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Rennard, Jane; Greening, Linda; Williams, Jane

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**“In praise of dead pets: an investigation into the content and function of human-style
pet eulogies”**

Jane Rennard^{1}, Linda Greening¹ and Jane M. Williams¹*

Hartpury University, Gloucester, GL19 3BE, UK

**Corresponding author: janerennard@outlook.com*

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10 **ABSTRACT**

11 Few socially recognised death customs are available for bereaved pet owners, who may
12 experience adverse mental health as a result of disenfranchisement and other complications
13 surrounding pet loss. Additionally, pet owners can experience complex grief when the death
14 is by euthanasia. When a human loved one dies, societal infrastructures allow mourners to
15 express loss through death rites. Such customs often include a eulogy; a traditional testimony
16 of praise which serves a number of functions in human bereavement, allowing the mourner to
17 celebrate the life of the deceased, publically validating their loss, and facilitating a ‘letting
18 go’. This study assessed the value of eulogy writing as a therapeutic memorial device for
19 bereaved pet owners. The text of 19 human-style pet eulogies, provided by professional
20 celebrants, was investigated using inductive thematic analysis and emerging themes revealed
21 two higher order categories; Structural Content and Emotional Content. Lower order
22 Structural Content themes included references to ‘*biographical detail*’ of the pet,
23 ‘*relationships*’, ‘*spirituality*’ and ‘*death*’. Lower order Emotional Content themes included
24 the strong presence of ‘*love*’ and ‘*joy/happiness*’, as well as ‘*sadness*’, and ‘*guilt*’ around
25 euthanasia. Similarities in content and structure were found between pet and human eulogies;
26 praising the deceased, describing fond memories and happy times spent together. This
27 suggests that human and pet eulogies may also share similar therapeutic benefits; allowing
28 mourners to ‘let go’, providing validation, and a means of retaining a remembrance bond with
29 the pet. We suggest that eulogy writing could offer a powerful tool to allow bereaved owners
30 to process their loss within a positive framework, and recommend that supporting
31 professionals, like veterinarians, social workers and bereavement counsellors, should
32 consider exploring the use of eulogy writing as a coping strategy option for vulnerable
33 bereaved clients.

34

35 **KEYWORDS**

36 Bereavement, grief, pet loss, eulogy, euthanasia

37 **INTRODUCTION**

38 When a human loved one dies, societal infrastructures enable mourners to respond to their
39 loss. Funeral rites are commonly performed, often including a eulogy in praise of the
40 deceased (Norton & Gino, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Eulogies serve a number of
41 purposes within the human grief experience, including paying tribute, allowing public
42 expression of loss, and providing consolation for the bereaved (Bailey & Walter, 2016;
43 Dennis & Kunkel, 2004; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). It is possible, therefore, that human-style
44 praise memorialisation activities may serve a similar function for some pet owners when their
45 animal dies.

46
47 Many owners consider pets to be ‘part of the family’ (Carlisle-Frank, & Frank, 2006; Charles
48 & Davies, 2008; Knight & Edwards, 2008), and the loss of a pet can have an adverse impact
49 on owner’s physical and mental health (Barnard-Nguyen, Breit, Anderson & Nielson, 2016;
50 Quackenbush & Glickman, 1984). Loss of appetite, insomnia and disruption to daily routines
51 are common (Quackenbush & Glickman, 1984) and some owners may enter a grieving
52 process similar to that which occurs following the loss of a significant human relationship
53 (Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011; Williams & Green, 2016). The process of human grief
54 outlined in the Classic Grief Cycle (Kubler-Ross, 1969) may be applied to the experience of
55 the grief process following the death of a pet. However, this model was not intended for
56 broad application to pet death and later research specifically into the nature of owner
57 response to companion animal death also found euthanasia and professional support from
58 veterinarian support to be prominent factors in predicting severe grief reactions for clients

59 (Adams, Bonnett & Meek, 1999, 2000). Feelings of guilt following euthanasia were reported
60 by 50% of participants, and 16% of those said they ‘felt like a murderer’ (Adams et al.,
61 2000).

62 In pet bereavement, the ‘*bargaining*’ phase of the Classic Human Grief Cycle (Kubler-Ross,
63 1969) may be replaced by ‘*guilt*’ (Figure 1), particularly if the death is by euthanasia
64 (Dawson, 2008; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

65

66 **Human death rituals**

67 All cultures have death rituals: from formal funeral ceremonies, to writing tributes, obituaries
68 and eulogies (Norton & Gino, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998, Zinner, 2016). Researchers
69 broadly agree that such practices serve as a vehicle for mourners to acknowledge the passing
70 of the loved one and provide a transition, allowing the bereaved to ‘relinquish’ a relationship
71 while also maintaining a post-death or ‘continuing’ bond with the deceased (Dennis &
72 Kunkel, 2004; Klass, et al., 1996; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Human death rituals can
73 therefore play a significant role in ameliorating the human grief process (Neimeyer, Klass &
74 Dennis, 2014; Norton & Gino, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). The therapeutic function
75 of death practices and memorialisation has also been observed in pet loss; however, there are
76 few socially sanctioned pet death rituals available for bereaved owners (Doka, 1989; Kwong
77 & Bartholomew, 2011; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

78

79 The human grief reaction to the death of a pet can be complex and occasionally problematic
80 (Adrian, Delirmich & Frueh, 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Owners can experience
81 ‘disenfranchised’ grief if they are unable to express their feelings of loss openly, which may
82 lead to intensified emotions and social isolation (Cordaro, 2012; Doka, 1989).

83 Memorialisation rituals can have a significant role in mitigating disenfranchised grief in both

84 human and pet loss because they allow validation of relationships and a means to express
85 grief (Hewson, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Therefore, professionals who work with
86 bereaved pet owners may be able to direct clients towards memorialisation practices, such as
87 writing a eulogy, as a strategy to alleviate or prevent problematic grief experiences (Cordaro,
88 2012).

89

90 **The human eulogy**

91 Many human death rites include a eulogy tribute to the deceased. From the Greek word
92 *eulogia* meaning ‘praise’, honouring the deceased by eulogy is now a cultural norm (Hayes,
93 2016). Eulogies serve a number of purposes within the human grief experience, including
94 paying tribute, allowing public expression of loss, and providing consolation for the bereaved
95 (Bailey & Walter, 2016; Dennis & Kunkel, 2004; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). Davis, Quinlan
96 & Baker (2016) found eulogies also serve as a means to make sense of the life of the author
97 as well as the deceased, and the tendency of authors to extend the positive ‘praise’ element of
98 eulogy rhetoric to idealization of the deceased may also allow the bereaved to make sense of
99 their own mortality (Hayes, 2016). The psychological benefits of eulogy composition within
100 human grief suggest the process of eulogy writing could be of similar value for bereaved pet
101 owners.

102

103 **Pet death rituals**

104 A number of owners now employ human-style rituals to mark the death of pets (de Mello,
105 2016; Mansfield, 2015), however despite this few societal infrastructures exist for pet loss
106 rites (Zinner, 2016) and individuals who wish to mark their pet’s death appear to create their
107 own rituals on an *ad hoc* basis. Some owners may be unaware of this purpose, or unable to
108 access, therapeutic memorialisation methods (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2017) and therefore

109 may experience problematic bereavement such as unresolved or prolonged grief as a result of
110 disenfranchisement (Adrian et al., 2009; Doka, 1989). The variety of post-death customs for
111 pets are comparable to those for deceased humans, with cremation (58%), followed by burial
112 (32%) the most popular forms of death rites (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2017). Many private
113 cremations, home burials and ash ceremonies are conducted within the family unit (Chur-
114 Hansen, Black, Geirsasch, Pletneva & Winefield, 2011; Dickinson & Hoffman, 2017)
115 however; some pet owners now utilize external professional providers to facilitate death
116 rituals. Individuals can employ celebrants, who conduct civil human funerals, to construct a
117 personal ceremony, which usually includes a eulogy to the pet (Guerrero, 2007).

118

119 **The pet eulogy**

120 While there has been little research into the content, purpose and contemporary practice of
121 pet eulogies, related studies suggest strong associations with human eulogy function
122 (Furman, 2005; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Lyons, 2013). Autoethnographic studies
123 exploring personal experiences of pet bereavement have found that eulogy writing provides a
124 vehicle to praise pets and express loss, and report a positive impact on personal grief
125 experiences (Furman, 2005; Lyons, 2013). The narratives described by Lyons (2013) and
126 Furman (2005) suggest pet death ceremonies and eulogy writing serve the same sensemaking
127 functions as those within the human grief process, enabling a ‘letting go’ and expression of
128 continuing bonds (Davis et al., 2016; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998).

129

130 The current study investigated the content of celebrant-sourced pet eulogies to identify
131 associations in content, function and structure with the human eulogy form, and assessed the
132 value of eulogy writing as a therapeutic tool for assisting some bereaved owners to process
133 their loss and maintain continuing bonds with their deceased pet.

134

135 **METHODS**

136 Ethical approval for this study was granted by UWE (Hartpury) Ethics Committee. An
137 interpretivist ontology underpinned the design of this study as eulogies were considered
138 social phenomena whose content would be informed by individual's human-animal
139 interaction experiences. A two-stage qualitative inductive content analysis research design
140 was used for this study.

141 **Stage 1**

142 *Sample selection: celebrant participants*

143 Access to pet eulogy texts for investigation is challenging. Few eulogy texts are reproduced
144 publically, therefore little is known about the scale of the practice among bereaved owners.
145 The current study identified professional celebrants who conduct pet death ceremonies as a
146 potential source of pet eulogies for exploration. This method of eulogy data collection also
147 bypassed the need to approach bereaved owners directly, which may have had ethical
148 implications. The optimum eulogy sample size was unknown, as there is no single
149 registration body for celebrants and multiple professional fellowships and organisations exist,
150 including The Association of Independent Celebrants, the Fellowship of Professional
151 Celebrants and the UK Society of Celebrants. A database of 849 celebrants worldwide was
152 collated using information publically available online from professional bodies and celebrant
153 websites. Participants were recruited via opportunistic and snowball sampling (Heckathorn,
154 2011; Koerber & McMichael, 2008). This approach has been used previously to successfully
155 obtain eulogy samples to reveal their sensemaking function as a ritualised form of
156 communication by Davis et al., (2016). Seven hundred and eight celebrants were contacted
157 directly via email and invited to participate in the study. One hundred and fourteen responses

158 expressing interest in the study were received; much of this correspondence included
159 observations and opinions on the use of pet eulogies. For example, celebrants indicated the
160 proclivity of clients to request pet funeral ceremonies, and their willingness or otherwise to
161 conduct human-style funeral ceremonies for pets. Of the 35 respondents (31% $n_{total}=114$) who
162 stated that they had engaged in pet ceremonies, 17 submitted a eulogy for inclusion in the
163 study.

164

165 **Stage 2**

166 *Sample selection: the eulogies*

167 Research into the content of human eulogies has employed samples generated from multiple
168 sources, including eulogy texts from family, friends and publically available eulogia of public
169 figures (Davis et al., 2016; Kent, 1997; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). Eulogies take many forms,
170 including poetry, prose and letters and may be delivered by the bereaved owner, an officiant
171 or another party. Inclusion criteria were therefore broad: any format, and original material.
172 Eulogies which were not written by, or in collaboration with, the pet owner or that were in
173 the form of pre-existing prose or verse were excluded from analysis. All eulogies received
174 met the inclusion criteria, and several submissions included full ceremony notes, directions,
175 additional ceremonial content and the celebrant address, which were included in subsequent
176 analysis.

177

178 *Data analysis: the eulogies*

179 A sample of 19 pet eulogy texts was investigated using qualitative inductive thematic
180 analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A multi-step analytic approach drawing from Grounded
181 Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and adapted from Keegan, Harwood, Spray & Lavallee
182 (2014) and Saldana (2013) was applied to the data:

183

184 (1) All eulogy texts were prepared in uniform format: documents were double-line spaced,
185 and line numbered with names of celebrant, owner and pet redacted throughout. Uniformity
186 of data enabled anonymity for bereaved owners and limited any researcher preconceptions
187 which may have occurred as a result of celebrant communications prior to analysis.

188 (2) Data emersion: eulogy texts were read and re-read for familiarity.

189 (3) First Cycle inductive analysis was performed using open-coded tags, drawing from Mixed
190 Affective methodology; a method suitable for investigating subjective qualities of human
191 experience (Saldana, 2013).

192 (4) Moving recursively between step (3), second-cycle (or focused) coded data were
193 categorised using constant comparison and critical reflection and themed for meaning; a
194 method suitable for participant-generated documents (Saldana, 2013).

195 (5) An iterative consensus validation process was conducted by three members of the
196 research team to ensure data were placed under appropriate themes.

197 (6) Peer debrief was undertaken within the research team to discuss validity and reliability of
198 developed themes/concepts.

199 (7) The identified higher and lower order themes/concepts were cross-checked with
200 participant celebrants to triangulate their validity.

201

202 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

203 Pet eulogies were received from celebrants in the UK (n=7), New Zealand (n=5), US (n=3),
204 Australia (n=3) and South Africa (n=1). The majority of eulogies were written in praise of
205 deceased dogs (47%, n=9) and cats (43%, n=8) with one (5%, n=1) composed for a rabbit and
206 one (5%, n=1) written for a pony. Reflecting human eulogy custom, the pet eulogies took
207 multiple formats and ranged between 25 - 4,037 words in length. More than a third of

208 eulogies (36%, n=7) were written by the celebrant *in memoriam* of their own deceased pets,
209 and nine eulogies (47%, n=9) were presented within the full funeral ceremony and included
210 the ‘order of service’, celebrant’s introductory address and working notes. Additional content
211 in the form of poetry, readings, music and description of post-death body care methods was
212 indicated in 12 (63%, n=12) eulogy submissions. Inductive thematic analysis identified two
213 higher order emergent categories embedded within the eulogies: Structural Content and
214 Emotional Content.

215

216 ***Structural Content***

217 All pet eulogies (100%, n=19) were presented in a structural form analogous to the human
218 eulogy (Davis et al., 2016; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). Five lower order themes emerged:
219 *funeral rites, biographical detail, relationships described, death and spirituality* (Table 1).

220

221 ***Biographical detail***

222 The overwhelming majority of eulogies (95%, n=18) contained biographical information
223 about the life of the pet. Anecdotes of origins and early life were observed in 79% (n=15)
224 eulogies: “...*he was a rescue from a local shelter*”. Authors who wrote about the origins of
225 the pet (60%, n=9) also made reference to ‘destiny’ of in ownership of their pet: “...*everyone*
226 *called it fate or universal design.*” Personality of the pet was described in 79% (n=15),
227 analogous to the tendency within human eulogia to idealize the character of the deceased
228 (Hayes, 2016), This trend was also observed within pet eulogy rhetoric: “...*the love he so*
229 *willingly demonstrated and shared; his eagerness to learn new things and to always please*
230 *his family...his beautiful nature...sweet, gentle and kind.*” The ‘praise’ tendency extended to
231 undesirable or negative behaviour (63%, n=12), which was often described with humour:
232 “*You were always hungry, the ‘witlitz’ who stole the bacon! The paw that would flick food off*

233 *our plates!*” Lower order concepts of ‘*brave*’, ‘*strong*’ and ‘*special*’ were observed in 37%
234 (n=7) eulogy texts, and ‘*loyalty*’ was present in 42% (n=8). The presence of ‘*loyalty*’ was
235 unsurprising. Studies exploring the HAB identify loyalty and devotion of a pet as key
236 characteristics of a successful human-pet relationship (Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006; Walsh,
237 2009): “*CAT was a loyal and loving friend to OWNER for the past 15 years.*” In common
238 with human eulogy rhetoric, favourite activities, typical behaviours, anecdotal incidents, likes
239 and dislikes of the pet were described, often with humour. A sense of humour in either the
240 pet’s behaviour or attributed to the pet itself was common (58%, n=11): “*CAT...liked to hang*
241 *out in OWNER’s bedroom, awaiting her return from school so that they could play together*
242 *and get up to mischief.*” The tendency to find amusement in or of a pet was previously
243 identified as a key concept in an analysis of online pet obituaries, which found humour to be
244 present within a successful HAB (MacKay, Moore & Huntingford, 2016). Implicit and
245 directed anthropomorphic concepts, such as ‘*humour*’, were present in 58% (n=11) texts,
246 supporting the need for some humans to perceive pets as “*similar to us*” (Boni, 2008; Serpell,
247 2002): “*...he was a four-legged person, a person in a dog’s body...*” It is unsurprising that the
248 tendency to anthropomorphise pets should be observed within a pet eulogy text, which is in
249 itself an anthropomorphic device, adopting a human death custom for use in pet loss
250 memorialisation.

251

252 Relationships described

253 References to relationships were found in the majority of eulogies (95%, n=18) alongside the
254 concept of the deceased pet as ‘*family*’ (84%, n=16). These findings support the familial
255 aspects of the HAB (Carlisle-Frank & Frank, 2006; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Kwong &
256 Bartholomew, 2011), and were observed in both implicit terms (“*mum*”) and in directed
257 statements: “*DOG was a very special member of this family.*” References to the pet as a

258 friend or companion were also common (89%; n=17). The lower order concepts of pets
259 fulfilling supportive roles to their owners, such as ‘*confidante*’ and ‘*non-judgemental*’ were
260 present in 32% (n=6): “*CAT was a friend, companion and confidante.*” The concept of pets
261 as a ‘friend’ is an established phenomenon within the human-companion animal bond
262 (Walsh, 2009). Relationships with wider family and social networks were indicated in 53%
263 (n=10) texts, with positive framing in all occurrences: “*DOG was a huge part of my boy’s life*
264 *and even after my divorce spent special time with my ex-husband...*” The role of pets as
265 agents for social capital is considered a positive benefit of pet ownership, broadening
266 opportunities for the owner to interact with a wider social network and exerting a positive
267 impact on mental health (Wood, Giles-Corti & Bulsara, 2005). Our results support the
268 existence of this phenomenon and suggest that owners may also perceive a value in
269 relationships between their deceased pet and other animals: “*DOG found a special friend, a*
270 *girlfriend named X, a Great Dane...*” Davis et al., (2016) found relational discourse
271 “*explicitly referring to the relationship between the mourners and the deceased*’ to be a key
272 theme in human eulogies, as a means to make sense of the life of the eulogy author as well as
273 the deceased. Therefore, the discovery of relational references in 95% (n=18) of eulogy texts
274 strongly supports the hypothesis that pet eulogies share the same sensemaking function as
275 human eulogies.

276

277 Death

278 Common to human eulogy rhetoric, reference to the declining health and death of the
279 deceased was found in 74% (n=14) of pet eulogies: “*...one day, old age finally took its toll,*
280 *and you couldn’t stand on those wobbly legs anymore.*” However, bereaved owners appear to
281 be more explicit in their descriptions of the declining health and final moments of their pets
282 than might be expected in the human eulogy form. The specific manner of death was

283 described in 63% (n=12), with euthanasia being the most common (78%, n=7) followed by
284 natural causes (33%, n=3). The death scene was described in 55% (n=5) of eulogy texts: “*As*
285 *we both held him the needle slipped in unnoticed, and three seconds later he collapsed*
286 *downwards as if falling asleep for the last time.*” References to decisions around euthanasia
287 were present in 86% (n=6) of eulogies where euthanasia was indicated as cause of death:

288 *Taking DOG to the vet for that last journey was one of hardest things that OWNER*
289 *would ever have to do. It is never easy and it often leaves the person with so many*
290 *unresolved feelings of doubt and guilt.*

291

292 Implicit and directed rhetoric within the eulogies, strengthened research that the ‘*bargaining*’
293 phase of the Classic Human Grief Cycle may be replaced by ‘*guilt*’ in pet loss (Figure 1), if
294 the death is by euthanasia, or is sudden and unexpected (Dawson, 2008; Sharkin & Knox,
295 2003). This could also explain the increased inclusion of the description of death scenes
296 within the pet eulogies evaluated.

297

298 Funeral rites

299 Death practices play a significant role in facilitating a positive grief process in human loss
300 (Norton & Gino, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Eulogy data suggests that bereaved pet
301 owners employ human-style death customs, indicating that pet loss rituals also act as therapy
302 for the mourner as well as providing a celebration of the life of their pet. Descriptions of
303 symbolic rites, words/acts of farewell and indication of additional memorialisation methods
304 were found in 74% (n=14) eulogy texts and additional ceremonial notes: “*Memorial to*
305 *celebrate the life of DOG*”. Indication of human-style rituals performed within the wider
306 funeral ceremony was observed in 58% (n=11) of submissions: “*Before we begin – who*
307 *would like to light these candles?*” Human funeral language was present in 74% (n=14), and

308 words or acts of farewell were discovered in 67% (n=13): “*Bayete to you my small king! Go*
309 *well, my dearest companion.*” The concept of ‘*remembrance*’ was core within the eulogies
310 (89%, n=17). Happy memories were recalled implicitly through anecdotes, and in directed
311 form: “*My favourite memory of you...sitting beneath our Christmas tree, happily batting the*
312 *toy train off its track whenever it went by.*” Further memorialisation methods were indicated
313 in 26% (n=5):

314 *When you (HORSE) died I kept some of your mane and tail hair and I also plaited a*
315 *piece of my hair into your mane, so a bit of me went with you; you will always be in*
316 *my head and my heart.*

317

318 The maintenance of an on-going relationship, or ‘*continuing bond*’, with the deceased allows
319 the mourner to make sense and adapt to the loss of a loved one in human death (Klass,
320 Silverman, et al., 1996; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). Expressions of continuing bonds within pet
321 eulogy texts supports recent research that the phenomenon is also present in pet bereavement,
322 and may afford owners a means for adapting to their loss (Habarth et al., 2017). Eulogy
323 writing appears to offer mourners an opportunity to recall fond memories and create a
324 keepsake memento (the eulogy), allowing effective maintenance of continuing bonds with
325 their deceased pet. Whether eulogy texts were retained as memorial mementoes is unknown,
326 although one submission indicated that a copy of the eulogy document was interred with the
327 pet during the funeral ceremony. Future exploration of whether the eulogy document itself
328 was used as a means to maintain continuing bonds, and exploration of this phenomenon
329 would be worthwhile.

330

331 *Spirituality*

332 A sense of ‘*spirituality*’ emerged throughout the eulogies (95%, n=18): “*DOG passed*
333 *peacefully, spiritually and without pain.*” Reference to some form of ‘*afterlife*’ occurred in
334 both implicit and directed form (89%, n=17): “...*OWNER knows you will be waiting for her*
335 *when her time comes to be with you again.*” Rainbow symbolism was found in 32% (n=6),
336 including specific reference to *The Rainbow Bridge*, the popular poetic concept of a pet
337 ‘*heaven*’ where animals wait to be reunited with their owners. Celebrant notes also indicated
338 the inclusion of the full Rainbow Bridge poem and rainbow-themed music in a number of
339 ceremonies. The concept of ‘*sleep, not death*’ was observed in 37% (n=7) eulogies and prayer
340 or blessing elements were present in 74% (n=14): “*DOG, we leave you to sleep and rest in*
341 *peace.*” Spirituality and afterlife are key themes in human eulogy rhetoric, and may be an
342 attempt by the mourner to answer “*difficult questions about the death*” by evoking
343 immortality (Davis et al., 2016). The strong presence of ‘*afterlife*’ references within pet
344 eulogies suggests owner-authors employ similar sensemaking functions as a bereavement
345 strategy in pet death as in human bereavement.

346

347 ***Emotional content***

348 Five lower order themes emerged to form the Emotional Content category: *joy/happiness,*
349 *love, gratitude, sadness and respect* (Table 2).

350

351 *Joy/happiness*

352 The concept of ‘*joy and happiness*’ emerged in the overwhelming majority of pet eulogies
353 (89%, n=17). Anecdotal descriptions of happy times spent in the company of the deceased
354 pet were common (47%, n=9) and the ‘*playful*’ and ‘*fun*’ nature of the pet’s character was
355 described in 53% (n=10): “*He approached each day, each moment with enthusiasm and*
356 *delight. He was happy and had fun each day.*” Implicit references to the enrichment of

357 author's lives through ownership of their pet frequently occurred (63%, n=12): "*He*
358 *organised the household...making certain that we stopped for morning and afternoon tea and*
359 *(cat) biscuits.*" This was also reflected in a number of directed supplementary comments
360 within the celebrant address: *We will acknowledge the way in which he enriched your lives,*
361 *filled your hearts with joy and made your smiles wider and your laughter louder...*"
362 Celebration and praise of the life of the deceased pet was implicit throughout the eulogy data,
363 and many eulogies idealised the quality of the life lived by the pet under the owner's care:
364 "*...at least, as one friend put it, DOG had had a gorgeous life.*" The emergence of the theme
365 of '*joy and happiness*' supports previous research into the nature of the HAB which found
366 that pets engender 'life-enhancing' emotions such as joy and trust, allowing owners to be
367 more receptive to embracing feelings of happiness in other aspects of life (Lasher, 1998).
368 Surprisingly, the concept of finding joy in pet ownership and within the character of the pet
369 itself was not identified as a specific emergent theme in previous studies of pet
370 cybermemorials (Cebrat, 2015; MacKay et al., 2016). Cybermemorials are recommended as a
371 coping strategy by pet loss support professionals so it is possible that the celebratory nature
372 of the longer eulogy form affords mourners additional opportunities to express grief within a
373 positive emotional framework, therefore providing a more powerful or uplifting therapeutic
374 means to mark their loss. Further research to compare the grief experiences between authors
375 of cybermemorials and eulogies is warranted.

376

377 Love

378 Expressions of love for the deceased pet, or love from pet to owner was present in all
379 eulogies (100%, n=19). Although not surprising, the depth of love expressed by authors was
380 notable: "*I love you, I love you, I love you and I always will.*" "*We carry your pawprints on*
381 *our hearts...for you were deeply loved.*" As expected, the concept of '*unconditional*' love

382 from pet to owner emerged (16%, n=3) reinforcing the intense nature of the HAB and owners
383 attachment to pets (Cebrat, 2015; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011).
384 Reference to the non-judgemental qualities of pets was found in 26% (n=5) of eulogies,
385 emphasising the importance of another key feature of the HAB in pet ownership (Kwong &
386 Bartholomew, 2011). The belief in a unique emotional bond, ‘*love at first sight*’ or ‘*special*’
387 connection with the deceased pet was present in 32% (n=6): “*DOG became OWNER’s once*
388 *in a lifetime true friend and soul mate...*” The ‘*love at first sight*’ phenomenon has been
389 previously identified within canine cybermemorials (MacKay et al., 2016) and aligns with the
390 lower-order concept of ‘*fate/destiny*’ identified within the Structural Content category. The
391 authors of 37% (n=7) of eulogies described loving and often extreme efforts to care for their
392 ailing pet, putting the animal’s comfort above their own: “*As her ears stopped working her*
393 *voice grew louder and she demanded more of us, but we were happy to meet her requests.*
394 *She was old and much loved, so we did not mind.*”

395

396 The concept of ‘*lessons learned*’ from the pet was observed in 26% (n=5) of eulogies and
397 mirrors the relational ‘*legacy*’ theme found within human eulogia, where mourners
398 commonly describe how their lives had been improved by the deceased (Davis et al., 2016):

399 *We are thankful for the lessons we may have learned through knowing her. To*
400 *remember to be playful in life, To remember to hold those we love, To remind us to*
401 *take a walk in the sunshine from time to time...And mostly...not to worry and be*
402 *happy.*

403

404 This discovery of the parallel ‘*lessons learned*’ theme within pet eulogies suggests that
405 human and pet eulogies share a common form and function.

406

407 Gratitude

408 ‘Gratitude’ towards the deceased pet was present as a theme in the majority of eulogies
409 (68%, n=13) and has been previously identified as a key aspect within pet cybermemorials
410 (MacKay et al., 2016). However, the previous research by MacKay et al., (2016) identified
411 anthropomorphic perceptions of gratitude *of* the pet towards their owner as a key finding, in
412 contrast to the current study, where gratitude was predominantly expressed by the owner
413 towards their pet. This reversal of emphasis may be explained by the employment of the
414 traditional ‘praise’ tone of eulogy rhetoric, celebrating and idealizing the life of the deceased
415 (Hayes, 2016; Kent, 1997). Studies of the HAB broadly agree on the enrichment pets bring to
416 the lives of many owners, and human attachment to pets can result in a strong dependency on
417 their presence, therefore it is unsurprising that bereaved owners may feel deep gratitude
418 towards their deceased pet (Walsh, 2009; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011).

419

420 Sadness

421 Surprisingly, no expressions of sadness or grief were found in 16% (n=3) of eulogies,
422 perhaps reflecting the dominant ‘praise’ or celebratory function of the eulogy form. Inherent
423 sadness was nonetheless observed in the majority of texts (84%, n=16), with mourners
424 expressing sorrow, often in profound terms: “*CAT's passing leaves an enormous ‘cat-shaped*
425 *hole’ in our lives and in our hearts.*” References to owners ‘missing’ their pets were present
426 in 47% (n=9): “*I love you and miss you and thank you for being the cat you were.*” However,
427 evidence also existed that some owners found solace in their death rituals or care of their pets
428 during illness (32%, n=6): “*...as sad as all this was, this ritual around DOG’s passing was*
429 *something of beauty. Everyone involved knew we had done the right thing in a truly loving*
430 *way.*” The emergence of the lower order theme of ‘solace’ suggests that pet eulogies serve
431 the same ‘consolation’ purpose as the human eulogy form (Bailey & Walter, 2016; Kunkel &

432 Dennis, 2003) and are therefore evidence that eulogies could have a therapeutic function
433 within pet loss grief. ‘Anxiety’ in general was noted in 21% (n=4) eulogies, focussing on
434 doubt, fear, stress and guilt in relation to decisions and events around the death of the pet,
435 especially when death was by euthanasia: “...we made that heart wrenching decision to let
436 her go. Anyone who’s ever had to do this will know just how it makes you feel.” Directed
437 feelings of guilt around the euthanasia process further strengthen research that the
438 ‘bargaining’ phase of the Classic Human Grief Cycle may be replaced by ‘guilt’ (Figure 1) in
439 pet loss if death occurs by euthanasia (Dawson, 2008; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). However, it
440 should be noted that all eulogies (100%, n=19) directed their emphasis on ‘love’ and the
441 ‘joy/happiness’ (89%, n=17) within the pet-owner relationship. This positive framing
442 supports the potential benefits of eulogy writing as a means to allow bereaved owners to
443 place emphasis on positive emotions, rather than feelings of sadness and anxiety, therefore
444 allowing them to progress through the grief process with reduced risk of developing
445 complications (Adrian et al., 2009; Norton & Gino, 2014). Furthermore, publically expressed
446 feelings of love and happiness towards the pet may also enable bereaved authors to
447 counteract perceived societal attitudes towards pet loss, by validating the strength of their
448 relationship with the deceased pet (Doka, 1989).

449

450 Respect

451 Expressions of ‘respect’ for the deceased pet emerged in 37% (n=7) of pet eulogies. Pets
452 were afforded the human qualities of dignity, integrity and honour: “Today we will
453 respectfully and reverently say our final farewell to DOG.” The ‘virtues discourse’ concept
454 has been identified as a prominent characteristic of traditional human eulogy rhetoric,
455 allowing the author to construct the identity of the deceased “one last time” (Davis et al.,

456 2016), and the presence of a sense of respect for the deceased pet further strengthens parallels
457 with the human eulogy form.

458

459 **Further discussion and recommendations**

460 Many acknowledged aspects of the bond between humans and pets were present within the
461 data, particularly in relation to pet loss. However, no evidence of the concept of
462 ‘*disenfranchised grief*’ was found in the eulogies examined here. It should be noted that this
463 set of participants were already actively engaged in human-style memorialisation methods,
464 including eulogy writing, thereby effectively selecting themselves as study participants. Self-
465 selection such as this can result in a biased sample as celebrant-sourced eulogy authors may
466 have been able to express their grief within a supportive social network. This positive bias
467 within the sample could explain why eulogy authors did not indicate feelings of
468 disenfranchisement. However, the absence of disenfranchised grief within eulogy rhetoric
469 data provides preliminary support for the use of memorialisation rituals in mitigating
470 disenfranchised grief in both human and pet loss through the validation of relationships that
471 exist, and by providing pet owners with a means to openly express their loss (Doka, 1989;
472 Hewson, 2014; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). Eulogies in particular appear to be effective in
473 ameliorating disenfranchised grief because they offer a comprehensive vehicle for the
474 mourner to document their feelings, often within a communal funeral-style ceremony.
475 However, it should be acknowledged that eulogy-writing may not be suitable for all owners,
476 and that alternative methods of memorialisation may be more appropriate for bereaved
477 owners who are not willing or able to engage in the eulogy process.

478

479 The presence of emotional turmoil around euthanasia decision-making has implications for
480 professionals who work with bereaved clients. For example, veterinarians (Barnard-Nguyen,

481 et al., 2016; Rémillard, Meehan, Kelton & Coe, 2017), and social workers (Risley-Curtiss,
482 2010) need to understand the impact of pet loss on clients and the potential impact of their
483 own interactions with those clients (Packman, Carmack & Ronen, 2011). Veterinary
484 professionals in particular have a significant role to play in pet loss support as they are often
485 involved in death procedures and immediate client bereavement reactions, and by default are
486 in a position to potentially alleviate the grief experience by directing ‘at-risk’ clients towards
487 therapeutic memorialisation methods. The methodology here omitted information about
488 whether the act of writing the eulogy provided therapeutic grief mitigation for the author.
489 Future qualitative interview research with authors of pet eulogies is required to establish the
490 perceived value of eulogy writing as a means to ameliorate complex grief.

491

492 Pet loss support is a key requirement for professionals who work with bereaved owners,
493 especially for veterinarians who are directly involved in the euthanasia process (Dickinson,
494 2014; Rémillard et al., 2017). Veterinary professionals can feel they have not had adequate
495 training or personal skills in communicating with clients around ‘difficult’ emotional topics
496 like euthanasia (Shaw, Adams & Bonnett, 2004) however, client perception of the interaction
497 they have with their veterinarian during this time can potentially exacerbate or relieve their
498 grief experience. Effective communication by veterinarians about the therapeutic benefits of
499 memorialisation may be beneficial in helping owners cope with the loss of their pet
500 (Rémillard et al., 2017). We recommend that professionals who work with bereaved pet
501 owners should consider directing some euthanasia clients towards eulogy writing as one
502 strategy to alleviate their grief experience. Future research exploring the support options for
503 veterinary professionals around pet bereavement is warranted.

504

505 Eulogy writing as a form of memorialisation may not be suitable for all mourners. Eulogy
506 content here was largely guided by celebrants who had experience in human eulogy writing
507 and therefore possessed the knowledge and skills to compose effective eulogies. Future
508 development of a pet eulogy-writing template or framework could provide a useful tool for
509 individuals and professionals working with bereaved pet owners.

510

511 **Limitations**

512 The population of celebrants who conduct pet ceremonies is unknown and the relatively
513 small sample of email respondents and eulogy texts is unlikely to be fully representative,
514 therefore generalisation is limited. Emerging themes were cross-checked for validation with
515 celebrants; however, study design excluded opportunities to validate themes with the
516 bereaved owners. However, as 36% (n=7) eulogies were composed by celebrants for their
517 own deceased pets, member-checks were conducted within this group. Expansion through the
518 use of in-depth interviews with bereaved owners to fully explore and evaluate the concepts
519 which have emerged here would add valuable insight in this field.

520

521 **CONCLUSION**

522 Eulogies written for humans and pets appear to share the same content and functions: praising
523 and celebrating the lives of the deceased, acknowledging the loss of a significant relationship
524 and validating the grief of the mourner. The therapeutic benefits of human and pet eulogies
525 also share parallel context, with the eulogy device allowing the expression of continuing
526 bonds through memorialisation, and enabling the mourner to progress through a positive grief
527 experience. Pet eulogies provide a rich source of information about the Human Animal Bond.
528 The love, happiness and joy owners feel for their pets was especially evident in the rhetoric

529 of their eulogy tributes written in praise of dead pets, emphasising the positive psychological
530 benefits of pet ownership even during times of loss.

531

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538

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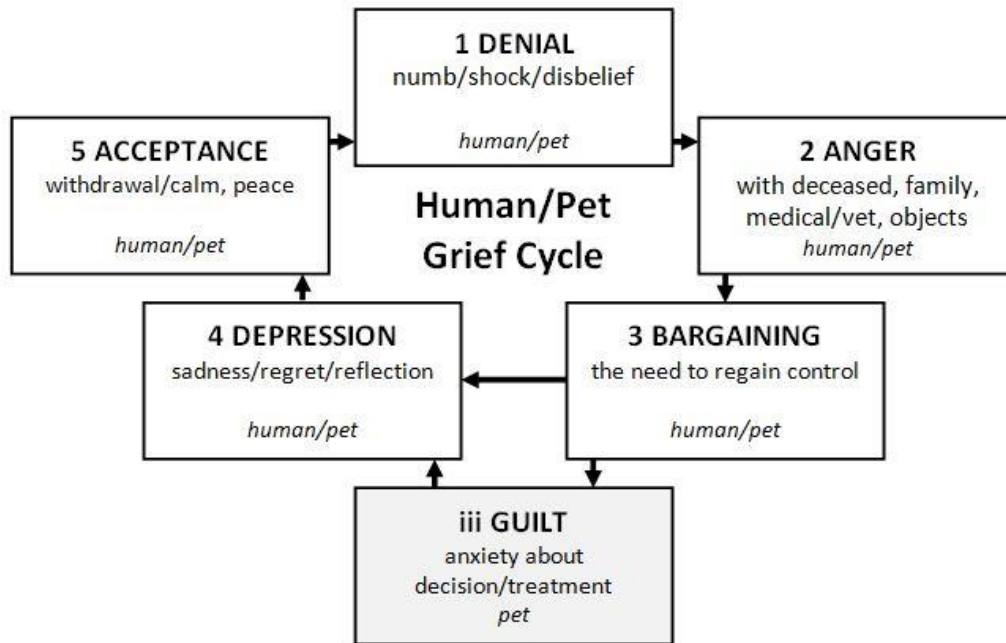
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FIGURES



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725

726 Figure 1: Amalgamation of the Kubler-Ross (1969) original five-stage Classic Human Grief
727 Cycle (CHGC) with the Pet Grief Cycle (Rennard, 2018, adapted from the CHGC using
728 Cordaro, 2012 and Sharkin & Knox, 2003). In pet loss, the ‘bargaining’ stage (3) is often
729 replaced by ‘guilt’ (iii). It should be noted that not everyone progresses through the stages in
730 the same order or experiences all of them.

731
732

733 **TABLES**

734

735 Table 1

736

737 Common themes identified within the Structural Content aspect of pet eulogies using open and focused
738 coding of pet eulogy texts to investigate the content and function of human-style pet eulogies.

739

STRUCTURAL CONTENT	
Theme	Lower order concept
Biographical detail (n=18)	origins of ownership: <i>destiny/fate</i> early life anecdotes physical characteristics humour in/of pet behaviour: <i>activities, routines, humour in negative behaviour</i> personality: <i>loyal, special, brave</i> anthropomorphism
Relationships described (n=18)	part of the family friend: <i>companion, confidante, non-judgemental</i> wider social network other animals
Death (n=14)	declining health/illness

	death scene manner of death: <i>euthanasia, natural, ambiguous</i>
Funeral rites (n=17)	human death language remembrance: <i>memories/memorials</i> words/acts of farewell
Spirituality (n=18)	afterlife: <i>implicit, directed, nature</i> rainbow symbolism: <i>Rainbow Bridge, other</i> 'sleep' not death soul: <i>implicit/directed</i> prayer/blessing

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Table 2

Common themes identified within the Emotional aspect of pet eulogies using open and focused coding of pet eulogy texts to investigate the content and function of human-style pet eulogies.

EMOTIONAL CONTENT	
Theme	Lower order concept
Joy/Happiness (n=17)	of pet/with pet life enriched by pet celebration/praise fun 'ideal' life
Love (n=19)	for pet/of pet unconditional unique/special bond efforts made for pet comfort/security
Gratitude (n=13)	"thank you" lessons learned legacy
Sadness (n=16)	"I miss you" solace anxiety 'short lives' anticipated grief
Respect (n=7)	integrity dignity reverence

747