

WellBeing International

## WBI Studies Repository

2016

# Attitudes and Perceptions of Pet Owners' Understanding of and Satisfaction with the Pet Memorialization Industry

Donna Lipari

*Humane Society University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://www.wellbeingintludiesrepository.org/hsu\\_students](https://www.wellbeingintludiesrepository.org/hsu_students)



Part of the [Animal Studies Commons](#), [Other Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Other Business Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lipari, Donna, "Attitudes and Perceptions of Pet Owners' Understanding of and Satisfaction with the Pet Memorialization Industry" (2016). *HSU STUDENT THESES AND CAPSTONE PROJECTS*. 4.

[https://www.wellbeingintludiesrepository.org/hsu\\_students/4](https://www.wellbeingintludiesrepository.org/hsu_students/4)

This material is brought to you for free and open access by WellBeing International. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the WBI Studies Repository. For more information, please contact [wbisr-info@wellbeingintl.org](mailto:wbisr-info@wellbeingintl.org).



Attitudes and Perceptions of Pet Owners' Understanding of  
and Satisfaction with the Pet Memorialization Industry.

Donna Lipari

Humane Society University

### **Abstract**

This thesis explores the bond between owners and their pets and the grief that is experienced upon the death of a companion animal. Studies show that pets are considered members of the family and as such grief which results from the loss of a pet can be as intense as any close human relationship. Although this notion of animals as family is becoming more and more accepted, many pet owners feel grieving for a pet cannot be openly acknowledged or publically mourned. This inability to feel their grief is “normal” makes grieving the loss of a pet a type of disenfranchised grief. The failure of one person to understand the meaning and experience of another is empathic failure. The unique relationship and deep bonds that contribute to pet loss grief has routinely been undervalued by the mental health and pastoral fields; two resources which grieving people look to for help.

Social support and empathy are critical for grief resolution. Rituals, too, can be a powerful therapeutic tool that can validate grief and allow disenfranchised grievers to name and own their losses. Because the validation of grief is essential for the resolution of grief, openly memorializing a beloved pet can be an effective means of grief resolution.

The goal of this study was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of pet owners who have lost a pet in the last 5 years. Specifically, this study focused on the pet owner's understanding of and satisfaction with the pet memorialization/aftercare industry. The growth in the pet aftercare industry seems to indicate that pet owners want to properly memorialize their pets as they would any other family member. The International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories 'membership has grown thirty percent in five years due to the increase in pet

crematories opening and the introduction of the industry's first accreditation program. Human funeral homes, too, have expanded their human services to include pet aftercare.

Historically, veterinarians have had the responsibility of supporting a pet owner through the death of a pet as well as providing assistance, even making decisions for the pet owner, regarding final arrangements for memorialization. Increasingly, much needed support from pet cemetery and crematory service professionals is becoming readily available. Whereas the typical avenues of grief resolution have been lacking for pet owners, the aftercare industry is filling this void. The full range of options and services offered by industry professionals makes it possible for a pet owner to openly memorialize a pet in a supportive environment, thereby allowing for an effective resolution of this very legitimate grief.

### **Introduction**

The human animal bond has existed since the beginning of civilization (Clutton-Brock, 1995; Ross-Barton & Baron-Sorenson, 1998), but the bond which exists between a pet owner and his companion animal has changed over time. This change in the role animals play has benefited pet owners and society as a whole. Studies continually show the medical and psychological benefits of owning a pet. Pet owners have lower blood pressure and less heart disease, loneliness, and depression than non-pet owners (Anderson, Reid, & Jennings, 1992). Companion animals provide companionship, assist with daily living tasks and are a source of unconditional love (Laguni, Butler & Hetts, 1994; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). According to a study out of Bassett Medical Center it was found that having a pet dog in the home was associated with a decreased probability of childhood anxiety (Gadomski, Scribani, Krupa, Jenkins, Nagykaldi, & Olson, 2015).

There are many ways people view their pets. They may be considered best friends, surrogate children, companions, protectors; and in the case of service animals, life lines. Many pet owners are of the opinion that their pets are members of the family. In American society, families are more than those genetically related; family can be a matter of choice (Weston, 1991/1997). Pattison, DeFranciso, Wood, & Crowder (1975) conceptualized family as “functional kin”. As members of this social network, functional kin provide services that supplement or are alternatives to that of one’s biological family (Cohen, 2002). The results of Cohen’s exploratory study (2002) suggest that pets are functioning as family members.

Changes in family structure and mobility have increased the importance of the social roles pets play (Toray, 2004). Research shows the bond between owner and pet has become as significant as the bond with a human family member. In a recent study college students with high levels of attachment to a pet reported a closeness to their pet dog equal to the emotional bond to their mother, best friends, siblings and significant others (Kurdek, 2008).

The American Pet Products Association (APPA) reported that in 2007-2008 63 percent of U.S. households owned a pet compared to 56 percent in 1987-1988, the inaugural year of the survey; with 163 million cats and dogs living in American households. In 2009, 44.4 billion dollars were spent for pets, half of which went toward the purchase of food, medicine and other necessities, while 12.2 billion dollars were spent on veterinary care (APPA, 2009). Walsh (2009) reports the amount of money spent on pets has doubled over the past decade, exceeding the gross national product of many developing nations. Franklin (1999) noted that trends in pet-keeping have extended familial relations to non-humans. The availability of products and services for pets mimic those for children in choice and number. The daily care provided and activities shared with pets closely resemble those of human relationships. There are opportunities for pet owners to include their pet in every aspect of their lives. This is reflected in the increasing

number of pet friendly hotels, airlines, stores, restaurants and housing and pet friendly work environments.

Pet owners, have a deep awareness that their relationship with an animal companion is an end in itself and not a means to an end, such as ego-enhancing, self-identity, the admiration of others, or an excuse to get exercise or a creature to protect the house against intruders (Holbrook, Stephens, Day, Holbrook, & Strazar, 2001). A feeling of kinship between humans and animals may be the best explanation for why people spend so much money, devote so much time and emotional stamina to dogs and cats (Brandes, 2010).

It has been reported that greater bonding coincides with the amount of time spent with a pet (Cohen, 2006). Kidd & Kidd (1989) and Johnson, Garrity, & Stallones (1992) found women bond more deeply with pets. Lago, Kafer, Delaney & Connelly (1987) and Johnson et al. (1992) reported being older, having no children or living in a household of one or two people has sometimes been associated with a stronger bond. Neither living with a partner nor having a child affected feelings of intimacy and kinship with a pet. An attachment to a pet does not reflect lack of human relationships (Cohen, 2002).

The American Pet Products National Pet Owner 2007- 2008 survey reported the vast majority of pet owners regard their pets as friends and/or family. Almost ten years prior, the American Animal Hospital Associations 1999 survey reported four out of five respondents refer to themselves as their pet's mom or dad. Cohen (2002) examined what pet owners meant when they described pets as family members. The author found no evidence that people believe their pet is human, but rather appear to have an overlapping but different relationship than humans in the family; and even those who consider their pets to be their "babies" or their "children" do not think so literally (Cohen, 2002).

Surveys report that in some instances, pet owners put their pet before other significant relationships. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA, 2000), nearly three quarters of married respondents indicated that they greet their pets before their spouses, and, if stranded on a desert island, more than half of those surveyed said they would choose pets over people for company. It was further revealed that people make sacrifices for their pets as they would a family member (AVMA, 1998). An American Animal Hospital Association survey (1999) reports more than half of the 1200 pet owners surveyed took time off from work to care for a sick pet.

The term pet tends to imply a possession rather than relationship, and over the last twenty years the term “animal companion” has become a politically correct designation (Franklin, 1999). Professionals and scholars in the veterinary field and animal welfare prefer the term companion animal, to connote a bond and relationship. Owners are no longer considered as masters but are human companions and animal guardians or custodians (Walsh, 2009).

Although animals, in most jurisdictions, are still considered property under the law, the evolving status of companion animals is no more evident than in the area of animal cruelty legislation, where animal cruelty charges have gone from disorderly conduct to felony charges. In addition, studies on attachment to material possessions (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995) and on the meanings of irreplaceable possessions, (Grayson and Shulman, 2000) show that pets are not regarded as objects that are owned.

### **Pet Loss and Grief**

The strength of attachment to a pet is a predictor of the grief one will experience upon the death of that pet (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009). Studies show that if the bond between a person and companion animal are strong, the loss of that companion animal will be as intense as

a significant human relationship (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Field et al., 2009; Podrazik, Shackford, Becker, & Heckert, 2000).

The mental health field has routinely undervalued the unique relationship and deep bonds people have with their animal companions (Kruger & Serpell, 2006); and they tend to propagate the widely held assumption that strong attachments to animals were a symptom of an inability to form healthy human relationships or a means to cope with loss and separation (Walsh, 2009). Because mental health clinicians are on the frontlines of grief counseling, they have the professional responsibility to validate grief by accepting that it exists.

Doka first introduced the concept of disenfranchised grief defining it as, "The grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported" (Doka, 1989). Pet loss, death by suicide, a miscarriage, and death from AIDS are all considered unsanctioned losses (Worden, 2008). Personal reports of grief as they pertain to a pet's death seem to parallel those who report their experiences of the grief following a miscarriage or stillbirth (Brown, 2006). Statements used to console are similar in nature; "He was just a dog" or "you can get another one" and "it wasn't really a baby" or "you can have another one" can isolate the griever.

There are three forms of disenfranchised grief: 1) the relationship is not recognized by society, as is the case with pet loss grief; 2) the griever is not socially recognized as capable of grieving, such as a child; 3) the death is not considered a recognized loss (Doka, 1989). Those dealing with the death of a companion animal are at risk for disenfranchised grief because the loss may not be viewed as legitimate (Packman, et al., 2011).

Social support is necessary as an adaptive means of coping with grief (Piper, Ogrodniczuk, Joyce, & Weideman, 2009). For a bereaved pet owner, a socially unspeakable loss

indicates either that the bereaved does not have a social support network or has a social support network but chooses not to use it (Cordaro, 2012). Disenfranchised grief in the form of a socially unspeakable loss is a genuine grief that does not qualify for empathy from a social support network (Cordaro, 2012). The concept of empathic failure in the context of disenfranchised grief describes the failure of one person to understand the meaning and experience of another (Neimeyer & Joyce, 2002). Neimeyer and Joyce conceptualized disenfranchised grief as four levels of empathic failure: 1) self with self, empathic failure by denying ones' own grief; 2) self with family, family members disregard grieving that is outside the patterns within the family; 3) self with the larger community, mismatch between the way an individual is grieving and the community's expectation for how one should grieve; and 4) self with transcendent reality, a spiritual disenfranchisement when solace falls short because of religious structures (i.e. do pets have souls?).

Empathic failure in the context of pet loss grief has historically pervaded the mental health and pastoral fields. Mental health professionals have been criticized for their lack of sensitivity on the topic of pet loss. Weisman (1991) believes the lack of professional articles covering the topic of pet loss and grief and the widely held belief that a pet loss response is displacement from a previous more serious loss, illustrates the lack of serious consideration given to this grief.

Even fewer articles on the subject have been presented by theologians for the world religions. Pastoral counselors, priests, ministers, and rabbis have undervalued a loss that has the potential to negatively impact so many. This is particularly significant because a religious counselor is in a position to give pastoral support in a situation where faith may be of benefit. (Kelly, 2004). According to Sife:

“The eventual death of a beloved animal raises profound personal questions about whether such a sentient, loving animal also has a soul that would eventually find its place in heaven. This presents a theological problem that had been ignored or scoffed at, until very recently. Organized Western religion had no doctrinal authority or precedence for this. As a result, it was unable to offer solace to people mourning the death of their beloved companion animals...Other than scripture interpretation and church dogma on the contrary, pets having souls has not been disproved” (Sife, 2014, p. 223).

Many individual churches have begun to acknowledge the importance of animals in people’s lives by providing opportunities to bless animals at special animal thanksgiving services. Catholic churches designate the birthday of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals, as a service of thanksgiving and blessing of pets. This type of service is an open expression of thanks acknowledging that for some, their animal companion is also their trusted friend and confidant (Flynn, 2000). An animal thanksgiving service allows people to express feelings and emotions that may otherwise be suppressed or avoided (Toray, 2004).

Several factors influence the intensity of grief responses after the loss of a pet including: level of attachment: whether the death was sudden or expected, traumatic, natural, or chosen by the owner; perceived understanding from others; accompanying stressful events; and how one feels about their own death (Planchon, Templer, Stokes, & Keller, 2002). Social support and empathy are critical for grief resolution (Hall, Ng, Ursano, Holloway, Fullerton, & Casper, 2004). Ritual, “the symbolic affirmation of values by means of culturally standardized utterances to express emotions”, (Taylor, 1980, p.198) can be a powerful therapeutic tool that can validate grief and allow disenfranchised grievers to name and own their losses.

If family and friends cannot provide the necessary social support network for grief resolution, counselors and other community resources can be used (Cordaro, 2012). The counselor can assess whether a bereaved pet owner is experiencing disenfranchised grief by examining where there has been an empathic failure (Cordaro, 2012). The perception that the loss is not socially recognized can be reframed by validating the grief (Lenhardt, 1997). An important objective of grief counseling for pet loss is to allow opportunities to meaningfully mourn the pet and to identify grief triggers to create strategies for healthy coping (Cordaro, 2009). In addition, mental health counselors can be helpful with end-of-life decisions such as whether to euthanize a pet or how to help children through the loss (Toray, 2004).

The advent of pet loss support groups and mourning rituals such as pet funeral services, viewings, memorials and services, private burials and cremations, also referred to as pet aftercare, have made it possible for owners to fully participate in planning the memorialization of a deceased pet's life. Because the validation of grief is essential to prevent feelings of disenfranchisement, pet memorialization can play an important role for many grieving pet owners.

Pet memorialization is not a new concept. The pet aftercare industry began in the United States on the apple orchard of Dr. Samuel Johnson, a New York City veterinarian, when a grieving client needed a final resting place for her beloved dog. Johnson received hundreds of requests from pet owners after the story made news. In 1896, that apple orchard became the first pet cemetery, Hartsdale Canine Cemetery in Hartsdale, NY. Owners were responsible for maintaining their plots, and the orchard began to resemble a human cemetery of the Victorian era; with epitaphs on the grave markers referencing beloved pets as friend or child. (Grier, 2006). Hartsdale Pet Cemetery was the start of a growing trend.

“There were just a handful of pet aftercare facilities in the U.S. less than a decade ago (so few, in fact, that nobody bothered to count them all). Today there are about 700 nationwide, including funeral homes, crematories, and cemeteries. There are no statistical data on their profitability—it’s a growing if untracked segment of the pet care industry, which brought in \$52.87 billion in 2011” (Spitznagel, 2012, p. 1).

According to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) (2015), the market for memorializing pets has become one of the fastest-growing "death care markets" in the United States. Because there is no federal regulatory system governing pet cemeteries nationwide, there are no concrete data regarding the number of pet cremations or internments that take place each year. The International Association of Pet Cemeteries & Crematories (IAPCC) (2014), a nonprofit that advocates for standards and ethics in crematories, announced a worldwide accreditation program in April 2014 for pet crematories. It was a first for the pet aftercare industry. Nationwide, pet loss businesses dealt with nearly 1.9 million pets in 2012, according to a survey by the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance (PLPA), an industry group of pet loss providers and related businesses. Of those pets, 99 percent were cremated.

Donna Shugart Bethune, executive administrator of the International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories, a not-for-profit that raises awareness and promotes pet cemeteries, reported that membership has grown 30 percent in five years due to the increase in pet crematories opening and the industry getting its first accreditation program. Human funeral homes, too, have expanded their services to include pet aftercare with some even seeking to add crematories on their premises to accommodate their clients (Grondahl, 2014).

### **Literature Review**

Empirical studies on the resolution of grief after pet loss are limited. However a search of the literature using the following keywords: pet loss grief, disenfranchised grief, human-animal bond, pet attachment, and pet memorials did reveal a number of studies on the resolution of grief and the role of pet memorialization. These studies will be discussed in detail below.

### **Continuing Bonds Expression: The Construct**

The original concept of continuing bonds in relation to pet loss is credited to (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009). They reported that an attachment to a pet continues after its death, similar to that of a human; they identified four Continuing Bonds Expressions (CBE'S):

- fond memories,
- sharing of memories, (reminiscing)
- legacy, ( leaving behind something of value, lessons learned)
- use of photographs

In 2011, Packman, et al. identified an additional eight CBE'S:

- Continuing connection (sense of deceased's presence),
- Belongings (use of deceased's belongings for comfort,
- Associated places (drawn to places associated with deceased),
- Dreams (dreams involving deceased),
- Reunited with deceased (thoughts of being reunited with deceased),
- Everyday decisions by living up to ideals or wishes of deceased,
- Memorials (organize special events to commemorate deceased
- Intrusion (mistaking other sounds or sights for deceased)

### **Continuing Bonds: Resolution of Pet Loss**

The results of one study were reported in two separate articles:

- Packman, W., Field, N., Carmack, B.J., Ronen, R. (2011): Continuing Bonds and Psychosocial Adjustment in Pet Loss, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 16 (4), 341-357.
- Packman, W., Carmack, B. J., Ronen, R. (2012). Therapeutic implications of CBE's following the death of a pet. *Omega Journal of Death and Dying*, 64 (4), 335-356.

The study was an investigation of the grief reaction and continuing impact of the death of a pet through the identification and exploration of CBE's. This study also explored whether these CBE's are comforting or distressing to grieving pet owners. The goal of this study was to gather data on the extent to which the bereaved preserve and maintain an ongoing attachment to the deceased pet through the use of CBE's as a means of regulating emotions in coping with the loss of a pet. Packman, et al. (2011) focused on identifying CBE's among pet owners (they identified the eight CBE's listed above) and exploring the relationship between CBE's and psychosocial adjustment. Their goal was to gather data to quantify the types of CBE's and determine whether these bonds were comforting or distressing among grieving pet owners.

The sample included 33 bereaved pet owners living in the San Francisco Bay area who lost a dog or cat within the year. Participants were solicited through flyers in veterinary hospitals, family centers, and at a pet loss support group. They ranged in age from 25 to 79, and women and the more highly educated were more heavily represented. Participants were asked to engage in a Continuing Bonds Interview (CBI) of Field, Packman, and Carmack (2007).

In the CBI the participants were shown the list of CBE's. They were asked to evaluate the degree of connection that they maintained with the deceased pet. They were also asked if they experienced these CBE's and whether they were comforting or distressing. Participants were also assessed for psychosocial adjustment using the following measures:

- The Inventory of Complicated Grief is a 30 item self-report questionnaire that measures symptoms of grief. Respondents rate their feelings on a 5-point scale regarding symptoms over the past month. (Prigerson, H. G., & Jacobs, S. C., 2001).
- The Pet Attachment Survey is an 11 item measurement of the strength of attachment the participant had with the deceased pet. Items are rated on a 5 point scale from almost never to almost always. (Gosse, G., 1988).
- Relationship Scales Questionnaire is a 30 item self-report measure of individual differences in adult attachment. (Griffin, D. W., & Bartholomew, K., 1994).
- Social Constraints Measure is a 15 item assessment of women diagnosed with cancer determining better emotional adjustment due to relationships with others. (Lepore, S. J., & Ituarte, P. H. G., 1999).
- Brief Symptom Inventory is a 53 item measure used to identify patterns of psychological symptoms in psychiatric and medical patients as well as non-patient respondents, using a 5-point scale on distress. (Derogatis, L. R., & Spencer, P. M., 1982).
- Posttraumatic Growth Inventory is a 21 item scale that measures the degree of positive changes using a 6-point scale for new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life. (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G., 1996).

Results of this study validated the twelve CBE's. The most frequently endorsed expressions were fond memories, belongings, reminiscing and lessons learned/positive influence. Data revealed that the bereaved preserve and maintain attachment to the deceased pet through CBE's which provide emotional regulation for coping with the loss. This study also confirmed the significance of the owner/pet bond showing the use of CBE'S for pet loss was comparable to that of a spousal loss sample.

Because the sample was small and rather homogenous (mostly middle class white women), the findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research should use a longitudinal research design and repeated measures of CBE's from pet death until 1 year post-death.

More detailed results of this same study were reported by Packman, W., Carmack, B. J. and Ronen, R. (2012). These results include:

- 67% of respondents reported they had a sense of their pet's presence or spirit coming back, being with the person, comforting or guiding the person.
- 76% of respondents indicated that they continued to talk to their deceased pet. As part of this construct, 52% respondents said they experienced a sense of unfinished business (regrets, self-blame, guilt).
- 90% of respondents reported having fond memories.
- 76% of respondents reported having dreams about their deceased pets.
- 61% of respondents described creating, holding or attending rituals and memorials for their pets, and 46% reported them as comforting.
- 55% of respondents felt themselves drawn to places they associated with their deceased pet, and the majority said those place were a source of comfort.

Participants were asked a series of questions about their deceased pet's belongings and possessions. Seventy-nine percent of respondents held onto or used special belongings/possessions in order to feel close to their pet. More specifically 61% kept some items for other pets; 52% kept special items as a memory; 21% stored but did not sort the possessions; 15% kept all belongs exactly as they were when the pet was alive, and 9% got rid of all possessions.

When respondents were asked about lessons they learned from their deceased pet:

- 79% experienced “lessons learned” and the majority reported these lessons as comforting
- 46% of respondents acknowledged that they try to live up to their pet’s wishes, and
- 64% of respondents thought in some way and to some degree they would be reunited with their pets.

The authors concluded that the majority of respondents frequently maintain ongoing meaningful ties with their deceased pet through the phenomenon of CBE’s and that it is the degree of adaptability and not the number of CBE’s that is significant. One implication of the research is to encourage people to discuss their experiences with CBE’s. Another finding was the recognition of the frequency of practices and behaviors people engaged in after a pet dies. Recognizing the frequency and validating the behaviors helps grievers to not feel “abnormal” or “crazy”. When given the invitation to talk about their experiences in a supportive validating setting, respondents were willing and grateful for the opportunity to discuss their experiences. In addition, the study corroborated the value of rituals and memorials.

The study limitations include the lack of diversity in the sample. The authors recommend ascertaining how pet loss affects people of different cultural backgrounds and suggest that an in-depth exploration of situational factors such as euthanasia and its impact on grief be examined.

The previous research by Packman, W., Cormack, B. J., Ronen, R. (2012) suggested that individual grief cannot be understood fully without looking into culture because certain cultures may not fully validate pet loss as a significant loss. In order to explore grief reactions among a more diverse sample, Packman, Carmack, Katz, Carlos, Field, and Landers (2014) conducted an online survey study. Their goal in this study was to investigate grief reactions in individuals who

lost a pet. In addition, the authors had an interest in knowing the extent to which these samples made use of continuing bonds to cope with the loss of their pet.

The survey included demographic questions and the following six objective measures the Pet Attachment Scale, Inventory of Complicated Grief, The Continuing Bonds Instrument, Social Constraints Measure, General Health Questionnaire and the Relationships Scales Questionnaire along with three open-ended optional questions. The last optional open-ended question was the focus of this study's investigation. The purpose was to explore the degree in which pet loss is a disenfranchised grief and whether there were differences and commonalities in grief expression between the two samples:

“Now that you have answered our questions are there any other feelings or thoughts about your experience of grieving for your pet that you would like to share with us? Feel free to write as much or as little as you like.” (Packman, et al, 2014, 337).

The participants were recruited from online posts and direct solicitations to pet loss support groups. There were 3267 respondents to the U.S. survey with 1962 answering the last question. Because of the large number a sample of 200 from the 1962 were selected using a systematic sampling method. At a randomized starting point, every 10<sup>th</sup> person was selected. There were 96 respondents from the French Canadian survey; 35 who answered the last question. Because of the small number of respondents to the French Canadian survey, no systematic sampling was used. A link to the survey on the Survey Monkey website was provided for the participants.

For both samples there were no statistically different demographics or other consequential variables between the two samples. Based on the open ended question, the

intensity of loss experienced along with an empathic failure was high in both samples. In other words, the respondents did not feel supported in their grief, hence the empathic failure. Many felt they had limited resources to express their grief and minimal support, making their grief disenfranchised.

The language used in responding to the open-ended questions suggested an intense, strong bond to their companion animals. "Animals as caregivers" was a theme reflected in the receiving of support from pets and in unconditional presence and love. Pet owners assumed the role of responsible caregivers for their pets. Pets were frequently described as family members, both in terms used, (child, baby, and family) and in life shared (sleeping in bed, and daily interactions).

This study helped to clarify that, regardless of variables, including culture, the loss of an animal companion can be devastating and that connection through shared experiences allows for a sense of purpose, more intimacy and less isolation. The data support the notion that pet loss as a disenfranchised grief is a result of empathic failure. With no prompting, some respondents described the survey as therapeutic. As such, the survey served as an empathic bridge. The survey itself produced two benefits: the first being personal, in that it allowed participants to explore their emotions and process experiences; and secondly, there was a benevolent component, sharing experiences for the benefit of others.

One limitation in this research is that the quantitative data were based on self-report measures. In addition, due to language differences, it is possible that the questions held different meanings for the two samples. Because of the small sample of French Canadian respondents, findings should be interpreted with caution. It is also possible that the two cultures are too

similar for a real understanding of how culture affects pet loss grief. The authors suggest that a longitudinal research design and repeated measures of CBE's be used.

### **Pet Loss and Rituals**

In addition to the study of the role of continuing bonds, there are studies that have explored the role of pet memorialization rituals and the effect of those rituals on the resolution of grief.

Stephens and Hill (1996) examined the dispossession of animal companions by pet owners. Their goal was to better understand the bereavement process for an animal companion from a consumer behavior perspective. Data were collected from two independent sources, the gravesites/memorials in a pet cemetery in the same community of the pet owners and essays written by current or former pet owners who had experienced a loss of one or pets.

Information from approximately 100 gravesites/memorials, which included pet's name, birth and death dates, and epitaph, was recorded. These data were collected to gain an understanding of the pet/owner relationship. The second measure asked 73 current or former pet owners to compose a lengthy essay describing their relationship with their deceased pet from the beginning until final dispossession. The researchers employed five components of everyday description to guide the analysis:

- undertaking an empathic immersion in the world of description,
- slowing down and dwelling on the details of the description,
- magnifying and amplifying the situation to understand its significance,
- suspending belief by taking a step back and wondering what this particular way of living, or situation is about, and

- turning from objects or events to the meaning they hold for the informants.

The analysis was achieved through four successive stages. The first stage required the researcher to read the essay to relive the experience of the respondent until they felt a sense of “empathic knowing” of the dynamic of the bond. The second stage required the summarization of each dispossession experience. The third stage involved searching for common themes. The fourth stage required any interconnections be explored to develop a comprehensive understanding of the pet dispossession experience.

The analysis showed three highly interrelated themes: “love and friendship,” “joy in life versus sorrow in death,” and “pets as family members.”

The theme of “love and friendship” was evident in the sentiments on grave stones. Terms such as beloved, best, loyal, and friend, were a sign of closeness that is experienced between an owner/pet relationships. The depth of the relationship was revealed in epitaphs that extended feelings into an unlimited future; “we love you, now and forever”, “love always”, or “until there is a reunion, “my love until we meet again”, “if there is eternity may we share it together”. This theme revealed the depth of the relationship and its enduring quality.

The “joy in life versus sorrow-in-death” theme was depicted by a contrast between the past and future relationship, “the joy of our lives” and “such a sweetheart always sitting pretty” as remembrance of positive traits and behaviors and the deeply felt loss of ‘sadly missed’.

The “pets as family members” theme was evident and widespread. Pets were often referred to as “son”, “daughter “, “baby” and owners as “mommy” or ‘daddy’. Special terms were used to distinguish status by noting “adopted” or “only child”. This theme was often connected to other themes such as love and family, “you bring us the greatest love, Papa-

Mamma” and feelings of sorrow and family, “your broken hearted Mommy”. This theme shows animal companions fill the role of an esteemed family member.

Analysis of essays also revealed three additional themes, “vividness of unexpected death,” “good-bye rituals” and “return to nature.”

The “goodbye rituals” theme included the special treatment pets during their last days. This was seen specifically in the owner’s choice of ending the pet’s life due to incurable or degenerative illness. Many received special indulgences, like favorite food or foregoing normal routines to spend the final hours with the pet.

The “vividness of accidental death” theme in the essay showed that respondents were cognitively and possibly, emotionally reliving the event. The detail of ruminations by owners seems to be a way to come to terms with the death. In doing so, many tried to attach a significance to the event. Most of the deaths recounted in the essays could have been prevented and respondents expressed guilt as a result.

The “return to nature” theme showed the importance of owners burying their pet in places they perceived as a favorite of the animal, under a tree the pet laid under, or which held some significance to them. The notion of new life or beauty coming from the ending was expressed in a tree planted in memory of the pet. The burials were a way of honoring and caring for the pet in death as in life. It was reported that the location made it possible to go there to remember or be with the pet and that having physical location was comforting because it could be visited regularly allowing for a connection with the pet.

The data from the two sources, gravestones and essays, provide parallel findings. The authors reported that although pet owners differed demographically, they shared a deep, loving

relationship with their pets. Pets are not seen as objects, but as loved and cherished family members. Stephens and Hills (1996) found that most pet owners chose to bury their animal companions instead of other means of dispossession so that they could establish a lasting memorial to a special family member and that these goodbye rituals, burial rites and sites appear to provide relief for grieving pet owner.

Chur-Hansen, Black, Giesch, Pletneva, and Winefield (2011) conducted a study on both pet owners' views on the cremation process as well as service providers' views on what type of pet owner chooses cremation in modern Australian society. Their goal was to identify pet owners' awareness of and attitudes towards cremation as well as investigate the use of human rites and rituals for companion animals.

Service provider participants were recruited from commercial business listings in a telephone directory that specialized in these services. Of five providers contacted directly, three agreed to take part in the study. These three pet cemetery service provider participants were adults over 18 years old, currently employed in the area of animal cremation and memorialization in an Australian city of about one million people.

Companion animal owners were recruited by a veterinarian's staff who identified people who had cremated their companion animal in the previous three months. These identified owners were then invited to contact one of the researchers for an interview. Staff passed details of the study to 20 people, and six accepted by contacting the interviewer. One participant referred the researchers to a friend who agreed to participate. Data reached saturation at seven interviews and no further participants were sought. The sample included six women and one man, ranging from 40 to 78 years of age. All were Anglo-Celtic and residents of Australia.

The qualitative methodology used for this study was framework analysis. All interviews with service providers were audiotaped, and transcribed data were checked by participants for accuracy. Transcripts were analyzed by two researchers to locate thematic content. Interviews with service providers lasted between 37 and 69 minutes, which started with an opening question, "What kinds of people use cremation services for their companion animals?" Minimal prompts were given except for two direct prompts given during all interviews, "Can you tell me what kinds of people use your service?" and "Was there anything special about the pet that people want to have a cremation or memorial or headstone for?"

Interviews with pet owners who had recently cremated a companion animal lasted between 15 to 75 minutes. Participants were asked to respond to questions about their companion animal. They were asked to discuss their feelings regarding the loss of the animals, explain why they chose cremation, express their opinions on interactions with staff, and describe what they did or were going to do with the ashes. In the experience of each owner participant, no one had direct contact with a cremation service provider directly; the veterinarian was the intermediary.

Five main themes emerged from the research question, "What kinds of people use cremation services for their companion animals?"

- All types of people use cremation services, (no single category)
- people who consider companion animals as family, as a child;
- people who want memorials for their companion animals;
- grieving people;
- people who seek compassion and social support.

All three service providers agreed there was no single category of people who cremate their companion animal, hence the opinion that “everyone” uses cremation services. They noted all ages, genders, families, couples and singles attended services. Dogs and cats were typically the companion animals cremated but all types of animals had been cremated. Cremation was sought whether an animal had been a pet for weeks or years, had died from sudden or chronic illness, or had been euthanized.

One category of people who chose cremation were those with practical challenges such as, an animal that was too large, killed in an accident (person too distressed to collect the remains), or a psychological inability to touch the dead animal, as well as laws forbidding burial at home or living in a place with nowhere to bury the animal (apartment).

All three providers felt the users of their services had strong emotional bonds with their companion animals. The service providers reported that some clients wanted to be buried with their companion animals. Pet owner respondents confirmed this by saying they wanted to cremate their animals so they could be buried with them or with multiple cremated companions. Service providers also reported that owners chose cremation so the animal “could remain with family” and expressed the importance of knowing the ashes were those of their animals and paid additional costs for that assurance.

All three service providers cited the importance of having a memorial (ashes, plaques, urns, a planting) or ritual similar to human rituals, and they all agreed it helped clients with the grieving process. They also indicated that people would spend from hundreds to thousands of dollars regardless of age, gender or socioeconomic status. None of the providers offered a funeral service, but two offered a quiet grieving room. All companion animal owners discussed the need

for a memorial, and all engaged in a ritual using the ashes, such as scattering ashes in a favorite spot, keeping the urn with a photograph, or dividing ashes to scatter and keep.

The providers discussed numerous examples of grieving using terms such as, crying, distraught, heartbroken, suicidal, not coping, unable to breathe, unable to speak, requiring counseling or medication. The pet owners confirmed these expressions of grief. All three service providers also acted as grief counselor. They saw this as an important role since they understood what their clients were going through even though none had formal qualifications. They gave both practical guidance on making choices and emotional support and all three service providers noted that continuous exposure to death and grieving clients was distressing and took a toll on their lives. Owners praised their veterinarians for their support and guidance through the euthanasia process and the decision to cremate, as well as the care in handling the body after death.

People wanting a cremation do not fit a particular category and although research has focused on particular groups (children, elderly) this study reinforces the value of the human-animal bond in a wide range of people across all age groups. Because of this, grief as the result of the death of a companion animal should not be marginalized or pathologized by health care professions or others. If people consider a companion animal to be a family member, it seems reasonable to memorialize them with mourning rituals. All participants in this study discussed the importance of these rituals for the grieving process.

The research is exploratory and no quantitative data is available regarding how many and what types of people use cremation services. The perception of the service providers that “everyone” uses their services is vague. According to the authors, cremation is not a universal

choice by pet owners in Australia. They also bury their companion animals at home, dispose pets in the rubbish, and flush fish down the toilet. The study tells something about those who seek cremation, but does not predict who will or will not want the service. Also, none of the service providers offered funeral services. There is no data on people's awareness of availability of cremations or preferences for other human rites and rituals for companion animals.

The authors discuss the cultural differences in funeral services, including the ability to be buried with pets, pet cemeteries and pet funerals which are more widely available in Europe and North America. The authors conclude that without appropriate, socially sanctioned rituals, people must find their own ways of dealing with grief. Chur-Hansen, et al. (2011) believe the veterinarian, doctor, psychologist, social worker, and pastoral counselor all have a role in validating pet owner grief.

The authors recommend that service providers be the focus of future research to better understand the role they play, consider ways their work impacts their lives, and how they may best assist grieving pet owners. According to the authors there are no data available on people's awareness or attitudes of cremation and its availability or preferences for human rites and rituals for companion animals. This research can provide modern Western society with information to sensitively respond to people grieving the loss of a companion animal.

### **Pet Loss and Veterinarians**

Rujoiu and Rujoiu (2015), address the relationship between veterinarians and pet owners in the final stage of a pet's life, that of its passing. Because veterinarians are the most likely group to initially counsel grieving pet owners, it is helpful to know their perceptions on how qualified and successful they are in this role. Twenty Romanian veterinarians, eight females and twelve males, between 26 and 56 years old from nine private clinics and a state veterinary

facility in Bucharest participated in an exploratory study on pet loss. The participants were selected based on snowball sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted and four themes were identified: the role of a pet in the owner's life, the reaction to loss, euthanasia, and the relationship between veterinarians in the role as pet loss counselors. Twelve veterinarians were both a doctor and a pet owner and were interviewed from both perspectives. The motivation for this research was to consider the need for the creation of a network of pet loss support groups in veterinary clinics. Recognizing the potential need for pet loss support groups acknowledges the imbalances and latent emotions an owner feels as a result of a pet's death. This recognition is especially important in a country where pet loss grief is still stigmatized. The four themes and results are listed as follows:

- The Role of a Pet in an Owner's Life
  - The veterinarians who had animals in childhood gained principles of conduct such morality, respect and empathy toward their patient's and the owner. Physicians whose own pets had diseases dealt with complex reactions and emotions like most pet owners. Their personal experiences with their pets helped them assist owners in similar circumstances.
- Reaction to Loss
  - For most participants the reaction to the loss of their pet was grief comparable to the loss of a family member. Some confessed they did not or could not express their feelings.
- Euthanasia
  - When pet owners are faced with the end of a pet's life, the veterinarian has the responsibility to counsel on the decision to end it. The veterinarians who had their

own pets euthanized felt no guilt, only sadness. The authors found the presence of emotions with a dual substrate: rational and spiritual. Some veterinarians understood the medical role of euthanasia but had difficulty dealing with it for moral reasons. When deciding on euthanasia for their own pets, they are not the ones to perform the procedure.

- Pet Loss Counseling
  - All the participants believed that counseling services are extremely useful and necessary. Some admitted not being able to overcome the loss of their companions even after a considerable amount of time had passed. They were supported by colleagues and families, yet they did not tell them how affected they were because of embarrassment, shame and blame.

The participants expressed lack of sufficient time to counsel a pet owner and offered limited support. Some noted they felt uncomfortable discussing the loss. The presence of a grief counselor would be appropriate to assist in those situations. Lack of training for veterinarians is cited as a challenge and it was noted that “there is no wish for change for ideas that seem idealistic”.

Because the number of participants was small, the results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to all Romanian veterinarians or veterinarians in other countries. The authors suggest that more research is needed on the relationship between veterinarians and pet owners by way of mixed qualitative and quantitative studies focusing on loss, grief and trauma as it relates to pet loss. The relationship between veterinarian and pet owners of different professions should also be examined. A larger sample of both groups is recommended.

In this descriptive analysis it was found that expression of emotions and feelings were not ignored in the dual role of veterinarian and pet owner, but the grief is more intense when the loss involves one's own pet. This suggests that these veterinarians would have greater understanding and empathy for their client's grief. The authors believe that professional training, communication skills and empathetic behavior are the most important components in developing a relationship between veterinarian and pet owner.

### **Methods**

The pet funeral and cremation industry has been largely a self-regulated industry. Currently there are only 3 states in the United States that have any legal standards for pet cremation. Recently the International Association of Pet Cemeteries & Crematories (IAPOCC), has put in place an accreditation program which will give the industry and the pet owner a measure of protection in the integrity of the pet aftercare processes from those who seek out accreditation and inspection. (IAPOCC, <https://www.iaopc.com/professionals/accreditation-professional>)

Due to lack of federal or state regulations, except for environmental regulations or business licensing, there has been very little oversight and data reporting. However, trends seen by industry organizations such as, IAOPCC and the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance (PLPA), under the auspices of the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCF), have shown that pet owners have a greater interest in using these services (PLPA, 2015). Coleen Ellis, the chairperson of the PLPA and board member of the ICCFA, has expressed

concern over the lack of standardized, terminology used by the industry which can be confusing or misleading to grieving pet owners. (Personal communication with Coleen Ellis, PLPA Chairperson, September, 15, 2014). For example, in the case of cremation, there are several terms used in the industry: individual, individual partitioned, private, group, family and mass cremation. Individual cremation is an interim term used by the industry, and it suggests that a pet will be cremated alone. However, the term is often synonymous with partitioned or segregated cremation which means a pet will be cremated at the same time as other pets and separated by trays, refractory bricks or just space. Ashes are collected singularly, taking care not to comingle cremains, but there is no guarantee a pet's cremains will not be comingled with another's. The term private cremation is, in fact, a cremation of a single pet, with only that animal's cremains collected and guaranteed to be the cremains of only that pet.

A survey (see Appendix A) containing 20 questions, 5 demographic and 15 pet loss/pet memorialization questions, was created using the Survey Monkey tools

(<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>). The terms used in this survey were taken from the *Standards of Practice for Cremation of Pets, a joint project of the International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories (IAPCC) and the Cremation Association of North America:*

- *Communal Cremation* – To cremate several pets in a cremation chamber at one time with no regard for keeping pets separated. This process allows for the comingling of cremated remains. No cremated remains are returned to the client.
- *Individual/ Individual Partitioned Cremation* – More than one pet is placed in the cremation chamber and cremated at the same time with some form of separation between pets such as trays, refractory bricks, or space; the pet's location in crematory

is documented and cremated remains of pets are removed one at a time and kept separated. Each pet's individual cremated remains are returned to the client.

- *Private Cremation* – Only one pet is placed in the cremation chamber and cremated, with the cremated remains returned to the client. Private cremation may include viewing of the cremation by the client.

The survey was intended to take no more than 10 minutes. Participants for this survey were recruited through electronic social media. Specifically, an electronic link to this survey was posted as a public post on the author's personal Facebook (FB) account. This account had a "friend" base of 780 people with the majority of those known only in the FB setting. Because it was a public post, the link was shared with all of the account's FB "friends" and with their "friends". As a result, there was a potential for this survey to be shared with a wide and diverse audience. The post was hash tagged using key words, such as "pet loss", "pet cremation", "pet loss grief" to attract the targeted respondents. This method allowed the post to be seen by those searching for any of the terms hash tagged. The survey link was reposted daily to keep the information active on the public newsfeed.

Data was analyzed using the statistical analysis tools provided by Survey Monkey. Specifically, frequencies of each survey element was determined and correlations between attitudinal data and demographic data were explored.

The start date of posting the survey monkey link was January 1, 2016. The post remained active until January 30. At the end of this time period, the targeted 100 respondents had been reached. Data analysis was completed on March 15, 2016.

## **Results**

The goal of this study was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of pet owners who have lost a pet in the last 5 years. Specifically, this study focused on the pet owner's understanding of and satisfaction with the pet memorialization/aftercare industry. The pet memorialization survey was posted on social media site, Facebook, for 30 days. The majority of responses came within the first week of posting. One hundred and twenty-one respondents participated in part or all of the survey. The number of skipped questions varied and may have been the result of non-applicable questions relating to the respondent's pet memorialization experience. For example, burying a pet at home was not an option on this survey but was mentioned by four of the respondents in the comment section. All 121 surveys were analyzed regardless of whether all questions were answered. This survey focused on the use of memorialization services offered by service providers, i.e. veterinarians and pet cemetery and crematory service providers, as well as human funeral providers.

Previous to this study, Coleen Ellis, director of Two Hearts Pet Loss Center, board member of the International Cemetery and Crematory and Funeral Association (IAOPCC) and co-chairman of the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance, explained that she believes there is a lack of understanding of services provided especially in the case of cremation. Ellis is currently advocating for a standardization of the language used to describe the different cremation processes available. To that end, this study set out to gather data to ascertain the level of understanding of the types of cremation by pet owners.

## **Demographics**

Respondents were predominately female 87% (105), between the ages of 30-49, 42% (51) and 50-65, 42% (51). Fifty-four percent (64) were from the Middle Atlantic region and 23% (27) were from the South Atlantic region of the United States. Sixty-four percent (77) were married or in a domestic partnership, 59% (70) had a college degree.

### **Analysis of Questions**

Of respondents who used VSP Ninety-four respondents answered the question: Did you interact directly with a pet cemetery and crematory provider? Two groups emerged from the results, those who used a pet cemetery and crematory service providers (PCCSP) (17) and those who used a veterinarian service provider (VSP) (77). Eighty-two percent (77) interacted with a veterinarian for their pet memorialization decisions. Seventy-five percent (89) of all respondents felt it was important to very important to memorialize their pet. Ninety-four (15) of respondents who used PCCSP felt it was very important to memorialize their pet, as compared to 44% (34) of respondents who used VSP. Eighteen percent (17) of respondents consulted directly with a pet cemetery and crematory service provider and 76% (13) were from the Middle Atlantic region. Both the VSP group and the PCCSP group were equally satisfied with the services they received.

The respondents that used VSP showed a lack of awareness of available services within the pet memorialization industry. Fifty-four percent (35) of respondents who utilized the veterinarian and staff for their memorialization choices were unaware of pet loss counseling; 81% (50) were unaware of the option to view a pet before cremation or burial; 64% (40) were unaware of the option of having a memorial service; and 81% (50) were unaware of a virtual/online memorial.

Those who used PCCSP had greater awareness of available services namely burial; 80 % (12), cremation 100% (14), viewing, 57% (8), memorial service, 71% (10), pet loss counseling, 60% (9), and virtual memorial, 29% (4), prior to a pet's death. Because of this awareness, these respondents may have sought out a PCCSP because they wanted to utilize their unique services.

All fifteen respondents who used PCCSP and 81% (52) of respondents who used VSP chose cremation for their pet's memorialization. Four VSP respondents buried their pet or its cremains. Forty-four (4) of PCCSP respondents were offered a viewing and declined. Thirty-three (3) of PCCSP respondents were not offered the service. Twenty-two percent (2) of PCCSP respondents chose to have a viewing of their pet prior to cremation. No VSP respondents chose a viewing, 13% (6) were offered a viewing and declined, and 87% (41) were not offered the service.

One female respondent from the South Atlantic region said,

"I held Buddy as he passed away. It was incredibly sad, and hard. He still wanted to live right up until the very last minute, but his neurological deterioration made it impossible for him to eat or drink the last day. Their services were very minimalistic in their scope. There was no offer of anything other than after he died he can go home with you, he can be cremated in a group of animals and have some random ashes, or private cremation with a paw print casting."

Other responses to the question "What pet memorialization did you use?"

included:

"I took my deceased pet home and buried him in my own yard."

“We buried our pet’s ashes in a garden in our yard”,

“Paw print in clay”.

.

As was expected, based on the discussions with Coleen Ellis, the terms “private cremation” and “individual cremation”, although defined differently, seem to be used by the majority of respondents in both groups interchangeably. The distinct difference between the two terms is individual cremation allows for more than one pet to be cremated at the same time, with the possibility of the commingling of cremains. In addition, a third term, “single cremation”, was also used by some respondents to express private cremation, that is, one pet cremated with the ashes of that pet returned.

Of those surveyed:

- 88% (61) of all respondents accurately defined private cremation as cremation of a single animal with cremated ashes of only that animal returned.
- 90% (9) of respondents who used PCCSP, accurately defined private cremation as cremation of a single animal with cremated ashes of only that animal returned.
- 91% (10) who used PCCSP identified individual cremation as cremation of a single animal with cremated ashes of only that animal returned, which seems to indicate there is confusion between the terms private cremation and individual cremation.
- 88% (50) of respondents who used VSP defined private cremation, as cremation of a single animal with cremated ashes of only that animal returned.
- 91% (51) of respondents who used VSP identified individual cremation as private cremation.

- 56% (33) of respondents identified Partitioned cremation as
- 55% (35) of respondents identified Communal Cremation as
- 78% (51) of respondents accurately identified Group Cremation. as

Thirteen of the 17 PCCSP respondents answered the question, "If you selected cremation, what type did you chose and why?"

- Four respondents specifically used the term "private cremation" to explain the desire to retain their pet's cremains.
- Four respondents used the term "individual cremation" to explain the desire to retain their own pet's cremains.
- One respondent used the term "single cremation" to explain the desire to retain their own pet's cremains.

The remainder of respondents made the following statements:

"We wanted to make sure we got our girl back"

"In urn so always with me"

"Always choose individual. Animals are my family"

"Chose to cremate to scatter ashes, he was a large size"

Of the VSP respondents, forty chose cremation. Of those who elaborated:

- Nine respondents described their choice as a private cremation.
- Nine respondents described private cremation, but used the term "individual" emphasizing they wanted only their pet cremated and their pet's ashes returned.

- Five respondents described private cremation but used the term “single” to identify the desire to retain only their pet’s ashes stating, “I wanted to ensure that I got my dogs ashes” and “He was the only one and I put his ashes in a necklace”
- Two respondents identified their choice as group cremation, many animals cremated together and did not receive ashes.
- Four respondents did not know there were different cremation choices:  
  
“There is more than one type?”  
  
“Wasn’t aware of choices”  
  
“I didn’t know there was more than one type”  
  
“Don’t know”
- Five respondents left the decision up to the veterinarian.

### **Level of Satisfaction**

Sixty-four respondents answered the question regarding the level of satisfaction with memorialization choices. Seventy-five percent (45) of respondents were satisfied with their memorialization choices, with 25% (16) being very satisfied. Dissatisfaction was reported by three respondents in the VSP group. Four respondents from the VSP group commented:

“We had a paw print that was poor quality artwork. We could have done better ourselves.”

“Did not have a memorial service”

“Did not receive pet’s ashes”

“My vet and staff were very kind. There was nothing anyone could have done to satisfy me”.

Overall, eighty-eight percent, 56 of 64 respondents, felt their memorialization choices brought them comfort.

### **Demographic significance**

The most significant demographic result was that of geographic region. The geographic regions most represented in this survey were the Middle Atlantic (MA), 52% (64) and South Atlantic (SA), 23% (27). Twenty four percent of Middle Atlantic respondents used PCCSP whereas none of the South Atlantic respondents used PCCSP. Those from the Middle Atlantic were more knowledgeable of the available services regardless of whether they used a veterinarian or a PCCSP. Respondents from both groups were generally unaware of services beyond burial and cremation. Seventy-five percent (15) MA and 42% (18) SA were unaware of the option of memorial service. Sixty-seven percent (28) MA and 80% (16) SA were unaware of the option of viewing. Seventy-one percent (30) MA and 80 % (16) SA were unaware of the option of online “virtual” memorial. Thirty-eight percent (17) MA and 70% (14) SA were unaware of the option of pet loss counseling. In regard to level of understanding of cremation terminology, 84% (31) MA and 88 % (14), correctly identified the term private cremation, but also used the term individual cremation to express private cremation.

### **Discussion**

Pet owners appear to have a knowledge of the services that are typically arranged through the veterinary hospital, typically cremation with private time with the pet after euthanasia with a keepsake such as a paw print, and a lock of hair. This study showed that cremation was the overwhelming choice because of the desire to retain a pet’s cremains so they would “always be

with them”. One respondent elaborated on the necessity of cremation due to the size of the pet, “Private cremation. Wanted him with me. He was too big to bury. He was an English Mastiff.”

We cannot glean from this survey how veterinarians interpret their role as aftercare providers. A study examining this would be helpful to the pet cemetery and crematory industry. Based on the survey responses, it appears veterinarians and their staffs are not fully aware of available services or are merely providing the most expeditious means of disposition. As one respondent pointed out, cremation made sense because of the size of her dog. Veterinarians may also feel that after death decisions beyond euthanasia is not part of their job. Veterinarians and their staffs may not have the time or inclination to be involved with the dissemination of information or providing a wide variety of services. If so, it would be helpful for veterinarians to communicate to pet owners that they have the option of working directly with a pet cemetery and/or crematory service provider if they are interested in more personalized and supportive services. It would be advantageous for PCCSP to become a more visible partner within a veterinary practice. It is suggested that a staff member of a veterinary practice be a liaison between the client and the PCCSP.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this survey helped to identify some of the effects of the lack of standardization in the pet aftercare industry, and provided some insight into the efficacy of services offered by this industry. The analysis seemed to suggest that people are unaware of the choices available to them through the pet memorialization industry. The use of a veterinarian appears to limit pet owners' memorialization choices because they receive what their

veterinarian recommends or is willing to provide. Some defer their memorialization decision to the veterinarian. Veterinarians and their staffs may be unaware of the services available or are not interested in providing a more comprehensive memorialization service. It is advisable for veterinarians to give their clients the name of a pet cemetery and crematory service professional to assist them in making memorialization choices, thereby lessening the burden on the veterinarian and staff and to allow the pet owner a full range of options and services to satisfactorily memorialize their pet.

Since the respondents in this study were mostly middle aged, females, further investigation is recommended to ascertain how the role of gender and age may play a part in memorialization choices. It is also recommended that an analysis of socioeconomic factors be examined to determine how they may affect the choices pet owners make when selecting memorialization for a pet. Further investigation is recommended to determine whether PCCSP is more prevalent in certain geographic regions and if so, why.

### References

- American Animal Hospital Association (1999). *Results of the 1999 American Animal Hospital Association Pet Owner Survey*, Retrieved on April 10, 2015 from <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=0+1525&aid=1265>.
- American Pet Products Association (2009). Industry Statistics and Trends, Retrieved on April 9, 2015, <http://appma.org>.
- American Veterinary Medical Association (1998). Owners treating pets as VIPs. Retrieved on April 10, 2015 from <http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/mar98/s031598k.asp>.
- American Veterinary Medical Association (2000). Owners taking good care of pets. Retrieved April 10, 2015 from <http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/feb00/s020100d.asp>.
- Anderson, W. P., Reid, C. M., Jennings, G. L. (1992). Pet ownership and risk factors for cardiovascular disease. *Medical Journal of Australia* 157:298-301
- Archer, J. & Winchester, G. (1994). Bereavement following death of a pet. *British Journal of Psychology*, 85, 259–271.
- Bethune, D. S. (2014). Personal correspondence on September 16, 2014 with executive administrator of the International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories
- Brandes, S. (2010). The meaning of American pet cemetery gravestones, *Ethnology*, 48:2, 99-118.
- Chur-Hansen, A., Black, A., Gierasch, A., Pletneva, A., Winefield, H. (2011). Cremation Services upon the death of a companion animal. *Society & Animals*. 19, 248-260.

Clutton-Brock, J. (1995). *Origins of the dog: domestication and early history*, J. Serpell (Ed.)

*The Domestic Dog: its evolution, behavior, and interactions with people*, Cambridge:

Cambridge University, 7-20.

Cordaro, M. (2012). Pet Loss and Disenfranchised Grief: Implications for Mental Health

Counseling Practice. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 34:4.

Cohen, S. P. (2002). Can pets functions as family members? *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 24, **621-638**

Cremation Association of North America (2015). Retrieved April 14, 2015 from

<http://www.cremationassociation.org/?page=PetCremation&hhSearchTerms=%22pet+and+cremation%22>.

Doka, K. J. (Ed.) (1989). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow*, Lexington, MA:

Lexington Books.

Doka, K. J. (Ed.) (2002). *Disenfranchised Grief: New directions, challenges, and strategies for practice*, Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.

Duffy, T. (2005). Saying goodbye: pet loss and its implications, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 1 (3/4), 287-295.

Ellis, Coleen (2014). Personal communication with Coleen Ellis, PLPA Co-Chair, September, 15, 2014

Ellis, Coleen (2011). *Pet Parents: A journey through unconditional love and grief*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc.

Field, N. P., Orsini, L., Gavish, R., & Packman, W. (2009). Role of attachment in pet loss. *Death Studies* 33 (4), 334-355.

- Flynn, C. P. (2000). Woman's best friend: pet abuse and the role of companion animals in the lives of battered women. *Violence against Women*, 6, 162---177.
- Franklin, A. (1999), *Animals and Modern Cultures A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Gadomski, A. M., Scribani, M. B., Krupa, N., Jenkins P., Nagykalai, Z., Olson, A. L. (2015).  
Pet dogs and children's health: opportunities for chronic disease prevention? *Prevention of Chronic Disease*, 12:150-204.
- Grayson, K. and Shulman, D. (2000). Indexicality and the verification function of irreplaceable possessions: A semiotic analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (June), 17–30.
- Grier, K.C. (2006). *Pets in America: A history*. New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt.
- Grondahl, P. (2014). Retrieved on April 9, 2015 from  
<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Funeral-home-wants-to-offer-pet-cremations-5136972.php>
- Hall, M. J., Ng, A., Ursano, R., J., Holloway, H., Fullerton, C., & Casper, J. (2004).  
Psychological impact of the animal-human bond in disaster preparedness and response.  
*Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 10, 368-374.
- Holbrook, M., Stephens , D. L., Day, E., Holbrook, S. & Strazar, G. (2001). A collective  
stereographic photo essay on key aspects of animal companionship: The truth about cats  
and dogs. *Academy of Marketing Science Review* 1, 1–17.
- International Association of Pet Cemeteries & Crematories (2014). Retrieved April 14, 2015  
from <https://www.iaopc.com/>.

- Johnson, T. P., Garrity, T. F., & Stallones, L. (1992). Psychometric evaluation of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS). *Anthrozoös*, 5(3), 160-175.
- Kleine, S. S., Kleine, R. E. & Allen, C. T. (1995). How is a possession “me” or “not me”? Characterizing types and an antecedent of material possession attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(3), 327-343.
- Kidd, A. H., & Kidd, R. M. (1989). Factors in adults' attitude toward pets. [\*Psychological Reports\*](#) ; 65:3.
- Kruger, K. A., & Serpell, J. A. (2006). Animal-assisted interventions in mental health: Definitions and theoretical foundations. A. H. Fine (Ed.), *Handbook on animal assisted therapy: Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice* (2nd Ed.). New York: Academic Press.
- Kurdek, L. A. (2008). Pet dogs as attachment figures. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25, 247-266.
- Lago, D., Kafer, R., Delaney, M. & Connelly, C. (1987). Assessment of favorable attitudes towards pets: Development and preliminary validation of self-report pet relationship scales. *Anthrozoos*, 1, 240-284.
- Lagoni, L., Butler, C., & Hetts, S. (1994). *The Human –Animal Bond and Grief*. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders.
- Lenhardt, A. (1997). Grieving disenfranchised losses: Background and strategies for counselors. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 35, 208-216.

- Meyers, B. (2002). Disenfranchised grief and the loss of a companion animal. Doka, K. J. (Ed.). *Disenfranchised grief: New directions, challenges, and strategies for practice*, Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.
- Morley, C. and Fook, J. (2005). The importance of pet loss and some implications for services. *Mortality*, 10(2), 127-143.
- Neimeyer, R. A., & Jordan, J. R. (2002). Disenfranchisement as empathic failure: Grief therapy and the co-construction of meaning. K. J. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief: new challenges, strategies and directions*. Chicago, IL: Research Press, pp 95-126.
- Packman, W., Field, N., Carmack, B. J., & Ronen, R. (2011). Continuing bonds and psychosocial adjustment in pet loss. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 16(4), 341-357.
- Packman, W., Carmack, B. J., & Ronen, R. (2012). Therapeutic implications of CBE following the death of a pet. *Omega*. 6(4), 335-356.
- Packman, W., Carmack, B.J., Katz, R., Carlos, F., Field, N. P., & Landers, C. (2014). Online survey as empathic bridging for the disenfranchised grief of pet loss. *Omega*. 69:4, 333-356.
- Pattison, E. M., DeFrancisco, D., Wood, P. & Crowder, J. (1975). A psychosocial kinship model for family therapy. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 132, 1246-1251.
- Pet Loss Professionals Alliance (2015). Retrieved April 13, 2015 from <http://connectingdirectors.com/articles/40088-pet-loss-professionals-alliance-releases-findings-of-inaugural-professional-survey>.

- Planchon, L. A., Templer, D. I., Stokes, S. & Keller, J. (2002). Death of a companion cat or dog and human bereavement: Psychosocial variables. *Society & Animals*, 10, 93-105.
- Pierce, J. (2012). *The Last Walk: Reflections on Our Pets at the End of Their Lives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Piper, W. E., Ogrodniczuk, J. S., Joyce, A. S., & Weideman R. (2009). Follow-up outcome in short-term group therapy for complicated grief. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 13, 46-58.
- Podrazik, D., Shackford, S., Becker, L. & Heckert, T. (2006). The death of a pet: Implications for loss and bereavement across the lifespan. *Journal of Personal and Interpersonal Loss*, 5, 361-395.
- Ross-Barton, C. & Baron-Sorenson, J. (1998). *Pet Loss and Human Emotion*. Philadelphia: Accelerated Press.
- Rujoiu, O., Rujoiu, V. (2015). Veterinarians' views on pet loss: Evidence from Romania *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 20, 139-148.
- Sife, W. (2014). *The Loss of a Pet. A guide to coping with the grieving process when a pet dies*, (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Nashville, Tennessee: Howell Book House.
- Stephens, D. L. & Hill, R. P. (1996). The loss of animal companions: A humanistic and consumption perspective. *Society and Animals*. 4(2), 189-209.
- Spitznagel, E. (2012). Retrieved on April 9, 2015 from <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2012-09-07/theres-never-been-a-better-time-to-be-a-dead-pet#p1>

- Toray, T. (2004). The human-animal bond and loss: Providing support for grieving clients. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 26(3), 244-259.
- Taylor, R. B. (1989). Cultural Ways, K. J. Doka, (Ed.). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Walsh, F. (2009). Human-Animal Bonds I: The relational significance of companion animals. *Family Process*, 48(4), 462-480.
- Weston, K. (1997). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1991).
- Weisman, A. (1991). Bereavement and companion animals. *Omega Journal of Death and Dying*, 22(4), 241-248.
- Worden, J. W. (2008). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.
- Zasloff, R. L., & Kidd, A. H. (1994). Loneliness and pet ownership among single women. *Psychological Reports*, 75(2), 747-752.

**Appendix A: Survey Questions**

1. What is your gender?

Male

Female

2. What is your age?

18-29

30-49

50-64

65 years or older

Prefer not to answer

3. What is your marital status?

Single, never married

Married, domestic partnership

Widowed

Divorced

Separated

Prefer not to answer

4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Less than high school degree

High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)

Some college, but no degree

Associate degree

Bachelor degree

Graduate degree

5. In which region of the United States do you live?

New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut)

Middle Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)

East North Central (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin)

West North Central (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas)

South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida)

East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi)

West South Central (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas)

Mountain (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada)

Pacific (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii)

6. How important was it to you to memorialize your pet's life?

Very important

Important

Somewhat important

Somewhat unimportant

Unimportant

7. Did anyone assist you in making your pet memorialization decisions? Select all that apply.

Veterinarian/veterinary staff member

Pet cemetery/crematory service provider

Human funeral home

Other (please specify)

8. Did you interact directly with a Pet Cemetery/ Crematory Service Provider?

Yes

No, my veterinarian made arrangements on my behalf

9. In regard to the assistance you received, how satisfied were you?

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

10. Which of the following pet aftercare memorialization options were you aware of?

Burial

Cremation

Memorial service

Viewing

Online "virtual" memorial

Pet loss support counseling

11. Which pet memorialization option did you use? Select all that apply.

Burial

Cremation

Memorial service

Viewing

Online "virtual" memorial

Pet loss support counseling

12. If you selected cremation, what type did you choose and why?

The following 5 questions (13-17) will contain these 4 possible answers

- One pet is cremated. Ashes of that pet are returned. May include viewing.
- More than one pet is cremated at a time. Ashes are returned. It is possible that ashes may be commingled
- More than one pet is cremated at a time. Some form of physical separation is used. Ashes are returned. It is possible that ashes may be commingled.
- Several pets are cremated at the same time. Ashes are commingled. Ashes are not returned.

13. What is your understanding of Private cremation?

14. What is your understanding of Individual Cremation?

15. What is your understanding of a Partitioned Cremation?

16. What is your understanding of Communal Cremation?

17. What is your understanding of Group Cremation?

18. Were you satisfied with your pet memorialization experience?

Very satisfied, I got more than I expected

Satisfied, I got what I expected

Dissatisfied, I did not get what I expected

19. If you were dissatisfied with your experience, what would you do differently to memorialize your next pet?

20. Did the memorialization choices you made for your pet bring you comfort?

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/?sm=jP8XIjpDNynWiwSvk1W1ET8QQ08tw%2fhOz2h%2bWmiNrYqJxUn1renin9NdBdcNfsaAw59IqYGn0KW%2bKeOdZU5hMI0FMCygEu9k0yH0GDyk%2bFc%3d>