

EXPERIENCES OF PET LOSS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT:

In this research the experience of pet loss in relation to the intensity of grief and the repression of that grief due to societal restrictions was studied in a South African sample of 12 pet owners who had experienced the loss of a pet within 24 months prior to the study. A pilot study was conducted in order to refine the semi-structured interview schedule. Participants were asked about their pets, their experience of pet loss in relation to their feelings before and after the loss and whether they felt they could openly grieve around friends and family. The findings indicated that the intensity of grief experienced by the participants was influenced both by the intensity of their Bond with the pet and the repression of their grief due to assumed social sanctions surrounding mourning the loss of a pet. The findings from the study clearly indicate the necessity for pet loss counselling, however it was clear that societal views surrounding pet loss are shifting, thus allowing pet owners to mourn their loss more openly with family and friends. This indicates a decrease in cases of disenfranchised and complicated grief. Furthermore the impact of pet loss necessitates the social legitimization and acknowledgment of the significance of pet loss in contemporary society as these relationships with pets are an increasingly prominent feature both within and as an alternative to familial systems.

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A special Thanks to My Mother for taking on the emotional baggage that comes with being there in our Dogs final moments when we could not be. You are my Rock!

DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to Max and Jabulani, who will forever be in our hearts.

PAWPRINTS LEFT BY YOU

You no longer greet me,
As I walk through the door.
You're not there to make me smile,
To make me laugh anymore.
Life seems quiet without you,
You were far more than a pet.
You were a family member, a friend
. . . a loving soul I'll never forget.
It will take time to heal -
For the silence to go away.
I still listen for you,
And miss you every day.
You were such a great companion,
Constant, loyal and true.
My heart will always wear,
the pawprints left by you.

-Teri Harrison

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study revolves around individual experiences of pet loss and how societal views surrounding pet loss can influence the intensity and duration of the grieving period for pet owners. Over the last 20 years, researchers have found that grief responses to pet loss are experienced in the same way as grief responses to the loss of a human loved one (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). However this grief response has been trivialized within society to the point that grieving the loss of one's pet is viewed as inappropriate as pets are seen as insignificant and replaceable (Adrian, Deliramich & Frueh, 2009). Researchers have found that society disregards the roles that pets occupy within familial and societal systems, and in so doing have caused increased incidence of disenfranchised and complicated grief (Adrian et al., 2009).

Research and the literature reviewed revealed a gap in that the majority of these studies were conducted in America (Chur-Hansen, Black, Gierasch, Pletneva & Winefield, 2011; Rosell, 2005). Therefore the present study seeks to expand the current limited body of knowledge surrounding pet loss from a qualitative perspective in the South African context. In Particular the present study aims to provide critical information that can be utilized by psychologists and counsellors when dealing with bereaved pet owners. The present study is exploratory and is based on qualitative research methods in which interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) has been utilised to gain an in-depth understanding of participants experiences of pet loss (Smith, 2007). Qualitative research methods are used to gain insight into and greater understanding of the subjective experiences of certain situations or events. IPA is well suited for studies such as the present study as it explores how participants make sense of their experiences within the social world (Smith, 2007). The research question that formed the basis of the study is: How is Pet loss experienced by individuals in the South African Context?

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa and was limited to this area due to time and funding constraints. Participants were drawn from the Grahamstown area and were voluntarily recruited. The only criteria that was necessary for participation was experiences of pet loss within 3-24 months prior to the commencement of the study. There were no restrictions on the type of pet that was lost in order to gain a broader perspective on the bonds that develop

between pet owners and various pet types such as hamsters, dogs, cats or horses. However the individuals that chose to participate had lost dogs or cats specifically.

A pilot study was conducted in 2014, the results of the pilot study indicated that there was a lack of social support for bereaved pet owners. However, the present study found that over a two year period there has been a slowly progressive shift in social support for bereaved pet owners which has caused a decrease in the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms among bereaved pet owners. It is important for the reader to understand that while there appears to be a shift in social views surrounding pet loss, the present study is cross-sectional and regionally restricted. In order to corroborate the depth of this finding, regarding the shift, a more in-depth longitudinal study is required, one that encompasses as many of the provinces in South Africa as possible. Furthermore, in future, both qualitative and quantitative data is required to gain a fully comprehensive understanding of the experience of pet loss and the social views that influence these experiences.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The present study focused on the exploration of individuals' personal experiences of pet loss. The present study is interested in the intensity of the bond between pet and owner and how this bond can influence the intensity and duration of the owner's grief after the loss of the pet. Furthermore the study looks at how social views surrounding pet loss pose a problem to pet owners in that their grief is often repressed out of fear of social judgement and ridicule. The research question is "How is pet loss experienced by individuals in the South African context?" The required information was gathered using one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

The dissertation is presented in six chapters excluding the references and appendices. This introductory chapter outlines the study and its exploratory nature into the link between the intensity of the bond between pet and owner and how the loss of this bond can influence the intensity and duration of grief for the bereaved pet owner. Furthermore this chapter contextualises the study, notes the research goals and orientation and the main research question that frames the study.

Chapter two presents the literature that informed the foundation of the present study. This chapter highlights the significance of the bond that develops between pet and owner in relation to Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory. Furthermore this chapter notes the increasing significance of pets in contemporary society and how societal views surrounding pet loss negatively influence the intensity

and duration of grief for pet owners. This chapter focuses on pets in contemporary society and the positive and negatives surrounding pet ownership throughout the human life span.

Chapter three presents an overview of the methodology. This chapter describes the qualitative method that was chosen to analyse the data. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method to analyse the data in that this method presents an in-depth understanding of participants' narratives. Furthermore this chapter outlines the research design, sampling methods, data collection and the procedures that were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The ethical considerations are discussed as well as the limitations of the present study.

Chapter four focuses on the analysis and discussion of the data collected. IPA was used to analyse the data collected from participants. Each transcript was analysed individually. Three main themes emerged from the analysis; intensity of grief, intensity of the bond, and repressed grief versus strong social support. Each theme has several interlinked and overlapping sub-themes. This section unpacks the participant's narratives and dissects the meaning of the participant's experiences. Furthermore this section focuses on linking the findings to the reviewed literature. In this section it becomes clear that the findings are mostly consistent with previous findings, however it also indicates that the present findings have found a shift in the social views surrounding pet loss.

Chapter 5 concludes the research. This section wraps up the findings in a concise and clear manner for the reader. Furthermore the limitations of the study will be discussed, indicating where improvements can be made in future studies on this topic.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The loss of a pet or companion animal is summed up perfectly by Packman, Carmack and Ronen (2011); “*With great love comes great grief*” (p. 335). The last two decades have seen the field of psychology take an interest in human-animal attachment and the implications of pet bereavement on pet owners. However, as Walsh (2009) notes, such bonds are imbued throughout history and cross-cultural contexts. For instance archaeological evidence indicates that humans have been found buried with their pets since the Palaeolithic period (Rosell, 2005). According to Rosell (2005) mummified remains of cats were discovered in Egypt and it has been suggested that such instances indicate respect for and even deification of domestic animals in such cultures. Walsh (2009) notes that both dogs and cats appear in religious and folklore stories worldwide, such as the worship of cats in Egypt due to their association with Bastet, an Egyptian goddess; and the negative association of cats with witchcraft in American History. Dogs were considered to be guides in the afterlife in Egyptian mythology, while cats were viewed as the guardians of the underworld (Walsh, 2009). In relation to pet loss, in ancient Egypt the loss of a dog was followed by a ritualistic mourning period in which the pet owner “shaved off their eyebrows, smeared mud in their hair, and mourned aloud for days” (Walsh, 2009, p. 463). It is interesting to note that ancient Egypt had several animal necropolises, where beloved pets were buried (Walsh, 2009). It is noted that many commoners would gather up all the money they could to mummify and bury their pets in these necropolises, indicating that these pets were loved and revered (Walsh, 2009). Such evidence could indicate that companion animals have been considered family members for centuries, however respect for mourning the loss of a pet appears to have fallen between the cracks as, in contemporary society, mourning a pet is considered abnormal or an over-reaction (Chalfen, 2003; Shell, 1986; Walsh, 2009).

In the present day we can look to Hinduism where cows are revered, as a symbol of life and therefore are not killed, to illustrate the significance of certain domesticated animals, however, such respect for animals does not extend to all cultures (Chur-Hansen, Black, Gierasch, Pletneva & Winefield, 2011; Rosell, 2005). Pets and companion animals come in many shapes and sizes, from mice and dogs to horses and even bulls (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Rosell, 2005). However despite the growing significance of the role of pets and companion animals in contemporary society, the grief response to the loss of a pet has been trivialized and pathologized within western cultures, even though such losses are felt in a similar manner to, if not more intensely in some cases, than the loss of a human being (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Packman et al., 2011; Rosell, 2005).

2.1. COMPANION ANIMALS AND MODERNITY

The last decade has seen an increase in companion animal ownership. While the figures vary across the literature, a general estimation is that between 60-80% of western households own one or more companion animals (Adrian et al., 2009; Albert & Bulcroft, 1987; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brandes, 2009; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon, Templer, Stokes & Keller, 2002; Podberscek, Paul & Serpell, 2005; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010). As previously mentioned, there are a variety of animals that are kept as pets, however according to the literature dogs and cats predominate as companion animals (Adrian et al., 2009; Archer, 1997; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Podberscek et al., 2005; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010). The majority of these households (87%) consider their companion animal as part of the family, in some cases going as far as to treat the pet like one would a human child (Adrian et al., 2009; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Podberscek et al., 2005; Turner, 2003; Zottarelli, 2010). Here it is interesting to note that in most instances these households include their pets in human holiday celebrations such as religious holidays like Christmas. Purchasing gifts for their pets at Christmas and including them in the family Christmas cards (Walsh, 2009).

The rise of social networking in contemporary society has provided pet owners with the means to gather and share information pertaining to the care and welfare of their pets (Walsh, 2009). One only needs to scan through the various social groups on Facebook dedicated to various breeds of cats, dogs and other pets to understand the growing importance and necessity of companion animals in our society (Walsh, 2009). Furthermore the last decade has seen an increase in pet friendly service providers such as airlines, hotels and restaurants, due to the demand for such services as a direct result of the increase in pet ownership (Walsh, 2009). Here it should be noted that according to Walsh (2009) service dogs - e.g. police dogs, guide dogs - are socially and legally excluded from the 'companion animal category' and for this reason the present study has not included service animals. It should be emphasized that in spite of the increase in pet ownership and the importance of companion animals in our society, the subject of pet loss and the grief response to the loss of a pet is still highly trivialized within society as pets are viewed as replaceable (Adrian et al., 2009; Archer, 1997; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Duffey, 2005; Planchon et al., 2002; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010).

The attachment and bonding that takes place between human and animal has increasingly been likened to that of human-to-human attachment and bonding, therefore several articles indicate that an understanding of Bowlby's attachment theory is necessary when considering the impact of pet loss

on bereaved owners (Archer, 1997; Field, Orsini, Gavish & Packman, 2009; King & Werner, 2011; Payne, Bennett & McGreevy, 2015). These studies indicate that the greater the attachment or bond between pet and owner the greater the intensity and duration of the grief reaction to the loss of a beloved pet (Adrian et al., 2009; Archer, 1997; Duffey, 2005; King & Werner, 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Turner, 2003; Zottarelli, 2010). Furthermore Fraley and Bonanno (2004) discuss the potential implications of anxious or avoidant attachment on the intensity and duration of the grief response to pet loss. At this point it should be noted that there is a lack of research pertaining specifically to the loss of companion animals and the adverse effect this has on bereaved owners. The field of psychology has paid little attention to the issue of pet loss which has hindered psychologists, counsellors, and veterinary staff's ability to provide a supportive environment for clients experiencing pet loss (Adrian et al., 2009; Archer, 1997; Planchon et al., 2002; Turner, 2003). The present study seeks to add value to the current limited body of knowledge on pet loss, in an effort to provide psychologists, counsellors and veterinary practices with the information necessary to help clients work through the loss of their pet, as well as to emphasize the importance and necessity of acknowledging and legitimizing the grieving of the loss of a companion animal in society.

The loss of a pet does not only pertain to death, it can refer to a missing pet or having to surrender a companion animal due to immigration or new housing developments that do not allow animals (Chur-Hansen, 2010). However, while these losses are significant and should be acknowledged as such, the focus of this study is on the loss of a companion animal through death. It should also be noted that throughout the psychology literature pets are referred to as companion animals, however in the present study we shift between the use of pets and companion animals depending on the contexts of the articles referenced (Chur-Hansen, 2010).

2.2. ATTACHMENT, ANTHROPOMORPHISM, & COMPANION ANIMALS

Archer (1997) notes that attachment theory can be used to understand human-animal bonds as these bonds tend to reflect mother-child bonds developed during infancy. In other words companion animals elicit emotions and behaviours that are associated with human attachment relationships (Field et al., 2009). It is for this reason that it is necessary to briefly discuss attachment and the basic concepts within Bowlby's attachment theory.

Holmes (1993) refers to attachment theory as a "spatial theory" (p. 67), indicating that the mediation of attachment is linked to 3 of the 5 senses, sight, sound and touch. In other words the sight, sound and touch of an attachment figure elicits and satisfies certain needs and emotions. In essence

proximity to a care-giver can be seen as the determinant in terms of distance and duration of exploration (Holmes, 1993).

Attachment has been defined as an enduring emotional bond with a specific being over the course of a lifetime (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Payne et al., 2015). These attachments fall under two categories “secure and insecure attachment” (Holmes, 1993, p. 67). According to Holmes (1993) there are three main factors that define attachment relationships; proximity seeking, secure base, and separation protest. Attachment theory, according to Bowlby, revolves around the innate desire to seek close proximity to an attachment figure/primary care-giver, during times of need, such as for solace and security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Payne et al., 2015). While the attachment process is most often referred to and observed in infancy, this process is repeated throughout our lifetimes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). A full explanation of attachment theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it is necessary to briefly cover the concept of internal working models and attachment styles as these concepts will be discussed further on in relation to the duration and intensity of the grief response to pet loss.

According to Holmes (1993) internal working models are internal representations of external realities and the potential actions that follow. In essence internal working models enable an individual to react appropriately and competently in any situation, emergency or otherwise which they may be faced with in their day to day lives (Holmes, 1993). Internal working models develop from experiences with the primary care-giver in infancy, these experiences lead to the development of attachment styles which influence how we perceive and respond to relationships in adulthood (Margolies, 1999; Noonan, 1998). There are four attachment styles; secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, and insecure-disorganised (Holmes, 1993). Insecure-disorganised attachment can be viewed as an ad hoc category which has not been theorised, and therefore only the first three attachment styles will be discussed in relation to the present study. Insecure-avoidant/ambivalent will be discussed in more detail under attachment and pet loss in relation to what Holmes (1993) refers to as theories of neurosis.

Secure attachment styles develop from the predictable and comforting proximity of the primary care-giver during infancy (Holmes, 1993). However, insecure attachment styles develop from unpredictable or rejecting proximity of the primary care-giver (Holmes, 1993). Attachment and attachment styles are highly relevant in human-animal bond research as Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer and Shaver (2012) acknowledge the human animal bond as an attachment bond. As such the authors note that attachment styles in relation to pets provide a basic understanding of “how pet owners relate to their pets” (p. 1). Attachment styles have therefore been linked to the way in which individuals react to and cope with, the loss of a companion animal (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012).

Attachment behaviour and attachment behaviour systems (internal working models) are important to note as Sable (2013) indicates that pets, particularly dogs, display attachment behaviour, indicating a reciprocal emotional fulfilment of human-animal/animal/human bonds. Attachment behaviour has been defined as behaviour that attains or retains proximity to a preferred individual (Holmes, 1993). Holmes (1993) notes that separation usually triggers attachment behaviour. Therefore “behaviour systems of attachment” allow beings to “initiate and maintain proximity to affectional figures for protection and survival” (Sable, 2013, p. 95).

According to Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver (2011) attachment theory is applicable throughout the human life-cycle. In other words attachment theory can be used to understand child, as well as, adolescent and adult relationships (Zilch-Mano et al., 2011). There are 4 criteria, according to Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011), that need to be met in order for attachment theory to apply; proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress. The Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011) note that human-animal bonds fulfil these 4 criteria as according to the literature pets and pet owners alike often seek close proximity to each other and take pleasure in the others’ company (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Zilcha-Mano, 2012). Furthermore pets and owners alike are said to seek comfort and support from each other, serving as a reciprocal safe havens (Payne, 2015; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Zilcha-Mano, 2012). In relation to a secure base both parties serve as a secure base for each other, thus allowing for confident exploration of the external world (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Zilcha-Mano, 2012). In a study conducted by Zilcha-Mano et al. (2012) on pets as a secure base and safe haven for pet owners, it was found that pet owners experienced higher levels of goal generation within close proximity to their pets or in the face of symbolic proximity to their pets, as opposed to the absence of the pet. Furthermore it was found that individuals faced with a distressing task were more at ease when their pet was in close or symbolic proximity as opposed to increased blood pressure with the pet’s absence (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). This indicates that pets do in fact serve as a secure base and safe haven for their owners, however it is noted that this is dependent of the attachment orientation of the owner (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). This will be discussed further on in relation to theories of neurosis. Pet owners have further been known to experience grief, and mourn the loss of a companion animal, in the same way that pets have been known to grieve and mourn the loss of their owner (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011; Zilcha-Mano, 2012). Therefore it can be said that the human-animal bond reflects an attachment bond, both in that it fulfils the criteria laid out by Zilcha-Mano et al., (2011) and through the reciprocal nature of the bond.

According to Field et al. (2009) inter-species bonding occurs in a similar manner to that of human bonding and therefore the bonding between human and animals can provide both a sense of security and an inborn instinct to provide protection and security for another. Furthermore it is noted across

the literature that companion animals are frequently considered members of the family and therefore take on human like roles within the familial system (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Field et al., 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

Several authors mention that people tend to anthropomorphize their pets, which means they tend to attribute human like qualities to their pets, for instance attributing human like emotions and feelings onto a beloved pet (Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008; Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Serpell, 2002). Furthermore it is noted that we tend to base our understanding of human-animal relationships on human relationships instead of viewing human-animal relationships on their own terms completely (Epley et al., 2008; Epley et al., 2007; Stephens & Hill, 1996). This understanding stems from anthropomorphic thought processes in which we use our knowledge of human behaviour and emotions to understand the behaviour and emotions of our companion animals (Serpell, 2002). This knowledge is linked to ‘reflexive consciousness’ which allows humans to predict or anticipate others behaviour (Serpell, 2002). According to Serpell (2002) humans from early childhood tend to view animals as social subjects, projecting human like mental capacities, motivations, desires and beliefs onto animal counterparts. It is this instinctual act that allows for the inclusion of pets into familial roles and why for some children pets become their main source of social support (Serpell, 2002). Serpell (2002) notes that social support is defined by Cobb (1976) as “information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligation” (p. 442). Chur-Hansen (2010) adds that in some cases the human-animal bond goes beyond that of human relationships, in other words the bonds between humans and animal can be stronger than that of human to human bonding as they are based purely on an emotional and non-verbal understanding of each other. However several authors mention that bonds of this type occur among those individuals that are disabled or lack the capacity to develop and maintain meaningful human relationships (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Field et al., 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). This conception however is refuted throughout the literature and is seen as a manifestation of the societal views of the inferiority and replaceable nature of companion animals (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Field et al., 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

Companion animals take on certain roles within the familial system such as friend, confidant or even child, this however is dependent upon the nature of the attachment between animal and owner as well as the age of the owner (Suthers-McCabe, 2001; Walsh, 2009). Companion animals not only provide companionship, they also provide emotional stability, security, and ‘unconditional positive regard’ (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Field et al., 2009; Walsh, 2009). In the following sections these aspects will be discussed in relation to pets and families, children and the elderly, it is important to illustrate the benefits of pet ownership to further emphasize the impact the loss of a pet can have on an individual,

not only emotionally but also physically and psychologically (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Field et al., 2009; Garrity, Stallones, Marx, & Johnson, 1989; Walsh, 2009).

2.3. Health advantages and disadvantages of Pet Ownership

According to Budge, Spicer, Jones, and George (1998) the literature indicates that there are physical, emotional and psychological (social interaction and responsibility) benefits associated with pet ownership and companionship (Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brown, Richards, & Wilson, 1996; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Morley & Fook, 2005; Netting, Wilson, Goodie, Stephens, Byers & Olsen, 2013; Staats, Wallace & Anderson, 2008; Suthers-McCabe, 2001). The human-animal bond is said to be an essential factor in the maintenance of the quality of life, which has been validated through limited research on the topic (Morley & Fook, 2005). There have been several studies conducted on the health benefits of pet ownership and while the majority of these studies confirm these health benefits, Budge et al. (1998) and Walsh (2009) note that the research on this topic is inconclusive.

According to Budge et al. (1998) some studies indicate that mental health improves through pet ownership, for instance studies have reported reduced levels of depression among pensioners housed in a pet friendly nursing home. Furthermore psychological well-being is said to increase through the acquisition of a companion animal (Budge et al., 1998; Noonan, 1998; Sable, 1995; Sable, 2013). A more detailed discussion of these two points will be discussed in relation to attachment and dependency. It is interesting to note that Stern et al. (2013) conducted a study on “the potential benefits of canine companionship for military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)”, reporting that veterans presented a marked improvement in symptomatic behaviour related to PTSD since the acquisition of a dog. Participants reported a reduction in loneliness, depression and fears surrounding personal and familial safety along with a calmer demeanour (Stern et al., 2013). However, it should be noted that this study focused on pet ownership among long time veterans and therefore the results of this study may be compromised through memory lapse and prolonged emotional withdrawal from traumatic situations. Furthermore the study focuses on the health benefits of dog companionship as opposed to various species companionship as is the case with the present study.

Several studies indicate that medical measures support the notion that pet owners are healthier and have fewer doctors' visits than non-pet owners (Andreassen, Stenvold, & Rudmin, 2013; Archer, 1997; Hunt, Al-Awadi & Johnson, 2008; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Morley & Fook, 2005). Morley and Fook (2005) accredit pet ownership with decreasing incidence of coronary heart disease, cardiovascular disease and reducing blood pressure through stress reduction (Andreassen et al., 2013;

Archer 1997; Hunt et al., 2008; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; McNicholas, Gilbey, Rennie, Ahmedzai, Dono, & Ormerod, 2005; Morley & Fook, 2005; Noonan, 1998). Interestingly, according to Sable (2013) recent neuroscience studies note that components of pet attachment can be confirmed “by demonstrating links between underlying attachment processes and brain activity in both animals and humans” (p. 94). In other words looking at, talking to or touching a companion animal can elicit the excretion of a hormone known as oxytocin, which is responsible for reducing stress and increasing feelings of pleasure in humans, it is also known to boost the immune system and reduce feelings of fear and danger (Sable, 2013). Furthermore pet ownership has been linked to reduced use of medication (Andreassen et al., 2013; Archer, 1997; Morley & Fook, 2005; Terra et al., 2012). Pet ownership is further credited with the production of endorphins, stress management and the motivation for self-care as others are dependent on you (companion animals), this aspect is particularly relevant to elderly pet owners (Andreassen et al., 2013; Archer, 1997; Garrity, Stallones, Marx, & Johnson, 1989; Morley & Fook, 2005; Terra et al., 2012). According to Andreassen et al. (2013) it has been reported that the mere presence of a companion animal is associated with improved health, particularly among the elderly and chronically ill. It is interesting to note that higher levels of pet attachment are associated with improved psychological and physical health (Andreassen et al., 2013).

Allen, Kellegrew, and Jaffes (2000) note in an article on the benefits of pet ownership among AIDS patients that pets serve as a “social buffer from social stigma and social isolation” (p. 271). Furthermore pet ownership provides AIDS patients with a sense of purpose, allowing them to have a meaningful reciprocal relationship with a companion animal that is not tainted or strained due to their illness (Allen et al., 2000). McNicholas et al. (2005) also note that the human-non human bond with pets can provide a certain level of comfort for woman with breast cancer both pre and post treatment.

In relation to emotional benefits, companion animals provide owners with a sense of security, “social support, affection, a sense of being loved, unconditional acceptance” (p. 129), which becomes especially important in the latter part of an individual’s life, “emotional responsiveness, promotion of trust, facilitated learning, a sense of play, humour and entertainment and sensory stimulation through touch”, the latter five of which are crucial in child development (Morley & Fook, 2005 p. 129). Companion animals have been known to mediate stress within the familial system, reduce instances of depression and anxiety, and provide comfort (Morley & Fook, 2005; Noonan, 1998).

Companion animals are also credited with increasing communication between people and between people and animals (Morley & Fook, 2005; Staats et al., 2008; Walsh, 2009). It has been suggested by some that through increasing communication and therefore aiding in the development of social relationships, companion animals promote positive self-concept and self-esteem, which are crucial in

the social development of children and adolescents (Morley & Fook, 2005). It is through the various routines attached to pet ownership that individuals gain a sense of responsibility, structure and organization (Allen et al., 2000; Morley & Fook, 2005; Walsh, 2009). This aspect will be discussed further on in relation to socialization during childhood and improved quality of life for the elderly (Morley & Fook, 2005; Walsh, 2009). Therefore Walsh (2009) argues that there is more evidence to support the notion that animal companionship provides health benefits to pet owners. However at this point it is important to note the negative elements of pet ownership in order to present both stand points.

According to the literature the disadvantages of pet ownership are predominant among elderly pet owners (Boat & Knight, 2001; Winefield, Black, & Chur-Hansen, 2008). Boat and Knight (2001) note that the elderly may sacrifice or jeopardize their own health out of fear for the well-being of their pets. In one case it was reported that an elderly woman refused hospitalization until her pet was fostered by a local animal shelter (Boat & Knight, 2001). Furthermore there were several reports in which the elderly pet owner would sacrifice basic needs such as food to ensure that their pet was fed (Boat & Knight, 2001; Winefield et al., 2008). Winefield et al. (2008) argue that pets become hazardous for the elderly as they may cause falls and serious fractures if the owner trips over them. It is also noted that older pet owners may begin to develop pet related allergies (Winefield et al., 2008). Pet ownership among the elderly, in some cases, can cause emotional distress through the loss of a pet, either through death or relinquishment (Stern et al., 2013; Winefield et al., 2008). According to Boat and Knight (2001) the loss of or potential loss of a companion animal may result in heightened depressive symptoms among the elderly, particularly elderly woman. However gender studies on pet loss are insufficient; due to a lack of male participation, there is no clear indication of why there is a lack of male participants. However, the literature indicates that social views surrounding masculinity and pet loss may hinder or prevent men from participating in such studies that may 'compromise' their masculinity in society (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). This being said, the literature indicates that the advantages of pet ownership outweigh the disadvantages (Archer, 1997; Brown et al., 1996; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Morley & Fook, 2005; Suthers-McCabe, 2001; Walsh, 2009). Furthermore several disadvantages are related to lifestyle and not specifically related to Zoonotic diseases (Waltner-Toews, 1993). According to Waltner-Toews (1993) Zoonotic diseases are diseases that would normally exist in animals but that can be transmitted to humans. In other words zoonotic diseases are illnesses that can spread from animals to humans such as swine flu, rabies, and typhus.

2.4. ATTACHMENT AND DEPENDENCY

In the context of this section dependency is defined as help-seeking and help-giving behaviour that revolve around the physical, emotional, psychological and social interactions between two beings (Gewirtz, 1972). Our need for attachment and a sense of security exceeds our basic needs, in other words our desire for close proximity to a loved one/attachment figure overrides basic physical human needs such as food, water, and shelter, especially in times of distress (Stern & Cropper, 1998). For instance, Harlow's experiments of attachment on baby rhesus monkeys revealed that in times of distress the monkeys would turn to the cloth covered mother as opposed to the milk bearing wire mother, and while this experiment involved animals it can be applied to human attachment development (Harlow, 1958). Therefore it becomes clear that attachment and dependency are interlinked (Stern & Cropper, 1998).

The human-animal bond is often viewed from a human bond perspective, in other words we do not look at the unique nature of human-animal bonds but rather compare them to human bonding (Serpell, 1996). It is important to note that the bond between human and animal can exceed that of human/family bonds, as companion animals provide unconditional social support, something in which human bonds are lacking (Hunt & Padilla, 2006). The relation between the human-animal bond and attachment was discussed in the previous section, therefore here the focus revolves around the apparent mutual dependency that develops between pet owners and their companion animals across the life-cycle (Stern & Cropper, 1998).

According to Stern and Cropper (1998) an affectional bond refers to a connection or attachment between two individuals in which seeking behaviour is prevalent and distress is apparent in the absence of the attachment figure. Steward (1999) notes that companion animals possess certain traits, that are absent from human relationships for various social reasons, such traits have the potential to improve quality of life; such as emotional support, self-esteem, dependable character, relaxation, constant presence and links with nature. Furthermore companion animals have been associated with healthy child development and education, family cohesion and reducing loneliness and depression among the elderly (Krause-Parello, 2012; Robinson, 1995; Rodgers, 1989).

2.4.1. CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENTS AND COMPANION ANIMALS

According to Stern and Cropper (1998) during childhood we initiate attachment behaviour as it forms the basis of our "emotional make-up and interpersonal life" (p. 9). Therefore the authors note that pet ownership during childhood allows for the development of certain skills that are required to function in a complex and diverse society, through the connection/separation processes within attachment

relationships (Stern & Cropper, 1998). These skills allow individuals to maintain secure relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Stern & Cropper, 1998). These skills include sensitivity, responsibility, mutual respect and consistency (Stern & Cropper, 1995). Furthermore Walsh (2009) notes that pets/companion animals lay the foundation for the development and enhancement of empathy, self-esteem, cognitive development, and increased social and physical activities. These aspects link to the notions of the health benefits of pet ownership discussed previously.

According to Robinson (1995) children are directly influenced by the family pet and the associated dependency through socio-emotional and cognitive development. The development of self-esteem is strongly linked to socio-emotional development during childhood (Brown, 2004; Robinson, 1995; Wilson et al., 2013). Robinson (1995) notes that self-esteem can be built through the inclusion of the child in age appropriate pet care responsibilities. The involvement of the child leads to positive reinforcement and feelings of acceptance, which according to Robinson (1995) are the key building blocks for self-esteem. Furthermore as previously noted pet ownership during childhood is associated with the 'competent' development of empathy (Brown, 2004; Robinson, 1995; Sable, 2013). The development of competent empathy is directly linked to dependency between the child and the pet, in other words the pets complete reliance on the child for basic and emotional needs results in the child's development of the emotional awareness of another's emotions, thus resulting in a keen sense of emotional awareness for both human and animal counter-parts (Robinson, 1995; Sable, 2013). This process could be viewed as a primitive form of operant conditioning as through a process of trial and error the child learns how to read and respond to their pets emotions and as such this skill is then projected when encountering another human being. Such processes are said to form "an active part of working models throughout the life cycle" (p. 94).

It is interesting to note that according to Robinson (1995) pets often act as a source of social support for children and adolescents, both age groups have been recorded as naming their pets as their confidant in times of need and distress. This form of support is directly linked to emotional support which is associated with "the healthy psychological development of all children" (p. 11). However as this information is drawn from 1995 it may be out of date and therefore more recent studies on this subject are necessary to validate such claims. It is interesting to note that according to Brown et al. (1996) adolescents tend to form strong bonds with their pets and rely on their pets as a safe haven during difficult times and changes, such as puberty, familial issues and emotional distress.

In relation to the cognitive development of children, Robinson (1995) notes that pet ownership/bonding in childhood is associated with "language acquisition and enhanced verbal skills" (p. 11).

2.4.2. FAMILIAL SYSTEM AND COMPANION ANIMALS

Pets are often considered family members and as such they fulfil various roles within a familial system, acting as confidant, sibling, comforter, and child (Hunt & Padilla, 2006; Noonan, 1998; Toray, 2004; Walsh, 2009). However outside of these roles a pet/companion animal often acts as a family cohesive, bringing the family together and creating ‘family time’; an almost forgotten past time in contemporary society due to technology and reduced necessity of face to face contact (Robinson, 1995; Walsh, 2009). Furthermore pets often fill the role of starter ‘child’ for young couples considering bearing children in the near future, often being referred to as the first child when the human baby comes along (Walsh, 2009). Furthermore, according to Walsh (2009) Couples, whose pet serves as a confidant have been reported to have higher levels of life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and physical and emotional health.

According to Walsh (2009) the pet’s role within the family is not only significant to the functioning and cohesion of the familial system but is also emotionally and physically responsive to family tensions, illness or euphoria. Walsh (2009) notes that pets respond to each family member in a different way. Furthermore pets/companion animals tend to be emotionally attuned to each family member as well as the family as a unit, with owners often reporting that their pets sought them out when they (the owner) were sad or ill to serve as a comfort or companion (Noonan, 1998; Walsh, 2009). The significance of pets within the familial system is however dependent on the role the pet occupies within the family as well as on the way in which the family views their pet. For instance it is unlikely that a pet acquired specifically for protection and security will fill the role of confidant or family member. It is important to note that the intensity and duration of the grief response to the loss of a pet within a family can disrupt and displace familial connections and cause conflict, depending on the circumstances surrounding the pet/companion animal’s death (Noonan, 1998; Walsh, 2009).

2.4.3. THE ELDERLY AND COMPANION ANIMALS

As Humans pass into the later stages of adulthood, we experience a process of progressive social isolation in which the daily rituals, schedules and social interactions begin to decrease leading to induced isolation, depression and loneliness (Krause-Parello, 2012; Krause-Parello & Gulick, 2013; Robinson, 1995; Rodgers, 1989; Ruckert, 1987). According to Rodgers (1989) loneliness among the elderly develops as a result of certain life events such as widowhood, loss of contact with loved ones, physical incapacities, pet loss, and environmental changes. Therefore in the context of this section loneliness is defined as prolonged or temporary separation from loved ones/attachment figures endowed with meaning (Rodgers, 1989). According to Krause-Parello (2012) pet ownership among the elderly is accredited to increased physical and psychological health. Furthermore pets tend to act

as companions and coping resources, provide social and emotional support and have been known to reduce depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness among the elderly (Krause-Parello, 2012; Krause-Parello & Gulick, 2013; Ruckert, 1987; Wilson et al., 2013). Krause-Parello (2012) notes that pet ownership among the elderly provides a sense of purpose and responsibility that may otherwise have been lost after retirement. Furthermore the animals need for caring results in a reciprocal dependent relationship in which both beings rely on the other for both survival and placement within a significant social role (Krause-Parello, 2012; Krause-Parello & Gulick, 2013; Wilson et al., 2013).

2.5. ATTACHMENT, PET LOSS & GRIEF

“The survivor’s perception and imputed meaning count most in our understanding of the nature and extent of loss. The survivor defines the power of a loss in his or her feelings of devastation and extent and depth of mourning” (Harvey, 1996, p. 37).

The literature reviewed indicates that the grief response to the loss of a pet is experienced in much the same way as the grief response to the loss of a human family member. Often individuals experience sadness, loneliness, flashbacks, emptiness, anger, depression, guilt and pining for the companion animal (Beck & Katcher, 1996; Morley & Fook, 2005; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014). Therefore it is necessary to discuss both the stages of mourning developed by Bowlby in the theory of bereavement and the phases of bereavement/grief focusing on human bereavement developed by Kubler-Ross, which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Cordaro, 2012; Holmes, 1993).

2.5.1. ANATOMY OF MOURNING

It is important to distinguish between grief and mourning as often these concepts are used interchangeably, however, there is a distinct difference between the two (Quackenbush, 1985). Grief refers to the individual internal or private emotional reactions and responses associated and most often elicited by loss, whereas mourning refers to the processes an individual uses to deal with the loss, such as burial rituals which allows for the rebuilding of internal working model (Quackenbush, 1985). While these concepts are different in most aspects, they tend to overlap and both form part of the healing process (Quackenbush, 1985). It should be noted however that the suppression of grief leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms which will be discussed in more detail further on.

In relation to attachment, Bowlby (1979) argued that bereavement is an extension of separation anxiety (Holmes, 1993). In this case anxiety is elicited through separation or the threat of separation from an attachment figure (Holmes, 1993). According to Bowlby’s theory of attachment, attachment

processes occur throughout the life cycle and therefore we experience such anxieties when an attachment relationship with friends, family or companions (human or animal) are threatened (Holmes, 1993). Holmes (1993) notes that Bowlby viewed the grief response to loss as an extreme and irreversible version of separation anxiety, separation anxiety being characterised by subjective worry, pain, anger, tension, punishment and restless searching. Therefore it is unsurprising that Bowlby included several of these traits in his stages of mourning. The stages of Mourning are highly relevant to the present study as they can be used to gain a greater understanding of the depth and intensity of participant's experiences of pet loss and the processes each individual undertakes to deal with such losses.

According to Holmes (1993), Bowlby believed that "the psychological response to the trauma of separation is biologically programmed in the same way that the inflammatory response is an orderly sequence of physiological responses to physical trauma" (p. 90). Therefore accordingly the early stages of grief are reflective of intense separation anxiety, while the latter stages revolve around the grim realization of the loss of one's secure base and the reorganisation of an internalized version of the lost secure base (Holmes, 1993). It is suggested that an individual can only form new bonds or attachments once they have let go of lost attachment figures, however in the case of pet loss it is noted that severing the bond to the lost pet is not necessarily the best plan of action, but rather it has been found that continuing the bond on a spiritual level with the lost pet is more emotionally and psychologically healing than severing the bond (Field et al., 2009; Noppe, 2000; Stroebe & Schut, 2005). In other words a version of the lost pet is internalised which maintains the bond and reduces the individual's grief, thus improving their emotional and mental wellbeing (Field et al., 2009; Noppe, 2000; Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

The four stages of Mourning set out by Bowlby provide the present study with insight into individual processes of coping with loss that are unaffected by societal views surrounding pet loss, whereas the grief response to pet loss is often inhibited by social views of pet loss causing maladaptive and extended grieving processes (Holmes, 1993). The four stages of mourning are numbing; yearning, searching and anger; disorganisation; and reorganization (Holmes, 1993). Stage one revolves around the initial shock of the loss (Holmes, 1993). This reaction leads to an emotional shut down that presents as calmness (Holmes, 1993; Sife, 2005). In such instances the emotions are too great for the individual to cope with and therefore the ego's defence mechanism kicks in suppressing these feelings until such time as the individual can process them (Frosh, 2012; Sife, 2005).

According to Holmes (1993) Bowlby emphasized that searching behaviour in the wake of a loss forms the centre of the mourning response. Stage two is described as experiences of physical restlessness in which the bereaved searches for their lost object, in the hope that their death was some mistake and

their loved one will appear at any moment in the next room (Holmes, 1993). According to Holmes (1993) such cases involve the experience of action replay, in which the bereaved replays the last days hours or minutes of their loved ones lives in order to determine if something could have been done to save them or change the outcome of their fate. In such instances mental searching manifests into visual and auditory misinterpretations of reality (Holmes, 1993). The hope that the loved object is still alive deceives the mind into seeing the loved object in inanimate objects (Frosh, 2012). The anger associated with loss stems from the sudden realization of the reality of the loss (Holmes, 1993; Sife, 2005). This anger is then projected onto doctors, family and in the case of the present study veterinarians or veterinary staff, as these individuals symbolise the reality of the death and the loss of hope for the bereaved (Holmes, 1993; Sife, 2005). Stage 3 is labelled as disorganization and involves the breakdown of an individual's secure base, which as previously noted is a key aspect of attachment both in infancy and adulthood (Holmes, 1993). A secure base provides an individual with the confidence to explore the internal and external world (Holmes, 1993). The loss of the secure base results in internal turmoil as the bereaved no longer has the loved one they would usually turn to in times of distress (Holmes, 1993).

In order for stage 4 or reorganisation to occur, Bowlby argued that it is necessary for the individual to go through the phases of grief as grief initiates the healing process (Holmes, 1993). In other words grieving allows the individual to rebuild an internal version of the lost secure base, it is only once this internalization is complete that the bereaved can form new meaningful attachments (Holmes, 1993). However as noted previously Bowlby believed that new attachments could only be formed through relinquishing the bond between the bereaved and the deceased, more recent theories suggest that maintaining or continuing the bond may be more beneficial for some (Holmes, 1993; Noppe, 2000).

The first stage of grieving, according to Kubler-Ross' framework of bereavement is denial. Denial is defined as the inability to accept or acknowledge the reality of loss (Crossley, 2013). Denial prevents the individual from experiencing overwhelming grief all at once, it allows the mind time to come to terms with the loss (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Sife, 2005). The second stage is anger, Kubler-Ross (1973) notes that this stage is important in the healing process, further noting that anger is not the only emotion experienced at this time, it is just the most dominant (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008; Sife, 2005). It is at this stage that individuals begin to blame others for the loss, in most cases doctors and God are the main targets (Holmes, 1993; Sife, 2005). This stage overlaps with the stages of mourning. Bargaining is the third stage of bereavement, this stage is known as the 'if only...' or 'what if...' stage, in which the individual pleads for the loss to be but a dream (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008). Depression then sets in as the reality of the loss sinks in (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross,

1973; Petrich, 2008). Depression is a normal process after losing a loved one however it is often pathologized, especially in the case of pet loss (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008). The final stage is acceptance, in which the individual comes to terms with the loss and how to cope with the loss (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008). Kubler-Ross (1973) emphasizes that these stages do not necessarily occur in order, nor are they experienced in the same way, as grief is an individual experience (Brown et al., 1996; Kubler-Ross, 1973; Petrich, 2008).

While it has been argued by some that these phases can be applied to the loss of a pet, Petrich (2008) discusses the grief stages developed by Quackenbush and Graveline (1985), two predominant theorists in the study of pet bereavement, which differ slightly to Kubler-Ross's phases of bereavement. Quackenbush and Graveline (1985) note that the stages of pet bereavement are guilt, anger, denial and depression in Petrich (2008). Guilt is the first stage in pet bereavement, here pet owners often feel as if they have let their beloved pet down as they failed to save them, it is argued by some that guilt is more predominantly felt by owners that euthanize their companion animals, however there is no evidence to back up this claim in the research reviewed (Butler & DeGraff, 1996; Petrich, 2008; Sife, 2005). The second stage anger, mirrors Kubler-Ross's second stage in the bereavement stages, as this stage is the same as above, the same feelings are expressed however usually toward the veterinarian, or veterinary staff (Butler & DeGraff, 1996; Petrich, 2008). Denial is the third stage in contrast to the previous model in which denial was presented first, however the same emotional and mental path is taken (Petrich, 2008). The final stage is depression, here depression refers to "listlessness, guilt, melancholia and lack of motivation" (Petrich, 2008 p. 32). Again it is emphasized that these stages do not occur in sequence and are unique to the individual (Petrich, 2008).

This information was vital to the present study as it was used to guide the development of interview questions, enabling a more in-depth and sensitive approach to the personal experiences of pet loss. These phases are important for the researcher to be aware of, especially when dealing with ethical issues relating to the harm of the participant, and while pet loss is not considered a legitimate bereavement in society and the field of psychology, the present study utilized the above information in an effort to acknowledge the importance of the participants' experiences of pet loss as well as to guide the interview schedule on a more therapeutic path, attempting to avoid re-traumatization.

The loss of a loved one can be an emotional and traumatic experience, however Sharkin & Knox (2003) note that society as a whole disregards the significance of the loss of companion animals as pets are viewed as replaceable. Such disregard for the significance of pet bereavement has resulted in incidences of disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012; Field et al., 2009; Petrich, 2008; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2012). Disenfranchised grief is defined as "the grief that persons experience when they incur

a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publically mourned or socially accepted” (Turner, 2003 p. 71). In a 2005 article “*Grieving the loss of a companion animal: pastoral perspective and personal narrative regarding one sort of disenfranchised grief*” by Rosell, the experience of disenfranchised grief was described as “those bereaved whose experiences were neglected, unacknowledged, unexpressed, avoided by others, not legitimised, or not accorded the normal need to grieve” (p. 51). This description emphasises the implications faced by those experiencing pet loss, it is no surprise then that disenfranchised grief manifests into a maladaptive form of grief known as complicated grief which is defined as “an excessive, distorted, and unproductive response to loss” (Toray, 2004 p. 250). Turner (2003) briefly mentions four types of complicated grief; chronic, delayed, exaggerated and masked grief, each of which inhibits a normal and healthy grieving process, in other words they prevent people from working through their grief.

According to Pearson (1994) chronic grief is most often associated or as a result of a sudden and unexpected loss. Delayed grief refers to situations in which at the time of the loss the bereaved could not grieve for whatever reason but rather their grief is triggered later on by some other trauma or loss (Pearson, 1994). Delayed grief is often as a result of a traumatic or grotesque death, for instance a pet being hit by a car (Pearson, 1994). Delayed grief can also be caused by social circumstances and views surrounding pet loss, as society does not legitimize pet loss the individual may suppress their grief to avoid ridicule or insensitive remarks (Adrian et al., 2009; Lowe, Rhodes, Zwiebach & Chan, 2009; Pearson, 1994; Zottarelli, 2010). Masked grief refers to cases when the bereaved experiences presenting symptoms that appear unrelated to grief, it is only through therapy that the cause of these symptoms are linked to the loss of a loved one (Pearson, 1994).

Across the literature there is an indication of increasing rates of complicated grief among pet owners through the social suppression of their grief reactions to the loss of a pet, however the literature fails to present statistical data to corroborate the claim of increasing rates of complicated grief (Adrian et al., 2009; Lagoni, Butler, & Hetts, 1990; Lowe et al., 2009; Zottarelli, 2010;). Adrian et al (2009) conducted an exploratory cross sectional study on complicated grief and post-traumatic stress disorder among bereaved pet owners, recruiting 106 participants from a veterinary clinic waiting room and found that 4.3% of their participants were experiencing complicated grief over the loss of their pet, 21.7 % experienced mild grief reactions and 12% indicated minor functional impairment. While this study found little evidence of cases of PTSD among bereaved pet owners, the authors note that despite its rarity cases of PTSD in relation to pet loss have been recorded in the past (Adrian et al., 2009). It is therefore necessary to expand the limited body of knowledge available on pet bereavement from a qualitative perspective in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the

experience of pet loss and the emotional implications of these experiences on pet owners (Adrian et al., 2009; Lagoni et al., 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

In this sense the loss of a pet, depending on the level of attachment, can be likened to the loss of a friend, family member or child (Beck & Katcher 1996; Field et al., 2009). Several authors have noted that the strength of an attachment between human and companion animal is likely to determine the intensity and length of the grief response experienced by the bereaved pet owner, as previously mentioned (Adrian et al., 2009; Crossley, 2013; Gage & Holcomb, 1991; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Therefore the necessity of such studies as the present are imperative to those experiencing pet loss, to enable clinicians and veterinarians to guide these individuals through their grief.

2.5.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN LOSS VS. PET LOSS: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Davis, Irwin, Richardson and O'Brien-Malone (2003) note that the experience of pet loss is qualitatively similar to that of human loss, however, the authors note that the experience of pet loss is usually shorter in duration and less severe than the experience of human loss. This notion contradicts the majority of the literature on pet loss which states that in some cases the experience of pet loss is more severe than the loss of a human (Adrian et al., 2009; Gage & Holcomb, 1991; McNicholas et al., 2005; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). This factor, however, would depend on the intensity of the attachment between the pet and owner (Planchon & Templer, 1996). According to the literature reviewed there are few that focus on a comparison of human and pet loss (Quackenbush, 1985; Tzivian, Friger & Kushnir, 2014). Therefore further research on the matter is necessary.

Davis et al. (2003) stand by the notion perpetuated throughout the literature that the experience of pet loss is socially suppressed and not viewed as a legitimate response to pet loss. The authors clearly illustrate this, noting that most pet owners seeking counselling do not divulge the extent of their grief to practitioners due to the socio-emotional sanction that surrounds pet loss, however when the practitioner acknowledges their loss as legitimate and respects the client's grief, pet owners are grateful and appreciative (Davis et al., 2003). During the pilot study interviews on this topic the researcher briefly shared a personal experience of pet loss. This appeared to ease the participants and make them feel more comfortable in sharing their stories with the researcher. Therefore for the purpose of the present study, a similar process was used to ease the participants into the interviews.

Due to the social views surrounding pet loss, pet owners rarely get to express their grief openly and often have little to no support during such times (Davis et al., 2003; Quackenbush, 1985). Furthermore human loss is usually followed by time off from work to mourn, burial rituals and in severe cases

counselling, whereas pet loss is not afforded the same courtesies (Brandes, 2009; Davis et al., 2003; Morales, 1997; Quackenbush, 1985; Toray, 2004). While counsellors are increasingly becoming aware of the implication of pet loss on pet owners, this increase is slowly progressive. It is interesting to note that legally pets cannot be buried in human cemeteries, however, humans may be buried with their pets in pet cemeteries (Brandes, 2009). Social support outside of the familial and friendship systems for pet owners experiencing pet loss is increasing globally (www.petloss.com and the Rainbow Bridge), however such social support is limited in the South African context (Davis et al., 2003). This factor was included in the interview schedule in the form of a question “would you find a pet support group or hotline beneficial?”

2.5.3. CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE DEATH OF A PET AND THE IMPLICATIONS THEREOF

According to Stewart (1999) the circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one, whether human or animal can influence the immediate reaction/response to the loss as well as the grieving process proceeding the loss. Stewart (1999) discusses circumstances of death in relation to pet loss; sudden unexpected death and euthanasia. Sudden unexpected death includes anaesthetic deaths of healthy animals that have undergone a routine or minor surgery, this does occur and according to Stewart (1999) it is important to be wary of putting dogs and cats over 5 years old under anaesthetic, furthermore it is important for vets to inform pet owners of that risk. While this will not ease their grief or shock it is important (Stewart, 1999). Acute medical conditions such as parvo and bloat are common causes of sudden unexpected deaths, such deaths are difficult to come to terms with and should be approached with sensitivity by veterinary staff and counsellors (Quackenbush, 1985; Stewart, 1999). Violent deaths refer to pets being hit by a car, attacked by another animal or shot for whatever reason (Quackenbush, 1985; Stewart, 1999). In such incidence tension may rise within the familial system as family members lay blame on each other for negligence (Stewart, 1999).

Euthanasia, according to Stewart (1999) should only be considered once all other options have been reviewed. Euthanasia is regarded as a gift to many, especially in veterinary medicine as it allows for a pet to be put out of its misery humanely (Pierce, 2013; Quackenbush, 1985). However the fact remains that taking the decision to euthanize ones pet is difficult and traumatic, even though it may be the kindest option for the owner to end their pets suffering (Hetts, 1990; Stewart, 1999). In such cases it is important for the pet owner to have all the facts surrounding their pet’s condition and the euthanasia process (Dickinson, 2014; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Sife, 2005; Stern & Cropper, 1998 Stewart, 1999). It should be noted that it is important to include children in the decision making process and to answer any questions or concerns they may have (Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Sife, 2005; Stewart, 1999). Several authors note that some pet owners prefer to be with their pet

during the euthanasia process to comfort them while others feel that this may be too traumatic for them (Beck & Katcher, 1996; Dickinson, 2014; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Robinson, 1995; Sife, 2005).

2.6. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE GRIEF RESPONSE

There are several factors that are said to influence the duration and intensity of grief over the loss of a pet, such as age, gender, role within the family, intensity of attachment, personality and social circumstances (Planchon & Templer, 1996). In the following section these aspects will be discussed in detail as they form the basis of the present research and were used to inform the development of the interview schedule.

2.6.1. STYLE OF ATTACHMENT AND COMPANION ANIMALS

In this section the maladaptive attachment styles noted earlier will be discussed in more detail in relation to the human-animal bonds and the effect these attachment styles have on the intensity and length of the grief response to pet loss (Field et al., 2009; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011).

Attachment styles, as noted previously, develop from early attachment relationships with primary care givers (Holmes, 1993). The availability and supportiveness of a care-giver determines the attachment style that develops, for instance if a care-giver is available, responsive and supportive a secure attachment style develops along with a positive and optimistic internal working model (Margolies, 1999; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). However, when an attachment figure is aloof, unresponsive and rejecting an insecure attachment style develops along with a negative internal working model (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). Insecure attachment styles can be divided into two main categories, anxious or avoidant (Field et al., 2009; Holmes, 1993; Margolies, 1999; Zilch-Mano et al., 2012). An insecure anxious attachment style indicates the degree to which an individual worries about the absence of an attachment figure during times of distress or need (Field et al., 2009; Margolies, 1999; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). In such instances an individual “adopts hyperactivating attachment strategies, energetic, insistent attempts to obtain care, support and love” from attachment relationships, in order to regulate their distress” (Zilch-Mano et al., 2012, p. 1). This can be applied to both human and human-animal relationships, it should be noted that in human-animal relationships both the owner and the pet can exhibit the behaviour noted above (Field et al., 2009; Sable, 1995; Sable, 2013; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012).

An avoidant attachment style indicates the degree to which an “individual distrusts relationship partners goodwill, strives to maintain behavioural independence and emotional distance from partners, and relies on deactivating strategies, such as suppression of attachment related thoughts and emotions” (Zilch-Mano et al., 2012, p. 1). As noted above both owner and pet can display such behaviours toward each other (Field et al., 2009; Sable, 2013; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). For example Sable (2013) discusses how her dog Beaully, a shelter dog, appeared to display characteristics of an avoidant attachment style. Sable (2013) notes that due to Beaully’s previous circumstances she shied away from people and displayed “deactivated detachment behaviour” (p. 95). However it is interesting to note that according to Sable (2013) after a life threatening experience and being forced to accept care and be in close proximity to others, Beaully began to behave in a more secure manner, not shying away from people to the same extent and actively seeking attention. However she never fully got over her avoidant attachment traits (Sable, 2013). These aspects of attachment theory are relevant to the present study as they can provide insight into and an understanding of the intensity and duration of the grief response to pet loss.

Furthermore the owner’s attachment style may influence the length and intensity of the grief response and to what extent the pet owner is able to cope with their grief (Field et al., 2009). The owner’s grief response would be affected by the loss of a perceived secure base, i.e. their pet as well as the loss of a safe haven. As noted previously pet owners often turn to their pets for comfort, treating them as confidants (Field et al., 2009; Ruckert, 1987). Therefore the loss of these two key attachment aspects will influence the way in which the pet owners deals with the loss and the degree to which the loss is felt by the owner. It is important to note that attachment styles are viewed as “predictors of variability in the grief response” (Field et al., 2009, p. 337). According to Field et al. (2009) Bowlby noted that symptoms of chronic grief were associated with an anxious attachment style, further noting that the grief response of individuals with anxious attachment present with distress and a sense of helplessness that does not dissipate over time. Pet owners with anxious attachment styles tend to hyperactive their response to the loss of their pet, often experiencing anger toward the pet, a preoccupation with worries, reduced exploration and social isolation (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011). Furthermore these individuals appear to have great difficulty in accepting the pet’s death and as a result develop maladaptive coping strategies (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011). There are high levels of self and other blame and a loss of identity and meaning (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011).

Avoidant attachment styles have been associated or linked to experiences of delayed grief (Field et al., 2009). Field et al. (2009) notes that there are numerous studies that corroborate Bowlby’s notions surrounding chronic grief and anxious attachment styles, however, there are few studies that corroborate Bowlby’s claims surrounding delayed grief and avoidant attachment styles. Pet owners

with avoidant attachment styles tend to deactivate their grief response to the loss of a pet, seemingly indifferent to their loss (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011). Therefore these individuals appear to accept the death more easily than anxiously attached individuals (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011). Often these individuals experience higher levels of anger toward the pet than anxiously attached pet owners and lower levels of reduced exploration and distress related to death (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011). Furthermore these individuals appear to experience loss of identity and meaning to a lesser degree than anxiously attached pet owners as well as less social isolation (Zilcha- Mano et al., 2011).

According to Field et al. (2009) there are three mediators of attachment styles on grief: social support; pet bond; and continuing bond. As previously noted, social support is not usually forthcoming in cases of pet loss due to social views surrounding pet loss and therefore a lack of social support can cause a poor adjustment to the loss of a pet as the individual has no one to turn to for comfort or support and thus is unable to effectively work through their grief (Field et al., 2009). Social support, as with the experience of human loss should serve as a mediator in relation to the effect of attachment styles on grief (Field et al., 2009). In relation to the intensity of the bond between pet and owner Field et al. (2009) note that the bond may serve as an insecurely attached individual's primary source of bonding or attachment relationships. In other words the individual may not be able to form close attachment relationships with other people and therefore their pet serves a compensatory function (Field et al., 2009). It is this factor that influences the individual's ability to work through their grief successfully and a lack of social support only exacerbates the issue (Field et al., 2009). The notions surrounding continuing bonds was touched on in the attachment section and will be discussed in more detail further on.

2.6.2 GENDER & PET LOSS

The question of gender appears to be topical within the literature as several authors note that research has shown women tend to form stronger attachments with their pets in comparison to men (Archer, 1997; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Hunt et al., 2008; Kimura, Kawabata & Maezawa, 2014; Lowe et al., 2009; Margolies, 1999; Rajaram, Garrity, Stallones & Marx, 1993; Serpell, 2004; Tzivian et al., 2014; Zottarelli, 2010). According to Cordaro (2012) women form stronger bonds with their animals due to their natural maternal instincts- in some cases pets act as a surrogate child- as discussed in the section on attachment theory, however there is insufficient data available to corroborate this claim. It is possible that this assertion stems from the lack of male participation in such studies (Field et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Planchon et al., 2002; Wrobel & Dye, 2003; Zottarelli, 2010). Therefore in the interest of this study and of expanding the current body of knowledge the present study attempted to gather both men and women's experiences of pet loss

(Field et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Planchon et al., 2002; Wrobel & Dye, 2003; Zottarelli, 2010).

The literature has indicated that in the past the majority of men have refused to participate in such studies, inferences as to why this may be revolve around notions of hegemonic masculinity, which is possibly a key factor in the above mentioned assumption (Archer, 1997; Hunt et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Sife, 2005; Tzivian et al., 2014; Zottarelli, 2010). A study by Gage and Holcomb (1991) on pet loss among mid-life heterosexual couples who had lost a pet over the past three years, using a sample of 242 couples, indicated that 50% of the wives reported experiencing quite or extreme disturbances after the loss of their pet whereas only 25% of the husbands noted experiencing quite or extreme disturbances over their loss (Chur-Hansen, 2010). Furthermore, Chur-Hansen (2010) among others notes that women experience pet loss in a similar manner as they would the loss of a child, either through death or loss of contact (Archer, 1997; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Hunt et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Zottarelli, 2010). Whereas men experience pet loss in a similar manner to the loss of a friend, thus indicating that the claim that women are more affected by pet loss may have some ground to stand on, however more research is necessary to validate this claim (Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Hunt et al., 2008; Lowe et al., 2009; Zottarelli, 2010).

A study on pet loss conducted by Wrobel and Dye (2003) investigated the usual course of grief symptoms and gendered differences in the experience of pet loss as well as the role of attachment in the experience of pet loss. Here however we will discuss the gendered differences noted in the study, the aspect of a lack of male participation becomes clear in this study as the majority of participants were female (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). A sample of 174 adult participants, drawn from a college campus of which the name and location were withheld, was used to determine the above mentioned factors surrounding pet loss (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). The sample consisted of 112 females and 62 males who had experienced the loss of a pet over their lifetime (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Participant's ages ranged from 18-85 years and over 90% of the sample population were Caucasian (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Wrobel and Dye (2003) found that women tended to grieve longer and to a greater extent than their male counter parts. The authors note however that there was no distinction made between the species of companion animal nor the circumstances surrounding their deaths, it is possible that these factors could further influence the gendered differences in pet loss between men and women (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). It should further be noted that the reliability of the results would be compromised by the loss or distortion of memory for those that had lost a pet several years prior to the study as opposed to within the last year or two prior to the study. As memory tends to fade or distort over time, and certain crucial details of the experience may have been lost. It is for this reason that the present study recruited

participants that had experience pet loss within 3-24 months. Holcomb and Gage's (1991) study noted that the gap of 3 years could compromise the reliability of the data.

It should be noted that the only article reviewed that reflected a majority male sample was a study conducted by Stern et al. (2013) on canine companionship for military veterans with PTSD. The sample consisted of 90% male participant's 53% of which were Hispanic (Stern et al., 2013). The male predominance in this study can be attributed to the historical gendered occupational nature of the military. Furthermore while this study does not directly deal with pet loss but is rather focused on the health benefits of dog ownership, the concept of pet loss and the emotional disturbances associated with pet loss are only briefly noted. It is interesting to note that according to Fernandez-Mehler, Gloor, Sager, Lewis, and Glaus (2013) issues and questions surrounding euthanasia were more important to female pet owners. Furthermore female pet owners requested euthanasia to be carried out at home in comparison to male pet owners and, female pet owners were more concerned with what to do with their pet's remains after euthanasia (Fernandez-Mehler et al., 2013). In relation to the mourning process the authors found that female pet owners were more open to talking about their loss with friends and family as well as more willing to ask veterinary staff about how to cope with their grief (Fernandez-Mehler et al., 2013). Dunn, Melher and Greenberg (2005) further note that women are more open to crying over the loss of their pet while men are not and if they do break down they usually apologize for crying. This further indicates the social views surrounding hegemonic masculinity and its influence on male pet owner's grief response to the loss of their pet. However it should be noted that the male to female ratio was unbalanced, as 1606 of 2008 participants were female, therefore as noted previously due to the imbalance between male and female participation the claim that female experiences of grief are more intense than males has "not been systematically examined" (Chur-Hansen, 2010, p. 16; Fernandez-Mehler, 2013).

2.6.3. FAMILIES & PET LOSS

Walsh (2009) notes that pets play an integral part within the familial system, providing love, affection, and companionship, as well as psychological and social support. In the familial system it has been noted that pets provide a level of education and socialization for young children, these aspects are crucial in a child's development, especially in a society where both parents work to provide for the family and there is an increase in single parent households (Walsh, 2009). Pets provide children with a sense of responsibility, kindness and concern for another's well-being (Walsh, 2009). Pets have also been known to be a precursor to having children as many young couples adopt a pet to get a feel for taking care of and being fully responsible for another being (Walsh, 2009). Pets are often used as replacements for children once they leave the nest so to speak, to maintain the family system (Dunn

et al., 2005; Walsh, 2009). In essence pets provide emotional support and stability within the familial system throughout the familial life cycle (Walsh, 2009). In order to emphasize the importance of pets within the familial system several authors note that pets become the glue that brings the family together and holds them together and while there may be empirical evidence to back this claim it is few and far between, furthermore there appears to be little statistical evidence to validate this claim and therefore could be a good topic for future studies (Gage & Holcomb, 1991; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Walsh, 2009).

It is therefore unsurprising that the loss of a pet can destabilize family relations, however the depth of the disruption depends on the strength of the attachment between the family members and the pet as well as the circumstances surrounding the pet's death (Walsh, 2009). The death of a pet has the power to breakdown the familial system as in cases where the pet served as a buffer for family tensions or emotionally unsatisfying marriages (Walsh, 2009). According to Walsh (2009) accidental death of a pet either, pure accident or negligence on the part of an individual family member may cause blame or guilt within the familial system.

2.6.4. CHILDHOOD & PET LOSS

The development of a sense of well-being and emotional health in childhood has been associated with companion animals and what they offer to a child - affection, intimacy and unconditional love – as often pets become the child's friend, confidant or fill the role of sibling, such relationships often continue into adolescents, depending on the lifespan of the animal and often tend to be the anchor for the adolescent during times of change and emotional distress (Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brown et al., 1996; Shell, 1986).

According to Brown et al. (1996) and Stern and Cropper (1998) the death of a pet is usually the first experience a child has of death. It is therefore necessary to understand the impact of the loss of a pet during childhood and how parental actions and reactions may influence future responses to the loss of a loved one. Furthermore it is the responses of the parents and how they handle the situation that determine whether the child recognises the loss of a pet as a legitimate reason to grieve or whether their grief over their pet is mocked and ridiculed to the point that the loss of a pet becomes trivialised and potentially pathological (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Morley & Fook, 2005; Noppe, 2000; Robinson, 1995; Stern & Cropper, 1998). Such instances according to Kaufman & Kaufman (2006) may lead to cases of complicated grief.

Child and adolescent bereavement has been linked to cases of depression, anxiety, social and behavioural disturbances and isolation (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006). It is thus necessary for

counsellors and psychologists to acknowledge these losses as legitimate and to encourage the child to mourn naturally as one would for a human loss. The trivialization of pet loss within our society is teaching children that mourning the loss of an ‘animal’ friend is abnormal (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006). Furthermore Kaufman and Kaufman (2006) and Kimura et al. (2014) state that children tend to mourn the death of a pet for a longer period of time and feel the impact of the loss more intensely than adults. Stern and Cropper (1998) note that the reasoning behind the longer period of grieving during childhood stems from the child’s attachment to the pet and feelings of responsibility for the pet. While children may not take the responsibilities surrounding pet care seriously, when a pet dies the child often experiences more intense levels of guilt, feeling as though they could have prevented the death in some way and are therefore responsible for the pet’s death. Therefore the reaction of the parents to the loss and to their child’s grief is crucial for the emotional and psychological development of the child (Bjorklund, 2006; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Noppe, 2000; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Stern & Cropper, 1998). “Healing words, healing hearts: using children’s literature to cope with the loss of a pet” by Mercurio and McNamee (2006) illustrate but some of the ways that both parents and counsellors can help children cope with the loss of a pet. Several authors note that communication of feelings during times of pet loss within the family is vital to the child’s understanding and reaction to loss (Bjorklund, 2006; Brown et al., 1996; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Stern & Cropper, 1998).

Brown et al. (1996) conducted a study on 55 adolescents (27 boys & 28 girls) from Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia to determine how adolescents bond with their pets and therefore how they respond to the loss of a beloved pet. The authors had three main hypotheses 1) “Adolescents who are highly bonded to a pet experience more intense grief when it dies than do those less bonded”; 2) “degree of bonding, when measured by self-disclosure, is greater for girls than for boys”; 3) “Intensity of bereavement is greater for girls than for boys” (Brown et al., 1996 p. 505). The latter two relate to the question of gendered experiences of grief as mentioned above. The authors found that the data corroborated the three hypotheses, further noting that “attachment and bereavement go hand in hand” (Brown et al., 1996 p. 507). This study balances the male to female ratio therefore ensuring the reliability of the data, as well as ensuring that participants had experienced pet loss within the last year, thus eliminating much of the threat of memory impairment as seen in previously discussed studies (Brown et al., 1996). Interestingly the authors note that one of the limitations of this study was the exclusion or failure to include cultural aspects that may influence the way in which girls and boys react to the loss of a pet (Brown et al., 1996).

2.6.5. THE ELDERLY & PET LOSS

An article by Suthers-McCabe (2001) “Take one pet and call me in the morning” discusses the value of companion animals in the lives of the elderly, going as far as to say that the bond between human and animals is stronger and more intense among the elderly than at any earlier stage in one’s life, therefore the intensity of grief may be greater among the elderly. Pet ownership in later life is said to enhance the quality of life as having to care for another that is dependent on you for survival provides a purpose for living, furthermore pets offer love and companionship without rejection or competition (Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Suthers-McCabe, 2001). The quality of life for the elderly is enhanced by pets as they “increase happiness, decrease loneliness, and improve physical functioning and emotional health” (Suthers-McCabe, 2001, p. 93).

As previously noted according to Suthers-McCabe (2001) having a companion animal has a positive influence on the health of the elderly and is associated with lowering cardiovascular risk, as having a companion animal has been known to lower blood pressure, it is further noted that pet owners who have had a heart attack usually live longer than non-pet owners, however more research is required to validate this claim (Suthers-McCabe, 2001). Suthers-McCabe (2001) does however make mention of a study that found that when controlling for various physical, social and psychological factors, that pet owners tended to visit the doctor to a lesser extent than non-pet owners. It is interesting to note that pet ownership tends to decrease depression in the elderly, specifically depression that stems from loneliness and social isolation (Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Suthers-McCabe, 2001). According to several authors it is the routine associated with pet ownership that stimulates the will to carry on (Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Suthers-McCabe, 2001).

As individuals move into the latter part of their lives, companion animals tend to become their main connection to the world, as one gets older the more loss and processes of change we tend to go through especially as we begin to lose friends and family members either through a loss of contact or through death (Suthers-McCabe, 2001). Suthers-McCabe (2001) notes that companion animals tend to reduce the emotional distress of loss and ease such distress in times of change such as in being moved into an old age home.

However that being said, there are few old age facilities that allow companion animals, despite the growing body of knowledge surrounding the health benefits of companion animals among the elderly (Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Suthers-McCabe, 2001). Suthers-McCabe (2001) mentions a pilot study that was conducted to determine the effects on the elderly of being forced to give up a companion animal when entering a long term care facility and it was found that those individuals that had to surrender their companion animals had a harder time adjusting both emotionally and socially to the transition,

furthermore many reported having sleeping and eating issues and were more likely to feel that their health was deteriorating. While this is not directly related to the present study as we focus of the loss of a companion animal through death, it is important to note the significance of companion animals among the various age groups and to understand the effects of the loss of a companion animal under different circumstances as all loss is both stressful and traumatic no matter the conditions. Having a greater understanding of the experience of pet loss in its entirety allows for a more comprehensive study, even though this particular study only covers the loss of a companion animal through death.

2.7. SOCIETY AND PET LOSS

According to Morley and Fook (2005) pet loss should constitute as major concerns to society due to the emotional, physical and psychological implications on pet owners. However, our society along with western culture offer few socially acceptable ways of grieving for pets (Margolies, 1999; Morley & Fook, 2005; Rajaram et al., 1993). Society has trivialized and pathologized pet loss to the extent that many individuals develop disenfranchised and complicated grief as previously discussed (Adams, Bonnett & Meek, 1999; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Cordaro, 2012; Cowles, 1980; Field et al., 2009; Furman, 2006; Margolies, 1999; Morales, 1997; Morley & Fook, 2005; Petrich, 2008; Turner, 2003; Turner, 1997; Walsh, 2012). The disregard for grieving the death of a companion animal is prevalent despite the fact that the loss of a companion animal has been likened to and in some cases considered more traumatising and painful than the loss of a human companion (Morley & Fook, 2005). Society fails to acknowledge and legitimize grieving over the loss of a companion animal, viewing grieving owners as eccentric or childish thus forcing pet owners to internalize their grief, such insensitivities often begin in childhood and therefore we are socialized into believing that our grief over losing an animal is abnormal (Adams et al., 1999; Cordaro, 2012; Cowles, 1980; Field et al., 2009; Furman, 2006; Morales, 1997; Petrich, 2008; Turner, 2003; Turner, 1997; Walsh, 2012). It is interesting to note that some psychologists and counsellors do not take pet bereaved owners seriously, often dismissing their grief or attempting to attribute it to a previous human loss of some kind (Morley & Fook, 2005). It should also be noted that there are a number of books that have been written to aid veterinary staff deal appropriately and sensitively with pet loss and owners grief, this indicates that this aspect of veterinary care has been poor in the past and as such the increasing number of articles aims to rectify the situations (Lagoni et al., 1994; Stewart, 1999). Psychologists, counsellors and society often respond to the loss of a pet with, “Get another cat, or after all it is only a dog” which only intensifies cases of complicated grief (Morley & Fook, 2005 p. 133). In the following section we will discuss ways in which psychologists, counsellors and veterinary staff can

attempt to acknowledge pet loss as a legitimate reason for grieving and how these professionals can help their clients work through the loss of a pet.

2.8. WORKING THROUGH PET LOSS

As previously mentioned the loss of a pet can be traumatizing, as often it is not only the pet that is mourned but the broken bond between owner and pet that is pined for (Turner, 2003). In any kind of grief counselling it is important for the clinician to fully understand the meaning and depth of the relationship between their client and that which is lost, in this case it is important to establish the meaning and strength of the bond between the client and their deceased pet and to normalize the clients grief response (Clements, Benasutti & Carmone, 2003; Donohue, 2005; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Lee, 2015; Margolies, 1999; Sable, 2013; Toray, 2004). In assessing the client's attachment to their animal other subtleties such as a lack of a social support system may surface, emphasizing the importance of the loss and the intensity of the grief reaction (Donohue, 2005; Lee, 2015; Toray, 2004). Toray (2004) suggests 12 questions that may be used to assess the clients level of attachment to their pet/ companion animal, these questions were used to guide the construction of the interview schedule for the present study as the common instruments used to assess the strength of attachment are more suited to quantitative studies, such as "the pet relationship impact inventory" (Eckstein, 2000).

Toray's (2004) twelve questions revolve around gathering information on pet ownership, both past and present, the role the pet occupied within the clients life, what was the pet referred to as, i.e. my baby, child etc., is the pet considered a family member, does the relationship with the pet dominate other relationships or friendships, does the client have an understanding and empathetic social support group to who they can turn, has any of the clients past relations died of a similar disease or cause as the pet, if children are involved how does the pet fit in with the children, is the pet relied upon for emotional support and has the client had to euthanize a pet before and if so what was their experience of this, what were the circumstances surrounding the pets death and finally has the loss of a pet brought up any feelings and emotions linked to the loss of a human companion.

While previously we discussed Quackenbush and Graveline's (1985) stages of grief in pet loss, here we shall discuss Corazzini's theory of loss/grief, which Turner (2003) states is the most appropriate approach to pet loss. Unlike Kubler-Ross's (1973) and Quackenbush and Graveline's (1985) 5 stages and four stages of grief respectively, Corazzini's theory consists of three stages; loss, consolidation and reintegration (Turner, 2003). The first stage is the loss itself which incorporates the first three stages of Kubler-Ross's (1973) theory of grief (denial, anger and bargaining), the second stage occurs

when the individual starts to realize the reality of the loss and therefore becomes depressed (Turner, 2003). It is at this point that Turner (2003) indicates that therapy should take place. According to the author, Corazzini mentions four tasks of which a therapist must utilize to help their client work through their loss; open to loss, empathetic, reminiscent and “insist on the loss” (Turner, 2003 p. 73). It is these four approaches that bereaved pet owners are excluded from due to the social perceptions surrounding pet loss (Turner, 2003). In other words Pet owners have great difficulty moving past this stage due to the lack of social support systems and acknowledgement of their loss as a legitimate reason to grieve (Cordaro, 2012; Turner, 2003). It should be noted that Corazzini’s theory of grief was developed for the grieving of human loss, however it can be applied to pet bereavement (Cordaro, 2012; Turner, 2003). It is interesting to note that a model of bereavement therapy specifically for pet loss is yet to be developed (Cordaro, 2012; Turner, 2003).

Turner (2003) goes on to discuss therapeutic approaches to grief counselling over the loss of a human companion which can be applied and adapted as a therapeutic approach for grief counselling for bereaved pet owners. There are four main goals of grief counselling; “increase the reality of the loss; dealing with the expressed and latent affect; impediments to readjustment; and saying good-bye and to begin a reinvestment in life” (Turner, 2003 p. 74).

Sharkin and Bahrck (1990) and Lee (2015) state that the most important thing a counsellor or psychologist should do is to fully acknowledge pet loss, therefore providing the client with a friendly and supportive environment in which they can freely express their grief over the loss of their pet. This aspect is important and was applied to the present studies interview environment, acknowledgement of the significance of the loss was achieved by the researcher expressing a brief personal account of pet bereavement. Acknowledging and legitimizing the significance of the loss for individuals conveys to clients that pet bereavement is a normal and natural process (Clements et al., 2003; Cordaro, 2012; Hetts, 1990; Lee, 2015; Pearson, 1994; Sable, 2013; Sharkin & Bahrck, 1990).

Furthermore clinicians should avoid disenfranchising their client’s grief by attributing their grief to previous human losses or by encouraging them to replace the pet as this has an adverse effect for the client’s (Brown et al., 1996; Clements et al., 2003; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Cordaro, 2012; Sable, 2013; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). It is also important for the clinician to encourage the client to enlist outside support to work through grief, furthermore clinicians should encourage good-bye rituals such as funerals or cremation and the spreading of ashes for their pets as this provides closure for the client, allowing them to move on with their lives (Brown et al., 1996; Clements et al., 2003; Cordaro, 2012; Sable, 2013; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

In cases where a family has experienced the loss of a pet, family counselling may be required, as mentioned previously the impact of pet loss can destabilize the familial system (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). When young children are involved, Sharkin and Knox (2003) note that therapy may be necessary as parents may not be able to handle the child's grief and questions surrounding death, therapy can guide parents as to how to handle the situation and what should be avoided when explaining the death to a young child. In cases where the clinician deals directly with the child, there are various ways in which the clinician can convey the importance of animals such as having pictures and figures of them in their office, therefore creating an environment where the child can speak freely about their emotions surrounding the loss of a beloved pet (Cordaro, 2012). As mentioned previously children's books can be used to help the child understand the meaning of death and its finality (Cordaro, 2012; Mercurio & McNamee, 2006; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). When working with the elderly it is especially important to acknowledge the significance of the companion animals in the client's life, as often these human-animal relationships serve as replacements for the loss of meaningful human relationships (Cordaro, 2012; Sable, 2013; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). It is important for the clinician to respect the client's views surrounding the loss of their pet, even if the clinician has conflicting views on pet loss, one way to show respect is to call the animal by name when referring to it rather than referring to it as the dog or cat (Chur-Hansen, 2010). The clinician can also educate the client about the normal grief process to reinforce that what the client is experiencing is normal rather than abnormal (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Cordaro, 2012; Sable, 2013). Furthermore Lee (2015) notes that Psychologists and Counsellors should be respectful and acknowledge their clients religious beliefs surrounding their pets and the afterlife as this will allow the practitioner to "develop treatment plans based on their clients spiritual worldviews" (p. 6).

It is interesting to note that several veterinary practices, including veterinary Hospitals linked to various American universities such as Colorado state university, have established counselling services for those clients who have lost pets (Donohue, 2005; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Turner, 2008). Several authors note the importance of support from the pet owner's veterinarian as they are usually the first point of consolation when a pet gets ill or dies (Butler & DeGraff, 1996; Corby, 2003; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Stewart, 1999). According to Corby (2003) and Davis et al. (2003) veterinarians and veterinary staff are usually the most experienced when it comes to dealing with bereaved pet owners, however, they rarely have the appropriate training in relation to dealing with grief and bereavement. Sharkin and Knox (2003) suggest that in order to remedy this situations psychologists should team up with veterinary practices or schools to provide grief and bereavement training to staff and students. This type of combination could be highly beneficial to future clients and has the potential to decrease cases of disenfranchised and complicated grief. As veterinary staff

are usually the first point of contact after the loss of a pet, especially in cases of euthanasia, it is important for veterinary staff to be briefed on the stages of grief and how to identify them (Corby, 2003; Stewart, 1999). This aspect is important as if the staff member feels that a client is experiencing extreme grief or is having difficulty coping with their loss they can make themselves available to their clients or refer their clients appropriately (Butler & DeGaff, 1996; Corby, 2003; Lagoni et al., 1994). Furthermore veterinarians serve as facilitators, in other words when clients are distressed or emotional they are usually unable to think clearly and therefore unable to make decisions, it is at this point that the veterinarian steps in and guides the client through the decision making process (Butler & DeGaff, 1996; Corby, 2003; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Stewart, 1999). It is important for veterinary staff to encourage clients to say good-bye to their pets as this process facilitates the grieving process (Hetts, 1990).

Some veterinary practices provide 'pet loss counselling' for their clients during times of grief (Hetts, 1990). According to Hetts (1990) pet loss counselling consists of four interactions; emergency intervention, decision-making facilitation, death and euthanasia preparation, and finally grief support and education. Pet loss counselling requires certain verbal and non-verbal skill, however, these skills mirror those of bereavement counselling and therefore will not be repeated here (Hetts, 1990). Psychologists and veterinarians alike can provide their clients with details of pet loss groups on social networks or pet loss support hotlines (Dunn et al., 2005; Turner, 1997). In relation to education, veterinary staff should inform clients of the various burial options available to them and the associated processes (Hetts, 1990). The following section focuses on the importance of continuing bonds and good-bye rituals

2.9. CONTINUING BONDS & GOOD-BYE RITUALS

According to Packman, Field, Carmack, and Ronen (2011) the notion of continuing bonds is relatively new within pet loss literature. Continuing bonds refers to a state of being "emotionally sustained through a continuing bond to the deceased" (p. 337). While continuing bonds have been associated more often with human loss it is now being recognised as a phenomenon for loss in general (Packman et al., 2011; Packman et al., 2011). As previously noted under attachment, Bowlby believed that it was necessary to sever the bonds to a deceased loved one in order to allow the individual to form new attachments to other living beings (Field et al., 2009; Noppe, 2000; Stroebe & Schut, 2005). However in more recent literature this perspective on attachment has changed, it is now believed that for some, maintaining the bond with a deceased loved one and internalising the attachment as an internal secure base can lead to the resolution of one's grief and the formation of new attachments (Field et al., 2009;

Noppe, 2000; Stroebe & Schut, 2005). It has been reported that the ongoing attachment between bereaved pet owners and deceased pets is maintained in several ways, such as through memories, searching behaviour, keeping memorabilia (the pet's toys and bowls) and finally illusionary phenomenon in which bereaved pet owners claim to have heard or felt their pet's presence (Packman et al, 2011; Tzivian et al., 2014).

Packman et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine the level of connection that is maintained between the bereaved pet owner and the deceased pet and how the continuing bond may affect functioning. Data was collected from 33 individuals who had experienced pet loss within the last year, aged 25-79 and consisted of 27 females and 6 males the majority of which were Caucasian (Packman et al., 2011). The location of the study has been omitted from the article (Packman et al., 2011). The authors found that 67% indicate feeling their deceased pet's presence, some noted this experience a month after the death while others noted that this experience was continuous (Packman et al., 2011). 76% of participants reported that they continued to talk to their deceased pets as if they were still alive, 90% of participants indicated that they reminisce about special times with their beloved pet, further noting that these memories came on spontaneously, 76% reported having dreams about their deceased pets and 79% of participants kept some or all of their deceased pets belongings to feel closer to them (Packman et al., 2011). The main limitation of this study was that there was little diversity within the sample population, this aspect refers to culture and its impact on grief responses (Packman et al., 2011). The aspect of culture has repeatedly come up in the literature as being excluded from studies and therefore this aspect should be further investigated. Furthermore the authors note that a longitudinal study would provide more comprehensive data than a cross sectional study (Packman et al., 2011).

Packman et al. (2011) and Tzivian et al. (2014) indicate that good-bye rituals are important aspects for bereaved pet owners to experience and conduct in order to give them closure and help them move on. However according to Adams et al. (1999) there are no set rituals or protocols for the burial of a pet and while pet owners make their own arrangements, for burial or cremation, it is uncommon for veterinary practices to offer such services. This being said, Morales (1997) and Fernandez-Mehler et al. (2013) indicate that such services do exist and are increasing due to demand. Morales (1997) notes that "there are more opportunities for animals to be buried with full religious ceremonies, including funeral homes for pets, caskets, embalming, and memorial services" (p. 249). However there was no indication in the literature of such services in South Africa. According to Dickinson (2013) cremation is mostly used in the disposition of pet's remains as often burial costs in pet cemeteries are high. Memorials also provide the bereaved with a place to honour their deceased pet and a place to visit their beloved pet (Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Lagoni et al., 1994; Sife, 2005). Stephens and Hill (1996)

note that while there are no services that offer funerals for deceased pets, cremation is offered by veterinarian services, however often families choose to bury their beloved pets in their back yards to commemorate the animal. Stephens and Hill (1996) and Brandes (2009) note that there are over 600 pet cemeteries in America and new cemeteries tend to crop up on a monthly basis, thus indicating that the importance and significance of pets is prevalent and increasing, this indicates the growing importance and emotional ties to pets/companion animals, as through burial, pet owners commemorate their beloved pets. Brandes (2009) notes that one of the main reasons for the rapid increase and popularity of pet cemeteries in America is the inscribing of pet gravestones, which reflect the pet's behaviour, attitude and religious beliefs. However according to Chalfen (2003) Japanese pet funeral rites and rituals are more formally recognized than in some American sectors. For instance Chalfen (2003) notes that Japanese pet funeral services are as similar as possible to human burial services. The cemetery described by Chalfen (2003) was established in 1962. Photographs of pets appeared to be the main form of remembrance within the cemetery, each grave or cremation cube having pictures of the deceased pets, furthermore Buddhist rituals were performed both for burial services and memorial services (Chalfen, 2003).

2.10. FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH

The literature reviewed indicates that the cultural aspect of pet loss should be included in future studies as it has been suggested that culture may influence the grief response to the loss of a pet, a study focusing on the cultural differences in burial and good-bye rituals could shed some light on what animals mean to pet owners in various cultures i.e. western cultures vs. non-western cultures (Beck & Katcher, 2003; Chalfen, 2003; Packman et al., 2011; Serpell, 1996). Furthermore little research has been conducted on the link between childhood pet loss and how parental reaction to this effectively shape the grief response experienced by those children in adulthood (Beck & Katcher, 2003). According to Packman et al. (2011) future studies should be done on the aspect of euthanasia and its impact on the intensity and duration of the grief response. There are several studies that indicate that the human-animal bond has health benefits for humans however there is little indication of whether individual's health is affected by the loss of a pet (Beck & Katcher, 2003). The majority of studies reviewed had sample populations that included a majority of middle class Caucasian females and therefore future research should focus on the male experience of pet loss and the factors that may prohibit men from participating in such studies, such as issues surrounding hegemonic masculinity and emasculation (Packman et al., 2011). Longitudinal studies may provide more sound evidence relating to the intensity and duration of pet loss and the continuing bond experience, as well as a more diverse sample (Packman et al, 2011; Planchon et al., 1996). Kimura et al. (2014) note that

further studies should be conducted on the “factors that influence the development of neurotic symptoms in bereaved pet owners” thus allowing for the development of more suitable intervention programs and care for bereaved pet owners (p. 502). Future studies of pet loss should be all encompassing as pet loss is individually unique and therefore both qualitative and quantitative studies should be combined to ensure reliability and validity of the research.

The literature reviewed has revealed a gap as the majority of these studies were conducted in America and therefore the present study is highly relevant as it focusses on pet loss in the South African context. The present research seeks to inform psychologists, counsellors, veterinary staff and society itself on the effects of pet bereavement, providing information that will inform them on how to approach the concept of pet loss in therapy sessions and how to guide bereaved owners through the loss of their beloved pets. Furthermore the present study aims at providing vital information that will lead to the social acknowledgement and legitimization of the grief response to pet loss.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on the individual experience of pet loss in the South African context, in relation to international literature and how the intensity of the bond between pet and owner compares with the duration and intensity of the grief response. This study is highly relevant to the current body of knowledge surrounding the pet loss experience as according to the reviewed literature no such studies have been conducted in the South African Context. The following study employed a phenomenological framework, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyse the data collected from semi-structured interviews. The question framing this study is ‘How is Pet loss experienced by individuals in the South African Context?’ In essence the present study is an evaluation of the experience of pet loss in the South African context. Furthermore the sub-questions focus on the factors that influence the intensity and duration of the grief response to pet loss as well as the influence of the intensity of the bond on the grief response.

This chapter details the choice of the semi-structured research design and the relevance of this design in relation to the gathering of information that is required to answer the research question. Furthermore the sampling methods will be discussed in terms of their appropriateness for the present study. Data collection and analysis are noted in relation to semi-structured interviews and the development of the interview schedule, as well as the procedures involved when analysing the data through IPA methods. The ethical considerations and precautions will be noted according to their relevancy to the present study.

3.1. RESEARCH AIMS AND RATIONALE

The present study set out to determine how pet loss is experienced by individuals in the South African context, in relation to international literature and how the intensity of the bond between pet and owner compares with the intensity and duration of the grief response. The findings from this study could form the basis for future studies on the comparison of the pet loss experience, as these results are based on a small sample further research is necessary to increase the credibility of the data. Furthermore the findings from the present study can be used to aid counsellors and psychologists in their approach to treating bereaved pet owners. The study focuses on “theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability” (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011, p. 21).

3.2 METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on qualitative research methods in which interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilised to gain an in-depth understanding of participant's experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2007) of pet loss. Qualitative research methods are used to gain insight into and greater understanding of the subjective experiences of certain objects or events. IPA is well suited for studies such as the present study as it explores how participants make sense of their experiences within the social world and places emphasis on the researchers influence on the data through the interpretation process (Banister, Bunn, Burman, & Daniels, 2011; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith, 2007). It should be noted that IPA does not "seek to find one single answer or truth, but rather a coherent and legitimate account that is attentive to the words of the participants" (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 23). The present research is based on inductive theoretical assumptions which refer to a process in which theory is drawn from our observations and the generalized inferences of those observations (Bryman, 2012). The epistemological position of the present research is interpretivism, which emphasizes the importance of subjective meaning in the social realm (Bryman, 2012). The ontological position of the present study is constructionism, which holds that the social world and our understanding of it are produced through social interaction, both of which are in a constant state of change (Bryman, 2012). In other words it is a dialogical process.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research adopted a semi-structured interview design. This design is suitable for the purpose of the present study as it provided the opportunity to gather in-depth insights into participants' experiences through open-ended questions and conversational style interviews (Banister et al., 2011; Bryman, 2012; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2011). Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility which was necessary for the present study due to its sensitive nature (Banister et al., 2011; Bryman, 2012). The context of the present study necessitated the use of qualitative interviews, and while time consuming and restrictive in terms of sample size (Bryman, 2012), quantitative methods were not viable in relation to the purpose of the present study.

The present study is exploratory and is based on qualitative research methods in which interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be utilised to gain an in-depth understanding of participant's experience of pet loss (Smith, 2007). Qualitative research methods are used to gain insight into and greater understanding of the subjective experiences of certain objects or events, IPA is best suited for

studies such as the present study as it revolves around a two stage interpretation process which is referred to as a 'double hermeneutic' (Pringle et al., 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) a 'double hermeneutic' is a dual interpretation process in which "the participants make meaning of their world and, secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning to make sense of the participants meaning making" (p. 8). In other words IPA explores how the researcher makes sense of the experiences of the participants within the social world (Smith, 2007).

3.4. SAMPLING

The sample population was drawn from the Grahamstown area based on purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling (Non-random) is based on the notion that participants are selected on the insights they would be able to provide about the research phenomenon in question (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), which in the present study is the individuals insights into the experience of pet loss. The present study utilised criterion sampling which is a sampling scheme of non-random sampling that revolves around the notion that participants are selected based on the fact that they meet certain criteria (Bryman, 2012; Petrich, 2008). In the present study participants were required to have experienced pet loss within the last 3 to 24 months, there was no restriction on the type of pet (i.e. Dog, cat, mouse and horse.) According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) criterion sampling is often used for quality assurance purposes. The qualitative nature of the present study and the methodology restricts sample size and therefore it is suggested by Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) that in studies such as the present study between 10-15 participants are required, thus 13 participants between the ages of 18-60 (10 female/ 3 male) were recruited, however only 12 interviews (9 females/ 3 male) were analysed for the present study (Bryman, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This value excludes the participants from the pilot study interviews, the study conducted as a requirement for an honour's degree was used as a pilot study for the present research in an attempt to refine the semi-structured interview schedule and sampling methods. Convenience sampling was adopted to recruit participants as it was noted that snow ball sampling had failed to produce participants in the pilot study. Participants were recruited through the use of social networking groups on Facebook and recruitment posters that were placed, with permission, in the waiting room of veterinary practices within the Grahamstown area. Furthermore Veterinary staff were asked to inform clients of the research and its aims where possible and appropriate. There was a higher response rate from the advert posted in social networking groups. Here it should be noted that the two veterinary practices that were approached were concerned that the research may cause their clients more pain, however, one of the veterinary practices agreed to put the poster up in their waiting rooms (see 3.6 for full ethics disclosure). No participants replied to this advert. The use of this

technique was implemented in an effort to increase the transferability of the data as it ensured that the required criterion would be met (Bryman, 2012). The literature reviewed informed the choice of the sampling and participant recruitment methods (Adrian et al., 2009).

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

The present study utilised qualitative semi-structured interviews as this method best suited the purpose of the study, which was to gain in-depth and rich descriptive accounts of the experience of pet loss and the influence of the bond/attachment on the grief response (Banister et al., 2011; Bryman, 2012; Petrich, 2008; Smith, 2011). Semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to establish rapport with participants, this particular aspect was vital to the present study as it would determine the amount of detail provided by the participants, this is due to the sensitive nature of the study and the current social views surrounding pet loss (Smith, 2007). An interview schedule was developed using information gathered from the reviewed literature and the pilot study, ensuring that questions were open-ended, thus allowing for flexibility (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). At this stage in the question development a pilot interview was conducted in order to refine the questions and ensure that that the prompts for certain questions elicited an elaboration of the participant's response. Furthermore through the development of the interview schedule the researcher was able to consider the difficulties that might be encountered as well as how to phrase the more sensitive questions, in order to invoke more details from the participants without causing re-traumatization. The development of the interview schedule aimed to increase the dependability of the present study (Bryman, 2012). A sample of the interview schedule can be seen in Appendix A. The interviews were semi-structured therefore ensuring that the discussion did not veer off topic (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to freely express their experiences on the topic, therefore the participants controlled the depth of detail they provided (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). Furthermore information provided by the participant sparked off new questions that were not on the schedule, thus this type of interview structure enabled the researcher to pursue new avenues that had not been considered, or had been overlooked (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007).

3.5.1. PROCEDURE

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in order to gather the necessary information for the research question (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). The interviews were conducted in a friendly, non-judgmental environment of the participant's choice, ensuring participants felt

comfortable sharing their experiences (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). It should be noted that the majority of the participants opted to be interviewed in a private room in the psychology department, only one of the participants requested a home interview. An interview schedule guided the conversation, but did not dictate it, allowing for free expression of experiences (Bryman, 2012; Smith, 2007). Certain types of questions were asked in order to keep the conversation on track, draw further details on certain topics, and to allow the researcher to approach sensitive topics indirectly to avoid intimidation and re-traumatization of participants (Bryman, 2012). At the end of the interview participants were asked to comment on their experience of the interviewing process, in a debriefing manner (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were recorded using voice recording equipment (a digital recorder and a cell phone voice recorder). Each interview was transcribed by the researcher, this is important as it allows the researcher to become well acquainted with the data thus providing a more profound and credible analysis. Once transcribed each transcription was compared to the original recording to ensure that nothing had been left out (Bryman, 2012). This step is important as it adds to the validity and reliability of the study (see 3.8) (Bryman, 2012). Nvivo software (QSR international's Nvivo 10 qualitative data analysis software) was used to code and organize the data collected, in preparation for the analysis. The transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo and used to determine the most common themes within the data. Fourteen nodes or themes were then used to code the data in an organized manner. The software allowed the researcher to manage the data according to principles of IPA as will be discussed in section 3.7.

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained through the departmental Research Proposal and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) and the Humanities Higher Degrees Committee (HHDC). Research participants were fully informed about the aims of the research, informing them that they could refuse to answer questions, or withdraw from the study at any time (Bryman, 2012). Participation was completely voluntary as potential participants contacted the researcher if they were willing to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is important, therefore only the researcher will be aware of the participant's identity and no names or identifying characteristics were used in the final report (Bryman, 2012; Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). To further ensure the anonymity of the participants, participants were asked if they wanted a pseudonym to be used in place of their pet name and if so the participants chose the name they preferred. Here it should be noted only one of the participants requested a pseudonym for their pet. Written and verbal consent was obtained using voice recording equipment and signed consent forms, participants were given a copy of the consent form for their records (Bryman, 2012). It was necessary to ensure that the questions were specifically

phrased to avoid causing re-traumatization, rather serving as a therapeutic outlet for the participants. While this type of grief is not considered legitimate in society and within psychology, this does not decrease the risk of harm to participants as their grief is real to them and therefore the sensitive nature of this topic requires a sensitive and understanding approach (Adams et al., 1999; Bryman, 2012; Cordaro, 2012; Cowles, 1980; Field et al., 2009; Furman, 2006; Morales, 1997; Petrich, 2008; Turner, 2003; Turner, 1997; Walsh, 2012). Furthermore participants showing signs of distress were referred to the counselling centre, FAMSA or Lifeline. However none of the participants required referral. Furthermore, the researcher contacted the participants a week later to see how they were coping after the interview. A written detailed account of the research was offered to the participants once the research was complete (Bryman, 2012).

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

As previously mentioned IPA was the method used to analyse the data collected from the in-depth interviews. The aim of IPA is to gain a greater understanding of meanings within the participant's accounts as opposed to determining the frequency of these meanings, therefore it is necessary for the researcher to develop an interpretative relationship with the transcripts (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2007). IPA reflects a thematic analysis approach, however Smith (2007) note that IPA is reflective of an Ideographic approach to research. According to Fade (2004) Smith et al. discuss two approaches to IPA, the idiographic case study approach and the theory building approach. However for the purpose of the present study the former was adopted. The ideographic case-study approach is most often used in the exploration and development of the descriptions provided by either a single case or common themes across 4-10 cases (Pringle et al., 2011; Fade, 2004).

There are certain steps that need to be followed when conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis. Before discussing these steps it is important to note the significance of transcription in the data analysis process. According to Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000) there are several errors that can be made during transcription such as misinterpretation of words, inaccurate punctuation and sentence structure which can alter the meaning of what has been said. Therefore in an attempt to avoid such pitfalls in the transcription process it is suggested that the researcher should conduct all the interviews and transcribe all the data (Easton et al., 2000). Here it should be noted that the researcher completed the interviews and transcription personally, further checking the transcripts for error several times to ensure accuracy. As previously stated it is essential that the researcher carries out the transcription in order to familiarise oneself with the data, this then allows for a more dependable and trustworthy analysis. It is noted that during transcription it is essential to include non-verbal

communications, general impressions, tone and “respondents ability to retrieve information” as these factors aid in the interpretation of data during the analysis (Fade, 2004). It is noted that without such notes the analysis would not fully encapsulate the meaning of the participant’s experiences (Fade, 2004; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Nvivo 10 Software was used to code and organize the data from the interviews. The transcripts were uploaded into the Nvivo 10 program which then allowed the researcher to capture the various themes that arose as nodes. The 14 nodes were then used as the base for coding the data. According to Smith (2007) it is important to focus on one transcript at a time. Therefore each transcript was thoroughly examined several times before moving on to the next. The first step was to read and re-read the text to familiarize oneself with the text (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2007). The next stage of the text is iterative which refers to a process in which there is a “close interaction between the reader and text”, here each interview was coded, 14 themes were established; anthropomorphism, buffer effect, growing up with pets, intensity of the bond, intensity of grief, pet loss support groups, pets and religious beliefs, pets as family members, repressed grief vs. strong support, significance of burial rituals, social indicators, elapsed time, veterinary experiences, and debrief (Smith, 2007 p.72). This form of abstraction tends to lead to more psychological terminology according to Smith (2007).

It is essential to make connections between the themes, this results in the clustering of themes which reveals themes that cluster together within the text and superordinate concepts (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2007). A table of themes was drawn up on Nvivo which reflects superordinate themes as well and identifiers are used to aid in the data organization and to indicate its original source in the transcript (Smith, 2007). The above process was carried out for each individual transcript, using the first set of themes to orient the following transcript analyses thus allowing the researcher to make note of the similarities and differences between the transcripts as well as new issues. Once this was complete a final table of themes was constructed and used to determine the most relevant themes; Intensity of the bond, intensity of grief, and repressed grief v. strong social support (Smith, 2007). The superordinate themes attached to the three main themes were anthropomorphism, pets as family members, growing up with pets, elapsed time, buffer effect, veterinary experiences, significance of burial rituals, and social indicators. Pet loss support groups and the debrief section were discussed separately to the main themes. This final stage increases the credibility and transferability of the data, as will be discussed in the following section (Bryman, 2012).

3.8. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The concept of validity and reliability stems from a positivist paradigm which is associated with quantitative research. As the present study is qualitative it follows a naturalist paradigm and therefore has adopted the paradigms terminology (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) relating to validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The present study has taken several steps to increase the trustworthiness of the research.

According to Shenton (2004) “ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness” (p.64). In order to ensure credibility the present study followed the systematic approach of the research design as directed by the research question (Shenton, 2004). The outline of this approach can be viewed under the methodology chapter. Therefore it can be said that the assumptions reached through the analysis indicated whether the research question had been answered or not (Bryman, 2012; Shenton, 2004). It is important to note that the researcher followed the IPA guidelines set out by Smith, 2007. This ensured that the steps followed during data analysis had been utilised and successful in previous studies. However it should also be noted that these guidelines were adapted to suit the requirements of the present study. The adaption of the guidelines was encouraged by Smith.

Shenton (2004) notes that to increase credibility it is important to ensure that the participants have been informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and may refuse to participate. This is important as it ensures that the participants are willing to participate and are therefore more likely to provide truthful and detailed accounts (Shenton, 2004). These steps can be viewed in the ethical considerations section of this paper. Rapport was developed early in the interview session in order to further ensure the credibility of the participant’s accounts (Shenton, 2004). Further details of this procedure can be viewed under the data collection section of this paper. Furthermore any discrepancies picked up by the researcher during the interviews were addressed by prompts or additional questions that were not originally on the interview schedule. Where possible and applicable these discrepancies have been noted and possible explanations have been given as to why such discrepancies may have occurred in the analysis (Shenton, 2004).

As researcher bias is impossible to eliminate a reflexivity section was added to the discussion chapter, in which the researcher’s views and biases on the topic have been stated (Bryman, 2012; Shenton, 2004).

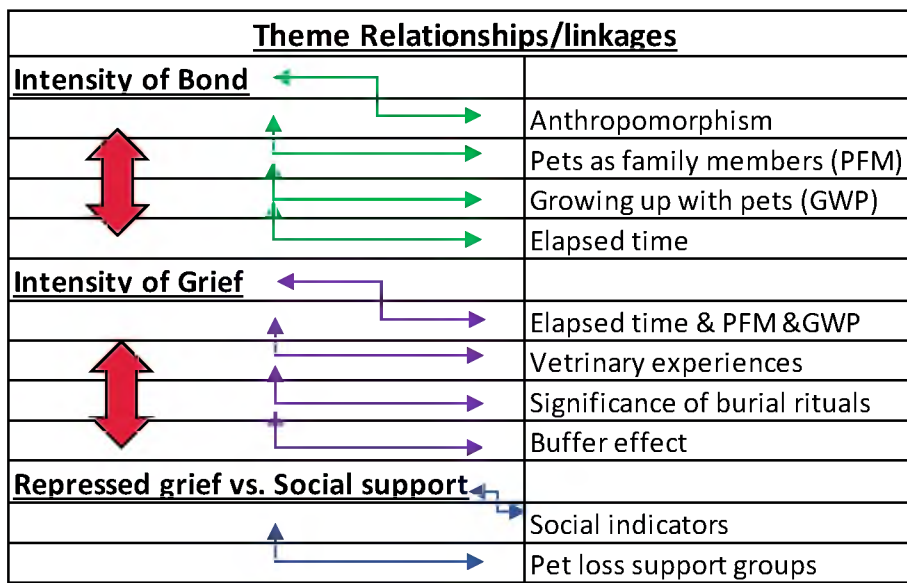
There are a number of factors that influence the transferability of research findings (Shenton, 2004). In relation to the present study these factors have been outlined in the limitation section of this paper.

These include geographical constraints, cultural constraints, sample constraints. In order for future research to increase the transferability of the findings, several recommendations have been outlined in the future directions section of this paper (Shenton, 2004). It is important to note that the literature reviewed indicated some level of transferability, however as the present study, according to the researcher's knowledge, is the first of its kind conducted in the South African context, transferability is questionable. Therefore it is clear from the steps taken by the researcher that all possible precautions have been taken to maintain the 'validity and reliability' of the present study's findings.

CHAPTER 4

4. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The following chapter is a combination of the analysis and discussion as it was found that structural fluency was distorted when presented separately. Furthermore it should be noted that such combinations are common practice in qualitative studies to present a comprehensive and concise analysis and discussion of the data and to avoid repartition (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).



*Refer to appendix 7.2 for the table of participants and length of pet-owner relationships.

The following analysis and discussion examines 12 participants' narrative experiences of pet loss, the loss falling within a 3-24 months period. Participants were asked to talk about their experiences of loss in relation to their feelings, attitudes and beliefs surrounding their loss. The participants narratives clustered around 3 interlinking and overlapping superordinate themes; intensity of the bond, intensity of grief and repressed grief vs. support system. Each of the three themes has several superordinate themes that emphasize and expand the main theme. Intensity of the bond includes; anthropomorphism, pets as family members, growing up with pets, and elapsed time. Intensity of grief includes; elapsed time, growing up with pets, burial rituals, the 'buffer effect' and veterinary experiences. Finally repressed grief vs. support systems includes; Social indicators, the 'buffer effect', veterinary experiences, and pet loss support groups. Here it should be noted that all of the superordinate themes overlap and are interlinked as with the 3 main themes.

The reviewed literature indicates that there has been a 60-80 % increase in pet ownership over the last decade (Adrian et al., 2009; Albert & Bulcroft, 1987; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005;

Brandes, 2009; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010). Therefore the main objective of the present study has been to expand the limited body of knowledge available on pet loss, particularly in the South African context, from a qualitative perspective in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of pet loss and the emotional implications of these experiences on pet owners.

Furthermore, the present study attempted to illustrate the relationship between the intensity of the bond between pet and owner and the intensity of grief that stems from the loss of the pet. The repression of grief has been implicated in the intensity of grief as an external contributing factor. The presence of strong social support systems appears to reduce the length of the grieving period, however it has little impact on the intensity of grief. Repressed grief in any form relates to societal views of pets as replaceable, thus deeming it inappropriate to grieve over the loss of a pet. However the present study's findings indicate a positive shift in societal views surrounding pet loss.

4.1 INTENSITY OF THE BOND

The following section focuses on the intensity of the bond between pet and owner which stems from the amount of time spent together, the impact of the pet on the owner's life and within their familial system and the overall emotional connection to the pet. The intensity of the bond will then be linked to the implications of this intensity on the grieving process. Here the influence of anthropomorphism, growing up with pets, and pets as family members will be discussed in relation to the development of the bond.

The literature reviewed indicates that the key element associated with the intensity of grief and the length of the grieving period is the intensity of the bond between pet and owner (Adrian et al., 2009; Albert & Bulcroft, 1987; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brandes, 2009; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010). The present study found that the intensity of the bond between pet and owner can be a predictor of the intensity of grief and the length of the grieving period. These results corroborated the finding of the pilot study conducted a year prior (Lowen, 2014) to the commencement of the present study. Furthermore these findings can be linked to research conducted by Field et al. (2009), which noted that the attachments or bonds formed between pet and owner can be likened to Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory. This notion specifically relates to the development of the bond between mother and child (Field et al., 2009).

The bond that develops between pet and owner goes beyond that of human bonding as human-nonhuman bonds develop through non-verbal communication and therefore these bonds are based on emotional and physical behaviour and the understanding thereof. The majority of the participants had known their pets for over a decade indicating that the intensity of the bond and therefore the intensity of grief would be greater (see appendix 7.2 on p. 138). Here it should be noted that the length of time a pet has been with an owner is linked to an increased grieving period as it is argued that the intensity of the bond would be greater due to the extended period of time that was spent getting to know the pet. However, some bonds are instant and intense from the beginning of the relationship. Therefore the intensity of the bond between pet and owner is not only dictated or bound by time but can be based on emotional and psychological states at the time the pet is introduced into the owner's life. A good example of such a connection is the bond that developed between participant 12 and Khaleesi. Participant 12 adopted Khaleesi at a difficult time in her life. Often when humans are vulnerable they unconsciously seek out forms of comfort. In this case Khaleesi filled this role for participant 12.

"I absolutely fell in love with her and I signed the forms".

The argument is that Khaleesi and participant 12 were drawn together due to their similar emotional circumstances. It can be argued in relation to the concept of anthropomorphism that participant 12 projected her emotional state onto Khaleesi allowing her to relate to Khaleesi on an emotional level. There was an understanding between them. Furthermore, as previously noted the intensity of the bond between pet and owner is classed as a key element in the prediction of the intensity of grief and the duration of the grieving process (Brown et al., 1996; Field et al., 2009; Robinson, 1995). The findings indicate that it is the depth of the bond that forms the basis of the prediction. However it should be noted that no time constraints are placed on the development of the intensity of the bond as the participants that had their pets for a short period of time i.e. 4 months to a year, indicated strong attachment to their pets.

"I picked her up when it was bed time and I actually pulled her into the bed with me like under the duvet, like ok you safe now. And I think there was a nice little bond going on there... Because I had lost my friendly... and from that day on she absolutely, she had to be near me when I was at home."

The above point is emphasized by the first sentence in the quote primarily 'you safe now'. This statement indicates that participant 12 felt safe now that Khaleesi was there, projecting those feelings onto Khaleesi in an unconscious attempt to reassure herself. Furthermore it can be argued that due to their dual vulnerability it was at this moment that their bond was solidified. Furthermore it should be noted that Khaleesi was only with participant 12 for 4 months before her passing, this fact reinforces Bowlby's (1979) notion of the maternal bond, as such bonds are almost instant. This is a clear

example that time is not the only factor in the development of tight bonds between individuals, humans and animals alike.

The bond that developed between participant 12 and Khaleesi can be likened to Bowlby's (1979) notions surrounding the bond between mother and child. As some pet owners view their pets as children as in the case of participant 5 and 6 "*He was like our kid basically*". It can therefore be argued that the common traits associated with maternal instinct are an active feature in the bond between pet and owner. One of the most common traits associated with maternal instinct is disregarding one's own safety to ensure the safety of a child (Bowlby, 1979). While several of the participants noted maternal like behaviour, participant twelve's action when attempting to save Khaleesi from a pack of street dogs clearly shows this disregard for one's own safety;

"I heard this barking, like wild barking and then just (makes cat scream) needless to say I have never run so fast in my entire life and um, down the storm drain, flew down there and there were four dogs heads down and you know, I don't know what I was thinking, cos those dogs could have turned on me but you know. I'm sure you've seen, there are little packs of township dogs and they just roam around, and you know just bolted down the storm drain screaming at them and I got there and there was Khalee, lying in the, in the storm drain basically in the wet and everything which was less than great, she was still alive."

This statement indicates that the bond between participant 12 and Khaleesi mirrored that of the bond between mother and child. Such bonds develop on an emotional level, their strength stemming from non-verbal communication. Here it should be noted that gender comes into question, as one could ask do men develop a fraternal bond with their pets. In the present study there was no indication of fraternal bonding between the male participants and their pets, however, it should be noted that only 3 of the 12 participants were male and therefore the notion of fraternal bonding with pets cannot be corroborated due to a lack of sufficient evidence.

It should further be noted at this point that not all female pet owners develop a maternal type bond with their pets. In some instance the circumstances prevent such a bond from developing as in the case of participant 10 and Rex. Participant 10 described how Rex had been adopted from a shelter and had a history of abuse. Therefore Rex did not completely trust humans and would often flinch at the sight of a broom or ball, clearly indicating that these objects had been used to inflict pain on Rex at his former residence. Developing and maintaining close relationships is difficult for victims of abuse both human and animal alike. As such Participant 10 notes that a special bond did develop between herself and Rex, however, it cannot be likened to a maternal bond. The bond between

participant 10 and Rex while strained to a certain extent due to Rex's past was still strong as according to participant 10 she was the only person that Rex trusted;

“The one thing he was, was completely after, a while well bonded to me. I was the only person that he didn't growl and snap at, never... He would lie next to me in my study when I was working, I work from home, mostly, and he would lie in the study with me and if B would walk in my study he would growl at him cos this was our space now.”

The above statements indicate the depth of the bond developed between participant 10 and Rex, solely based on trust which developed over time through non-verbal communication. However it could be argued, to some extent, that Rex's hypersensitive sense to movement and body language stems partly from his previous abuse. However it can also be argued that Rex's connection with participant 10 altered the hypersensitivity of his sense in that he trusted that participant 10 was not going to hurt him and therefore tuned into her emotional responses and body language.

Participant 10 made the difficult decision to euthanize Rex after a series of aggressive outburst towards others. This decision was not taken lightly and it was apparent from participant ten's account of Rex's final moments that on an unconscious level she was overwhelmed by her decision and felt guilty. This is indicated by the following statements;

“He just looked at me complete devotion the whole time and in a way that was wonderful for him because I was there for him the whole time and I didn't feel that I was betraying him because for him it was like going to sleep. But I just thought that was really the beginning and the end of the whole problem because in his mind his whole job was to defend me against anything and everything because he just had complete loyalty to me you know and I really do miss him...He never took his eyes off me, right up until the last second, I sat with him, I was hugging him and stroking him and telling everything was going to be alright. I was at peace with the decision in my mind”.

It can be argued that the third sentence in the quote is an attempt to justify her actions. While participant 10 notes she was at peace with her decision this attempt at justification can be linked to societal views surrounding such cases of euthanasia. Which to be clear are usually negative and therefore participant 10 was merely attempting to shield herself from social judgement. The aspect of guilt is illustrated by the second sentence in the quote which notes that participant 10 was reassuring Rex that all was well. The need for reassurance stems from Rex's constant and trusting gaze. Therefore it can be said that her reassurance for Rex was actually an unconscious attempt to reassure herself that her decision was justified.

“I know the big thing is to put things on Facebook, you know RIP fluffy or whatever and you know I don’t want that outpouring of sympathy actually because then I have to explain.”

The above statement, it can be argued is further evidence of the fear of social judgement in that through publically announcing his passing participant 10 would have to explain her reasons for putting Rex down and be faced with questions as to why and potentially be viewed in a negative light by those that do not know nor understand the situation.

Participant 5 and 8 are further examples that the intensity of the bond is not dictated by the length of time the pet is part of the family but can also be based on the emotional impact and meaning the pet brings into family life. Russell was participant five’s first pet as an adult and despite coming from a family in which pets were regarded as just animals, participant 5 developed a maternal type bond with Russell;

“He was like a kid to us cos, he’s sleeping in our bed, and ja he’s always there when I’m home.”

Participant 5 did not go into much detail regarding her relationship with Russell, however one of the key indicators of the intensity of their bond is indicated by the following quote;

“He was like our kid basically, like our kid, I would say, cos I’m, I’m like, I’m turning, turning 26 this year and I’m still studying. I do feel like I need a family, so, and like having dogs is like having kids for me. It takes that, I think fills that small gap. Where you have to take care of somebody, ja, so he’s there, you always feeding him, walking him and playing with him.”

This statement links in with the discussion on the maternal bond noted previously. Here it should be noted that participant 5 had Russell for 15 months before his passing.

It was apparent from the interview with participant 8 that there was a strong bond between herself and Lilly-Bell and while Lilly-Bell was only with participant 8 and her family for 3 years it was clear she had embedded herself within their familial system. The maternal bond concept was present in participant eight’s account of her time with Lilly-bell, not only in the way she was included in family life but also through the references to Lilly-Bell as her child.

“I mean she travelled everywhere with us I think it’s just um on the farm with her and I mean she went out on the boat with us at Kenton and she would sit there you know just and her head was going like that.”

Here it can be argued that including Lilly-bell in family activities and trips reflects the maternal bond concept in that a mother would take her child with her on family trips. This also links in with Walsh

(2009) notions surrounding inclusion of pets in family activities and holidays. This point is further evidenced in Participants eight's action when Lilly-bell went missing;

“My husband went um, they went to go do target shooting and she jumped in the car as they left and he thought ag, she is just going to stay there with him and I think she got a fright when they started shooting and she ran off. And because she is so tiny, the grass is very long, and we couldn't find her and I had to come back to Pretoria and it was, we literally, my Dad called people from all the other farms it was almost like a search party for this dog and um, and then we went and left the Bakkie there with the blankets there in the field to see if she won't come back.”

Here it should be noted that participant 8 had biological children and therefore it can be argued that the above statements illustrate the intensity of the bond between participant 8 and Lilly-bell as it is often assumed that the presence of biological children diminishes or reduces the development of a strong bond between pet and owner owing to the fact that the owners attention would be more focused on her biological children. In this case it was clear that participant 8 treated Lilly-bell as her own child despite no biological connection.

“To me it was really like losing, like losing a child.”

Participant 10 described a similar situation of her dogs being included and treated like her children, however, this account falls outside of the required time frame of loss and did not include Rex as it was several years before Rex came into the picture.

Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 13 had between 10-15 years with their pets. Six of the participants grew up with their pets while 2 of the participants acquired their pets later in life after leaving home. The intensity of the bond was not influenced by the age at which the pet entered the participant's life, however, the dynamic of the bond was different. The attachments developed during childhood appeared to form a support structure for the participants. On several occasions it was noted that their pets served as their confidant and comforter, however such indications were not prominent in the narratives of the participants that acquired their pets later on in life. The intensity of the bond in both situations was strong, however, the bonds themselves held different meaning and value for the two groups. Therefore it can be said that age influences the dynamic of the bond between pet and owner.

It is interesting to note that anthropomorphic thought was more intricate with participant 2 and 13 as both described the personality of their pets in greater detail and depth throughout the interview. For instance participant 2 noted;

“You sort of realise that we, we often don't give animals credit for being as intelligent as they are, for knowing, you know sort of what they are and what role they play in your lives. Um, we were

clearly very well trained, by, by Beatie and she managed that very quickly. I think in that, knowing that makes you realise how, how strong that bond can be”.

It can be argued that the bond between participant 2 and Beatie was based on mutual respect as participant 2 describes her bond with Beatie in what can be termed ‘adult attachment terms’. Adult attachment terms refers to terms that indicate an awareness of being. In other words the participants view their pet as being on the same level, emotionally and psychologically. Take the following statement as an example of such terms;

“Beatie had a very strategic approach depending on who she was interacting with. When she went to visit granny/grandpa, she would sit on this carpet and, and, and just sort of have a look at the fridge once in a while, remind granny that she was there, and suddenly granny would realise that she had bones in the freezer that she could bring out for Beatie. Whereas when she went to visit the students in the res, she knew exactly who had biscuits, so she would hit those rooms without fail.”

This statement indicates that participant 2 viewed Beatie as being on the same level as herself both in intelligence and status, therefore treating Beatie as an adult, an equal. The higher level of anthropomorphic thought being indicated through this statement. A further anecdote emphasizes the use of adult attachment terms;

“She loved beer. There was this brewery on the Glasgow green that we used to go to and it, you would acquire your beverages and Beatie would be given her own little beverage in a cup and you know it was, it was perfectly normal for like the three of us to go to the pub and I would be there sipping off my Fanta orange with delight, and Beatie would be sitting there sipping off her beer with delight and she looked very pleased with herself”.

Participant 13 also described Lizzy in adult attachment terms, referring to her fear of abandonment and her awareness of the changes taking place in their lives;

“When I fetched them that morning at the house cos everything had been packed up the day before, she was beside herself, she was beside herself. She probably thought we were leaving her. And she was so nervous in the car, even though she loved the car and Bentley doesn’t like the car, we’ve got to lift him in. And she found the trip through her quite traumatic. Every time we got out the car she was quiet”.

The majority of the participants that grew up with their pets described, in some form or another, how their pets became their confidants, therapist and “*calming agent*”. This indicates that these participants relied on their pets to some degree for emotional support. Participant 3, for instance, when describing his bond with Chester noted;

“They were very much a calming agents, therapists, even if it was just ourselves talking through, for ourselves talking through, so I think they are very important...And the best thing about dogs is that you can talk to them and they won’t judge, um its, it’s the nicest distraction in that you are letting things out. So you can just talk mindlessly without choosing your words or trying to be politically correct, or what have you um, you can just get it out and play with them. Go back inside and be in a better space to deal with it”.

It should be noted that Participant 3 had been going through a difficult time and when at home Chester served as his calming agent as indicated by the above statement. Furthermore participant 3 had not seen Chester for 3-4 months and was not present for his passing. Therefore it can be argued that the reality of Chester’s loss had not been fully realised by the participant at the time of the interview. Therefore in theory Participant 3 would experience what will be referred to as the ‘‘aftershock effect’ upon his return home as the reality of the loss will bear heavily on participant 3 as the realisation that Chester is no longer there will kick in. The ‘‘aftershock effect’’ can be likened to the aftershock of an earthquake as the initial reaction to Chester’s loss was stunted by the surreality of the situation and therefore the aftershock can be a more intense experience as the finality of the loss sets in. This notion is drawn from Participant three’s concept of home;

“When you think of home you think of the animals”

It can be argued that Participant 4 would experience a similar ‘aftershock effect’ as Asha passed away while she was at university and at the time of the interview had not been home as yet. The emotional impact of the ‘aftershock effect’ will be illustrated under the pets as family members section. As participant 3, participant 4 relied on Asha for emotional support and therefore this loss is likely to increase the intensity of grief experienced with the ‘aftershock effect’. Emotional support is a crucial aspect during childhood and those we turn to in times of distress become part of our psyche. The loss of which can alter how one copes with future distressing situations.

“I think she was like a great source of comfort, for everyone, like she, it was almost like she could sense when someone was sad and she would go and lie next to you. She was, like it sounds weird, but she was like a form of support. Um, because she was always loving and she was always there, and like if you had a bad day you could go lie there and she would come and smuggle up against you. Yeah, so comfort and support I would say.”

The mention of Asha always being there indicates the depth of participant four’s emotional dependency on Asha as it can be argued that Asha represented a stable entity within participant Fours life. Therefore, the loss of Asha may alter the stability of participant Four’s psyche.

Participant 6 grew up with Jack and Mischief. Her story is unique as she lost both pets within weeks of each other. According to participant 6 Missy, while unique in many ways displayed the aloof behaviour that is commonly associated with cats. Despite her independence Missy along with Jack (dog) played a significant role in participant six's life. In growing up with pets one develops a sibling type bond with them, however as the child grows the dynamic of the bond develops into a more maternal type bond. This is however, dependent on the age at which the pet is introduced into the child's life as well as the child's personality. For instance, participant 6 notes Jack and Missy "*became our brothers, children, everything*". This statement succinctly illustrates the development of the bond between participant 6 and her pets as she grew up. Participant 6 further notes that;

"He was 15...I mean I was 6 when we got him...he grew up with me or I grew up with him"

Participant 6 recounts stories of both Jack and Missy participating in child's play;

"Used to put her, as I said in the doll pram and I used to run around our garden and I just pushed her around and she would just sit there and stick her little nose in the, in the corner holding on like that and she loved it, she absolutely loved it. I used to also, When the fitted sheets were hanging on the, the um, the line and as it folds in like that you know where the smoking type thing is, I used to put her inside that and I used to swing her."

As in many species of animals, bonds develop through play and therefore it can be argued that the intensity of the bond between participant 6 and her pets was solidified through play as a child. Here it should be noted that we learn through play as children, often acting out what we have seen and heard in our environment (Walsh, 2009). Here it could be argued that the foundation for the shift to the maternal type bond stems from child's play in which the child mimics the type of care they have experienced or witnessed within their own familial system.

Several of the participants noted that in times of distress they sought their pets for comfort. This will be referred to as the 'safety blanket effect'. It should be noted that this effect is more common among the participants that grew up with their pets. Participant 6 noted that since the age of 6 Jack had slept in her room;

"He was my sleeping partner when I was younger, not even it was till before I left for Rhodes. Every night he used to sleep with me..."

This statement indicates that the bond between participant 6 and Jack was intensified by this nightly ritual. Especially when participant 6 was a child as it can be argued that Jack's presence on a nightly basis served as a form of comfort or calming agent. This is where the 'safety blanket' concept stems from as participant 6, it could be argued, depended on these nightly rituals on an unconscious

emotional level. Furthermore, this concept is backed by the fact that participant 6 sought Jack out in times of need. Seeking Jack out specifically stems from the bond that developed between them over a 15-year period of which the majority of that time Jack slept in Participant six's bedroom. In the last few years of Jack's life he was unable to jump onto beds or couches;

“Jack just being my sleeping partner, that's what he was known as. He was there every night, he used to jump on my bed. Ah I missed when he jumped, like the last year of his life...”

This statement indicates that to some extent losing that aspect of Jack distorted her connection to Jack and therefore her connection to the memories shared between herself and Jack. There was no indication that the bond between participant 6 and Jack was negatively influenced by the loss of this connection.

These findings can be linked to Field et al.'s. (2009) research which indicated that the attachments formed with our pets can be likened to Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory as noted previously. The 12 participants in the present study were introduced to their pets at varying ages and therefore while Bowlby's (1979) theory is associated with infantile attachments, these attachment processes occur throughout our lives, however the attachments made later in life do not resemble the dynamic of the attachment relationships developed during childhood (Field et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the participants in the present study developed similar attachment relationships with their pets. The difference in the dynamic of the relationship does not influence the intensity of the bond between pet and owner it merely shifts to age appropriate relationship dynamics. In other words, the attachments formed during childhood usually revolve around the desire to be close to another being, particularly in times of solace, distress and adolescent changes (Brown et al., 1996; Field et al., 2009; Robinson, 1995). In the analysis such attachments can be linked to the 'safety blanket effect', this effect does not appear among the participants that acquired their pets in adulthood. Whereas adult attachment relationships revolve around companionship and comfort through adult life events (Field et al., 2009). The analysis discussed adult attachment terms which is the projection of equality and same level understanding onto the pet. The analysis indicates that all of the participants relied on their pets, to varying degrees, for solace and security.

4.1.1. ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Anthropomorphism is a key factor in the development of bonds between human and animal. As human beings we have an innate need to form emotional bonds with other beings, including animals and therefore in order for us to achieve this desired level of bonding humans anthropomorphise pets, making them easier to relate to and understand. Anthropomorphism refers to the application of human

attributes and emotions on to animals. Serpell's (2002) definition of anthropomorphism fully encapsulates what will be discussed in this section; "anthropomorphic thinking enables animal companions' social behaviour to be construed in human terms, thereby allowing these nonhuman animals to function for their owners or guardians as providers of nonhuman social support" (p. 437).

Anthropomorphic thought processes allow us to relate to animals as we would other human beings, understanding animal behaviour through our knowledge of human behaviour (Serpell, 2002). Serpell (2002) notes that during early childhood development, children tend to view animals as social subjects. In other words, children tend to project human like mental capacities, motivations, desires and beliefs onto animals in an attempt to comprehend their behaviour (Serpell, 2002). These projections often lead to the inclusion of the pet in familial roles and why the pet in some instances becomes a source of social support for the child (Serpell, 2002). The analysis reveals that the majority of the participants indicated anthropomorphic thought processes in their narratives. This was particularly prevalent among the participants that grew up with their pets. The statements below indicate such projections from one of the participants that acquired their pets in adulthood. This example is given to illustrate that such projections occur across human developmental stages and are therefore not restricted to childhood bonding with pets.

"Beatie had a very strategic approach depending on who she was interacting with. When she went to visit granny/grandpa, she would sit on this carpet and, and, and just sort of have a look at the fridge once in a while, remind granny that she was there, and suddenly granny would realise that she had bones in the freezer that she could bring out for Beatie. Whereas when she went to visit the students in the res, she knew exactly who had biscuits, so she would hit those rooms without fail" (Participant 2).

In essence pet owners attribute or project human thoughts, beliefs, feelings and motivations onto their nonhuman companions. A fare majority of the participants clearly described various aspects of what is referred to as anthropomorphic thought. It can be argued that this indicates the pet owner's attempts to understand and relate to their pets. Once this level of understanding is reached both pet and owner benefit from the relationship that develops. The relationship is co-dependent as the owner depends on the pet for a certain amount of emotional support and the pet depends on the owner for its basic needs (food & water) as well as emotional support.

Participant 2 described Beatie using human traits and qualities indicating that these descriptions were participant two's way of understand Beatie and her behaviour. It can be said that this was Participant two's way of rationalising Beatie's behaviour making it more acceptable.

“On her own terms, she was definitely there on her own terms, full of personality, full of um attitude, um, it has to be said, often arrogance, um more companionship, but never doting, so ja. And you did need to seek her approval and if she was cross with you, she definitely expressed it. I have sheep skin slippers that will vouch for the truth of that fact, well what’s left of them”

It became apparent to the researcher that Participant two’s narrative of Beatie reflected her own personal feelings and tendencies. It is often stated that pets become a reflection of their owner, taking on their likes and dislikes, and their mannerisms (Serpell, 2002).

“Beatie was not a dog that tolerated fools, um she had very clear boundaries.”

“I don’t ever recall her coming over to be affectionate, it was more on her own terms. Um, there was a once off picture, when we were in the UK we would both get home at a specific time and Beatie used to wait by the door and one day it was quite chilly and she was gonna park off on the blankets um, so she brought one of her toy rats and parked that by the door, and then she sat on the blankets and watched the rat, and you walked through the door and sort of saw the rat and then you looked up and around and saw Beatie and, but it, it was such a weird thing to do, but at the same time you know she wasn’t going to be uncomfortable, but she still understood that you might need a, it seemed almost bizarre”

Participant 2 at one point described Beatie as being cunning and somewhat manipulative, implying that Beatie knew how to handle different types of people to get what she wanted. This links in with the use of adult attachment terms to indicate self-awareness;

“Beatie had a very strategic approach depending on who she was interacting with. When she went to visit granny/grandpa, she would sit on this carpet and, and, and just sort of have a look at the fridge once in a while, remind granny that she was there, and suddenly granny would realise that she had bones in the freezer that she could bring out for Beatie. Whereas when she went to visit the students in the res, she knew exactly who had biscuits, so she would hit those rooms without fail. And, and, but not all the rooms with biscuits cos she knew who wouldn’t give her a biscuit. She hit the people that she knew would feed her.”

This statement indicates the depth of anthropomorphic thought in that it illustrates Participant two’s belief that Beatie had goals and skills through which to achieve those goals, i.e. a means to an end. The notion of goals and the achievement of such goals is a human concept as animals are led by instinct, they are not goal orientated. However participant 2 found Beatie’s behaviour to be goal orientated accompanied by a plan of action.

The presence of anthropomorphic thought is not only illustrated by the attribution of human mental states but can also be found in the treatment and care of the pet. For instance, feeding a pet on what is classed as human food or taking them to specialist doctors when they are ill (Walsh, 2009). Participant 2 noted that Beatie developed adult onset epilepsy in the latter half of her life and while there was no mention of specialised doctors it was noted that Beatie was on a number of medications to control her disorder and to make life more comfortable. Furthermore, toward the end of Beatie's life her appetite shifted and she could not eat dog pellets at which time participant 2 began making her special meals to ensure that her food consumption would not decrease any further.

"We had to make rice and mince..."

This statement indicates the degree of anthropomorphism within the relationship between participant 2 and Beatie as participant 2 treated Beatie like a family Member, taking care of her when she was ill and going the extra mile to ensure her comfort in the last few years of her life. At this point it is interesting to note that Participant 2 appeared to view her relationship with Beatie on two levels. An anthropomorphic level as indicated above and on a role reversal level;

"We were clearly very well trained, by, by Beatie and she managed that very quickly. I think in that, knowing that makes you realise how, how strong that bond can be"

This statement indicates that participant 2 felt that Beatie had a certain amount of control over herself and her family as Beatie always got her own way. Furthermore, it can be argued that the notion of Beatie having a certain amount of control within the family reflects participant two's unconscious need for control in the family;

"And you did need to seek her approval"

This statement reinforces the above notion. It can further be argued that the projection of these feelings onto Beatie indicates that they are unconsciously viewed as undesirable traits for participant 2 to have and therefore they appear more socially acceptable when coming from Beatie. In much the same way it can be argued that Participant 3 projected his reflexive consciousness onto Chester. In other words, Participant 3 unconsciously projected the traits he viewed as undesirable onto Chester;

"We think the problem was that he is very much like my dad, um, in that he couldn't stand still and he always had to know what was going on type thing."

This statement indicates that the noted traits are perceived by participant 3 as undesirable traits to have and therefore projects them onto Chester so as to disassociate these traits from himself. Note the use of both past and present tense in the first sentence. It can be argued that the past tense indicates the acknowledgement of Chester's passing and the present tense as an unconscious, or Freudian slip

which indicates an unconscious awareness that participant 3 no longer has a scapegoat for the traits he feels are undesirable. Therefore, the loss of Chester affects participant 3 in two ways. On a conscious level participant 3 has lost a family member, confidant and form of emotional support and on an unconscious level participant 3 has lost his scapegoat to which he could attribute all the undesirable personality traits onto.

As previously noted we attribute human emotions to animals in order to understand their behaviour. We project societal norms, religious belief and motivations onto our pets in the way we perceive and understand their behaviour. For instance, participant 4 noted that Asha reacted negatively to being left at home when the family went on vacation;

“Whenever we went away and came back, she would be really grumpy for a few days like ‘how could you leave me’. Um, but then she would like be all friendly again.”

Such behaviour, it can be argued, is associated with a child’s temper tantrum which fades quickly once the child is satisfied that their point was made or in fear that they will not get the desired amount of affection if they continue that kind of behaviour.

Gender stereotyping appears to cross human-nonhuman boundaries in that pet’s behaviour can be viewed as gender driven. As participant 5 noted;

“He would like sleep in the house, sometimes sleep outside. He was a boy so he liked to sleep outside more but I liked him to be inside mostly.”

It can be argued that this statement illustrates participant five’s views of the male species and the relationship dynamic between men and woman. Men being more distant in relationships and woman wanting closeness within their relationships. This can be linked to Participant five’s past experiences in relationships as well as a reflection of her parent’s relationship. However further evidence would be needed to corroborate this argument and such information is irrelevant to the present study. Although the relationship dynamic could be linked to why participant 5 viewed Russell as a family member and could potentially explain the discrepancy between the way in which participant 5 views pets and the way in which her family views Pets. However, this point is beyond the scope of the present study but could form an interesting base for future studies into the human-nonhuman relationship dynamic and development of this dynamic.

Anthropomorphic thought often extends into religious beliefs. Religion is a popular concept among pet owners with the belief that they will be re-united with their pets in the afterlife (Walsh, 2009). The concept of religion among pet owners can be seen in the burial rituals pet owners prepare for

their pets or through the prayer for one's beloved pet. Participant 6 noted that she prayed that Jack would keep going until she got home so she would have the chance to say goodbye;

“My Mom said she doesn't know if Jack's gonna make it for Christmas and I prayed that he would be there when I got back and he was.”

The point on burial rituals will be discussed under the intensity of grief, however, it should be noted that several participants inferred that they believed their pets had souls which is linked to the concept of religion as it is our soul that ascends to the afterlife.

In order to develop tight bonds with other beings it is necessary to understand their behaviour. This enables us as humans to relate to animals of all species as we see a part of humanity within them. Anthropomorphism is the key to the development of tight bonds, without it we would not understand our companion and incorporate them into our familial system. The concept of anthropomorphism is directly linked to the notion of pets as family members as the relationship that develops between pet and owner stems from the owners anthropomorphic through processing.

4.1.2. PETS AS FAMILY MEMBERS

A family member is generally associated with individuals that are related by blood or marriage. Pets or companion animals in the general sense do not fall under this category however through the anthropomorphic thought processes of pet owners – as discussed above- pets or companion animals are inserted in this category, often being referred to as children or siblings. Here it is important to note that empathy is a key requirement in the development of any relationship, specifically, in the case of animal relationships. Participants were asked to talk about their pets in terms of their personality, behaviour, and the role they occupy within their familial system. It should be noted that the majority of the participants clearly indicated the significance of their pets within their family, while the minority inferred the familial connection, seemingly unwilling to divulge the depth or extent of their bond. This unwillingness, it can be argued, stems from the fear of social judgement of one's emotional feelings surrounding the loss of a pet. Furthermore, this unwillingness can be attributed to societal views surrounding masculinity.

The concept of home in our society is viewed as the place where our immediate family resides or the house in which we grew up. In the case of many pet owners the concept of home is only complete if their pet is present. Therefore, it can be argued that the loss of a pet or companion animal can distort their sense of home, leaving a void in their emotional and physical perception of home.

Participant 3, when discussing the loss of Chester with whom he had known for over a decade, states that

“When you think of home you think of the animals...he was very much family and it's, it's just kind of to the point where home is almost just not the same”.

The notion of altering the concept of home through the loss of a pet is further emphasized by participant 2 in her account of Beatie's gradual deterioration and passing;

“You know there was a fair bit of time for us to prepare, mentally and emotionally, but the, the anxiety, knowing we were going to have to physically put her down, um and then knowing that we wouldn't have her at home when we came home”.

These statements indicate the extent to which Chester and Beatie were imbued within the participant's lives and concepts of home. Participant 8 also clearly indicated that her concept of home revolved around Lilly-Bell's presence and therefore it can be argued that her perception of home two years later is still distorted;

“I found a picture (shows picture of Lily-Bell). My daughter's actually, the one that's in grade 10 has a canvas one of Lilly in her room. I don't want to remove that cos to me that's like home (discussing the picture that is set as her home phone number) with Lily-Bell there.”

Pets or companion animals become permanent fixtures in our daily lives, sharing family time and partaking in family activities. Through this constant interaction, as with human family members, we learn to understand and anticipate the behaviour of those around us. This phenomenon extends to human-nonhuman relationships and can go both ways. For instance, several of the participants indicated that their pets had a sixth sense when it came to their emotional status, often coming to them in times of distress, acting as a source of comfort. Participant 3 indicated that during a difficult time in his life Chester was always there for him and to a certain extent helped him get to a place where he was able to deal with the situation;

“You kind of go sit on the stoop and he like sits with you and he would just sit there as long as you needed and he would sit there with you. And the best thing about dogs is that you can talk to them and they won't judge, um its, it's the nicest distraction in that you are letting things out. So you can just talk mindlessly without choosing your words or trying to be politically correct, or what have you um you can just get it out and play with them. Go back inside and be in a better space to deal with it.”

Participant 4 also indicated that Asha had a sixth sense regarding her emotional state and would venture to her room even though Asha was afraid of the dogs, who resided near participant four's room;

“she just knew like how people were feeling, it was so weird like she could sense it and my cats would usually stay in my parents’ bedroom on one side of the house cos they were scared of the dogs and so they wouldn’t really come through to where we were a lot and like it was so weird cos if I was in my room and I had a bad day or something, she would just come through and like usually she would never do that, but then like she would just arrive at my door and come and chill on my bed, which was unusual but then whenever like I needed it she would be there, and like it was just amazing, like every single time she would do that”.

These two examples illustrate the depth of the bond between human and animal. These statements also indicate the necessity of anthropomorphic thought as without it such relationships would not develop. The bond between participant 12 and Khaleesi indicates that the concept of the sixth sense between pet and owner can be instant as opposed to developing over several years. More to the point it could be argued that Humans develop a sixth sense in relation to their pet whereas animals naturally possess this sixth sense. As previously noted participant 12 was going through a difficult time in her life and noted that Khaleesi was constantly close to her or on her lap when she was at home. Here it could be argued that Khaleesi’s apparent need to be close to Participant 12 is linked to her awareness of participant twelve’s emotional state at the time;

“If I was studying she got a bit rashy sometimes even, I was trying to work and she would have to be on top of me. I promise you she would crawl in my shirt if she could.”

Several of the participants also indicated how they were aware of any changes in their pet’s behaviour, which as previously noted links in with the notion of family. Participant 6 talks about how a slight change in Missy’s behaviour alerted her to the fact that Missy was ill and from this particular change it was clear that she would need to be euthanized;

“the fact that I knew she was ill is that I could put her, I could hold her like a baby like that (illustrating how she held the cat) and she never liked that and so, she, when she sat like that with me and just closed her eyes while I scratched her, then we, then we knew it was time”.

Therefore participant twelve’s perception of Khaleesi’s need to be close to her stems from her own need to be close to Khaleesi. This links in with the projection concept noted previously.

“I was going through a lot of sadness and whatever, you know cos of the friend being sick and what, what, what and I remember distinctly the one time I was skyping my parents and I don’t know where

Khalee had gone, she had potted off somewhere. Cos you know I give them free reign in and out of the house and she came and I was balling my eyes out, you know skyping to the parents. She hopped on my lap and just rubbed her head constantly on my chin, and I'm balling "thank you" and it's just kind of what she did"

These example encapsulate the general notion among the majority of the participants regarding their pet's sixth sense and vice versa.

In some instances as in the case of participant 13 the absence of Lizzy's presence alerted her to the fact that something might be wrong as it was unusual for Lizzy not to come and say good morning. Participant 13 noted on several occasions how Lizzy was very attached to her and would always follow her around, even to the bathroom. Hence her absence meant that something was wrong;

"she's always, you know if you open the back door she's there and I was in a rush you know getting ready to leave and only coming back in the evening and as I was walking to my car I thought 'I haven't seen Lizzy' and I called and called and called, no Lizzy. And I luckily went back to the laundry and she, she'd gone into a state of collapse".

The concept of pets as family members can be argued further in relation to the participant's efforts to either prolong or end their pet's life. While euthanasia in most of the western world is illegal for Humans it is acceptable and even encouraged depending on the health and quality of life for a pet. Euthanasia is considered the kindest method for animals that are suffering. Before discussing this further it should be noted that the majority of the participants mentioned the expense of caring for their ailing pets or companion animals, however, this was mentioned in the sense that the cost was not the important factor but rather the well-being of their pet.

Participant 2 described how in the latter part of Beatie's life she developed adult onset epilepsy and was therefore on a number of different medications to control the disease. The expense in this case was not directly stated it was inferred through the mention of the medication and specialised dietary requirements for Beatie in the last few years of her life. Here it should be noted that participant 2 had moved to the United Kingdom in the latter part of Beatie's life and bore the cost of shipping Beatie to the UK to be with her family. This factor indicates that participant 2 was not concerned with what it would cost to keep Beatie in her life but rather that there was no limit to how far participant 2 would go to keep Beatie and to ensure her quality of life.

"She was part of our family...despite the fact that they are animals, they are as much part of your family as any human is".

“Um, the food consumption was incredibly erratic, so she, for example couldn’t eat pellets, we had to make rice and mince”.

The above statement shows that Participant 2 took the time and went the extra mile to care for Beatie’s needs. Such behaviour is commonly seen within a familial system when sickness occurs. These actions it can be argued solidify the concept of pets as family members as it shows that Pet owners treat their pets as they would a blood relative. Therefore it is inevitable that pet owners would mourn the loss of their pets in a similar or mirrored manner to their reaction to the loss of a human family member.

As noted previously euthanasia is the kindest way to help our loved ones into the next life. The majority of the participants were given the opportunity to make this difficult decision for their pets, however 2 of the participants were not as fortunate. This point will be discussed further in the intensity of grief section as it holds more relevance in that section. Participant 2, among others noted that she supported the idea of euthanasia as it gives us the option to end the suffering of a loved one. Therefore when participant 2 noticed Beatie’s decreasing health and quality of life she made the difficult decision to euthanize Beatie.

The level of medication was quite high, it was having knock on consequences with respect to her Bladder and her general quality of life”.

Even though this decision had Beatie’s best interests at heart it was still a difficult decision to live with, not because of a sense of guilt as participant 2 clearly stated but rather living without Beatie;

“Human company obviously exists, we have a partner, children so it’s not like the house is quiet or empty, it’s still not full of Beatie and that’s the point.”

Participant 6 perfectly captured the role Pets play within the familial system and how the loss of that being effects a family in her description of Missy and Jack’s passing. It should be noted that this statement encapsulates the general feeling of the participants regarding the loss of their pets.

“His last few days, few weeks and the whole family, it was just this undertone of sadness...every time like if we had a visitor, something, you could just feel it was different to my family and that’s the role they played. They crept so deep into our hearts that it’s, it was like losing a child when we didn’t have them anymore”.

It can be argued that the reference to ‘losing a child’ indicates the extent of the loss as losing a child is possibly one of the hardest losses to experience in one’s life, par from the loss of a parent or sibling. This statement indicates the depth of the bond as it illustrates how such a loss can disrupt the dynamic of the familial system.

Furthermore the notion carried by society in general that ‘a pet is just a pet’ appears to be a foreign concept to many including the Participants as most of the participants indicated to some extent that their pets were part of their family. In other words their pet was a crucial part of the functioning of the familial system, not just a material object that could be easily replaced. Participant 5 when describing the loss of Russell emphasises this point;

“We know that it’s a dog, but he meant a lot. He was part of our family”

Here it should be noted that Russell was participant five’s first pet outside of her childhood home and appeared to fill the starter family role (Walsh, 2009). Often young couples acquire a pet to serve the purpose of surrogate child in an attempt to determine if they are ready to have children (Walsh, 2009). It can be argued that in this case Russell took up the role of a surrogate child as participant 5 stated that;

“He was like our kid basically, like our kid, I would say, cos I’m, I’m like, I’m turning, turning 26 this year and I’m still studying. I do feel like I need a family, so, and like having dogs is like having kids for me. It takes that, I think fills that small gap. Where you have to take care of somebody, ja, so he’s there, you always feeding him, walking him and playing with him.”

It should further be noted that participant 5 was brought up in a home where pets were just animals and therefore it is interesting that she developed a familial type bond with Russell. The general assumption in such a situation would be that Participant 5 would have been socialized to act and react in certain ways to animals therefore assuming she would mirror the relationships she had with pets while she was growing up. i.e. viewing them as just pets. However in this case it appears that participant 5 went against the familial norm by adopting Russell as a family member. The notion of socialization having an effect on the treatment of pets would be an interesting topic for future studies.

It is interesting to note that while new couples adopt pets to fulfil the role of surrogate child, so older couples often adopt pets as a replacement child once their children have left home (Walsh, 2009). This concept links in with pets as family members, as pets take on a human position within the family. Participant 9 describes this scene perfectly encapsulating the concept;

“Once I left home, she and the new puppy became my replacements. Um, you know you’ve been replaced when you go home and the dogs get more Christmas presents than you do.”

In relation to the pet’s quality of life, participant 9 describes how Dackl’s hind legs went lame and the veterinarian recommended that she be euthanized. However, Participant 9 notes that his family was not satisfied with this answer and took it upon themselves to see if there was an alternative. The

following statement coincides with the concept of going the extra mile for ones pet which was discussed previously in relation to Beatie.

“You know my Mom did some treatments with her and she was fine again, you know. She was going on, you know, hour long walks again”.

The above statements also link in with Morley and Fook’s (2005) notion that pets tend to act as mediators of stress within the familial system and reduce depression by providing comfort for their owners. The present study found several instances that corroborate this notion, however due to page limitations only a few statements were chosen.

The majority of the participants indicated that they had known their pets for over a decade, the majority of this cluster meeting their pets as children. Within the field of psychology it is common knowledge that the early stages of childhood are associated with the phases of development and learning and therefore it can be argued that the bonds developed during childhood hold greater value and meaning for these participants as they tend to be deeply ingrained, due to the developmental contributions in the child’s life (Eckstein, 2000). However, this does not mean that the human-animal bonds developed during adulthood are less meaningful, but rather these bonds are based on different emotional growths and experience and as noted previously these relationships have a different social dynamic to those developed during childhood. Furthermore the intensity of the bond between pet and owner cannot be solely based on emotional developments over a life time but should encapsulate psychological and social developments as well (Adrian et al., 2009; Albert & Bulcroft, 1987; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brandes, 2009; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010).

The literature also indicates that companion animals provide a more in-depth emotional bond with their owners as they tend to provide emotional stability (Field et al., 2009). Therefore it can be argued that the death of the pet can result in emotional turmoil, often leading to depression, anxiety and insecurity. The most relevant and significant example of such instances link in with the concept of the ‘aftershock effect’ noted in previous sections. Participant 3 and 4 at the time of the interviews had not been home since before Chester and Asha’s deaths and therefore the reality of their loss has not been realised. It can therefore be argued that emotional turmoil, depression, anxiety and insecurity may well affect the participants on their return home as the realisation of the loss of their ‘safety blanket’ kicks in. However further interviews to attain such information were not conducted. This is one of the limitations of the present study.

The intensity of the bond between pet and owner links in with the notion that many pet owners view their pets as family members. The literature notes that in such instances pets tend to fill certain roles

within the familial system, those often occupied by humans (Archer & Winchester, 2009; Field et al., 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). The above statements illustrate such findings.

It is evident that the majority of the participants felt that their pets were a part of their families to the extent that the pets were treated as any other human member would be regarding their health care and quality of life. Furthermore the participant's pets were imbued into family life and activates both pet and owner knowing how the other was feeling through their behaviour and possibly through the sixth sense that pets are said to possess. The development of the dual sixth sense can be related to the owner growing up with the pet as the participants that had not grown up with their pets made no indication of the presence of the 'sixth sense'. However as noted previously time does not dictate the intensity of the bond between all pets and owners.

4.1.3. GROWING UP WITH PETS

There is no concrete evidence that suggests that growing up with pets influences the way in which an individual would treat a pet as an adult. However the majority of participants in the study indicated that they were drawn to pet ownership in adulthood due to the fact that they had grown up with pets. Half of the participants have not acquired a pet in adulthood as yet due to their current living arrangements. One participant made no reference to childhood experiences of pet ownership while another indicated that her socialization in relation to pet ownership did not influence the treatment of Russell in adulthood. As previously noted participant 5 grew up in a home that viewed their pets as animal, however participant 5 viewed Russell as a family member.

Participant 2, 10, and 13 described growing up with pets and how as adults they felt the need to have a pet in their homes. This cluster of participants further noted that their homes felt incomplete without the presence of a pet and they themselves felt as though a part of them was missing without the companionship of a pet.

"I had a dog since I was a child, I worked in kennels for a while with bull terriers so I feel like I'm missing half an arm if there's not a dog around the place. Walks seem absolutely purposeless without a dog."(participant10).

Here it can be argued that this need to acquire a pet in adulthood stems from the emotional connections the participants developed with their family pets as children. This can be emphasized by the point made under pets as family members and the intensity of the bond, which indicates that pets often serve as the child's safety blanket. In other words it is possible that participant 2, 10, and 13 relied on their pets in childhood for emotional support during difficult or stressful times. However more evidence is required to confirm this notion.

“My husband and I grew up in homes where we both had pets and only for that 18 months that we or a year and a bit where we lost the other two dogs, did we not have a pet. Um, other than that we have always grown up with dogs and cats. So, our home was pretty empty not having um an animal” (participant 13).

“We were quite keen to get a pet, cos both of us had grown up with animals.” (Participant 2).

“If you grow up with animals you just think it’s a normal part of life and we did, we do.”

Several of the participants noted the importance of having pets as a child as pet ownership during childhood teaches a child to be responsible for another being (Walsh, 2009). Furthermore children learn to be selfless and respectful.

“It was also my parent’s idea of getting me and my sister into responsibility and cos I like dogs I got a dog and cos she likes cats she got a cat. And we were both encouraged to look after them entirely, so feed them, walk them, well you don’t walk cats but. Basically it was just sort of to convince us to try and be more responsible towards others, which I think worked because I cared for her basically entirely as much as I could and it’s quite interesting cos it’s always nice growing up with a pet.” (Participant 7).

“But then at the same time, children have to learn at some point how to play with creatures and how to treat them. Um and I think that relation, I know I learnt as a child that you have to be able to think about something other than yourself. You know, to have to care for something other than yourself.” (Participant 2).

Participant 2 noted that it would be interesting to see if pet ownership during childhood influenced how people relate to others in adulthood;

“Often you look around these days and see people who are so self-absorbed and you wonder whether they in fact had a pet, whether they had to actually look beyond their own needs and whether perhaps they might have benefited from such an experience.”

This could be an interesting topic for future studies into human relational dynamics as well as human-nonhuman relational dynamics. The question of nature vs. nurture.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants that grew up with pets indicated that they received emotional support from their families after the passing of their pet. Some indicated that the support was linked to their parents own experiences of pet loss in the past. While other participants noted that although they received support from their families or significant others they felt that their grief was not fully understood by the supporting party.

“I don’t think B because of his own experience understands the depth of how, how, how I miss them. I think he tries to but I don’t think he can because he hasn’t felt that way about an animal since he was a kiddie and maybe he thinks that’s a kiddie feeling of loss about animals but he is sympathetic to me and, and he comforts me. Um, but I don’t think he can find it within himself to, to share that feeling.” (participant10).

“I don’t think they would really understand that, that much. Um, my parents have been very sup, supportive though, even though they didn’t really, cos for them dogs, they would just leave them outside and that was it. It was just there to guard the house. We never had dogs living with us inside the house but I like that. Um, ja, so they wouldn’t understand but they try to and they did send me messages. Telling me no, you will be fine. Just like, just ja he was a joy for a while um, but then now he is gone, just forget about it you will be fine. Just give it some time.” (Participant 5).

Participant 8 did not mention growing up with pets, however it can be argued that in light of the above statements and the fact that Participant 8 received a lot of support from her family after Lilly-Bell’s passing, that these reactions indicate that participant 8 potentially grew up with pets;

“My family all stays in Pretoria so I think they cried just as much as what I did, so she was really just a special dog.”

It can therefore be argued that growing up with pet’s influences the bond between pet and owner on an unconscious level in adulthood as during childhood pets serve as emotional support for the participants. Therefore it can be further argued that growing up with pet’s influences the intensity of grief experienced after the loss of a pet in adulthood. The time spent with pets has an effect both on the intensity of the bond and the intensity of grief. However as noted previously there are cases in which time plays no part in the intensity of the bond as in the case of participant 12 and Khaleesi. The elapsed time since the pets passing as well as the intensity of the bond dictate the emotional reaction elicited during the participants narratives.

The present study’s findings are consistent with Brown et al’s. (1996) notions surrounding the development of a sense of well-being and emotional health in childhood, which has been associated with companion animals and what they provide the child with –affection, intimacy and unconditional positive regard- as the pet often fills the role of confidant, friend or sibling, as previously indicated. These relationships often continue into adolescents and adulthood, depending on the life span of the pet and tend to be an anchor for the owner during times of change and emotional distress (Brown et al., 1996; Walsh, 2009).

4.1.4. ELAPSED TIME

This section is just a brief indication of the time that has both been spent with each pet as well as the time that has passed since the passing of the participant's pets. While this has been noted throughout this section, it simply emphasizes the intensity of the bond regardless of time and leads into the discussion in the following section of the Intensity of grief. It is interesting to note that half of the participants were still emotionally affected when discussing the passing of their pets while others were not. Here it should be noted that the emotional response varied in relation to the time elapsed since the passing of the pet. In other words in some cases the pet passed away 2 years ago while in others the pet passed a few months ago. This indicates that the intensity of grief varies between the participants and is not only dictated by the intensity of the bond but is rather influenced both by the emotional support the participants had during their grieving period as well as the individual participants ability to cope with loss. It should be noted that in order to fully understand an individual's ability to deal with loss one would need to examine past experiences of loss especially in childhood and how the individual's parents handled the concept of loss in relation to the child's reaction and dealt with the loss themselves. This aspect was not focussed on in the present study, however, could be an interesting study for future research.

4.2. INTENSITY OF GRIEF

At this point in the discussion the link between the bond and the intensity and duration of grief related to the loss of the bond becomes clear. The literature as well as the findings from the present study indicate that there are two factors that contribute to the intensity of the grieving process; intensity of the bond and repressed grief due to societal views on pet loss and the lack of acknowledgement that the experience of pet loss is capable of producing the same, if not more intense emotional reactions than the loss of a human (Archer & Winchester, 2009; Field et al., 2009; Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

The following paragraphs will reflect a discussion on the intensity of grief in relation to the intensity of the bond and introduce the concept of repressed grief and the social implications thereof. It is interesting to note that the findings from the present study differ from the findings in the pilot study (2014) regarding repressed grief and social support as the present findings indicated increased numbers of social support as opposed to repression of grief.

As previously noted the intensity of grief is dependent upon the intensity of the bond, the level of social support during the grieving period, and the individual's ability to deal with loss. It is important

to note that in cases where the pet has died tragically or unexpectedly the intensity of grief may be exacerbated by the psychological and emotional trauma associated with such losses. Five of the 12 participants lost their pet's under tragic or unexpected circumstances. The trauma of the loss can influence the intensity of grief in that the pet owner loses their beloved pet or was perhaps witness to the horrific circumstances of their pet's death.

Participants 5, 8, and 12 bore witness to their pet's tragic deaths. Here the discussion will revolve around the influence of such incidents on the intensity of grief experienced by the pet owner and the possibility that tragic and sudden pet loss may increase the grieving period due to the violent nature of the loss.

Participant 5 believes that Russell was hit by a car on one of his escapades as he had been known to jump the fence. However Participant 5 was not present when the incident occurred. It could be argued that this was a precipitating factor for the intensity of grief experienced by the participant. This factor could have been brought about by feelings of guilt for not preventing the incident. It should be noted that participant 5 did not directly state any sense of guilt, this notion stems from the researchers interpretation of the participants body language as well as the detail depth supplied by the participant. It could be argued that the shallow detail depth provided indicates the depth of psychological trauma from the incident, however, a psychological assessment regarding grief and trauma is beyond the scope of this report.

“Some car, um bumped into him or something. Because he came back, I think he jumped back to us, then we just saw him crawling into his kennel and he had, his back leg one of them was outside and I just heard a big noise of him entering the house... we pulled him out and then we saw that he was bloated. His body was bloated... we put him on the table and she tried to turn him around and that's when he puked blood. A lot of blood, it was like on all the table”

The above statement describes the traumatic events experienced by the participant. These bloodied images of Russell are the last images she was exposed to. It can therefore be argued that these images cause re-traumatization every time participant 5 thinks of Russell. However it should be noted that participant 5 did not supply enough information to corroborate the notion of re-traumatization.

Re-traumatization can however, be illustrated through participant 8 and twelve's narratives on pet loss. The concept of re-traumatization is eminently clear in participant eight's narrative about Lilly-Bell's passing. The trauma experienced by participant 8, it can be argued, greatly influenced and continues to influence the intensity of grief as well as an extended grieving period.

“I stopped at the gate, and it was. Opened the gate and saw the garage door was closed and I took a phone call and um then somebody left the side door open and I just, I drove over her ... well we rushed her to the vet and they put her in, ag, took all the x-rays and everything and she said, she is keeping her overnight but her back was completely shattered”

This statement indicates that even two years after Lilly-Bell’s passing participant 8 is still traumatised by the incident and harbours a lot of guilt. Furthermore participant eight’s final memories of Lilly-Bell are dominated by this incident and her untimely death.

“I actually didn’t go to work for a week. It was really hard and I think the fact that I drove over her, is, I felt like you know you have that moment where you think ‘if I didn’t take the phone call, if I concentrated or if I wasn’t on my phone’. It, it was my fault.”

Despite participant eight’s best efforts, Lilly-Bell was given a 1% chance of survival with the reality that if she survived she would never walk again. Therefore Participant 8 took the decision to end Lilly-Bell’s suffering and euthanized her.

“We were planning on the next day to see if we could take her through to P.E. to, um the orthopaedic surgeon or something to come and see if they can do something, but um the blood flow actually started, didn’t go through to her back. So we had to put her out... I just think it was the hardest thing I, I, I don’t know it’s like, it’s like losing a child.”

The above statement was said with contrition, indicating that participant 8 experienced re-traumatization through her guilt and regrets. Therefore it can be argued that the 2 year grieving period experienced by participant 8 is influenced and extended through this memory trauma. Here it should be noted that while participant 5 indicated experiencing intense grief after Russell’s passing, it was stated that this grief dissipated over a two week period. The briefness of this grieving period does not devalue the intensity of the bond between participant 5 and Russell, however it can be argued that due to a lack of social understanding participant 5 unconsciously extinguished her external grieving function, repressing it. At the same time it can be argued that everyone grieves in their own time and have different coping mechanisms in place.

At this point the last memory re-traumatization concept (LMRC) shall be introduced and illustrated through participant twelve’s narrative. Participant 12 witnessed Khaleesi’s violent passing as Participant 12 rescued Khaleesi from a pack of stray dogs that were attacking her. Participant twelve’s last memory of Khaleesi is watching her take her final breath and witnessing the life drain out of her eye’s. Khaleesi, like Russell, died before she reached a veterinarian due to internal injuries.

“I heard this barking, like wild barking and then just (makes cat screams) needless to say I have never run so fast in my entire life and um, down the storm drain, flew down there and there were four dogs heads down and you know. I don’t know what I was thinking cos those dogs could have turned on me but you know”

“I just looked at her and she was making these funny little noises and she looked at me and I was looking at her, begging her to be okay and um she just died and I just looked at her and suddenly that light just went and she just had this little puff and that was it.”

The impact of Khaleesi’s final moment was clear as participant 12, two years later, began to tear up noting that she thought she had dealt with her grief. However through the interviewing process and sharing her memories of Khaleesi with the researcher participant 12 discovered how intense her grief still was. It was clear, according to the researcher, that participant 12 had dealt with her grief to a certain point, however, the LMRC reignites her grief when she thinks about Khaleesi (Stern & Cropper, 1998). The following quote is an indication of the participants subsided grief;

“Well put it this way I don’t, I don’t lose sleep over it or uh it’s not something I think about everyday but often I will be, I will tell a story of something like that and she’ll be in it. Um, or I don’t know she will just come up every now and again and then it’s sort of a pang but I wouldn’t say full blown grief. So it’s definitely subsided.”

As noted it is clear participant twelve’s grief has subsided to a point, however, the presence of the LMRC indicates that she potentially repressed her grief in order to cope with Khaleesi’s death. However the LMRC prevents full repression of those last memories and therefore there is a certain amount of grief and trauma that participant 12 has not worked through. This is evidenced in her emotional reaction when recalling those last moments of Khaleesi’s life.

A further indication of the presence of the LMRC is clearly illustrated in the following statement;

“I was desperately tryna unhook it and everything, anything to, and he just kind of went limp at one stage and it was just Khalee all over again...So it was just every little feeling from that day just went Whaaa, straight back and, and that night Beans, he has a little bean bag and he sleeps next to me, I did not take my hand off him.”

The above statement describes a scene where participant twelve’s new pet Beans was caught in a snare in the same storm drain that Khaleesi had been attacked. The fact that Participant twelve’s first thoughts in this situation take her back to the day Khaleesi passed away indicates the presence of her grief as well as the fear that developed from that traumatising incident. The fear of re-experiencing Khaleesi’s death indicated the LMRC. As even though in this situation Beans was in peril, participant

12 was experiencing flashbacks of Khaleesi's attack and therefore was going through re-traumatization, as well as being traumatized by this new traumatic event. However this event is not applicable to the present study and was therefore not examined in depth.

Participant six and seven's pets passed away suddenly and thus they had no time to emotionally prepare themselves for the loss. It should be noted that such emotional preparations rarely reduce the intensity of grief but may in fact contribute to an extended grieving period. It can be argued that the grieving period is extended through the experience of watching ones pet deteriorate over the years. Therefore the LMRC can be applied to such cases, however this will be discussed further on.

According to participant 6 Mischief fell ill suddenly noting that;

"That was so sudden...it was in two days."

"She woke me up and said Missy is really, really not well and that, that sinking feeling in your heart cos you know there is nothing you can do. That's, I just, where we spent the whole day with her until the appointment."

Participant 6 goes on to describe the processes of Missy's euthanasia and how this event was emotionally traumatizing due to Missy's negative reaction to the drug.

"just the actual process of seeing her, I didn't know if it was normal when they injected her or whatever they did and then she, this is what keeps sticking in my mind, is the bile that came up and she like did this whole reaction."

Here it should be mentioned that Mischief and Jack passed away within a few weeks of each other and therefore the comparison between a sudden passing and a prolonged passing is prominent and reliable as both memories would be fresh in the participants mind, especially because Jack had passed three month prior to the interview. Therefore there is little room for memory loss. However it should be noted that trauma may distort/alter memories. In relation to Jack's passing participant 6 noted that she did not want to be present at his euthanasia due to her negative experience when Missy was euthanized. This decision can be attributed to the presence of the LMRC.

"With Missy, as hard as it was putting her down, the fact that it was almost so sudden was, it made it easier in a way because it didn't, and it wasn't a build-up and getting weaker and weaker."

The above statement indicates that according to participant 6 Jack's death was more emotionally taxing than Missy's. However in this instance the LMRC applies in a different way. In Missy's case the LMRC applies because the euthanasia process was emotionally traumatising for participant 6 *"the*

bile that came up and she like did this whole reaction.” Whereas in Jack’s case the LMRC applies because participant 6 watched Jack’s health deteriorate over several years and therefore participant 6 has years’ worth of emotionally taxing memories. These memories over shadow the earlier happier memories of Jack (Stern & Cropper, 1998).

“He was there every night, he used to jump on my bed. Ah I missed when he jumped, like the last year of his life we started forgetting the things that he could do or walk or anything.”

“Um and just slowly those memories just, I mean that’s what upsets me so much I mean the fact that, I only remembered now how earlier on those two steps that he would jump like that and you forget those things and I just wish it could stay in my mind forever cos now how I remember him is not having his back legs working and that’s what, it really sucks that way.”

The above statements clearly indicate the presence of the LMRC developing in the last few years of Jack’s life. In both instances it can be argued that the LMRC is present, however, in Jack’s case appears to influence the intensity of grief to a greater degree as it built up over time. It should be noted that this does not imply that Jack’s passing was more significant or emotionally traumatising for the participant but rather it indicates the degree to which the participant’s grief was influenced by the pets passing and ultimately the LMRC.

According to participant 7, Silky’s passing was also sudden and unexpected. While participant 7 explained that Silky had been sick for a while, the veterinarian had indicated that Silky would live out her natural life expectancy rate and therefore Silky’s passing came as a shock to participant 7.

“It was interesting because she had been diagnosed with cancer and she had just underwent an operation to remove it and it wasn’t suc, it wasn’t entirely successful, but it was a slow moving one that according to the doctor wouldn’t impact too much and she would still live her whole natural life. And my other dog had just caught biliary which is a, quite an infectious um, disease which doesn’t have one of the highest survivability rates and he spent, I think three nights on the edge of death before recovering and um I think two months later she caught cerebral biliary. Which there’s no cure for that and basically I noticed that she couldn’t walk, couldn’t do anything.”

Participant 7 noted that he was not present when Silky passed away as he was at school and then a friend’s house. However upon his return home his parents not so much as told participant 7 that Silky had passed but rather showed him.

“Well they didn’t as much tell me but show me, ok, I was at home and they brought her back and they, they told me and sort of opened, she was in the boot of the car. So, she had died, and I was

pretty shaken up. I was struggling I understood what had happened and I had accepted it but it was quite a, it's a sudden thing knowing that it's now gone from your life."

The above statement indicates the presence of the LMRC in the sense that Silky's passing was unexpected and therefore when participant 7 was shown Silky's lifeless body this became the last imprinted memory of Silky. As seen in the literature review, it is for this reason that the way in which parents handle the death of a loved one, where a child is concerned, is important as the child learns how to deal with loss from the way in which their parents deal with and express their emotions during such times (Field et al., 2005; Walsh, 2009). While there was no indication that this was participant seven's first experience of loss, his reactions and body language during the interview indicated that participant 7 was holding back his true feeling surrounding Silky's passing. On several occasions during the interview participant 7 went red in the face and his speech became strained. While it can be argued that his early experiences of loss taught him that it was inappropriate to mourn for a pet there is no clear evidence to back up this argument, at the same time his behaviour and demeanour during the interview, it can be argued, is related to social views surrounding hegemonic masculinity and that mourning in general is not socially acceptable for 'real' men. An indication of this could be directly related to the researcher's gender as well. A further argument could be made that participant seven's demeanour during the interview was a defence mechanism related to the suppression of grief due to gender stereotypes as well as against LMRC. In the case of the latter the suppression indicates that participant 7 had not yet dealt with his grief.

It is also important at this point to bring in the concept of closure. Closure refers to understanding the finality of an individual's death. In other words for the families of missing persons there is no closure as there is always the hope that they will come back and that they are alive. A further example would be soldiers that are missing in action, often the family does not get closure until the soldier's body is found and they have something to bury, something to bring about the realisation of the finality of that individual's death. As previously noted participant 7 was not present when Silky passed away however the participant noted that;

"Although I would have liked to be there, I'm not sure if I really would have, it's quite a painful thing for them to actually die in your arms."

While participant 7 received closure by viewing Silky's body and laying her to rest there are several other participants that did not have such closure as they were away from home at the time of their pet's death. Before going on to closure it should be noted that the LMRC links in with the 'aftershock effect' as they both cause re-traumatization, the difference lies in the circumstances surrounding the pet's death and the type of re-traumatization. The 'aftershock effect' kick's in when the participant

was away from home when their pet passed away and therefore the reality of the death only sets in once they are home and their pet's presence is missed. On the other hand the LMRC kicks in when the participant's pet died under sudden or disturbing (illness, old age, accidental) circumstances and their last memory of their beloved pet consumes the happy memories and thus each time the participant thinks about their pet the last memory comes to mind first bringing back the feelings and emotions experienced upon their pet's death.

A good example of a lack of closure can be found in participant four's narrative. Participant 4 was at university when Asha passed away. It is important to note that closure is not the only reason participants wanted to be with their pets when they passed away, as will be seen in the following statement by participant 4, but rather that it is important to be there so your pet knows you cared for them and that they do not die alone.

“Just wanted to be there so she would know that I care cos like I can't really explain to her like I'm at Varsity or whatever, so, ja it was just like difficult... yeah, and like I just, I hate, cos I don't know how she looked like when she died, so I just wish I had been there to just like stroke her and tell her its ok.”

The majority of the participants were present when their pets passed away and had witnessed the deterioration of their pets as they aged naturally. As with humans the natural aging process leads to the deterioration of the mind and body. The only difference is that Pets life spans, especially dogs and cats are a lot shorter than the human life span and therefore the aging process is sped up.

It should be noted that there is no accurate way to measure an individual's level of grief and therefore these narratives are not being compared but rather viewed holistically together as no experience will match another's. While it can be argued that accidental deaths are more traumatic than natural deaths that does not mean that those individuals experience higher levels of grief.

It became clear to the researcher that the participants that were present for their pet's final moments had experienced the LMRC on varying levels. This is evidenced through the depth to which the participants described the days leading up to their pet's death and the actual passing itself. For instance participant 13 noted how Lizzy went into a state of collapse and was unable to move, she had to be carried to the car.

“she's always, you know if you open the back door she's there and I was in a rush you know getting ready to leave and only coming back in the evening and as I was walking to my car I thought 'I haven't seen Lizzy and I called and called and called, no Lizzy. And I luckily went back to the laundry and she, she'd gone into a state of collapse so we couldn't pick her up... I phoned and they said no I

could bring her and we put her in the back of my car and uh she was whimpering and uh, I asked the vet to come out to the car and she said look there is nothing we can do, everything is just shutting down.”

Whereas participant 2 did not describe Beatie’s passing in detail, rather focusing on how she would no longer be around or reminiscing about Beatie’s past adventures.

“It’s a bit of a it’s, it’s, it’s, you know when you go home, you would always have you would never be alone, it would be on their terms obviously, but you would never be alone. And I think that for me is the toughest part. Human company obviously exists, we have a partner, children so it’s not like the house is quiet or empty, it’s still not full of Beatie and that’s the point.”

“Once when Beatie was a puppy and we took her for a walk and she saw one of the chickens, and you know foxies are meant to be hunters and Beatie wasn’t a hunter, she was just sort of a ‘you threw the ball, well done it has landed over here, now you will come and fetch it and you can throw it again and I will tell you where it goes ‘But, but for some reason on this day she decided that the chicken was very pleasing to her and she snuffled it in her mouth, and there it was in her mouth, with its head sticking out and its wings like this ((indicating position of wings)) playing very still and there was Beatie sitting there looking as smug as anything with this chicken in her mouth”

It can be argued that the above statements indicate that participant 2 did not experience LMR in that her memories of Beatie revolve around their lives together rather than her final moments. Participant 2 made the final decision to euthanize Beatie and therefore it could be argued that because the decision was participant two’s and not a sudden or accidental passing that participant 2 was psychologically prepared for Beatie’s passing. This does not mean that Beatie’s death was not difficult as participant 2 was not emotionally ready to say goodbye to Beatie. In comparison to participant thirteen’s case participant 2 made the final decision whereas participant 13 was forced to make the choice due to the circumstances. Therefore it can be argued that participant 13 was not psychologically ready to put Lizzy down, while her death was eminent and not unexpected due to her age participant 13 was, in a sense, blindsided by her passing. As when a pet gets to a certain age it becomes a waiting game, you are never sure when that time will come but you know it is coming. Therefore, in a sense Lizzy’s passing was sudden for participant 13 and thus the participant had no time to psychologically prepare for Lizzy’s death. Participant 2 on the other hand noticed Beatie’s health deteriorating and decided that it was time to euthanize her so she would not suffer.

“When you noticed that she was just miserable, it seemed selfish to continue, um so ja, January 15th last year. We said that, we made an appointment with the veterinarian, we prepared ourselves, went in and that was that.”

“You know we could have held on to her a little longer. Knowing that it would be selfish to do so but still the temptation.”

This is not to say that participant 13 extended Lizzy’s life for selfish reasons. While Lizzy was old she was happy until the morning of her passing. Everyone deals with death differently and therefore this factor can be used to explain why some participants experience LMRC and other did not. An individual’s psychological and emotional state determine whether LMRC is present or not. Therefore, it can be argued that those participants that were psychologically prepared for their pets passing would not experience LMRC unless their pet’s euthanasia was a traumatic process as in the case of participant 6 and Mischief. Furthermore not all the participants that experienced their pet’s deterioration during their natural aging process would have been psychologically prepared for their passing. It can further be argued that the presence of LMRC also depends heavily on the individuals coping mechanisms and early childhood experiences of death. However, there is no definitive way to corroborate these arguments without further investigation.

It was apparent that the participants that were not present for their pets passing were not affected by LMRC, however, the “aftershock effect” as noted previously was common among these participants (3, 4, 9, & 11).

This group of participants also noted a lack of closure both directly and indirectly. As previously noted this lack of closure stems from their absence at the time of their pet’s death as they felt that it was a time when their pet needed them the most and to ensure that their pet knew he/she was loved.

“Um like she wouldn’t understand why I wasn’t there (tears). Um it’s just going to be like really weird when I go home again she won’t be there, cos it doesn’t really feel like she is gone, but ja just wish like, I just wanted to be there so she would know that I care cos like I can’t really explain to her like I’m at Varsity or whatever, so, ja it was just like difficult.” (Participant 4)

“It’s so difficult, it’s just weird that they gone after being such a big part of your life” (participant 4)

“I was definitely very, very sad. Especially because, not long before that my, Mom um, from the previous holiday, My Mom had taken some photos of us on a walk and she sent me a nice big photo frame with me with photos of Dackl. So it was quite sad.” (Participant 9)

The intensity of grief felt by all 12 participants is evident and like the intensity of the bond is not determined by the amount of time spent together but rather on the strength of their relationship. Therefore it can be said that the intensity of the bond between pet and owner influences the intensity of grief and the length of the grieving process. However the length of the grieving process is also

affected by other factors which will be discussed in the section on repressed grief vs. strong social support.

According to Morley and Fook (1996) the grief response to the loss of a pet is experienced in much the same way to the loss of a human, as often pet owners experience sadness, loneliness, flashbacks, emptiness, anger, depression, guilt and pining for their companion animal. Furthermore several Authors note that pet owners experience similar mourning processes to that of human loss (Brown et al., 1996; Holmes, 1993; Petrich, 2008). The findings clearly indicate several of the above mentioned emotional responses as many of the participants noted their grief responses to the loss of their pet. Sadness and loneliness were the most common, however it can be argued that depression could manifest for those participants that had not been present for the passing of the pet, linking in with the 'aftershock effect', as well as for those participants that had little to no social support.

The above discussion indicates that the loss of a pet is often experienced in the same way as the loss of a human family member. Furthermore a number of participants indicated that the loss of their pet was more traumatic than the loss of a human due to the void that is left after the passing of the pet. However it should be noted that none of the participants mentioned experiences of human loss and therefore no accurate comparison could be made in the present study. This is one of the limitations of the present study, further studies are required to make an accurate and sound comparison of the experiences of human and pet loss.

The following subsections link in with the concept of the intensity of grief. Here it should be reiterated that several of the subsection throughout this analysis and discussion interlink and overlap. As seen in the intensity of the bond there are other factors that can be related to the degree of grief experienced by each participant. The subsections that will be discussed below are as follows; growing up with pets and elapsed time, the 'buffer effect', veterinary experiences, and the significance of burial rituals. It will be argued that each of these subsection either increased or decreased, to a certain extent, the participant's intensity of grief.

4.2.1. GROWING UP WITH PETS AND ELAPSED TIME

As previously noted under the intensity of the bond participant 2, 10, and 13 noted the void they felt after their pet's death. These three participants had all grown up with pets and had owned pets of their own as adults, however they had not acquired a new pet since their loss. Whereas the other participants due to living arrangements have not acquired pets in their adulthood. Participants 5 and 12 acquired new pets soon after their loss due to the loneliness felt without their pet and participant 8 did not make reference to pet ownership when she was growing up, however it was noted that a

new pet was acquired soon after Lilly-Bell's death by participant eight's family. Participant 8 could not bond with the new pet as it was too soon for her, she felt as though it was a replacement for an irreplaceable being. Participant 2 and 10 specifically noted the lonely feeling coming home to an empty house.

"You know when you go home, you would always have you would never be alone, it would be on their terms obviously, but you would never be alone. And I think that for me is the toughest part. Human company obviously exists, we have a partner, 2 children so it's not like the house is quiet or empty, it's still not full of Beatie and that's the point." (Participant 2).

"I hate walking into an empty house without the presence of a pet, it feels like the house hasn't got a soul any longer." (Participant 10).

Participant 13 noted how she missed Lizzy's constant presence at her side;

"Lizzy would follow me around everywhere, if I went to the loo and I didn't let her in, boy she would sit and wine."

The above statements indicate the degree to which pets or companion animals permeate our lives. In each case pets became a constant in the participant's lives, someone to rely on and to always be there when you needed them. These animals became part of the participant's daily lives and therefore after their death the participants found certain activities had no purpose or value to them anymore without their beloved pets.

"Walks seem absolutely purposeless without a dog.... So, I am learning to live without a dog and I still find it really a waste of time to go for a walk without a dog" (Participant 10).

"Despite the fact they are animals, they are as much a part of your family as any human is. And um when they pass on the void they leave is as significant as the void people leave." (Participant 2).

It can be argued that these pets acted as an emotional safety blanket for participant 2, 10 and 13 in the same sense that their childhood pets would have and therefore the loss of their pet brought on a sense of loneliness and vulnerability that human contact could not mend.

"We have a partner, 2 children so it's not like the house is quiet or empty, it's still not full of Beatie and that's the point." (Participant 2).

This statement clearly indicates the depth of the relationship between participant 2 and Beatie in that their human-nonhuman relationship provides the psychological and emotional support the participant does not get from human relationships as these relationships are based on non-communicative interactions and therefore form stronger bonds and connections. It can be argued that the depth of

these relationships intensify the grieving process due to the emotional and psychological connection between pet and owner. In relation to the 'safety blanket concept' it can be argued that participant 13 utilises a sub-division of this concept as Lizzy became a surrogate child for participant 13 after her daughter went to university in a different province. Therefore when Lizzy passed away it can be said that participant 13 experienced similar effects to those experiencing the 'safety blanket effect'. In other words participant 13 lost her emotional safety blanket that had been with her and helped her cope through the empty nest transitional phase of her life. Such life events are both psychologically and emotionally significant and therefore those that were present at that time are woven into our new corset of life. The loss of such an individual can have adverse effects on one's psychological and emotional wellbeing.

“Once N left home to go to Varsity Lizzy would follow me around everywhere, if I went to the loo and I didn't let her in, boy she would sit and wine.”

After experiencing several difficult life changes Participant 10 adopted Rex who became an emotional safety blanket, getting her through several transitional stages in her life. It can be argued that participant 10 and Rex, due to their past histories, needed each other to cope with moving into the next stage of their lives. In other words participant 10 and Rex emotionally relied on each other for support and comfort throughout the four years they were together.

“He was, was completely after a while well bonded to me. I was the only person that he didn't growl and snap at, never... everybody else he had big problems with, except interestingly Brian but even then he would lie next to me in my study when I was working, I work from home, mostly, and he would lie in the study with me and if Brian would walk in my study he would growl at him cos this was our space now.”

This statement indicates that Rex felt the need or rather that it was his job to protect participant 10 from any sort of emotional or potential physical harm. It was evident that participant 10 felt that way too, in that when Rex was euthanized it was not because he was a nuisance but rather that participant 10 would rather euthanize Rex on her terms than have to be forced to put him down for mauling someone. That way participant 10 could say goodbye to Rex properly and peacefully.

“He just looked at me with complete devotion the whole time and in a way that was wonderful for him because I was there for him the whole time and I didn't feel that I was betraying him because for him it was like going to sleep.”

It can be argued that this statement indicates complete understanding and affection between pet and owner, both seeming to accept the decision and enjoying their final moments together. It can however

also be argued that the pressure of social etiquette regarding pet ownership exacerbated participant ten's grief as in essence society dictated that Rex should be euthanized because of his tendency to bite strangers.

“if I had waited and I have waited before with pets just a little bit too long and it's all gone wrong and I should have done the responsible thing and because that is part of the responsibility of having an animal is knowing when it's time to do the kind thing and I really do think it's a kind thing. Um, I didn't want to leave it too late for him and end up with somebody injured or a child bitten or a law suit. All of which were a quite possible outcome, just because I wanted to keep this dog”

The above statement is directly linked to societal indicators as social pet owner etiquette often dictates whether a pet lives or dies. It is clear that participant 10 was socially pressured into euthanizing Rex as she was worried that she would be forced to euthanize him and end up with a law suit if he bit anyone. It should be noted that in such cases if a stranger approaches your dog and gets bitten they should be held liable not the pet and owner. Dogs are animals and are therefore unpredictable and should always be approached with caution. Getting permission from the pet owner is necessary to avoid such conflicts.

Participant 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 11 as previously noted all grew up with their pets, the safety blanket concept applicable in all cases. Therefore it can be argued that the loss of their pets has a significant effect on their emotional and psychological states which then affects the length and intensity of the grieving process.

“She was, like it sounds weird, but she was like a form of support. Um, because she was always loving and she was always there, and like if you had a bad day you could go lie there and she would come and snuggle up against you. Yeah, so comfort and support I would say...it's so difficult, it's just weird that they gone after being such a big part of your life” (Participant 4)

“You kind of go sit on the stoop and he like sits with you and he would just sit there as long as you needed and he would sit there with you. And the best thing about dogs is that you can talk to them and they won't judge...Chess will be Chess but he is gone but it's nice to remember him” (participant 3).

As noted previously the participant's concept of home and thus their self-concept was altered as they no longer have their emotional safety blanket and therefore no longer have someone to turn to in times of distress. That is to say no one that will completely understand them in the way their pet did. Here it should be noted that some of the participants had other pets at the time of their pets passing.

In such instances the majority of participants noted that their other pets, to a certain extent, served as a source of comfort.

“I don’t think they can really fill her role exactly, but I think having another cat there does make it easier in a way” (participant 4)

“Yes Rogie will definitely be a friendly face to see, good to see again.” (Participant 3)

“The cats were actually more comforting than the other dogs” (participant 11)

“I think my husband felt it more than me. Um ja, no look it was tough, especially when you get home and uh they not around but uh you know we luckily had Bentley” (participant 13)

The above statements indicate the presence of what will be referred to as the ‘buffer effect’. The ‘buffer effect’ refers to something, in this case other pets, that relieve some of the grief through their presence. In other words these other pets attempt to comfort or console the pet owners throughout the grieving period and can potentially shorten the length of the grieving period as they buffer the shock of the passing. It can be said that in some cases the pet owner sought the other pets for comfort to dull the pain of their loss by attempting to fill the void with another pet.

4.2.2. BUFFER EFFECT

The following section consists of a discussion on how other family pets can act as a buffer after the loss a pet as well as looking at the difference between the participants that had buffers and those that did not. Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 11 and 13 noted that they all had other family pets at the time of their pet’s death that served as a comforting agent. As previously noted participant 3 and 4 were not at home when their pets passed away and therefore would experience the ‘aftershock effect’ upon their return home. However participant 3 and 4 had other family pets that could potentially serve as an emotional comforter in the wake of their pet’s death. While the relationship between the participants and the other family pets was not as intense and closely bonded as the participants were to their pets, it can be argued that the similarity and familiarity of the type of relationship is sought by the bereaved owner in order to feel a certain level of comfort. When asked if her other pet would serve as a comforter in the wake of Asha’s death participant 4 noted;

“I think my other cat sort of would but not in the same, not in the same way because her and him were really different”

The statement reflects the above comment on the difference in the relationship between pet owner and other family pets. They do not fill the void left by the beloved pet but rather serve as a pillow to soften the blow of their pet’s death.

Participant 6, 7, 11, and 13 were present or at home at the time their pets passed on and had other pets to turn to for comfort. However participant 6 and 11 noted that some of their other pets exacerbated their grief to a degree because those pets did not seem to notice that one of their kin had gone.

“The other dog definitely not. Um, the cats were actually more comforting than the other dogs. The other dog was quite a, he quite a young black male and he started getting quite dominant with Oscar and a bit aggressive with him as he was getting sicker. So he didn’t really feel the loss to badly” (participant 11).

“What we actually found a bit strange and it was almost a bit upsetting, is the fact that when we lost Jack, our other two dogs, it’s like they didn’t even notice. And I mean every night they walked together, they would sleep together on the couch, so it was like they were brothers as well. They would play together. Um, and the fact that when jack was gone and they didn’t, they acted as if it was normal. It was, it was, it almost felt as if they were betraying us. They would think like, we would be like why haven’t you noticed him gone.” (Participant 6).

The last paragraph of the previous section indicates how some of the participants viewed their other pets as a buffer. Participant 13 went on to note that;

“You know it was, it was, it was very traumatic at the time but we, we did get over it, you know it was, I think because we had other animals.”

Participant 7 noted that his other family pet served as a comforter but he felt that they lent on each other for comfort;

“I think it was sort of mutual like, like he wouldn’t seek me out but he would just come, he would just generally come and visit and we both sort of be sad together.”

This comment can be linked to the researchers notion that participant 7 was holding back the true extent of his emotions surrounding Silky’s death as often he would go red in the face and answer questions in a contradictory manner. For instance in the above statement participant 7 noted that his other dog did not seek him out intentionally and then states how his dog would just come. While this may seem insignificant it is important in that the participant may not be fully aware of the extent of his own feelings and thus these feelings are being released from the unconscious in unconventional ways such as the above minor contradiction. A further indication that participant 7 was holding back is the lack of descriptive words when describing Silky’s death and how he felt about losing her. In essence the above statement indicates that participant seven’s other pet served as a comforter after Silky’s death, however it is apparent that participant 7 was not aware of the depth of his own grief.

In the case of participant 5 and 12, while they were both present when their pets passed on neither had other pets to turn to at the time. However it should be noted that both participants acquired pets with a few months of their loss. It can be argued that acquiring a new pet soon after the loss of a pet is the pet owner's way of coping with their loss as well as an attempt to fill the void created by their loss. Acquiring a pet soon after the loss of a pet is often viewed as a means of replacing the pet, however often pet owners believe that the new pet will reduce the pain, serving as a buffer for their loss. Therefore in such cases the 'buffer effect' concept is applicable. Therefore it can be argued that under these circumstances a new pet provides the pet owner with the opportunity to create a new bond which therefore reduces their grief as they pour their love and energy into the bonding process with the new pet. It should be noted that not all pet owners can acquire a new pet soon after their loss as it is too painful and they are not able to emotionally bond with the new pet as in the case of Participant 8. Having said this it is important to reiterate that getting a new pet for some pet owners is not replacing their pet but rather distracting them from their grief.

"It was really nice to have like at least other dogs, cos that was I think a month after Russell died. It was really, really great to have them, but they were very naughty cos they were together." (Participant 5).

"Now I have Beans. Who I actually got because I was missing Khalee. I got him about two months afterwards." (Participant 12).

Having pets around after the loss of a beloved pet allows one to share their pain and anguish with another. What's more is that you share these emotions with another animal through non-verbal communication which seems to help people work through their grief on a deeper level, free of judgement. As previously noted the bond we form with animals is based on a trusting non-judgemental level, expressing your feeling without judgment is an important factor when it comes to grief work. At this point the notions of anthropomorphism can be brought in as humans are able to relate and share their feelings of despair with another animal as we feel they can relate to these emotions, which in turn provides us with comfort.

"I think he understood cos he got along with everyone. It had been the three of them and then suddenly he was alone. So he did spend time, he used to go lie by the graves and um, and sort of visit every now and then. But he was a lot of comfort." (Participant 7).

The above statement illustrates the concept of anthropomorphism and projection which was discussed under the intensity of the bond section. The process of projection in participant seven's case indicates the anthropomorphic thought process, in essence participant 7 was justifying his feelings of bereavement by projecting them onto his other family pet thus allowing himself to be comforted as

well as to comfort his pet. It can be argued that the 'buffer effect' concept along with anthropomorphic thought allows individuals to justify their need for comfort as well as their emotional reaction to the loss of a pet. The need to justify ones emotional reaction to the loss of a pet is directly linked to societal views surrounding the insignificance of pet loss and pets as a whole in people's lives.

When a pet is ill or dying we rely on our veterinary practitioner for support, not necessarily emotional support but psychological support. Confirming that our decision to euthanize our pet is our only option or the right option and in the best interest of our pets. However not all veterinarians have mastered empathy which can in turn increase the intensity of grief for a pet owner.

4.2.3. VETERINARY EXPERIENCES

When pet owners make the final decision to euthanize their pet it is important for the veterinarian and veterinary staff to be supportive and non-judgmental. A doctor would not say 'you didn't take good care of you mother' they would be supportive and show that you had done all you could for you loved one. This type of comfort is important, it is authoritative comfort. Authoritative comfort is where someone who has the knowledge and skills, like a veterinarian, supports your decisions without criticism and provides you with all the information that you may require, such as what to expect during the euthanasia process. Seven of the twelve participants were able to comment on their veterinary experiences or those of their parents. It is important to note that first hand experiences are more reliable as details may be lost or forgotten by the secondary story teller.

Veterinary experiences can also contribute to the intensity and duration of the grief period for several reasons (Hetts, 1990; Stewart, 1999). Euthanizing a pet is emotionally and psychologically taxing, therefore one expects no surprises during the procedure. Veterinary staff should not only be supportive of your decision but it is their duty to inform you about the procedure and what can go wrong. Stern and Cropper (1998) note that it is common for pet owners to only remember their pet's euthanasia, particularly in cases where the individual had not been fully informed of negative reaction to the drug. Such instances are referred to as the last memory retraumatization concept in the analysis. As in the case of participant 6 and her experience with Missy.

Three of the seven participants had negative experiences with veterinary staff, however participant 6 described her experiences as predominantly positive. It is however, in the opinion of the researcher that participant 6 had a negative experience due to her narrative which describes how Mischief had a negative reaction to the euthanasia which she was not prepared for.

"Ja, to me, uh, uh, the beginning part I actually don't remember to well, but they were very, very, very good. They made me feel at ease, they, I remember the doctor, he is a doctor right? The vet, the

vet, um, he did explain what's going to happen and everything and um, the assistant also, she was scratching him, her sorry and um, she was asking us about her and what is her personality and asking, just trying to keep our minds off the process and um, ja, no they explained it very well and it did put my mind at ease although it didn't make it easier. The, um, their whole aura about them it was, it was unbelievable...so that I'm very pleased about but just the actual process of seeing her, I didn't know if it was normal when they injected her or whatever they did and then she, this is what keeps sticking in my mind, is the bile that came up and she like did this whole reaction and that's what I didn't want to see happen to jack and that was really hard to see and I, I asked my Mom (tears) as it was happening if its ok and what freaked me out is when she was lying there and it had happened and it just took a long time for the euthanasia to work cos her system was so clogged up, but it was just, it was just so I don't know full of whatever it was."

The above statement indicates that the veterinary staff were very supportive and sympathetic to participant six's situation, however they did not prepare her for Mischief negative reaction to the medication nor did they disclose the ins and outs of the procedure. Participant 6 may not have been so shocked and traumatized from this experience, had they done so. As previously noted it is this last image of Mischief that sticks with participant 6 causing LMRC. If participant 6 had been fully informed of the possible negative reactions she may have been in a better psychological and emotional state to deal with Mischief's difficult passing (Stern & Cropper, 1998). Such information may have prevented the development of LMRC (Stern & Cropper, 1998).

Participant 4 and 11 had negative veterinary experiences and thus it can be argued that these experiences exacerbated their grief. While there is no way to measure or confirm this notion the potentiality of exacerbation can be inferred from the participant's narratives. Participant 4 was not present when Asha was euthanized, however the participant described the experience her parents had. In this case a secondary veterinarian was sought due to the experience with the first veterinarian.

"Well she had well last year she, star, she started having some trouble with walking and um, ja, so we took her to the vet and first they accused us of hi, hitting her and like causing her back problems. Um, so like animal abuse, so we were really shocked. So we left and went to a different vet and they said she had arthritis in her back and her back legs so she had problems walking around."

After such an accusation a second veterinarian was sought who handled the situation more delicately.

"The vet that they went to, they said was really nice. Um, and they like, my dad was really worried cos the vet didn't suggest putting her down, and he was worried that if he asked about it they'd like be like "wow, why are you giving up on her" but he asked and they were like, no it's your decision

and he explained the whole process and everything. So I think like that was like nice for them, you know that the vet staff were helping them and knew what was going on and everything.”

The accusations made by the first veterinarian may have exacerbated participant four's parent's grief as well as her own once she was privy to that information. Furthermore such accusations may have ignited high levels of anxiety that should not be associated with pet loss. The above statement indicates that participant four's father was anxious about his decision to euthanize Asha, however, the veterinary staff made sure that he felt comfortable with his decision by supporting it. It is important to note that in some cases such accusations may prevent pet owners from seeking veterinary help which will only exacerbate their grief and their pets suffering, that is why the support of a veterinarian is important in the euthanasia process.

Participant 11, like participant 4 was not present when Ozzy was euthanized however, the participant's parents conveyed their veterinary experience to participant 11. According to participant 11 the experience was unpleasant and to a certain extent exacerbated her parent's grief. It can be argued that participant eleven's grief was also affected through secondary exposure to the experience.

“she actually had quite a bad experience with that because the vet was, what they do when they put the dogs down is that they give them sort of a sedative first so they just sleepy and then while they were doing that he was actually sort of analysing Oscar, cos I mean he had one or two growths and whatever but by the time we picked it up he was like 13. My Mom, we actually thought he was going to have to be put down like 4 years before he actually did but he always seemed to bounce back. Um, so we never really had it looked at, you know, you know we were sort of like he is 14 there is no point putting this dog through all this extensive surgery. Um, so he actually started getting very critical and it just made my Mom more upset while we were, while she was trying to put him down.”

The above statement clearly illustrates why participant 11 and her families grief may have been exacerbated by their veterinary experience. As previously noted pet owners already feel that they have let their pets down when they decide to euthanize and therefore being told as much by a veterinarian only increases levels of grief, anxiety and guilt. Here it should be noted that any animal over 10 years old going in for surgery is at risk of dying on the table due to their age. This principle applies to elderly human beings as well depending on their health and the deterioration of their aging bodies. Therefore the decision made by participant elevens family is justified and they should not have been criticized. According to participant 11 when Ozzy appeared to be suffering they made the decision to euthanize him.

Participant 2, 8, 10, and 13 had positive veterinary experiences in which the veterinary staff were informative and supportive of their decision. These positive experiences may not reduce the

participant's grief but they ensure that no further pain or anguish is experienced during the euthanasia process. Positive veterinary experiences make the euthanasia process psychologically easier for the pet owner as their fears are eased and their decision is supported by a knowledgeable professional.

"We'd, we had known the veterinarian since Beatie had arrived, we had spoken to him ahead of time, um I mean because we had obviously been preparing for it for quite a while. So we knew about what the process involved, um we also knew what our options were after she had been put down. Um the veterinarian is not exactly the hand holding type, I, I mean he is a really nice man and he is solid, dependable, he is honest, he's practical. But often you know you can see him tilting his head looking at you thinking, "Ok, I'm not sure what to do here". Um, practically we got all the information we needed, Um I don't think you can ever prepare yourself emotionally for what you know is going to happen. Um and there is the sort of thing where time will heal all wounds, if it's true but (inaudible) you will now find days where, you will think of her less often than we used to, but I don't think a day goes past when we don't..." (Participant 2).

"The Nurse was extremely supportive. Um, ja she didn't really, I think she understood that I, this was obviously not the first time for me and that I was I had arrived at this conclusion and it wasn't a lightly done thing. So, I don't think she probably felt the need to, to really explain in great detail what was going to happen. Um, but she was supportive and she was also sympathetic, yeah, to the situation and supportive over my decision as well which I was grateful for." (Participant 10).

"I did find that having somebody who knew her well do it and also do it here was, was better than the previous time when my husband had taken the two to the vet in Cape Town...I think we blessed here to have that you know intimate and nice relationship with your vets. I think it's, its, makes a huge difference." (Participant 13).

The above statements indicate that having a prior relationship with the veterinarian may make the euthanasia process easier for the pet owner. It can be argued that this is related to the veterinarian's knowledge and relationship with the pet that developed over several years. This knowledge may ease the pet owner's anxiety as they know the veterinarian will take care of their pet and support their decision. Support from the veterinary staff makes the experience easier for the pet owner as indicated by participant four's family experience with the second veterinarian consulted. Participant 8 made no indication of a prior relationship with the veterinarian that attended to Lilly-Bell. However it was noted that the veterinarian took good care of Lilly-Bell and notified participant 8 of all the available options as well as providing estimated statistics of survival for Lilly-Bell in the scenario's presented. Furthermore it is interesting to note that participant 8 received a condolence card from the veterinarian a week or so after Lilly-Bell had passed away. The card contained the veterinarians own experience

of pet loss as well as a note that Lilly-Bell would not be forgotten. Unfortunately the participant did not have a copy of the card at the time of the interview.

“I asked the vet, I said ‘what are the chances if we take her through to PE’ and she said there is always a chance but she would probably say you’ve got a 1% chance of her making it and she probably won’t be able to walk and um, ja, it, it was just really hard. We had, my husband actually got into the little cage with her, he was just lying there and um ja, it was, it was hard...I must say she was absolutely amazing and um, she sent me, about probably a week later, she sent me a letter to say you know ‘how are we doing and um sort of her experience of having lost a pet’ so she was really amazing.”

It can be argued that a positive Veterinary experience in which the individual has been psychologically prepared for negative incidents spares the individual from the LMRC. This is important as according to several Authors most pet owners want to be with their pets during the euthanasia (Beck & Catcher, 1996; Hetts, 1990; Lagoni et al., 1994; Robinson, 2005; Sife, 2005). The findings indicate that only a few participants were with their pets during the euthanasia, however, it can be argued that that the above statement is accurate as several of the participants were not present when their pets passed away.

The above statements illustrate how positive and supportive veterinary experiences can help pet owners come to terms with their loss. It can be argued that positive veterinary experiences do not decrease the intensity of grief, however, they can positively influence the duration of the grieving period. Positive veterinary experiences are important when pet owners euthanize their beloved pet. Support from the veterinary staff provides comfort to the pet owner and makes the transition easier. While such experiences do not reduce the pet owner’s grief but rather aid in the acceptance of their decision to euthanize their pet. Negative experiences tend to exacerbate the owner’s grief and extend their grieving process as they become plagued with guilt and regret. The experiences of participant 4 and eleven’s families clearly illustrates the effects of negative experiences and the development of anxiety and guilt. As previously noted it is important for pet owners to be aware of the burial options available to them after their pet has passed on. The significance of burial rituals varies from pet owner to pet owner as each has different beliefs surrounding the souls of their pets and the importance of being buried close to home. In the following section these factors will be discussed.

4.2.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BURIAL RITUALS

In the western world burial rituals signify the importance of the individual that passed away. Grave stones indicate who they were, what role they occupied within a familial system and how long they

lived. For those that prefer cremation, memorial blocks are set up displaying the same information as a grave stone would. Such displays are not only our way of remembering someone and honouring them in death but these sites give people a place to visit their loved one even though their physical being is no longer there. Burial rituals, it can be argued are conducted to keep the spirit of the deceased alive for those they left behind. Over the last century there has been a rise in pet cemeteries across the globe as more people begin to view their pets as family members (Field et al., 2009). However for some burying a pet has no meaning as they believe the essence that was their pet, is gone. In both cases pet owners tend to keep their pets belonging as something to remember them by which in a sense links in with the principles surrounding the significance of burial rituals.

Ten of the twelve participants were able to comment on how they felt about burial rituals and if they had in fact utilized any of the available burial options for pets. Four of the ten participants noted they had not buried or cremated their pets. It was indicated directly or indirectly that burial or cremation of their pet did not play a significant part in how their pet would be remembered or mourned. The 10 participants were asked to comment on whether the veterinary staff had informed them of the various burial options available to them. The majority of which indicated that they had been informed of the various options.

“I think she did say do you want anything special done or something like that, but that, even with people I don’t hold great store by what happens after, the thing that is the person or the dog is gone, it’s gone so the rest is just stuff, you know. It’s not important to me, what happens after that... The Rexness of Rex has gone so you know little pots or plots you know whatever it’s not, yeah.” (Participant 10).

“The vet asked like do you guys want to take the body and bury him or leave him. Then I didn’t have anywhere to bury him, so then I thought no, we will just leave him. I, I still think sometimes that maybe I should have took him, taken him and buried him somewhere.” (Participant 5).

Participant 4 and 11, as noted previously, were not present when their pets passed away and were therefore not able to provide first hand experiences or insight into the reasoning for their pet’s ashes not being collected from the veterinary practice after cremation. However it can be argued based on their narratives and the treatment of their pet that the pet’s ashes were not a significant part of the remembrance and mourning processes for the participants and their families. In such instances photos and memories would be more significant to the family as they hold more meaning in relation to their relationships with Asha and Ozzy.

“I don’t know what actually happened to her, I assume they left her at the vet and then I don’t know what happened to her there.” (Participant 4).

“They had him cremated but we didn’t get the ashes back.” (Participant 11).

Participant 2, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13 believed that through burying their pets they gained closure as well as the opportunity to keep their pets close to home. The majority of this cluster buried their pets at home or close by so that they were able to visit their pet’s grave. Participant 6 described the burial of both Jack and Missy noting that;

“We decided to bury our dogs and Missy to, to keep them close and everything.”

In relation to Jack’s burial participant 6 stated that;

“Seeing Jack coming back from the vet, it was like he was still there. Um, my Dad had dug a nice deep hole for him and we laid him in covered him with some leaves and flowers it was the pain that everyone felt (Crying more intensely). It really is, it’s like taking a limb off you, you don’t feel the same afterwards.”

The above statement links in with the intensity of grief as participant 6 noted that after the passing of her pets *“you don’t feel the same afterwards”*. This statement while not directly stated by all the participants was evident throughout their narratives.

“When you think of home you think of the animals (inaudible) um He was very much family, and it’s, it’s just kind of to the point where home is almost just not the same, I don’t know how to describe it further” (participant 3).

“Knowing that we were going to have to physically put her down, um and then knowing that we wouldn’t have her at home when we came home. I think that for us was the real cos you so used to seeing her little face and um. ja, so, so a great deal of anxiety, a great deal of fear I suppose, knowing what to expect and I mean it’s been over a year and we’re still, like we have her kennel, we have her toys, we haven’t replaced her, cos I don’t think we can, in time we may get another dog, but I don’t think it will ever be Beatie.” (Participant 2).

The above statements are just two examples from the participant’s narratives illustrating how participants did not feel the same after their pet had passed on. As previously stated burial rituals serve to bring closure to pet owners and give them the opportunity to say goodbye to their beloved pets. Thus participant 6 and her family felt that it was necessary to bury Missy when her sibling arrived home later that day. The family waited so that the other member of the family could say her goodbyes.

“But the fact that we kept Missy, which seems really creepy but it was just so my sister could say good-bye and she could at least be part of that.”

This statement indicates how important burial rituals can be within the familial system. It can be argued that without this closure the participants familial system may have been disrupted as one of them would have been absent when Missy was laid to rest. This could cause friction within the family. Often people place roses or personal objects on the coffin of a family member or loved one when they are laid to rest, this ritual is a common practice among pet owners as well (Field et al., 2009). Several of the participants indicated that placing personal items with their pet would make their pet more comfortable or happier in the afterlife. It can be argued that this ritual serves as a form of comfort for the pet owner as it makes them feel contented that their pet is in a better place.

“When we did bury her, we did, I, I threw a ball in just as well. And we planted a tree over her grave which was a beach tree, which I liked the sort of irony of that. And then one of the neighbours who used to walk her and also really loved her put a kite in the tree.” (Participant 7).

A grave site serves as a reference point for the pet owner as they have the opportunity to visit their pets and pay their respects. Here it could be argued that the grave site serves as an emotional surrogate for the pet owners. In other words the pet owner continues the bond with their pet through the visitation of the grave site. This visitation then has the potential to ease the pet owner’s grief as the bond is continued rather than severed.

“I suppose you don’t really think about it too much and then when you do it does still hit you. Um, I, I do miss her but when, when I was still in Cape Town I did used to go and visit her grave every now and then and just sort of say hi and think about her for a while and then leave. Um, but it’s not really something that comes out unless you actively talking about it.” (Participant 7).

“We later buried her in the bot gardens.” (Participant 12).

“P took her and he buried her...my daughter came home in April and then we went to the, where P had her buried. And put some flowers. And we were all fine you know we were fine about it.” (Participant 13).

Participant 2 and her family chose to cremate Beatie and decided to “hold onto her” as they were not ready to part with her. Beatie had been such a big part of participant two’s life and had been there for her through several transitional phases in her life.

“Once Beatie came back from the crematorium, we got like this really ridiculous little zip lock back with about, and you know you sort of think really tubby, she was not big boned, she was actually fat,

quite a fat little dog, um, fits into this teeny- tiny zip-lock, and you know that it is just a token amount that you get cos you will never get the whole of the person or animals that you cremated, um and then they put her in this little, what looks like a little sandwich, cardboard sandwich box, with a little handle with a certificate saying, you know that was your Beatie and you sort of, we had her in the car its seems strange because Beatie loved to be in the car. So Beatie drove around with us for a few months after that and we thought ok, we actually gonna have to do something we can't just live with Beatie in the car um and we used to go down to (place name) quite a bit with her and she used to frolic in the lagoon so we (teary) basically put her there."

The above statement indicates that while participant 2 worked through her grief she did not have the heart to let Beatie go, however, once some time had passed she laid Beatie to rest at her favourite place. The fact that participant 2 felt that it was time to lay Beatie to rest does not indicate that she had finished grieving but rather indicates that participant 2 had come to terms with Beatie's death and felt that it was time to let her go. It is important to emphasize at this point that participant 2 was still in mourning to a certain degree at the time of the interview.

It is evident that for some of the participants burial rituals are necessary for closure and to maintain a continuing bond with their pet in the afterlife. Furthermore the grave site offers comfort to the pet owner as their pet remains close to home. However for some of the participants what happens to their pets remains is unimportant as the essence of their pet is no longer there and therefore they see no point in burying and 'empty shell'. Whether pet owners feel burial rituals are necessary or not the point of the matter is that the participant found their own way to remember and honour the life of their pets, many holding onto their pet's personal items to remind them of their pet in the years to come.

"I mean I've still got her little, um, she had a little collar that I took that was engraved and I've still got it in my jewellery case." (Participant 12).

An interesting finding was that the majority of the participants attempted to maintain their bond with their deceased pets to varying degrees. This was achieved by holding on to the pet's belongings and memorialising their pets. This finding is consistent with those of Packman et al. (2011) as they reported that the ongoing attachment between owners and the deceased pet can be maintained in several ways such as through searching behaviour, memories, and keeping memorabilia. Illusionary phenomenon can also occur.

"I've still got her little, um, she had a little collar that I took that was engraved and I've still got it in my jewellery case." (Participant 8).

Closure is a key aspect in the healing process as it enables the acceptance of the loss more easily. Closure can be grouped under primary and secondary closure. Primary closure in this case refers to instances in which pet owners are present when their pet is euthanized. While secondary closure stems from burial rituals. According to Packman et al. (2011) and Tzivian et al. (2014) both forms of closure are important for pet owners to move on after their loss. It can be argued that the duration of the grieving period can be negatively influenced for pet owners that only experience secondary closure. Furthermore when neither form of closure is attained, as in the case of participant 4, both the intensity and duration of grief are negatively influenced. This is clearly illustrated in the following statement.

“Um like she wouldn’t understand why I wasn’t there. Um it’s just going to be like really weird when I go home again she won’t be there, cos it doesn’t really feel like she is gone, but ja just wish like, I just wanted to be there so she would know that I care cos like I can’t really explain to her like I’m at Varsity or whatever, so, ja it was just like difficult... I don’t know what actually happened to her, I assume they left her at the vet and then I don’t know what happened to her there”

Stephen and Hill (1996) indicate that the majority of pet owners prefer to bury their pets at home, as opposed to cremation. It could be argue that this relates to the fact that there is no indication of formal pet cemeteries in South Africa, whereas the literature clearly notes over 600 pet cemeteries in America and Japan (Brandes, 2009; Stephens & Hill, 1996). As such the findings do not corroborate or debase Stephen and Hill’s (1996) findings but rather the present findings are neutral as home burials appear just as common as cremation. Therefore it is important for future studies to look into the concept of pet cemeteries in the South African context and weather they would be utilized.

The following section focuses on how societal views surrounding pet loss and the ensuing repression of grief may influence an individual’s grieving process and potentially lead to disenfranchised grief. It should be noted however that the majority of participants had strong support systems and were therefore not affected by societal views regarding pet loss.

4.3. REPRESSED GRIEF VS. STRONG SOCIAL SUPPORT

In the following section the concept of repressed grief versus non-repressed grief is discussed in relation to the degree of social support received by the participants from family and friends after the loss of their pet. The influence of societal views surrounding pet loss will also be discussed in relation to the impact such views have on the intensity of grief felt by the pet owners and how this has the potential to increase the length of the grieving period.

The last decade has seen a shift in societal views surrounding pet ownership and pet loss. However the majority still hold that pets are just animals and one should not mourn for a lower being (Walsh, 2009). Mourning for a pet is viewed as an inappropriate emotional response (Walsh, 2009). It is interesting to note that as the subject of pet loss has become more widely recognised in academic circles and within the general public pet owners are paying less attention to social views and more attention to dealing with the loss of their pet. In other words the notion that pet loss is on the same level as human loss is becoming more widely accepted. However the progression is slow and there are several social indicators that reveal the degree to which societal views have permeated the pet owner communities, especially in relation to pet loss.

The present study indicates that the majority of the participants received a sufficient amount of social support after the loss of their pet. Therefore there were only a few cases in which the notion of repressed grief could be applied. This result contradicts those of the pilot study that was conducted in 2014. A strong social support system forms the foundation of an individual's ability to cope with loss, particularly when that support system is built up from childhood. As previously noted the way in which parents handle the death of a loved one will influence the way in which the child will deal with death as an adolescent and adult (Packman et al., 2011; Walsh, 2009).

“I think if you have support and people around you, like I have a husband, I think it does make a difference. Cos my husband and I could talk about it you know.” (Participant 13).

The above statement indicates the importance of having someone to talk to about loss and the significance of that individual being a close relation. The key to working through loss is to talk about your loss, this provides an outlet for the individual's psychological and emotional well-being. Talking through one's grief prevents the repression of such grief which in turn prevents the development of complicated or disenfranchised grief, both of which can have adverse effects on the individual's psychological and emotional well-being. The repression of grief according to Freud can lead to unprovoked emotional outbursts (Frosh, 2012). However none of the participants noted such outbursts.

“We definitely did speak about Lizzy a lot, um we didn't um, sort of put the photographs away or anything like that. We actually really, like for a long time, um laughed and you know took out the photos. Especially when my daughter is home you know.” (Participant 13).

According to participant 6 her family and friends were very supportive after the loss of Missy and Jack. Participant 6 further indicated that in her opinion people don't talk about loss as they want to forget it happened and that by talking about loss you keep the spirit of that being alive. This can be linked in with the continuation of the bond in the afterlife that was discussed in the previous section.

“A lot of people don’t talk about pets and family members that have passed on cos they kinda want to forget about it but, I don’t just forget you know. I’m gonna, I’m gonna talk about them and remember all the great things that they did and um. So although it is easier now um, its, it’s never going to be the same without them, it really won’t. They formed such a big part of our lives that you can never just move on and pretend that everything, everything is normal. So it is time, time does heal but it doesn’t heal it completely.”

“So, I was lucky that my parents and my sister and my whole family and friends, they all understood so that, that helps a lot cos talking to someone who just laughs it off ‘like its fine it’s just a pet’ that’s, joo I wouldn’t be able to deal with that.”

However it is interesting to note that even though participant 6 had a strong social support system there were still signs of repressed grief.

“I was, I just, I, I think my Mom’s pain was the worst to see because she, she expressed her emotions more outwardly, she would cry as soon as she would start speaking about him and stuff and I, I tried to be the strong one almost for her. So, I didn’t really cry as such (teary), obviously when I was alone it was different.”

“Ja, definitely. My friends I only told my, well I mean I only felt it was needed to tell my very close group of friends. There is four of us. I didn’t think the others, they don’t really have pets and stuff. But my four friends, they’ve also, I have known them my whole life so they know who Jack is, they know who Missy is. Um, so when I let them know that they weren’t well, they would immediately message me. They were phoning me and making sure I was ok and everything. So they were, my family obviously as well, very easy to talk to.”

The first statement clearly indicates self-repression as participant 6 felt that she needed to repress her grief and be strong in order to support her mother during that time. However when her mother was not present participant 6 grieved alone. The repression of such emotions no matter the quantity can have adverse effects on the participants grieving process, both exacerbating and extending it to a certain degree. It can be argued, in relation to Bowlby’s (1979) attachment theory that participant 6 did not receive the desired amount of comfort from her primary care giver at a time of need and while this deprivation was self-inflicted it could debilitate participant six’s grieving process with future losses, resulting in an extended grieving period (Field et al., 2009). Comfort from a primary care giver is more effective than comfort from secondary sources such as friends or relatives.

The second statement indicates the presence of negative social views surround pet loss as participant 6 was not the only participant to indicate that those friends that were pet owners were more understanding than those that had never had or lost a pet before. Non pet owners were unsympathetic toward her especially as more time elapsed since the pets passing. However it should be noted that participant 6 did not mention a personal experience of intolerance but rather this appeared to be an assumption on her part based on other people's experiences. Generalising such an assumption renders these comments unreliable as there is no clear evidence to back this claim up in this case.

“It was easier to talk to them cos they are genuinely concerned and they are animal lovers as well which does help a lot and I didn't feel like I should um, like keep it back from them either. I cried in front of them, I was quite comfortable with doing that. Um, and they also, they made it easier. The fact that they understood, they've also been through it with their pets and everything I think that makes a big difference. They can relate to it.”

Participant 8 also described how only a few close friends helped her through her grief as they could relate to her situation, having had or lost pets within their lifetime.

“I don't know if some people probably thought that, I didn't, I think I've got quite a close relationship with three or four people here, um, they also, they also very close to their pets, so I think that helped me quite a bit. Um, and um, ja, I, I didn't feel like it was, that they were not supportive.”

It should be noted that participant 8 described having a strong social support system which included both friends and family. Furthermore participant 8 showed no signs of self-repression or repression of any type, indicating that the number of people in one's support system is not important but rather the degree of support received from those individuals.

“I think so, I think um, because she was such a part of my family and friends all knew, I mean we travelled with her everywhere. If we went to Pretoria she went with, if we went to the farm, she went with. So I mean she had a, we, you know the aeroplane, the little cage, she was really part of the family and um ja, I think they acknowledged it, my family all stays in Pretoria so I think they cried just as much as what I did, so she was really just a special dog.” (Participant 8).

“Um, some friends, some not. Strangely enough probably more the ones that have animals, um like Sam my old digs mate um, who had Dams cos we used to joke about how Khalee and Dams would be friends and blah, blah, blah. They would have dated, you know we were just being silly. Um, and how that would have happened and so when Khalee died I told her and she was practically in tears with me.” (Participant 12).

The above statement by participant 8 emphasizes the point that there are only a select few that one can relate to during the experience of pet loss. Participant 12 illustrates the importance of having someone to relate to during a grieving period through anthropomorphic thought processes.

“Basically her dogs and especially now, with us, the three of us, me my brother and my sister, we’ve all left home and so she has empty nest syndrome and the dogs are really her babies and so Khalee was my baby and she has her babies so I think she kind of, at least I felt I could definitely ball my eyes out and she would get it completely.”

“My roommate was at home when my Mom was busy skyping me, um, later that day. Um she is very understanding as well cos she lost one of her dogs at the beginning of last year. Um, and ja, she, we both animal lovers so we’ve always had a good relationship about of that. And my step Mom studies animal behaviour, she actually runs a whole lot of groups that work with autistic children and she also phoned me later that day and she’s really dog crazy, so I’ve got it from all sides of the family.” (Participant 11).

The above statement by participant 11 further indicates that there is a limited group of people to turn to when experiencing pet loss. However participant 10 and 5 noted that although their loved ones did not understand their grief, due to not having pets or viewing their pets as animals and nothing more, they still received support from these individuals. This support although not from an understanding perspective helped the participants deal with their grief.

“I don’t think Brian because of his own experience understands the depth of how, how, how I miss them. I think he tries to but I don’t think he can because he hasn’t felt that way about an animal since he was a kiddie and maybe he thinks that’s a kiddie feeling of loss about animals but he is sympathetic to me and, and he comforts me.” (Participant 10).

“Ja, I don’t think they would really understand that, that much. Um, my parents have been very sup, supportive though, even though they didn’t really, cos for them dogs, they would just leave them outside and that was it. It was just there to guard the house. We never had dogs living with us inside the house but I like that. Um, ja, so they wouldn’t understand but they try to and they did send me messages. Telling me no, you will be fine. Just like, just ja he was a joy for a while um, but then now he is gone, just forget about it you will be fine. Just give it some time.” (Participant 5).

Participant 10 indicated that there were a few friends that she could turn to as well, however participant 5 noted that only her family and boyfriend were there for her during that time. It should be noted that at the time of the interview participant 5 indicated that she had worked through her grief and moved on after two weeks of grieving, however, it can be argued that the following statement

indicates self-repression and therefore it can be said that participant 5 has not completely dealt with her loss. This notion can, to an extent be corroborated by the second statement below as participant five's fears for her new pet and the over protective nature of their relationship reflects fears of history repeating itself. This links in with unresolved grief as well as the LMRC. A similar comment was made in the previous section in relation to participant 12 and her fears for her new pet Beans. It is interesting that participant 5 and 12 had similar feelings as both their pets passed away under tragic circumstances.

“For me it took like maybe two weeks to really get over it and try and forget about it because the only thing I was thinking when, when I thought of him was how he was bloated and like the blood, it was really bad. So, even after a week I was still taking rescue every day, I couldn't sleep, I was just crying once in a while. It was ja, it wasn't nice. But now, ja, I'm over it I suppose.”

“Because now we are more protective of her. We don't want anything to happen to her. Ja, but it's a girl so she like to be indoors more as well.”

According to participant 3 he had a strong social support system;

“Probably more Vic's and Mom cos they'll very freely talk to us about it or we will talk to them about it and have a discussion. Uh Friends I could, uh the friends I have now have gotten me through some pretty serious stuff, so I'm sure they would be more than happy to talk it out. Which would be nice, but at the moment I feel that it is unnecessary.”

However as previously noted participant 3 was not present when Chester passed away and at the time of the interview had not been home yet. Furthermore participant 3 noted that Chester's passing had not sunk in yet due to the fact that he had not been home since Chester's passing. Therefore it can be argued that due to the 'aftershock effect' participant 3 has repressed his grief. In other words as the death of Chester is not yet real for participant 3 he has not grieved properly and thus his grief has been repressed to a certain extent. Therefore it can be said that the repression of his grief will lead to an extended grieving period which will be exacerbated by the 'aftershock effect' and while participant 3 has a strong social support system the repression period will influence the effect of the social support received.

“It's, its, maybe hasn't been processed as yet, it hasn't been real yet, but also I don't want it to, type of thing. I got stuff that I have to do I will have to deal with it at some time.”

In relation to the 'aftershock effect' like participant 3, participant 4 will have a similar experience due to her absence at the time of Asha's passing. However participant 4 indicated that she did not have a strong support system both at home and at university.

“Not really, like maybe my Mom but also like it has been a while, it’s been like a month so, I think if I, I know if I went to my Mom and I was like really upset, she’d be like I’m sorry and like whatever. But I think like friends and stuff, um, if I was still upset now I think they would think it was a bit weird, like the loss of a cat shouldn’t really impact you that much like however or a month later or so...I’m sure I could tell them that I miss her and they would be like shame, shame but I couldn’t really sit there and have a crying session and they would be completely ok with it I think.”

This statement indicates that participant four’s grief has been repressed while at university and will continue to be repressed when at home as she has no one she feels completely comfortable with to share her grief. The above statements indicate the presence of societal indicators. In other words participant 4 fears social judgement over her grief for Asha and therefore represses her grief to avoid judgement and social ridicule. This frame of mind reflects the impact of societal views surrounding pet loss and the mourning of a pet.

Participant 7, as previously noted, appeared to be holding back his true feelings over the loss of Silky. However he eluded these feelings through the projection of his feelings onto the other family pet.

“I think he understood cos he got along with everyone. It had been the three of them and then suddenly he was alone. So he did spend time, he used to go lie by the graves and um, and sort of visit every now and then.”

Participant 7 was asked if he believed he could speak freely to friends and family about Silky’s passing to which he responded *“Um, probably”*. After further prompting by the researcher it was clear that participant 7 was not willing to speak freely about his emotions surrounding the loss of Silky. The participant’s demeanour further confirmed that the participant was not open to showing any signs of emotion. Participant 7 gave no indication of a strong support system and therefore it could be argued that he felt sharing his emotions was not socially acceptable because of his gender. These notions are common throughout the literature (Cordaro, 2012; Field et al., 2009; Petrich, 2008; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2012). However it can also be said that participant seven’s friends and family did not feel the same way about pets as participant 7 and therefore participant 7 felt compelled to repress his grief so as not to be socially ridiculed or judged. In both instances participant seven’s grief was repressed as a result of social norms and conventions surrounding pet loss and hegemonic masculinity.

Participant 2 made no mention of a support system, however, it can be argued that the participant’s narrative reveals what can be perceived as a support structure as the participant frequently noted several relationships that were woven into the participant and Beatie’s relationship. This may indicate

the presence of a support structure, however, according to the participant it is not in her nature to express her emotions particularly in cases of loss.

“I think after we put her down, it was it was the awareness of the fin, finality of the thing, um and, and my, my approach to dealing with any sort of emotion is usually to divert myself to another activity that entertains me and occupies my time to avoid the issues that I know you know, I should actually be thinking about.”

Further noting, in relation to pet loss support groups, which will be discussed in more detail further on;

“In reality there is no addressing the situation, there is just accepting the situation and then accepting that you have, in my case myself accepting the situation, accepting have feelings and then finding a way to live with those feelings until other feelings replace them.”

The above statement indicates that participant two's grieving period has potentially been extended and exacerbated through the self-repression of her grief as she has no outlet for her grief. Therefore in accordance with Freud's theories surrounding repression the participant's grief will indicate its presence in unrelated ways (Frosh, 2012). For instance it can be argued that the participant's development of a phobia is linked to the repression of her grief. However there is no way to measure the outcome of repression. Furthermore participant 2 did not indicate that the phobia arose after Beatie's death.

Throughout the interviews it became clear that there was a shift in societal views surrounding pet loss and the appropriate grieving period for a pet since the pilot study had been conducted. These views were more positive and supportive, however as noted previously the progression is slow and therefore there were still several indications of the negative influence of societal views surrounding pet loss. This finding goes against Sharkin and Knox's (2003) view that society disregards the significance of the loss of a pet which often leads to increased cases of disenfranchised or complicated grief. While this view is still valid the shift in social views are changing and therefore the face of disenfranchised grief and complicated grief are changing. The findings indicated that only 3 of the 12 participants displayed characteristics of maladaptive coping mechanisms. Participant 4, 7, and 10. The former two were discussed previously.

“I haven't actually, if I think about it, my son knew Bud a bit when he would visit and he has gone overseas and I haven't actually told him. Um, partly, and I didn't, I know the big thing is to put things on Facebook, you know RIP fluffy or whatever and you know I don't want that outpouring of sympathy actually because then I have to explain.” (Participant 10).

It can therefore be argued that there is a significant decrease in cases of disenfranchised or complicated grief as the pilot study indicated that the majority of the participants experienced complicated grief to various degrees whereas the present study indicated the minority had experience complicated grief symptoms. However the difference in sample size should be taken into consideration as there were only 4 participants in the pilot study versus the 12 participants in the present study. Therefore this aspect of the discussion requires further investigation before any concrete statements can be made.

Kaufman and Kaufman (2006) note that when left to fester, bereavement can result in cases of depression, anxiety and social isolation. The findings from the present study indicate that only participant 4 and 7 appear to have experienced such symptoms. This was clear both in their accounts of pet loss as well as their behaviour and demeanour during the interviews. This links in with previously stated arguments regarding the participants lack of support structure and in the case of participant 7, gender related factors. As this has been touched on the examples will not be repeated here.

Regarding social support, the majority of the participants felt that they could talk to their friends or families about their grief as they felt comfortable that their grief would be met with support. As noted previously a minority felt that they could not rely on friends or family for support. Despite the evidence presented by the present study regarding an increase in social support for grieving pet owners, it should be reiterated that for those that lack such support the reality of maladaptive coping mechanisms is a direct result of negative social views surrounding pet loss. Furthermore the lack of support leads to increased periods of grieving for pet owners. According to the literature the participants fears surrounding judgement and ridicule of their bereavement stems from primary and secondary phases of socialization in which children and adolescents are lead to believe that mourning for a pet is socially unacceptable and therefore to mourn over ones pet becomes internalized as a social taboo (Cordaro, 2012; Field et al., 2009; Petrich 2008; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2012).

It is clear that the social views surrounding pet loss have shifted to a more positive reaction as the majority of participants clearly indicated the presence of strong social support systems outside of the relationship with their pet ('safety blanket effect'). However there were a few participants that lacked the social support structure needed to deal with their grief. Furthermore several of these participants enforced self-repression as a means of coping. It is interesting to note that participant 2, 3, 4, and 7 despite the lack of social support and self-repression indicated that they would not utilize pet loss supports groups if available to them at the time of their pet's death. The most common reason being that they did not want to share their feelings with strangers. This notion leads to and is directly linked to the discussion of the impact of social indicators on the grieving period in relation to pet loss.

4.3.1. SOCIAL INDICATORS

Social indicators refer to social norms and conventions surrounding pet loss that have led to the repression of grief and the fear of judgement and social ridicule. Nine of the twelve participants indicated the influence of social indicators on their grieving period. It should be noted that such indicators are unconsciously instilled in us through socialization and significant life events. These indicators dictate how we respond and react to certain events and actions in our everyday lives.

As noted previously, societal views surrounding pet loss, while shifting, still focus on the inappropriateness of mourning for a pet as most people believe ‘it’s just a dog’. As a result of these views many people feel the need to justify their actions and emotions by clearly acknowledging the ridiculousness of it. This is done out of fear of social judgement and ridicule. This is clearly illustrated in the following statements by participant 12;

“I was just balling, and I’m like sorry, trying to apologise cos I thought it was ridiculous being so torn up about this, this cat I hadn’t even had that long.”

“Like I said I apologized profusely to nick balling my eyes out because I thought I was being ridiculous. So that’s why I say some friends yes some friends no.”

“We must have looked ridiculous, god only know what time in the morning with this towel and these two humans that look bedraggled with a spade.”

The above statements indicate the impact of societal views surrounding pet loss as participant 12 felt compelled to apologise for mourning the loss of Khaleesi, her best friend. This kind of behaviour would not been seen if a human life had been lost. Society in essence made participant 12 feel as though mourning for Khaleesi was wrong and that she should be ashamed of mourning for a pet.

“I know it sounds weird that a cat would be like that but she was like my, my best friend. It’s silly but its Beansie now.”

The above statement clearly illustrates that participant 12 feels the need to clarify that she knows the relationship between her and Khaleesi was unnatural and silly. This type of justification stems from the fear of social judgement, which trumps her grief and therefore not only leads to repression to a certain extent but also forces her to devalue her relationship with Khaleesi in public so as to satisfy social norms.

In order to emphasize the impact of social views an example was drawn from participant four’s narrative;

“I was with my friends, um and lots of people I didn’t really know well, so I like went outside and he told me and I was fine, um cos I was expecting it, and I also didn’t want to cry in front of like all these random people.”

“Maybe my Mom but also like it has been a while, it’s been like a month so, I think if I, I know if I went to my Mom and I was like really upset, she’d be like I’m sorry and like whatever. But I think like friends and stuff, um, if I was still upset now I think they would think it was a bit weird, like the loss of a cat shouldn’t really impact you that much like however or a month later or so.”

The second statement indicates a socially instilled time restriction on the appropriate amount of time to mourn for a pet. It is interesting to note that such restrictions are not socially instilled in relation to human loss and mourning. Participant 5 also indicates time restrictions on mourning for Russell, however these restrictions are self-inflicted due to social and familial views surrounding pet loss. While participant five’s family was supportive after Russell passed away they did note that she would get over it. While this may seem to be a normal comment, it would be unacceptable in the first few month after human loss and therefore the same should apply to pet loss.

“For me it took like maybe two weeks to really get over it and try and forget about it because the only thing I was thinking when, when I thought of him was how he was bloated and like the blood, it was really bad. So, even after a week I was still taking rescue every day, I couldn’t sleep, I was just crying once in a while. It was ja, it wasn’t nice. But now, ja, I’m over it I suppose.”

This statement shows that participant 5 placed unrealistic time restrictions on herself, allowing little time too psychologically and emotionally deal with Russell’s death. Therefore it can be argued that the comment *“I’m over it, I suppose”* indicates that in fact participant 5 has not fully dealt with her loss. This hesitation stems from the repression of her grief as well as the fear of social judgement and ridicule.

Participant 6 described her personal views of how society views pet loss. It can be argued that this view stems from her previous experiences with pet loss and the reactions of others. However, the participant made no indication of previous negativity toward her pet loss experiences.

“A lot of people think that it’s, it’s an effort to keep, upkeep animals, you have to feed them, you have to take them for a walk. To us it wasn’t, it wasn’t time away from us it was part of our lives. They fitted into our schedules and everything, so it was I don’t know the role they played, they stole a part of our hearts, they became our brothers, children and everything.”

“A lot of people don’t see pets as, as an entity, a lot of people see it as more of an entity than a, than a family member and they don’t understand the pain that people go through and if you don’t

understand it, it's, you can't talk to them because they will just laugh it off and it won't make anything easier. So, I was lucky that my parents and my sister and my whole family and friends, they all understood so that, that helps a lot cos talking to someone who just laughs it off 'like its fine it's just a pet' that's, joo I wouldn't be able to deal with that."

Participant 8 indirectly acknowledged her awareness of societal views surrounding pet loss. However, such social restrictions have had little impact on her views surrounding pets and pet loss.

"To me pets is, that part of my, my house and I always say if you don't like my dogs then you can't come visit me cos am not going to lock them out co you don't like dogs, then it's your problem."

This statement indicates a significant change in pet owner mentality, being unafraid to mourn for a pet and to make others aware that Pets are more than just an animal. This statement illustrates a common trait among pet owners, locking ones pet away so other people can feel more comfortable in your house. This is like locking up your child because your visitors dislike children and their sticky fingers. The latter is very unlikely to happen as it would be socially unacceptable to lock a child away and yet it seems perfectly normal and is even expected of pet owner to lock their pets away. While this statement is not directly related to the present study it shows the shifting pet owner mentality which is linked to the shift in societal views surrounding pet loss in that as pet owners become more aware of their 'right' to be emotionally attached to their pets, so society begins to understand the significance of the human-nonhuman relationship.

Having said this, the shift is slow and therefore for many pet owners social views dictate how they interpret their relationship with their pets. For instance it is common for pet owners to associate their pets 'love/attachment' for them with food. This was the case with participant 13, who believed that Lizzy was attached to her because participant 13 fed Lizzy.

"She was very protective over me particularly, probably cos I fed her."

Furthermore the fear of social judgement regarding the human-nonhuman relationship stems from the social view that the concept of having a meaningful relationship with an animal is absurd and unacceptable. This applies to mourning for a pet as well. The following statement indicates the impact of such views on pet owners mourning process.

"I'm gonna try to be liberated and retrieve my pouch of stuff and then I'm going to pretend that there was actually something else in there that I wanted to show you."

The context of this statement was as follows; participant two became emotional during her narrative of Beatie and went to get a pouch of tissues from her bag. The justification of her actions and the *'pretend'* statement indicates the fear of social judgement as well as a socially tainted view of the unacceptability of public mourning over a pet. Here it should be noted that as the interview continued participant 2 became more comfortable noting that the researchers own experience of pet loss had made her feel more open to sharing her feelings surrounding Beatie and her passing.

Participant 10 illustrated the new age fears of social judgement. In other words as the social views surrounding pet loss are shifting there are now other situations that pet owners are faced with. For instance as previously noted, participant 10 euthanized Rex due to a behavioural issue that was getting out of hand. Participant 10 now fears social judgement regarding her decision as society would judge her based on the fact that Rex was a healthy dog and therefore there was no reason to euthanize him.

"I know the big thing is to put things on Facebook, you know RIP fluffy or whatever and you know I don't want that outpouring of sympathy actually"

It can be argued that the above statement regarding sympathy refers to questions of why he had to be put down if he was healthy or why not re-home him. If the participant posted about Rex, such questions might be asked and the participant did not want to have to explain her decision to those that did not know the full story nor did she want to expose herself to that sort of social judgement, especially while she was grieving for Rex.

The shifting social views surrounding pet loss is slowly progressive. Participant 5 received support from her family after Russell's death however as noted, her family did not view pets as family members and therefore they tended to down play her grief which lead to self-repression. This is clearly illustrated in the following statement;

"So they wouldn't understand but they try to and they did send me messages. Telling me no, you will be fine. Just like, just ja he was a joy for a while um, but then now he is gone, just forget about it you will be fine. Just give it some time."

The Hypotheses put forward by Brown et al. (1996) are relevant to the present study as well as in contemporary society with the increase in pet ownership over the last decade. Brown et al. (1996) hypothesised, after conducting a study on 55 adolescents in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia, that 1) "Adolescents who are highly bonded to a pet experience more intense grief when it dies than do those less bonded"; 2) "degree of bonding when measured by self-disclosure is greater for girls than for boys"; 3) "intensity of bereavement is greater for girls than for boys" (p.505). The ratio of male to female participants was relatively equal thus providing fairly accurate findings. It should be

noted that the aim of the study was to determine how adolescents would respond to the loss of a pet with whom they held a close attachment with (Brown et al., 1996). The present study found that the findings corroborated the first two hypotheses by Brown et al. (1996). The present study reinforces the notion that the greater the bond between pet and owner the greater the intensity of grief. However it should be noted that the present study did not interview participants with a weak attachment to their pets. It can be argued, however, that through some of the participants accounts these hypotheses are accurate as several of the participants noted that friends that were not pet owners or had young pets showed little understanding and sympathy for the participants loss.

“I’m sure I could tell them that I miss her and they would be like shame, shame but I couldn’t really sit there and have a crying session” (Participant 4).

“A lot of friends would just be like oh are you ok...a lot of people see it as more of an entity than a, than a family member and they don’t understand the pain that people go through and if you don’t understand it, it’s, you can’t talk to them because they will just laugh it off and it doesn’t make anything easier” (Participant 6).

In relation to the second hypothesis there was no direct evidence presented by the participants, it is only the impression of the researcher that can back up this hypothesis. The researcher noted that the demeanour of 2 of the 3 male participants indicated a reluctance to show their true feelings regarding the loss of their pet. This can be attributed to the notions surrounding hegemonic masculinity as well as the gender of the researcher (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Furthermore the present study did not have an equal ratio of male to female participants and therefore based on these two facts the corroboration of the second hypothesis falls short. Further research is needed to confidently corroborate the second hypothesis. It is interesting to note that participant 3 was very open about his relationship with Chester and did not show signs of reluctance when asked personal details about the depth of their bond. Here it can be argued that this openness indicates the slowly progressive shift in societal views surrounding pet loss and hegemonic masculinity. This would be a good topic for future research.

The focus of the following section revolves around pet loss support groups in which participants were asked to comment on whether they would utilize pet loss support groups or not.

4.4. PET LOSS SUPPORT GROUPS

The following section focuses on how the participants would feel about using pet loss support groups to deal with their loss. Participants were asked if they would use this service and whether they would

prefer a focus group type setting or a social networking group (online). The general consensus indicated that participants would not use pet loss support groups in any form. There were a few participants that noted they may have utilized pet loss support groups when their pet had passed on, however, later noting that they would probably not utilize them. This section links in with social views surrounding pet loss as many participants indicated that the main reason for not utilizing pet loss support groups was that they were uncomfortable sharing their feelings with strangers. This is a clear indication of the impact of societal views on pet owner mentality as even in a group of like-minded individuals pet owners feel restricted and repressed out of fear of social judgement.

Participants 6, and 12 indicated that if the pet loss support group was online and anonymous they may be more inclined to join the group. This would allow the participants to avoid exposure and thus the fear of social judgement.

“I think it depends on where I am at the time, um, because I was home for both of their passing’s it was easy, I had my support structure at home, my friends and family. So, in that case I don’t think I would use it but if something, if I was away from my family and away from the people I could really talk to, I may be able to use something like that but. I think more social media than...I think the fact that I have such a strong support structure I personally wouldn’t use it but I’m sure people who didn’t have those outlets, have friends who would just brush it off or laugh it off or anything, I think that would be a really, a good idea for people to talk to them cos at least those people can understand and relate.” (Participant 6).

“I might have felt a bit silly. Um, even though you know its people like you, you sort of feel, ja it’s a bit silly doing it. I think online if it was, you know how Rhodes confessions works, probably like that cos then you not really throwing yourself out there, being like I’m vulnerable I but it was a cat. Um, so probably if it was sort of an anonymous thing then probably, I probably would’ve poured my heart out. Um, but in terms of actually going and sitting somewhere with a whole other bunch of people and I think it’s also you, you, you feel bad tryna make out like I was the only one that was feeling this way. I mean I think people have, well with pets, with people, with everything, but they experience grief in different ways. And I think it would have been really weird trying to sort of just share that because people are different like that. Um, so JA maybe on a more uh what’s the word, detached, I can’t think of the word, that sort of level yes, in terms of an actual group where you would go and talk, no. Especially that soon afterwards I would’ve cried.” (Participant 12).

It is interesting to note that the participants that appeared to have weak support systems indicated that they would not utilize pet loss support groups. Here it can be argued that such groups may make the participants feel vulnerable and exposed. Opening themselves up to social ridicule or judgement

despite being among like-minded people. Furthermore the participants fear of exposure and vulnerability could be viewed as a form of self-repression as if given the opportunity to work through their grief with others they would opt out.

Participant 8 and 9 appeared to be the only participants that would utilize pet loss support groups.

“I think maybe not a formal group. I will do it on, on, on, on line but I think more because of the time constraints in terms of you know my family and everything cos, I’ve, I’ve got two kids that’s still at school so. I think sort of that that’s the only thing, but I think I would use a support group online.” (Participant 8).

“um, at the moment not, but I think at the time I would have...I think both really, um, I mean actually definitely cos you know the whole thing that I hadn’t seen her for what? 3 or 4 months. So um, but even if I was at home its still, like it, she was basically a part of the family so it’s still quite sad. You know waking up and she’s not there anymore.” (Participant 9).

As noted in the previous section Participant 8 intimated that societal views had little effect on her views surrounding pets and pet loss. Therefore it can be argued that for this reason participant 8 would not feel vulnerable and experience self-repression as she does not appear to be worried about social judgement. This is something all pet owners should work towards to prevent the societal repression of their grief.

“Um, I don’t know if I would join, like I don’t really like telling strangers how I feel and whatever, like I also feel a bit embarrassed to cry in front of them and get emotional, even if they completely understood. I would still feel a bit weird about it. Um, ja, so I just prefer to talk to my friends or something instead of a support group.” (Participant 4).

“Not really. I, I considered myself fairly adjusted to it. I got used to it. I miss her but I’ve accepted what’s happened. Everything is going to die eventually so, might as well accept it. They probably in a fairly decent place if it exists or anything. I’m not entirely religious but I’m sure where ever she is she will be happy.” (Participant 7).

Participant 3 indicated that a one on one pet loss support session would be more appealing to him as the risk of exposure is limited to one person. Participant 3 also indicated that a psychologist would be preferable as psychologists are bound by client confidentiality laws further reducing the risk of exposure and feelings of vulnerability.

“The thing is with a group is that you are not just opening up to another person about how you feel, cos you also opening up to the group. And the thing is the multitude of tiny interactions you have even before the group, you know um, it’s like people could have held the door open for you or finished the

coffee or took two more donuts than they were supposed to, its I don't know, maybe I'm, maybe I'm giving a very elaborate example but, you don't want those people to know that you hurting, so maybe small groups, maybe interchangeable groups yes, I would prefer the one on one in relation...It's just, it's just nice to it's comforting to know you kinda of, the two of you have an obligation to keep what is said inside to yourselves type thing. Um, I feel as, it's I would feel uncomfortable with the entire group. You know this sounds very paranoid but uh sense of power brought out or that's just my feelings."

On the same level Participant 2, 5, 10, 11, and 13 noted that they would not utilize pet loss support groups in any form, however some of the participants noted that they could see how such groups could be beneficial for some people. Furthermore the participants indicated that the reason for not utilizing such groups was that they were not comfortable sharing their story with others but felt that the present research could be the exception due to the aim of the study. Again their reluctance stems from the fear of social judgement and can therefore be linked to self-repression.

"I find that when I am surrounded by people who have similar feelings or who are expressing similar feelings, they tend to amplify the feelings that I have, it's not a practical approach to actually addressing the situation, because in reality there is no addressing the situation, there is just accepting the situation and then accepting that you have, in my case myself accepting the situation, accepting have feelings and then finding a way to live with those feelings until other feelings replace them...I do not like to vocalize, I think, we have the, it was quite interesting when we saw the post on Facebook, because for us it was a case of looking at it and thinking, that it was actually a valid approach to study a thing, but it's a real thing, but we don't give it any real weight. Those that have not had pets will never understand, those that have had pets understand, some choose to be more um collective about it, some choose to feel the void immediately rather than dealing with it, some you actually have to persuade to fill the void, because quite honestly they are just completely unmanageable...yeah, the, the concept, the concept of a rent a crowd, doesn't seem, is not appealing to me." (Participant 2).

"Um, no. I didn't want to, I don't really like speaking to people that much. I think I'm here to speak to you because um, I know the pain of trying to find volunteers." (Participant 5).

"I don't think I would personally, but I can see how it could actually be necessary and very helpful to a lot of people. I think if your life has come maybe to the point where a pet is your main focus and a lot of people's lives come to that, you know, um, single people or whatever, that, the place that that pet holds in their life becomes a really important one and, I mean when I was in that situation, ja, maybe let me put it this way, when I was in that situation, when I lost Sebastian I might very well have because he was then ja, he was really focal in my life. I didn't have a partner, my kids had gone

overseas, I was by myself, starting a whole new phase of life and he was a really big part of that. Um, and then when I lost him it was like sort of the last leg of the table was taken away and that was, that was a very big blow and I think a lot of people might, might half expect it but I think it has more of an impact that people might expect if a pet occupies that position in the life.” (Participant 10).

According to the literature there is a strong holding of pet loss support groups in America, however, there are very few in South Africa (Davis et al., 2003). The present study’s findings on this matter, while limited, indicate that fear of social judgement and ridicule could be linked to the absence of formal pet loss support groups. The vast majority of participants in the present study noted that they would not utilize such services, while some said they might if the services were anonymous.

“Um, I don’t know if I would join, like I don’t really like telling strangers how I feel and whatever, like I also feel a bit embarrassed to cry in front of them and get emotional, even if they completely understood. I would still feel a bit weird about it. Um, ja, so I just prefer to talk to my friends or something instead of a support group.” (Participant 4).

It could further be argued that the use of such services is unnecessary for those that have strong support systems as most of the participants indicated as much. However it is interesting that those that did not have support systems also refused such services. This can be linked to fears of social ridicule as indicated in the above statement, as well as social notions surrounding hegemonic masculinity. It appears that the shift in social views surrounding pet loss has been more rapid overseas and therefore this aspect would be an interesting research topic for future scholars to undertake.

The majority of the participants noted that they would not use such groups as they would feel vulnerable and exposed. The fear of exposure and vulnerability in the presence of others stems from societal views surrounding pet loss and leads to self-repression which has an adverse effect on the participants grieving period and the intensity of their grief. While the majority of the participants in this study indicated that they would not utilize pet loss support groups in any form these views cannot be generalised. In order to fully assess the usefulness of such groups future studies should develop a pet loss support group survey and distribute the survey to a large sample population making sure that both those that have experienced pet loss and those that have not are included in the study.

4.5. DEBRIEFING

Participants were asked to comment on their experience of the interview in relation to the questions and the manner in which they were phrased, furthermore participants were given the opportunity to share their feelings about the research topic. It was clear from their comments that the participants

appreciated the acknowledgment of their loss and felt that the topic was relevant in contemporary society.

“The interview was interesting cos I didn’t realise that I was still that upset about it. Um, like I said when I emailed you I was like that happened last year oh no wait it happened 2 years ago. Well just under but um, gee that went quickly and I was like I will be fine I will tell her the story and it will be a bit sad but um, I got a fr, I was I didn’t realise quite how I felt until the interview but in terms of things being asked I think you nailed it. No I didn’t feel uncomfortable or anything or.” (Participant 12).

“I do not like to vocalize, I think, we have the, it was quite interesting when we saw the post on Facebook, because for us it was a case of looking at it and thinking, that it was actually a valid approach to study a thing, but it’s a real thing, but we don’t give it any real weight... well it was after I met you that I felt comfortable telling you about the feelings we had for a fish. Whereas most people mock us for having feelings for a fish... I think you have been super, um, and very open to engaging, clearly there is no judgement on your face as I drip and drizzle snot everywhere, which is quite pleasing. Um I would say that the one um, the reason I spoke about the fish is that we often look at relationships with furry creatures, we forget that people have relationships with other creatures, I am personally terrified of a lizard or a snake, I can’t think of why anyone would want one, they are nasty, they must not be around me and they must not be in my home etc. etc. however other people have strange suspicious feelings about them and they don’t understand the way I feel about a dog or a fish, um I think it would be quite nice to perhaps inform people that pets includes everything from one end of the spectrum to the other...” (Participant 2).

“I think it was really nice how you like let me say whatever, like just asked questions and then I just said whatever came to mind. Um, and I don’t think you like asked anything that shouldn’t have been asked, even if it like does make me sad, like asking how she died, I do think like um, like you do need to say how it happened and if you need to cry then you need to cry. Like you do need to talk about it. Um, so, ja, I think it was a good experience, like I would do it again, it’s not like I wouldn’t come back, so.” (Participant 4).

Participant 3 and 6 made some good suggestions that should be included in future studies.

“I think the fact that you asked the vets, um, the vets question, I think that was good, cos that does make a huge difference, I mean if they hadn’t treated me well, the whole experience, even those it wasn’t a good experience, it would have made it so much worse. Uh, things that you could have asked me (7) I don’t think, I think as well you’ve, you’ve covered everything.” (Participant 6).

“I think everything was perfectly relevant... no, um if I can make a comment, like um, the asking how the pet died could be very difficult, um, I know I stated it myself, I feel that is the only way it can work really. So like if by the end of the interview it hasn't been said, well, maybe just, you know you kind of like with people you don't say like how did your dad died.” (Participant 3).

It should be noted that the question on ‘how the pet passed on’ was broach carefully in that the researcher informed the participant that the questions would be more difficult to answer due to their nature. However this comment was noted by the research and future studies should attempt to improve the delivery of the question.

The interviews provided participants with an outlet for their grief and allowed them to positively remember their best friend, confidant and family member. It should be noted that a week after the interviews, the participants were emailed or messaged to see how they had been coping since the interview. The majority of the participants indicated that they felt better after the interview and were glad they participated. None of the participants appeared to experience re-traumatization effects after the interviews.

4.6. REFLEXIVITY

The nature of this research project and my own personal experience of pet loss made this project difficult on an emotional level. However this project helped me work through my own “complicated grief” and made me realise the necessity of such research for others like myself and the participants.

The most difficult part of this research project was the data analysis as the number of participants made the task more difficult and strenuous, each interview was unique and each participant’s expression of grief varied in degree. During the data analysis I experienced a whorl wind of emotions as I remembered the dog I had lost 2 years previously, Max. This aspect made the analysis harder as often I would find myself buried in sadness, having to remind myself that this project was important and was inspired by Max’s passing. These thoughts spurred me on at the worst of times. The easiest part of this project was relating to the participants as I had had similar experiences to those expressed by the participants. Therefore I could relate and sympathise with them however this aspect had adverse effects on my psyche as noted above.

A week after the interviews I made contact with each of the participants, as part of the debriefing process, to see how they were coping after the interviews. It did not surprise me that the majority of participants indicated that they had been feeling better after the interviews, as they had been given the opportunity to talk about their pets without the fear of judgement or dismissal of their grief.

All in all I believe that this project helped both myself and some of the participants begin to work through our pent up grief. However I do believe that this research could have incorporated quantitative methods as well which would have made the findings more valid and reliable on a scientific level, therefore giving future research a scientific base to build on. It should be noted that a study consisting of both quantitative and qualitative methods could provide a more comprehensive and valid study however the present study has not the time nor the resources to conduct a study of this calibre. Furthermore it should be noted that age and race were not included in the demographics of this study, however, these factors should be included in future studies as generational and cultural factors have the potential to influence the grieving process either positively or negatively.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to explore individual experiences of pet loss and the implications thereof, stemming from societal views surrounding pets. Thirteen individuals were interviewed regarding this matter and 12 of the participants' experiences were analysed using qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of these individuals' experiences of pet loss. The present research does not claim to provide a fully comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences of pet loss, three main themes were identified across the 12 participants' stories; the intensity of the bond, the intensity of grief, and repressed grief versus strong social support. These themes had several interlinking and overlapping superordinate themes as seen in the analysis and discussion. Furthermore the three main themes interlink and overlap to varying degrees. The intensity of the bond is a key determinant in the intensity of grief experienced by pet owners.

The intensity of the bond between pet and owner is a key element in the development of the intensity and duration of the grieving period for pet owners. This was consistent throughout the literature along with the notion that anthropomorphism is the main element in the development of the bond between pet and owner (Adrian et al., 2009; Albert & Bulcroft, 1987; Archer, 1997; Bagley & Gonsman, 2005; Brandes, 2009; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Chur-Hansen et al., 2011; Planchon et al., 2002; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014; Turner, 2003; Walsh, 2009; Zottarelli, 2010).

The findings from the present study indicate that the experience of pet loss is an issue that needs to be acknowledged by professionals and society alike, furthermore the grief that stems from pet loss needs to be legitimized in contemporary society so that pet owners will have the emotional freedom to mourn their beloved pets without the fear of social judgement and ridicule. The present study has found that there is a slowly progressive shift in societal views surrounding pet loss, this shift indicates that human non-human relationships are becoming more socially acceptable, however this shift is slow and therefore there are still social implications for grieving pet owners. This was made clear by the reluctance of participants towards pet loss support groups and the use thereof. The findings from the present study indicate that there is a potential shift in the social views surrounding pet loss and therefore the findings have the potential to debase some of the notions put forward over the last decade regarding social support. However, it should be noted that to say that societal views on pet loss have changed is not within the scope of this enquiry. Furthermore the findings indicate that there is an increase in familial social support for pet owners which positively influences the duration of the

grieving period. As the literature notes the intensity of the bond between pet and owner influences the intensity of grief, this holds strong in the present findings (Field et al., 2009).

Pet loss is experienced in much the same way as human loss and therefore should be socially acceptable. However, despite the slowly shifting views surrounding pet loss, mourning pet owners are still constricted by social judgement and the pressure to conform to social norms and conventions that have been instilled since birth through socialization and the various influences that shape our being. Even as we move into a new age of understanding regarding the significance of pets in human lives, new forms of social indicators develop and further repress and restrict the public mourning of pets. In light of this, the concept of pet loss support groups could aid mourning pet owners work through their loss in a non-judgemental environment where other like-minded people come to share their stories as well.

While the present study presents interesting and new data regarding the experience of pet loss, it should be noted that further research is required to corroborate and maintain the findings from this study. Furthermore future studies should eliminate the limitations of the present study in order to produce more valid and reliable data.

5.1. LIMITATIONS

As with any research, the present study has several limitations that need to be considered when examining the findings. Firstly as the present study is based on qualitative research methods, particularly, semi-structured interviews, the data gathering process is time-consuming, hence the small sample size. Furthermore the time frame used for the present study 3-24 months may compromise the research findings due to memory limitation over time. This then reduces the transferability of the data gathered. Furthermore the geographical area in which the data was collected predominantly yielded educated, middle class Caucasian females and therefore the sample is not representative of the cultural diversity within the South African context (Brown et al., 1996). Several authors note that culture may impact the experience of the grief response to pet loss differently and therefore should be considered in the development of future studies (Adrian et al., 2009; Brown et al., 1996; Packman et al., 2011). One of the key limitations of the present study was that certain aspects that may influence the experience of loss were not included in the study such as cultural aspects, personality, past losses and coping styles (Toray, 2004). The latter two would have a significant impact on the experience of loss as in the case of childhood loss and parental reactions to the loss that shape the child's future grief reactions, this would be an interesting aspect to investigate in relation to pet loss.

A further limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional nature, “it is not possible to ascertain the directionality of the relationship among variables in the same way that it is possible with longitudinal data” (Field et al., 2009, p. 351). Future studies should conduct a longitudinal study in which participants are interviewed on several occasions from soon after the loss up to the 1 year mark, this then enables the researcher to account for the potential for under or over estimation of the grief response. Furthermore this enables the researcher to control for memory limitations over time. The lack of male participants further impacts the transferability of the findings, therefore a comparative study should be conducted to determine the difference, if any, between male and female grief responses to pet loss. Future studies should attempt to utilize a mixed methods approach as this could add more value to this type of research providing both empirical and theoretical backing to the findings. Researcher bias may potentially impact the reliability of the findings, however making these biases clear to the reader reduces the impact.

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7. APENDICES

7.1. APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

Firstly I would like to thank you for participating in my research and I would like you to know that you may refuse to answer any questions and you can withdraw from the study at any time if you so choose. The information you provide is confidential and anonymous, only myself and my supervisor will know your identity.

Let me give you a brief overview of what my research is about and what it aims to achieve. My research focuses on individuals personal experiences of pet loss. Therefore my research aims to inform both society and the field of psychology of the impact of such loss on an individual in an attempt to legitimize the mourning of a pet, as currently our society views pet loss as an insignificant loss, whereas research has shown that for some people pet loss is as significant, if not more so than the loss of a human. If it would make you feel more comfortable I will share my personal experience of pet loss with you.

I would like you to know that in this space no judgements are made and if you need to cry, please let it out. This interview is not meant to cause you more pain by reawakening those feelings, but rather think of it as an outlet where you can speak freely about your experience and possibly begin to work through your loss.

1. Firstly would you like to tell me a little bit about your pet and your history with them? For instance what was his/her name? How long was he or she with you? What breed was he or she and what sort of temperament or personality did he/she have?
2. At what age was your pet introduced into your family?
3. What role do you feel your pet occupied within your family?
4. How did (name of pet) pass on?
 - Prompt: was it natural or unnatural (accident or euthanasia)?
5. How did you feel leading up to (pet's name) passing (whether natural or unnatural).
 - Prompt: if euthanized what was the final deciding factor to put (dogs/cats name) to sleep?
 - Prompt: guilt, despair, helpless, like you had failed them in some way.
6. How was your experience with veterinary staff? Were you fully informed about the euthanasia process and about various burial rituals by your veterinarian? I.e. Cremation burial etc...

7. Could you describe how you felt after (dog/cats name) passing?
 - Prompt: Physically, mentally and emotionally? (did you ever find yourself talking to (name) either out loud or in your head; did you find yourself unconsciously looking for him before realising that he/she was gone)
8. Do you have other pets at the moment? Did your other pets act as comforters after you loss? If so in what way?
9. Did you feel that you could speak about and mourn your loss freely within your family and friends?
 - If not, why? If yes, can you provide examples?
 - How did others respond to your grief over the loss of (dogs name)
10. Have you kept any of (Pets name) belongings
 - Prompt: bowl, collar, lock of fur, blankets toys etc.
11. Do you feel that your grief has subsided in any way since (pet's name) passing? If yes, in what way?
 - No longer feel their presence, hear or dream about them etc.?
12. If pet loss support groups were available would you attend? If yes, explain? If no, why not?
13. Is there anything you would like to share with me, such as a fond memory?
14. How did you find the interview? Are there any areas that you believe should be improved upon?

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my study. Would you mind if I contacted you for a follow up interview if I need more information.

7.2. APPENDIX B: TABLES INDICATING NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS, PETS NAMES AND LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP

Table of themes

Name of theme/Node	Number of Sources	Number of References
Anthropomorphism	8	26
Growing up with pets	8	14
Intensity of Bond	12	122
Intensity of grief	12	135
Buffer effect	7	11
Elapsed time	12	14
Pets and religious beliefs	3	3
Pets as family members	8	23
Veterinary experiences	7	12
Repressed grief vs. Support system	12	38
Pet loss support groups	12	21
Societal indicators	9	21
Significance of burial rituals	10	16
Debrief	12	17

Participants and number of references drawn from the data

Participants & Pet Name	Number of Nodes used	Number of References
Participant 1- Milo	0	0
Participant 2- Beatie	14	77
Participant 3- Chester	9	43
Participant 4- Asha	11	31
Participant 5- Russell	12	29
Participant 6- Mischief & Jack	14	81
Participant 7- Silky	12	26
Participant 8- Lilly-bell	10	33
Participant 9- Dackl	7	27
Participant 10- *Rex	11	32
Participant 11- Ozzy	10	19
Participant 12- Khaleesi	9	43
Participant 13- Lizzy	12	33



Names with a * have been changed as requested by the participants.

Participants and length of relationships with pets

Participants & gender	pets name	length of relationship
Participant 2- Female	Beatie	15 years+-
Participant 3- Male	Chester	8 years+-
Participant 4- Female	Asha	13 years
Participant 5- Female	Russell	1 year, 3 months
Participant 6- Female	Mischief & Jack	11 & 15 years
Participant 7- Male	Silky	11 years+-
Participant 8- Female	Lilly-Bell	3 years
Participant 9- Male	Dackl	15 years
Participant 10- Female	*Rex	4 years, 6 months
Participant 11- Female	Ozzy	11 years
Participant 12- Female	Khaleesi	4 months
Participant 13- Female	Lizzy	14 years+-

* It should be noted that for practical reasons race and age were not included in the demographics of the study. However future studies should include these demographics, particularly focusing on cultural and generational variations in the experiences of pet loss.

7.3. APPENDIX C: TABLE OF THEME CONNECTIONS

Theme Relationships/linkages	
Intensity of Bond	←
	→ Anthropomorphism
	→ Pets as family members (PFM)
	→ Growing up with pets (GWP)
	→ Elapsed time
Intensity of Grief	←
	→ Elapsed time & PFM &GWP
	→ Veterinary experiences
	→ Significance of burial rituals
	→ Buffer effect
Repressed grief vs. Social support	←
	→ Social indicators
	→ Pet loss support groups