time of death or following death (Cornell, Brant, & Bonvicini, 2007; Lagoni, Butler, & Hetts, 1994; Lagoni & Durrance, 2011; Ross & Baron-Sorensen, 2007; Sife, 1998). These books are both theoretically and practically based. Additionally, they were written for both professionals as well as those who are grieving. This apparent omission in cultural sensitivity related to pet loss in existing literature reinforces the importance of our study as we begin to address this deficit. To date, systematic cultural comparisons on the effect of the loss of beloved animal companions on bereaved pet owners have not been conducted. In the current study, we attempted to address this deficit by conducting a qualitative comparative study in the United States and French Canada.

In the current cross-cultural study, we used qualitative methodology to compare, analyze, and report the responses of participants (200 U.S. and 35 French Canadian) to the last open-ended question on our pet loss survey. In keeping with Doka's call for additional research describing particular and unique losses with possible interventions, we explored the degree to which our qualitative data would illustrate the perception of pet loss as disenfranchised grief. We were especially interested in whether there are commonalities and differences between the U.S. and French-Canada bereaved in the expression of grief following the loss of a pet. Another question of interest is to what extent the U.S. and French Canadian participants made use of continuing bonds to cope with the loss of their beloved

animal companion. To better understand and enhance our qualitative findings, we also compared the U.S. and French Canadian participants on demographic variables and on the Pet Attachment Scale (PAS) and Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG).

METHODS

Participants and Procedure

Bereaved pet owners were recruited via requests posted online and direct personal solicitations to pet loss support groups. A cover letter explaining the goal of the study, the affiliation of researchers, and link to the Survey Monkey website was sent to potential participants. Eligible participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and must have lost a pet through death. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Palo Alto University.

Participants had the option of completing the pet loss survey on the Internet or could request that hard copies be mailed to them. An informed consent page was at the beginning of the survey. Once the participants agreed to participate in the survey and submitted their answers, they were given links to pet loss support services and resources. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire followed by a set of six objective measures that included the Pet Attachment Scale, Inventory of Complicated Grief, The Continuing Bonds Instrument, Social Constraints Measure, General Health Questionnaire, and the Relationships Scales Questionnaire. In addition to the objective measures, there were three open-ended (optional) questions.

After all of the standardized measures, we posed the last optional open-ended question to participants:

Now that you have answered our questions are there any other feelings or thoughts about your experience of grieving for your pet that you would like to share with us? Feel free to write as much or as little as you like.

At the time of data analysis, there were 3267 respondents to the U.S. survey. Of those, 1962 answered the last optional open-ended question. Due to the large number of responses, a representative sample of 200 was selected from the 1962 respondents who answered the last open-ended question using a systematic sampling method. The starting point was randomized and every 10th subsequent person was selected. Respondents were not pre-examined to “cherry-pick.” As long as the starting point is randomized, systematic sampling is considered to be a type of probability sampling for selecting essentially a random sample (Finlay & Krueger, 2011).

There were 96 respondents to the French Canadian survey; of those, 35 answered the last optional question and all were included in the analyses. Because there were a smaller number of participants in the French Canadian survey, it was

not necessary to use systematic sampling. Further, it was important to see if the samples differed on demographic and contextual variables and, in order to enhance this comparison we chose to use all of the participants who answered the last open-ended question. For both samples, there were no statistically significant differences on any demographic, background, or contextual variable between the participants who answered the last open-ended question and those who did not. In terms of attrition issues, at the time of data analysis roughly the same percentage of respondents completed the entire survey. Of the U.S. respondents who started the survey, 22% finished the entire survey and of the French Canadian respondents who started the survey, 18% finished the entire survey.

Research Design: Qualitative Analytic Procedure

The transcribed interviews were uploaded into ATLAS.Ti 6.0, a software program that provides a systematic approach to organization, coding, and analysis of qualitative data. We used directed content analysis, a qualitative method that is guided by theory or prior research (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) to analyze participants' responses to the last question. "The goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Content analysis using such an approach is a more structured process than conventional content analysis (Hickey & Kipping, 1996). Investigators begin by identifying key concepts as initial coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Next, operational definitions for each coding category are determined based on theory. In the current investigation, bereavement and continuing bonds theories (Doka, 2008; Field, 2008) as well as prior research on pet loss (Carmack, 2003; Packman et al., 2011; Orsini, 2005) guided the development of initial coding categories. Data that could not be coded were identified and analyzed later to determine if they represented a new theme or a subcategory of an existing category. The major strength of directed content analysis is that "existing theory can be supported and extended" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The responses were first independently coded by WP, BJC, and RK and then reviewed by all three together until consensus was reached. Before coding the responses from the French Canadian sample, the responses were translated into English by FC and WP. As noted above, the emerging themes were identified and categorized and new codes developed as needed. In addition to the coding, we ran queries of the data and built matrices and networks to assist in the analysis of themes among subgroups of participants. It is important to point out that ATLAS.Ti does not provide an actual analysis of data; rather, it is an organizational tool that assists with qualitative analysis. The results of ATLAS.Ti queries help to organize the data and achieve an efficient and complete qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis: Quantitative

The two samples were compared on background characteristics (e.g., gender, age), parameters of the loss (e.g., cause of death, time since death) and self-reports of the strength of attachment (PAS) and grief (ICG). The comparisons were done using *t*-tests and chi-square analyses.

Standardized Measures

The Pet Attachment Scale (PAS) (Gosse, 1988) is an 11-item measure assessing the strength of attachment the participant has to his or her deceased pet. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “almost never” to “almost always.” The PAS has a demonstrated high level of internal consistency. Gosse found a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .74 and Jarolmen (1998) found a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .77.

The Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG) (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001) is a 19-item self-report questionnaire that measures symptoms of grief. Respondents rate their feelings with respect to their deceased pet over the past month regarding the symptoms described on a 5-point scale. The total score is a summation of the item scores and indicates the severity of grief symptoms. This study used 9 of the original 19 items of the ICG in order to create a shorter scale which did not include items that are more useful for describing CBs with the deceased (Filanosky, 2003). Filanosky (2003) validated use of this instrument using only 9 of the original 19 items in his study on grief and CB in an adult sample of grievers. The ICG is internally consistent (Cronbach’s alpha = .095) and has an acceptable level of criterion-related validity (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001).

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings: Characteristics of the Samples

Gender

A chi square analysis was conducted and no significant difference was found between the two samples ($\chi^2(1) = 2.18, p < .139$) in terms of gender (see Table 1).

Age

There was significant difference in the mean age of the U.S. and French Canadian samples ($t(233) = .341, p < .05$). The U.S. sample was slightly older ($M = 43.7, SD = 12.52$) than the French Canadian sample ($M = 42.51, SD = 11.42$).

Table 1. Characteristics of Sample

Characteristic	U.S. (<i>N</i> = 200)		French Canadian (<i>N</i> = 35)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Gender				
Male	30	15.0	2	5.71
Female	170	85.0	33	94.29
Relationship to deceased				
Best Friend	90	45.0	2	5.71
Parental	70	35.0	9	25.71
Partner/Significant other	23	11.5	13	37.14
Other (Soul mate, protector, family member, sister, mentor, guardian angel)	17	8.5	11	31.43
Marital Status				
Single	55	27.5	26	74.29
Married/partnered	121	60.5	8	22.86
Divorced	19	9.5	1	2.86
Separated	2	1.0	0	0.00
Widow/widower	3	1.5	0	0.00
Cause of death				
Natural	27	13.5	7	20.00
Unexpected	56	28.0	7	20.00
Major Disease	62	31.0	14	40.00
Other (mauled by dog, taken by coyote, perceived veterinary incompetence)	55	27.5	7	20.00
Euthanasia				
Yes	129	64.5	26	74.29
No	71	35.5	9	25.71
Children				
Yes	68	34.0	13	37.14
No	132	66.0	22	62.86
Education				
Less than high school	2	1.0	1	2.86
High school	29	14.5	6	17.14
Vocational/trade school	14	7.0	2	5.71
College	104	52.0	6	17.14
Graduate school	51	25.5	20	57.14
Income				
Less than \$25,000	19	9.5	2	5.71
\$25,000–\$49,999	49	24.5	12	34.29
\$50,000–\$74,999	42	21.0	7	20.00
\$75,000–\$100,000	35	17.5	6	17.14
More than \$100,000	55	27.5	8	22.86
Mean age of owner (<i>SD</i>)	43.7 (12.5)		42.5 (11.4)	
Age of Pet				
Mean in years	10.68		10.14	
Time since death				
Mean time in days	106.91		314.77	

Relationship to Deceased

The relationship to the deceased pet was shown to be significant ($\chi^2(4) = 56.14$, $p < .001$). For the U.S. sample, the Best Friend (45%) category comprised the largest percentage of the relationships, followed by Parental (35%), Partner/Significant Other (11.5%), and Other (8.5%) categories. For the French Canadian sample, the Partner/Significant Other (37.14%) category comprised the largest percentage of the relationships, followed by Other (31.43%), Parental (25.71%), and Best Friend (5.71%).

Marital Status

There was a significant difference between the two samples in terms of marital status ($\chi^2(4) = 29.03$, $p < .001$). The largest category in the U.S. sample was married/partnered participants (60.5%), followed by single (27.5%), divorced (9.5%), widow/widower (1.5%), and separated (1.0%). For the French Canadian sample, the largest category was single participants (74.29%), followed by married/partnered (22.86%), and divorced (2.86%).

Time Since Death

There was a significant difference between the two samples in terms of the time since the pet loss ($t(231) = .021$, $p < .05$). The time since the loss for the U.S. sample was $M = 106.91$ days while the time since the loss for the French Canadian sample was $M = 314.77$ days.

Cause of Death

There was no significant difference between the samples in terms of the cause of death of the pet ($\chi^2(3) = 2.96$, $p < .40$). For the U.S. sample, the most frequent type of cause of death fell into the Major Disease category (31.0%), followed by Unexpected (28.0%), Other (27.5%), and Natural (13.5%). For the French Canadian sample, the most frequent type of cause of death was Major Disease (40.0%), followed by the other three categories of Unexpected, Natural, and Other all at 20.0%.

Euthanasia

There was a significant difference between the two samples for the use of euthanasia ($\chi^2(2) = 29.5$, $p < .001$). In the U.S. sample, 64.5% responded "yes" while 35.5% said "no." In the French Canadian sample, 74.29% responded "yes" to the use of euthanasia while 25.71% said "no."

Children

No significant difference was found between the two samples for whether or not the family unit consisted of children ($\chi^2(1) = .13$, $p < .72$). In the U.S. sample, 66%

of participants said there were no children while 34% said there were. In the French Canadian sample, 62.86% of participants said there were no children while 37.14% said there were.

Education

A significant difference was found between the two samples for the education level of the pet owner ($\chi^2(4) = 18.62, p < .001$). For the U.S. sample, the greatest percentage of participants had a college education (52.0%) followed by graduate school (25.5%), high school (14.5%), vocational/trade school (7.0%), and less than high school (1.0%). For the French Canadian sample, the largest percentage of participants had a graduate level education (57.14%), followed by college and high school categories with both at 17.14%, vocational/trade school (5.71%), and less than high school (2.86%).

Income

There was no significant difference found between the samples for the level of income for the participants ($\chi^2(5) = 5.03, p < .41$).

Age of Pet

There was no significant difference found between the two samples for the age of the pet at the time of death ($t(228) = .600, p < .55$). The mean age in years for the pet for the U.S. sample was $M = 10.68$ years and was $M = 10.14$ for the French Canadian sample.

Pet Attachment Scale (PAS)

There was no significant difference found between the two samples on the PAS ($t(233) = 1.59, p < .112$). The mean score for the U.S. sample was 3.45 ($SD = .46$) (range was 2.00-4.09). The mean score for the French Canadian sample was 3.31 ($SD = .50$) (range was 1.55-4.09). In Orsini's (2005) study of pet loss, participants reported a mean score of 3.63 on the PAS.

Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG)

There was significant difference in the average score of the U.S. and French Canadian samples on the ICG ($t(233) = 2.97, p < .003$). The mean score for the U.S. sample was 3.47 ($SD = .84$; range was 1.35-5.00); and, the mean score for the French Canadian sample was 3.00 ($SD = 1.0$; range was 1.00-4.67). In a study looking at bereavement in humans, the mean score on the ICG was 2.55 (Filanosky, 2003). In Orsini's (2005) study of pet loss, participants reported a mean score of 2.20 on the ICG.

Demographic variables, contextual factors, and other aspects associated with the loss are detailed in Table 1.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analysis of the U.S. and French Canadian samples indicated four major overall categories of responses within the broader conceptual framework of disenfranchised grief: lack of validation and support; intensity of the loss experience; the nature of the human pet relationship; and continuing bonds/coping with loss (Table 2).

Lack of Validation and Support

One component of the intensity of the grief was manifested in the high scores on the Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG). A second component that complements the quantitative findings consisted of qualitative responses to the last, optional open-ended question. For example, some respondents' intensity extended to feeling clinically depressed and suicidal. Yet, in spite of the intensity of loss, an empathic failure exists in that respondents felt they had limited places for expression of their grief as well as minimal support for their loss, that is, their grief was disenfranchised. For example, one respondent said:

One of the hardest parts is now when you feel so alone because there are no gatherings of friends and relatives, no published obituary, no one bringing food, etc. It is as if no one knows how real and deep the loss of the unconditional love can be and so you feel you need to hide or you cannot be true to yourself even after having spent years working on self-esteem and valuing yourself.

Another respondent wrote:

I feel that people don't take it as seriously as I would like or don't know how to approach it. I feel that those who I confide in are running out of things to say and are sick of me being sad and lonely. I feel guilty expressing how alone I feel because I am surrounded by those who care for me.

Lack of validation and support was clear in the participants' answers. In the U.S. sample family, God, spouse, and therapist were cited only once as a source of support. Support coming from friends and other pets each were cited three times. In the French Canadian sample, only one person received support, and that was from a mental health professional. "Je me sens tellement délaissé par ma famille et mes proches au sujet du décès de ma petite Daisy. . . . C'est le manque de soutien et de compréhension des gens que j'aime le plus qui font que le deuil est difficile à vivre." [I feel so abandoned by my family and by the people close to me, since the death of my little Daisy. . . . It is the lack of support and understanding of the people I love the most, that make the grief so difficult to live."] Such minimal validation lends support to the perspective of pet loss as a disenfranchised grief as well as empathic failure. The low number of responses showed the respondents lack of validation and support (Table 2).

Table 2. Qualitative Responses—Themes and Frequencies of Responses

Theme	U.S.	French Canadian
	(<i>N</i> = 200)	(<i>N</i> = 35)
	%	%
The Loss Experience		
Intensity of Loss	34	20
Symptoms of Grief	14	94
Language Used	11	3
Guilt and Regrets	12	29
Euthanasia	12	17
The Nature of the Human-Pet Relationship		
Relationship	23	14
Quality of Relationship	14	9
Caregiving Support from Pet	9	6
Unconditional Love	5	3
Continuing Bonds/Coping with Loss		
Fond Memories	5	9
Memorials	5	0
Sense of ongoing presence	3	6
Reunited	3	33
Sounds and physical sensations	2	0
Dreams	2	0
Lessons learned	1	0
Drawn to places	1	0
Reminiscing	1	0
Retaining Possessions	1	0
Ongoing connection	3	0
Seeking CB	3	0
CB as source of comfort	2	9
CB as source of distress	5	0
Total CB	33	29
Lack of Validation and Support		
Therapeutic Benefits of Survey	13	14
Disenfranchised Grief	6	14
Sources of Support		
Family	1	0
God	1	0
Spouse	1	0
Professional Therapist	1	3
Pet	2	0
Friends	2	0
Social Support	1	0

Concurrent with the notion of pet loss as a form of disenfranchised grief is the resulting perception of minimal or absent validation and support for a pet's death. Respondents learned not to share their grief with people who were not supportive. For example, one respondent wrote, "I have rarely discussed this and never will with anyone unless I knew their attitude about pet grief." To recall Doka's (2008) description of disenfranchised grief occurring when one's relationship is not recognized, multiple responses spoke to this, for example, "When I tell people they are my children, I always get a negative reaction." Another respondent expressing her lack of validation and support wrote, "It makes me so mad that people could think 'it's just an animal'." Reading these statements is a reminder of empathic failure as described by Neimeyer and Jordan (2002), that is, one's experience is not understood by those in one's social network.

Therapeutic Benefits of Survey: Empathic Bridging—The survey became available to people as a way to express their feelings in an anonymous, safe, invitational way. Gilbert (2005) and Gilbert and Horsley (2011) describe the anonymity aspect of the internet as especially appealing to disenfranchised grievers. For many respondents, this may have been the first time anyone was invited to share their experience. Without prompting, many participants spoke about the therapeutic benefits of the survey (13% U.S.; 14% French Canadian). It is important to note that this open-ended question was, in fact, optional and completed after an exhaustive online survey consisting of several standardized measures. The overall benefit of the survey consisted of two dimensions: the first was personal in that it allowed participants to explore their own emotions and process their experience. The second was a benevolent component, that is, a willingness to share their experience as a way to benefit others. Our questions facilitated respondents' ability to have the disenfranchised grief experience normalized. According to Neimeyer and Jordan's (2002) description of empathic bridging, our survey served this role—"to promote dialogue across the interface at which empathic failure occurs" (p. 102). Neimeyer and Jordan (2002) go on to write about the value of "empathic bridging" as encouraging and respecting previously disenfranchised grief experiences (p. 102).

The value of the survey appears to have been that it provided respondents with a place and a means to describe the remaining three major themes: intensity of loss, nature of relationship, and continuing bonds/coping with loss.

The Intensity of Loss Experience

The high mean scores on the ICG for both samples speaks to the intensity of loss experienced by participants. The overriding theme in the descriptions of participants' loss experience was the intensity of their loss (34% U.S.; 20% French Canadian). This intensity was reflected in numerous descriptions of various dimensions such as emotional, spiritual, physical, psychological, and practical.

Intensity of Loss and Emotional Reactions—Intensity on an emotional level was expressed by statements such as, “The loss of Merlin has been the hardest experience of my life, more so than the loss of friends and family” and “I’m in such pain because of the loss that I can hardly function.” It was common to read statements saying that participants missed the deceased pet more than humans who had previously died. It became clear that participants were surprised by the intensity of their emotions such as grief, sense of loss, guilt, and extreme sadness, “It is the most painful thing I’ve ever experienced, and I’ve experienced significant pain in my life.”

It was not unusual to have grievers speak of their intensity in terms of suicidal ideation, “If it weren’t for my 2-year-old son, I would have walked in front of a car by now” and “I felt very depressed, had thoughts of suicide, and wished I would wake up dead.” While not expressing suicidal feelings per se, respondents made statements such as, “I wish I could die” because being in the world without their beloved animal companion was too painful.

Participants (14% U.S.; 11% French Canadian) wrote of their symptoms of grief, some expressing them on a physical level while others described them in terms of emotional pain often reflected in behavioral ways. Some participants described aspects of all three, for example, “I miss him so much, sometimes it hurts so much I feel like I can’t breathe or live one more second” and “I’m a police officer and was emotionally immobilized for almost 2 weeks and couldn’t perform my duties. This could have jeopardized mine or other people’s lives.”

Language Used—Intensity was reflected not only in the substance of statements but also in the powerful language utilized in expressions of grief (11% U.S.; 3% French Canadian). Recurrent language described bodily sensations of being “empty” and having a hole in their being—“I feel as though there is a big gaping hole in my chest and nothing can fill it up”—or having a broken heart—“There is a hole in my heart; a piece is missing of me.” One person wrote, “I feel as though my heart has been ripped out of my body.”

Another predominant aspect of the intensity of the grief experienced was the frequency in which feelings of guilt and regrets (12% U.S.; 29% French Canadian) were expressed due to perceived acts of omission and/or acts of commission. “I just wish I could know for sure that he did not suffer at all but I feel like he did and was scared and in pain. It will be so hard to wake up every day and know that this is all my fault and that I am careless enough to allow something like this to happen.”

Euthanasia—A feature unique to pet loss is the option of euthanasia. Often, this decision is made alone and without support. Participants in both samples (12% U.S.; 17% French Canadian) described aspects of their euthanasia experience. It is not uncommon for guardians to struggle with the decision to euthanize a loved animal, and our sample was no exception. For example, one person said, “When you rescue an animal you feel like you’re giving them a second chance, so to have the choice of ending their life is excruciating.” Often regrets and guilt accompany the emotions that make up the experience of euthanasia.

While some people find peace in their decision to let their animals go through euthanasia, others struggle with the decision though intellectually they tried to do the right thing for their pet. For example, one participant wrote, “It was an extremely difficult decision and I hope to never have to make that decision again. Since his death I’ve been second guessing my decision over and over even though I spoke with the vet and the cancer was too far advanced for the chemo to save his life.” Second guessing and regrets were evidenced in the person who wrote, “We prolonged Gilligan’s death in fear that he still had life to live. In retrospect that was unfair and probably an inhumane decision on our part. I’m grieving him obviously, but I’m also angry with myself for not releasing him peacefully from his painful experience earlier.”

The theme of missing their animals was consistently described. However, the words that were used and said, it was a deep missing that came through in the responses.

The Nature of the Human-Pet Relationship

Attachment Bond—The high scores on the Pet Attachment Scale (PAS) and participants’ qualitative responses demonstrated the intensity and strength of their relationships with their companion animals. “Finding Amber was the closest thing in my life to divine intervention . . . if God has a face, it’s canine for sure.” Qualities such as unconditional love, “always there for me,” companionship, and core membership in one’s family were recurrent themes. The depth of love and connectedness was expressed in statements such as, “Pets can be closer to the emotional core than other humans” and “Dogs (pets) allow people a type of unconditional love that humans will never truly possess.” The deceased pet was referred to as friend and buddy. It became evident that the grief experience was so intense because of the strength of unconditional love. A recurring theme was respondents’ acknowledgment that their pets often had higher personal and emotional value to them than most people they knew. Pets were spoken of as being “constants” and providing stability in participants’ lives.

The Caregiving Relationship—Participants spoke about two aspects of the caregiving relationship. First, several spoke about receiving caregiving support from their pets (9% U.S.; 6% French Canadian), that is, feeling nurtured by their companion animals through their unconditional presence, grounding, and love. One person noted, “I was longing for love and allowed my dog to fill in as a substitute for what I was not getting.” Others talked about their animals as being the only ones they could truly depend on for comfort. The other aspect of the caregiving relationship was the caregiving responsibility the bereaved pet owners had for their pets (5% U.S.; 9% French Canadian). One participant noted that “my pets count on me and I need to be healthy” while other talked about how their pets relied on them for everything.

Pets as Family Members—Pets are frequently described as family members by a large percentage of pet owners (Cowles, 1985; Stewart et al., 1989; Toray, 2004). In our samples, it is common to read and hear of people referring to their pets as family members: “A part of my family is missing,” most often “child” or “baby,” “He was my husband and my first child so it was very sad to see him go.” Another participant responded in a way that furthers this perspective of pets as children, “Once in a lifetime you get lucky and have that mother-child pet bond . . . the pain is only understood by the individual who looked into the eyes of the pet-child or was there for them when they got their first boo-boo. . . .”

The shared life that respondents had with their pets was often described with the accompanying resultant loss of those daily interactions, for example, “My lab slept with me every night. She shared my pillow with my arm around her. I would massage her foot until she fell asleep. I am finding it hard to get to sleep and often cry.” The little daily interactions that were such a part of one’s life and are now missed was expressed by this person, among others, who wrote, “I miss playing with her fur on her head and twisting her ears around my fingers and the smell of her when she has just had a bath.”

Coping with Loss/Continuing Bonds (CB)

In terms of CBs, resolving grief does not involve ending a relationship (detachment), but instead involves a reorganization of the relationship with the deceased (Field, 2008). In our earlier work (Packman et al., 2012) we described both the comforting and distressing aspects of continuing bonds. Our qualitative data from the current sample (33% U.S.; 29% French Canadian) also supported both the adaptive nature of continuing bonds as well as their distressing nature. One participant described both aspects when he wrote, “It was my wife’s idea to give away or destroy all objects which would remind us of our boy. The sole exception is the wooden box which houses his ashes. It now sits next to the one that houses his brother who died nearly ten years ago.”

The comforting aspect of CBs was apparent in one respondent’s description of her use of reminiscing when she wrote, “. . . all these things, memories and pictures and talking help me keep her alive in a way with the ability to let her go.” Likewise, the comforting nature of dreams was described when someone wrote,

I have only had one dream of him, where I was holding him, and even though I didn’t see him, I could feel his warmth, smell his scent. It would comfort me so much if I could experience him in my dreams even one more time.

Rituals and memorials are a form of CB and their value has been continually described in the literature (Carmack, 2003; Carmack & Packman, 2011; Packman et al., 2011; Packman et al., 2012). Our data demonstrated an occasional example of someone having some form of ritual and memorial as a way of coping with their animal’s death, for example, “When we cremated Shakespeare’s remains, he was

placed in the crematorium in his favorite ‘beddy-bye’ and covered with one of his favorite ‘blankies’.” On the other hand, rituals and memorials do not always bring comfort as conveyed in this statement by one of our participants,

I buried him and created a garden around his gravesite, and though I tend it meticulously, I don’t seem to be able to find comfort there. Because he was with me in everything, there is nowhere I can go that is not a reminder that I have lost him.

DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, this is the first cross-cultural study to investigate the impact of the death of a pet on bereaved pet owners. An analysis of these responses demonstrated the intensity of the grief as well as the intensity of closeness in the relationship people had with their animal companions. Additionally, disenfranchised grief as well as empathic failure emerged from the data.

Among other issues, five major themes—intensity of loss, nature of relationship, guilt and regret, continuing bonds, and meaning making—need to be addressed in the clinical setting. In order for bereaved pet owners to disclose their emotions and the depth of their loss, a safe place where empathic bridging occurs must be provided.

Intensity of the Loss Experience

One of the authors (BC) notes her experiences in which people regularly describe the intensity of their loss. Such expressions occur in both one-on-one counseling sessions and support group settings. A primary facilitative role is to accept and validate the intensity of loss and nature of the relationship. Our data with a mean time since death (106 days for U.S. and 314 days for French Canada) indicated a high intensity of loss. We can only speculate how the intensity ratings would have differed had the data been reported earlier or later in the grief process. Our data demonstrate that pet loss is not “light” grief that quickly dissipates. Much too frequently grievers report that they have experienced being asked, “aren’t you over it yet, it’s been 3 weeks already.” Such a question speaks to the disenfranchised grief often experienced in pet loss.

Gilbert (2005) describes situations where one’s social network does not consider the relationship, type of death, or griever deserving of grief. Her description of disenfranchised grief fits with Doka’s conceptualization. She characterizes “socially questionable” and hidden losses, pet loss being one, in which the internet can be therapeutic as an online community and source of social support for disenfranchised grievers.

Gilbert (2005) and Gilbert and Horsely (2011) citing Sofka (1997), identified one form of internet social support as emotional or affective, resulting in a community of supporters who legitimize the griever and/or loss (p. 8). It appears that our internet

research site provided respondents with this perception of emotional support because of the number who said “thank you” in some way. This site provided empathic bridging by allowing respondents to connect with others (i.e., the researchers).

Gilbert (2005) and Gilbert and Horsely (2011) also describe a function of some internet sites that allow participants to share stories as well as express feelings and thoughts (p. 9). While they did not call this “empathic bridging,” our site may have provided participants with this needed and important function. This approach supports the notion of therapies that emphasize a re-telling of one’s narrative of death under conditions of perceived safety (Neimeyer, Burke, MacKay, & van Dyke Stringer, 2009, citing Rynerson, 2006). Such a therapeutic approach can provide social validation and “redress the empathic failure or silence with which many of the bereaved are met, especially when their losses or their responses to them are non-normative (Neimeyer and Jordan 2002)” (Neimeyer et al., 2009, p. 76).

Nature of the Relationship

The clinical setting needs to be an environment in which clients are invited to express not only the depth of loss but also the nature of the relationship. Often the bereaved are tentative when they are not sure of others’ recognition of their relationships with their companion animals. They are hesitant to say, “she was my baby” or “she was my best friend, my soul mate.” But when the clinician invites such disclosure by affirming “frequently people describe their pets as their baby, their child, a member of their family and that this is the hardest loss they have ever experienced,” people are more likely to acknowledge such feelings. They can hold onto the possibility that the clinician will be accepting and validating of both the intensity of their feelings and the nature of their relationship and not feel the embarrassment, and even shame, that they have felt in other settings.

A woman called one of the authors (BC) seeking counseling for the loss of her dog. She had been seeing another therapist in whom she had lost confidence because the therapist had told her, “The loss of your friend must be much harder for you than the loss of your dog.” This particular woman had a relationship end with a male friend during the same time she was grieving for her dog. To have assumed that the loss of her friend was more difficult than the loss of her dog negated any value the therapist might have had in this woman’s eyes. For this client there was no comparison in magnitude of loss in the two relationships.

Because intensity of loss is profound, assessment of suicidal risk is necessary. Our data indicated, not surprisingly and in line with previous research and in anecdotal writings, that grieving pet owners do, in fact, describe feelings of suicidality.

Guilt and Regret

The preponderance of guilt and regret is high as seen both in our data and experience. Exploring the possibility of individuals’ experiences of guilt and regret is a priority. It is frequent in pet loss support groups that guilt and regrets are expressed

both in terms of acts of omission and acts of commission. There is a woman who has been attending a pet loss support group for over 3 years because of her guilt over the way she feels she failed her cat when she did not go back to the hospital to say goodbye when the euthanasia occurred. She seems stuck in her guilt and regret and seems to be making little progress in moving forward.

One of the authors (FC) notes that her patients consult her mainly because of their strong sense of guilt. “Ninety-five percent feel guilty no matter how the death occurred, even after they have given all their possible care for their pet or the animal died because of his old age.” She attributes this to the Judeo-Christian side of education in Quebec. It is her experience that when a person has to make the decision to euthanize a pet, that person is sure that he is responsible for that death so it is his fault. “People have the impression of being in the action when feeling guilty.” She goes on to say as long as we do not want to experience our emotions, we find good reasons to avoid them. One reason why the grief for an animal is so difficult comes from our perceived responsibility to our animal. When someone decides to adopt, that person feels responsible for the duration of an animal’s life. When death occurs, that perceived sense of responsibility leads to a person feeling guilty and one asks oneself where did I fail at the task? Continuing to feel guilt allows one not to experience the emotions thus bringing that person back to his perceived sense of responsibility. Individuals look for a person or reason that was responsible for the death of the pet, for example the veterinarian or clinic staff. She goes on to say that this guilt happens frequently in patients who have provided a great deal of care to their animals with chronic illness for years and years. Thus, when death occurs these individuals are convinced they could have done something more. By feeling guilty, they have the impression that they are still doing something for their animal by continuing in some way to care. As noted by one participant: “Je me sens totalement irresponsable de n’avoir pas fait toujours ce que j’aurais du faire.” [“I feel totally responsible for not always having done what I was supposed to do.”]

Offering ways to manage and resolve the guilt and regret is an important clinical skill. Often guilt and regret, as well as anger, are ways to avoid feeling the intensity of the loss and grief. FC notes that “When they come to consultation and we are able to put aside the feeling of guilt, then they can feel the emotion of the pain of the lack of their animal’s presence, and at that moment, we are dealing with or onto the real emotion.”

Issues related to euthanasia were cited multiple times (12% U.S.; 17% French Canadian) in our data. Euthanasia is a decision and action that can cause major issues for clients. As cited above, clients often feel guilt due to their decision to authorize euthanasia. Others feel guilt because they feel they did it too soon or too late. For others the euthanasia did not go smoothly and they are left with an image of their beloved animal having a less than peaceful death. In the example above, the woman in the support group continues to carry her grief for 3 years because she did not go back to the veterinary hospital when her cat was euthanized. Whatever the issues, and they can be many, these need to be explored and addressed.

Continuing Bonds

The presence of continuing bonds (CB) among those grieving the death of their pets implies that clinicians need to address this dimension of grief. Exploring the degree to which clients experience CB is the first step. A second step is identifying the degree to which clients feel comfort or distress from their experience of CB. For those CBs that have the potential for bringing comfort, for example rituals and memorials, reminiscing, and holding on to a pet's items such as a blanket or toy, the clinician can explore the client's willingness to consider. For those CBs that are causing distress, the client can be helped to assess if putting them on hold for the time being might be the wiser decision. At a time when the grief is not as intense, a client might reconsider and reincorporate those CBs into his/her practice.

The clinical experience needs to be one of validation and support. This is especially necessary for those who are disenfranchised and in need of empathic bridging.

Meaning Making/Existential

The death of a beloved pet can be a turning point that alters one's perspective on life. Many people are able to transcend pain and turn crisis into opportunity while finding meaning out of the loss. One interesting cultural difference that emerged in coding the U.S. and French Canadian samples was how they accepted death. From a quantitative perspective, we identified an existential theme in the data (7% U.S.; 20% French Canadian). Not only was existential a more prominent theme for the French Canadian participants, we also discovered that while the loss of their animal companion was extraordinarily difficult, their ability to grow and make meaning from the experience differed. As noted by two French Canadian participants:

Le deuil est une processus vivant qui nous lie à la vie. [The mourning is a living process which links us to life].

Tout dépend de comment la personne voyait déjà la vie versus la mort. J'ai toujours été en paix avec la mort en tant que tel, donc le deuil de mon chien ne m'a pas été trop dur à supporter. [It all depends on how we see life versus death. I have always been at peace with death, so the mourning of my dog was not too hard for me].

By sharing what they learned in their grieving process, respondents channeled their pain into something productive and meaningful; they could identify with their struggles, empathize with their sorrow, and offer valuable information and support.

It is possible that other variables could have influenced this finding including time since the death, accumulation of losses, religious and spiritual beliefs, and life experiences. In summary, regardless of variables and culture, our findings reveal that although the loss of one's animal companion can be devastating, benevolent

connection through shared experiences (i.e., our online survey) allows for greater intimacy, less isolation, and a sense of purpose.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current study expanded our understanding of the subjective experiences of bereaved pet owners in the United States and French Canada. Using a mixed-methods design, we explored the richness of experiences shared by participants. Our data confirmed pet loss as a form of disenfranchised grief within the broader umbrella of empathic failure. We observed that an online survey provided an outlet for people to express their feelings in a safe, anonymous, and invitational way, thus becoming a means of empathic bridging. Additionally, we observed that our online survey facilitated a benevolent component, that is, a bereaved participant's willingness to help others in their grief. It appears that this online survey served the role of empathic bridging described by Neimeyer and Jordan. Researchers and clinicians are encouraged to identify, explore, and establish other ways in which empathic bridging can occur for those experiencing empathic failure.

However, there are some limitations to the study and the current findings should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. One limitation is that the quantitative data were based on self-report measures (ICG, PAS). It is possible that these measures cannot adequately capture the complex nature of strength of pet attachment and grief. In addition, we were diligent in back-translating all measures and open-ended questions, but it is possible that the questions held different meanings for participants in the United States and in French Canada.

Another limitation of our study involves the cross-sectional nature of the design. Future research should use a longitudinal research design and repeated measures of CB expressions and other constructs (from immediately after the pet's death until 1 to 3 years post-death). It would then be possible to clarify the normative course of various CB expressions in pet loss.

Future research should include an in-depth exploration of contextual factors related to pet loss. Specifically, the authors recommend examining the situational factors related to euthanasia and their impact on grief. Of interest would be the relationship between the euthanasia decision-making process and the subsequent intensity and duration of grief in addition to the impact on CB expressions. Because a pet's death is often disenfranchised, resulting in minimal or no support, people might need to become physically sick or exaggerate their emotional feelings in order to be taken care of when they are grieving a pet's death. What we find intriguing is the possibility that the death of a pet and resulting grief isn't "sufficient" enough to merit an understanding and supportive response (i.e., empathic failure), yet one's physical symptoms and illness does merit concern and care. Future research might pursue this idea.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors' thanks go to Scott Hines for his technical expertise and assistance; Dr. Betty Davies and Dr. Guenther Krueger for their methodological expertise; Dr. Rama Ronen and Dr. Tara Cronin for their data management; and Tartine Packman for her unconditional love and support. Above all, we thank our participants for taking their time to share with us the nature, depth, and intensity of their grief experiences and consistently emphasized the profound importance of companion animals in their lives.

REFERENCES

- Archer, J., & Winchester, G. (1994). Bereavement following death of a pet. *The British Journal of Psychology*, *85*, 259-271.
- Carlos, F. (2008). *Le Deuil animalier*. Quebec: Broquet Inc.
- Carmack, B. J. (1985). The effects on family members and functioning after the death of a pet. *Marriage & Family Review*, *8*(3-4), 149-161.
- Carmack, B. J. (2003). *Grieving the death of a pet*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books.
- Carmack, B. J., & Packman, W. (2011). Pet loss: The interface of continuing bonds research and practice. In R. Neimeyer, D. Harris, & G. Thornton (Eds.), *Grief and bereavement in contemporary society: Bridging research and practice* (pp. 273-284). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cornell, K., Brandt, J., & Bonvicini, K. (Eds.). (2007) *Effective Communication in Veterinary Practice*. Veterinary Clinics of North America, Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.
- Cowles, K. V. (1985). The death of a pet: Human responses to the breaking of the bond. *Marriage & Family Review*, *8*(3-4), 135-148.
- Doka, K. J. (2008). Disenfranchised grief in historical and cultural perspective. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, H. Schut, & W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 223-240). Washington, DC: U.S. Psychological Association.
- Field, N. P. (2008). Whether to relinquish or maintain a bond with the deceased. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, H. Schut & W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 113-132). Washington, DC: U.S. Psychological Association.
- Field, N. P., & Friedrichs, M. (2004). Continuing bonds in coping with the death of a husband. *Death Studies*, *28*(7), 597-620.
- Field, N. P., Gao, B., & Paderna, L. (2005). Continuing bonds in bereavement: An attachment theory based perspective. *Death Studies*, *29*, 277-299.
- Field, N. P., Nichols, C., Holen, A., & Horowitz, M. (1999). The relation of continuing attachment to adjustment in conjugal bereavement. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *67*, 212-218.
- Field, N. P., Orsini, L., Gavish, R., & Packman, W. (2009). Role of attachment in response to pet loss. *Death Studies*, *33*(4), 332-355.
- Filanovsky, C. (2003). *The nature of continuing bonds with the deceased and their effect on bereavement outcome*. Doctoral Dissertation, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.

- Finlay, C.J., & Krueger, G. (2011). A space for mothers; Grief as identity construction on memorial websites created by SIDS parents. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 63, 21-44.
- Gerwolls, M. K., & Labott, S. M. (1994). Adjustments to the death of a companion animal. *Anthrozoös*, VII(3), 172-187.
- Gilbert, K. R. (2005). *Disenfranchised grievers on the net*. Presentation at the ADEC annual meeting, Albuquerque, NM.
- Gilbert, K. R., & Horsley, G. C. (2011). Technology and grief support in the twenty-first century: A multimedia platform. In R. Neimeyer, D. Harris, & G. Thornton (Eds.), *Grief and bereavement in contemporary society: Bridging research and practice* (pp. 365-373). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gosse, G. (1988). *Factors associated with the human grief experience as a result of the death of a pet*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (AAT No. 8825153).
- Hickey, G., & Kipping, C. (1996). Issues in research. A multi-stage approach to the coding of data from open-ended questions. *Nurse Researcher*, 4, 81-91.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 15, No. 9, 1277-1288.
- Jarolmen, J. (1998). A comparison of the grief reaction of children and adults: Focusing on pet loss and bereavement. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 37(2), 133-150.
- Klass, D., & Chow, C. (2011). Culture and ethnicity in experiencing, policing, and handling grief. In R. Neimeyer, D. Harris, & G. Thornton (Eds.), *Grief and bereavement in contemporary society: Bridging research and practice* (pp. 341-353). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. L. (Eds.). (1996). *Continuing bonds—New understanding of grief*. Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis.
- Lagoni, L., Butler, C., & Hetts, S. (1994). *The human animal bond and grief*. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders.
- Lagoni, L., & Durrance, D. (2011). *Connecting with grieving clients*. Lakewood, CO: AAHA Press.
- Meyers, B. (2002). Disenfranchisement grief and the loss of an animal companion. In K. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief* (pp. 251-264). Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Neimeyer, R., Burke, L. A., MacKay, M. M., & van Dyke Stringer, J. G., (2009). Grief therapy and the reconstruction of meaning: From principles to practice. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40, 73-83. doi: 10.1007/s10879-009-9135-3
- Neimeyer, R. N., & Jordan, J. R. (2002). Disenfranchisement as empathic failure: Grief therapy and the co-construction of meaning. In K. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief* (pp. 95-117). Champaign: Research Press.
- Orsini, L. M. (2005). *Attachment styles and pet bereavement discussed in the context of attachment theory*. Doctoral Dissertation, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.
- Packman, W., Carmack, B.J., & Ronen, R. (2012). Therapeutic implications of continuing bonds expressions following the death of a pet. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 64(4), 335-356.
- Packman, W., Field, N. P., Carmack, B. J., & Ronen, R. (2011). Continuing bonds and psychosocial adjustment in pet loss. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 16(4), 341-357. doi: 10.1080/15325024.2011.572046

- Podrazik, D., Shackford, S., Becker, L., & Heckert, T. (2000). The death of a pet: Implications for loss and bereavement across the lifespan. *Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss, 3*, 361-395.
- Potter, W. J., & Levine-Donnerstein, D. (1999). Rethinking validity and reliability in content analysis. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 27*, 258-284.
- Prigerson, H. G., & Jacobs, S. C. (2001). Traumatic grief as a distinct disorder: A rationale, consensus criteria, and a preliminary empirical test. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, coping and care* (pp. 613-647). Washington, DC: U.S. Psychological Association.
- Quackenbush, J. E. (1985). The death of a pet: How it can affect owners. *The Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, 15*, 395-402.
- Rando, T. A. (1993). *Treatment of complicated mourning*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Ross, C., & Baron-Sorensen, J. (2007). *Pet loss and human emotion*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sife, W. (1998). *The loss of a pet*. New York, NY: Wiley Publishing Co.
- Sofka, C. J. (1997). Social support, "Internetworks," caskets for sale, and more: Thanatology and the information super highway. *Death Studies, 21*(6), 553-574.
- Stewart, C. S., Thrush, J. C., & Paulus, G. (1989). Disenfranchised bereavement and loss of a companion animal: Implications for caring communities. In K. J. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow* (pp. 147-159). Lexington, England: Lexington Books/D.C. Health and Com.
- Toray, T. (2004). The human-animal bond and loss: Providing support for grieving clients. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 26*, 244-259.

Direct reprint requests to:

Wendy Packman, JD, Ph.D.
Pacific Graduate School of Psychology at Palo Alto University
1791 Arastradero Road
Palo Alto, CA 94304
e-mail: wpackman@paloaltou.edu