5-2012

Companion Animal Loss: A Disenfranchised Form of Grief and why it's Relevant to Social Work

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Recommended Citation
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Submitted by Emily Merrill

May, 2012

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master’s thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

Thirty participants of the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group held at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center evaluated this program in order to find out if a mutual aid support group is beneficial for pet loss survivors. Demographics of participants were examined, as well as how efficient the CALLM group was at meeting its five main objectives which are: a.) Normalize feelings b.) Improve understanding on the grief process c.) Improve knowledge of useful coping mechanisms d.) Encourage therapeutic storytelling of one’s companion animal and e.) Provide resources and referrals as needed. Results were that the majority of pet loss survivors found CALLM to be beneficial. Respondents also validated that CALLM made them feel less alone in their grief, which is important for a disenfranchised population.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Jeannine Moga and my wonderful clients at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center (VMC). Thank you for all of your guidance and support. Your knowledge on the human-animal bond and how to work with disenfranchised grief amazes me. My broader understanding of how to support those who have experienced a loss is a direct result of working with my clients at the VMC, both in the Companion Animal Love, Loss and Memories (CALLM) group and individual counseling. I can not thank each one of you enough for opening up and sharing your heartfelt experiences with me. I will forever be touched by the amazing animals and people at the VMC.

I would like to thank my amazing committee members Cara Carlson and Margaret Callan, along with my chair Felicia Sy. Thank you all for devoting time to help me complete such a daunting task. It is because of your positivity and support that I got through the challenging moments and anxiety. Your thoughtfulness, humor, and patience have meant the world to me.

I am extremely grateful to Catholic Charities for granting me with a phenomenal scholarship. I wouldn’t have had such an amazing educational experience if it were not for this opportunity. Within Catholic Charities I would like to thank Hope Street. I cannot thank my supervisors Andrea Simonett and Jim Scott enough for your patience and flexibility around my schedule while over the last three years. I appreciate everyone’s support and many pep talks throughout my time in school.

Thank you to my many lovely, amazing, and humorous friends for giving me an outlet during stressful times. Thank you for answering the phone and talking me through stressful
moments. Thank you for coming over with wine. Thank you for sending encouraging emails, texts, and cards. Thank you for understanding my absence. Thank you for making jokes. Thank you for believing in me and for all of your support. I have the best friends.

Thank you to the love of my life, JD. Your constant support got me through this. Thank you for waiting up for me when I got home late from class. Thank you for calming me down when I got overwhelmed. Thank you for allowing me to rant about social justice issues, even when you were tired. Thank you for making me laugh when all I wanted to do was cry. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for making me so happy.

Finally I want to thank my family, especially my mom for your unconditional love and support. Your strength and resilience is a true inspiration to me. Thank you for always believing in me even when I doubted myself. Thank you for all of your encouragement. I am who I am today because of you.
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Relevance to Research

I want to provide my audience with some background information which is why I will be writing this section in the first person. When I found out that I would be spending the next year doing my clinical field placement at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center; I felt compelled to conduct further research on the human-animal bond and the disenfranchised grief associated with companion animal loss, in order to better understand the clientele with which I would be working with. What I have found is that there is a whole sub-culture that social workers are missing and are often uneducated about. That sub-culture is those grieving the loss of a companion animal.

At my field placement I co-facilitate a Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) mutual aid support group that is offered through The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center. I also facilitate individual, couple, or family counseling to clients making difficult and end of life decisions, along with grief and loss associated with death regarding their companion animal. What I have experienced thus far is that people have strong reactions to losing their companion animals, yet they feel that they are “crazy” or “silly” for having these intense feelings of grief and bereavement. In order for social workers to better serve this large population of clients that have or have had companion animals, it is important to be sensitive and compassionate by validating their feelings of loss.

Guilt combined with grief can cause the grief to become more complicated and can make a companion animal’s death more difficult to understand than human death (Turner, 2003). As the social worker at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, this researcher works with many clients experiencing guilt. There are many ways that guilt plays a role in a veterinary medical setting; many clients feel guilt because they do not have the funds to provide their companion animals with treatment after a diagnosis, such as cancer. This often leads to
having to euthanize their companion animal, which causes even more feelings of guilt. Many members of the CALLM group have voiced guilt regarding other companion animals and not having the same closeness as they once had with a particular companion animal, with whom they viewed as a friend, spouse, child, sibling, or other family member.

Introduction

According to the 2011-2012 APPA National Pet Owners Survey; sixty-two percent of U.S. households own a companion animal (2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey). This means that 72.9 million homes today have a companion animal, an increase of six percent since 1988 (2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey). Research suggests that households, as high as ninety-seven percent, regard their companion animal as a member of the family (2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey). Research conducted by this same study also shows little difference in grieving the loss of a human being and that of a pet.

Although, there is a high number of Americans with companion animals, there are no accepted social structures that support pet loss (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). For example, it is much more uncommon for people to have funerals or memorial ceremonies for their companion animals in comparison to human funerals or memorial ceremonies. This, in part, contributes to the reality that the loss of a companion animal is a disenfranchised form of grief (Sharkin & Knox, 2003; Turner 2003).

Turner (2003) explains disenfranchised grief to be a grief that someone can experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. Because the research on the human-animal bond and the disenfranchised grief associated with it is a new and growing body of research, there is also likely less research on end of life ceremonies for companion animals. End of life ceremonies help people mourn the
loss of loved ones. With nothing in place for companion animals it becomes more difficult to mourn the loss.

A way in which social workers can help clients dealing with disenfranchised grief associated with companion animal loss is by referring them to appropriate resources or counselors that are educated on the human animal bond, and have an appreciation for an animal’s role in a human’s life (Turner, 2003). Many people grieving their companion animal’s death do not have adequate social support. When grief associated with the loss of an animal is validated it can take away a large amount of anxiety associated with disenfranchised grief (Turner, 2003 and Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). Mutual aid support groups are a great way for clients to gain lost social support, cope with devastating life transitions, restore any diminished self-concepts, prompt healthy life review, and maximize their strengths which promote mental health (Kelly, 2005).

Regardless of the population we serve, as social workers we will inevitably be confronted with a myriad of issues in which grief and loss are at the core (Pomeroy, 2011). It is important for social workers to understand how difficult it is for one to grieve the loss of a pet. Sharkin and Bahrick (1990) state: “Many clinicians consider the topic of pet loss to be outside of the realm of their professional work, even considering it to be irrelevant or insignificant. Before clinicians dismiss the importance of providing bereavement and grief therapy for companion animal loss, they might consider the statistics regarding this growing concern.”

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of a facilitated mutual aid support group for pet loss survivors. In order for social work to be seen as relevant and beneficial to veterinary medical settings, more research and literature need to be conducted. The
hope in conducting a program evaluation is to provide some support for veterinary social work, and grief and bereavement support for pet loss survivors.

Adults grieving the loss of a loved one can benefit greatly from the powerful dynamics of a mutual aid support group (Kelly, 2004). As mentioned throughout the literature review, many people grieving the loss of a companion animal are experiencing disenfranchised grief, which often isolates the bereaved person due to lack of social support. Grief may be defined as a multidimensional experience and when it goes unattended it can lead to other emotional problems and mental health issues (Pomeroy, 2011). Providing a person experiencing disenfranchised grief with a mutual aid support group can allow them to connect with other people experiencing similar grief (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009).

The literature reviewed will provide further information on the human-animal bond, the disenfranchised grief associated with companion animal loss, and the relevance to social work. It is important for social workers to provide their clientele with appropriate resources in aiding to their support. An added form of support for those grieving the loss of a loved one is a mutual aid support group (Kelly, 2005). To further examine how helpful a mutual aid support group can be to those grieving the loss of a companion animal, a program evaluation will be conducted for research in a quantitative study. With more Americans having companion animals than have children (Turner, 2003) it is important that more research be done in the social work field to better serve this now distinct and prominent sub-culture.

Literature Review

The impact of the human-animal bond is relevant everywhere you go; there are water dishes available at the doors of many businesses, sometimes even dog treats. The important role a companion animal plays is evident in society today; yet the grief associated with companion
animal loss often goes unrecognized. This is apparent in the lack of available counseling and therapy options led by licensed professionals, who are skilled and trained on the human-animal bond and grief and loss therapy. What research is finding is that because society views this grief as inappropriate, people who experience companion animal loss are repressing their feelings, rationalizing or minimizing their loss, and using denial as a way to cope (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990).

There is a growing body of research developing which supports the powerful relationship between human and companion animal; therefore it is important for social workers to be educated in this area (Risely-Curtiss, 2010). Social workers are professional helpers that must be prepared to work with a variety of populations and problems, including explorations of the human-animal bond. Yet, social workers are poorly prepared due to the lack of research, education, and practice regarding the bond between humans and companion animals (Risley-Curtiss, 2010). This literature review specifically examines three areas to better understand this phenomenon: the human-companion animal bond, the grief associated with companion animal loss, and the relevance to social work; along with how mutual aid support groups can benefit this population.

The Human-Companion Animal Bond

Ninety-five percent companion animal owners viewed their pets as friends and eighty-seven percent considered their pet a family member (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007). Many companion animal owners have extremely deep and fulfilling emotional ties to their pets (Meyers, 2002). A large number of companion animal owners report that their animal provides as much or more emotional support than human family and friends in times of stress (Furman, 2005). Many of this researcher’s clients have identified feeling similarly.
Estimates from the study conducted in 1994 indicate that more people today have companion animals than people have children, and the popularity of companion animals in America only continues to grow (Turner, 2003). Just as attachment is important for human relationships, it is also important and apparent with human-animal relationships. The attachment between the owners and their pets can rival that between a parent and a child attachment (Woodward and Bauer, 2007).

It is important to understand attachment theory to better appreciate the human-companion animal bond, because much like human relationships, people form attachments to the animals they own. According to Bowlby (1969), attachment is a “lasting psychological connectedness” (p. 194) between two living beings, that is not limited to humans. Attachment theory as outlined by Bowlby (1996) also states the human need to be caregivers. Carmack (1985) attests to this theory, stating that companion animals fulfill the human desire to feel needed, as they are constantly dependent on their owners for food, shelter, exercise, and access to the outdoors.

Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver (2011) state that attachment relationships meet four criteria: a.) proximity maintenance- preferring to be near the attachment figure, especially in during times of stress or need, b.) safe haven- relieving distress and providing comfort, encouragement, and support, c.) secure base- increasing a sense of security, and d.) separation distress- feelings of distress when the attachment figure is temporarily or permanently unavailable. Based on the review of Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver (2011) the human-animal bonds indicate that owners and companion animals most often meet the four prerequisites for an attachment relationship.

Understanding the human-companion animal bond means to understand how it exists. Turner (2003) believes that symbolic interactionism provides a rationale for why it exists. One
of the theory’s main ideas came from the theory of pragmatism, which means the objects we encounter are defined based on their use to us. An example of this would be an owner defining their companion animal as either a “guard dog” or “best friend”. This coincides with pets having a specific role or function while living with their human companions (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007). Many times these defining roles serve as a secure base, which allows owners to pursue activities, take risks, and explore the world (Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011).

People form emotional attachments with their companion animals, which are sometimes very special and different from the attachments they form with people (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990). It has been discovered that the strong bond that exists between humans and companion animals has both physical and mental health benefits for humans (Turner, 2003) and the positive impact has been recognized as far back as the middle of the 18th century (Risley-Curtiss, 2010). Turner’s (2003) findings show that cardiac patients who own companion animals have a higher survival rate, and also found that petting an animal can lower one’s blood pressure. Netting, Wilson, and New (1987) also found that companion animals provide tactile stimulation, which can have a beneficial effect on the cardiovascular system. Along with those physical traits, therapy animals have been shown to lower signs of depression and can also decrease aggression among those incarcerated (Turner, 2003).

For most people, companion animals provide their owners, both adults and children, with a source of unconditional love, affection, support, comfort, safety, security, stability, and relief in times of need (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990, Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011 and Risley-Curtis, 2010). Companion animals can also contribute to children’s cognitive and language development, and assist with an elderly person’s ability to function in daily activities (Risley-Curtis, 2010). Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel (2007) support the theory of companionship
by acknowledging that companion animals provide not only a source of comfort, but are a stimulus for exercise, and also reduce anxiety and decrease loneliness and depression. Netting, Wilson, and New (1987) found similar results, that companion animals minimize loneliness. In certain circumstances, where a person may feel physically or psychologically removed from human attachments or relationships, the relationship between companion animal and owner may be even more significant (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990).

Higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness are common in older adults (Watt and Pachana, 2007) and with the Baby Boomer generation advancing, social workers need to be better prepared to address many different aspects affecting this population’s life. Risely-Curtiss (2010) found that companion animals teach families over time about different life experiences, such as responsibility, care giving, loss and death. This could be seen as a positive way to prepare young adults for old age and potentially could benefit their mental health in their elder years.

Older adults are more likely to live alone, compared to any other age group. Watt and Pachana (2007) found that almost 44% of people over the age of 60 live alone, and of those living alone, 70% were female. A big reason for older adults to be at risk for loneliness is because they have a decreased number of new social contacts and more exposure to disruptions in social networks, due to deaths of family and friends (Watt and Pachana, 2007). The human-companion animal bond can help relieve and restore emotional equanimity during times of need or of distress, which can be beneficial to the quality of life for older adults (Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011).

The grief associated with companion animal loss
Because the human-companion animal bond is suggested to develop similarly as the bond between humans, the response to the loss of a companion animal should theoretically follow the same response that follows a human death, although this is not common (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). When a companion animal is critically injured, ill, or dying, there is less and/or likely no social service support among the veterinary clinic or hospital, compared to a human hospital. Pilgram (2010) examines veterinarians’ perceptions of giving social support to grieving clients in her article. What Pilgram (2010) concluded was that veterinarians perceive that they do offer social support; however they do not have the appropriate training that social workers have in order to do so.

Research has shown that the strength of the attachment between human and companion animal is a significant predictor of the severity in grief and bereavement following the death of a companion animal (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). When a companion animal is someone’s source of unconditional love, support, comfort, safety, security, and stability, the grief and bereavement can feel almost unbearable and can be just as intense as losing a significant person (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990).

Not only can bereavement associated with companion animal loss go unacknowledged, it can also be seen as inappropriate or not legitimate in society to grieve this loss (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990 and Pilgram, 2010). For a long time and for even some people today, pets were and are viewed as “property” and not as family members. Therefore some people believe that grieving the loss of a “property” is unjustified or unnecessary (Pilgram, 2010). Acknowledging that a companion animal is more than property helps build rapport more quickly, which is important when working with a client.
The first step in helping clients cope with the loss of a companion animal is to acknowledge the loss (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990). In order to acknowledge this loss appropriately, the social worker must understand that not only is the client grieving but they are grieving in a much different way than when grieving a human loss. There are two types of grief that can be associated with companion animal loss; complicated grief and disenfranchised grief, mentioned earlier (Pilgram, 2010).

Complicated grief is considered to be a grief reaction that goes beyond what is considered to be “normal grieving time or grief reaction” (Turner, 2003). Turner (2003) explains that there are four different complicated grief reactions: chronic grief, delayed grief, exaggerated grief, and masked grief. Complicated grief usually develops when a person is experiencing other difficulties in life, such as mental illness. Being proactive when working with clients experiencing other difficulties may improve client satisfaction and quality of care (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007 and Turner, 2003). Having a social worker on-site at a veterinary medical center would provide the client with a sense of comfort, and the ability to access counseling if needed. This in turn could improve mental health and feelings of isolation for bereaved clients (Netting, Wilson, and New, 1987).

Complicated grief can be defined as a deviation from the cultural norm in the course of time or intensity in symptoms of grief (Pilgram, 2010 and Turner, 2003). Many of this researcher’s clients at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center have commented that those that make up their outside support system continue to tell them to “get over it” or say things like “It was just a dog, why are you still upset?” These comments often encourage people to repress their feelings (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). Turner (2003) states, that
when people do not have emotional social support after the loss of a companion animal, feelings of anger can begin to set in.

It is important for clinicians to understand this because it is an important aspect of the grief process. Recognizing the impact of companion animals on people’s lives can significantly affect a social worker’s ability to help their client (Risley-Curtis, Holley, and Wolf, 2006). Research shows that having social support and the ability to confide in others helps those going through the bereavement process (Pilgram, 2010, Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990, Netting, Wilson, and New, 1987, Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007, Turner, 2003, Margolies, 1999). It is also important for clinicians to remember that not only can a person grieve the loss of a companion animal, but they can also feel a large amount of guilt, especially if the animal was euthanized (Turner, 2003).

Relevance to social work

Companion animals bring meaning to a person’s life, (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007) so when a person loses their companion, it’s important for helping professionals to respond to this grief with compassion. This means having an understanding of the human-animal bond and disenfranchised grief. Risley-Curtis (2010) also validate this theory stating, that the majority of people who own companion animals consider them a part of their family; therefore the social work profession should be educated on these significant relationships. Social workers who are knowledgeable and competent in the human-animal bond are able to provide their clients with validation of their feelings associated with disenfranchised and complicated grief. These skills are extremely important in weathering bereavement (Pilgram, 2009 and Turner, 2003).
Because the grief associated with pet loss is a disenfranchised form of grief many people react insensitively when a person is openly grieving the loss of a pet, which discourages the individual to deal with their grief effectively. Many counselors are still skeptical in playing a role in helping people cope with pet loss, which can also reinforce people to repress their feelings or minimize their loss even more (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990). Not only do veterinary social workers provide grief and loss therapy for their clients, but they also provide counseling and education to medical professionals (Kitchen and Brook, 2005, Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel, 2007, Netting, Wilson, and New, 1987, Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990).

Although there are many empathetic and compassionate veterinarians, it is extremely important that there are trained professionals available for clients in need of counseling, referrals, or time to process when making difficult decisions regarding their beloved companion animal. Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel (2007) found in their study that the key findings were that veterinarians see themselves as lacking the necessary communication skills needed to maximize their potential to be successful practitioners. Kitchen and Brook (2005) found that the impact of the professional collaboration between veterinary medical centers and social work to be a necessity, when it comes to medical outcomes. Although, there are many professionals and clients that view the role of the social worker as valuable, there are still many that are skeptical. Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, and McDaniel (2007) also found that graduating veterinary medical students report feeling ill-prepared to appropriately address the emotional concerns of their clients, or deal with difficult clients that are angry about the quality of services.

Social workers can benefit a veterinary medical center by providing competence in recognizing that pets are often regarded as family members, awareness and knowledge of therapeutic interventions and techniques, and acknowledgement of veterinarian personal well-
being (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig, McDaniel, 2007). The indirect work that social workers provide is often overlooked, but is so important. Some of the benefits of having social workers available, is that they are able to provide a veterinary medical center with: offering advice or professional opinion to staff and clinicians, aiding in the articulation of painful feelings, reflection on the current situation, encouraging thought about the situation, discussion of client’s behavior and possible courses of action, aid with client’s current feelings or beliefs about the situation or the agency, explaining procedures or treatment to clients having a difficult time understanding, and responding to the client in crisis (Johnson, 1999).

There are many aspects that needed to be taken into account when working with clients of veterinary medical centers. Other aspects to consider when working with veterinary medical centers are: is the socioeconomic status of the client and their access to community based services (Kitchen and Brook, 2005). Medical professionals are not focused on these aspects, due to their medical focus. Therefore, it raises another aspect in which social work can take the lead, allowing the medical professionals to focus on medical procedures.

Social workers can take the time to go over costs of treatment and help the client process how they will manage the situation they are in, along with possibly referring them to whatever additional services needed. Social workers are, by virtue of their training, uniquely qualified to serve as the coordinators of the discussion on the decision-making process. What is unique and distinct about the way social workers manage their work on their units in bureaucratic organizations is that they are team players (Kitchen and Brook, 2005). Although, many would also argue that medical professionals are also team players.
When working with clients dealing with grief and bereavement associated with companion animal loss it is important to have an understanding of attachment theory, because it can be helpful in understanding the roles and relationships pets may play in a person’s environment (Neting, Wilson, and New, 1987). Just as humans have relationships with other humans, humans also form attachments to animals. Recognizing the impact of the attachment formed from the human-animal bond can significantly affect a social worker’s ability to be effective in helping their clients (Risley-Curtiss, Holley, and Wolf, 2006). The purpose of attachment is to feel secure (Margolies, 1999) and that is exactly what a companion animal brings to a person’s life (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990). This security needs to be respected and understood in order for our clients to open up and work through the bereavement process.

Bowlby (1969) defines attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness” between two living beings. The human-animal bond has been recognized as advantageous for both the human and the animal, in terms of a mutual need for attachment that spans species (Watt and Pachana, 2007). According to Bowlby (1980), attachment and bonding are present and active throughout the lifespan. Attachment theory also expresses the human need for being caretakers (Bowlby, 1980). Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver’s (2011) study found that attachment bonds can be formed with pets, due to a pet being a natural object of attachment, as they are readily available, active and mobile, and affectionate. In a strong human-animal attachment bond, the human takes care of the animal by meeting its needs; while the human receives unconditional love, affection, and companionship (Watt and Pachana, 2007). It has been suggested that pet owners display parental behaviors toward their companion animals in most cases (Woodward and Bauer, 2007).
Bowlby (1982) led many other scholars to argue that when attachment is formed between adolescent and adult it meets four criteria: 1.) *proximity maintenance*, which means that one prefers to be near the attachment figure, especially in times of stress or need; 2.) *safe haven*, the ability to use the attachment figure as a safe haven in order to relieve distress and provide comfort; 3.) *secure base*, increasing one’s sense of security; and 4.) *separation distress*, which happens when the attachment figure is temporarily or permanently unavailable (Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011). Based on Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver (2011) literature review they found that in most cases the human-companion animal bond meets these four prerequisites for an attachment relationship.

Inter-species attachment bonding develops very similarly to how humans form attachment to one another. The way in which this attachment is formed is through a mutual role of providing and offering security and protection. This function creates a reciprocal attachment security (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). Watt and Pachana (2007) describe this attachment as being formed through the exchange of acceptance and affection, which creates an advantageous bond for both the human and the animal. Therefore, the response to loss of an animal-attachment should be the same as the response to the loss of a human-attachment (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009).

Based on our underlying human need for attachment (Ainsworth, 1989), it makes sense that the human-animal bond is comparable to the human-human bond (Watt and Pachana, 2007). What type of attachment style a person may have is a factor in how one forms an attachment with their pet (Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011). When examining the human-animal bond through attachment theory it is helpful to develop an understanding of your client’s attachment style, so that as a clinician you can understand their systematic pattern of relational expectations,
emotions, and behaviors, which they have developed through a particular attachment history (Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011). Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman (2009) back up this idea, as they found that attachment style has a direct bearing on a person’s response to separation or loss, which is an important predictor of variability in how a person responds to grief.

The strength of the attachment bond to a pet can also be a great predictor of the severity of grief that a client may experience following the death of their companion animal (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009). This is something a social worker can watch for and can provide support when appropriate. Watt and Pachana (2007) found similar evidence stating that pet owners with a high level of attachment showed higher levels of well-being and positive effect, which can also predict the severity in grief after losing a pet with which one has a strong attachment. Woodward and Bauer (2007) found that the attachment between pets and their owners can sometimes rival that between a parent and child; obviously in this case the severity of grief would be high. If clinicians do not understand the depth of the relationship they can destroy their chances of helping their client.

Awareness of attachment theory is crucial in understanding how the CALLM group at the VMC is run, because the goals of this mutual aid support group were based on the client’s attachments to their companion animals. In order to provide a safe space for clients to discuss their loss, the social workers facilitating must understand this conceptual framework.

Facilitated Mutual Aid Support Group Description

A program evaluation will be conducted on the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group offered through the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center. The CALLM group is a mutual aid support group that is facilitated by The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center’s social worker, Jeannine Moga, and interns, one being the
researcher. The CALLM group is held in the Pomeroy Building on the University of Minnesota’s campus on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.

The social workers at the VMC provide clients with a safe space for them to open up and discuss the loss of their companion animal. This also helps reduce isolation by connecting each member to other pet loss survivors who are also dealing with disenfranchised grief. There are four main goals of the CALLM group and they are 1.) normalize feelings and reduce pathology, 2.) increase understanding of the grief process and improve coping, 3.) encourage meaning making and resolution, and 4.) increase general sense of support for loss and response to co-occurring issues (Moga, 2011). In order to achieve these goals the VMC social worker and intern/s will use strategies that encourage the achievement of these specific goals. The four strategies are 1.) normalize and validate the human-animal bond, 2.) educate the group members on the grief process and different relevant and effective coping mechanisms, 3.) encourage members to participate in therapeutic storytelling, and 4.) give the members appropriate resources and referrals as seen necessary (Moga, 2011).
Methods

In general there is a need for further investigation on the nature and impact of the human-animal bond, companion animal loss and the grief associated with it. There is also a need for more appropriate social work services among veterinary medical centers and clinics, so that those grieving the loss of a companion animal are able to receive services from professionals experienced in the human-animal bond as well as grief and bereavement counseling. A program evaluation was chosen to cite the strengths and limitations of mutual aid support groups for pet loss survivors.

In order to gain better knowledge of how members of a mutual aid companion animal loss support group felt about these services an evaluation survey was distributed to past CALLM group members, from the last eight years. The CALLM group has four main strategies which are to: normalize and validate feelings related to the human-animal bond and grief and bereavement, educate members on the grief process and coping mechanisms, allow for therapeutic storytelling, and provide members with resources and referrals if necessary (Moga, 2011). Past members of the CALLM group were asked to evaluate if they felt that the CALLM group met the above four strategies, in order to determine if they felt that this group was productive and helpful for pet loss support.

Research Design

Program evaluations have become increasingly more important for human service professionals because these evaluations focus on the effectiveness or the efficiency of a program or practice (Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong, 2008). Program evaluation is extremely beneficial to the field of social work because many programs and practices rely on their evaluation for
continued funding. In order for programs to continue functioning successfully, outcome reporting is essential and necessary (Unrau and Coleman, 2006).

Evaluating how a group runs can guide practice because if a program is not projecting the outcomes expected, then changes need to be made to reinforce the desired outcomes (Secret, Abell, and Berlin, 2011). In social services there continues to be high demands for public accountability, which requires administrators to prove their program’s effectiveness, which can be done through different statistical tools in program evaluation (Unrau and Coleman, 2006). Therefore, program evaluation has become an integral part of human service programs (Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong, 2008).

In order to gain perspective as to how beneficial the CALLM group is a program evaluation survey based on the goals and objectives of the CALLM group was mailed out to past attending members of CALLM. The program evaluation survey consisted of 14 structured multiple choice and multidimensional scaled questions. Please see Appendix D for data collection instrument. When developing a scale to measure client satisfaction for a program evaluation there are three major attributes of service to measure (Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong, 2008). The three attributes of service to measure are: 1.) Relevance: Did the CALLM group correspond to the client’s perception of his or her problem or needs? 2.) Impact: Did coming to the CALLM group reduce the problem? 3.) Gratification: Did CALLM enhance self-esteem and contribute to a sense of power and integrity (Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong, 2008).

Sample

The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center’s Social Work Department maintains a list of all past and current CALLM members. One hundred names from the last eight years were chosen from a random number table. One hundred names were selected to ensure a
better outcome for participation. The researcher used purposive sampling to specifically identify companion animal loss survivors who have experience with social work services and would be able to give feedback on its relevance. Because the survey was anonymous, the researcher had no knowledge of which recipients choose to complete the survey.

At any time, the CALLM group is made up of twelve group members, males and females that range in age. The CALLM group is voluntary and free to all members. The CALLM group is offered to clients of The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, but is not limited those clients. Many clients are referred from outside agencies or by personal connections. The group rotates, meaning it is not always the same twelve people that attend this mutual aid support group. Members of this group can come freely based on openings. Participants of the CALLM group are predominantly Caucasian females, which may cause bias. None of the participants will be under the age of 18.

Protection of Participants

Protection of participants was ensured via an application to The University of St. Thomas’ Institutional Review Board (IRB), as well as informed consent, confidentiality, and non-coercion strategies. Participation in this program evaluation offered limited risk to participants. If recalling the event of their companion loss caused any disturbance or brought up feelings of grief or bereavement, participants were encouraged to come back to the CALLM group for support. Clients were also encouraged to come in for up to three free individual sessions with one of the three social workers at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, should these feelings arise.
Project Information Sheet

Participants were given a project information sheet/cover letter that clearly outlines the study’s purpose, the survey design, and any risks or benefits the participants may incur.

Participants were notified that by filling out the survey and returning it they were giving their consent to participate in the program evaluation. Please see Appendix A for cover letter to participants.

Anonymity

All responses were kept anonymous, unless the participant wished to give their name to this researcher. Only the researcher and Director of Social Work Services at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center have access to data. There is no way for the researcher to know which participants completed the survey, unless the participant chose to release their information. The data collected from this survey will be kept indefinitely for future research for the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center.

Data Collection

Each CALLM member was mailed a cover letter (Please see Appendix A), explaining the research being conducted, along with the survey and a self addressed stamped envelope. The project information sheet/cover letter and survey was sent via U.S. mail. This researcher sent out 100 letters to past CALLM members within the last eight years. The nature of participation was strictly voluntary to avoid any conflict of interest or bias.

Instrument

The instrument that was utilized in this study was an evaluation survey regarding the CALLM group and it consisted of 14 questions, with additional space for comments (Please see Appendix B). The instrument was created by the researcher of this project, based on the mission,
goals, and objectives of the CALLM group. All survey questions were reviewed by this researcher’s committee members and the Social Work Director at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, Jeannine Moga.

The reliability of the questions was assessed by committee members and Jeanine Moga to make sure the questions were understandable. The face validity (which means that the questions were only obtaining information that was needed) was evaluated by committee members, chair and the researcher’s clinical field supervisor. Content validity was also achieved through examination of the literature and use of feedback from experts on the research committee.

Data Analysis Plan

The intent of this study was to explore the demographics of this population, in terms of clientele seeking grief and bereavement counseling for companion animal loss. The demographics that this researcher was seeking were gender, age, race/ethnicity, yearly income, and type of companion animal. The quantitative data was based on the CALLM group’s mission, goals, and objectives. The quantitative data was analyzed based on whether or not the participant felt those mission, goals, and objectives were met.

The goals of the CALLM group are to normalize and validate feelings regarding the human-animal bond and the grief the members are feeling, to educate regarding the grief process and on coping mechanisms, allow for therapeutic storytelling, and be able to obtain resources and referrals as needed. Participants were asked to rate their experience on a Thurstone scale, which is similar to a Likert scale, but uses the selection of many statements that relate to the variable measured (Monette, Sullivan, DeJong, 2008).

The researcher evaluated if the CALLM group and/or social work services met their goals and objectives. The participants were also asked if they received any outside services and
if they found them to be helpful. Another objective of this research was to find out if the participants felt that the clinicians were experienced in the human-animal bond and grief and bereavement counseling.

Quantitative Findings

Out of 100 surveys sent out to past Companion Animal Love, Loss and Memories (CALLM) participants, a total of 30 surveys were completed and sent back for analysis. The survey consisted of 14 questions. The first five questions were demographic questions. Please see Appendix B for survey questions. At the end of the survey the researcher left room for additional comments. Of the 30 completed surveys 24 respondents made additional comments. The comments made were seen as valid and useful additional information; therefore a qualitative section was added to enhance the research and help support the hypothesis. The hypothesis is that the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group was beneficial for those in need of bereavement support for the loss of a pet.

Demographics of Respondents

The sample, as predicted, was overwhelmingly white female, with 90% of participants identifying as female and 93.3% identifying as white. Participants were asked to circle the age bracket that they currently fit in; therefore the sample’s age range is difficult to determine. The categories that the sample identified as their current age ranged from 35-44 and 65 and older ($M=45-54$). Please see Table 2 for frequency distribution.
Table 2. *Statistics for Gender Distribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fem.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (30%) of the respondents identified that their annual household income was $70,000 or higher. Twenty percent of respondents reported their annual household income to be $40,000-$49,999. One respondent (3.3%) makes $10,000-$19,999, one (3.3%) reported $20,000-$29,999, and one (3.3%) reported $30,000-$39,999. There were no respondents identified as their annual household income as being $9,999 and under. Four respondents (13.3%) identified that their annual household income was $50,000-$59,999 and four respondents (13.3%) identified that their annual household income was $60,000-$69,999. Four respondents (13.3%) did not answer this question, with one respondent marking on the survey that this information was “too personal.” Please see Figure 1 for additional information on annual household income of respondents.
One hundred percent of respondents answered the question asking them to identify the companion animal for which they were attending the CALLM group. The majority of respondents (25 out of 30) attended CALLM for the death of a dog/s (83.3%). The other 5 (16.7%) respondents attended CALLM for the death of a cat. No respondents identified that they attended CALLM for the loss of any other animal.

**Gender Differences**

One hundred percent of respondents answered on a scale from 1 to 5, how beneficial was the Companion Animal love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group was for them. Sixty-three percent of female respondents felt that CALLM was extremely beneficial. Eleven percent of female respondents felt that CALLM was somewhat beneficial. Seven percent of respondents
rated the CALLM group as not beneficial. Out of the three male respondents one, male (33.3%) rated the CALLM group as extremely beneficial. The other two males (66.7%) rated the CALLM group as somewhat beneficial. It appears that women are more likely to attend the CALLM group after the loss of their companion animal then a male is.

*Objectives and Goals of CALLM*

The CALLM group has five main objectives, which are: a.) Normalize feelings b.) Improve understanding on the grief process c.) Improve knowledge of useful coping mechanisms d.) Encourage therapeutic storytelling of one’s companion animal and e.) Provide resources and referrals as needed. In order to find out if each goal was met a frequency distribution was run on each goal and rated by each respondent from 1=not beneficial to 5=extremely beneficial.
The first goal evaluated was based on if the respondent felt that their feelings were normalized while attending the CALLM group. Seventeen of 30 respondents (56.7%) felt that in terms of normalizing their feelings, this group was extremely beneficial. Thirteen percent felt that the group was somewhat beneficial in normalizing their feelings. Two respondents (6.7%) felt that the CALLM group was not beneficial in normalizing their feelings. Please see Figure 3 for Pie Chart.

Figure 3. Percentage CALLM normalized Feelings of Grief
The second goal was based on if the respondent felt that the CALLM group improved their understanding on the grief process. Fifty percent of respondents felt that the group increased their level of understanding on the grief process. Thirteen percent felt that the group was somewhat helpful in fulfilling this goal and 6.7% felt their understanding did not improve. Please see Figure 4 for Pie Chart.

Figure 4. Percentage of Improved Understanding of Grief
The third goal of CALLM is to improve participant’s knowledge of useful coping mechanisms. Forty-three percent felt that CALLM was extremely successful at providing useful coping mechanisms. Thirty percent of respondents felt it was in between somewhat successful and extremely successful. Thirteen percent felt the group was somewhat successful in proving useful coping mechanisms and 6.7% felt it was not successful in doing so. Please see Figure 5 for Pie Chart.

![Pie Chart](image)

Figure 5. Improved Knowledge of Useful Coping Mechanisms
The fourth goal of CALLM is to allow time and encourage therapeutic storytelling. Twenty (66.7%) out of 30 respondents felt that CALLM was extremely successful at encouraging therapeutic storytelling. About 17% felt that CALLM was beneficial, 10% found it somewhat beneficial, and 3.3% found it less than somewhat beneficial. One participant found it not beneficial, this participant marked low on all categories. Please see Figure 6 for Pie Chart.

![Pie Chart](image)

Figure 6. Percentage of Encouraged Therapeutic Storytelling
**CALLM Overall Rating**

Eighteen of the 30 respondents (60%) rated CALLM as a whole, extremely beneficial. About 17% of respondents rated CALLM somewhere higher then somewhat beneficial. Seventeen percent of respondents rated CALLM somewhat beneficial. Two (7%) of the 30 respondents felt CALLM was not beneficial. Please see figure 7 for a Pie Chart displaying these percentages.

![Pie Chart of CALLM Overall Rating](image.png)

**Figure 7. Overall Rating of CALLM**
Qualitative Findings

As suspected, many of the respondents made additional comments regarding their experience with the CALLM group and with pet loss. Twenty-four of the 30 respondents made additional comments on the survey and there were a few themes that came up; *respondents felt less alone in their grief from the support they received from group members in CALLM, pet loss is misunderstood, and CALLM was a positive experience.* Out of the 24 additional comments three respondents had negative comments and one of the respondents with a negative comment felt that despite some negative feelings “group was great.” In this qualitative findings section the common themes will be explained in more detail.

*Less Alone/More Support*

The theme this researcher found most relevant from the data collected was that CALLM made them feel less alone in their grief. Thirteen of the 30 comments made reflected respondents feeling less alone in their grief and supported by group members. One comment reflecting support was, “It was nice and comforting to be with others experiencing similar but different losses.” Another respondent stated, “It was great to be comforted by others when our hearts were broken.” One respondent commented, “It gave me an absolutely vital outlet and support system for my grief. I would certainly use the group again.”

In regards to comments made about feeling less alone in their grief, one respondent commented, “One of the best benefits I received from CALLM is that I was not alone in my grief and that my feelings were completely normal.” Another statement that reflected feeling less alone was, “This really helped me move on. Losing my dog was very traumatic for me and I felt I had lost everything. This group made me realize I am not alone.” One respondent commented,
“I think the best part of the program is knowing that you are not alone with your feelings of grief after the loss of a pet.”

*Pet Loss is Misunderstood*

Respondents felt that CALLM was a place where they could go and feel understood. One respondent commented, “This group is one of the most valuable services available to a pet owner. It is nice to be in a group that knows what you are going through.” Another commented that, “While I’m fortunate to have a circle of friends who are pet lovers and understand pet loss grief; I found it very beneficial to meet with the group (once) and share thoughts and feelings. Hearing others tell their grief stories and share tears help displace my grief with empathy. It was comforting to share that raw emotion with strangers who get it.”

Comments such as, “Sometimes other people outside the group, like friends can’t get it” solidify that pet loss is a disenfranchised form of grief. Another example of this, “At the time, it was helpful to talk and listen to others who valued and appreciated the loss of a pet as a family member. Not all people acknowledge that bond with animals. I appreciated it.” One respondent stated, “With these people you will NEVER hear it is just a dog or just a cat so get over it. I attended this class for quite awhile to get through my grief.” One respondent commented, “Pet loss grief is really misunderstood. When I lost my cat unexpectedly to cardiomyopathy I had just moved to Minnesota and had no support network. This program, the meetings, and the subsequent referral to a grief counselor cannot be underestimated. It gave me an absolutely vital outlet and support system for my grief. I would certainly use the group again.”

*Positive Experience*

Nineteen of the 24 comments were direct positive comments. Two of the comments were, “Best wishes!” and “Thanks and good luck with your studies.” One positive comment
was, “I cannot say enough positive things about how helpful/what an important resource the CALLM group has been to me!!” One respondent commented, “Attending the CALLM meeting was extremely beneficial to me. Especially in making end-of-life/treatment decisions. I have always felt that “sitting in a group, crying and telling stories” was not of interest or importance to me CALLM eliminated all of those feelings.”
Discussion

Due to the researcher’s experience as a social work intern at the VMC over the last year her exposure to those grieving pet loss has increased immensely. The researcher had the opportunity to co-facilitate the CALLM group all year and was able to see firsthand, how beneficial it was for those experiencing pet loss. The goal of finding out if CALLM was helpful for those grieving the loss of a pet shifted along the way. The further along the researcher got into her internship and research project she got, the more the goal began to shift to backing up how beneficial the researcher knew this group was to those receiving this support. As suspected, the CALLM group was viewed as more beneficial than not by the respondents of the surveys. In this section the researcher will discuss what data collected was relevant from both her quantitative and qualitative findings.

Quantitative Data

In conducting research surrounding pet loss support the researcher wanted to get a better idea of what the demographics of this population look like. From the data collected the demographics shown were somewhat surprising to the Director/Social Worker at the VMC, Jeannine Moga because the demographics were dominantly Caucasian females with above the median annual household income. The median annual household income of survey respondents was higher than most American households in the United States today. The real median household income was $49,445 in 2010, a 2.3 percent decline from 2009 (United States Government Census, 2011). Therefore, the average annual household income of respondents was surprising to not only the researcher, but her supervisor, chair, and committee members.
Although the gender and race demographics collected from this research does match the demographics of some similar studies, which may conclude that older Caucasian female pet loss survivors are more likely to seek bereavement support than younger male pet loss survivors of diverse backgrounds. In a similar pet loss study 91% of respondents were Caucasian and 84% were female and the mean age of participants was 44.48 (Field, Orsini, Gavish, and Packman, 2009). Watt and Pachana (2007) also found a higher number of older females to be pet owners. These findings may also tell us that a higher number of older females are willing to give feedback in regards to pet attachment and pet loss, therefore findings may be segued.

Although there are similar findings in the demographics of this population it is not representative of pet owners. This may be a representation of pet loss survivors that seek bereavement support. These finding were discussed with Jeannine Moga at the VMC and it is suspected that the surveys returned (12) were related to the recession and those whose were returned likely moved or are highly mobile, which is another factor in the annual household income. It could be possible that people who seek out bereavement support may tend to be those of higher economic status. Further research needs to be conducted to find out if socioeconomic background/status has an effect on asking for support for a loss in which is disenfranchised.

A common theme found in both the quantitative and qualitative findings was that CALLM validated that participants were not alone in their grief. This is an extremely important aspect in providing pet loss support because pet loss survivors are a disenfranchised population, meaning they often feel alone in their feelings. Turner (2003) also speaks to the importance of recognizing this disenfranchised grief and notes that pet loss is similar to suicide, as they are both are not publicly mourned, openly acknowledged, or socially supported. Providing those
experiencing a disenfranchised form of grief with a group of people, also experiencing a similar loss provides support they would likely not get from society.

**Qualitative Data**

The most common themes found in both in this research and outside research was that pet loss is misunderstood and unsupported, which leaves pet loss survivors feeling alone in the grief they are experiencing. As this researcher began collecting data she found that the additional comments respondents made were not only impactful and heartfelt but they were more substantial than the answers she received from the quantitative survey questions.

Many respondents reflected that their feelings were validated and normalized, which are crucial in working with disenfranchised grief. Sharkin and Bahrick (1990) note that people experiencing pet loss may often repress their feelings, minimize their loss, or use denial as a way to cope because pet loss often goes unacknowledged and is commonly viewed as inappropriate.

Pilgram (2009) also identifies that social support and having the ability to confide in others has been shown to help persevere through bereavement. The lack of social support may actually contribute to feelings of isolation and unhappiness and has been known to further complicate grief (Pilgram, 2009), which this researcher found to be true to hear from not only respondents of the survey but the members of the CALLM group she co-facilitated. Many of the respondents made comments about how helpful it was to have others in the group validate their feelings and felt that relating with others made them feel supported in ways that their natural support system could not make them feel.
Limitations of Research

As I began my research I did not take into account how timely it would be to obtain 100 participants and their addresses. I went as far as eight years back, therefore it hindered the amount of surveys I received back because many people had moved and two respondents had died, per another person writing “died” on the envelope. Due to deadlines I had to enter in the responses I had and even after entering in the data collected I was still receiving completed surveys. Twelve more surveys came back completed after entering in the data collected that was not able to be entered. Twenty surveys were forwarded back to the VMC.

I think if I would have sent out my surveys earlier I would have had a better response rate. I also did not give a timeline of when I would like the surveys back by, which I also think would have increased my response rate. Out of the surveys that came back and were entered by my deadline, 90% were female and only 10% were male. Of the surveys that came back past deadline 7 of them were completed by females and 5 were completed by males. Based on the demographic information that was collected there is also bias because the majority of respondents (93.3%) were Caucasian. Therefore there is limited diversity. There is only a limited sample size therefore findings must be reviewed cautiously.
**Implications**

The primary implication for the field of social work is to increase awareness and understanding of the human-animal bond and the impact pet loss has on pet owners. The field of social work does not openly acknowledge the human-animal bond and is implied in the lack of education social work students are introduced to. When I explain that I am interning at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center and what I do, to not only non-social workers, but other social work professionals I either get looks of confusion or an overwhelming interest based on their own experience with pet loss. These two responses tell me two things. One, that more research needs to be done and education be given to those going into the field of social work and the second is that there is a need for this work.

Turner (2003) estimates that more people today have pets than have children and most pet owners consider their pet to be a family member. Therefore, based off of this information social workers should have awareness of this significant bond and the depth of the bereavement that goes along with pet loss. Due to recent social changes in this country more and more people are living alone and pets are increasingly filling this void; therefore social workers and other helping professionals cannot afford to be ill prepared to help people cope with the emotional impact of pet loss (Sharkin and Bahrick, 1990).

Disenfranchised clients are often marginalized by society; therefore they may not address the topic of the loss of a pet when in therapy. As social workers we need to be forthcoming in asking questions around pet ownership and whether or not our client has experienced the loss of a pet. Once this issue has surfaced it is important to acknowledge their loss and provide empathy so that they are allowed to grieve and address their feelings of loss. It is also the social worker’s responsibility to become familiar with local pet loss resources so that clients are able to connect...
with additional resources and support groups, which help to cope with disenfranchised grief. Not only will this awareness build rapport with clients, but it can enhance the social workers ability to connect with clients in a much deeper way and ultimately help the social worker’s productivity.
Conclusion

Despite the fact that companion animal/pet loss is a phenomenon that most Americans will experience at some point in their lives (AVMA, 2002), social workers are ill prepared to work with this loss, based on the lack of education and literature. Social workers will undoubtedly encounter a client who has experienced this loss. Whether or not social workers are addressing the loss with the client or discussing pet loss with a client they need to be prepared to work with this trauma and loss in a culturally responsive manner.

As Wolf (2000) explains clearly in his article, speciesism is discrimination based on species, and social workers are encouraged to reflect and speak to the issue of differential treatment based on species. As the NASW (1996) states, a core value of social work is appreciation and respect for the inherent dignity and worth of all persons. It is important for social workers to have the knowledge and skills to assist clients in grieving the loss of a pet, as it is disenfranchised by most of society. More research is definitely needed to help enhance and bring to light the importance of the bond and this devastating loss.
February 22, 2012

Dear Participant,

I am currently a Social Work Master's student at St. Catherine University and The University of St. Thomas. I am also currently interning at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, where I help facilitate the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group. I am doing my clinical research project on companion animal loss in order to help other human service professionals understand why pet loss is important to address.

I am requesting your feedback regarding the CALLM group you once attended at The University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center. Your name was randomly selected to provide important data on companion animal loss and your experience with CALLM. You will not have to put your name on the survey, therefore all answers are anonymous. However you are welcome to contact me with further information if you should choose to.

If for any reason this survey brings feelings of grief or bereavement to the surface please feel free to contact Social Work Services at 612-624-9372. You are welcome to discuss feelings over the phone and/or set up counseling sessions with one of the three social workers at the Veterinary Medical Center.

Sincerely,

Emily Merrill
Companion Animal Love, Loss and Memories Survey

Please choose the best answer for each of the following questions:

1. Sex:
   A.) Female
   B.) Male

2. Age:
   A.) 19-24
   B.) 25-34
   C.) 35-44
   D.) 45-54
   E.) 55-64
   F.) 65 and older

3. Race:
   A.) African
   B.) African American
   C.) Asian
   D.) American Indian
   E.) Alaskan Native
   F.) Multiracial
   G.) Pacific Islander
   H.) White
   I.) Other: 

4. Annual Household Income
   A.) 9,999 and under
   B.) 10,000-19,999
   C.) 20,000-29,999
   D.) 30,000-39,999
   E.) 40,000-49,999
   F.) 50,000-59,999
   G.) 60,000-69,999
   H.) 70,000 or higher

5. Please identify the companion animal for whom you came to the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group:
   A.) Dog
   B.) Cat
   C.) Horse
   D.) Bird
   E.) Other: 

6. How did you hear about the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group?
   A.) U of M Veterinary Medical Center referral
   B.) Friend or neighbor
   C.) Family
   D.) Referring veterinary staff
   E.) Internet
   F.) Other: 

7. On a scale from 1 to 5, how beneficial was the Companion Animal Love, Loss, and Memories (CALLM) group for you?
   1. Not Beneficial
   2. Somewhat Beneficial
   3. Beneficial
   4. Extremely Beneficial

8. Have you ever received pet loss support from any of the following services?
   A.) Previous counselor, therapist, or social worker
   B.) Clergy
   C.) Other pet loss group:
   D.) Online site or blog
   E.) Other, please specify:

TURN SURVEY OVER
9. Were those outside services beneficial on a scale from 1 to 5?
   1  2  3  4  5
   Not Beneficial  Somewhat Beneficial  Extremely Beneficial

10. On a scale from 1 to 5, did the CALLM group normalize your feelings?
    1  2  3  4  5
    Not Beneficial  Somewhat Beneficial  Extremely Beneficial

11. On a scale from 1 to 5, did attending the CALLM group improve your understanding on the grief process?
    1  2  3  4  5
    Not Beneficial  Somewhat Beneficial  Extremely Beneficial

12. On a scale from 1 to 5, did attending the CALLM group improve your knowledge of useful coping mechanisms?
    1  2  3  4  5
    Not Beneficial  Somewhat Beneficial  Extremely Beneficial

13. On a scale from 1 to 5, did the CALLM group encourage therapeutic storytelling of your companion animal?
    1  2  3  4  5
    Not Beneficial  Somewhat Beneficial  Extremely Beneficial

14. Were you given resources or referrals regarding the human-animal bond or grief and loss?
    A.) Yes, and they were helpful
    B.) Yes, but they were not helpful
    C.) No, but I did not feel I needed or wanted any
    D.) No, I wish resources would have been offered to me

Other comments:
References


