

When the Bond Breaks: Variables that Influence Grief  
Following Companion Animal Loss

by

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Counseling Psychology, OISE  
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## Abstract

An online survey investigated variables that are related to grief, guilt and loneliness following companion animal loss. Variables of interest were: *relationship, species, time since death, type of death, attachment, social support*, and demographic variables. Female and male participants over eighteen ( $n = 85$ ) who had lost a companion animal within the last six months completed the survey. Individuals who classified their pets as good companions reported significantly less grief relative to those who considered their pets to be their children ( $p < 0.001$ ) and best friends ( $p = 0.001$ ). Those who labeled their animal as “my child” had significantly higher attachment scores when compared to those who labeled their pet as “a good companion” ( $p = 0.012$ ). Older age was predictive of significantly lower grief, situational guilt, and loneliness. High grief participants considered their pets to be their children and reported the highest state guilt, loneliness and attachment scores.

# Acknowledgments

## In Loving Memory of Our Lost Companions

and I think: how to thank  
the ones who've listened  
and sidled and let us stroke them,  
how to love them in their absence  
when sorrow comes  
in the night  
and in their shape

(Ronna Bloom, 2009)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

People are often severely affected by the death of their companion animals, particularly when the animals are considered to be part of the family (Gerwolls & Labott, 1994, McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002). It has been suggested that the loss of a companion animal can be experienced as a loss of identity, as animals often become projections of their owners' personalities and extensions of the self (Stern, 1996). Human- animal relationships can exceed human-human relationships in their ability to provide people with a greater sense of self-cohesion, self-esteem, calmness, soothing, and acceptance (Brown, 2007). There are myriad factors to consider when examining this field of loss; what is clear is that companion animal death can cause intense grief. Some research indicates that that the experience of owner grief is similar in intensity to losing a loved human (Field et al., 2009; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Keddie, 1977), while other studies suggest that not all bereaved pet owners experience a comparable grief (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). This spectrum of loss might contribute to why society tends to under-acknowledge and underestimate the importance of pets and the impact that their death can have on individuals and families (Meyers, 2002). In light of the differences that exist in the experience of pet bereavement, the psychological processes by which people deal with companion animal loss needs to be better understood. The purpose of this study is to provide greater insight into the variables which influence grief after the loss of a companion animal.

The following section will offer a review of literature examining grief associated with the death of a loved animal. It will review: companion animals in the home as well as different forms of grief, guilt, loneliness, social support and attachment related to the experience of pet loss. This review offers background information affirming the need for further work investigating the human animal bond and the consequences of its loss.

### 1.1 Companion Animals Bonds

Individuals acquire animals for many different reasons (e.g. entertainment, labour, service, or as an addition to the family). The reason for acquiring an animal may predict the type of bond that will exist between the owner and animal. A valuable study which delineated the different ways animals are perceived in the family unit was carried out by Cohen (2002). This study looked at

the role of pets in urban American families, and how the role of animals within the family compared to human family members. As one might expect, the results revealed that the roles that animals fill within the family unit vary across households. The different roles that animals have within households have important and unexplored implications for understanding variance in companion animal grief.

Recent world events have highlighted how deeply bonded humans are to companion animals, and how influential their loss can be. In the tragic aftermath of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster the United States government passed the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, 2006) in response to pet owners who were endangering their own lives by refusing to evacuate the disaster zone without their pets. This law ensures the consideration of household pets in state disaster planning. This bill is a striking example of how intensely attached North Americans are to their pets.

Companion animals that have traditionally filled utility roles outside the household have evolved to provide social-emotional roles within households (i.e. strong familial bonds), and engagement outside of the household in the community. Morley & Fook (2005) found that owning a pet was associated with higher community engagement and greater meaning in life. Throughout human history, our species has utilized animal relationships for food and labour (e.g. work horses, hunting dogs, beef cattle), but arguably, a shift has started to take place in the last century in the developed part of the world. Comfortable and even indulgent environmental conditions may be allowing for the greater development of a specific type of intense bonding behaviour between humans and companion animals; that is, a strengthened human –companion animal bond. These human-animal familial relationships make the study of this particular cost of social commitment (i.e. companion animal grief) a more salient focus of psychological research.

Our ability to bond within and across species has been a valuable survival behavior that is supported by psychological and physiological mechanisms. These mechanisms also explain how we are able to bond so closely to other social mammals. Psychological mechanisms include: anthropomorphizing (assigning human qualities to non-human animals), neotenizing (the elicitation of infant care-giving responses), and allelomimetic behaviour (human care behaviours in response to animals mimicking human group members) (Lagoni in Butler & Hetts, 1994). The theory of symbolic interactionism, whereby the use or meaning of an object determines the

relationship with the object, has also been applied to the field of human-animal relationships (Sanders, 2003)

The relationship a person shares with his or her companion animal can comprise different qualities which vary in nature and intensity. For example, Keddie (1977) was the first to suggest that one of the functions of domestic animals is to serve as surrogate relatives. The most common roles being: parents, siblings, spouses or offspring. Turner (2001) has specifically looked at the notion of animals fulfilling a variety of emotional roles for women. The author found that the role that the animal serves can have a profound impact on the individual's psychological health as the commitment in these bonded relationships is often very high.

Chur-Hansen (2010) discusses how women in Western cultures develop maternal ties with their companion animals by referring to them as surrogate children, using phrases like "fur-children" or "fuzzy kids". This psychological phenomenon is well exemplified in popular media and on television. A well-known high-end dog food company called Blue Buffalo released a successful advertisement series targeting "pet parents" in which an affluent soccer mom explains to viewers that she wants the best for her dog and feeds him like family because "he's not a dog, he's their biggest boy" (Blue Buffalo Co., 2012).

Margolies (1999) and Turner (2001) reported that women who do not have children living in the house have stronger bonds with their animals. Additionally this author suggests that the death of a pet can be amplified by the loss of a nurturing and mothering role, leaving the woman feeling as though she has lost a child.

Other researchers interested in human-animal bonding find contention with the need to classify our relationship with our pets in human-human terms and suggest that some attachments with animals transcend any relationship shared with other human beings (Wrobel & Dye, 2003; Chur-Hansen, 2010). Morales (1997) argues that there is a degree or type of intimacy that exists with an animal that cannot be (or should not be) compared with that of parents, spouses, friends, or siblings. In Meyers (2002) it is argued that the bonds we share with animals are unique and should not be thought of as more or less important in relative terms. The author emphasizes the need to validate, affirm and respect the worthwhile relationships we have with animals.

## 1.2 Grief

Grief has been simply and appropriately referred to as “the cost of commitment” (Parkes, 1972). It can be thought of as the unfortunate trade-off for being able to maintain stable relationships; a cost that evolution has determined to be acceptable. Parkes (1972) argues that grief can be evolutionarily conceptualized on two levels: the ultimate level, whereby the intensity of grief that one experiences is a distal consequence of the intensity of the relationship that was lost (i.e. its adaptive significance); or, on a proximal level, in which grief can be understood in relation to the direct attachments that one has for that who was lost (Parkes, 1972). The intense experience of grief in the human–animal context appears to be a facet of human complexity that has been largely ignored in theories of cognitive and biological psychology. However, it has been given greater acknowledgment in applied fields of social psychology.

Grief is a multifaceted form of emotional suffering. Zisook and Shuchter (1985) conducted a survey based study that investigated the types and rates of *grief related feelings* in a sample of 300 participants who had lost their spouses. The time period ranged from weeks to years since loss. Loneliness and guilt were two prominent feelings related to the experience of loss. In the initial year of bereavement over half of the participants reported worry about loneliness and over a quarter of them experienced ideas of guilt or self-reproach regarding their partners’ deaths. Specific quantitative measurement of these two affects related to companion animal grief could not be found in the literature. Pets provide another form of intimate companionship, prompting a desire to better understand the rates and intensity of grief, guilt and loneliness in companion animal loss.

## 1.3 Disenfranchised Grief

Doka (1989) argues that societies have ‘grieving rules’ that delineate who, what, when, how, and for whom people should grieve. When these rules are incongruent with the nature of the person’s attachment and experience of loss, the grief that he or she endures is disenfranchised. A person’s suffering is exacerbated when he or she is not able to openly grieve and society does not acknowledge the event as worthy of the person’s grief. Disenfranchisement inhibits the needed resolution of grief and the mourning process. Chur-Hansen (2010) discusses some of the judgments that accompany disenfranchised grief in the context of pet loss. A common judgment being that the bereaved pet owner is bizarre or deficient in his or her ability to maintain

meaningful attachments with other humans, instead choosing to bond with animals. These criticisms and dismissive thinking can cause the bereaved individual to become isolated, feel ashamed, and guilty. Negative judgments of the person who is mourning the loss of a loved one can also increase a person's chances of having complicated reactions (Chur-Hansen, 2010).

Doka (1989) argues that managing the death of a companion animal can be uniquely challenging because of the lack of socially sanctioned traditions that bring family and friends together to support the grieving pet owner and allow for the expression and resolution of that grief. As a result, companion animal loss may be perceived as disenfranchised grief, and disenfranchised grief may convolute or prolong the individual's grieving process (Doka, 1989). Kauffman (in Doka, ed., 1989) explains the process of disenfranchisement through two means: 1) the influence of social norms, and 2) the individual's internalized belief system, values, and expectations (referred to as intra-psychic mechanisms). Disenfranchised grief has also been investigated among humans grieving for humans: for example, when a gay or lesbian individual loses his or her partner (Walter, 2003). It has been found that when couples are not open about their relationship or the culture and family is not accepting and supportive, the magnitude of the partner's death is marginalized, unrecognized, and disenfranchised (Walter, 2003). One can conclude that this research highlights the importance of social recognition and support after the death of a loved one.

Researchers have consistently noted that there are few if any well recognized and widely accepted social systems to assist in coping with the death of a loved animal (Sife, 2005; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). This has been interpreted as a social denial of the importance of human – animal bond relationships (Baydak, 2000). An important distinction made in the literature is that societal disenfranchisement results from a lack of acknowledgment for the relationship that was lost, rather than a failed appreciation of the object that was lost (Corr, Nabe, and Corr, 2009). Corr, Nabe, and Corr (2009) have drawn three conclusions relating to the experience of pet loss: 1) it is the relationship that is central to appreciating the loss, not the object of the relationship, 2) the nature of the death (how it occurred) will affect the bereavement, and 3) the circumstances of the bereaved (i.e. stage of life or household structure) are critical to the experience. These authors suggest that if society acknowledges the influence of these variables on the individual after the death of a loved animal, social disenfranchisement can be avoided.

A clear example of how social values influence an individual's legitimate right to grieve the loss of an animal family member is evident in organizational employee bereavement policies. Most organizations do not acknowledge the death of a family pet and employees are forced to take time off to manage their grief or the palliative care of their animal(s) under the guise of "sick days". If a person's social community neglects to recognize the depth of the relationship loss that the person is experiencing, it diminishes the individual's right to grief (Corr et al., 2009). These social norms can be internalized and result in a second form of disenfranchisement at the intra-psychic level (Kauffman, 1989).

Social norms and behaviours, such as referring to a deceased pet as "just an animal" reinforce the mentality that non-human species are not worthy of our grief; regardless of a shared significant relationship with the animal. People are more supportive of children's experience with animal loss, but expect adults to "know better" when it comes to the death of a pet (Baydak, 2000). Yet there is considerable evidence of the very real distress that people feel. Kauffman (1989) reported that sensory hallucinations and dreams about the deceased are common symptoms of grief and indicators of intra-psychic processes. Examples may be hearing the familiar sounds of your animal, such as the clinking of the dog collar or mew of a cat. Gustafson (1992) reported that after the death of a loved pet, people often find themselves listening and looking for the pet against all reason. This often causes pet owners to feel embarrassment or shame when unexpected or uncontrollable emotional expressions occur (Baydak, 2000). This is especially psychologically upsetting for people that internalize socially determined grief rules (which exclude animal loss from legitimate cause for bereavement), and experience significant grief symptoms. According to Kaufman's (1989) theory, intra-psychic or self-disenfranchisement causes the person to believe that their reactions are inappropriate or unhealthy; ultimately exacerbating their grief related depression, guilt and shame, and may even cause them to question their mental stability.

## 1.4 Complicated Grief

Currently there is no universally accepted definition for complicated grief and it is not an independent established diagnostic entity; although it is recognized under the umbrellas of other disorders. The ICD-10 and DSM-IV-TR acknowledge grief to be a clinical problem and classify severe symptoms as abnormal under two separate pathologies. The ICD -10 recognizes

pathological grief symptoms under adjustment disorder diagnosis, while the DSM-IV considers grief symptoms under Major Depressive Disorders (Maercker, 2007). Grief researchers have questioned the exclusion of complicated grief as its own entity on the grounds that it is distinct from depression and other adjustment disorders (Prigerson et al., 1999).

Horowitz et al. (1997) developed a definition and criteria for pathological grief, also referred to as complicated or traumatic grief, which has been readily cited in the literature (Forstmeier & Maercker, 2006; Maercker, 2007; Prigerson et al., 1999). The authors distinguished it as: intense intrusive thoughts, pangs of severe emotion, distressing yearnings, feeling excessively alone and empty, excessively avoiding tasks reminiscent of the deceased, unusual sleep disturbances, and maladaptive levels of loss of interest in personal activities (Horowitz et al., 1997). Pet bereavement can encompass all of these symptoms.

## 1.5 Companion Animal Grief Research

Adams, Bonnett, and Meek (1999) used qualitative methods to research owner responses to companion animals. From the nondirective interviews they concluded that the process of grief can best be understood as a social and psychological search for meaning. Adams (1997) earlier work found that the majority of interviewed respondents reported that the experience of companion animal grief is unique from human loss. Most owners struggled to make sense of their feelings about their lost companion. In later research Adams, Bonnett, and Meek (2000) conducted survey research that comprised of 200 participants who had lost a companion animal in the last two months. The researchers focused on three outcome measures: social/emotional and physical consequences, thought process, and despair. It was found that 30% of participants suffered severe grief. Adrian, Deliramich, and Frueh (2009) focused on the presence of complicated grief and post-traumatic stress after the loss of a pet and found that 20% of respondents experiences significant grief reactions, and 5 – 12% of participants endured a sort of pathological disruption.

Gage and Holcomb (1991) looked at gender differences in a sample of married participants who had lost a pet in the last three years. The authors found that women suffered higher levels of bereavement and were twice as likely to rate the loss as “quite” or “extremely” disturbing. Men were more likely to rate the stress of the event as like losing a best friend, while women found the experience comparable to losing contact with their adult children. Chur-Hansen (2010) also

reported that women tend to feel greater despair after losing a pet and are also more likely to seek out health and support services.

### 1.5.1 Bereavement Guilt

Bowlby (1980) broadly addresses grief as the symptoms that result from the termination of any highly treasured attachment relationship. However, there is an important element of grief associated with companion animal loss that is not recognized in the above definition - *guilt*. Practitioners have noted that guilt is a prominent emotion after the death of a pet (Allen, 2000), and pet bereavement literature identifies guilt as a prominent emotion when evaluating the decision of whether or not to euthanize one's animal (Cusack, 1988; Fogle, 1981). Unfortunately, guilt measures and theoretical models and explanations for this aspect of grief have not been focused on. It is therefore important that this paper offer a rational argument for pet loss related guilt. The following section will propose a theoretical explanation for why guilt is often tied to companion animal loss.

Excessive guilt may be a unique factor to pet bereavement because of the lack of socially shared responsibility for animal welfare and the greater decision making power concerning death. For example, the Canadian legal system does little to protect the welfare of animals. Animals fall under property law and harm or death to an animal is punished with monetary fines. If an individual's dog is hit by a car and killed, there is no follow up investigation; the onus of protecting one's animal(s) rests almost entirely on the owner. Therefore traumatic accidents that end in death can be interpreted by the owner as a failed duty of care and cause distinct self-blame. Secondly, most if not all, Westernized legal systems prohibit euthanasia of humans. In Canada, the burden of death and palliative decision making is shared by the health care system. This shared responsibility reduces the questioning of decision making, and feelings of wrongdoing after the death of a loved one. In the case of companion animals, the financial burden of the health and wellbeing rests entirely on the owner. Many owners might not have the funds to provide the medical treatment that their animal requires and are then left with the decision to euthanize their pet or watch them suffer. Guilt and regret can be disabling, and it is important to consider the influence of this emotion when considering grief associated with companion animal loss.



Some authors have recognized the role of guilt in companion animal loss, but few studies have specifically investigated its impact through standardized measures of analysis. Frid & Perea (2007) discuss guilt in the context of euthanasia, and suggest that the presence of a supportive veterinarian who helps the owner make informed decisions about the use of euthanasia can relieve owner guilt. Hancock and Yates (1989) also address the important role that veterinarians have in mitigating the pain of companion animal loss. These authors argue that communication between owner and veterinarian concerning matters of medical needs and death of pets are very important conversations that help clients deal with the process of feeling guilty and helpless. An interesting study was performed by Thomas (1996), who took a phenomenological perspective when investigating the experience of pet bereavement in 22 participants. The author conducted semi-structured interviews and found that guilt and blame were themes that emerged alongside notions of responsibility, the perception of animals as children, ownership, euthanasia, suffering, and decisions regarding the life and death of the animal.

Carmack (1986) reported high frequencies of guilt, compared to Weisman (1991) who reported low levels of guilt after the death of a pet. The expression of guilt is highly correlated with attachment and influenced by the circumstances of death, i.e. when a pet is hit by car (Baydak, 2000). Other researchers have suggested that guilt is the expression of anger turned inward (Barker, 1985). In this sense guilt can be thought of as a normal part of grief, a notion that is supported by Cowles (1985).

Guilt is an important construct for researchers to be cognizant of in the thanatology of pets as it involves negative treatment of the self, which can be a particularly corrosive type of emotional pain. This study investigated guilt reactions compared with more commonly reported grief symptoms, such as loneliness.

### 1.5.2 Loneliness

Loneliness is another aspect of pet bereavement that has received little scientific research attention. This is surprising as animals are often sought for companionship and to fill relationship needs in people's lives. McCutcheon & Fleming (2002) do not directly discuss the construct of loneliness, but present related findings concerning isolation after companion animal loss. The researchers administered a questionnaire based study to 103 adult participants and found that social isolation, as well as greater total grief was more prominent in participants

whose companion animals died naturally rather than being euthanized. The authors also found that owners who lived alone and therefore may be at greater risk of greater loneliness, experienced significantly greater somatization than those who lived with others (McCutcheon, & Fleming, 2002). The findings suggest that a relationship might exist between loneliness after pet loss and somatoform symptomology.

### 1.5.3 Social Support

Social support and attachment are two of the most studied aspects of pet loss. King and Werner (2011) in their study of variables that influence cat or dog companion animal bereavement found that higher levels of social support predicted lower levels of grief, depression, anxiety and somatic symptoms. Social support was also negatively related to attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance.

In Nilsson's (2006) study, the author investigated different types of support systems and found that most people viewed their pet(s) as family members and turned to their companion animals for social support. This impacted owners' experience of loss. Nilsson (2006) reported that those who experienced grief were more likely to be proactive about seeking support from friends, family, and professionals. Discrepancies between actual and hoped for support from friends and family were related to higher levels of grief. Adams, Bonnett and Meek (2000) in their study of owner responses to companion animal death conclude that it is societal attitudes specifically which differentiate the experience of companion animal loss from other forms of loss.

McCutcheon (2006) investigated variables that influenced complicated and uncomplicated grief related to the death of a pet in a sample 201 participants who completed a questionnaire based study. Findings related to social support revealed that unsupportive social interactions were predictive of all forms of grief (complicated, uncomplicated and intense uncomplicated grief) as well as shorter time since loss, high attachment, low adaptiveness, and high hassle exposure. Interestingly, not euthanizing one's companion animal was predictive of complicated grief.

### 1.5.4 Attachment

Topics concerning attachment are prevalent in the pet bereavement literature. Henry (2009) identifies that there is variation in the pet bereavement literature concerning the conceptualization and measurement of attachment. Some studies measure attachment using the

*attachment theory* approach, which grew out of the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Attachment theory delineates different responses (attachment styles) a person has to a significant care provider (i.e. secure vs. insecure). By contrast, other researchers have used measures like the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale or PAQ Pet Attachment Scale to evaluate the quality and depth of bond a person shares with his or her companion animal – this is referred to as level of attachment. The current study has employed the later approach to attachment and has measured quality and depth of bond with the animal.

Henry (2009) investigated whether a person's attachment *style* was predictive of level of grief. The author found that contextual variables such as time since death had a greater impact on grief than a person's attachment *style* to a caregiver (i.e. secure attachment vs. insecure attachment). Other attachment theory researchers have found that attachment anxiety and avoidance are positively associated with owner grief, depression, anxiety and somatic symptoms after pet loss (King, 2011). Kwong (2010) in a study that looked at companion dog loss reported that owner grief responses were consistent with the experience of losing an attachment figure. The author applies attachment theory to human – animal relationships and suggests that companion animals can fulfill fundamental human needs for attachment and caregiving. Related findings are found in the work Nilsson (2006) who reported that people who did not have a partner were especially likely to feel attached to their pets. Margolies (1999), who employed a psychodynamic perspective to the study of human animal interactions proposes that a gender difference exists in attachment relationships with animals. Margolies (1999) conducted a study that examined unresolved grief related to maternal loss in female pet owners who had lost their companion animals. The author suggests that companion animal relationship dynamics can be understood as internalized parent/child figures.

## Chapter 2

### Study Hypothesis and Rationale

From the above literature review, it is evident that grief and guilt associated with companion animal loss is a prevalent and significant issue which warrants greater understanding. A number of variables have been identified in the literature as affecting grief including attachment, type of death, gender, age, social support, and veterinarian support. In addition, this study also investigated the impact of type of relationship (how we label our companion animals) and reported grief related loneliness scores. The purpose of this study was to investigate the quantifiable impact of these specific variables on guilt and grief following the loss of a companion animal. Furthermore, most previous studies have focused on the loss of dogs and cats. In this study the type of animal was expanded.

## Chapter 3

### Experimental Designs and Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

Participants who had recently lost a companion animal (within six months) were invited to participate in a web based survey. They were informed that the researchers are investigating grief related to companion animal loss. Participants were recruited from posters placed in veterinary hospitals, frequented grief support forums (i.e. the SPCA pet loss web page) as well as, electronic ads in the volunteer section of Craigslist. Eligible participants had to have experienced the death of a companion animal within the last six months and be 18 years or older. The only exclusion criterion was an insufficient ability to read and understand the English language.

#### 3.2 Procedure

Interested participants were invited to participate in an online survey and were given a web address that directed them to the study welcome page. Alternatively, participants could request that an electronic copy or hard copy be sent to them. Although this option was available, no participants chose this option. The welcome page explained the study and introduced the researchers. On the web based version, at the bottom of the page a consent button allowed the participant to continue on with the study. If participants agreed to continue with the study, they completed a six part online survey (see Appendices 1-6) constructed to examine their social and individual experiences with animal attachment and loss. The survey was administered through the online survey tool, “Survey Gizmo” (Widgix Software, Massachusetts). Veterinarians were contacted via phone and email to obtain consent to post flyers and recruit from their clinics. Participants interested in receiving feedback from the study were invited to email the researchers to receive a copy of the final report. Participation was completely voluntary and no compensation was provided.

#### 3.3 Measures and Instruments

The survey consisted of six sections: the Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ), the UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA), the Companion Animal Attachment Scale (PAQ), the

Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG), the Guilt Inventory Questionnaire (Guilt), and the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ).

### 3.3.1 Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ)

This section was created for this study. It contained three subsections titled: “information about you;” “information about your animal;” and “your experiences with others after the loss of your animal.” The three sections collected demographic information such as age, sex, ethnicity, and level of education. It also contained questions about the relationship between the person and the deceased animal (e.g. type of pet, cause of death, and responses from friend, family, and community (Appendix 1: Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ) ).

### 3.3.2 Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG)

This is an objective instrument that measures and quantifies the multi-dimensions of grief associated with the loss of a loved one. The scale was condensed from the Inventory of Grief scale by Faschingbauer, Zisook, & DeVaul (1987). The TRIG is a two-scale Likert questionnaire that is divided into past and present behaviours and feelings. Eight of the questions are dedicated to how the person was feeling at the time of death and thirteen questions cover how they are feeling at the present moment. Brown, Richards and Wilson (1996) showed this scale to be applicable to companion animal grief. Reliability scores show this measure to be satisfactory with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86-0.89 for the past scale and 0.77-0.87 for the present scale (Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002). This grief measure was chosen for the following reasons: it has been widely used; it focuses on grief rather than broad psychiatric symptoms; it assesses normal, not complicated, grief; and considers grief across all possible losses, rather than a specific loss (Altmaier, 2011). Prigerson, Maciejewski, Reynolds, Bierhals, Newsom, Fasiczka, et al.(1995) examined grief reactions in a population of 97 conjugally bereaved elders by employing different grief measures. This study only used the present TRIG scale, which measures current feelings and behaviours as the researchers were concerned that participants advanced age would affect participant’s ability to recall feelings and behaviours. The average time since loss was 2.83 years. The mean score from the TRIG (present feelings) scale for bereaved participants was  $36.8 \pm 10.8$ . The average score for control participants was  $26.8 \pm 10.6$ . The two subsets have the following possible ranges: TRIG Past grief scores range from 8 to 40, and TRIG Present grief range from 13 to 65. Examples of the type of statements that

participants were asked to respond to on the TRIG past scale include: “I found it hard to work well after my pet died” and “after my pet died I lost interest in my family, friends, and outside activities”. Examples of the type of statements that participants were asked to respond to on the TRIG present scale include: “I still cry when I think of my pet who died”, “I am preoccupied with thoughts about my pet who died”, and “things and people around me still remind me of my pet who died”.

### 3.3.3 Guilt Inventory Questionnaire

The Guilt Inventory is composed of three subscales measuring trait guilt (Guilt-Trait) (i.e. characteristic variables), state guilt (Guilt-State) (present or acute feelings), and moral standards (Guilt-Moral) (such as subjective moral reasoning related to feelings of guilt). Previous research has suggested good reliability and the validity of their interpretations (Jones, Schratte & Kugler, 2000; Kugler & Jones, 1992). The measure includes a total of 44 questions that use a five point Likert scale ranging from completely false to completely true. Internal consistency of a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89 is reported (Kugler & Jones, 1992). Jones and Schratte (2000) administered this scale to 1688 university students who were enrolled in psychology classes. The authors reported mean scores of  $28.0 \pm 6.5$  for state guilt, and  $55.6 \pm 11$  for trait guilt. State Guilt scores range from 10 to 50 and Trait Guilt from 20 to 100. Examples of the type of statements that participants were asked to respond to on the State Guilt Inventory include: “I have recently done something that I deeply regret” and “lately, I have felt good about myself and what I have done”. The Trait Guilt Inventory included statements like: “I do not believe that I have made a lot of mistakes in my life”, or “frequently, I just hate myself for something that I have done”. Moral guilt scores were not included in the analyses as there was no reason to hypothesize that this type of guilt would be relevant.

### 3.3.4 Companion Animal Attachment Scale (PAQ)

This is an eight-item scale that was chosen because it is not dependent on type of companion animal (Stallones, Johnson, Garrity & Marx, 1990). The reliability of the PAQ is trusted with a Cronback’s alpha of 0.75, indicating good internal consistency (Stallones et al., 1989). Brown (2002) employed the PAQ in a study that examined ethnic variations in pet attachment in a sample of 133 students attending veterinary school. Normative data from this study reported an average male and female score of  $12.8 \pm 4.7$  and  $16.0 \pm 3.7$  respectively. Scores range from 0 to

23 points. Examples of the type of questions that participants were asked on the PAQ Attachment scale include: “to what extent would you say owning (*name of pet*) has helped your health?”, “to what extent do you agree with the statement: no family is complete until there is a pet in the home”, and “do you, or did you, keep a picture of (*name of pet*) on your person or in your living space (i.e. in your wallet or on display in your home or office)”?

### 3.3.5 UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA)

This scale assesses subjective feelings of loneliness or social isolation. It was chosen for its concise format, which includes a ten item scale that rates the frequency of feelings associated with loneliness. The Revised University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale is the most widely used measure of loneliness (Knight, Chisholm, Marsh, & Godfrey, 1988). The UCLA was presented in the section of the survey titled “Questions about how you feel towards other people.” Normative data compiled by Knight et al. (1988) was drawn from a sample of 978 adults who were asked to complete a health survey. Scores can range from (lowest possible) to (highest possible). The average male score was  $34.9 \pm 9.5$ , while females averaged a slightly higher score of  $35.6 \pm 10.3$ . Reliability and validity assessments reveal that this measure is highly reliable, both in terms of internal consistency ( $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from 0.89 to 0.94) and moderate test-retest reliability over a one-year period ( $r = 0.73$ ). Convergent validity for the scale was indicated by significant correlations with other measures of loneliness (Russell, 1996). This scale has a possible range of 20 to 80. Examples of the type of questions that participants were asked on the UCLA scale include: “how often do you feel that you are “in tune” with the people around you” and “how often do you lack companionship or feel that there is no one you can turn to”?

### 3.3.6 Social Support Preference Questionnaire (SSQ)

This section includes a list of social support options that are available to people who have lost a companion animal. The SSQ was referred to in the survey as “Questions to determine what support services would be best for you”. The preference list is aimed at investigating favorable and unfavorable support options depending on level and type of grief experienced. A copy of the SSQ is located in Appendix 2: **Social Support Preference Questionnaire**.



### 3.4 Analysis

Data were collected and organized with Microsoft Excel 2007 and analyzed with SPSS version 17 (Chicago, Illinois). Descriptive statistics were obtained for demographic and descriptive variables in the Demographic Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ) and Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ). Means, standard deviations and ranges for the UCLA Loneliness Scale, PAQ attachment, Guilt Inventory, and TRIG Grief questionnaires were examined for statistical differences using one way ANOVA analysis between: the type of companion animal, types of relationship, the time since companion animal loss, and how the animal died. Bonferroni corrected *post-hoc* analyses were performed if the ANOVA reported a main effect.

To assess if demographic variables such as age or sex are predictive of grief following a companion animal loss, stepwise linear regression analysis was performed.

To determine the characteristics of individuals experiencing high levels of grief, the cohort was divided into tertiles based on grief past and grief present. Following this, chi square analysis explored demographic variables and ANOVA with Bonferroni correction explored absolute scores on scaled measures. Pearson correlations explored relationships between measures.

## Chapter 4 Results

### 4.1. Demographic Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ) results

A total of eighty five participants completed the survey. Demographic data are reported in Table 1. Four hundred and thirty five individuals visited the site, but did not open the survey and 48 individuals began, but did not complete, the survey.

The majority of participants were Caucasian ( $n = 82$ , 97%), female ( $n = 76$ , 89%), and lived in an urban setting ( $n = 62$ , 73%). Twenty individuals (24%) lived in a single person household, and sixty five (77%) people lived with one or more individuals. Eighty percent ( $n = 68$ ) of the participants had another companion animal in the household. The age of participants ranged from 18 years of age to over 60 years of age, with the majority of the participants falling within the 35-54 year old age bracket ( $n = 49$ , 58%). Education levels ranged from less than high school to graduate or professional degrees, with 84% ( $n = 71$ ) of respondents reporting having a post-secondary degree. While assessing the distribution of age using Chi Square analysis age brackets were collapsed into 18-44 and  $\geq 45$ .

Demographic data for companion animals is located in Table 2. Cat ( $n = 37$ , 44%) and dog owners ( $n = 24$ , 28%) comprised the majority of the of the study sample. Other animals included rabbit ( $n = 14$ , 17%), hedgehog ( $n = 5$ , 6%), guinea pig ( $n = 2$ , 2%), horse and rat ( $n = 2$ , 2% respectively). Approximately one third ( $n = 25$ , 29%) of participants obtained their pets through rescue. For subsequent analysis species of animal was collapsed into three groups (cats, dogs, and rabbits). This was due to low numbers in other species.

Participants reported a variety of motivations for obtaining their pet including: companionship ( $n = 12$ , 14%), wanting an addition to the family ( $n = 5$ , 6%), getting a pet for their children ( $n = 2$ , 2%), utility ( $n = 2$ , 2%), compassionate adoption (i.e. taking over the care of a friend or relative's pet) ( $n = 8$ , 9%), or as a replacement for another pet ( $n = 5$ , 6%). One of the key variables of interest in this study was how participants described their relationships with their companion animals. The most common answer being that the deceased pet was labeled "my child" ( $n = 38$ , 45%). This was followed by "a good companion" ( $n = 29$ , 34%), and "my best

friend” ( $n = 15, 18\%$ ). Only two individuals described their pet as “my guardian” ( $n = 2, 2\%$ ) and only one participant referred to his or her pet as “a nice animal”.

Most animals in the study were euthanized following disease ( $n = 40, 47\%$ ). Other causes of death were: a disease that ended without intervention ( $n = 16, 19\%$ ); a sudden event that ended in euthanasia ( $n = 18, 21\%$ ); and a sudden event (i.e. being struck by an automobile) that ended without intervention ( $n = 11, 13\%$ ). Time since death ranged from one week since passing to six months since passing. Full details are located in Table 2.

Table 3 reports mean results for attachment (PAQ), Loneliness (UCLA), Grief (TRIG) and guilt measures.

*Summary of the scales mean values in a normative context:* All survey results were found to be within possible ranges for the respective scales. Comparator normative data can be found in Appendix 3: **Normative Data for Study Scales**. PAQ attachment values had a possibility of ranging between 0 and 23 points. The current study sample had a mean of  $12 \pm 3$  with a range of 4 to 19. This mean value was on par with male and less than female veterinary students in previous literature (Brown, 2002). The TRIG grief scale is divided into two subsets, TRIG Past grief (ranging from 8 to 40) and TRIG Present grief (ranging from 13 to 65). The current study sample had a mean of  $23 \pm 7$  with a range of 8 to 37 for TRIG Past grief. The mean for TRIG Present grief was  $45 \pm 10$  with a range from 21 to 64. These values are higher than reported control values in elderly individuals (Prigerson et al., 1995). Present study scores were also found to be higher for TRIG Present grief (Prigerson et al., 1995). The UCLA loneliness scale has a possible range of 20 to 80. The average score in the present cohort was  $44 \pm 13$  and ranged from 20 to 73. Literature control values have a mean of  $34.9 \pm 9.5$  for males and  $35.6 \pm 10.3$  for females (Knight et al., 1988). The Guilt Inventory is divided into three subsections: State Guilt (possible values ranging from 10 to 50), Moral Standards (ranging from 15 to 75), and Trait Guilt (ranging from 20 to 100). The present study’s values were as follows: State Guilt (mean  $27 \pm 8$ , range 14 to 45), Moral Standards (mean  $48 \pm 8$ , range 26 to 71), and Trait Guilt (mean  $59 \pm 13$ , range 33 to 89). These values were on par with reported control values for State Guilt, higher for Trait Guilt, and on par for Moral Standards (Jones & Schratte, 2000).

## 4.2 Grief

The initial analysis began with exploring the influence of *type of Death* (Table 4, Table 5, & Table 6), *time since death* (Table 7), *type of relationship* (Table 8) and *type of animal* (Table 9) on grief scores. ANOVA was utilized for this analysis. This was an important stage of the analysis as it allowed the examination of raw grief scores, the primary endpoint of the administered surveys.

Of the aforementioned variables only *type of relationship* (how people labeled their relationship with their pet) was found to be significantly influential on past (reflecting back to the time of loss) and present grief (how the survey respondent is currently feeling) scores. The highest grief scores were attributed to those who labeled their animals as “best friend” (past:  $26 \pm 4$ ; present:  $49 \pm 8$ ). This was followed by those who labeled their companion animals as “my child” (past:  $24 \pm 7$ ; present:  $48 \pm 9$ ). There was no significant difference between those who labeled their companion animal as their child or their best friend. These labels were, however, associated with significantly greater grief when compared to those who labeled their companion animal as a good companion (past:  $19 \pm 7$ ; present:  $40 \pm 11$ ). Full results are located in Table 8.

To assess the predictive influence of chosen variables on grief, a multivariate linear regression was performed (Table 10). Variables included in this regression were: *time since death*, *animal age*, *gender*, *age bracket*, *the presence of a support figure*, *number in household*, *attachment*, *living location*, and *whether the death was an accident, a result of disease, or euthanasia*. Results for past grief revealed that *age* and *attachment* were significant variables. *Age* had a negative relationship with past grief indicating that older participants had lower grief scores ( $B = -1.2$ ,  $SE (0.5)$ ,  $t = -2.353$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ). *Attachment* was found to have a positive relationship with past grief indicating that individuals who had higher attachment levels also had higher past grief scores ( $B = 1.0$ ,  $SE (0.2)$ ,  $t = 4.901$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Full results can be located in Table 10.

The intensity of respondents' current grief (present grief) was found to be significantly predicted by *age*, *attachment* as well as *time since death*. *Attachment* was again found to have a positive relationship with present grief ( $B = 1.1$ ,  $SE (0.3)$ ,  $t = 3.386$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ). *Age* and *time since death*, however, had a negative relationship (*age*:  $B = -2.1$ ,  $SE (0.8)$ ,  $t = -2.599$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ; *time since death*:  $B = -2.4$ ,  $SE (1.0)$ ,  $t = -2.424$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ). This indicates that as an individual ages, and as time since losing a companion animal increases, current feelings of grief are reduced (Table 10).

To further explore the profiles of participants who had high levels of grief, the cohort was broken down into three groups so that we could isolate the highest grievers and understand their specific characteristics. These tertiles represented the highest, middle and lowest grievers. Demographic variables (those included in Table 1 and Table 2: *sex, age bracket, ethnicity, living location, education, other animals in the household, number of people in the household, species, reason for getting a pet, relationship with pet, type of death and time since passing*) were examined with Chi-Square analysis to explore the proportional distribution amongst the three levels of grievers.

Of these variables only *relationship with pet* and *species of animal* were found to be significantly different amongst the groups for past grief (relationship:  $\chi^2 = 20.757$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ; species:  $\chi^2 = 16.147$ ,  $6$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ). There was a higher distribution of individuals who labeled their companion animal as “my child” in the high past grief group (Table 11). Also, a high percentage of respondents who labeled their pet as a “good companion” were found to be in the low grief (past) group.

For present grief, *species of animal* ( $\chi^2 = 15.819$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) and *age bracket* of participant (44 or younger vs >44) ( $\chi^2 = 9.614$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ) were found to differ amongst the three groups (Table 11). Cat and dog owners had a high percentage of respondents in the high present grief group. Respondents with rabbits were disproportionately in the low past grief group.

ANOVA analysis was again employed to assess guilt scores, this time using high medium and low grief groups as the factors. Attachment, loneliness, and state guilt were found to differ amongst the three grief groups (both past and present grief).

In terms of grief past, attachment levels were examined as an independent variable and found to be highest in the high grief group ( $F(2,82) = 9.847$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This group of individuals had significantly higher mean attachment scores ( $14 \pm 3$ ) when compared to the low ( $11 \pm 3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and middle ( $12 \pm 3$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) grief groups. Individuals with high grief were also found to have the highest state guilt scores. Low grief individuals were found to have the lowest loneliness levels ( $37 \pm 12$ ). These individuals had significantly lower loneliness levels when compared to both the middle ( $45 \pm 12$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ) and high grief groups ( $50 \pm 12$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) (Table 12).

In terms of present grief, individuals in the high grief group were found to have the highest attachment levels, loneliness levels and state guilt levels (Table 12).

### 4.3 Guilt

Similar to grief, the initial analysis began with exploring the influence of *Type of Death* (Tables Table 4, Table 5, & Table 6), *time since death* (Table 7), *type of relationship* (Table 8) and *type of animal* (Table 9) on guilt scores. ANOVA was utilized for this analysis.

Of these variables, only *type of animal* significantly influenced guilt scores. Specifically, only state guilt (guilt related to the circumstances of the loss), was different between owners of differing companion animal species ( $F(2,72) = 5.585, p = 0.006$ ). Dog ( $28 \pm 7, p = 0.025$ ) and cat ( $29 \pm 8, p = 0.005$ ) owners had significantly higher state guilt when compared to rabbit owners ( $22 \pm 5$ ). Only cat, dog and rabbit owners were included in this analysis as the remainder of the study cohort was comprised of low numbers of various species unsuitable for ANOVA analysis.

To assess the predictive influence of chosen variables on guilt, a multivariate linear regression was performed (Table 10). Variables included in this regression were: *time since death, animal age, gender, age bracket, the presence of a support figure, number in household, attachment, living location, and whether the death was an accident, a result of disease, or euthanasia*. Of these variables *support figure* ( $B = -5.8, SE (2.0), t = -2.969, p = 0.004$ ) and *age* ( $B = -2.2, SE (0.6), t = 3.854, p < 0.001$ ) were found to be significant predictors of state guilt. If an individual had a supportive other, they were found to report lower levels of state guilt (Table 10). Similarly, as a respondent's age increased, they were found to report lower state guilt scores.

We again divided the study cohort into three groups: those with high, medium and low state guilt. The sole demographic variable found to be significantly different between the three levels of state guilt was sex ( $\chi^2 = 6.913, df = 2, p = 0.032$ ). The majority of male participants were found in the medium state guilt group (7 of 9). Female participants were equally distributed amongst the three groups (data not reported).

ANOVA analysis of study measures revealed that amongst the three levels of state guilt, grief (both past ( $F(2,82) = 7.238, p = 0.001$ ) and present ( $F(2,82) = 13.572, p < 0.001$ )), loneliness ( $F(2,82) = 20.302, p < 0.001$ ) and trait guilt ( $F(2,82) = 17.876, p < 0.001$ ) significantly differed. High guilt respondents had the highest grief scores (past and present), loneliness, and trait guilt

scores (Table 13). The higher trait guilt scores amongst the highest state guilt tertile suggests that individuals who experience high guilt related to the circumstances of death experience more guilt day to day.

#### 4.4 Other Findings

Stepwise linear regression revealed three predictive variables of loneliness. Increasing age ( $B = -2.5$ ,  $SE (1.0)$ ,  $t = -4.994$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was associated with lower levels of loneliness. Additionally, being female ( $B = -10.9$ ,  $SE (4.1)$ ,  $t = -2.685$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ) and having a reliable support figure ( $B = -16.7$ ,  $SE (3.3)$ ,  $t = -2.561$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ) were found to be predictive of lower loneliness (Table 10).

*Social Support Preferences (SSQ)*: Investigation of the desirability of different types of support services was conducted. The following trends were observed. Overall the most popular social support preferences were learning resources that address grief associated with losing a companion animal (68%), phone calls and emails from the animal's veterinarian (57%), memorial services (60%), animal assisted therapy (54%), and speaking with another person who has also just lost his or her pet (76%). For a more detailed summary of respondent social support preferences see Table 14.

*Grief and Social Environment Results*: Participants' level of comfort concerning pet loss in their social environment was assessed with a short survey (Table 15). Most respondents were pleased with their veterinarians and their level of support. The majority of participants felt at ease when speaking with friends, family, and the greater community about their recent loss. The one exception being that most participants did not feel that others understood their situation (61%). Many people also indicated that they would have preferred friends and family to show them more love and concern (51%). A smaller subset of participants indicated a concerning lack of perceived social recognition for their loss. For a more detailed summary of respondents reports of their social environment see Table 15.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### *Study population*

The normative data comparisons reveal that the participants in this study are similar or above average in their level of grief, loneliness and guilt relative to other studies (Prigerson et al., 1995; Knight et al., 1988; Brown, 2002; Jones & Schratter, 2000). (Refer to Appendix 3).

### *The Relationship*

One purpose of this study was to identify differences in grief and related feelings - primarily guilt, across differently defined human-animal relationships. The current study has demonstrated that the way people conceive of their relationships with their companion animals influences components of grief. The most notable findings derived from this study are: 1) that the intimate labels which we attach to our companion animals, mainly “my child”, are related to the level of grief that comes with their loss, and 2) guilt related to the event of pet death is a prominent emotion for owners.

Our findings from the primary analysis suggest that referring to companion animals in intimate terms, such as “my child” or “my best friend” is associated with intensified bereavement. Comparable levels of grief between people who conceived of their companion animals as their children verses best friends was not anticipated, especially when considering that attachment was highest for those who described their pet as “my child” and that attachment was significantly predictive of grief. It seems dubious that parents who have lost a child would argue that the experience of losing a child is similar to losing a best friend. However, upon secondary analysis this interesting finding was explored more fully and a much clearer profile of high grievers emerged. The greatest numbers of high grief participants were those who labeled their animals as “my child”. The discrepancy that emerged when shifting the lens of analysis suggests that a few people who labeled their pet as their best friends might have had very high grief scores. This might have inflated the mean grief scores in the primary analysis for the label of “best friend” making it equal with “my child”.



Morales (1997) and Wroble and Dye (2003) question the notion of trying to define human-animal relationships in human-human terms. Perhaps the labels we often use to describe how we feel about our pets do not adequately encapsulate the unique qualities that exist in the loving bonds we share with animals. Rather, the labels we use may say more about the types of roles we prefer. Therefore, when we lose an animal, we are not just losing a loved one, but we are losing an important role. This might depend on our social-emotional needs; some people have the desire to be needed and care for others, while other people prefer to be cared for. When considering the label of child it brings up the notion of a being who is a *receiver* of unconditional love and support. This is in contrast to a best friend, who is often thought of as a reliable *provider* of social support. Even if the label does not perfectly symbolize the relationship, there are important qualities and meaningful variances in levels of intimacy implicit in labels like “my child” “best friend” and “good companion”. A difference found in grief between these labels signifies that the meaning of the relationship with the animal can determine the impact of the loss. Our results support the work of Corr, Nabe, and Corr (2009) who argue that it is the relationship and meaning of the relationship that is central to appreciating the loss, not the object of the relationship. When helping an individual cope with the recent loss of a companion, an important question to consider is, “what qualities and what role did this animal embody for the owner, or vice versa, and what was lost when he or she died?” Putting the relationship first can help a person to feel better understood.

### *Gender*

The vast majority of participants who chose to complete this study were women. This is an interesting observation as earlier studies have reported that women have higher levels of grief after the loss of a companion animal and are more likely to seek support services (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Brown, 2006; Margolies, 1999). This survey was made available in locations where people were seeking support after the loss of a pet, such as, grief forums, veterinary offices and rescue sites. Although the male sample size for this study is small ( $n = 9$ ) it is interesting that being a male was predictive of greater loneliness (see regression analysis in Table 10 Stepwise *Multiple Regression Results*) and that no other gender differences were found to be significant. Caution should be applied with interpreting the gender results due to the very low male representation.

## *Age*

Age turned out to be an interesting predictive variable in this study. This variable should be discussed within the context of the dominant cohort profile. Most of the participants in this study were well educated Caucasian females who live in urban households with other animals and other people. This might explain why loneliness was not an issue for older participants in this population, as they were surrounded by other people and pets. Most animals were *not* acquired to fill a companionship role (less than 15%), most animals were rescued.

Our primary and secondary analyses indicate that younger participants experience higher levels of grief. The absolute grief values (past and present) were highest for younger participants, and the proportion of high grievers reflecting back (grief past) was greatest for younger people. Similar results have also been found in the work of Templer, Lavoie, Chalgujian, & Thomas-Dobson (1990). Kimura, Kawabata & Maezawa (2011), in their study of bereaved Japanese pet owners, reported that older people coped better with companion animal death, and attributed this to greater experience with death and bereavement. These authors also found that people who lived in larger families experienced lower levels of depression. McCutcheon and Fleming (2002) reported that younger people experience greater anger and despair following the death of a companion animal. While other authors have reported no found differences associated with age and grief (Gosse & Barnes, 1994).

The older participants in this study also had lower levels of state (situational) guilt, for example having a decreased desire to go back in time and rectify things that they think they have done wrong. These age related findings are possibly related to greater experience with death, or more honed coping skills that foster greater acceptance of death.

## *Guilt*

This study employed a guilt measure comprised of three scales measuring state guilt, trait guilt, and moral guilt. An overall pattern of significance emerged between guilt and pet loss; state guilt was consistently significant across many domains while trait guilt and moral standards were rarely significant. This pattern suggests that the experience of guilt related to companion animal grief is situational and not related to any enduring quality of the person.

### *Type of Animal*

Species of animal was a significant variable in this study; although, the breadth of comparison was restricted as there was only enough data to compare cats, dogs, and rabbits. Studies that broaden this comparison to other commonly owned companion animals like horses and birds would be useful and interesting. Dog owners, in this study, reported the strongest bonds with their companion animals as indicated by the highest attachment scores. They also represented the highest number of high grievers. Cat and dog owners also reported the highest levels of state guilt. Species related findings are a reminder that the relationships that we share with animals are bi-laterally determined, meaning that we are not just projecting a relationship onto an inanimate object. Different types of animals have different characteristics that influence how we bond together. Differences were also found with rabbit owners, who did not have the same level of situational (state) guilt that dog or cat owners had. This could be related to the visibility of the pain and suffering that rabbits exhibit. Rabbits are not verbal animals who do not favour the same degree of eye gaze/contact that cats and dogs do. A rabbit's pain or discomfort and inner emotional experience is not as evident and has to be deduced from other behaviours, such as not eating or hiding. This less direct form of communication might lessen the guilt related to the event of death.

In the primary analysis, statistical significance was approached in the relationship between loneliness and cat death relative to rabbit and dog loss. This indicates that people who lost their cats may be at greater risk of loneliness. Further research should be conducted to investigate this near significant difference. Related studies have reported that cat owners are more likely to be referred to counseling services after pet loss than dog owners (Quackenbush & Glickman, 1983)

### *Non-Significant Findings*

The two most surprising non-significant findings were that type of death did not impact any of the outcome variables, nor did time since death. Even after dichotomizing type of death into euthanasia versus other types of death and disease versus accident, no differences were found. Findings concerning type of death were expected, although results in the pet loss literature concerning this variable are mixed. McCutcheon & Fleming (2002) found that euthanizing a pet was associated with lower grief, while Planchon & Templer (1996) and Gerwolls & Labott (1994) did not report significant results related to type of death.

A possible reason for the lack of significant differences across time in this study is that participants were not measured over time. Secondly, this survey employed a passive recruitment style, meaning that interested participants independently pursued access to this survey and were looking for information and support resources for pet bereavement. It is possible that participants who were looking for resources six months after the death of their animal and who chose to complete a 45 minute survey on the topic were still enduring strong feelings of grief. The self-selecting bias of this study might explain why no cross-sectional differences related to time since death were observed. All of the participants were experiencing strong feelings of grief as indicated by their comparative scores to the Prigerson et al. (1999) spousal bereavement study. The participant mean grief score in this study was higher than the mean grief reported by people who had lost a spouse.

### *Social Support and Support Preferences*

Earlier literature has demonstrated the importance of social support for bereaved pet owners (see: King & Werner, 2011; Adams et al., 2000; McCutcheon2006). The predictive findings concerning the importance of having a reliable support figure are not surprising, greater social support decreases feelings of loneliness and guilt related to the death of a pet. Encouraging grief sufferers to seek out social supports can help resolve some of the symptoms of loss.

The social support preferences portion of the study that explored interest in various support services indicated that the majority of people did not favour formal services, such as interventions from social support workers, monthly meetings, or in-person counseling. The most popular preferences were speaking with another person who had lost a pet and searching out learning resources. These preferences suggest this to be a relatively independent and self-reliant group. This sample might reflect a greater preference for independently seeking out learning resources as most of them likely came across this survey while searching for online resources. If recruitment had been conducted through a counseling center or grief support line the social support preference might offer a different picture.

A valuable finding from the social support preferences questionnaire was the high frequency of people who would like to speak with someone else who had also recently lost a companion animal. When clinicians are treating clients who are experiencing this form of loss, it might be helpful for them to be aware that speaking with someone who is also experiencing the same form

of loss has been reported as helpful and desirable. For people who are not inclined to seek out counseling services, speaking with someone who can understand the pain of companion animal loss might help alleviate some of the disenfranchised emotions that accompany pet loss. It can also remind the griever that they are not alone in their suffering. Talking through the experience of loss with an understanding person may assist the griever in making sense of recent painful events and create a therapeutic narrative to help overcome the trauma of death and the loss of a loved one.

### *Disenfranchised Grief*

Based on the findings from Table 15

*Grief and Social Environment Results (Grief and Social Environment Results)*, the majority of respondents are not suffering from disenfranchised grief. Most participants appear comfortable and open about discussing their lost companion animals with friends, family and the community. This is despite feeling that others may not really understand their experience or loss.

Although the majority of respondents reported favourably, approximately 12% of respondents may be at risk of disenfranchised grief. This is based on the average frequency of reports of: others avoiding them, changing the topic when speaking with them, minimizing their problems, hiding their feelings, and telling them not to worry about it. Respondents in this subset would benefit from seeing a counselor. Meeting with a counselor would provide them with the needed support that they are lacking in their environments and would give them a forum for discussion to address and resolve some of the painful emotions and unresolved grief.

### *Limitations*

It is possible that the multiple choice format asking how an individual perceives of his or her human-pet relationship was too limited or rigid (i.e. “I think of my companion animal as like: a. “my child, b. “my best friend” etc.) which resulted in participants who viewed themselves as emotionally involved care providers labeling their companion animals as their children because it was the closest fitting label.

The scope of participants in this study is likely limited by the recruitment approach, which had a self-selection bias. This resulted in a homogenous sample of people who were intensely bereaved by the loss of their companion animals. As this was not a paid survey, it was the highly

committed pet owners searching out resources related to managing their loss who chose to participate. Caucasian females who live in households with other people and other pets were overly represented in this study. American statistics indicate that about 64% of pet owning households have more than one pet (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). Approximately 80% of respondents indicated having another animal in the household.

Finally, the use of age brackets is not recommended for future studies. Age was a variable of interest in this study and analyses were limited by the use of age brackets. Future studies would benefit from collecting individual ages.

### *Conclusion*

The above study investigated whether defining our relationships with animals in intimate vs. non intimate terms influences our grief reaction after companion animal loss. Labels carry powerful emotions; particularly the label of “my child” and it can be concluded that, yes, how we define our relationship with our companion animals can impact the severity of bereavement.

Another endeavor of this study was to provide quantitative findings of grief, guilt and loneliness that were not well explored in the existing literature. Situational (state) guilt is closely tied to feelings of pet bereavement. This carries important implications for counselors helping clients who are managing the loss of a pet. Follow up research should be conducted examining loneliness and gender to determine if men do indeed experience greater loneliness after losing a companion animal. Solid conclusions regarding male perceptions cannot be drawn due to the small male sample size in this study.

The number of people ( $n = 568$ ) who voluntarily pursued access to the survey and opened the information page is a good indication of the interest that people have in pet bereavement information and resources. Losing a companion animal can be very painful, and a lack of understanding can increase the suffering that people endure. In our efforts to better understand companion animal loss and improve how we address this form of bereavement, we are acknowledging and validating people’s suffering by deeming the relationships lost as worthy.

## Chapter 6 Tables

Table 1  
*Demographic Data*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	9	11
Female	76	89
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18-25	5	6
26-34	12	11
35-44	25	29
45-54	24	28
55-60	12	14
60+	7	8
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Caucasian	82	97
Other	3	3
<b>Living Location (<i>n</i> = 64)</b>		
Urban	62	73
Rural	22	26
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	3	4
High School Graduate	9	11
Current Undergraduate Student	2	2
College Diploma	27	32
Bachelor's Degree	23	27
Graduate or Professional Degree	21	25
<b>Other Animals in Household</b>		
Yes	68	80
No	17	20
<b>Number of People in Household</b>		
Five	4	5
Four	6	7
Three	10	12
Two	45	53
One	20	24

*n* = 85

Table 2  
*Animal Demographic Data*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Mean Age $\pm$ SD
<b>Species</b>			
Cat	37	44	13 $\pm$ 6
Dog	24	28	10 $\pm$ 5
Rabbit	14	17	8 $\pm$ 4
Hedgehog	5	6	2 $\pm$ 1
Guinea Pig	2	2	6 $\pm$ 2
Rat	2	2	3 $\pm$ 0
Horse	1	1	30
<b>Reasons For Getting Pet (<i>n</i> = 84)</b>			
Addition to Family	5	6	
Companionship	12	14	
For Children	2	2	
Utility Animal	2	2	
Compassionate Adoption	8	9	
Rescue	25	29	
Replacement	5	6	
Companion for Another Pet	4	5	
Other	21	25	
<b>Relationship With Pet</b>			
My Child	38	45	
Good Companion	29	34	
Best Friend	15	18	
My Guardian	2	2	
Nice Animal	1	1	
<b>Type of Death</b>			
Disease-Euthanasia	40	47	
Disease	16	19	
Sudden-Euthanasia	18	21	
Sudden	11	13	
<b>Time Since Passing</b>			
1 week	12	14	
2 weeks	7	8	
1 month	8	9	
2 months	14	17	
3 months	11	13	
4 months	9	11	
5 months	1	1	
6 months	23	27	



Table 3  
*Measure Results*

Measure	Mean $\pm$ SD	Min	Max
PAQ - Attachment	12 $\pm$ 3	4	19
UCLA - Loneliness	44 $\pm$ 13	20	73
TRIG - Past grief	23 $\pm$ 7	8	37
TRIG - Present grief	45 $\pm$ 10	21	64
Guilt-State	27 $\pm$ 8	14	45
Guilt-Moral	48 $\pm$ 8	26	71
Guilt-Trait	59 $\pm$ 13	33	89

$n = 85$

Table 4  
*ANOVA Results: Type of Death*

Measure	Disease- Euthanasia ( $n = 40$ )	Disease ( $n = 16$ )	Sudden- Euthanasia ( $n = 18$ )	Sudden ( $n = 11$ )	$F$ $df(3,81)$
UCLA – Loneliness	45 $\pm$ 15	42 $\pm$ 11	46 $\pm$ 7	43 $\pm$ 11	0.308
TRIG - Past grief	23 $\pm$ 7	22 $\pm$ 7	25 $\pm$ 8	22 $\pm$ 7	0.428
TRIG - Present grief	44 $\pm$ 11	43 $\pm$ 10	48 $\pm$ 10	48 $\pm$ 10	0.910
Guilt-State	27 $\pm$ 8	25 $\pm$ 6	32 $\pm$ 6	26 $\pm$ 6	2.198
Guilt-Trait	60 $\pm$ 13	57 $\pm$ 11	64 $\pm$ 11	53 $\pm$ 14	1.996

Note: Data reported as mean  $\pm$ SD.

Table 5  
*ANOVA Results: Euthanasia v. Other Types of Death*

Measure	Euthanasia ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Other ( <i>n</i> = 27)	<i>F</i> <i>df</i> (1,83)
UCLA - Loneliness	44 ±14	44 ±11	0.000
TRIG - Past grief	23 ±7	23 ±8	0.020
TRIG - Present grief	45 ±10	45 ±10	0.048
Guilt-State	27 ±8	28 ±7	0.697
Guilt-Trait	58 ±13	59 ±13	0.309

Note: Data reported as mean ±SD.

Table 6  
*ANOVA Results: Disease v. Accident*

Measure	Sudden ( <i>n</i> = 29)	Disease ( <i>n</i> = 56)	<i>F</i> <i>df</i> (1,83)
UCLA - Loneliness	44 ±10	44 ±14	0.004
TRIG - Past grief	23 ±7	22 ±7	0.298
TRIG -Present grief	48 ±10	44 ±10	2.552
Guilt-State	28 ±7	27 ±8	1.106
Guilt-Trait	57 ±14	59 ±12	0.485

Note: Data reported as mean ±SD.

Table 7  
ANOVA Results: Time Since Death

Measure	1 week (n = 12)	2 weeks- 1 month (n = 15)	1-3 months (n = 25)	3-6 months (n = 33)	F df (3, 81)
UCLA – Loneliness	47 ±12	44 ±13	42 ±12	44 ±14	0.376
TRIG – Past grief	24 ±4	22 ±7	21 ±7	24 ±7	1.304
TRIG – Present grief	51 ±6	45 ±11	46 ±8	43 ±12	2.022
Guilt-State	30 ±6	27 ±9	28 ±7	26 ±7	1.181
Guilt-Trait	59 ±9	57 ±15	58 ±13	59 ±13	0.133

Note: Data reported as mean ±SD.

Table 8  
ANOVA Results: Type of Relationship

Measure	Child (n = 38)	Good Companion (n = 29)	Best Friend (n = 15)	F df (2,79)
UCLA – Loneliness	42 ±13	43 ±13	48 ±11	1.061
PAQ – Attachment	13 ±3 <sub>a</sub>	10 ±3 <sub>a</sub>	12 ±3	4.654*
TRIG – Past grief	24 ±7 <sub>a</sub>	19 ±7 <sub>a,b</sub>	26 ±4 <sub>b</sub>	9.999***
TRIG – Present grief	48 ±9 <sub>a</sub>	40 ±11 <sub>a,b</sub>	49 ±8 <sub>b</sub>	7.504***
Guilt-State	27 ±8	27 ±8	28 ±8	0.166
Guilt-Trait	59 ±13	58 ±12	58 ±15	0.131

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Data reported as mean ±SD. Means with corresponding subscripts within rows are significantly different at the  $p < 0.05$  based on Bonferroni *post-hoc* paired comparisons.  $n = 82$ .

Table 9  
ANOVA Results: Type of Animal

Measure	Dog (n = 24)	Cat (n = 37)	Rabbit (n = 14)	F df (2,72)
UCLA – Loneliness	45 ±13	47 ±12	38 ±11	3.110†
PAQ – Attachment	25 ±4 <sub>a,b</sub>	21 ±4 <sub>a</sub>	21 ±4 <sub>b</sub>	10.714**
TRIG – Past grief	25 ±6	24 ±7	20 ±7	2.924
TRIG – Present grief	47 ±10	47 ±10	40 ±8	2.689
Guilt-State	28 ±7 <sub>a</sub>	29 ±8 <sub>b</sub>	22 ±5 <sub>a,b</sub>	5.585**
Guilt-Trait	58 ±15	61 ±12	52 ±8	2.701

Note: Other animal types were excluded from analysis due to insufficient numbers for analysis. \*\* $p < 0.01$ . † $p = 0.051$ . Data reported as mean ±SD. Means with corresponding subscripts within rows are significantly different at the  $p < .05$  based on Bonferroni *post hoc* paired comparisons.

Table 10  
*Stepwise Multiple Regression Results*

Variable	UCLA loneliness		TRIG-Past grief		TRIG-Present grief		Guilt-State	
	B(SE)	$\beta$	B(SE)	$\beta$	B(SE)	$\beta$	B(SE)	$\beta$
Support	-16.7 (3.3)	-0.49***					-5.8 (2.0)	-0.30**
Gender	-10.9 (4.1)	-0.26**						
Age	-2.5 (1.0)	-0.25*	-1.2 (0.5)	-0.23*	-2.1 (0.8)	-0.26*	-2.2 (0.6)	-0.39***
PAQ			+1.0 (0.2)	+0.47***	+1.1 (0.3)	+0.34**		
Attachment								
Time					-2.4 (1.0)	-0.25*		
R	0.53***		0.52***		0.49***		0.47***	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Variables entered in stepwise regression: Time since death, Animal age, Age, Gender (female=1), Support, Number in household, Accident v. Disease, euthanasia, PAQ, Living Location. There were no significant predictors of the Guilt-Trait sub-measure.

Table 11  
*Demographic Data by Grief Tertiles*

Variable	Low	Med.	High
<i>Grief Present</i>			
Relationship With Pet			
My Child	11	10	17
Good Companion	16	10	3
Best Friend	0	10	5
Other	1	1	1
<i>Grief Past</i>			
Species			
Cat	8	15	14
Dog	7	6	11
Rabbit	9	3	2
Other	4	6	0
Age			
18-44	8	15	19
≥45	20	15	8
Sex			
Male	1	7	1
Female	28	25	23

Table 12  
*Measure Results by Grief Tertiles*

Measure	Low	Med.	High	<i>F</i> ( <i>df</i> =2)	<i>p</i> value
<i>Past</i>					
Attachment	11±3 <sup>a</sup>	12±3 <sup>b</sup>	14±3 <sup>a,b</sup>	9.847	<0.001
Loneliness	37±12 <sup>a,b</sup>	45±12 <sup>a</sup>	50±12 <sup>b</sup>	8.005	0.001
Grief-Present	39±10 <sup>a</sup>	44±8 <sup>a</sup>	54±6 <sup>a</sup>	21.661	<0.001
Guilt-State	24±7 <sup>a</sup>	27±8	30±6 <sup>a</sup>	4.914	0.010
Guilt-Trait	57±11	57±12	63±14	1.866	0.161
<i>Present</i>					
Attachment	11±3 <sup>a</sup>	12±3	13±3 <sup>a</sup>	3.198	0.046
Loneliness	39±3 <sup>a</sup>	45±13	48±11 <sup>a</sup>	4.212	0.018
Grief-Past	17±6 <sup>a</sup>	23±5 <sup>a</sup>	28±6 <sup>a</sup>	31.393	<0.001
Guilt-State	22±6 <sup>a,b</sup>	28±7 <sup>a</sup>	32±6 <sup>b</sup>	14.372	<0.001
Guilt-Trait	55±12	58±10	62±16	2.247	0.112

Data reported as mean ±SD. Values with corresponding superscript represent significant differences at the  $p < 0.05$  level for Bonferroni corrected *post hoc* comparisons.  $n = 85$ .

Table 13  
*Measure Results by State Guilt Tertiles*

Measure	Low	Med.	High	$F(df=2)$	$p$ value
PAQ - Attachment	11±4	13±3	12±3	2.542	0.085
Grief-Present	39±9 <sup>a,b</sup>	46±10 <sup>a</sup>	52±7 <sup>b</sup>	13.572	0.001
Grief-Past	19±6 <sup>a</sup>	23±7	26±6 <sup>a</sup>	7.238	<0.001
UCLA -Loneliness	34±9 <sup>a,b</sup>	46±11 <sup>a</sup>	53±12 <sup>b</sup>	20.302	<0.001
Guilt-Trait	53±9 <sup>a</sup>	56±11 <sup>b</sup>	70±12 <sup>a,b</sup>	17.876	<0.001

Values with corresponding superscript represent significant differences at the  $p$  <0.05 level for Bonferroni corrected *post hoc* comparisons.  $n = 85$ .

Table 14  
*Social Support Preferences*

	Percentage of Respondents		
	Not At All / A Little Useful	Somewhat Useful	Quite/ Very Useful
1. Confidential telephone calls from a social support worker	57 (67%)	18 (21%)	10 (12%)
2. Email support from a social support group	44 (52%)	21 (25%)	20 (24%)
3. Monthly support group meetings	57 (67%)	19 (22%)	9 (11%)
4. Learning resources that address grief associated with losing a companion animal	27 (32%)	19 (22%)	39 (46%)
5. One –on-one grief counseling	45 (52%)	18 (21%)	23 (27%)
6. Support councillor’s presence during and after euthanasia	43 (51%)	20 (24%)	22 (26%)
7. Short term psychotherapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist	53 (62%)	12 (14%)	20 (24%)
8. Long term psychotherapy with a psychologist or a psychiatrist	48 (68%)	16 (19%)	11 (13%)
9. Animal Assisted Therapy (counseling that involves activities with other animals)	39 (46%)	19 (22%)	27 (32%)
10. Phone calls and emails from your veterinarian	37 (44%)	20 (24%)	28 (33%)
11. Memorial services for your deceased companion animal	34 (40%)	19 (22%)	32 (38%)
12. Speaking with another person who has also just lost his or her pet.	20 (24%)	18 (21%)	47 (55%)

Note: Highest percentage response per question shaded grey.

Table 15  
*Grief and Social Environment Results*

	never/rarely	sometimes	often/always	n
<i>1. When talking with your friends, family and community about the death of (#name), to what extend have you had the following experiences they...</i>				
Change the topic	43 (51%)	35 (41%)	7 (8%)	85
Do not understand your situation	33 (39%)	33 (39%)	19 (22%)	85
Avoid you	68 (81%)	15 (18%)	1 (1%)	84
Minimize your problems	48 (56%)	30 (35%)	7 (8%)	85
Seem to be hiding their feelings from you	53 (64%)	26 (31%)	4 (5%)	83
Seem comfortable	12 (14%)	29 (34%)	44 (52%)	85
Tell you not to worry too much about your loss or think about it.	43 (51%)	27 (32%)	15 (18%)	85
Do not show you as much love and concern as you would like.	41 (49%)	26 (31%)	17 (20%)	84
Gave you a card, flowers, plant, or made a donation to a charity on behalf of (name). (or something of this nature)	32 (38%)	27 (32%)	25 (30%)	84
<i>2. To what extent do you feel that your veterinarian was sufficiently supportive when you lost (name).</i>				
	6 (7%)	13 (15%)	65 (77%)	84
<i>3. How frequently do you feel that you would have (or would now) benefit from more support from your Veterinarian?</i>				
	42 (51%)	27 (33%)	13 (16%)	82
<i>4. If your veterinarian euthanized your animal, how frequently did you feel as though he or she empathized with what you were going through?</i>				
	4 (7%)	8 (14%)	47 (80%)	59



Table 16  
*Selected Long Answer Response Questions*

I am grateful that most of the people around me, including my vet, are very understanding and supportive, knowing first-hand loss of companion animals
I did what I had to do because that was the commitment I made to my dog. The staff & the vets in the doggie ICU were wonderful. My only complaint is how vets go about collecting their money after you euthanize your dog. They should bill you!
no. but my dog was out to sleep a year ago so, should maybe out a 1+yr of death..
these questions were answered honestly. The only thing that I found difficult in answering is the fact that I have another boston terrier at home. I had the both of them at the same time. Which I think reduced the pain and grief I felt because I had to look after Bonnie, (still here). Also Bonnie has been quite sick since the loss of her "sister". We thought she was also grieving, but it is worse than that. Helping her get her health back has been on my mind.
time and the support of friends and your other pets is the only sure way, my pets are never forgotten
It was over 6 months, actually 1 yr since lost of Prince. My family suggested getting another dog. Which we did 4 months later.
death is part of life; a good experience with a pet makes you more open to have another
I never knew losing Ella would hurt this much.....
I don't feel any of these would have been helpful/required by me but answer them as my opinion in general.
My reactions and preferences may be biased due to the fact that I fostered my dog; knowing that she would likely die within a couple of years. I loved having her live with me for just one year.
overwhelming sadness that unless you have a pet people jut didn't understand.
the loss of Felix was quite hard on both myself and my wife; we had lost our other cat a year earlier, so there was a void in our lives; we had grown very, very close to them over 20 years.
Blue actually died a year ago and I swore I wouldn't get another dog, hurts too much when you lose them, but here I sit with my cat on one side and my new 'rescue' dog Alice, that I have had for six months, and i s about two years old. Live goes on!
I run a small animal rescue, specializing in caring for terminally ill animals, so I deal with death and loss a lot more than many people. However, every death hurts and I grieve the loss of each companion.
I have my animals cremated and keep their ashes which helps me.
All my rabbits are rescued and I am an HRS/Educator
I run a rescue and farm sanctuary so I deal with this quite a bit. However, it is always difficult..
George died of a heart attack. He is the third beloved lost pet. Doesn't get easier and mostly what does not help is that family and friends don't get it, it is only an animal. That compounds the grief, causes feeling isolated with the grief. We work in rabbit rescue and no real family support. for that either. This is a great survey.
I care for sanctuary rabbits and experience loss frequently. In the past year I lost 4 rabbits, including Lance
I was raised around death as my father was a funeral director so I have seen grief from many different walks in life.
Having to make the decision to euthanize my beloved Utah was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. However, his condition was irreversible and had I made the decision not to euthanize, it would have been selfish. He loved me & I could not let him suffer.
I started volunteering at a local animal shelter after Diego died, and that has helped my grief tremendously. I see it as a tribute to him, something good that came from his passing.
In my case our puppy died after being sedated. Never made it to the incision for a neuter. We suspect negligence was involved but can't prove it which has been the most troubling part of it. We were also on vacation so we were not there. We weren't able to take him in that morning and be assured that nothing else was given to him, ie medication. Would love for a pathologist to talk to to ask about quantitative drug results.

---

A lot of the questions can be answered in more than one way. If a person has just one person as a support and feels isolated from most other people you can't say they have no one - yet they still feel quite isolated.

---

We let Chewy outside to potty without a leash and he was struck by a vehicle. I will forever live with the guilt.

---

Tobi wasn't put to sleep. He died suddenly; had systemic shock, after 4 days of being warded to have a urinary catheter. Vets still can't figure what went wrong. :(

---

I was close with Axel and loved him very much but my Dad had a special bond with him. His answers would be very different. For instance, he feels a lot of guilt about the euthanasia. Of course, so do I, but for him its especially pronounced.

---

Most of the guilt and regret I am feeling is that couldn't save her and that I often had to go to work and leave her alone when she was so sick.

---

I really miss my cat.

---

Remembering your pet is the best therapy you can do for yourself, although it might be hard you have to remember the love you had and what love they gave to you.

---

Support in the decisions related to getting a new pet would also be useful

---

Despite the pain I feel from letting Sunny go; I would still have him in my life all over again even knowing this pain was coming.

---

## Chapter 7 Figures

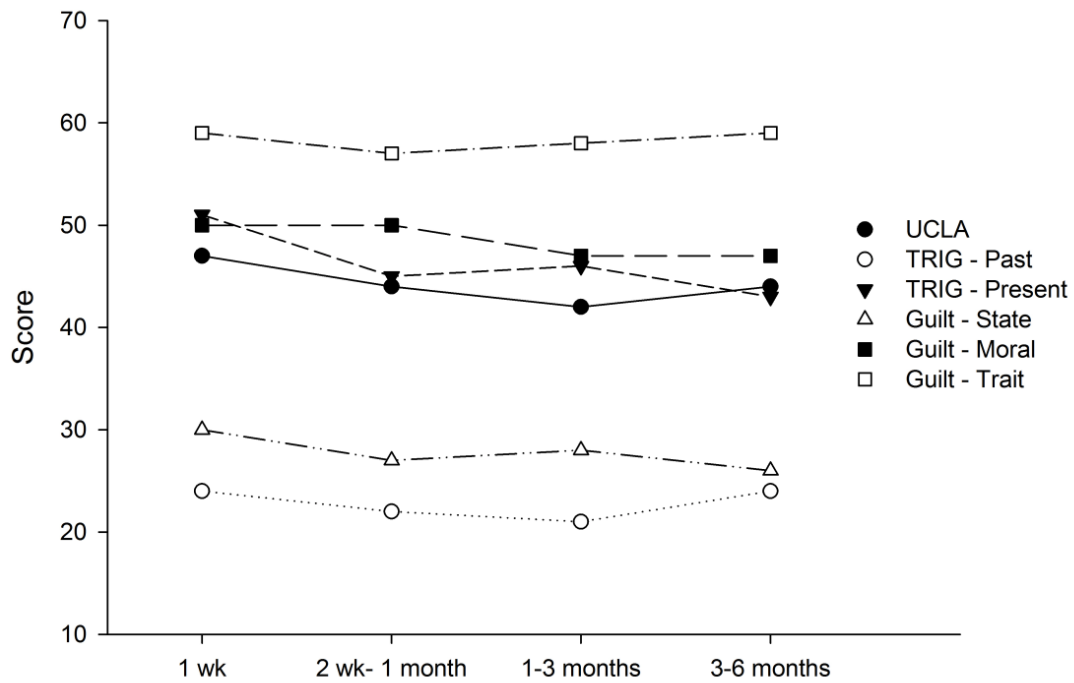


Figure 1

*Graphical depiction of measure results over time.*

*\*Time since animal death was not associated with measure results. Note: participants were not followed over time.*

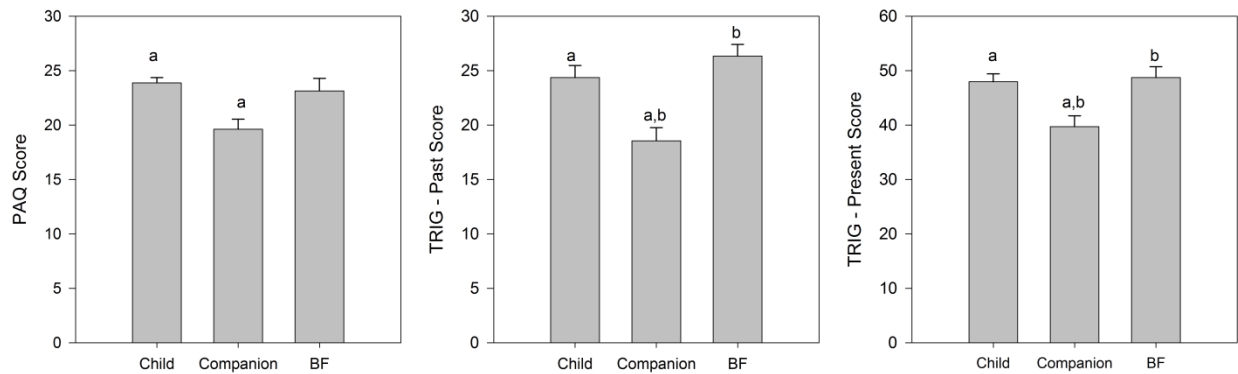


Figure 2

*Graphical depiction of type of relationship and attachment (PAQ), and grief past (TRIG past) and present (TRIG present).*

*\*Corresponding letters indicate significant differences as determined by Bonferonni post hoc comparisons at the  $p < 0.05$  level.*

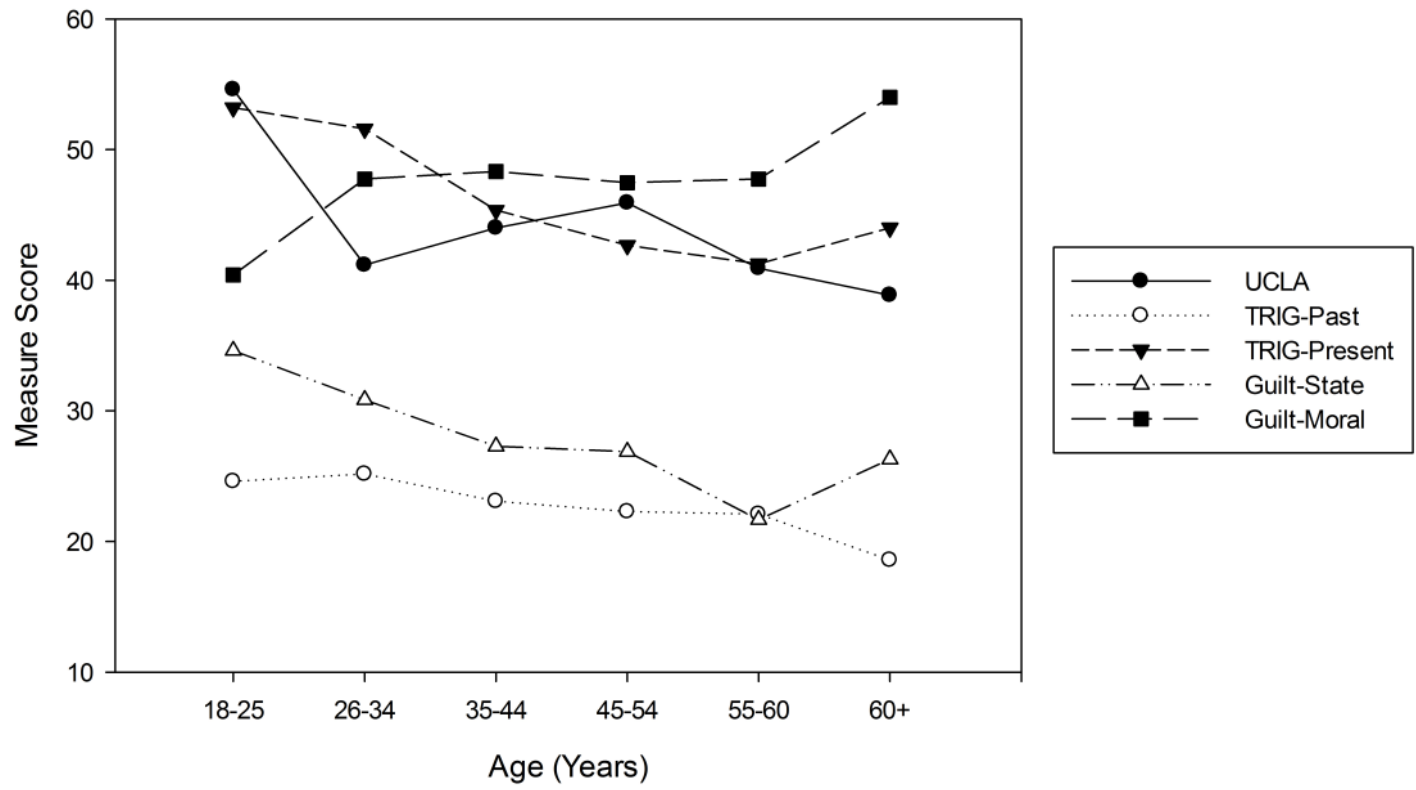


Figure 3  
*Graphical depiction of study measures and age*

*\*Data depicted mean  $\pm$ SE. Corresponding subscripts within rows are significantly different at the  $p < .05$  based on Bonferroni post hoc paired comparison*

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ)

### Part 1: Information About You

The following questions will ask you about yourself, your animal, and your experience with people after the loss of your animal

Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ)
1. <i>Please enter your age:</i>
Please answer the following questions by clicking the box beside the item...
2. <i>What is your gender?</i>
Male Female
3. <i>What is your ethnicity?</i>
Caucasian African-Canadian Asian Native Hispanic Other (please specify)
4. <i>What is your highest level of education that you have achieved?</i>
Less than high school High school graduate Current Undergrad Student College diploma Bachelor's degree Professional degree
5. <i>Do you live in a:</i>
Urban Setting Rural Setting
6. <i>Do you have someone in your life that you can consistently rely on to support you?</i>
Yes No
7. <i>How many people are in your household, including yourself?</i>
8. <i>What was the name of your deceased pet?</i>
9. <i>Is there anything about your religious or spiritual beliefs that helped you when you lost (#name)?</i>



## Part 2: Information About Your Animal

Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ) Continued...
1. <i>When did (#name) die (MM/DD/YY)</i>
2. <i>What kind of animal was (#name)?</i>
3. <i>How old was your pet when (#name) died?</i>
4. <i>What was your reason for getting (#name)?</i>
5. <i>Choose the statement that best defines you relationship with (#name):</i>
He /she was like my child He/she was my best friend He/she was a good companion He/she was my guardian He/she was a nice animal He/she was just a pet
6. <i>How did (#name) die?</i>
A major disease that ended in euthanasia A major disease that ended by natural means A sudden medical emergency that ended in euthanasia A sudden event (i.e. a car accident) that ended in death (not euthanized) A sudden event (i.e. A car accident) that ended in euthanasia
7. <i>If (#name) was euthanized, did you make that decision alone?</i>
Yes
No
8. a) <i>If (#name) was euthanized, were you present at the time?</i>
b) Was anyone else present?
Significant Other Friend Family member Other (please specify)
9. <i>Do you have any other companion animals living with you?</i>
Yes
No

**Part 3: Your Experiences with Others after the Loss of Your Animal**

Demographic and Descriptive Questionnaire (DDQ) Continued...
Please use a 1-5 rating scale when answering the below questions. <i>1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always</i>
<i>1. When talking with your friends, family and community about the death of (#name), to what extent have you had the following experiences they...</i>
Change the topic Do not understand your situation Avoid you Minimize your problems Seem to be hiding their feelings from you Seem comfortable Tell you not to worry too much about your loss or think about it. Do not show you as much love and concern as you would like. Gave you a card, flowers, plant, or made a donation to a charity on behalf of (name). (or something of this nature)
<i>2. To what extent do you feel that your veterinarian was sufficiently supportive when you lost (name).</i>
<i>3. How frequently do you feel that would have (or would now) benefit from more support from your Veterinarian?</i>
<i>4. If your veterinarian euthanized your animal, how frequently did you feel as though he or she empathized with what you were going through?</i>

## Appendix 2: Social Support Preference Questionnaire

*Please indicate on a using the following scale your level of preference for the following social support services: Not at all, A little Useful, Somewhat Useful, Quite Useful, Very Useful*

Social Support Preference Questionnaire
1. Confidential telephone calls from a social support worker
2. Email support from a social support group
3. Monthly support group meetings
4. Learning resources that address grief associated with losing a companion animal
5. One –on-one grief counseling
6. Support councilor’s presence during and after euthanasia
7. Short term psychotherapy with a psychologist or psychiatrist
8. Long term psychotherapy with a psychologist or a psychiatrist
9. Animal Assisted Therapy (counseling that involves activities with other animals)
10. Phone calls and emails from your veterinarian
11. Memorial services for your deceased companion animal
12. Speaking with another person that has also just lost his or her pet.

### Appendix 3: Normative Data for Study Scales

*Appendix Table 1: Normative Data for Study Scales*

	Population	Score	
		Males	Females
TRIG <sup>1,2</sup>		( <i>n</i> = 79)	( <i>n</i> = 65)
TRIG - Past	Elderly (>60 years old) control participants	11.1 (5.6)	13.8 (8.4)
TRIG - Present		26.8 (10.6)	30.5 (13.4)
		Bereaved	
TRIG – Present	Conjugally bereaved participants and controls	( <i>n</i> = 69)	
		36.8 (10.8)	
		Males	Females
UCLA <sup>3</sup>	Adults collected during a general population health survey	( <i>n</i> = 494)	( <i>n</i> = 484)
		34.9 (9.5)	35.6 (10.3)
		Males	Females
PAQ <sup>4</sup>	Students enrolled in Veterinary School	( <i>n</i> = 29)	( <i>n</i> = 104)
		12.8 (4.7)	16.0 (3.7)
		Males	Females
Guilt <sup>5</sup>		( <i>n</i> = 318)	( <i>n</i> = 518)
Guilt – State	University students enrolled in psychology classes	27.8 (6.6)	26.7 (7.0)
Guilt - Trait		55.6 (11.8)	54.6 (12.6)
Guilt - Moral		46.0 (7.8)	48.0 (8.0)

<sup>1</sup>Gallagher et al., 1983; Prigerson et al., 1995<sup>2</sup>; Knight, Chisholm, Marsh, & Godfrey, 1988<sup>3</sup>; Brown, 2002<sup>4</sup>; Jones & Schratte, 2000<sup>5</sup>