



Universiteit Utrecht

Grief after pet loss:
Difference between species and the role of social
acknowledgement

S.A. van Dijk

Date: July 13, 2019

Supervisor: H. Schut

Second examiner:

Name: S.A. van Dijk

Student number: 5482143

Masterthesis Clinical Psychology

Department Social Sciences

Utrecht University

Abstract

The loss of a pet can evoke significant grief in their owners, as they often have close bonds with their animals. Grief after pet loss is often addressed as disenfranchised grief – grief that is unacknowledged by others. This study aims to investigate the difference between species in grief and social acknowledgement. The answers of Dutch participants ($N = 149$) who had lost a pet in the 5 years prior to this study were analyzed. The Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ) was used to measure grief and the Social Acknowledgement Questionnaire (SAQ) was used as a measure for the individual perception of social acknowledgement after the loss. Participants were divided in three groups according to their deceased pet; dogs ($N = 58$), cats ($N = 53$) and other pets ($N = 38$). Results show that there is a difference between species in grief and social acknowledgement. Social acknowledgement moderates the difference in grief between species. This highlights that further research about pet loss should not ignore the role of species nor the importance of social acknowledgement in grief. Taking the number of pets in Dutch households into consideration and the feelings of grief that pet loss can evoke, it is of great importance to broaden our knowledge about this novel and still relatively unknown area.

Key words: pet loss; disenfranchised grief; grief; social acknowledgement; species

Introduction

An estimated number of 33,4 million pets live in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2015). Pets are often seen as part of the family, and provide comfort, companionship and opportunities for intimacy and nurturing (Bussolari, Habarth, Phillips, Katz, & Packman, 2018; Cohen, 2002; Gage & Holcomb, 1991). People throughout the world give their animal companions human names, celebrate their birthdays and mourn them when they die (Serpell, 2004). Because inevitably, at some point most of these pet owners have to cope with the passing of their pet.

In a study on the death of a family pet (Gage et al., 1991), the death of the pet was the most frequent occurring stressor of mid-life families, which can be explained by the overall shorter lifespan of pets. The loss of a pet can evoke significant grief in their owners, as they often have close bonds with their animals (Cohen, 2002; Gage et al., 1991; Walsh, 2009). Some researchers claim that pet death can be experienced in a manner similar to the loss of a human, with disruptions in eating, sleeping patterns and social activities. (Bussolari et al., 2018; Field, Orsini, Gavish & Packman, 2009; Packman, Field, Carmack & Ronen, 2011, Sharkin & Bahrck, 1990; Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

The loss of a significant other can be an intense emotional experience (Boerner, Stroebe, Schut, & Wortman, 2017; Shear, 2012). Grief is the reaction to the loss of someone, consisting of thoughts, feelings, behaviors and physiological changes that vary in pattern and time. Therefore, grief is not a constant state but a process that changes over time (Shear, 2012; Zisook & Shear, 2012).

But while the grief after pet loss may be similar to the grief experienced when a significant human dies, the mourning process is not (Wrobel et al., 2003). Mourning refers to the expression of grief, shaped by social and cultural practices and expectations (Boerner et al., 2012). Where the grief of the loss of a significant human usually goes accompanied with social acknowledgement from one's surroundings, the loss of a pet is often unacknowledged by others (Cordaro, 2012; Field et al., 2009; Gage et al., 1991; Morley & Fook, 2005; Sharkin et al., 1990; Wrobel et al., 2003). Grief that is socially unacknowledged, is referred to as disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1999), which can be caused when those surrounding the bereaved do not recognize or understand the severity or meaning of the loss. In the case of pet loss, this could be due to a failure of others to validate the significant bond between owner and animal (Bussolari et al., 2018; Packman, Field, Carmack & Ronen, 2011). For example, Packman, Carmack, Katz, Carlos, Field, & Landers (2014) conducted a cross-cultural study with participants of a pet loss survey. They found that individuals often mentioned that they

did not feel like they could express their grief after pet loss, because they expected that it would not be accepted by their environment.

Disenfranchised grief can have a negative impact on the process of grief (Bussolari et al., 2018; Lenhardt, 1997). It is commonly known that social acknowledgement is important in grief, such as support from family and friends (Kaunonen, Tarkka, Paunonen & Laippala, 1999), and can protect for the development of symptoms of complicated grief and posttraumatic stress disorder (Mueller, Moergeli & Maercker, 2008; Wagner, Keller, Knaevelsrud & Maercker, 2012).

However, disenfranchised grief covers more than just a lack of social acknowledgement from family or friends, but also includes societal regulations. Pet loss is not regularly integrated in protocols for bereavement, such as for company policies (Clements, Benasutti & Carmone, 2003; Cordaro, 2012; Toray, 2004). For example, bereaved pet owners often cannot take days off for the loss of their pet, as their company policy does not account for pet losses (Cordaro, 2012). Next to that, there are no, or little, funeral services for the loss of a pet (Chur-Hansen, 2010; Wrobel, 2003).

Not only in literature is this proposed 'quiet suffering' after pet loss mentioned. In the Netherlands, multiple tv-shows addressed the subject and books have been written about pet loss and the (non)responses from society. This shows that this topic is highly important and relevant, taking the number of pets in Dutch households - and their short lifespans - in account. It is expected that many people will even experience multiple losses of pets in their life.

Although pet loss and disenfranchised grief are novel and growing areas, findings have been speculative and inconclusive. They appear to be insufficient to draw solid conclusions about the role of social acknowledgement in grief after pet loss. For example, the foundation for theories about disenfranchised grief and pet loss consists mostly out of literature reviews and the number of empirically tested studies is small. The earlier mentioned study of Packman and colleagues (2014) with participants of a pet loss survey showed that lack of validation and support after pet loss was common in 13% to 14% of the sample. However, this study recruited their participants via pet loss support groups, who were already seeking counseling for the grief they experienced after the loss of their pet. It can be questioned if this sample is representative for all grieving pet owners. Another study of Field, Orsini, Gavish & Packman (2009) with 71 pet loss participants, found that social support was not a significant predictor of grief after pet loss. However, the researchers mention this could be due to the social support measure that was used, that did not specifically focus on the

context of pet loss (Field et al., 2009). These conflicting outcomes and the fact that the studies had their methodological flaws, makes this an important subject to investigate further.

Moreover, when it comes to pet loss and grief, most studies do not take species into account for pet loss. According to the theory of George (2016) and Driscoll (1995), humans tend to have more positive attitudes towards bigger animals, who score higher on dimensions of smartness, responsiveness and loveableness; animals that people see as more 'charismatic'. This indicates that grief after pet loss would differ between bigger and more charismatic animals, such as dogs and cats, and smaller and less charismatic animals, such as birds or even fish. This could also indicate that social acknowledgement after pet loss would be higher when a more charismatic animal dies; that someone receives more support after the loss of a dog than after the loss of a goldfish.

This study aims to investigate the difference between species in grief and social acknowledgement. Based on the previous studies it is expected that there is a difference between species in grief after pet loss. Furthermore, a difference between species in social acknowledgement after pet loss is expected. Finally, it is expected that the difference between species in grief is moderated by the social acknowledgement of the loss.

Methods

Participants

In total, the study recruited 175 participants of which 149 were included. The inclusion criterion was the loss of a pet in the last 5 years. For this reason, 10 participants were excluded from this study. Next to that, 14 participants were excluded who had not filled out any of the questions. Participants had to be at least 18 years old to be included in this study, because of that, 2 more participants were excluded. All remaining participants completed the demographic questions about their gender, age and the core variables of this study, of which 16 males ($M = 32.81$, $SD = 12.25$) and 133 females ($M = 32.50$, $SD = 14.44$).

The participants were divided in three groups according to the species of their deceased pet: dogs ($N = 58$), cats ($N = 53$) and other pets ($N = 38$).

Instruments

Two different instruments were used: the Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ) and Social Acknowledgement Questionnaire (SAQ). Furthermore, participants were asked for demographic information (e.g. age) and information about the deceased pet (e.g. species).

Demographics and pet loss characteristics

The questionnaire started with questions about demographic information, e.g. age, gender, level of education and terms of employment. Participants were asked if they considered themselves an animal lover in a 5-point Likert scale. Additionally, multiple questions about the loss of their pet were asked, e.g. time since death, age of pet and time period of ownership.

Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ)

The PBQ (Hunt & Padilla, 2006) is a 16-item self-report questionnaire about the psychological impact of losing a pet. The PBQ distinguishes three different factors: grief, anger and guilt. Psychometric properties of this questionnaire were investigated by Hunt and Padilla (2006). Factor analysis found support for the underlying structure of the three subscales, grief, anger and guilt. Strong construct validity evidence was provided by the pattern of relations between the three subscales of the PBQ and other measures of grief and depression (Hunt et al., 2006). Based on the criteria of George and Mallery (2003) the internal consistency of the PBQ was considered to be good, $\alpha = .87$ (Hunt et al., 2006). In current sample, after removal of one item to achieve higher reliability, the internal consistency of the PBQ was also good, $\alpha = .85$. For the different subscales the following alphas were reported: grief scale $\alpha = .85$, anger scale $\alpha = .62$ and guilt scale $\alpha = .58$ (George & Mallery, 2003). Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1= “strongly disagree”, 4= “strongly agree”). In this study, participants could also answer with ‘not applicable’. Participants were asked to mark the answer that corresponded best with their opinion in the last four weeks. Examples of items were: “My life feels empty without my pet” and “I miss my pet enormously”. Higher scores represent higher degrees of the dimensions of bereavement.

Social Acknowledgement Questionnaire (SAQ)

The SAQ (Maercker & Müller, 2004) is a 16-item questionnaire that measures the individual’s perception of social acknowledgement after trauma. The SAQ distinguishes three factors: recognition as a victim, general disapproval and family disapproval. The SAQ has a good internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .79$ to $\alpha = .86$ (Maercker et al., 2004), based on the criteria of George and Mallery (2003). The Dutch translation of the SAQ

is used (van der Velden & de Bruijne, 2008). Van der Velden and colleague (2018) also added a question about disclosure about the traumatic event, which is included in current study as well. Next to that, the question “the reactions of my acquaintances were incomprehensible or offensive” is added to the SAQ in current study, for adding contrast to the exact opposite included question: “the reactions of my acquaintances were helpful”.

Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= “strongly disagree”, 4= “strongly agree”). Participants could answer with ‘not applicable’. A higher score on the SAQ represents higher social acknowledgement. To avoid confusion, the dimensions general disapproval and family disapproval were renamed as general approval and family approval respectively.

For the purpose of this study, phrases in the SAQ such as ‘the traumatic event’ are rephrased into more specific terms according to the topic of current study, such as ‘the death of your pet’. Examples of questions are: “My family showed a lot of understanding for my state after the loss of my pet” and “The people where I live respect me more since the death of my pet”.

The overall internal consistency of the SAQ in this study was good with a Cronbach’s Alpha of $\alpha = .82$ (George et al., 2003). One question was removed to achieve a higher reliability. For the dimensions the following alphas were reported: recognition scale $\alpha = .82$, general approval scale $\alpha = .65$ and family approval scale $\alpha = .64$. However, due to the large number of people who answered ‘not applicable’ on the questions within the general approval scale, only 20% of the sample could be included for the overall reliability statistics.

Procedure

Participants in this study were recruited via Facebook and the professional and personal network of the researcher in a two-month period. An invitational message with a link to the questionnaire was posted in a number of Facebook groups, including a group for Clinical Psychology students, a group for lost and found animals, and several groups for animal lovers. Next to that an email was sent to the professional and personal network of the researcher, with the question to participate in the study and or forward the survey to others.

This study was conducted online using Thesistools. Participants filled out the questionnaires at a place where they had an electronic device to their disposal. After clicking on the link to participate in this study, an informed consent form was shown. The participants had to fill out the presented informed consent form before being allowed to participate. The informed consent mentioned the goal of this study, namely to investigate possible factors that

could influence the grief after pet loss. Furthermore, the form stated that participation in this study was voluntary with a possibility to withdraw at any time and it emphasized that participating in this study was anonymous. Once the informed consent was accepted, participants were directed to the questionnaire. The questionnaire started with questions about demographic information, continued by questions about the loss of their pet, whereafter the PBQ and SAQ followed.

Design and data analyses

The current study used a cross-sectional correlational design to assess the difference between species for grief and social acknowledgement. The data were analyzed using Excel 2016 and SPSS 25.0. First, to test the hypothesis that the level of grief differs between species, a multivariate analysis of variance was performed to compare the scores on the PBQ subscales (guilt, anger grief) for species (dog, cat, other). Secondly, to test the expectation that social acknowledgement after loss differs between species, a multivariate analysis of variance was performed for the scores on the SAQ dimensions (recognition, family approval, general approval) between species (dog, cat, other). Thirdly, for the hypothesis that social acknowledgement moderates the difference between species in grief, a moderation analysis was executed. Preceding the data analysis, the variable 'not applicable' was recoded as missing for the PBQ and SAQ. For the SAQ, the questions 27-1, 27-2, 27-3, 27-4, 27-5, 27-7, 28-4, 28-5 and 28-6 have been recoded, in order that higher scores represented higher degrees of social acknowledgement.

Results

Data inspection

Prior to executing the analyses, inspection of the data was conducted. Missing values were examined for each variable and showed a non-monotone missing pattern. For the SAQ score, 11 (7,4%) of the 149 values were missing. After further inspection, these participants had answered 'not applicable' on too many questions to calculate a representative score for the SAQ and therefore were marked as missing. Assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity and normality were assessed by inspecting plots and histograms. The assumption of normality was violated for the variables age, time since death, being an animal lover, age of deceased pet, PBQ and SAQ. However, the sample size was sufficiently large (>30), which means that according to the Central Limit Theorem, the shape of the data should not affect significance

tests (Field, 2013). Also, box plots and stem-and-leaf plots were used to identify potential outliers. Three cases with outliers in the time since death of the pet were removed.

Exploratory analysis

Prior to performing the main analyses, a correlation analysis was performed. Overall, there is a small negative correlation between the questionnaires SAQ and PBQ; $r(.) = -.332, p = .000$. This indicates that higher scores in social acknowledgement are associated with lower scores in grief. The relationship between the SAQ subscales and PBQ subscales was also investigated using a Pearson correlation coefficient, see *Table 1*.

Table 1. *Correlation matrix with dimensions of the PBQ and SAQ*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. PBQ_Grief	-					
2. PBQ_Anger	-.574*	-	.			
3. PBQ_Guilt	.524*	.483*	-			
4. SAQ_Recognition	.587*	-.433*	-.206*	-		
5. SAQ_General Approval	.072	.044	-.119	.191*	-	
6. SAQ_Family Approval	-.244*	-.330*	-.100	.416*	.304*	-

* correlation is significant, $p < .05$.

Difference between species in grief

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate the difference in grief between species. The three dependent variables were the subscales of the PBQ (guilt, anger, grief). The independent variable was species. Using Wilks's Lambda, there was no significant effect of species on bereavement, $\Lambda = 0.93, F(6,270) = 1.66, p = .132$; partial eta squared = .04. This indicates that, against expectations, no difference between species and the PBQ subscales is found.

Because this study focusses on grief especially, a univariate one-way analysis of variance was conducted for the grief subscale of the PBQ. There was a statistically significant difference in grief for species: $F(2,145) = 4.1, p = .019$. The effect size was small to medium, .05. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicate that the mean grief score for cats ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.74$) did not differ significantly from either dogs or other pets. The mean grief score for dogs ($M = 2.54, SD = 0.72$) was significantly higher than for other pets

($M = 2.09$, $SD = 0.84$). This shows that, if looking at the specific subscale grief, higher levels of grief for dogs than for other pets are reported.

Time since death needs to be neutralized as a covariate in the previous comparisons since it significantly differed between species ($p = .000$) and was correlated with the PBQ ($-.059$). After adjusting for *time since death* the difference between species in PBQ scores remained insignificant; $\Lambda = 0.92$, $F(6,268) = 2.04$, $p = .61$; partial eta squared = .04. For the grief subscale, after adjusting for *time since death* the difference in grief between species remained significant; $F(2, 145) = .186$, $p = .007$, partial eta squared = .066.

Difference between species in social acknowledgement

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was performed on differences in social acknowledgement for species. The subscales of the SAQ (recognition, general approval and family approval) were used as dependent variables, the independent variable was species. Overall, there was a statistically significant difference between species on the SAQ score, $F(6,224) = 3.1$, $p = .005$; Wilks's Lambda $\Lambda = 0.853$; partial eta squared = .076.

When looking between-subjects at the results for the separate SAQ subscales, the subscale recognition reaches a statistical significance, $F(2,118) = 3.5$, $p = .032$, partial eta squared = .057. This indicates that for dogs ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.85$) less recognition is reported, compared to cats ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.83$) and other pets ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.99$). The subscale general approval, $F(2,118) = 3.3$, $p = .040$, partial eta squared = .053, shows that general approval is significantly different for dogs ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.61$), cats ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.74$) and other pets ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.96$). The subscale family approval did not differ significantly for species, $F(2,118) = 0.4$, $p = .667$, partial eta squared = .007.

For the difference between species in social acknowledgement, there is also assessed for potential confounders, see *Table 2*.

Table 2. *Potential confounders with significance difference between species and correlation with SAQ*

Variable	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	
Age	.035*	-.180*	* p-value or
Age of animal	.000*	.111	

correlation is significant, $p < .05$.

After adjusting for *age* and *age of pet* there was still a statistically significant difference between species on the dimensions of social acknowledgement, $F(6,228) = 3.09, p = .009$; Wilks's Lambda $\Lambda = 0.861$; partial eta squared = .072. When looking at the different dimensions however, for subscale family approval there was a significant main effect among species for *age* and *age of pet*, respectively $p = .020$ and $p = .051$. This indicates that *age* and *age of pet* have a disrupting effect on the difference between species in family approval.

Relationship between species and grief moderated by social acknowledgement

Multiple regression was used to assess the ability of species to predict levels of the PBQ grief subscale. For the purpose of computing this analysis, the category 'other' has not been taken into consideration. Dog's and cats' were made into dummies, respectively 1 and 0.

Table 3. *Linear model of SAQ score in interaction with species as predictor of PBQ grief subscale*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.27 [2.07, 2.49]	-	22.09	.000
Species	0.19 [-0.10, 0.47]	0.122	1.32	.191
SAQ (centred)	-0.69 [-1.03, -0.34]	-0.554	-3.99	.000
SAQ x Species	0.50 [0.00, 1.00]	0.276	1.98	.050

This moderation analysis shows that, there is a significant moderation of social acknowledgement in the difference between species and grief after pet loss. For dogs, there is a stronger relationship of social acknowledgement in the difference between species and grief than for cats.

Discussion

Previous research has shown inconsistent findings about the difference between species in grief and the role of social acknowledgement. The aim of the present study was to fill this gap

by investigating the difference between species for grief and social acknowledgement after pet loss. The results indicate that the hypotheses were supported.

First, it was hypothesized that there is a difference between species in grief after pet loss, which results were partially consistent with. There were no substantial differences between species in the scores on the pet bereavement questionnaire, that measured grief, anger and guilt after pet loss. However, when looking specifically at the grief dimension, dog owners reported a higher amount of grief after pet loss, than owners of other pets. This is consistent with the theory that people tend to have more positive attitudes toward bigger animals who score higher on dimensions of smartness, responsiveness and loveableness (Driscoll, 1995; George, 2016), and that positive attitudes towards animals are associated with greater grief after pet loss (Stokes, Planchon, Templer, & Keller, 2002). The mean grief score for cat owners centered between dog and other pet owners. While cats also appear to score high on the dimensions smartness, responsiveness and loveableness, the lower grief for cats versus dogs could be explained by the differences in their social behavior (Driscoll, 1995; George, 2016; Gosling, Sandy & Potter, 2010; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Cats appear to be more emotionally distant from their owners than dogs (Gosling, Sandy & Potter, 2010; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011).

While the grief score differed between species, the subscales anger and guilt did not. The current study included participants who lost a pet in the five years prior to data collection. Wrobel & Dye (2003) studied bereavement symptoms after pet loss over time and found that feelings of guilt had decreased after six months. Themes of the PBQ grief subscale, such as loneliness and preoccupation with memories, remained longer (Wrobel et al., 2003). Additionally, a study of Archer & Winchester (1994) found that only a quarter of their person sample reported feelings of anger after pet loss, which could explain why no significant difference for anger between species was found.

Secondly, it was expected that there is a difference between species in social acknowledgement after pet loss. Results were consistent with this prediction, however there were conflicting outcomes in the different dimensions of social acknowledgement. The highest recognition scores were reported for other pet owners, and the lowest recognition scores for dog owners. The recognition dimension addressed the disruption of daily life. The loss of a pet in the category 'other' presumably causes a smaller disruption in daily life, compared to the loss of a dog. Dog owners are more likely to spend time training their dog, walking their dog and playing with their dog, compared to owners of other pets, such as a guinea pig or goldfish (Freiwald et al., 2014; Payne, Bennet & McGreevy, 2015; Kurdek,

2008). In contrast, for the dimension general approval the highest scores were reported for dog owners, medium for cats and lowest for other pet owners. This dimension addressed the topics receiving help and sympathy. The fact that dog owners received more help and experienced more sympathy after the loss could be explained by the personalities of different pet owners. Dog owners appear to score higher on extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness than cat people (Gosling, Sandy & Potter, 2010; Hergovich, Mauerer & Riemer, 2011). It is possible that these personality traits make dog owners more likeable and easier to approach, which makes others more willing to express sympathy and give help. Additionally, it could be that owners of other pets were less in need for help and sympathy after the loss of their pet, as their mean grief scores were the lowest of all species.

For family approval no differences between pet species were found. The confounders 'age' and 'age of pet' had a considerable influence on family approval. It is difficult to draw conclusions for these findings. The dimension family approval focused on the (mis)understanding of the family after pet loss. It could be that, as pets are often considered as part of the family, the loss is a family experience (Bussolari, et al. 2018; Cohen, 2002; Gage et al., 1991). That would make this dimension less applicable for pet loss.

Thirdly, it was hypothesized that social acknowledgement moderates the difference between species in grief. This hypothesis is also found. For dogs, there is a stronger moderation of social acknowledgement in grief after pet loss compared to cats. This can be explained by the fact that the loss of a dog evokes a bigger interruption in daily life than the loss of a cat. Freiwald, Litster & Weng (2014) found that dog owners were more willing to invest time in their dog, by training them or taking them to the vet, compared to cat owners. This change in daily life could evoke a bigger need for social acknowledgement in dog owners after pet loss (Freiwald et al., 2014). In addition, current study shows that social acknowledgement and grief are negatively correlated, which means that higher social acknowledgement is associated with less grief. This is in line with previous research that found that social acknowledgement can benefit the process of grief and protect for the development of symptoms of complicated grief or posttraumatic stress disorder (Kaunonen et al., 1999; Mueller et al., 2008; Wager et al., 2012).

Limitations

Although the hypotheses were supported, the results have to be interpreted with caution. This study tried to set the first steps in research for species and pet loss. Participants were recruited for the loss of a dog, cat or other pet. However, this also had its downside. Where the

categories dogs and cats were quite homogenous groups, the group other pets had a big variance in species (rabbits to fish). Statistical differences in variables found for the group 'other' therefore have to be interpreted with caution for clinical practice.

Secondly, the SAQ is developed for perceived acknowledgement after trauma. It is unclear if the questions of the SAQ are also applicable for pet loss, as supposed in present study. For example, the statement 'important figures of public life expressed their sympathy after the incident' is probably not applicable for pet loss, as it is not common for public figures to know about the death of your pet. This resulted in a higher amount of 'not applicable' answer, which could have influenced the SAQ scores.

Third, this study recruited their participants, among other things, in Facebook groups for animal lovers. As this study recruited so proposed 'animal lovers', results may be not representative for the overall population of pet owners.

Fourth, some variables have not been incorporated in the data collection of the current study. Such as the variable attachment, that according to earlier research appears to be of great importance for grief after pet loss (Field et al., 2009; Stokes et al., 2002; Walsh, 2009), or longitudinal research for the amount of social acknowledgement on grief over time, as grief is a process that changes over time (Shear, 2012; Zisook et al., 2012).

Implication and suggestions for further research

Despite the limitations, current study has shown that there is a difference between species in grief and social acknowledgement after pet loss, and that social acknowledgement has a moderating role in the difference in grief between species. Further research about pet loss should not ignore the role of species nor the importance of social acknowledgement in grief. In addition, future work should look into explanations for current findings and the directions of these found associations. Taking the number of pets in Dutch households into consideration and the feelings of grief that pet loss can evoke, it is of great importance to broaden our knowledge about this novel and still relatively unknown area.

References

- Archer, J., & Winchester, G. (1994). Bereavement following death of a pet. *British Journal of Psychology*, 85(2), 259-271.
- Boerner, K., Stroebe, M., Schut, H. A. W., & Wortman, C. B. (2017). Grief and Bereavement: Theoretical Perspectives. *Encyclopedia of Geropsychology*, 979-986.

- Bussolari, C., Habarth, J.M., Phillips, S., Katz, R. & Packman, W. (2018). Self-Compassion, Social Constraints and Psychosocial Outcomes in a Pet Bereavement Sample. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 0030222818814050.
- Chur-Hansen, A. (2010). Grief and bereavement issues and the loss of a companion animal: People living with a companion animal, owners of livestock, and animal support workers. *Clinical Psychologist*, 14(1), 14-21.
- Clements, P. T., Benasutti, K. M., & Carmone, A. (2003). Support for bereaved owners of pets. *Perspectives in psychiatric care*, 39(2), 49-54.
- Cohen, S. P. (2002). Can pets function as family members?. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 24(6), 621-638.
- Cordaro, M. (2012). Pet loss and disenfranchised grief: Implications for mental health counseling practice. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 34(4), 283-294.
- Doka, K. J. (1999). Disenfranchised grief. *Bereavement care*, 18(3), 37-39.
- Driscoll, J. W. (1995). Attitudes toward animals: Species ratings. *Society & Animals*, 3(2), 139-150.
- Field, N. P., Orsini, L., Gavish, R., & Packman, W. (2009). Role of attachment in response to pet loss. *Death studies*, 33(4), 334-355.
- Freiwald, A., Litster, A., & Weng, H. Y. (2014). Survey to investigate pet ownership and attitudes to pet care in metropolitan Chicago dog and/or cat owners. *Preventive veterinary medicine*, 115(3-4), 198-204.
- Gage, M. G., & Holcomb, R. (1991). Couples' perception of stressfulness of death of the family pet. *Family Relations*, 103-105.
- George, K. A. (2016). *Human-Animal Relationships: Exploring human concern for animals* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).
- Gosling, S. D., Sandy, C. J., & Potter, J. (2010). Personalities of self-identified “dog people” and “cat people”. *Anthrozoös*, 23(3), 213-222.
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for windows step by step 11.0 update (4th ed.)*. New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hepper, P. G., & Wells, D. L. (1997). Pet ownership and adults' views on the use of animals. *Society & Animals*, 5(1), 45-63.
- Hergovich, A., Mauerer, I., & Riemer, V. (2011). Exotic animal companions and the personality of their owners. *Anthrozoös*, 24(3), 317-327.
- Hunt, M., & Padilla, Y. (2006). Development of the pet bereavement questionnaire. *Anthrozoös*, 19(4), 308-324.

- Lenhardt, A. M. C. (1997). Grieving disenfranchised losses: Background and strategies for counselors. *The Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 35(4), 208-216.
- Maercker, A., & Müller, J. (2004). Social acknowledgment as a victim or survivor: A scale to measure a recovery factor of PTSD (van der Velden & de Bruijne, Vert. 2018). *Journal of traumatic stress*, 17(4), 345-351.
- Morley, C., & Fook, J. (2005). The importance of pet loss and some implications for services. *Mortality*, 10(2), 127-143.
- Mueller, J., Moergeli, H., & Maercker, A. (2008). Disclosure and social acknowledgement as predictors of recovery from posttraumatic stress: A longitudinal study in crime victims. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53(3), 160-168.
- Kaunonen, M., Tarkka, M. T., Paunonen, M., & Laippala, P. (1999). Grief and social support after the death of a spouse. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30(6), 1304-1311.
- Packman, W., Carmack, B.J., Katz, R., Carlos, F., Field, N.P., & Landers, C. (2014). Online survey as empathic bridging for the disenfranchised grief of pet loss. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 69(4), 333-356.
- Packman, W., Field, N.P., Carmack, B.J., & Ronen, R. (2011). Continuing bonds and psychosocial adjustment in pet loss. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 16(4), 341-357.
- Pallant, J. (2010). *SPSS Survival Manual* (4th ed.). Berkshire, England: McGraw-Hill.
- Rijksoverheid. (2015). *Rapport Feiten en Cijfers Gezelschapsdierensector 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2015/11/03/feiten-cijfers-gezelschapsdierensector-2015>
- Serpell, J. A. (2004). Factors influencing human attitudes to animals and their welfare. *ANIMAL WELFARE-POTTERS BAR THEN WHEATHAMPSTEAD-*, 13, S145-S152.
- Serpell, J. (2003). Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection—Beyond the "Cute Response". *Society & Animals*, 11(1), 83-100.
- Sharkin, B. S., & Bahrack, A. S. (1990). Pet loss: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 68(3), 306-308.
- Shear, M. K. (2012). Getting straight about grief. *Depression and anxiety*, 29(6), 461-464.
- Smolkovic, I., Fajfar, M., & Mlinaric, V. (2012). Attachment to pets and interpersonal relationships: Can a four-legged friend replace a two-legged one?. *Journal of European Psychology Students*, 3(1).
- Stokes, S., Planchon, L., Templer, D., & Keller, J. (2002). Death of a companion cat or dog and human bereavement: Psychosocial variables. *Society & Animals*, 10(1), 93-105.

- Toray, T. (2004). The human-animal bond and loss: Providing support for grieving clients. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 26*(3), 244-259.
- Varner, G. (2002). Pets, companion animals, and domesticated partners. *Ethics for Everyday, 450-75*.
- Wagner, B., Keller, V., Knaevelsrud, C., & Maercker, A. (2012). Social acknowledgement as a predictor of post-traumatic stress and complicated grief after witnessing assisted suicide. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 58*(4), 381-385.
- Walsh, F. (2009). Human-animal bonds I: The relational significance of companion animals. *Family Process, 48*(4), 462-480.
- Wrobel, T. A., & Dye, A. L. (2003). Grieving pet death: Normative, gender, and attachment issues. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 47*(4), 385-393.
- Zasloff, R. L. (1996). Measuring attachment to companion animals: a dog is not a cat is not a bird. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 47*(1-2), 43-48.
- Zilcha-Mano, S., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2011). An attachment perspective on human-pet relationships: Conceptualization and assessment of pet attachment orientations. *Journal of Research in Personality, 45*(4), 345-357.
- Zisook, S., & Shear, K. (2009). Grief and bereavement: what psychiatrists need to know. *World Psychiatry, 8*(2), 67-74.

Appendices

Vragenlijst over het verlies van een huisdier

Utrecht, november 2018

Geachte deelnemer,

Voor mijn thésisonderzoek van de master Clinical Psychology aan Universiteit Utrecht, heb ik een vragenlijst ontwikkeld over het verliezen van een huisdier. Deze vragenlijst bevat 55 vragen, over onder andere achtergrondgegevens van het baasje, het verlies van het huisdier en de reactie hierop van het baasje en de omgeving van het baasje. Deze informatie wordt gebruikt om een beeld te krijgen van rouw na het verlies van het huisdier en elementen die hierop invloed kunnen hebben. De doelgroep van dit onderzoek betreft volwassenen van 18 jaar of ouder, die in de afgelopen vijf jaar een huisdier zijn verloren.

Alle ingevulde gegevens worden vanzelfsprekend anoniem verwerkt en vertrouwelijk behandeld. Antwoorden zullen dan ook niet tot een individu te herleiden zijn. U kunt op ieder moment zonder consequenties het onderzoek beëindigen.

Mocht u vragen hebben over het onderzoek, kunt u contact opnemen met s.a.vandijk@uu.nl. Bij eventuele klachten of problemen kunt u ook contact opnemen met mijn supervisor, via h.schut@uu.nl.

Bij voorbaat dank voor uw medewerking,
Sanne van Dijk

1. Dit onderzoek mag alleen worden uitgevoerd als u expliciete toestemming voor deelname heeft gegeven en u ouder dan 18 jaar bent. Daarom wil ik u vragen om de onderstaande vragen te beantwoorden:

“Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor het afnemen van deze vragenlijst. Ik ben er van op de hoogte dat mijn gegevens anoniem worden verwerkt en vertrouwelijk worden behandeld. Ik ben mij ervan bewust dat ik het onderzoek op elk moment zonder opgaaaf van redenen kan beëindigen. Daarnaast bevestig ik dat ik 18 jaar of ouder ben.”

(Deze gegevens worden los van uw antwoorden opgeslagen op een zodanige wijze dat uw naam nimmer kan worden gekoppeld aan uw antwoorden.)

Voor- en achternaam:

Plaats:

Datum van akkoord:

Bedankt voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek!

Het invullen van deze vragenlijst zal ongeveer 10 minuten duren. U krijgt ongeveer 55 vragen met verschillende antwoordcategorieën. Kies of omschrijf het antwoord dat het meeste op u van toepassing is. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden maar probeer de vragen zo

nauwkeurig mogelijk te beantwoorden. Bij eventuele vragen kunt u de onderzoeker raadplegen.

Achtergrondgegevens

Nu volgt er eerst een aantal vragen over uw achtergrondgegevens.

2. Wat is uw geslacht?

- Man
- Vrouw
- Anders, namelijk:

3. Wat is uw leeftijd?

4. Wat is uw hoogst voltooide opleiding?

- Lagere school
- Mulo/mavo/vmbo/huishoudschool
- HTS/HBS/HAVO/VWO/Athenaeum/Gymnasium
- HBO of universiteit
- Anders, namelijk..

5. Welk van de volgende categorieën beschrijft het beste uw werksituatie?

- Ik heb een baan en werk circa 32 uur of meer per week
- Ik heb een baan en werk minder dan circa 32 uur per week
- Ik heb geen baan en ben op zoek naar een baan
- Ik heb geen baan en ben niet op zoek naar een baan
- Ik ben met pensioen
- Ik ben student

6. Wat is uw leefsituatie?

- Gehuwd/samenwonend
- Single/alleenstaand
- Alleenwonend, maar in een relatie
- Gescheiden
- Weduwe/weduwenaar
- Anders, namelijk:

7. Heeft u thuiswonende kinderen en zo ja, hoeveel?

- Nee, ik heb geen thuiswonende kinderen
- Ja, ik heb .. thuiswonende kind(eren), namelijk (aantal invullen s.v.p.)

8. Wat is grofweg het huidige maandinkomen van uw huishouden?

- Minder dan 2000 euro per maand bruto
- Tussen de 2000 en 3000 euro per maand bruto
- Meer dan 3000 euro per maand bruto

Er volgt nu een stelling over uw persoonlijke opinie over dieren. Deze stelling wordt beantwoord op een 5-puntsschaal, waarbij 1 betekent dat deze stelling helemaal niet op u van toepassing is en 5 betekent dat deze stelling helemaal wel op u van toepassing is.

9. Ik beschouw mijzelf als dierenvriend

1 2 3 4 5

10. Heeft u een huisdier verloren in de afgelopen vijf jaar?
Met verloren wordt bedoeld dat het huisdier is overleden.

- Ja
- Nee

Overlijden van het huisdier

Er volgt nu een aantal vragen over het verlies van uw huisdier(en). Wanneer u in het afgelopen jaar meer huisdieren bent verloren, wil ik u vragen het huisdier in gedachten te nemen waar u het meest aan gehecht was.

11. Hoeveel maanden geleden is uw huisdier overleden? Maak indien nodig een schatting.
.. maanden

12. In welke categorie valt uw overleden huisdier?

- Hond
- Kat
- Ander zoogdier, namelijk..
- Vogel, namelijk..
- Reptiel, namelijk..
- Vis, namelijk..
- Anders, namelijk..

13. Wat was de oorzaak van het overlijden van het huisdier?

- Ongeluk
- Ziekte
- Anders, namelijk..

14. Was het overlijden verwacht of onverwacht?

- Verwacht
- Niet verwacht, niet onverwacht
- Onverwacht

15. Is er euthanasie gepleegd?

- Ja
- Nee

16. Was u aanwezig bij de euthanasie? Waarom wel of niet? U kunt uw antwoord in het tekstvak invoeren.

17. Wat is er met uw huisdier gebeurd na het overlijden?

- Ik heb het huisdier zelf begraven
- Ik heb het huisdier laten begraven

- Ik heb het huisdier laten cremen
- Ik heb het huisdier achtergelaten bij de dierenarts
- Anders, namelijk

18. Wat was de leeftijd van het huisdier bij overlijden? .. jaar

19. Hoe veel jaar bent u het baasje geweest van uw huisdier tot het kwam te overlijden? .. jaar

20. Was dit uw eerste huisdier?

- Ja, dit was mijn eerste huisdier
- Nee, ik heb of had eerder al een ander huisdier

21. Had u één of meer andere huisdieren ten tijde van het overlijden van dit huisdier?

- Ja
- Nee

22. In welke categorie valt dit of vallen deze huisdieren? (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Hond(en)
- Kat(ten)
- Andere zoogdier(en), namelijk
- Vogel(s), namelijk
- Reptiel(en), namelijk
- Vis(sen), namelijk
- Anders, namelijk

Reacties op verlies van het huisdier

23. Nu volgt er een aantal stellingen over uw emotionele reactie op het overlijden van uw huisdier in de afgelopen 4 weken. Kies het antwoord dat het meeste op u van toepassing is, waarbij 1 helemaal mee oneens is en 4 helemaal mee eens. Sommige vragen zullen echter niet op u van toepassing zijn, u kunt dit dan ook aangeven door “n.v.t.” te kiezen.

Ik ben boos op de dierenarts omdat hij/zij mijn huisdier niet heeft kunnen redden.

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik ben erg overstuur van de dood van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Mijn leven voelt leeg zonder mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik heb nachtmerries over het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik voel me eenzaam zonder mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik had moeten weten dat er iets ergs met mijn huisdier kon gebeuren

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik mis mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik voel me schuldig over dat ik niet beter voor mijn huisdier heb gezorgd

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik voel me slecht dat ik niet meer heb gedaan om mijn huisdier te redden

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik huil als ik aan mijn huisdier denk

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik ben boos op andere mensen omdat ze hebben bijgedragen aan de dood van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik ben erg verdrietig over de dood van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik ben boos op vrienden/familie omdat zij niet meer behulpzaam zijn geweest

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Herinneringen aan het laatste moment van mijn huisdier achtervolgen me

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik zal nooit over het verlies van mijn huisdier heenkomen

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

Ik wou dat ik mijn huisdier meer liefde had getoond

1 2 3 4 N.V.T.

24. Heeft u in de vier weken NA het overlijden van uw huisdier de aanschaf van een ander huisdier overwogen of daartoe al besloten?

- Ik heb een ander huisdier overwogen maar deze niet aangeschaft
- Ik heb een ander huisdier overwogen en deze ook aangeschaft
- Ik heb geen ander huisdier overwogen

Reactie van omgeving

25. Hebt u in het algemeen na het overlijden van uw huisdier, hierover gesproken of contact gehad met .. (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- a. Familie: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- b. Vrienden: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- c. Buren: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- d. Bekenden: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- e. Collega's, klas of studiegenoten: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- f. Lotgenoten: nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- g. Professionals (denk aan; medisch specialist, politie, leidinggevende, slachtofferhulp):
nooit, zelden, regelmatig, vaak
- h. Andere personen dan hierboven genoemd, namelijk..

U hebt zojuist aangegeven dat u met niemand hebt gesproken of contact hebt gehad over het overlijden van uw huisdier. Graag wil ik weten of andere mensen misschien toch weten dat u deze gebeurtenis hebt meegemaakt (bijvoorbeeld omdat zij op de één of andere manier gehoord of gezien hebben dat het is gebeurd).

26. Weet iemand dat u de stressvolle gebeurtenis hebt meegemaakt?

- Ja, één of meerdere personen
- Ja, ik vermoed één of meerdere personen
- Nee, helemaal niemand
- Ik weet het niet

27. Neem s.v.p. het overlijden van uw huisdier in gedachten bij de beantwoording van de volgende stellingen. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre u het, in het algemeen, met deze stellingen eens of oneens bent? Let op, deze vragen dienen te worden beantwoord op een 5-puntsschaal, waarbij 1 betekent helemaal niet mee eens met de stelling en 5 helemaal mee eens. U kunt tevens aangeven of deze stellingen niet op u van toepassing zijn, door "N.V.T." te kiezen.

De meeste mensen begrijpen niet wat ik heb meegemaakt

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Op de ene of andere manier ben ik geen normaal lid/onderdeel van de samenleving sinds de gebeurtenis

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Er is niet voldoende begrip voor wat mij is overkomen

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

De enige mensen die mij echt begrijpen zijn degenen die iets soortgelijks hebben meegemaakt

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

De meeste mensen kunnen zich niet voorstellen hoe moeilijk het is om met je "normale" dagelijkse leven door te gaan

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

De reacties van kennissen van mij op het overlijden van mijn huisdier waren behulpzaam

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

De reacties van kennissen van mij op het overlijden van mijn huisdier waren onbegripvol of beledigend

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Veel mensen boden hun hulp aan in de eerste dagen na het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn vrienden hebben begrip voor wat mij is overkomen

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mensen in mijn omgeving respecteren mij meer sinds het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Als de gebeurtenis algemeen bekend was: belangrijke publieke personen in mijn woonplaats (bv. geestelijke, burgemeester) toonden hun begrip

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

28. Kunt u aangeven in hoeverre u het, in het algemeen, met de volgende stellingen eens of oneens bent? Als u geen familie of baas/leidinggevende hebt, kiest u dan 'N.V.T.'. Let op, deze vragen dienen te worden beantwoord op een 5-puntsschaal. Waarbij 1 betekent helemaal niet mee eens met de stelling en 5 helemaal mee eens.

Mijn baas/leidinggevende toonde volledig begrip voor als ik afwezig was na het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn familie toonde veel begrip voor hoe het met mij ging na het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn familie heeft het gevoel dat ze me moeten beschermen sinds het overlijden van mijn huisdier

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn familie vindt mijn reacties op het overlijden van mijn huisdier overdreven

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn ervaringen worden door mijn familie onderschat

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

Mijn familie vindt het niet prettig om over mijn ervaringen te praten

1 2 3 4 5 N.V.T.

29. Bedankt voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek!

Bent u benieuwd naar de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek? Na afloop van het onderzoek kunt u een samenvatting krijgen van het doel en de resultaten van dit onderzoek. Laat daarvoor hier uw e-mailadres achter. Dit e-mailadres zal niet voor andere doeleinden gebruikt worden.

Emailadres:

Dit is het einde van de enquête. U kunt deze pagina afsluiten.