ON LIFETIMES:

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF COMPANION ANIMAL DEATH

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Abstract

The purpose of this interdisciplinary research project is to investigate children's lived experiences of companion animal death within the Greater Toronto Area. The central research questions are: "What does it mean for children to experience the death of a companion animal? What do children's experiences with companion animal deaths reveal about their perceptions of, and relationships with, the more-than-human world?" Twelve children, ages six 6-13, were interviewed about their relationships with a wide range of companion animals, including dogs, cats, guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits, and tropical fish.

This project takes a reflexive, pedagogical approach to engaging in research with children, suggesting that interviews are important sites for exploring the meaning of various experiences. Interview texts were analyzed using a modified, interpretative approach rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology. Emergent themes include the value of shared intentionality, empathy, and intimacy, as evidenced in children's descriptions of playing, communicating, or cuddling with their pets. Children's descriptions of death suggest the importance of the cause of a companion animal's death or her age at death in determining the quality of her life. Finally, children's accounts of experiences after a companion animal's death emphasize the importance of various socially meaningful practices and rituals, such as burial rites, constructing memorials, and telling stories about deceased pets, as well as spatial and embodied elements related to their experiences of grief.

Finally, this dissertation also highlights textual excerpts that demonstrate the subjectivity and agency of companion animals. The children in this study often emphasized their observations of companion animals' unique mental, physical, and emotional lives. While children often described their relationships with pets as built around mutuality and intersubjectivity they simultaneously acknowledged various difficulties in living with companion animals, including the challenges of language, care, and responsibility. The findings suggest that children can be deeply attuned to the ethical and emotional complexities of dwelling within multi-species households. The potential implications for these findings include new insights into human-animal relationships and opportunities for children's voices to influence theory and practice within both humane and environmental education.

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Chapter 1. Children, Animals, and Death: Foundations of an Inquiry

Like millions of other North Americans, I live with a dog. The dog I live with is a five year old Husky mix that my partner and I rescued from a nearby animal shelter, and her name is Penny. Over the past four years, Penny has become a focal point of our daily lives. We share daily routines, we play, we cuddle, we comfort each other, and on occasion, we even share food—we cannot eat carrots without giving at least one to Penny, who loves them. One day, while we were out walking her in our neighbourhood, we came across a young family with two small children. Penny enjoys attention, and the children had already made eye contact with her and were calling to her in high-pitched, singsong voices as we approached. The children's mother, Heather, slowed and asked us if they could pet Penny, and we obliged. While her children cautiously approached our dog, Heather informed us that their own family dog, Sneakers, had recently died. She noted that the children were still experiencing a bit of sadness whenever they saw a dog walking down the street. I shared with Heather that I was just about to begin doing fieldwork for my dissertation on that very topic, and asked her if she and her children would be interested in participating. Heather, an elementary school teacher, was immediately enthusiastic. When I asked her if she could talk to the children—it is important to me that children have a choice to participate or not—she suggested that the older of her two

children, six-year-old Oscar, would most likely be willing to participate. A few weeks later, we set up the interview.

It was a sunny April afternoon when I arrived at Oscar's home. According to my field notes, I was "nervous and excited." I wrote in my journal that "Oscar is a sensitive kid in a lot of ways," and that I didn't "want to upset him." Still, our conversation was easier than I anticipated and it set the tone for the next year of interviews with children I did not know, about a difficult topic: death. Among the many things I have learned is that when talking to children, one needs to expect the unexpected. After practicing various interview skills, I asked Oscar the very first question on my list (I am indicated here by the letter "I"):

I: So what is an animal?

Oscar: Um, uh, an animal is something that has lots of fur and it, and it does not come out of an egg.

I: It does not come out of an egg? What, can you think of different kinds of animals?

Oscar: Um, gerbils, guinea pigs, hamsters, and um, kangaroos. Buffaloes.

I: Wow, so there's more than just one kind of animal?

Oscar: Dogs.

I: Dogs? What kind of animals do you see around your house?

Oscar: My hamster, my dog, and sometimes, sometimes I can picture Sneaks in my head.

I: Sneaks? And who is Sneaks?

Oscar: My dog (p) my old dog that died.

Before the interview, I asked Heather to tell Oscar that I was coming to talk about their dog, Sneakers, and to ask if he would be comfortable sharing his experiences with me. Perhaps it is unsurprising then, that he quickly brought up the topic of his dog in response to my seemingly introductory questions about what an animal is and what kinds of animals he sees regularly. He knew I was there to discuss Sneakers, and yet I do not doubt that Sneakers remained on Oscar's mind, even though it was just a year after the dog died. It is estimated that 80-90 percent of North American children first experience with death involves a companion animal (Melson, 2001). It is likely that a large number of those losses are significant for children, and my conversation with Oscar covered many of the more meaningful aspects of living with animals and experiencing their deaths.

Over the next forty-five minutes, Oscar and I discussed his dog's death, the death of a few goldfish, his current pets—a hamster named Fuzzy and a new dog named Ginger—and his thoughts about animals in general. The conversation was not always easy for Oscar or for me. I fumbled with difficult questions and he often changed the subject, became distracted, and in the end, he said he was done and walked away. While I finished talking to his mother, Heather, Oscar went into the next room and drew me a picture of Sneakers to take with me:

Box 1.1 – "Sneakers," by Oscar, age 6

Gene Myers (2007) claims that the presence of companion animals in children's' lives matters to them in significant ways. Children are often highly engaged by the various animal presences in their lives: a pigeon eating crumbs on the sidewalk; the family dog licking fingers under the dinner table; a cricket chirping in the grass; the body of a chicken on a dinner plate; a lion chasing gazelles on a TV documentary; or a panda seen through the glass at the zoo. Children's association with and interest in living animals is reflected across a wide range of statistical reports. In 2012, for example, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums reported that 50 million children across 130 countries attended accredited, member zoos with their families, with another 12 million children attending as students on a school-based field trip (AZA website, 2012). For many children, their earliest and most intimate experiences may come from

relationships and interactions with companion animals living inside of their homes. The high incidence of pet ownership in North America makes it likely that children experience the presence of animals from a very young age. In 2001, Ipsos Reid conducted a survey of Canadian households as part of their "Paws and Claws" study on Canadian pet ownership. That study found that over 53% of Canadian households "own a cat or a dog," suggesting that the "majority of pet owners are families with children" (Ipsos-Reid, 2001, p. 4). A 2009 *Canadian Veterinary Journal* report suggested that number had grown to 56% of households, with over 8.5 million cats and 6 million dogs living in Canadian homes. In addition, the report indicates:

> Fish can be found in 12% of homes, birds 5%, and rabbits and hamsters in only 2%. Only 1% of homes have lizards, horses, guinea pigs, snakes, frogs, turtles, ferrets, or gerbils. Ownership of any other type of pet was less than 1%. (Perrin, 2009, p. 49)

Statistics Canada does not collect information on "pet ownership," but it does collect statistics on financial expenditures for "household pets," and in 2009, it was reported that 48.5 of Canadian households reported pet expenses, with an average of $870 a year per pet (2009, p. 16). The Canadian pet industry earned roughly $6.5 billion in profits in 2012, according to the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council of Canada (Hanes, 2013). Living with companion animals is undoubtedly a core experience for many North American children, and perhaps foundational in their relationships with and attitudes toward other non-human animals and the wider natural world.

Central Research Question(s) & Key Terms

This dissertation focuses upon the following central research questions:

I. What does it mean for children to experience the death of a companion animal?

II. What do children's experiences with companion animal deaths reveal about their perceptions of and relationships with the more-than-human world?

These central questions flow from other questions and curiosities that help to clarify my research interests, my assumptions, and my theoretical location among the many disciplinary perspectives that children's studies, human-animal studies, and environmental studies encompass. Such questions include, but are not limited to:

• What is it like for children to experience close relationships with non-human others?

• What is it like to experience the death of a non-human animal? What meanings emerge from experiences of loss across species boundaries?

• What role does loss play in the development of and (co)construction of individual and social ideas about the self and otherness?

• What are the most appropriate methods for researching and reporting the experiences of children?

• How does the witnessing of another's death—in this case an intimately known animal—contribute to a child's internal models of self, others, communities, and world(s)?

This list of questions is incomplete, and was added to and subtracted from as the research project unfolded. Certain questions arose from the data as part of the hermeneutic circle, a heuristic for understanding the research process, which strives for clarity between specific textual passages and larger questions (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

One key requirement for understanding these questions more fully is to be explicit about the terms I utilize by briefly defining some of them up front and allowing those definitions to be challenged and evolve over the course of my analysis. For instance, throughout this dissertation, the terms "child," "childhood," "animal," "non-human animal," "companion animal," "pet," "more-than-human," "death," "grief," "bereavement," and "loss" are used extensively. Some of those words—particularly death, grief, bereavement, and loss—will be introduced in later sections, as they do not belie the kind of historically and ethically fraught power discourses that surround notions of "childhood" and "pets."

For the purposes of this research project, the Western, developmental, notion of childhood will be tentatively approached as simply one construction among many, albeit the one that my participants and I may be most familiar with and enact most readily. Many theoretical and practical approaches to working with children are built upon developmental psychology and its stage-based approach. Within such a framework, children are often considered as less than adult, even less than human (Calarco, 2008). Where it is necessary, I draw

attention to examples of this kind of sedimented discourse within the literature and in my data. I agree with feminist critiques of child development that the universalized and normalized child (Burman, 1993; Code, 2006) cannot stand as a measure for all children everywhere. Children in their actuality and even in our discourses are as diverse as the cultures and locations that they may experience in their lifetimes. As such, it seems reasonable to assume that childhood must be considered in all of its located, ecological specificity.

Much like children, pets are often considered to be "less than" human (Calarco, 2008). Pets, however, have also been regarded as industrially and technologically engineered products of human design, and so additionally, they are often considered as "lesser" animals (Tuan, 1984; Franklin, 1999; Fudge, 2008). Following Erica Fudge (2008), I recognize that the term "pet" maintains economic connotations of mastery and dominance, reducing particular groups of animals to passive, inferior possessions of human masters. As a result, I prefer to use the term "companion animal," in order to recognize the mutuality present in many human-animal relationships, not as a symbol or metaphor, but as an actual, real, material sharing of intent. The term "companion animal" recognizes the subjectivity and agency of those animals who happen to live in or around the home. However, while any term can be problematized and cast aside, the familiarity and brevity of the word "pet" does not guarantee or necessitate an associate with mastery or domination. Many of the children I spoke with referred to "pets" in loving, respectful ways that also took the animals' own agency and

subjectivity seriously. Because I wish to stay true to the language used by my participants, I often use these terms interchangeably.

On a wider scale of animality, I use the phrase "non-human animal" to delineate any animal that is not a member of the species, *Homo sapiens.* Jacques Derrida warns that the singularity of the word "animal" erases the vast zoological differences among individuals and species in the animal kingdom:

> Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article ("the Animal" and not "animals"), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbours, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm or the hedgehog from the echidna. (2002, p. 402)

Furthermore, Derrida claims that such language actually enables human violence toward other beings by erasing their differences and placing them in opposition from humans, who are the proper locus of moral consideration (Derrida, 2002; Calarco, 2008). I agree with Derrida that the term "animal" is problematic for these reasons, and because it erases humanity's own continuity with the animal kingdom. I also recognize that "non-human animal" is itself cumbersome and fraught with the same difficulties. Other scholars have introduced various

substitute terms, such as "other-than-human" (Warkentin, 2002), but for this project I have chosen to follow the predominant language in human-animal studies. As such, I employ the phrase non-human animal while maintaining a critical view on its simplicity and possibly reductionist meaning. At various points, I also employ David Abram's (1996) term, "more-than-human," in reference to the wider, relational communities of biotic *and* abiotic forms that support life in all its forms. Despite its seemingly hierarchical structure, which incorporates the comparative coupling "more than," Abram's phrase is intended to situate humanity, with all its uniqueness, not only within a spectrum of animality, but as a being that an emerges from interdependent relations.

Why Focus Upon Death?

> We can see now what is the part played by questions about death and accidents… death is the fortuitous and mysterious phenomenon *par excellence*. (Piaget, 2002, p. 181, emphasis original)

In an era of significant ecological loss, destruction, and species endangerment and extinction, death is both a familiar theme and a persistent threat. Environmental organizations, ethicists, politicians, and educators work tirelessly to unearth practices, policies, moral arguments, or curricula that will convince their audiences that environmental protection is worthwhile; that life and biodiversity are preferable to dying, death, and destruction. In line with such goals, it would seem crucial that researchers interested in addressing the "ecological crisis" (Shepard, 1996) begin to ask how individuals and

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communities experience and make meaning of loss and death both personally and in ever-widening ecological contexts.

As an environmental educator over the past ten years, I frequently ask myself questions about the role of loss, crisis, and death in my work with children and adolescents. Much of the environmental education curriculum I have taught focuses upon the ecological roles of living things near and far, local and global, tiny and enormous. Lesson plans also typically stress the important and ominous realities tied to endangered species, ecological threats, issues of environmental justice, serious economic concerns, and the moral decisions within our day-to-day lives that impact a wide range of others, both human and non-human. In addition, the children with whom I have worked undoubtedly arrive with their own immense background of knowledge and experience. They are often more knowledgeable than me regarding various issues or topics, citing stories in popular media, read scientific magazines or journals, or follow political debates balancing the perceived need of human civilizations with life-giving ecosystems, diverse and unique species, or individual animal populations.

Within environmental education in particular, there is a growing literature surrounding issues of loss. Much of this research focuses upon the experiences of adults in "nature" (Gough, 1999; Chawla, 2001). Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods* (2008) highlights an increased focus in both popular, Western culture and in scholarly research regarding the positive effects of unstructured time spent in natural environments on children's emotional, cognitive, and

physiological well-being (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Wells, 2000; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Still, there remains an insufficient amount of research incorporating children's own voices and experiences in response to environmental crisis discourses (Hacking, Cutter-MacKenzie, & Barrett, 2013). In particular, there is a gap in existing concerning children's emotional and psychological relationships with the more-than-human world (Fawcett & Dickinson, forthcoming). Without sufficient research into children's relational experiences with non-human others, how can educators ask children to care—let alone act accordingly—about the plight of dynamic endangered species and habitat loss half a world away? Beyond that, how can children be expected to take on the deeply emotional task of enacting responsibility for even the smallest of creatures, or for ecosystems that they may never come to know? These are some of the questions that drive my own inquiry into children's experiences of animal death.

As Jean Piaget (2002; 2004) argues, an experience with death often leads to a developmental shift in children's consciousness. He suggests that questions of death—why it happened, what caused it, who was responsible—provide new opportunities for reflection and learning. As a result, children begin to question what Piaget refers to as their own autistic-thinking artificialism,[1] which assumes causality in all things. The prevalence of causality in the belief systems of a child is predicated, according to Piaget, on an extremely artificial notion of reality; one that begins and ends with some inventor's intentions, most likely God or significant human beings. Ultimately, children ascribe what they perceive in the

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world to be a result of the intentionality of others, be they more-than-human animals, human animals, or 'inanimate' objects. "Organic life is, for the child, a sort of story, well regulated according to the wishes and intentions of its inventor" (Piaget, 2002, pp. 180-181).

Questions about death, however, raise new concerns and challenges to children's embedded notion of causality or finality, leading to a broader awareness and acceptance of chance occurrences and fortuitousness in a child's world. A being's death is not necessarily controlled or controllable; death is often perceived as untimely or unfair. As a result of witnessing, experiencing, or otherwise coming to know the presence of death in the world, children are introduced to the idea of chance. The introduction of chance to the developing mind removes anthropocentric intent from events in the natural world (Piaget, 2002). In short, witnessing the death of another being—whether human or non-human—potentially causes an interruption within our everyday, taken-for-granted experience of the lifeworld. Here I am utilizing the individuated concept of a consciously directed "lifeworld" as explained by Neil Evernden:

> properties of consciousness ensure that whatever is perceived is not neutral, not just the passive reception of external stimuli, but the result of our active involvement in grasping the world… all [perceptions] derive from the same source and are equally valid experiences of the world… the life-world. (1993, p. 74)

This lifeworld—articulated within the various frameworks, languages, and approaches embedded in geographic, cultural, and historical locations—consists

of the measurable and the meaningful, the perceivable and the conceivable. A lifeworld is personal, partial, and situated within the limitations of perception—both conscious and unconscious. Yet even the phrase, "lifeworld," priviledges phenomenon associated with living and "being," such as the perception of motion and animation or the experience of interaction or communication. A focus on the lifeworld perhaps belies those phenomena associated with death, such as stillness, rot, and decay within our perceptual spheres. It backgrounds not only the perceptions, but the meaning of what psychologist Ernst Becker refers to as a "natural, organismic fear of annihilation" (1973, p. 13). Beings are born, they live, and they die, often in front of our very eyes. When the conscious self becomes aware that it will die as well, how does it respond? Does one's experience of the world fundamentally change?

In this project, I have undertaken an inquiry into childhood experiences of companion animals' deaths. While I remain curious about wider ecological concerns, I am convinced that significance and meaning arise more gradually within a child's experiential and relational milieu (Burman, 1993; Code, 2006). Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development starts with infants' relations with caregivers and family members in their home environment and gradually moves outward into the wider communities of which they are a part. Paul Shepard (1982; 1996) and John Livingston (1994) have outlined similar theories of child development, but placing children in relation with non-human others and natural environments as well. The mature adult human, in Shepard's

view, is one who "celebrates a central analogy of self and world in ever-widening spheres of meaning and participation, not an ever-growing domination over nature, escape in abstractions, or existential funk" (Shepard, 1982, p. 14). For that reason, I have chosen to focus upon some children's most immediate and intimate relations with the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996), namely the companion animals that live with their families and in their homes.

The experience of another's death is a pivotal event in the cognitive, emotional, and moral lives of individuals. Death is also a pivotal event within familial and communal experience and practice (Anthony, 1971; Kellehear, 2007). There are a range of experiences of and responses to death across cultures, times, and locations. Conceptually, death can be differentiated from "loss." While death is often the most physical, spatial, and experiential manifestation of loss, it does not necessarily cover all experiences of loss. In psychoanalytic theory, *object loss* refers to a separation of the self from a loved or desired object, typically the breast or the mother (Kristeva, 1989; Freud, 2005). In "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud suggests that loss can be a felt reaction to "a beloved person or an abstraction taking place of the person, such as fatherland [*sic*], freedom, an ideal and so on" (2005, p. 203). Loss can be experienced symbolically as much as it can be physically felt. For Freud, how one responds to loss as an infant, child, adolescent, or adult has implications for the psyche. Infants and young children, who learn to accept loss or replace the lost object, develop into more complete selves. On the contrary, Freud outlines a range of

psychological states—denial, melancholia, or the development of a narcissistic personality to name a few—that arise when a loss is not fully incorporated into the subjective self (Kristeva, 1989; Freud, 2005). Freud's focus on the unconscious, symbolic experience of loss has led many scholars and practitioners to consider human mourning as a result of pet loss to be merely an abstraction of the original loss of one's mother. As a result, psychoanalytical approaches to loss tend to gloss over the importance of human-pet relationships (Myers, 2007).

Experiencing a significant death in childhood, particularly that of a familiar, non-human animal, may decentre an individual's subjective view of the world and introduce the strangeness of animal subjectivities, lifetimes, and other ecologically rooted worlds beyond the confines of the human community. In a sense, experiencing and exploring the meaning another being's death quite possibly provides an emotional and psychological foundation for beliefs or actions that challenge anthropocentric thought. "Anthropocentrism" is understood as "a version of human self-enclosure… with attendant low levels of consciousness of the ecological embeddedness of human life… [which] promotes various damaging forms of epistemic remoteness" (Plumwood, 2002, p. 98). In addition, anthropocentrism refers to those systems of environmental theory and practice that "refuse to recognize that the *form*" of ideas is implicated in addition to the content, a position that becomes "progressively more impractical the further one moves from the human sphere… [operating] to reflect and reinforce our current social structures" (Smith, 2001, p. 15). The

quandaries of death might open one's consciousness to the possibility of a more complex, relational ordering of reality inclusive of a wild and unpredictable intersubjective world made up of more-than-human beings, geological processes, cosmic forces, and much that lies beyond the control of any individual actor.

The ABCs of Child-Animal Studies

The statistics presented in the introduction reveal various culturally relevant links between children and animals, but they only reveal part of the story. In scholarly literatures, children and animals have been linked together in many significant ways. For example, scientific and psychological knowledge of childhood and development is often the result of research and testing on animals, particularly primates. Perhaps the most famous study of childhood that used primates was conducted by Harry Harlow, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the early 20th century. Harlow (1968) separated rhesus macaque infants from their mothers after birth and raised them in a variety of settings. Some infants were kept in cages with inanimate, "surrogate" mothers, such as wire and wood models covered in cloth or fur, while others had "wire" mothers without cloth coverings, or nothing at all. Even while factoring in the provision of milk by each substitute "mother," the results of Harlow's studies suggest that the constant physical presence of a mother is crucial for the psychological and emotional well-being of infants. While it was originally conceived of as ground breaking evidence of the importance of infant-mother

attachments, Harlow's research has been thoroughly criticized as violent, speciesist, and avowedly misogynistic (Haraway, 1989; Burman, 1993; Franzblau, 1999). Recent research, while certainly less violent and traumatic, continues this trend of cognitively and behaviourally comparing infants and primates. Kerstin Dautenhahn provides one such example in her study of primate social behaviour and communication, suggesting that "verbal and nonverbal social interactions among primates" are continuous with the "preverbal communication of human infants" (2002, p. 99). Such connections between animal capacities and human infants or children are prevalent. These types of linkages do not make benign comparisons of phylogeny, but also create and establish notions of adult superiority and dominance over both nonhuman animals *and* children. Both are considered "less than" adult humans or, in the case of children at least, humans in the making.

Research on the roles and experiences of animals in childhood remains rooted mostly in critical and cultural studies of symbolic animals and in psychological research surrounding children's development in the presence of real animal others. Melson notes that child-animal studies has rarely been given serious attention within research and scholarly literature, save for a few exemplary studies that tended toward an anthropocentric bias, studies which have "impeded both theory and research into the developmental significance of animals, especially companion animals, for children" (2003, p. 32). Yet there is a growing, foundational literature within child-animal studies. Existing

publications and discourses cover a broad range of practical and theoretical concerns, including companion animal ownership and the use of animals in therapy also known as "animal assisted therapy," or "AAT" (Wells, 2004; Fine, 2010; Kazdin, 2011); the importance of animals in cognitive, affective, and moral development (Kellert, 1997; Myers, 2007; McCardle, McCune, Griffin & Maholmes, 2011); and the presence of animal attachments during childhood and adolescence (Walsh, 2009a; Walsh, 2009b; Melson, 2011; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2012). In addition, there are human-ecological studies focusing upon humanity's social and evolutionary heritage owing to animal others (Shepard, 1982; Kellert, 1997) as well as the role of animals in human sociality throughout historical time (Shepard, 1982; Livingston, 1994). Pedagogically, an animal-focused educational literature discusses the ability of animals to engage the first stages of moral development and the importance of humane and environmental education programs (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Fawcett, 2002; Coleman, Hall, & Hay, 2008; Pedersen, 2010a). Finally, many journals (notably *Anthrozoos, Society& Animals, Children & Environments Quarterly*) take up socio-cultural analyses of animals in the lives of children in myriad ways, such as the role of animals within children's popular culture (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004).

In my reviews, however, very few authors take up the experience and meaning of animal death within childhood, despite the prominence of loss as a guiding theme in both ecopsychological literature (Fisher, 2002; Macy, 2007; Edwards & Buzell, 2009) and in environmental concerns as of late. The

predominant literature surrounding children and animal death is largely focused

upon *normalizing* the process of pet bereavement for parents and practitioners

(see Baron-Sorensen & Ross, 1998; Tuzeo-Jarolmen, 2007; Toray, 2010); such

publications tend to take on a stage-based approach in line with the famous work

of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross on stages of grief (1969). In addition, there is a growing

body of literature—both fiction and non-fiction—that seeks to help children

understand both the biological process of death, such as Jan Thornhill's *I Found a*

Dead Bird (2006), or to explore and express emotional responses to losing a

beloved pet. Judith Viorst's *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (1971), tells the

story of a young family dealing with the loss of their cat, Barney, from one

child's point of view. It opens with an illustration of a child crying into their

hands over an empty bowl at a table, accompanied by the following text:

> My cat Barney died last Friday.
>
> I was very sad.
>
> I cried, and I didn't watch television.
>
> I cried, and I didn't eat my chicken or even the chocolate pudding.
>
> I went to bed, and I cried. (Viorst, 1971, p. 1)

The book describes the family's decision to have a funeral for Barney, and the

child is tasked with coming up with ten "good things" to share about the cat.

While he can come up with nine good things, he struggles throughout the course

of the book to think of one more good thing. When his father tells him that

Barney's body will become the soil, and help the seeds they planted on his grave

to become flowers, the boy declares that to be the tenth "good thing." The back cover of Viorst's book suggests it is appropriate for children ages five to nine. The story itself elicits many themes, including questions of the afterlife; ecological concepts of death, decay, and nutrient cycles; and the importance of sharing and expressing one's emotions. While such literature certainly resonates with many individuals' experiences of losing a pet at a young age, it is still written by adults for children. How might children tell such stories given their own chance?

There is a smaller focus within child-animal studies on experientially-focused research. Leesa Fawcett highlights the results of her own study, which presented Canadian children with direct experiences of three common, wild animals, bats, frogs, and raccoons:

> The opportunity to experience other living beings, to differentiate between diverse animals, is integral to a child's sense of self, as a human, above and beyond being an individual. I think children come to know themselves as human mammals by comparing themselves to other humans, and then other non-human members of their wider biotic communities. (2002, p. 136)

Fawcett argues that children's individual and communal subjectivity develops through recognition of similarities and differences between self and other as a result of shared, embodied experiences. Direct experiences with non-human animals are vital, she notes, in establishing a sense of connection with the more-than-human world: one that acknowledges the unique subjectivity and agency of other beings (Fawcett, 2002). In more recent work, Fawcett (in press) suggests

that children's experiences with and narratives of non-human animals form the basis for what she calls a "kinship imaginary," an interspecies ethics built upon the kinds of curiosities that emerge from shared experiences as described above. Such research takes the experiences and ideas of children seriously and makes them central to theoretical explorations of life in multispecies communities.

This dissertation research similarly seeks to focus upon those concepts and themes that emerge from the children's own accounts. The resulting findings will contribute new insights to a range of disciplines: environmental philosophy, human-animal studies, critical animal studies, ecopsychology, and to various pedagogical areas including environmental education, humane education, moral education, and critical pedagogy. At the heart of the work will remain questions of children's experiences and emergent meanings concerning death that are intimately connected to considerations of place, history, relationships, and identity. Given that this work is concerned with the stories and experiences of actual child participants as well as constructions of childhood, it will also contribute to a growing literature that deals directly with ethical and methodological considerations of working with children and the ways in which research influences such constructions (Burman, 1993; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Code, 2006).

To outline the existant literature that forms the background of my topic, I present an introductory "ABC" guide for child-animal studies. ABC guides have been popularized in children's literature, typically taking the form "A is for

Apple, B is for Banana" and so on. Rishma Dunlop (2009) borrowed the form to

present a poetic, imaginative, and counter-hegemonic exploration of the

philosophies and politics in environmental education. My own alphabetical

listing of existing literature, research, and theories is incomplete. Yet it

introduces and explores the ways in which children's interests, interactions, and

knowledge of animals have been analyzed and discussed by a wide range of

scholars.[2] Each letter is associated with a particular theory or approach to

understanding child-animal relationships, they should not be seen as exclusive.

In fact, many of the theorists whose work I explore below—in particular Gail

Melson and Gene Myers—present highly eclectic projects that bridge many of

the sections below. As such, I have chosen to focus upon the theoretical

approaches that they apply in various studies rather than on the totality of their

work. My own, interdisciplinary approach draws heavily upon and also

contributes new insights to these psychological, ethological, educational,

philosphical, and ecological understandings of child-animal relationships.

Attachment theory is a common theoretical approach to studying and

understanding human-pet relationships (Andersen, 2007; Walsh, 2009a). It has

also become a dominant theory for exploring the intersubjective and affective

dynamics of child-pet relationships in particular (Melson, 1990; Daly & Morton,

2006; Daly & Suggs, 2010).

Attachment theory was first developed by John Bowlby following his work with infants who were abandoned or orphaned during World War II. Bowlby and his team began a series of studies on the impact of separation from caregivers on infants affected by tuberculosis. They also conducted observations of children who were separated from their caregivers, particularly during a mother's extended hospitalization for child birth; a common practice in Europe and North America during the 1940s and 1950s (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Bowlby's approach to attachment theory drew upon his training in Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Melanie Klein's focus on object relations, developmental psychology, and perhaps most importantly, the ethological work of scientists such as Konrad Lorenz, Niko Tinbergen, and Jakob von Uexküll (Bowlby, 1969; Holmes, 1993). Bowlby's initial work was also empirically supported by Harry Harlow's studies of infant and mother interactions in primates, as well as various anthropological, clinical, and experimental research programs (Burman, 1993).

Attachment theory takes a broad theoretical stance, focusing upon the infant-caregiver dyad—with particular emphasis on mothers—as the environmental and relational context within which young mammals establish a sense of security within the world. As opposed to Freud's psychoanalytic theory of infancy, which focused on libidinal energies and the satisfaction of hunger or sexual urges, Bowlby's theory adopted an ethological approach, focused upon infants' innate, comfort-seeking behaviours:

Ethology conceives of it [the organism] as starting with a number of highly structured responses (some of which are active at birth and some of which mature later), which in the course of development become so elaborated, through processes of integration and learning, and in Man [*sic*] by imitation, identification and the use of symbols, that the resulting behaviour is of amazing variety and plasticity. (1958, p. 365)

While it may seem that Bowlby was presenting an overly behavioural theory rooted in stimulus and response activity, he acknowledged the potential shortcomings of ethology and the need for ongoing research incorporating symbolism, language, and life-long representations of early, pre-linguistic relations.

Bowlby biographer Jeremy Holmes describes attachment theory as spatial: "when I am close to my loved one I feel good, when I am far away I am anxious, sad, or lonely" (1993, p. 67). In evolutionary terms, this sense of security within an attachment relationship improves an infant's chance of survival in the face of various environmental, interpersonal, or physical threats. Evidence of attachment behaviours has been observed in a wide range of animal species, including elephants, whales, dolphins, primates, and birds (Walsh, 2009a). Given the vast numbers of species, attachment behaviours vary wildly as well. Attachment is thus best understood as a system of behaviours engaged in between infants and caregivers. Such behaviours may be signalling behaviours to alert the adult to the child's interest in interaction and bring them closer (e.g., smiling or gurgling). Some behaviours such as crying are aversive, bringing the

adult closer to ameliorate the behaviour. Others (such as following or approaching) are active and move the child towards the adult (Holmes, 1993; Slater, 2007).

The promise of attachment theory comes from its focus on the multiple intersubjective, emotional, and embodied relationships that influence early and even lifelong psychological development (Stern, 1985; Slater, 2007). The theory itself has a long, wide-ranging history of rejection and acceptance within various applications of psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. For the last twenty years or more, it has become a cornerstone of child welfare practice and law among social workers, day care workers, and early childhood education experts (Burman, 1993; Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Yet, attachment theory has been critiqued for normalizing and even prescriptively calling for the "necessity of constant maternal presence" (Burman, 1993, p. 79), as well as for its highly deterministic orientation toward the first two years of life and its over-construction of infant social experiences and families (McHale 2007). Others defend the theory with caveats, claiming that its critiques are a result of misunderstanding the immensity of a theory that is partial, at best, and rooted in animal study work which cannot necessarily be generalized to humans (Slater, 2007). Still, attachment theory mainly posits a universal stance in theorizing childhood, and one that is based in biological needs for proximity and secure emotional relationships with individual caregivers.

Attachment theory follows a general sequence of stages from birth through two years of age. Children can be rated upon a scale of attachments, from secure attachment, where children feel confident upon the availability of caregivers in times of threat or uncertainty, to various forms of insecure attachment. Infants who are insecurely attached display a wide range of behavioural strategies due to their inability to trust or rely upon caregivers. Such strategies are most evident upon reunion with a caregiver after an extended separation, including avoidance and self-soothing, exaggeration of needs, or preoccupation with caregiver's whereabouts (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Holmes, 1993). Attachment is an ongoing process, and should be viewed not as a stage-based, developmental theory, but rather as a "life-span issue" (Stern, 1985, p. 25). Key to attachment theory is the infant's establishment of "internal working models," which are largely sedimented unconscious, subjective, and experiential bases for future relationships. Patterns of behaviours between infants and caregivers lead thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and ultimately predictions of the other's ability to meet one's emotional and physical needs (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

As a relationally-focused approach to understanding children's emotional and cognitive development, and as a life-long process, attachment theory has been popularized within various other relational models. Researchers in human psychology have adapted attachment theory to study adult relationships, exploring the behaviour and beliefs of married couples, co-workers, and several

other interpersonal couplings (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Researchers within human-animal studies have also adopted various aspects of attachment, citing Bowlby's claim that multiple attachments can be made within an infant's sphere of relationships (Melson, 2003; Bowlby, 2004). Others have noted that human-animal studies, particularly in psychology, often tended to borrow concepts from attachment theory and psychoanalysis in order to claim that individuals' bonds with their pets were actually evidence of social and psychological pathology; in short, people who bonded with pets were considered unable to develop healthy relations with other humans (Walsh, 2009a).

Gail Melson, a child psychologist with a particular focus on child-animal studies, argues that attachment theory can be extended to human-animal relationships. Melson highlights Bowlby's claims that intersubjective attachments serve various affective and physical functions throughout an individual's lifetime. In particular, Melson's claim aligns itself with Holmes' articulation of attachment theory as essentially spatial:

> An important index of attachment, as measured in very young children, is the tendency to maintain proximity to the attachment figure. As children grow older, the tendency diminishes, but the child acts to maintain the relationship by thinking about the object of attachment, initiating interaction, and expressing affection. By examining how much time a child spends with a companion animal, one can get a rough measure of the tendency of the child to maintain proximity to this attachment figure. (Melson, Peet, & Sparks, 1991, p. 92)

Melson acknowledges that a wide range of variables—personality, family

dynamics, gender, and cultural beliefs—can provide further context for

understanding children's attachments with pets. She outlines in particular the

need for attention to time spent together, knowledge of an individual animal's

needs or desires, interest in the pet, and behavioural responsiveness to the pet as

further evidence of strong, healthy attachments (Melson et al, 1991).

To date, a wide range of scales has been employed to measure human-

companion animal attachments, including the Companion Animal Bonding Scale

(Poresky, Hendrix, Hosier, & Samuelson, 1987), the Pet Attachment Survey

(Holcomb, Williams & Richards, 1985), the Pet Attachment Scale for Children

(Melson, 1988), and more recent applications, such as the Centre for the Study of

Animal Wellness Pet Bonding Scale (in Anderson, 2007). A compilation of these

analytical tools has even been published, outlining a twenty year history of

applying attachment-type protocol to human-animal studies (Anderson, 2007).

*B*iophilia is a hypothesis describing the psychic and physical bond felt by

humans toward other beings, ecosystems, and even the natural world as a whole.

Edward O. Wilson popularized the concept of biophilia, defining it as the "innate

tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (1984, p. 1). Wilson claims that

"from infancy," human beings "learn to distinguish life from the inanimate and

move toward it like moths to a porch light" (1984, p. 1). The biophilia hypothesis

has subsequently been taken up in studies of childhood that seek to describe children's love of animals and nature as an innate, evolutionary drive.

Stephen Kellert and Peter Kahn first applied the concept of biophilia to child development, arguing that children have a deep need to connect with animals and natural settings around them. Kahn (1999) suggests that the biophilia hypothesis is built upon credible research and literature, citing research on the beneficial physiological effects of nature scenery, the presence of animal metaphors in common language, and even cross-cultural psychological and anthropological studies as evidence of an innate human preference to seek out and be close to nature. Kahn also warns about the potential pitfalls of adopting biophilia as a guiding hypothesis, including genetic determinism and various examples of human affiliation with highly technological, and virtual environments. In contrast, David Orr (1993) presents the opposing concept of "biophobia," referencing humanity's deep-seeded, evolutionary fear of predatory animals, as well as "the urge to affiliate with technology, human artifacts, and solely with human interests regarding the natural world" (quoted in Kahn, 1999, p. 31). Humanity's evolutionary past, wherein predators were a more common threat, may be connected to this urge to separate from nature through technological advancement.

Stephen Kellert's developmental research focuses upon the role of biophilia, as well as experiences with animals and nature, in children's "personality formation and character development" (2002, p. 117). Kellert

distinguishes between three kinds of experiences children have in natural environments or with non-human beings: direct, indirect, and symbolic experience. Direct experiences involve physical contact "largely outside and independent of the human built environment," experiences that are unplanned or unstructured (Kellert, 2002, p. 118). Indirect experiences involve physical contact with "natural habitats and nonhuman creatures" that is the "result of regulated and contrived human activity" (Kellert, 2002, p. 119). Examples include visits to zoos or aquariums, animal visits to classrooms, and even experiences with pets in the home. Symbolic experiences, also referred to as "mediated" experiences (Fawcett, 2002) occur outside of physical contact with nature, where children encounter "representations or depicted scenes of nature that sometimes are realistic but that also, depending on circumstance, can be highly symbolic, metaphorical, or stylized characterizations" (Kellert, 2002, p. 119). Children, for example, may have symbolic experiences while watching nature documentaries, youtube videos, or reading books with animal characters. Each of these experiential modes, Kellert argues, enhance the development of various cognitive, affective, and moral abilities within childhood; a finding which Kellert describes as unfortunate, given the decline in natural spaces and species as a result of modern, technological, capitalist culture.

Recent developmental research builds upon the concept of biophilia in establishing young children and infants' tendency to "monitor the environment for the presence and location of animals and other humans," known as the

"animate-monitoring hypothesis" (DeLoache, Pickard, & LoBue, 2011, p. 87). An overview of research in this area indicates that even in infancy, human beings are drawn to animate stimuli, and in particular animals. Both dynamic and static features of animals are attended to, including facial features, body shapes, animal movement patterns, "self-initiation, and apparent agency and intentionality" (DeLoache et al, 2011, p. 94). Arguably, this perceptual attendance to animate and animal objects in an infant's lifeworld builds a potential foundation for children's future epistemic investigations, including categorization, names, identities, and typical behaviour of animals. Furthermore, tracking the presence and location of individual and recognizable non-human animals in infancy figures to be key in establishing interspecies relationships, bonds, or even friendships (Fawcett, in press).

With regard to this study, Kahn and Kellert's exposition of biophilia perhaps overlooks the experience and meaning of child-pet relationships. Kellert suggests that direct experiences in nature are preferable to, and indeed more beneficial than, indirect and symbolic experiences. As a result, he puts studies of "pets" on a lower tier of interest. Erica Fudge notes similar trends within animal studies, citing a widely held belief that pets are "degraded animals," since the "truly animal qualities of wildness and self-sufficiency have been removed from—bred out of—the pet and replaced with tameness and dependency" (2008, p. 8). Fudge instead suggests that pets provide much to think about regarding

globalization, the destruction of natural spaces, and the human-animal divide, particularly, she argues, within literary explorations of human-pet relationships.

Cultural studies of childhood often highlight the wide ranging animal symbolism present in children's culture, including literature, television, cartoons, toys, and other media. Human-animal studies in general owes much to cultural theorists who recognize the intertwining of human and animal in the production of various texts. Susan McHugh suggests that cultural theorists in literature and other disciplines have worked to decentre human exceptionalism and promote animal studies, establishing three priorities:

> First, conceptualize agency itself as more than simply a property of the human subject form. Second, recover the spectrum of agency forms central to a variety of cultural traditions that (even as they are put under erasure) challenge the process of literary-canon formation… the third charge concerns the interrelations of the representational forms and material conditions of species life, the processes whereby the agency of literary animals comes to consist precisely in the way that they cannot finally be enlisted in the tasks set for them. (2011, p. 10)

Cultural studies also draws attention to the ways in which knowledge systems, or epistemologies, work politically, historically, and materially (Potts & Armstrong, 2010). Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions* (1989) is a prime example, although more recent research continues to build upon her investigation of social and political influences on scientific study. Friese and Clarke's (2012) historical

analysis of mammalian fertility studies between the mid-20th century and early 21st-century traces social factors impacting knowledge, animal bodies, and technological innovations in reproductive science. They argue that social pressures—economic, agricultural, and cultural pressures to increase women's fertility—led to a generalization of mammalian bodies and the subsequent alignment of scientific practice across otherwise diverse sites of practice, including biotechnology companies, fertility clinics, farms, laboratories, and zoos (Friese & Clarke, 2012). In essence, scientific knowledge about animals has its own history and institutional politics; it is not free from bias, impartial, or universal. Critical, cultural analyses of scientific knowledge regarding nonhuman animals outlines an often dark history of anthropocentrism, sexism, colonialism, abuse, death, and destruction (Haraway, 1989; Plumwood, 2002).

Within cultural analysis of human-animal studies, there is a growing focus on children's cultural texts. The relatively new field of ecocriticsm has even been applied to children's culture, exemplified by Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd's collection of essays entitled *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004). Ecocriticism has been defined as "a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xviii). While its application has been broadly conceived in various disciplines, ecocriticism at heart recognizes the deep connections between cultural representations in literature and other media, and the natural environment. Dobrin and Kidd, as ecocritical scholars of childhood, point to the need to examine the many

connections between text and nature in children's cultural texts, in particular as such connections impact the real and imagined spaces of childhood (2004). In recent research on animal messages in young children's contemporary media, Timmerman and Ostertag highlight "how animals in young children's media are profoundly mis- and dis-placed" (2012, p. 65). As evidence, they cite depictions of animals free from context, the literary and musical joining of drastically different animal species from separate bioregions, and the emphasis on animals that children would otherwise never encounter in their day-to-day lives. They explore the possibility of increased attention on local, everyday animals in their preferred contexts as a counter-hegemonic attempt to deemphasize inherently anthropocentric and Eurocentric values of "individuality, disconnection, and displacement" (Timmerman & Ostertag, 2012, p. 66).

Timmerman and Ostertag (2012) also draw attention to shifts in cultural representations, in particular the ways in which non-humans animals that children do not regularly (or ever) encounter are framed. They reference the "notable presence of domesticated farm animals in children's media (e.g., toy barns and accompanying animals, farm animal books, and "Old MacDonald" farm songs)" (Timmerman & Ostertag, 2012, p. 66) as having mixed effects on children's learning. Increased urbanization suggests that children are both physically and experientially removed from farms and animals whose labour and lives provide their food, a trend that some argue has serious implications for how animals are conceptualized, encountered, and considered morally (Fudge,

2002; Timmerman & Ostertag, 2012). The presence of farm animals in children's literature (e.g., *Charlotte's Web*), toys, music, and other media persists alongside a steady increase in factory farming worldwide. While the children and I largely avoided the topic of domestic farm animals, it is worth acknowledging that they are still symbolically significant within children's early animal experiences. The degree to which farm animal symbolism or media are shifting is worth further investigation.

Children's cultural production is part of cultural analyses as well. Edith Cobb suggests that artistic genius and creativity begins in the childhood relation with nature: In *The Ecology of Imagination*, Cobb writes of:

> a special period, the little-understood, prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve -- between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence -- when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition. (1959, p. 538)

Cobb contends that childhood is extensive in order to establish a "plasticity of response to the environment," one that can persist throughout childhood and into adulthood in order to continue the poetic synthesis of experience with worldview in a creative way that elicits learning and growth. What children draw, write, or sing about their relationships with nature or nonhuman animals is a key to understanding not only their personal experiences but also their reflections, reactions, and adaptations of cultural genres and tropes. Melson

notes that Western children, from an early age, internalize the cultural worldview of "humans as radically distinct from and superior to other species," (2001, p. 20) and yet many examples of children's animal representations challenge such norms.

While not solely a concern of cultural studies, the concept of anthropomorphism is central to most explorations of child-animal relationships, especially those that consider culture, language, and representation to be central foci. Anthropomorphism is "the transference to animals (or other nonhuman entities, e.g., automobiles) of human attributes" (Hirschman and Sanders, 1997, p. 56). While anthropomorphism has been decried as both scientifically and culturally unsophisticated (Fawcett, 1989), some recognize that it is a legitimate way of knowing and understanding across species boundaries. Wildlife ecologist Mark Bekoff writes that "animals continually provide prompts for anthropomorphizing," and that as such we must "use these to describe and explain their behaviour, intentions, beliefs, and emotional states" (2009, p. 43). Jonathan Balcombe provides another useful approach to thinking anthropomorphically:

> Your own feelings and motivations are a reference point for another
> person's feelings, and we call it empathy. Use your characteristics to
> interpret the behaviour of an animal, and we call it anthropomorphism,
> which literally means *human shaped*... Anthropomorphism is rather *verboten*
> in respectable journals and conferences because scientists don't want to
> make declarations that can't be scientifically proven… I'm all for scientific

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rigor, but when we reject even the suggestion that geese feel glad, elephants love, bats utter, fish get excited and foxes besotted, then we reduce a conscious being to little more than an organized collection of organs and tissues. (2007, pp. 40-43)

Balcombe recognizes on the one hand that there are good reasons to question overly anthropomorphic attributions in animals, citing the "smiling dolphin" and the "smiling chimpanzee" as potentially dangerous interpretations given that each species has physiological traits and behavioural tendencies that do differ from humans. Yet he also recognizes that avoiding any linguistic description that might ascribe nonhuman animals with affects and interests akin to our own erases the similarities that exist between us, and the multiple ways in which animals actually enjoy living (Balcombe, 2007). Anthropomorphism is a constant in children's cultural texts and even in children's utterances, as we will see. What it means and how it is a means of understanding and relating across species boundaries is an important question.

Developmental psychology has historically been a central discipline within research, theory, and practice regarding childhood. Arguably the most important contributor to developmental psychology is Jean Piaget (Burman, 1993; Engel, 2005; Code, 2006). Serious investigations of childhood or children's experiences tend to come into contact with Piaget's work at some point. Piaget was originally trained as a zoologist, and his particular interest in children actually arose from a

deep curiosity about the development of rational, scientific cognition in humans. As a result of Piaget's foundational work, children, as research subjects, are often described in abstraction from their specific familial and social environments so as to maintain a dispassionate and universal view of their individuation and, ironically, their socialization (Damon, 1983; Burman, 1993). Piaget's empiricist approach not only abstracts children from their environment and universalizes this pattern of growth, but as Erica Burman (1993) notes, his actual tools of measurement work to produce children as both research objects and research subjects, thereby failing to theorize the contexts they inhabit. Piaget's limited research into child-animal relations tends to focus upon children's categorical understanding of animals as animate and their cognitive ability to separate living from nonliving objects. For example, Piaget draws attention to the stage of development wherein children recognize that the moon, stars, and sun are objects separate from the free, self-motivated, and animate objects present in the animal kingdom, but this is the extent of his foray into children's interactions with animal others (2004).

Developmental studies of child-animal relationships vary in scope and focus. What they share is an attentiveness to the ways in which animals play a key role in the development of the human self. Many researchers have approached the study of child-animal relations as a way of understanding the development of empathy. Lori Gruen (2009) outlines empathy's varied use within the psychological literature; it is typically described as knowing, feeling,

or responding to another being's (typically a person's) own feelings. There is a historical precedent for thinking that relationships with companion animals contribute to children's empathic abilties, one which I will explore further in the next section on humane and environmental education (Grier, 1999). Several contemporary, developmental studies suggest that higher empathy "scores" are correlative to relationships with pets (Daly & Morton, 2006; Wynne, Dorey & Udell, 2011). What such scores *mean* however, is debatable. As Gail Melson notes (2003), there is no indication that the presence or introduction of cats or dogs into the family home produces the effect of higher empathic understanding; it may be just as likely that sensitive, empathic children ask their parents for a pet. Still, when asked about the connections between children and animals, almost 70 percent of adults reported a belief that it is "good for a kid's development to grow up with pets" (Ipsos-Reid, 2001, p. 33).

Frank Ascione is another psychologist interested in what child-animal relationships reveal about children's affective and moral development. Ascione's work similarly draws upon notions of empathy (see Ascione, 1992), although his most prominent research tends to consider children's animal relationships as indicative of future affective capacities or psychopathologies. In *Children and Animals: Exploring the roots of kindness and cruelty*, Ascione (2005) explores various case studies and conducts new research into the correlations between domestic abuse, child abuse, and animal abuse. He argues that children who are abused by caretakers are more likely to abuse animals when young, and spouses, family

members, or other children when older. He cites humane education programs as important steps toward improving children's empathic capabilities not only toward companion animals, but toward other human beings as well (1992; 2005). Ascione also describes various social work programs and strategies as critical methods of intervention for an otherwise predictable turn from childhood animal abuse to future psychopathology and criminality.

Conservation psychologist Gene Myers provides perhaps the most compelling and wide-reaching studies of child-animal relations, starting with his year-long study of pre-school children's interactions with animals in the classroom (2007). Myers' work is built around a belief that nonhuman animals are real, subjective, and vital figures in children's lives:

> Partly because we do not see animals as fundamentally important to human life, we have dispersed them to the official domains of child psychology—here in conceptual development, a bat that is not a bird; over there in psychoanalysis the horse that is the father… But in the actual lives of children, the animal is a whole and compelling presence. We can recover that animal by identifying the biases that have led us to marginalize other creatures and, most importantly, by going directly to the source—to children and their experience of animals. (2007, p. 2)

Myers firmly places humans within the sphere of animality, arguing that we are first and foremost relational selves within an ecology of subjects. Such an expression of human embeddedness and creaturely existence echoes Donna Haraway's suggestion that "beings do not pre-exist their relatings" (2004, p. 6).

Myers' observations of children led to a wide range of findings regarding the significance of child-animal relationships and the self-and-other relation more broadly. While there is not enough room here to summarize each of his developmentally significant findings, a few stand out as particularly relevant for the project at hand. First, Myers presents several examples of child-animal interactions that display children's ability to recognize animals as possessing unique and significantly different minds, developing what is known as a "theory of mind." Theory of mind "holds that people have beliefs and desires, which can lead to intentions and actions, and which interact with situations in the real world and with emotions in the self" (Myers, 2007, p. 101). In essence, theory of mind is the ability to recognize subjective and affective states in other beings. Recent cognitive and consciousness studies indicate that theory of mind is present in varying degrees in humans, primates, and possibly other animals, and may be attributed to the possession of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are unique in that they "fire" as a result of both action *and* observation:

> They constitute, therefore, a specific neural system matching action observation and execution. The observed action produces in the observer's premotor cortex an activation pattern resembling that occurring when the observer actively executes the same action. (Gallese, 2001, p. 36)

We experience the effects of mirror neuron activation when we witness others being injured and reach for our own un-injured body part; the effect is similar when witnessing others act in ways that reveal a particular emotional response. It is possible that mirror neurons are actually at the root of empathic

understanding (Gallese, 2001). Children articulating a theory of mind regarding animals challenges the ever-out-dated Cartesian notion that animals are merely instinctual beings. Myers reveals that while children tended to attribute wants and desires to animals rather than more complex thoughts, the foundation for further development is laid in early childhood (2007).

Myers also emphasizes the interaction between theory of mind and children's development of language use. He describes several examples of children speaking to animals or speaking about animal language. One particularly interesting conclusion Myers makes is that children both make assumptions about animals' ability to recognize their intentions through verbal communication—typically through high-pitched, upward inflected questions—and that children can distinguish between their own use of language and the animals' modes of communication. Myers shares an interaction between the classroom teacher and the children during a visit with a dog as evidence:

> Mr. Grier: "If I'm up in my apartment and he's out in this park by himself, I've got to know when to go get him, right, when he's ready to come in. So you know what he does?" A child barks. Mr. Grier: "Exactly, who said that?" Ms. Tanner and Drew indicate it was Joe. Mr. Grier: "exactly, I'll be up in my apartment, maybe reading or something, and I'll hear from outside 'Woof, woof woof' just a couple of times, and that means he's waiting right by the door outside and he's ready to come on." (2007, p. 112)

Myers interprets five-year-old Joe's barking as evidence that Joe recognizes the meaning conveyed by the dog's communicative action. Language use around

animals shifts according to the contexts, moods, and desires of the children, revealing shifting experiences of self-awareness and relationality in a more-than-human world (Abram, 1996). According to Myers, "language is essential in making us the creature that connects" (2007, p. 91). Myers' description of humans as *the* creature that connects belies a humanistic, psychological tendency to differentiate between humans and animals on the basis of some cognitive capacity, including language use (Calarco, 2008). David Abram, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the embodiment of language, suggests that language is not just a matter of grammar or speech, but is embodied:

> In the *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty had begun to work out a notion of human language as a profoundly carnal phenomenon, rooted in our sensorial experience of each other and the world. (1996, p. 74)

Abram further suggests that language and meaning emerge within a sensory, affective world of embodied encounter with others and even with entire landscapes. Understanding language in this way reveals that humans are one of many social beings who make connections, both within and across species boundaries.

The highlight of Myers' study is perhaps his exploration of various intersubjective experiences and states. Intersubjectivity is multiply defined, but through outlining the phenomenological work of Edmund Husserl, David Abram concludes that intersubjectivity is at heart, the experience of specific phenomena "by a multiplicity of sensing subjects" (1996, p. 38). Such shared

experiences can be embodied, cognitive, imaginative, theoretical, and even affective or emotional. Myers outlines several modes of shared experience that he observed between children and animals to varying degrees, notably the sharing of affects (interaffectivity), shared attention, and shared intentionality. When different animals were brought into the classroom, Myers described the children's behaviours as often aligned with the vitality affects of the animal: a hyper monkey entered the classroom and the children became hyper, a turtle's presence made the children move slowly and even take the hunched over shape of a turtle in its shell, and so on. He notes that these "vitality affects" may have been unconscious on some level, but that children were often actively interpreting an animal's behaviour as representative of her emotions and intentions (2007). While he warns that little evidence was found in his studies to suggest that animals aligned their own affects or intentions with the children's, Myers does acknowledge the possibility and suggests that children and adults may actually learn to interpret animal actions interaffectively. He provides the example of animals "liking" children:

> The turtle crawls toward Dawn, who declares: "He likes me." Mr. Lloyd:
> "He likes you? He's going to crawl right under you there, huh?" Dawn
> backs up, spreads her knees on floor, and laughs. (Myers, 2007, p. 93)

Myers' work reveals a promising foundation for a shift in developmental focus on child-animal relationships, one that takes animal agency and children's animality as a starting point. It is important to recognize the interplay of

cognitive, linguistic, and embodied developments in the real and imagined

relational spaces of childhood to obtain a larger picture of children's experiences,

without pre-determining what children "ought" to become as adults. Following

in similar footsteps as Edith Cobb (1959) and John Livingston (1994), Myers

draws attention to the ecological and intersubjective contexts of childhood. The

rational, dispassionate, apex adult that epigenetic models of development

portray as the end point of proper child development are so often removed from

the more-than-human world. Models of development built on relational,

ecological concepts offer new possibilities for thinking about not only childhood,

but the human animal's place in various contexts (Code, 2006).

Education is the final area I would like to explore here, as pedagogy is an

underlying concern within my research. In particular, there are two educational

domains that have focused upon child-animal relations: humane education and

environmental education.

Humane education has a long history, stretching back to mid 19th century

practices of domesticity and child-rearing, when middle-class families "became

convinced of the role non-human animals could play in socializing children into

the virtues of kindness and sympathy" (Grier, 1999, p. 95). Humane education

became formalized in North America with the creation of the American Society

for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), founded in 1866 and dedicated

to the rather new principles of anti-cruelty and animal welfare (Grier, 1999; Unti

& DeRosa, 2003). Humane education slowly grew in popularity across North America, even becoming compulsory in some states before slipping in popularity during the 20th century (Unti & DeRosa, 2003). Currently, humane education campaigns have grown in popularity again, and the movement itself has taken on a broad approach to pedagogy, encompassing a wide range of goals and objectives (Selby, 1995; Unti & DeRosa, 2003; Pedersen, 2010a).

David Selby claims that humane education has four main thematic aims and objectives: "the development of a biophilic (life-loving and life-affirming ethic; consciousness of interconnectedness; consciousness of values and perspectives; commitment to democratic principles and process" (1995, p. 49). Selby suggests that the heart of the humane education movement is a focus on kindness, care, and compassion (Selby, 1995). Zoe Weil (2004) expands upon humane education's beginnings in domestic animal care and welfare, extending concerns to moral, economic, and political awareness of the wellbeing of all non-human animals and natural environments. Weil also highlights the relationships between ecological crises and the complexities of human social injustices and oppression. She describes four core "elements" for a "quality humane education":

1. Providing accurate information so students understand the consequences of their decisions as consumers and citizens.

2. Fostering the 3 Cs: Curiosity, Creativity, and Critical Thinking so students can evaluate information and solve problems.

3. Instilling the 3 Rs: Reverence, Respect, and Responsibility so students will act with kindness and integrity.

4. Offering positive choices that benefit oneself, other people, the Earth, and animals so students feel empowered to help create a more humane world. (Weil, 2004, p. 19-20, emphases original)

Environmental education emerged as a global phenomenon and educational practice following its formalization in the 1977 Tbilisi Declaration, although its roots can be traced back to the "Nature Study" movement of the early 20th century and even to the philosophical and pedagogical writings of thinkers like Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey (Palmer, 2002). The Tbilisi Declaration states that EE:

> should constitute a comprehensive lifelong education, one responsive to changes in a rapidly changing world. It should prepare the individual for life through an understanding of the major problems of the contemporary world, and the provision of skills and attributes needed to play a productive role towards improving life and protecting the environment with due regard given to ethical values. By adopting a holistic approach, rooted in a broad interdisciplinary base, it recreates an overall perspective which acknowledges the fact that natural environment and man-made [sic] environment are profoundly interdependent. It helps reveal the enduring continuity which links the acts of today to the consequences for tomorrow. It demonstrates the interdependencies among national communities and the need for solidarity among all mankind. (UNESCO, 1977, p. 5)

While the field seeks to address underlying moral and political problems that support the ongoing ecological crisis, less attention has been paid to the role of

human-animal relationships (Bell & Russell, 2000; Oakley, Watson, et al, 2010) or to children's experiences with animals (Gough, 1999; Fawcett, 2002; Timmerman & Ostertag, 2011). Linkages between anti-oppressive critical pedagogy and humane education have been made in recent environmental education publications (Humes, 2008; Kahn, 2008; Kahn & Humes, 2009). For example, Kahn and Humes (2009) argue that non-human animal advocacy is itself an important issue for an emancipatory movement such as environmental education. They highlight mass extinction of animal species, exploitative animal agriculture industries, and the growth of grassroots animal activism as indicative of a need for new, liberatory pedagogy paradigms, concluding:

> Those working for environmental education and animal rights need to begin to robustly engage with political issues such as white supremacy and class privilege, even as it suggests that those working for the benefit of peace and equality between human groups need to critique their own potentially speciesist and/or industrialist-urbanist assumptions. (Kahn & Humes, 2009, p. 191)

Helena Pedersen's (2010a; 2010b) recent contributions to education and child-animal studies also bridge various practical and theoretical gaps that exist between humane education, environmental education, and critical animal studies. Pedersen draws critical attention to the ways in which human-animal relations are discussed in the classroom environment, not just within prescribed humane or environmental education programs, but also in a range of historical, economic, and scientific discourses. Pedersen sees the school as a social

institution wherein discourses of power and domination become consolidated and reproduced, internalized and externalized, and even possibly contested. Her focus on narratives of human-animal relationships as well as various school-based practices involving animals illuminates the role of schools in ongoing issues of animal care, domination, oppression, and resistance. Such analyses are vital for thinking not only about the curricular messages that educators present regarding human-animal boundaries and relations, but also about what Pedersen refers to as the "hidden" curriculum at work in the larger economic, political, and social practices of the school environment (2010a, p. 8-18).

There are many more theoretical and practical concepts that arise from the growing field of child-animal studies. Some of these will arise throughout the course of this dissertation, but the five areas highlighted above are at the root of my own discursive, hermeneutic analysis. In order to understand the role of non-human animals as well, however, I will now turn my attention to the interdisciplinary field of human-animal studies.

Attending to (Companion) Animals

As indicated in the previous section, many studies of child-animal relationships tend to focus on the impacts of those bonds on children's cognitive, emotional, and moral development, with little consideration to the agency, well-being, or subjective experiences of the animals themselves. This is a common trend within

much academic literature, one that has recently become the focus of human-animal studies. The interdisciplinary field of human-animal studies (HAS) has rapidly risen in popularity among academics in fields as diverse as ethology, literary studies, science and technology studies, education, philosophy, political studies, and sociology (DeMello, 2010). I use the phrase human-animal studies broadly, to cover a wide range of animal scholars who may choose to label their work as "posthumanist," "post-Cartesian," "critical," or otherwise (see Castricano, 2008; Wolfe, 2010; DeMello, 2010).

Like others in human-animal studies, I espouse the post-Cartesian view that the dualisms of mind/body, human/animal, culture/nature are both deeply embedded within Western culture and also work to create unnecessary separations, suffering, and loss. Many of my colleagues in human-animal studies and environmental studies have developed strong research orientations toward what they see as a problematic and violent understanding of animals within their various research projects and publications (Castricano, 2008). Traci Warkentin, for example, articulates an approach that is rooted in phenomenological biology and ecological psychology for exploring human-whale interactions. Drawing in particular on the work of Jakob von Uexküll, Warkentin (2007) suggests that it is possible to imaginatively envision another being's sensory lifeworld—including the sights, sounds, scents, flavours, textures, and even their sense of time. Uexküll's famous concept of the *umwelt*—translated as "environment," or more roughly, "surrounding world"—was radical in that it extended the possibility of

worldhood and multiple realities to all living things. According to Uexküll, no singular being's reality is more truthful or accurate than another's; they are different yet complementary. This ontological coupling of animal being with environment is the foundation of an *umwelt,* the closed perceptual world of an individual organism. Uexküll's most famous example is that of the tick, an organism that will lie in an almost catatonic state until it perceives the scent of mammalian blood, when it will then drop down for a meal. Our perceptual worlds do not overlap; our reliance upon vision and sound are nonsensical to the tick. Its perceptual capacity for smelling blood and sensing body heat are largely unknown to humans. A tick's *umwelt* can be imagined, but never truly known or experienced, yet it is no less "real" (Evernden, 1993; Warkentin, 2007).

Pets in particular present a difficult subject even within human-animal studies (Fudge, 2009). Erica Fudge cites Edmund Leach's description of pets as "man-animals," as well as Yi-Fu Tuan's insistence that pets are "tied up with human loss in the modern world" as evidence that companion animals are given secondary status even among animal scholars (2009, p. 8-17). In contrast, Donna Haraway's stories of "companion species" (2002; 2008) acknowledge the historical and material intertwining of organisms, troubling categories of being such as "human," "animal," and even "companion animal," which maintain the fictions of biological and philosophical species boundaries. In thinking through the implications of companion species ontologically, epistemically, and ethically, Haraway makes reference to "a looping story of figuration, of ontics, of bodies in

the making, of play in which all the messmates are not human" (2008, p. 165). In *The Companion Species Manifesto,* Haraway broadens the categorical understanding of pets as well, claiming that the category is itself limiting, proposing instead the term "companion species," a reference to the depth of self-and-other relationships consisting in "co-constitution, finitude, impurity, historicity, and complexity" (2003, p. 16). Haraway's concept of companion species is not without its critics, however, as Weisberg (2009) suggests that Haraway's framework neglects its own underlying humanism. I appreciate the depth and complexity of Haraway's notion of companion species; however, I find companion animal to be a more intimate and inviting phrase, particularly in exploring the felt sense of interspecies kinship (Fawcett, in press).

There are many wonderful ways to think about, think with, and live with companion animals (Haraway, 2003; Fudge, 2009). The difficulty in exploring human-companion animal relationships as intersubjective, or in engaging with animal agency within my own project, arises from a pre-condition of my research question: the animals I am most interested in discussing with children are dead. While there were animals present in many of the interviews—dogs, cats, new pets—and while we did discuss other animals, all of the children are talking mostly about companion animals who are no longer physically alive in the world. On the one hand, this reality reveals an assumption I have had to explore and challenge both personally and in the context of my research. Following the Western, scientific model, my initial bias assumes that a dead animal is one that

ceases to exist, that it is *deceased*, literally meaning "gone away" (Online

Etymology Dictionary, 2013). As a result, I began this project under the

assumption that the animals whose lives I inquired into are no longer actors,

agents, or subjects engaged in the world.

I employ a methodology and methods that respect and engage with

animal subjectivities. My approach to this problem within my own research is

multi-faceted. First, it is given that I recognize and make room for the physical

presence of non-human animal others within my research. Many of the children I

spoke with had relationships with living animals, some of whom they interacted

with during the interview. Oscar, for example, held his pet hamster, Fuzzy,

during part of our interview. Thirteen-year-old Neville stopped our interview on

two occasions to look for and show me his pet cats. When possible, I explore

those interactions and experiences in order to understand what relationships

between these children and their pets may mean to the animals. In addition, real,

living animals were present not only within my interviews, but within my

analysis and writing. As I work in my office at home, my dog Penny is lying next

to me, and a small aquarium with live plants, invertebrates, and fish is on the

shelf next to me. These *actual* animals are foregrounded and backgrounded

throughout my day, as I stop to think about various data, theories, or even the

right wording for my work.

Moreover, the deceased animals that were the focus of my interviews

could be seen or felt as "present" at various times. When children showed me

pictures, or told me stories, those animals' subjectivities, characteristics, and identities became present in memory. In addition, some children actually showed me what remained of their pets' bodies, as when Mac showed me his dog Suri's ashes. Some children used their hands to describe an animal's size or shape, an embodied performance that created a sense of the animal in the present moment. Others showed me objects that belonged to their pets: food bowls, collars, and toys. I also pay close attention to the language children used—metaphors, narrative forms, the use of past or present tenses to name a few—as a way of understanding the animals' agency within their lived relationships.

Throughout this dissertation, I maintain my focus on, and curiosity about, child-animal relationships rather than simply on the children I interview. As stated earlier, much of the literature surrounding children, animals, and death comes directly from developmental psychology, attachment theory, and popular psychology. These texts are aimed at helping parents, guardians, and teachers to assist children in coping with loss or to instruct them in the process of grief. While I think this goal is vital to consider, the unique nature of child-pet relationships and the role of animals in human lives are backgrounded. Animals—including pets—are often absent in historical writing, establishing an anthropocentric narrative trend that negates the possibility of animal subjectivity and agency (Fudge, 2009). I have written elsewhere about animal narrativity, a concept that explores the degrees to which humans are capable of, or willing to recognize stories in the lives of non-human animals. My own approach to animal

narrativity suggests that hermeneutic phenomenology is not merely a "human science" as Ricoeur (1981), Polkinghorne (1988), Kearney (2002), and others suggest: it is first and foremost a deeply observational and interpretative awareness of the multitude of lifeworlds in our midst, including those of other species or beings (Russell, in press). In short, my conversations with children revealed real, lived experiences shared between beings with affects, desires, and interests that converged and diverged in significant ways. Children and companion animals are beings who are striving to get along together (Haraway, 2008), and each contributes significance to the relational, temporal, spatial, affective, and embodied experiences of the other in unique and important ways.

Outline of Chapters

Throughout this dissertation, I will be returning to the central questions exploring children's lives with animals and their experiences of pet death. Each chapter builds upon the previous ones, creating a narrative arc that follows not only my approach to research and analysis, but also the stories shared by children themselves. In Chapter Two, I return to the questions I set out to address in order to outline what methodological framework and research methods are best suited to my overall project. I introduce the philosophical and analytical tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. As an approach utilized in a wide range of disciplines, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to uncover the essential meaning structures and themes that emerge from lived experience in

the world (Van Manen, 1990; Smith et al, 2009). I outline my own adaptations to this rich philosophical tradition, and present the steps I took while interviewing children, transcribing and analyzing the interviews, and even writing up the results.

In Chapter Three, I present a brief "interlude" on the role of memory within this research project. While analyzing my interviews with children and my field notes, a recurrent theme emerged that drew my attention to questions of recall, representation, and relationality regarding past events and present meanings. I outline the ways in which children described the past, and the others who contribute to their evolving interpretations of their experiences with companion animals.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six present the children's voices and other data, following a narrative arc that arose throughout the course of the interviews and analysis. The interviews themselves were semi-structured, meaning that while I had written out a series of questions, participants' own responses and interests ultimately guided the course of the conversation. While looking back at the transcripts, I noticed that each interview tended to follow a pattern, tracing children's lived experiences with their pets, their experience of an animal's death, and those moments and events that took place in the days, weeks, and months *after* a pet died. As a result, I built my analysis around the themes that emerged regarding life (Chapter 4), death (Chapter 5), and moving on (Chapter 6). Each chapter presents a phenomenological exposition of the predominant, existential

themes (Van Manen, 1990) in a descriptive manner. I explore the main experiential features that children presented regarding each larger theme of life, death, and moving on, before engaging with various interpretations of those experiences based in the literature presented in this chapter and other relevant studies. Experientially-based theories from phenomenology, psychology, and education are presented in dialogue with my own findings. In each chapter, I also take an opportunity to highlight or summarize examples of animal agency as part of my interpretative analysis. These three individual chapters each conclude with a summary, experiential description of the main theme, a practice that is in line with various phenomenological approaches to qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013).

Chapter Seven serves as the conclusion for this dissertation. In that chapter, I present a summary account of the research findings, delineating main themes, existential features, and interpretations. I place those findings in dialectical relation with both the research presented in Chapter One—in particular attachment theory and Myers' relational self—and various discourses presented throughout the dissertation in order to trace this project's contribution to child-animal studies, environmental and humane education, and other interdisciplinary areas. I also briefly explore some of the shortcomings present in this project in order to anticipate and suggest future directions within my own research and for those projects that may be influenced by my work.

Notes

[1] This reference to "autistic thought" comes from Piaget's work in cognitive development. It is not directly related to the autism-spectrum disorders, but rather, a reference to young children's tendency to think within the confines of the self, the self's imagery and rules; in short, in an undirected and subconscious manner (Piaget, 2004).

[2] Obviously, there was not enough room for the entire alphabet in my ABC guide of child-animal studies here. I chose the five areas of research and theory most relevant to my own work, but I do plan to continue working through the alphabet—from F (Four-H/Farm Animals) through to Z (Zoo-based Experiences)—in a later, comprehensive publication outlining the history of the field.

Chapter 2. Exploring Children's Lifeworlds: Methodological Framework and Research Methods

What does it mean for children to experience the death of a companion animal?

Below the surface of this research question lies an orientation that guides both

my interest in the subject matter and the course by which I set out toward deeper

understanding. Max Van Manen (1990) provides a distinction between research

methodology and research methods, positioning methodology as the larger,

historically theoretical framework within which the researcher orients herself.

Methods, on the other hand, describe those techniques and procedures that

become the mode of research, strategies that are "charged with methodological

considerations and implications," but remain flexible to the dictates of fieldwork

and analysis (Van Manen, 1990, p. 28). Van Manen's distinction provides a

general framework for this chapter. I will first explain my approach to various

research traditions before describing how my methodology impacted my

particular fieldwork and analytical strategies.

My research question seeks both to describe and to interpret meanings

around a given phenomenon—animal death—experienced by a relatively

homogenous group of participants: twelve children from the GTA, ages 6-13.

Because I am reflective of my own interpretive role and presence within data

collection, analysis, and especially writing, my inquiry fits distinctly within the

realm of qualitative research. Creswell provides a distinct and thorough

definition of qualitative research that I find useful:

Qualitative research begins with the assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (2013, p. 44)

My overall research methodology is informed by the philosophical tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Creswell, 2013), and to a lesser extent, narrative inquiry (Riessman, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the heart of my investigation are children's experiences of companion animal deaths, and the meanings attributed to those experiences. Drawing from phenomenological work in particular, I briefly explore the problematic—yet central—concepts of experience and meaning. I argue that my iterative, reflexive, and interpretive framework acknowledges these epistemic challenges while still offering contextually sensitive insights into children's experiences and meaning-making activities. In the methods section, I present the specific phenomenological and narrative approaches to fieldwork and analysis that I used in my investigation. I conclude with brief overview of the importance of quality and evaluation within qualitative research, including

my approach to validity.

The Centrality of Experience

Experience has myriad connotations and applications in theory and in research practice. Environmental educator Philip Payne suggests that there is an "ambiguity of meaning about experience… demonstrated in the variable uses of adjectives like concrete, direct, vicarious, cyber, native, mediated, indoor, and wilderness, to name a few…" and as a result, "conceptual vagueness about experience (of self and of nature) is still present" (2003, pp. 171-173). This vagueness often coincides with epistemic doubts about the accessibility of experiences within a research setting, especially in work with children (Greene & Hill, 2005). Cutter-MacKenzie (2009) and others address these concerns in various ways, suggesting that children need to be more engaged as participants in research rather than as objects of investigation. Research focusing on children's experiences benefits from a two-fold process that firstly involves children as active participants in research "of relevance to them," and secondly, considers children as "experts, actors, and stakeholders in their own and other environments' (Hacking et al, 2013, p. 438).

Despite a wide range of criticisms aimed at the notion of "experience," it remains a fundamental concept within qualitative research. This highlights an ongoing need to define and clarify these terms and to remain reflexive about their use. Experience can be thought of in several ways: as embodied activity,

mental reflection, or as conscious knowledge. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) point out that there is a flow of everyday, lived experiences—which we are often unconscious of—out of which "an experience" may arise. They argue that much research is typically interested in singular or particular experiences that maintain some significance for individuals or groups. They employ William Dilthey's explanation:

> Whatever presents itself as a unit in the flow of time because it has a unitary meaning, is the smallest unit which can be called an experience. Any more comprehensive unit which is made up of parts of a life, linked by a common meaning, is also called an experience, even when the parts are separated by interrupting events. (quoted in Smith et al, 2009, p. 2).

Dilthey's definition in particular demonstrates how experience and meaning are concepts that are intricately bound together. While one may be constantly experiencing events, perceptions, and feelings in the world, many of these experiences become backgrounded, or acknowledged without reflection. When a subject stops to reflect upon a particularly noteworthy experience or event, they are acknowledge its meaning; one may explore the significance of these events with others, in a sense "making meaning" together.

John Dewey outlined three criteria for experience: interaction, continuity, and situation. Interaction refers to the experiential connection between the personal and the social, the individual and the historical. Dewey acknowledged that we may understand or know others individually, but each individual

emerges from a particular social, historical, and ecological milieu. Deeper understanding and knowledge is achieved when we place personal or individual experiences and meanings within their larger contexts (Code, 2006). Dewey's second concept, "continuity," describes the significant linking of events across time:

> Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Dewey's notion of continuity describes an existential manner of being in the world. We experience a lived relation with past, present, and future to varying degrees in such a way that our perspectives of each part of the continuum—our experiences of the past, our feelings in the present, or our hopes or anxieties for the future—influence each other (Van Manen, 1990). The final criterion Dewey outlines, "situation," is a reference to a particular notion of place, not just an environment, but a landscape of physical, geographical, and epistemic "inquiry landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51). This linking of experience with place is particularly relevant for an ecologically minded project such as this one, as it takes locationality and context to be a vital component of experience and knowledge (Code, 2006).

Van Manen describes the "existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world," outlining four existential themes: "*lived space*

(spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (1990, p. 101, emphases original). He suggests that these four themes are fundamental across the lifeworlds of all (human) beings; despite their various contexts. Given my focus on human-animal relationships, I altered his last existential to read simply, "lived relations." Van Manen's use of the phenomenological term "lifeworld" adds a dimension of immanence to Dewey's tripartite structure of experience. At various points in this dissertation, I utilize the term lifeworld, following Neil Evernden's description:

> properties of consciousness ensure that whatever is perceived is not neutral, not just the passive reception of external stimuli, but the result of our active involvement in grasping the world… all [perceptions] derive from the same source and are equally valid experiences of the world… the life-world. (1993, p. 74)

A lifeworld—articulated within the various frameworks, languages, and approaches embedded in geographic, cultural, and historical locations—consists of the measurable and the meaningful, the perceivable and the conceivable. A lifeworld is personal, partial, and situated within the limitations of perception—both conscious and unconscious. Further, a lifeworld interacts with those of various others in our social realms, expanding and contracting in its relationality and articulations.

I asked children about their experiences of companion animal death as part of an inquiry into the meanings that arise from these various experiential

conditions. Throughout my analysis and writing, I maintained focus on children's embodied experiences; their interactions with and perceptions of their own and other bodies. Together, we explored the meaning of particular relationships or events within their personal and social milieu, the significance they place on experiential continuity, and their situatedness within a family structure, a home, an interview setting, or even larger geographic areas. My ultimate goal remains a located, contextual articulation of children's experiences of the death of their companion animals and the meanings or significance they attribute to those events.

Lifeworld Research: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Narrative

Qualitative research seeks to explore "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Whether the truth that is sought is considered to be a partial insight into that phenomenon or an absolute claim makes a significant difference in how researchers approach their subject matter and the various relationships and strategies that are employed in both the field work and analysis stages. I am particularly interested in the relationships that exist between children and companion animals. While these categories appear to be general or homogenous, they are not universally understood or fixed concepts. As a result, I believe that any investigation I undertake can only point to some version of the truth. I am working from my own standpoint as an

individual situated within a particular socio-cultural, economic, and linguistic matrix of experience.

The backgrounds of meaning that a subject brings to a particular inquiry fundamentally influence what it is they discover or perceive about a phenomenon. Within a dialogical relation between the unique and the general, the personal and the communal, is a deeper—but not absolute—understanding of reality, experience, and truth; in short, there is a "hermeneutic," or means of interpretation. Payne suggests that phenomenology is uniquely suited for research that seeks to critically question "language, texts, images, myths, and discourses due to their presumed or possible effects on human subjectivities and subsequent constructions of gender, youth, class, ethnicity and nature" (2003, p. 170). Phenomenology arose as a radical response to naturalism—the belief that nature is governed by causality and, to a certain extent, functionality (Wood, 2001). Edmund Husserl developed his approach to phenomenology as a rigorous method, seeking to turn focus "to the things themselves" (quoted in Moran & Mooney, 2007, p. 67). With this focus, phenomenology is concerned with the study of subjective experience within individuals' "lifeworlds," the subjectively perceived world that is the source of all observations, factual deductions, and affective manifestations.

Phenomenology is thus presented as "a kind of deliberate naivety through which it is possible to encounter a world unencumbered with presuppositions" (Evernden, 1993, p. 57). Focusing on the structures of consciousness,

phenomenology describes and interprets the *sensation* of being. The ultimate goal of a phenomenological investigation is to present a rich description of a particular experience and to interpret that experience's meaning within an embodied, relational lifeworld (Russell, in press). Since its initial presentation in the work of Husserl, phenomenology has split into two largely separate approaches, both to philosophy and to its application as a research method: descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (Smith et al, 2009; Creswell, 2013). While this project takes on an interpretative or hermeneutic stance, it is important to note that most phenomenology seeks to be descriptive in some sense. The core difference between the two strands lies in their respective commitments to "transcendence" or "immanence." Husserl believed that phenomenology, properly conceived and attuned to the most essential structures of consciousness, would present descriptions that transcended the contextual, everyday aspects of subjectivity or perception, what he called the "natural attitude" (Moran & Mooney, 2007, p. 15). As a result, Husserl's transcendental focus held that the structures of meaning, discovered through a strict series of 'reductions' focused upon consciousness, would erase the differences between various accounts of experience and expose what was most *essential* (Van Manen, 1990; Smith et al, 2009). Ultimately, this belief in transcendence drew criticism from Husserl's own students and ideological heirs, but many of his methods remain fundamental within subsequent iterations of phenomenology.

In contrast to his transcendental approach, Husserl's student Martin Heidegger endeavoured to re-establish phenomenology's existential ties, focusing upon the conscious subject's immanence within a contextual, interrelational *lebenswelt*, or lifeworld. Heidegger's "concept of 'worldliness' affords the embodied, intentional actor a range of physically-grounded (what is possible) and intersubjectively grounded (what is meaningful) options" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 17). "Intersubjectivity" describes our shared, relational experience of the world; it is a key component of Heidegger's primary ontological focus on the human experience of 'Dasein,' a German phrase meaning 'Being-there' (Evernden, 1993, p. 63). For Heidegger, all subjective experience and perception is situated within a world, or as Evernden notes, a "field" of meaning and understanding.[1] What Heidegger refers to as "being-in-the-world," Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur name "belonging," and while the two terms are often presented as equivalent (Ricoeur, 1981), I prefer to use Gadamer and Ricoeur's term because of its ethological connotations and potential for thinking through the relational experiences of children and animals. As such, I present subjectivity and meaning within the context of "belonging to *a* world," a unique world that emerges from a spectrum of both similar and radically different others. This notion of belonging situates the self within fundamentally intersubjective, ecological, historical, and linguistic matrices of relationality.

In turning to the centrality of one's being-in-the-world, Heidegger also began to develop an understanding and approach to phenomenology that was

interpretative, or hermeneutic. A specifically *hermeneutic* approach to

phenomenology, as opposed to transcendental or essentialist phenomenology,

alerts us to the prior understandings and 'horizons' of knowledge that form the

background for all of our experiences. Andy Fisher provides an example of

'horizons' by way of childhood, suggesting that children learn various social

norms and practices, such as how far to stand from others, by observing and

imitating adults, typically with "little awareness that they are doing so" (2002, p.

38). Heidegger refers to this referential structure of understanding as the "fore-

conception," noting, "an interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless

apprehending of something presented to us" (1996, p. 192). The key to

understanding the phenomenon under investigation then, is to both

acknowledge these tacit assumptions or biases and to allow what is "new"

within a text or experience to critique, challenge, or otherwise be placed into

dialogical relation with our pre-conceptions (Smith et al, 2009).

There are three concepts within the hermeneutic phenomenological

tradition that have a profound influence on my research design and methods:

bracketing, the hermeneutic circle, and narrative. I will briefly discuss each of

these ideas below, illustrating both their value and limitations as well as their

influence on my overall research inquiry.

Bracketing was introduced by Husserl as one of the first of several steps toward

setting aside the "natural attitude," our everyday way of being in and

experiencing objects and the world. Instead, Husserl proposed that the researcher strive to enter into the "phenomenological attitude," attending to the internal structures of consciousness and perception of a phenomenon:

> Putting it in brackets shuts out from the phenomenological field the world as it exists for the subject in simple absoluteness; its place, however, is taken by the world as given in *consciousness* (perceived, remembered, judged, thought, valued, etc.). (quoted in Smith et al, 2009, p. 13, emphasis original)

Husserl borrowed the concept of bracketing from mathematics, where it indicates components of an equation that should be highlighted and dealt with prior to or after other operations. Unfortunately, Husserl's notion of bracketing is often tied to his belief that the essential structures of consciousness were accessible by an idealized "transcendental ego," devoid of contextual, historical, and even linguistic influence (LeVasseur, 2003). As noted above, the existential and hermeneutic turn instigated by Heidegger holds that this kind of pure reflection is ultimately unattainable; all consciousness is situated in and tied up in the world.

While Husserl's strict approach to the phenomenological reduction and the transcendental ego is highly idealized and seemingly at odds with the contextual framework I propose here, the notion of bracketing remains an important one. To maintain focus on children's experiences, it will be beneficial to set aside my own biases, assumptions, and—as much as is possible—my

existing knowledge of these categories and phenomena in order to allow the participants to speak for themselves. Van Manen provides an example in his investigation of parenting:

> I explore the literature by specialists of parenting, I note how the large majority of books do not address the question of the meaning of parenting. Instead, they tend to give advice to mothers and fathers of children of all ages. I notice too, that parenting is often considered a "how to do" skill that can be taught… No matter how practically compelling the contents of these books may be, they do not necessarily bring us any closer to understanding the nature of parenting itself. (1990, p. 47)

For Van Manen, such background knowledge—whether it is practical, instructional, or scientific—predisposes us to particular interpretations, closing off new possibilities or understandings about the *significance* of the phenomenon we are investigating. For him, bracketing is not about forgetting what we know, but rather, it is about making our fore-conceptions and assumptions explicit, formulating a "profound sense of wonder and amazement" about experience, and allowing our knowledge or conceptions to be changed by what presents itself as unique, new, and deeper (Van Manen, 1990, p. 185). Bracketing ultimately has its limits; and therein lies the importance of self-reflexivity; of returning to the words, language, and experiences of the participants.

This proposal of bracketing builds upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "reduction," whereby curiosity itself is considered an awareness of the shortcomings of one's own knowledge. Bracketing becomes a "kind of

astonishment before the world that disrupts habitual patterns of thinking" (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 417). In thinking through the relationships of children and companion animals, my approach to bracketing is to make explicit not only my own personal experiences, but to remain curious about the very categories and language that arise in my inquiry. I want to allow the research process—from the interview context, through data analysis and into the writing process itself—to dialectically challenge my own personal and cultural assumptions about childhood, animality, and death as well as the knowledge base and understandings I bring to this work. Throughout each chapter, then, I will periodically bracket my own experiences both literally (I will highlight these sections with large brackets) and theoretically, in an attempt to set them aside or put them into dialogue with the themes that emerge from research texts.

The hermeneutic circle complements this approach to bracketing as self-awareness, curiosity, and openness to change, linking it to a spiralling form of inquiry that represents the interpretative process. The hermeneutic circle, according to the earliest depictions of it as a method, refers to a mode of interpretation which oscillates between the parts and the whole of a text, attempting to place text within an author's collective works, a literary genre, or even the entirety of the author's "inner life" (Gadamer in Moran & Mooney, 2007, p. 327). By attempting to "transpose ourselves into the perspective" within which an author formulates

his or her own views, we try to achieve a common understanding and perhaps seek to make our own ideas or arguments stronger.

This circular character of inquiry and understanding, of placing the particular and the whole in relation to each other is taken up in some respects as a *method* of textual analysis and as the actual condition of meaning and understanding. We cannot always access or explain our fore-conceptions. We cannot always bracket out that which we hold to be true, whole, or obvious; and so the hermeneutic circle points to an always incomplete, unfinished, and intermediary dialectic of understanding. Gadamer suggests that the hermeneutic circle is more than a methodology, it is representative of how understanding itself works. Gadamer also suggests that understanding is not a totalizing endeavour:

> Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*. (quoted in Moran & Mooney, 2007, p. 330, emphases original).

This hermeneutic circle will thus remain open, invitational, and partial. A partial approach, open, and tentative approach does not mean that research findings cannot be significant, but rather that they point to a new way of looking at or understanding a problem.

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Finally, another benefit of a hermeneutic approach is that it recognizes the various roles and influences of the researcher within the research process, from beginning to end (Langdridge, 2008). I consider this self reflexivity to be a form of positionality, aligned with the feminist outlooks offered by Code, Haraway and Berman above. My own approach to the hermeneutic circle also recognizes a "double hermeneutic" within the research process (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). First, the children I work with and interview throughout this project are attempting to understand and interpret their experiences of animal death. They are responding to questions I pose, but this process does not disclose their own contributions to meaning-making. Second, as the researcher, I am attempting to make sense of these children's experiences within their lifeworlds. I am interpreting *their* anecdotes, stories, or responses within an interview setting while sitting in front of a computer at home, in my own contextual milieu. I do so for the benefits, hopefully, of my own audiences. Langdridge (2008) argues that ultimately, this distance between speaker and listener, or in written work author and reader, guides the need for hermeneutics within qualitative research.

Narrative is multiply defined and employed within the humanities and within social science research. Norman Denzin writes that because experiences are largely inaccessible, one must rely upon recognizing "how narratives, connected to systems of discourse (interviews, stories, rituals, myths), represent experience" (2004, p. 85). We encounter narrative in many forms: in conversation, literature

and other artistic representations, and in various cultural and historical accounts of the past. Narratives take on different lengths, from anecdotal musings to epic tales. It should not be surprising then that narratives and stories serve many functions: formulating a sense of identity over time in an individual teller, relating a sense of shared experiences in social settings, or securing a sense of belonging and cohesion among individuals in cultural groups (Kearney, 2002; Riessman, 2008).

I have written elsewhere (Russell, in press) that narrative has a strong tie to phenomenological tradition within the works of Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, and Richard Kearney. Ricoeur and Kearney in particular, focus on the hermeneutic and phenomenological functions of narrative. Narratives are first of all tied to experience and meaning, whether we classify them as fictional, fantastical, personal, or historical. Narratives attempt to re-present some real or imagined event, its temporal, spatial, relational, and embodied structure (Kearney, 2002). In this sense, narratives display a highly hermeneutic function. Through the narrative process, the construction of personal and historical stories, we attempt to think through and interpret actions, experiences, and events and assign them some significance (Langdridge, 2008). In addition, narratives are highly communicative. Stories maintain a typically singular function: "someone telling something to someone about something" (Kearney, 2002, p. 5). My approach to interviews draws upon both narrative and phenomenological methods, seeking both to capture some essence of children's experiences, and an

attempt to understand the autobiographical (children's self-narratives) and biographical (children's narration of companion animals' lives) significance of these events. While my overall writing structure in this dissertation takes a narrative arc—both in terms of representing my research experience and in terms of the overall story of life, death, and grief that children recounted with me—I am aware of and sensitive to narrative's shortcomings

Narrative, like phenomenology and hermeneutics, has been criticized as a method of research as well as for its perceived, privileged claim to primary experience (Kearney, 2002). Important post-structuralist and post-modern critiques suggest that narrative relies too heavily upon a structural view of reality, one which claims that stable, homogenous narratives are accessible or even possible (Maan, 2006). In addition, such critics suggest that narrative research is overly reliant upon thematic or content analysis, while ignoring the role of discourse or language (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). My own response is to maintain a reflexive focus both on what is unspoken within my interview texts—pauses, notes on children's embodied reactions, changes in tone—as well as attentiveness to both the power and failings of language in representing experience. Narrative is, after all, one possible attempt to make sense of what is often unsayable (Kearney, 2002). I want to emphasize that not all meaning is narrative. There are meaningful breaks, pauses, and gestures within my transcriptions and field notes that provide other opportunities for analysis and reflection. I will address these features frequently throughout this

dissertation. I recognize what may not be present in children's accounts, as well as the socially and culturally specific forms of knowing that are privileged in the interviews. I acknowledge my own power within the research setting, and yet, I find that stories abound.

Methods: Fieldwork and Analysis

In this section, I explore the particular research methods or strategies that are employed in my investigation of children's experiences with companion animals and death. I will draw on more recent descriptions of phenomenological methods outlined specifically for the qualitative researcher. In particular, my research practice combines approaches from two main sources, which I will introduce briefly: the process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a multidisciplinary methodology outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), and the pedagogical work outlined by Max Van Manen in *Researching Lived Experience* (1990). While both of these approaches are firmly rooted in interpretive phenomenology, neither is particularly prescriptive in terms of outlining a research method. IPA does provide suggestions, many of which I utilized and will discuss below, while Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is left more open ended and creative, seeking to avoid any potential missed opportunities for understanding (Langdridge, 2008). As a result, while influenced by these examples—as well as others—the sections below

highlight my own particular approach to this research project, with detailed explanation to guide the reader through my process as it developed.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a research approach that originated in "psychology but is increasingly being picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social, and health sciences" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 1). IPA draws upon three distinct traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. The first two areas were discussed at length in the previous section, so I will turn briefly to the influence of idiography in particular. Idiography is largely concerned with the individualized, personal nature of experience; it does not claim that the self is the most basic or essential structure of being, but it does acknowledge that subjective experience occurs within a unique and embodied lifeworld, that it is highly intersubjective, and that research involving individual cases provides a great deal of pragmatic value. Ashworth and Greasley refer to an "idiographic sensibility," which acknowledges the "interplay of factors which may be quite specific to the individual" (Ashworth & Greasley, 2009, p. 573). Despite its focus on detail and depth at the individual case level, ideography does not exclude the possibility of generalizing; in fact, by pairing it with phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA recognizes that deep within the particular or individual lifeworld are similarities and essential structures of experience (Smith et al, 2009). The idiographic process, however, seeks to establish what is particular about a small number of

representative cases before moving to what those cases have in common thematically or structurally.

Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is very similar to IPA. It is more interpretative than other phenomenological approaches, yet still attempts to move between what is unique and particular about various experiences and what is essential, or universal, among them. Van Manen's work more closely follows Gadamer's dialogical style, and in particular offers six basic steps:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented [pedagogical] relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
(Landridge, 2008, p. 122)

My own plan for dissertation research flows from these heuristic models, maintaining reflexivity and creativity where needed to fill in any gaps or shortcomings. Most importantly, I try to maintain focus on bracketing out my own experiences, maintaining a sense of curiosity about my subjects' lifeworlds through deep questioning, and on the moving back and forth between the particular and the universal that is characterized by the hermeneutic circle (Fisher, 2002). Turning to the research process now—from recruiting and setting

up interviews all the way through interpretation and writing—I hope to make my practical approach to these theoretical concepts more evident.

Recruitment

[Bracketing 2.1 — *My initial reaction to the difficulties of recruitment tended to focus on concerns with my own identity and appearance, and the belief that parents were reluctant to let a tall, bearded stranger into their home to talk with their child about grief, loss, and their pets. I considered the possibility that my interest in children and their intimate, emotionally complicated lifeworld experiences might be considered un-masculine or suspect, particularly in a culture of parenting referred to as "protectionist" or "fear-filled" (Louv, 2005). It has been suggested elsewhere that men who are interested in early childhood education, or more traditionally "nurturing" roles, are often treated with suspicion:*

> *Sargent (2005) describes the dilemma of male early childhood educators who wanted to nurture children in the ways characteristic of mothers but were constrained to behave more stereotypically. Unless they adapted more distant and masculine ways of being with children, men who nurtured were under suspicion of being pedophiles. Moreover, male teachers, who might have preferred not to be disciplinarians, were often given the most difficult children, thrusting them into the role of disciplinarian and thereby creating the self-fulfilling prophecy that men discipline (Deutsch, 2007, p. 112).*

While this description may shed light on my experience, I have no particular insight into non-participants' thoughts about my research or about me personally. I also am unsure

as to why certain parents agreed to participate only to later change their minds and

back out of the process. I told each participant and their guardians that they were

allowed to refuse participation at any time in the research process. Such a decision

was fully within their rights and indeed made known as a perfectly acceptable course

of action before, during, and even after interviews. Since no one chose this course of

action, I decided to bracket my personal anxieties about participation aside.]

Phenomenological research tends to target anywhere from one (for an explanation of the single case study approach, see Smith et al, 2009) to 25 subjects who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation, a process known as "criterion" sampling (Creswell, 2013). Typical projects target five to 10 subjects in order to promote depth of analysis over and above generalizations (Polkinghorne, 1988). I originally set a goal of 10 research subjects, from eight to 12 years of age, that had experienced a pet death within their own home (e.g., not through a friend, relative, or only through media). The target age range was strategic for several reasons. First, considering the subject matter, I wanted to be careful of any emotional stress caused to research subjects; discussing death is a difficult matter—both cognitively and emotionally—and many of the parents I met suggested that it would be easier to discuss such matters with their "older" children. Second, children past age six have a more cognitively, linguistically, and conceptually cohesive understanding of death based upon various investigations (Anthony, 1971; Piaget, 2004; Corr, 2010). Third, I originally

anticipated more depth of self reflection and willingness to participate fully in children considered pre-adolescent and several years into their formal education, an assumption that was challenged early and often! Finally, I wanted to defer to a developmental approach to narrative capacity: Susan Engel notes that older children (around age nine) tell more descriptive stories than younger children, although younger children, she believes, tell "livelier and more expressive" stories (1995, p. 158). While the average age of my participants was roughly 10, I found that their stories did not necessarily fit within Engel's descriptions; some of the younger children told lively stories, and some did not. Context played a large role in the kinds of discussions we had, as I will explain below. Finally, I sought an even gender split within the project, at most 50% male and at least 50% female. Due to my anticipation of challenges with recruiting, I did not initially seek to control any other demographic variables.

My strategy at the beginning of the fieldwork phase was to capitalize on the two or three parents I met at dog parks prior to finalizing my dissertation proposal. These parents seemed keen on my work and were open to me interviewing their children. My plan was to set up a snowballing or rolling approach (Creswell, 2013), encouraging participants to help me recruit friends or family members. In reality, several of those initial targeted parents showed reluctance and backed out once I received ethical approval. Only one, Oscar's mother Heather, followed through; and her contacts were not interested in the end. Early in the project, I also interviewed Helen, the owner of a pet funeral

service in Toronto, who seemed keen on helping me with recruitment over the phone. However, in person, she was reluctant to share client information or to recommend me, in order to maintain her own reputation.

Although the process was difficult—taking over a year—I was most successful in recruitment through York listservs. I sent out e-mails within Environmental Studies, Psychology, Child Studies, Education, and other departments with an attached recruitment advertisement (see Appendix A). I recruited another two interviews—Sabrina and Jim—through their mother, a local children's bookstore owner in Toronto who has helped me to find children's literature on my topic. The benefit of my overall recruitment strategy was a largely homogenous sample, at least in terms of income brackets, ethnicity, and location (eight of 10 interviews were conducted within the GTA). I believe their similarities to each other and to my own childhood allowed me slightly more insight into generalizations across cases than if the children had come from drastically different contexts.

Parents filled out a participant questionnaire prior to or during the interview (see Appendix A), but were told they did not have to fill in any information they felt uncomfortable providing. As my research focus is not to make predictions or demonstrate causality, I did not collect detailed demographic information. My decision to background demographic data does not mean I find such information superfluous; in fact, I maintain a strong focus on context in my analysis. Instead of collecting data from parents, however, I

sought to explore contextual and descriptive data that the children presented as interesting or important during the course of the interview. For each participant, I kept track of children's age and sex, parents' or guardians' relationship status, number of siblings, numbers and types of pets, and languages spoken at home.

Interviews

Interviews are a fundamental part of the data collection process in phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 2013). The interviews I conducted ranged in length from 15 minutes to almost one hour, with the average time being just over 32 minutes. I conducted 10 interviews with 12 children, two of which were interviews I conducted with a brother and sister: Sabrina and Jim, Charlie and Juliet. All interviews were semi-structured to allow for children to highlight and elaborate upon the experiences they found central, rather than those I chose to emphasize. As an educator, I approached each interview as a pedagogical process (Van Manen, 1990). In fact, this became an emergent theme within my coding process and analysis. While my original strategy was to conduct two separate interviews, my experiences with the first interviewee, Oscar, led me to alter that strategy. I had hoped that getting to know the child in the first interview, where conversation could focus on them, their interests, and their pets' lives, would allow me to return in a second interview with a new strategy—working on memory boxes, art projects, or writing—to tackle the more difficult issues around death. However, Oscar indicated he was confused as to why I was

coming back, and quickly became disinterested in the second interview. He assumed that everything of importance was already covered. In addition, several of the children I met with expressed disinterest in drawing or writing. As a result of these challenges as well as my ongoing problems with recruitment, I decided it was best to proceed with one interview rather than try to arrange two separate meetings.

Each interview experience was unique, in terms of location as well as presences of other subjects. Most of the interviews (70 percent) took place at the children's homes. I preferred conducting interviews within the children's homes, given the level of comfort children experience in the home environment; in addition, the home is the predominant setting for experiences with companion animals. Unfortunately, a home interview was not always logistically possible or preferable for the parents with whom I was arranging the interviews. As a result, one interview took place in a study room at the Toronto Reference Library, another at a Tim Horton's near the family's home in Brampton, and finally, Sabrina and Jim were interviewed at their mother's place of business; this last location was at least a very familiar and comfortable setting for the interviewees. It is noteworthy that the interviews at the Reference Library and at the Tim Horton's were the shortest in duration, at roughly 20 minutes and 14 minutes, respectively.

Other individuals were present to varying degrees, including parents/guardians, siblings, friends, family friends, customers, and pets. There

were only three interviews where parents/guardians or siblings were not at least nearby—classified as in the same room, but not sitting with us and listening or engaged—and the rest of the interviews took place with others present to varying degrees. Various pets were present in most of the home-based interviews including a hamster, cats, dogs, and fish. I will discuss the significance, if any, of these human and animal presences in the chapters that follow. For now, it will suffice to note that the presences of others often markedly changed the tone and flow of the interview; parents (in particular mothers) often sought to help or correct their children at various points of the interviews, siblings often interrupted each other or me, and pets often provided a shift of focus during difficult questions or an opportunity for "show and tell."

Finally, the schedule of questions (see Appendix A) evolved throughout the research process. A semi-structured interview was chosen to allow flexibility in case children were reluctant to share early on, though the intention of each interview was to allow the child's own language and narrative to carry the interview along, with the interviewer asking for explanations or helping to reconstruct the scene. Pre-determined questions were returned to in the event that particular issues became difficult to follow any further. My strategy for questioning, although not always perfect, built upon the following six points on research interviews with children:

1. Open-ended question forms (the "Wh-" questions, such as "who?" "what?" and "why?") encourage longer, more detailed responses

2. Closed-questions ("Yes/No" questions) should be avoided

3. Questions should be phrased so as to avoid suggestion or leading the child to specific answers

4. Repetition of questions, where possible, should be avoided; children tend to believe their first answers were somehow wrong and will change the content of their replies

5. Interviewers should both avoid interrupting children *and* allow for long pauses or silences in children's narratives

6. Children's own language or terms are important.

(adapted from Westcott & Littleton, 2005, pp. 151-152)

Transcription

Transcription is a vital step within qualitative research, especially research that entails interviews or observations. Each of my interviews was recorded using an audio device, then transferred onto a computer. Using a transcription program, ExpressScribe, I listened carefully to each recording once before transcribing in Microsoft Word. Listening carefully to each interview allowed for a deeper understanding of rhythms and tones that are important for subsequent rounds of analysis. In this process, I move from what occurred within particular discourses—Ricoeur's term for "spoken speech" (Langdridge, 2008)—and the creation of written documents, or texts. Each text should, as accurately as possible, refer back to the discourse that took place, including the pauses and breaks. Responses were generally transcribed as paragraphs.

My transcription process utilized a protocol similar to the one presented by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, who describe it as an important "form of

interpretative activity" itself (2009, p. 74). I made note of all spoken words, interactions, participants, sounds, non-verbal utterances (such as laughing or sighing), and pauses—indicated by the letter p in parentheses, with 1 p equivalent to roughly 1 second. Box 2.1 provides an example from my interview (my comments indicated by "I") with Mac, a 10 year old boy whose interview was marked by the presence and interactions of his mother, Anna, and her partner Eric. Mac's sister and friend were also present, as was the family dog. After each transcription session, I listened to the recording again to check for mistakes or attempt to clarify difficult passages or indecipherable words or phrases. I made notes in my research journal of any transcription difficulties or issues that arose which might be relevant for the next stage of analysis. Unlike some narrative analytical approaches (see Riessman, 2008) I did not re-arrange or manipulate transcripts into story segments. My own presence and the presence of other voices, pauses, and topical changes are important aspects for understanding the interview's pedagogical progression as well as, more vitally, each subject's own interpretative process.

> **Box 2.1 - Transcript Excerpt, Mac, age 10**
>
> I: So what hap, so, after Suri died (M: Yeah) you did some sort of ceremony?
>
> Mac: Uh, we got a plant and planted it.
>
> Eric (Anna's partner): Tree.
>
> Anna: Cherry blossom.
>
> Mac: A tree. Yeah.
>
> Anna: A sand cherry.
>
> I: Yeah, whose idea was that?
>
> Mac: Um, my Mom's. (I: Yeah) She was crying the whole time (I: Yeah) so I didn't get to… talk too much.
>
> I: Did you say anything at the ceremony?
>
> Mac: Nope.
>
> Anna: (*giggles*)
>
> I: No? Where did you plant the tree?
>
> Mac: In my Dad's backyard.

Analysis

Analysis is not a discrete stage within qualitative research; it is an ongoing, reflexive process that takes place in preparation, reading, interviews, transcription, and through into writing (Creswell, 2013). For instance, my initial approach to analysis builds upon the relationships between bracketing and the hermeneutic circle, as explored above. The overall attitude I cultivate is one of deep, penetrating curiosity. I am ultimately striving to understand how my research subjects experience their lifeworld experiences by drawing on the text of

our interviews. In my ongoing interpretation, I moved back and forth from specific passages or sentences to the larger anecdotes or narrative arcs within the research texts (Ricoeur, 1981). Following IPA, I tried to do this idiographically; analyzing each interview separately, while bracketing out previous or upcoming cases as well as my own childhood experiences. Finally, I made connections across cases, looking for themes that might be considered essential structures of children's experiences of companion animal death.

Both IPA and hermeneutic phenomenology seek to identify the predominant themes or meaning structures that are particular to a given discourse or text (Langdridge, 2007). While I largely borrowed from IPA's proposed analytical method of coding emergent themes, I find Van Manen's discussion of what themes *are* to be particularly influential. Van Manen describes themes as "the experiential structures" that are part of the phenomenon being investigated; more than just "conceptual abstractions," he provides several concrete examples to illuminate the methodological significance of themes (1990, p. 79). In particular, he focuses his attention on children's experiences of "feeling left or abandoned," and uses real children's anecdotes, fairy tales (Hansel and Gretel), poetry, phenomenological description, and even film (*Sophie's Choice*) to explore both unique and essential aspects of being left behind (Van Manen, 1990). He is careful to acknowledge that the themes we discover or interpret from various sources are not exhaustive, that in formulating them in language we immediately feel they are somehow inadequate; but themes are not fixed.

Themes are open, flexible, and ultimately semantic reductions of the deeper, pre-verbal experiences subjects have in their own lifeworlds. Yet themes illuminate the need or desire to make some sense of experiences, however partial or temporary. Thematic analysis attempts to articulate something fundamental or *essential* about the phenomenon under investigation (Van Manen, 1990).

My process for thematic analysis follows closely the methods laid out by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), with some variations. They suggest a six-step process, with steps 1-5 approached idiographically before moving on to step 6. This process also draws upon the hermeneutic circle in its gradual progression from close readings to abstraction, as well as maintaining a commitment to the actual text while seeking to discover underlying meanings across cases.

Step 1: Reading and re-reading interviews, with audio. The point here is to refamiliarize oneself with the content and tone of the interview. The authors suggest that this step helps to ensure that the participant becomes the focus of analysis throughout the next several steps, a way of bracketing out personal reflections or previously analyzed interviews.

Step 2: Initial note-taking. I printed out hard copies of each transcript, re-formatted to make room on the right hand margins for hand-written notes. These notes are initial reflections on the text with no forced "coding" structure or set rules. I used three different coloured pens to indicate three categories of comments:

descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Descriptive comments emphasize the key

objects, events, or experiences that the participant discusses. Linguistic

comments highlight the use of metaphors, repetition, pauses, and changes in

vocal tone or inflection. Finally, conceptual comments draw on the more

interpretive insights of the researcher. The authors of IPA suggest that

conceptual comments might be interrogative, such as "Questioning of self?" or

"Who is the participant if not themselves?" (Smith et al, p. 89). In Box 2.2, I

provide an example of my own descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments

from an excerpt of my interview with Neville, age 13. The descriptive comments

are in *italics*, linguistic comments are <u>underlined</u>, and conceptual comments are

in plain text. As the authors note, these categories are not mutually exclusive;

often, metaphors will be explained within a conceptual note, or comments on the

difficulties of language use will be treated as descriptive. Luckily, the authors

suggest that there is no hard set of rules here; these comments ultimately help

the researcher move forward into the next step of the process.

Box 2.2 - Initial Notes, Neville, age 13	
I: Yeah (N: Yeah) so, do you, do you like dogs as well? Or are you more interested in cats? Neville: I think I'm more of a cat person, because (p) um, I would do the commitment for dogs, like walking them every day (J: Yeah) but I think I prefer cats because they're a lot more gentle and they're not as, how should I put this, (pp) what's I'm running out of words (*both giggle*) uh, um, not as like, up in your face, like always wanting attention.	*Self as "cat person"* Not a matter of responsibility, but compatability with self? <u>Commitment</u> pets require a devotion/promise of care <u>Frustration with words/explanation</u> Important to get explanation right? *Cats don't require as much attention as dogs* <u>In your face</u> dog's "look" as needy, asking for self's response

Step 3: Developing emergent themes. I used Dedoose—an online qualitative analysis program—to code each interview with "emergent themes."[2] IPA's approach to emergent themes suggests that the researcher is simultaneously reducing the volume of details from transcription text and initial noting while maintaining or increasing complexity, "in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between exploratory notes" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 91). This stage also moves from a closer attentiveness to the participants to an increased level of researcher interpretation and analysis. The authors note that this movement away from participant and toward the researcher's interpretations is a necessary turn within the hermeneutic circle, provided the researcher maintains a strong connection with the lived experiences of the participant. In addition, many of the

emergent theme titles come from my own educational background and pedagogical orientation; my own approach to this research project becomes inflected within the theme process.

While reading through the initial descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes, I began to formulate brief statements that summarized an underlying component of a segment of transcript and notes. Each emergent theme attempts to semantically capture some consistent sense or meaning from the particular text—it may even use words directly from the participant. Still, the phrase or theme that is created remains only a partial insight into deeper structures and in some sense may be unsatisfactory (Van Manen, 1990). At this stage, each emergent theme stands alone: no coding tree is created, no themes are finalized. Doing so maintains the idiographic nature of IPA while also providing a subsequent opportunity for the analytical process to seek connections across themes and eventually across cases. In Box 2.3, I provide an example of some emergent themes created as part of my analysis of an interview with Kristina, age 12.

Box 2.3 - *Emergent Themes, Kristina, age 12*		
Emergent Theme	Original Transcript	Initial Notes
Multiple experiences Animals' deaths as reflective of self/relationship Affect as cause of death Struggling with belief in causality (giggling) Interviewer sharing Interview as pedagogy	I: ...How many hermit crabs did you have? K: Well first I had two, and then they died, and then I had three more and then they died, so I didn't get any more, cuz I thought like, that they didn't like me or something (giggling) I: Oh really? K: Cuz, like, everytime I got them they would die. I: I had hermit crabs when I was little (K: Yeah) and they died. I don't think they last very long. Maybe they're not supposed to be pets (K: Yeah) maybe, I don't know. Um…	Had multiple hermit crabs that died *Repetition* Death of another being as reflective of self/relationship? Self as cause of death? <u>Giggling – not serious? nervous to admit idea?</u> *Repetition of death* *Interviewer telling story about hermit crabs* Interviewer trying to relate to participant? Similar/shared experiences <u>"they don't last" metaphor</u>

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes. After a participant interview was "coded" in Dedoose, I printed out a chronologically ordered list of each transcript with notes and emergent themes. Using the processes of abstraction (creating new theme headings) and subsumption (moving some themes "under" others), I began to move themes around into groups. This step

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was highly interpretive, involving the identification of similar meanings, common metaphors, or parallel narrative elements. Abstraction and subsumption led to the creation of what might be described as "parent" and "child" codes (Creswell, 2013). IPA refers to these instead as "emergent" and "super-ordinate" themes (Smith et al, 2009). However, at this point, each interview was analyzed separately, and so no standardized coding tree was created for subsequent interviews. In addition, as I moved closer to identifying "essential" structures or themes surrounding this project, some of the emergent themes were set aside during this stage; in particular, I often set aside comments from participants' guardians or siblings unless they directly impacted the child's own responses through mirroring, repetition, or agreement/disagreement. Again, as part of the hermeneutic circle, such clustering and editing entails another step outward, albeit tentatively and with direct lines of connection back to the original text. Box 2.4 shows the development of super-ordinate themes, in italics, with the clustered emergent themes below. The themes come from an interview I conducted with Adele, 10 whose cat had died only five days before our interview.

Again, at this stage, each superordinate theme is an abstraction from the original interview text. However, it is important to note that each theme can be directly traced back to something for the text, for instance, under the superordinate theme "moral sense of death," the emergent theme "anxiety over proper burial (respect)" refers directly to Adele's comments about her cat's burial:

> Adele: I really hope the box is biodegradable.
> I: Oh yeah, I hadn't thought of that. Although, I guess you could take her out of the box.
> Adele: Yeah, I know, but then it would just be kinda like, putting a bird in the ground like, just dropping it and covering it with dirt. I really wanna try and find some form of biodegradable box.

This passage indicated to me a sense of moral responsibility that arises from death; Adele was concerned that the box be ecologically sound (biodegradable)

and that the ritual as a whole would show respect for the cat's value in her life (not like dropping a bird in the ground). So while the super-ordinate theme alone highlights that more essential experience of morality in the responsibilities and rituals surrounding death, it is in reference back to the particular text that this claim is strengthened.

Step 5: Moving to the next case. As an idiographic process, IPA is committed to analyzing each case as separately as possible. I engaged in steps 1-4 with each interview, attempting to bracket out, to some extent, the themes and meanings that arose in previous interviews. This process is not perfect, however. As Heidegger notes, in our process of understanding our fore-conceptions are eventually or hopefully challenged by new information (Van Manen, 1990). I found developing a memo for each interview a helpful process in this regard. For Creswell (2013), the ultimate purpose of phenomenological investigation is to develop a brief account of the essential components of the experience under investigation. While Creswell is admittedly a post-positivist in his approach, and tends toward more "descriptive" versions of phenomenology than hermeneutics, I wrote out my overall impression of each participant's interpretation of their experience in memo form in Dedoose to both bracket out that interview and to provide further material for the next step: analysis across cases (Smith et al, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases. As noted earlier, there are many approaches to phenomenological research. What most of the methodologies have in common, however, is their search for the deep, underlying structures of meaning in a particular experience. Van Manen suggests that phenomenology is an attempt to "discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (1990, p. 107). At first glance, this approach is perhaps best applied in a descriptive sense to phenomena such as "swimming in the ocean," or "being abandoned," rather than "children's experiences of the death of a pet." Yet, when we consider that the approach to phenomenology espoused here is hermeneutic—that I am trying to interpret the *meanings* of children's experiences—perhaps there are underlying, essential qualities without which the experience of animal death would be meaningless.

The analytical stage is highly iterative. My own hermeneutic approach occupies a central location between two seemingly distinct positions within hermeneutics as outlined by Ricoeur: a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion (Kearney, 2003; Langdridge, 2008; Smith et al, 2009). Similar to Kearney's "diacritical hermeneutics," this central position entails a radical turn toward the dialogical relation between self and other and away from the schisms that are at the heart of the researcher/participant, human/animal, child/adult dualisms. Such dualisms are typically accepted or rejected within various approaches to hermeneutics and phenomenology. That is, some thinkers

in hermeneutics believe the researcher is capable of "fusing horizons" with the text, author, or researched subject in able to understand their lifeworld completely; others believe that the "other" being researched is radically separate, and only knowable as a "radical alterity" (Kearney, 2003, p. 18). For Kearney, a diacritical hermeneutics not only seeks a middle ground through the practice of dialogue and imagination, but also promotes interdisciplinary analyses, engaging in "a cross-hatching of intellectual horizons" (2003, p. 19). By seeking to understand my research participants empathetically—while recognizing the limits of such understanding—and by engaging with my own interdisciplinary knowledge base in my interpretive process, I espouse a diacritical, hermeneutic phenomenological process that draws critical attention to historical, social, and cultural concepts and narratives while envisioning new, open-ended possibilities for multi-species life.

Writing

I believe that writing is perhaps the most critical stage within this project. Writing is often considered to be a fundamental aspect of the phenomenological tradition (Van Manen, 1990). In fact, Van Manen suggests it is the core quality of phenomenological work, whether it is philosophical or applied methodologically to a discipline in the social sciences or humanities: "to do research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a bringing to speech of something" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 32). This bringing to speech, he notes,

is typically in the form of writing, and phenomenological writing involves reflection, editing, and re-writing. In much the same manner as Merleau-Ponty and David Abram (1996), Van Manen ties experience, embodiment, thought, and language together; with language being both a particularly difficult means of expression and often our only recourse for understanding and sharing meaning. My approach to writing throughout this dissertation—including my bracketed sections—is to craft an overall narrative about the research project that illuminates my pedagogical orientation, my interpretative stance and commitment to exploring and understanding my participants' lifeworlds as best I can, and my hope for more ethical and compassionate living within our more-than-human world.

As I moved throughout my own analytical process, I began to identify an overall narrative arc within the interview structures and in other data sources as well. That narrative arc provided the overall writing structure for my dissertation. Each interview followed the same pattern: a discussion about children's lives with their pets, their experiences of the pet's death, and reflections about what happened afterward. As a result, the titles of Chapters Four, Five, and Six are "Life," "Death," and "After." Within each of these chapters, I apply Van Manen's four "existentials" of lived relation, lived body, lived space, and lived time, in an attempt to provide an overall narrative structure. By no means do I take this structure to be *essential*, although I agree with Kearney (1996) that narrative gives meaning to life. Rather, it can be seen as

an aesthetic attempt to represent both children's experiences and the interview process itself.

Quality & Validity

Quality and validity are central concerns for any research project, but within qualitative research they are often the source of particular anxieties (Creswell, 2013). My approach to quality and validity within this research project begins with this chapter's thorough documenting of my reflexive and iterative process. Following Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), I also espouse Lucy Yardley's (2000; 2008) four principles for quality and validity: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Yardley describes "sensitivity to context" as multifaceted. Researchers must first be aware of the context of their own research within theoretical and scholarly traditions. Secondly, researchers must be sensitive to their participants' various contexts: socio-cultural, linguistic, historical, and I would add ecological. Finally, she notes that the contextual dynamics of researcher/participant should be made clear.

Yardley suggests that the second principle, "commitment and rigour," is quite clear:

> The concept of commitment encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic (not necessarily just as a researcher, but also in the capacity of sufferer, carer, etc.), the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data (whether theoretical or

empirical). Rigour refers to the resulting completeness of the data collection and analysis. (2000, p. 221)

I have outlined my approach to this topic within the framework of hermeneutic phenomenology and other methodological approaches. While the majority of my data come from interviews with participants, I espouse Van Manen's (1990) view that a wide range of data sources provides a fuller understanding of a topic. As a result, I immersed myself in children's literature, children's own authored works, poetry, film, photography, and the larger theoretical traditions tackling this topic. Immersion can never be complete, but I continue to make every effort to understand this topic from multiple angles.

The third principle, "transparency and coherence" arises within the overall research report. I strive to maintain a writing style and transparency that is deeply committed to my research subjects. I am clear about my personal role and experiences both in setting up the background for this inquiry and in attempting to bracket aside my own experiences or biases. As Yardley suggests, the overall narrative that is constructed about a research process and the subsequent discussions must be both convincing and display an internal coherence (2000). Does it make sense to study children's experiences of animal death within a hermeneutic, phenomenological, and narrative framework? I have argued throughout this chapter that my methodological approach and research methods are particularly well-suited for an inquiry of experience and meaning.

Finally, we must consider the overall "impact and importance" of a research project utilizing qualitative methods. I believe the overall impact and importance are ultimately determined in my connection with various audiences—the wider scholarly community, my supervisor and examining committee, my participants, and the practitioners and members of the general public who maintain an interest in these issues. I maintain a strong pedagogical (Van Manen, 1990) and political orientation within my work, one that seeks to bring new insights into children's relationships with companion animals and the larger more-than-human world. Ultimately, the impact and importance of this project will be decided as it moves forward into wider networks of readers and practitioners.

Notes

[1] Heidegger's notion of "world" is an anthropocentric one, exlusive of Dasein. Animals, he notes, are "poor in world," and plants and rocks have no world at all (Calarco, 2009).

[2] None of the analytical guides I borrow from suggest utilizing computer software for phenomenological coding of themes, although they do not deny it can be a helpful tool (Van Manen, 1990; Langdridge, 2008; Smith et al, 2009). Langdridge in particular suggests that the time taken to learn qualitative software and the analytical restrictions they place on researchers make them unnecessary for a phenomenological review; after all, the point of phenomenological analysis is to "remain focused on the experience of the people participating in the study rather than the methods used to explicate this"

(Langdridge, 2008, p. 83). Yet, while these authors may find such software distracting for various reasons, I recognize the benefit in terms of organization, consistency, data storage, and the potential ease for presenting data heuristically in graph or table forms. After researching several programs, I decided to use Dedoose™, an online qualitative analysis program that offers cloud storage, can be used anywhere on any computer, and is Mac compatible. Online reviews suggest that Dedoose has the easiest learning curve, allowing users to begin data analysis almost immediately; it also had a 30 day free trial. I found the program easy to learn and highly useful for coding, exporting data in various forms, and for its online capacities.

Chapter 3. Interlude: On Memory and Meaning

> Memory is a complicated thing, a relative to truth, but not its twin.
> (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 49)

In a musical composition, an interlude typically bridges two symphonic movements in order to provide transitions in key changes, tempo, or mood. In this transitional chapter, I am employing the term "interlude" to refer to a section that bridges the shift from theoretical and methodological considerations to evidentiary and analytical sections. This interlude presents a fundamental concept that might otherwise be backgrounded in previous and subsequent chapters: memory. While interpreting and organizing the various emergent themes that arose during analysis, I recognized that memory plays a central role within a backward-glancing, hermeneutic phenomenological project such as this one. As a result, this section engages dialogically with phenomenological questions of temporality, relationality, (inter)subjectivity, and language particular to the act of remembering and recounting the past.

To understand memory's role in qualitative research, an understanding of its experiential and epistemic qualities is key. Paul Ricoeur describes memory as having two kinds of relation to the past: "a relation of *knowledge*… and a relation of *action*" (2002, p. 5, emphases original). As a relation of knowledge, memory is an attempt to claim some truths about the past: one might describe memories as either accurate or inaccurate in the hopes of developing a coherent, singular view of particular events, or of individual and collective histories. Ricoeur also

mentions, however, that memory is a relation of action: when we remember, he notes, we are "*doing* things, not only with words, but with our minds; in remembering or recollecting we are exercising our memory, which is a kind of action" (2002, p. 5, emphasis original). The role of memory within this research project raises several epistemic questions about experience and meaning: How do children experience and represent their memories, and with whom do they share or communicate them, if at all? How do the four existential structures of temporality, spatiality, embodiment, and relationality (Van Manen, 1990) apply to memory work, especially when considering seemingly significant events? How does the appeal to memory within the interview context influence both the children's understanding and interpretation of experiences with their pets and—in light of the double hermeneutic at work here—the interpretative relationship between researcher and text? While these questions are important, I suggest that the ultimate question to ask is: What do children's accounts or representations of past experiences reveal about the present *meaning* of those events?

Throughout this interlude, I address these questions by exploring memory as a kind of medium. Through the act of remembering, the children and I discussed and explored their past relationships with pets and reflected upon various meanings surrounding their experiences with death. In the course of my analysis, I became cognizant of how the children I interviewed recalled and represented their relationships with their companion animals. Most children shared distinct stories of the past, or spoke in more poetic, metaphorical ways.

Other children displayed an embodied sense of the past, as Adele did while describe her cat Harley:

> I: And what did Harley look like?

> A: Um, she was this big, this tall (indicating with her hands), she was about this long, and she was uh, what's it, tortoise-shell tabby.

Adele indicated the dimensions of her cat's body, indicating her height from the floor and sweeping her hand in space along the length of Harley's body before stopping to describe her colour. Adele's kinaesthetic description arose from her own embodied memory of touching and being with Harley, who was no longer physically there. Such verbal and physical enactments provide important insights into children's lifeworlds. In particular, relationality emerged as an essential part of remembering. Children's various relationships—with parents, friends, humans, non-humans, and even places—provide them with prompts, structures, and even new insights into past events and help them to organize sometimes disparate details into representational forms (Engel, 1995). With others, children come to reflect upon the ever-evolving meanings of past life experiences.

Memory provides a distinct challenge in working with children. Children's participation in interviews has long been a source of scepticism: their capacity for lying or providing fictional accounts, their suggestibility, and even their cognitive capacity for recall led to serious doubts about a researcher's

ability to access children's experiences or private worlds (Hogan, 2005). Newer research suggests however, that children—especially school-aged children—are capable of accessing past events with the same accuracy as adults, and that provided with a comfortable setting and proper questioning methods and interview parameters, they display a high degree of accuracy (Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Hogan, 2005). As a reminder, my central question throughout this work asks what it *means* for children to experience the death of a companion animal. The structure of the question suggests that analysis of the interview texts seeks to reveal what those experiences mean to children *in the present*—that is, during the interview—and not necessarily how they interpreted the events when they occurred in the past. This focus on meaning negates a positivist obsession with the validity and accuracy of recall. The children's stories in this project are not interpreted in light of their *ability* to remember the past, but rather are seen as connected to and representative of present meanings within the context of children's lives and the interview itself.

[Bracketing 3.1 — When I was born, my family lived in a narrow house in South Buffalo, an urban neighbourhood known for its predominantly Irish, Catholic immigrant population. We lived there—my parents, my older brother, my paternal grandmother and me—until I was four years old. While living in South Buffalo, we had a dog; a Boxer named Mandy. Mandy lived with us for just over one year before my parents decided there was not enough space and time for Mandy in their lives. She

was given away. I have no recollection of Mandy. What does present itself in my earliest memory are snapshots: frozen images of sitting in the backyard, playing on the sidewalk, one or two faces of people whose names I cannot recall. It is likely that Mandy's presence during my own infancy impacted my life in numerous ways. I have seen photographs of her and me sitting together in the backyard of our house, images that become part of my own story of living with animals. I likely owe some part of my sustained interest in the more-than-human world to Mandy's presence in my urban infancy. But I do not genuinely remember her. I do not remember what she looked like, how I felt about her, or our interactions, and I certainly do not recall my parents getting rid of Mandy before we moved to a new house. What I remember are the images in the photographs and the stories my parents and my brother tell me about her. These gaps in my own memory led to a deep-seated doubt in others' ability to accurately remember events from their early childhood. As a result, I often found myself sceptical of my participants' narratives from their own infancy, a scepticism which I bracket aside.]

I did not ask children explicit questions about their experiences of remembering, but it became an emergent theme during the course of my analysis. One over arcing focus developed within many of the interviews, but two predominant themes emerged, which require further exploration: memory as a social process and the tying of memory to various objects within the child's lifeworld. Following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the circular, iterative process of hermeneutics, I identify the predominant themes

pertaining to memory across the interviews (Smith et al, 2009). In particular, I will focus upon one superordinate theme from the interview and analysis stages of research: "memory as a social process." I will provide various sub-themes and textual excerpts in order to explore the relational context of remembering within children's lives and what implications that relationality has for exploring the meanings surrounding their pets' deaths. I also suggest that memory work is itself a pedagogical task for those concerned with children's well-being and development (Van Manen, 1990).

At the conclusion of this interlude, I suggest that memory is not a "problem," but rather a fundamental—albeit challenging—aspect of children's fluctuating sense of a self amid others. Following Ricoeur, I also suggest that memory is deeply entwined with problems of identity and ethics. As a result, memories are given shape and meaning in the form of biographical and autobiographical narratives. Each story that children shared about themselves and about their pets was filtered through the medium of memory, a highly intersubjective process of which I was an active participant during the interviews. Understanding memory as a dynamic, relational process will help provide a context for the present meanings that children attribute to their past relationships.

The Relational Essence of Memory

The children I interviewed each brought to light new insights, new directions for inquiry and questioning. During my second interview, it became clear that I was not fully aware of the challenges of reaching into the past with children, let alone to share personal memories about a sensitive subject like death. Eleven-year-old Ophelia was only my second research participant. After interviewing my first participant—six year old Oscar—I felt much more confident about the interview schedule and process. However, during my interview with Ophelia, an unexpected answer drew my attention to the importance of considering time and memory within my research:

> I: Um, alright, so like I told you before, the purpose of my interviews are mostly to talk about death, which is a sad topic for a lot of people, but if you could, tell me about what happened when Denny died.
>
> Ophelia: Uh…
>
> I: Do you, how old were you?
>
> Ophelia: Probably like, around four.
>
> I: Four? Yeah, and do you remember what happened?
>
> Ophelia: Uh, I thought that I fed her too much treats and killed her but no, it wasn't that (*All giggle*).
>
> I: That's what you thought?
>
> Ophelia: (*giggling*) Yeah.
>
> I: Why did you think that?
>
> Ophelia: I don't know, I don't know, I just did.

I: How long did you think that for?

Ophelia: Probably just when I was like, four.

I was caught off guard by the elapsed time between the death of Ophelia's cat, Denny, and the date of our conversation in the library. Approximately six years had passed. The date of each pet's death was not a part of the data I collected in the pre-interview forms, but using interview transcripts and text I decided to approximate the "elapsed time" between the most recent pet's death and the date of the interview for each child (see Figure 3.1).

Box 3.1 - Elapsed time between pet death and participant interview (approximate % of total)

< 1 week = 8%
< 6 months = 42%
< 1 year = 17%
< 2 years = 8%
> 2 years = 25%
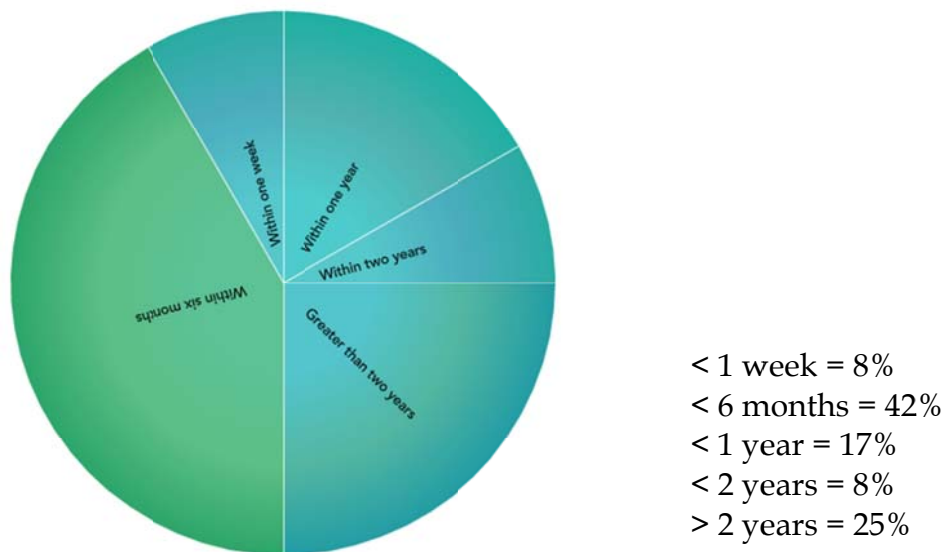
The majority of interviews (67 percent or 8/12) took place less than a year after the most recent experience of pet death. The elapsed time for Ophelia was the greatest, at roughly six years. Two other interviews were also more than two years removed, one interview took place between one and two years after a pet's

death, two more occurred within one year, and five occurred within six months of the most recent death. Adele's interview was by far the shortest in terms of elapsed time, at less than one week. Her cat, Harley, was euthanized only five days prior to our interview.

The meaning of memories need not be diminished by research regarding the accuracy of children's cognitive recall. Despite some legitimate concerns that psychological researchers raise about the validity of children's memories, I suggest that children's memories are better understood by considering the *present* meanings that are given to past events, whether personally remembered or shared with us by others. Shared memories become important through repetition over time, and as we connect meanings to particular experiences throughout our own lives—or through analysis of others' lives—they are given to greater and lesser degrees of validity based on their continuity, reflection, and interpretation. Sharing memories allows children to reach back into the past for meanings and a sense of understanding relevant to the present. By reaching back into the deep past, even further than one's own sense of self or cognitive awareness, those meanings are given deeper roots and the self is given a sense of continuity within the family structure (Connelly & Clandinin, 2002). Through others, children come to know of significant events and relationships from their own deep past, events they may not recall on their own. In addition, if I care about animals because of various experiences with animals in my own lifetime, those feelings and values become strengthened when I consider that significant

others in my life—my parents, my siblings—not only share those values, but do so because of their experiences and memories from their own pasts. Psychological literature describes children's development of episodic and autobiographical memory as highly social, taking place within a whole web of relationships (Fivush, 2002; Reese, 2002).

When interviews were conducted with parents or siblings present, there were many opportunities to witness directly the social context of memory work, but even interviews conducted away from parents and siblings shed insight into the relational process of remembering. The remainder of this chapter builds upon this theme of relationality within children's experiences of self-and-other through time. Significant others within children's lifeworlds—caregivers, siblings, family members, and even pets—provide prompts, details, clarification, confirmation, and even challenges to their version of the past. These social actions guide and shape children's views of the past, but also provide new insights into the present and perhaps even future relationships. These insights coincide with a particularly dominant emergent theme: memory as a social process. This theme builds upon several sub-themes—such as the presence of pets before children were born and children's belief that they remembered everything about the past—and research text which will be explored in the sections that follow.

Emergent Theme: Memory as a Social Process

It became apparent through my conversations with each of the children that they were reliant upon the inputs, prompts, corrections, and verification of others while recounting past events, a phenomenon that was most immediately evident within my role as researcher. My field notes often address various anxieties surrounding my role in memory work, discussing my need for better memory prompts, a desire for more pre-interview knowledge about particular events from parents, or even reflections regarding how I was possibly steering children toward particular memories—and away from others—with my line of questioning. My own memories came up several times as well, as I found myself frequently telling children stories from my childhood in order to make them more comfortable or even writing out events from my own childhood to help make sense of what the participants said.

My analysis of interview text and the initial descriptive, emergent themes led to the creation of a super-ordinate theme entitled, "Memory as a social process" (Figure B.1 in Appendix B shows a comprehensive table of excerpts for this code). I applied this theme as a code to examples where the social process of remembering was explicit (i.e., children like Ophelia and Mac who spoke directly with siblings and/or guardians about past events during the interview). I also applied this code to excerpts where the social process of remembering could be inferred, as in this excerpt from my interview with Sabrina, 13, and her brother Jim, 11, responding to a question about visiting their deceased cats' gravesites:

I: Do you ever visit them or anything?

…

Sabrina: I haven't, that much, I've visited them a few times I think, but (p)

Jim: Yeah, whenever I go to the farm like, we, I visit them, except for last time we went it was like, my grandpa's birthday party so, we didn't really get time but, but like, if when I'm going over in the summers I'm gonna visit them a bunch of times probably and like, some, we got like a four-wheeler sometimes and our Dad will drive us over there on it and like, kinda, pick some flowers and (*indecipherable*)

Sabrina: For me I think its still one of those things like I said, I don't really think about it that much so then I kind of don't really, it doesn't really come to me that I should go visit them or anything, like I don't, I don't think about it, I just don't really notice and then every once in a while someone, like, when I'm there, they'll just be like, oh yeah, wanna go visit the cats and I'm like, 'oh yeah, sure, let's go' or lets look and see what it looks like now and stuff…

Both the explicit and the implicit relationality of memory is at work here. Because they were interviewed together, Jim and Sabrina's ability to recall various events from the past was perhaps greater than if they had been interviewed separately. Others help us remember more vividly, adding new details from their unique point of view to our own accounts of shared events. There were several moments during this interview when Jim and Sabrina would help each other remember various details about a given experience or challenge each other's narrative. If we consider the above responses separately, however, there are more implicit indications of the importance of others for each of their

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experiences of remembering. Jim indicates his own personal impulse to visit the graves, stressing the "I" within his statement, even quickly shifting back to the "I" after saying "we" at one point. Jim is emphasizing his tendency to think about or remember his deceased cats on his own. He mentions his father's role in driving them over to the graves, but that is secondary to or a product of his personal desire to go "a bunch of times." Sabrina, on the other hand, offers up a different response to the question of remembering her pets: she does not dwell on or think about the death of her cats as Jim does, but is periodically influenced by others' prompts to remember. She decides to join in when others go to visit.

At a deeper level of interpretation, this excerpt indicates that the act of remembering the deceased pets is a relational experience for both children but in different ways. Jim is declaring himself, at least partially, as a self-starter in remembering, and he seeks to share his memories with others. His memory is directed from the inside outward to others. Sabrina, on the other hand, recognizes the centrality of her social connections and the role of others in helping her remember events she does not typically recall on her own. Her memory is described as working from the outside in, with others prompting her to recall past events. Memory is a balance of the internal, embodied awareness of time and the past with external forces and prompts. For both children, the effect of spatiality is important as well. Their cats have been buried at their grandparents' farm, a place they visit during the summer. When they are there, it

comes to mind—at least for Jim—to go and visit the cats' gravesites, perhaps to share stories or to "see what it looks like now."

For both Sabrina and Jim, family pets were—and continue to be—important parts of their lives. The cats and rabbits they shared stories about may be deceased, but any adult who had pets as children knows those relationships often remain part of one's childhood memories. Jim and Sabrina remember their deceased pets differently. They may argue over details of various events. Such differences can be attributed to any number of factors including their age, gender, personality types, or even the compound effects of other personal experiences. Regardless of such variables, the relational essence of their memory work often reveals various meanings. They are expressing a sense of self in relation to each other (i.e., I am different from him/her in this particular way), but they are also communicating with each other about past events, sorting out the meaning those events have in their personal and shared lives. Jim and Sabrina are part of an extended family unit, which plays a distinct role in shaping their perceptions, understandings, and memories of their pets.

This larger theme—concerned with the social process of memory—builds upon emergent themes and my initial descriptive notes of interview text. Two sub-themes in particular provide deeper insight into the social process of remembering deceased family pets. The first theme describes the sharing of very early memories and stories of pets that were already present in the family before the child was born. Of the 12 children I interviewed, nine of them indicated that a

family pet was already living in the home when they were born. Most of these children shared stories and memories of these pets from early childhood and some even shared moments from their infancy. I suggest that the sharing of such early memories reveals the felt importance of continuity between past and present versions of oneself and various others in one's lifeworld. The second sub-theme addresses questions of certainty and uncertainty regarding events in the past. During some interviews, parents or siblings were present, and often felt the need to clarify or correct the participants, often to my discomfort. While such moments can be interpreted as examples of children's suggestibility (Hogan, 2005), I also suggest that they are evidence of the social context of memory development. Important figures in children's lives—teachers, parents, peers, siblings, even popular authors—guide them toward particular details, themes, and affects surrounding significant events and even provide an opportunity to practice and develop culturally-relevant representational forms, such as narratives (Engel, 1995). In addition, many of the children displayed ambivalence around their own sense of certainty. In one excerpt they might declare the infallibility of their memory, and yet—sometimes in the same breath—they would subsequently admit they could not remember much at all. While this may be evidence of interview anxiety or fatigue, it is also likely that the felt importance of pet relationships often coincides with a *desire* to remember everything, perhaps out of a sense of loyalty. Forgetting can be interpreted as a lack of caring in certain instances. Children recognize that memory is an

imperfect process, subject to space, time, others, and even the influence of our imaginations; despite our noblest attempts to preserve the past, memory often fails us.

"Before I was Born"

> I: Um, and so what, what uh, when did you first meet Suri?
>
> Mac: When I was born. She was, she was 15 when she died. (I: Wow) So…
>
> I: So she was already in the house, in the family before you were born?
>
> Mac: Yeah.

In this excerpt from my interview with Mac, age 10, he reveals that the family dog, Suri, was already present in the household before he was born. This is a common theme within many of the interviews I conducted. Various pet keeping statistics suggest that while the percentage of family pets owned increases as children get older, about 45-60 percent of families with newborns, infants, or toddlers already have pets (Melson, 2005). Such numbers indicate that pets are present within approximately half of American and Canadian households when children are born, raising several important questions about the development of identity, subjectivity, and concepts of otherness in human-animal relationships. For children like Mac, understanding how others are involved in his memories of his own past—as well as his pet's life history—is a key part of understanding their relationship.

At first glance, this excerpt reveals Mac's awareness that Suri was alive before he was born. He recognized that she existed and lived for a particular period of time prior to his birth, and he affirmed that she was both present "in the home" and "in the family." She was older than he was when she died. While he did not provide any further details, Mac also suggested that he first met Suri when he "was born." He did not explicitly state that he remembered that first meeting, but we can assume that her presence throughout the earliest moments and impressions of his own conscious experience is noteworthy; for him, Suri was always *there*. After explaining to me that Suri was already present when he was born, Mac went on to speak about his earliest memories of Suri—with some help from his mother, Anna—including events from his early infancy:

I: So what was your first memory of Suri?

Mac: Uh…

I: Do you know how old you were?

Mac: No, I think it was like, (p) one or something?

I: Yeah? And what happened?

Mac: Um, I don't know, I forget. Its, I think I was playing with my toys or something, and, or we came home, and Suri pooped all over the carpet (*I laughs*) and, I started…

Anna: Did the dog do that, or the cat used to do that…

Mac: I don't know, and then, remember when I came home and I started crying cuz Suri dumped, dumped out all the garbage?

Anna: Oh yeah. She used to do that sometimes.

Mac's memories provide temporal, spatial, and relational details about the dog's life. When I asked Mac about his earliest memory of Suri, he offered up two first-person accounts: he was playing and the dog pooped on the carpet, and he came home and the dog had strewn garbage about, causing Mac to cry. The first event he suggested happened around age one, and in the second event he did not specify his age. In both events, however, he indicated the importance of space (he was at home or coming home), sequentiality (he was doing something and then noticed the dog's behaviour), and to a certain extent, his affective state (playing and crying). These are all features of a developing ability to reconstruct the past in narrative form (Engel, 1995). Despite some reservations, Mac shared two stories with similar themes: he witnessed the dog doing something "bad" in the house. While he was interrupted in his first memory by his mother, Anna—who indicates that it might not have been the dog, but that the memory relates to generic animal "poop"—the beginning of a response or conclusion to Suri's pooping on the carpet is indicated by "I started…" His second story built on the same theme, but he noticeably switched the order of cause and effect, perhaps to avoid his mother's interruption: "I started crying… cuz Suri dumped out all the garbage." Mac's affective response was central to his memories: he cried when he saw the garbage strewn about the room, perhaps a matter of anticipating the dog's punishment from his parents, or aligning his own emotions with what he perceived to be the dog's shame, guilt, or sadness. Perhaps he simply did not like messes.

For Ophelia and Kristina, this "older pet" relationship also provided an opportunity to explore their affective relationship with their pets. In particular, their memories present their pets as caring beings and themselves as the object of that care. Kristina, age 12, shared the following about her family dog Lassie:

> Kristina: So when I was like, before I was born, my Mom got a dog. And so like, my Mom told me this story, like her name was Lassie and my Mom told me this story where like, if I, if I woke up and I was crying in the night, my dog, like Lassie would start barking to tell my Mom to come and get me and she, I remember like the day she died she was like, she had this rash on her back or some—like on the side of her, and it had no fur on her and she was like itching it. And so, we had to like, um, bring her to the like, hosp— like, the vet hospital so we brought her there, and, she didn't make it, like she died before we got there and they said that they don't really know how she died, but they think its from like, something with her brain cuz she was really old.

Kristina's story is interesting for several reasons. First, she indicated that her Mom got the dog prior to her birth. Focusing on her mother rather than her father (the two are now separated, and Kristina lives with her mother) seemed to be of particular importance as she mentioned four times in the first few lines that these events involved her mother and not her father. Second, she directly stated that her mother told her the story; she was not passing it off as her own memory. In addition, she indicated that the dog was attuned to her own affective state, observing and becoming aware that she was crying or upset, and choosing to "tell" Kristina's mother to go and get her. The importance of this story for

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Kristina lies in recognizing that she was the focus of the dog's attention and care; the dog recognized her needs and saw to it that they were met, not by the dog, but by Krstina's mother. The dog became a sort of intermediary of caring, unable perhaps to soothe an infant herself, but aware of the human dynamics and relations that were vital in that situation.

While drawing our earliest memories of our pets, Ophelia, shared a similar event from her own infancy involving the older family cat, Denny:

Interviewer: So what did you draw?

Ophelia: My cat told my Mom in her language that like, the covers are over my head.

I: That what?

O: That the cover was over my head.

I: Your cat told your Mom in its language, that… (laughing) was this a real story? Yeah? So what happened, what is the story?

O: That cuz, uh, my the covers were over my head and I could've died. Cuz I couldn't breathe, and then, she, my Mom followed her, and yeah.

…

I: How would you describe that? How did you feel?

O: Pretty happy.

I: Pretty happy?

O: That I didn't die.

Box 3.2 - "Memory Drawing" by Ophelia, age 11
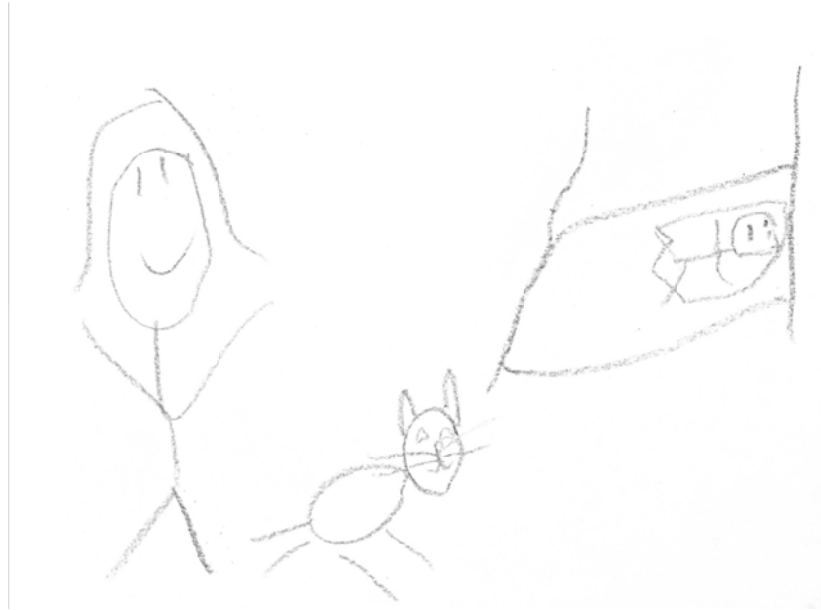
Unlike Kristina, Ophelia did not indicate that this story came from her mother. In fact, the second part of the excerpt shows Ophelia's response to my question asking "what is your earliest memory?" Her use of the first person suggests that, at the very least, she remembered her affective state during those events. She was happy that she did not die. This story is likely one that was shared with Ophelia by her mother, perhaps several times during her life. In turn, Ophelia has incorporated this story into her own sense of a self that persists through time. This memory is clearly a central one, as indicated by her choice to draw the event at the very beginning of our interview. It was her own prompt for discussing Denny. Ophelia even gave me a copy of the story, which she wrote for a school

board published book about "heroes" when she was six. The short story is entitled, "Denny the Cat:"

> When I was a baby, my cat, Denny, meowed to my mom. When my mom went into my room, she saw the blanket over my head. My mom took off the cover. Thank you, Denny, for saving my life.

This singular event holds several significant meanings for Ophelia: she is mortal or at least vulnerable (I couldn't breathe, I could've died) and her cat—described as a thinking, observant, and communicative being—saved her life as an infant. In addition, through this story, Ophelia came to recognize herself as a primary object of others' concerns (both her cat and her Mom). Ophelia's conclusion that she is glad she did not die indicates at least the beginnings of reflection upon her own vulnerability. In the written version, she even expresses gratitude for her cat's intervention. She recognizes the importance of others in her very survival. In a social context, sharing this story allows Ophelia's mother to re-affirm her importance within the family structure. The memory also provides insight into the family's shared values surrounding the cat. The cat is a central figure within the family structure, communicating and participating in vital ways. The cat's actions "saved" Ophelia's life. In returning to this memory periodically over time, the family is actively valuing the cat's presence in their lives.

Some of the children's stories also indicated an awareness of the quality of their parents' relationships with their pets before they were born. Ophelia

indicates that the cat spoke to her mother "in its own language," and Kristina notes that the dog would "tell" her mother to go and get her when she was crying. Both children recognized that their mothers and their pets had a mutual understanding of each other and were able to communicate effectively. Ophelia and Kristina's mothers valued their relationships with their pets prior to having children. Knowledge of their parents' past pet relationships may instil a sense of intergenerational continuity. While not the focus of my research, I did record short interviews with both Mac's mother, Anna, and Oscar's mother, Heather. Heather described her and her husband's relationship with their dog, Sneakers:

> Heather: He was our first dog as a couple, so I've always had dogs, my husband's always had dogs, and he was our first... dog. And we got him before we were married, we'd just moved into a house, so we knew the first thing we wanted to do was get a dog, and we saw him at the Humane Society looking completely pathetic and uh, brought him home and were thrilled and I was off for the summer because I teach and you know, yeah, he was like really our first born. Really was. So…

Heather's contention that Sneakers was like their "first born," reveals her own understanding of the role of pets in the family: they are *like* children, beings to care for, to bond with, and to nurture. Getting Sneakers was Heather and her husband's first major act within their new home, painting a vision of domestic living that has a long history in Canada and the United States (Fudge, 2009). Heather even shared experiences similar to Oscar's when she revealed that an "older" pet was euthanized when she was a young child:

I: No. And when you were a kid do you remember having animals put down?

Heather: Yes.

I: Yeah.

Heather: We had a dog, Lucky, who had an enlarged heart and when I was 9 he was put down, and then we got another dog and that was put down when I was in my, mid-20's or early-to-mid 20's, and my brother and I were the ones who ended up taking her to the vet and (*door opens and daughter starts talking*) you know, now I know never to hold a dog by the chest, cuz I felt that last heart beat, you know that was, that was (*makes a gurgling sound*) and I've always like sort of, been that big, big dog, dog lover so that was really difficult.

It is possible that Heather shared these experiences with Oscar and her daughter after the death of their dog, Sneakers, creating a shared sense of understanding and continuity between their lives.

Parents' memories may even provide a model for children's care for or hope for their own pet relations. For her book, *The World According to Dog*, Joyce Sidman (2003) collected a series of short stories and accounts written by teenagers about their dogs, and developed a series of poems to go along with those stories and photos. Sarah, age 13, shares a story entitled "Bandy," which addresses the life of a pet from her mother's childhood:

This is the story of a dog named Bandy. She was what some people like to call a mutt. You know, the kind of dog that has a shaggy coat and a short stubby tail, and so many different colors of brown, gold, and gray that you

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get dizzy if you look at them too long. The kind of dog that always seemed out of place, no matter where you went.

When my mother was a girl, she was a bit like Bandy; not the most popular pup in the litter, didn't get the best grades, did not have the latest fashions, which every girl at her school just *had* to have. She also walked to school, which was considered very uncool.

She made her way home one afternoon, having had the worst possible day. Bad grade on a math test, lost her history essay, had forgotten her lunch—need I say more? It was just a rotten day. She rounded the corner and saw a very peculiar sight: a large box labeled FREE PUPPIES.

Inside the box was one little mutt that no one seemed to have wanted. She couldn't stand to leave it there, so she took the little puppy out of its box. Immediately it began to lick her face. It was love at first sight. At that instant my mother knew she was going to keep it. My mother decided to call her Bandy, because she found her abandoned.

Although there are no remaining photos of Bandy, her memory will live on forever. She helped my mother understand the importance of life and affection. She guided my mother to appreciating everything and everyone as much as possible.

Our thanks to the person who left her there (Milnar in Sidman, 2003, pp. 12-13).

There are many strong themes within Sarah's story: abandonment, rescue, unconditional love, the sense of belonging, popularity, and so on. Sidman's subsequent poem even addresses the theme of teenage awkwardness and bodily self-consciousness that are seemingly "forgotten" when in the presence of a pet dog, who does not care about such things. Staying with the current discussion of

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memory, however, it is perhaps most interesting that this entire series of events happened during Sarah's *mother's* childhood; and yet, Sarah is sharing this story herself. While not told in the first person, Sarah's writing is clear and authoritative: she knows the story *as if* it were her own. How do we understand such an act of sharing?

Shared memories are often made significant through repetition over time (Ricoeur, 2002), and as we connect meanings to particular experiences throughout our own lives—or through analysis of others' lives—they are given to new meanings or insights based on their continuity, reflection, and interpretation with other events. Sharing memories allows children to reach back into the past for a sense of understanding relevant to the present. Through others, children come to know of significant events and relationships from their own deep past, events they may not recall on their own. The possible effects of such memory work are multiple: one may take on family histories, establish counter-narratives, or even rebel against the sense of continuity or identity that families often ask children to preserve (Ahmed, 2006). In the case of companion animals, feelings and values may become strengthened or diminished, considering that significant others in my life—parents, siblings, or friends—share those values.

"I Remember Everything"

The sharing of events prior to one's own birth allows for a certain degree of error; we are perhaps less accountable for the accuracy of those events when we were not present. Yet when we claim a memory or a story as our own, we take on the risk of being challenged; we risk being wrong. Children's adamant trust in their own memory was a common theme within many of the interviews. For example, during our pre-interview conversation, six year old Oscar suddenly interrupted me as I explained the interview rules. I remarked that if he couldn't remember a particular event or story I asked about, it was okay. Oscar immediately asserted, "I remember everything about Sneakers!" Despite such staunch insistence, there were still many questions and lines of conversation that ended in an "I don't remember" reply.

Ophelia responded this way while we were discussing the act of remembering more explicitly:

> I: …Okay. Um, (pp) so, were there any things that you do, that you have done, to remember Denny? As you've gotten older? Cuz now that you're ten, you still remember her?
>
> Ophelia: Yeah
>
> I: Do you do anything special to remember her?
>
> Ophelia: No, but I just like, there's a lot of pictures sometimes with her, so, and yeah, I just, I haven't really forgot that much at all.
>
> I: No?
>
> Ophelia: No.

I: No. (*giggles*) What kinds of things do you remember?

Ophelia: Um, well, (ppp) we used to feed her treats a lot. That's pretty much it. Yeah.

In many cases we can attribute answers such as "I don't know" or "I don't remember" to anxieties and issues of performativity with a stranger in an interview setting, particularly one dealing with difficult subject matter (Engel, 1995). Perhaps, as Adele showed, such responses indicate an inability to narrate certain memories. Maybe those memories are accounted for kinaesthetically, through poetic responses, or in other modes. Ophelia and I had never met before. She was interviewed in a small room at the Toronto Reference Library, with her mother and younger sister present. Each of these factors may have added to her anxiety. Yet, despite issues of performativity, her responses and others like them raise many questions about memory and the problems inherent in accessing the past, which must be addressed to better understand children's descriptions and interpretations of their own experiences.

For many of the children, their earliest memories seemed to be readily accessible. In some cases, like Mac's interview, there was a noticeable ambivalence about their own accuracy, especially when others were present. One can imagine that the physical presence of pets in many of their lives, from birth onward, left traces of both mundane and unique events in their memory. While some authors separate episodic, linguistic memories shared by older children from the more embodied, preverbal impressions that infants and young children

are able to integrate (Stern, 1985; Myers, 2007), in Mac's excerpts the two became entwined. Mac's preverbal, affective, and physical impressions of "meeting" his dog as a newborn and responding to its various actions as an infant were given a hesitant, linguistic form—stories that he changed when others were present or contributed differing points of view.

Accuracy is important to varying degrees in psychological and neurological literature. It is particularly important in case work and social work, when children's recall of traumatic events has serious punitive implications (Wilson & Powell, 2001). Within this study, however, accuracy is of less concern. I am asking questions about the meaning of past events, and meaning, as noted earlier, is a phenomenon that is in flux. One might ask whether Mac truly remembers events as they happened, but to what effect? Certainly the presence of Anna and her replies call the validity of Mac's memory into question, but the meaning of those events remains discursive and situated within the context of that particular moment. The presence of an interviewer, his mother, and his friend led Mac to recall events in ways that were often highly performative. If his mother, for instance, was not present, he may have remembered different details, and perhaps the meaning of those events would seem different. When mothers were present during the interview there was always at least one moment of clarification or challenging of the accuracy of a child's memory, as in the excerpt of Anna and Mac's conversation above. It becomes evident in light of such data

that memory is often negotiated socially, with varying perspectives and details coming to bear on the larger picture and the meanings attributed to an event.

Inaccuracy was also an important social phenomenon. In two-to-one interviews I conducted with siblings Sabrina and Jim or Charlie and Juliette, there were several instances of disagreement over the accuracy of dates, times, or event details. In this excerpt, siblings Charlie, 9, and Juliet, 7, argued over the date of their dog's death:

I: When did Flash die by the way? Was that, this year?

Juliet: Probably…

I: Or a year ago?

Charlie: It was last…

Juliet: Probably when I was like, four or something.

Charlie: No, no it was like in 2010 I think.

Juliet: yeah.

I: 2010, okay. And then, Chip died.

Charlie: Um, he died this year right?

Juliet: Oh no, um, probably…

Charlie: No, it was this year.

Juliet: Probably when I was five.

(p)

Charlie & Juliet: (both start talking at the same time, hard to hear what C says, but he sounds frustrated)

Juliet: I wasn't seven when he died.

Charlie: Yes you were, Juliet, it was in 2012.

Juliet: No.

Charlie: Yes it was.

I: Was it this winter maybe?

Charlie: Yeah.

Juliet: Is it okay if I ask my parents?

I: Yeah you can go ask them, that's fine.

A short time later, Juliet returned:

Juliet: (*door opening again*) Yeah, I was thinking about Flash, it was actually he, um, died this year, February, February 22nd he died.

I: That was Chip?

Juliet: Yeah.

I: Okay, February 22nd, so that was pretty recently?

Juliet & Charlie: (*simultaneously*) Mmhmm.

Juliet and Charlie had two relatively recent experiences with dogs dying: two of their family's four dogs had passed away within the past two years. Juliet's confusion and Charlie's insistence led to a disagreement, and her solution was to ask their parents for clarification. We might recognize this exchange as a simple matter of sibling rivalry, of a brother and sister each trying to get an answer "right" or claiming superiority in their memory. It may be that Charlie, as an older child, possessed a more fully developed memory "apparatus" (Reese, 2002). Taken in the larger context of their interview, however, the two seem to get along very well, and in fact, both of them at a later point state that their

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experience of grief for the dogs was temporally bounded; they grieved for a period of time, and then, according to Juliet, they didn't "mind it" anymore.

Juliet's personal choice to check the facts with her parents was unique within the larger sampling of interviews I conducted, but it may represent a more universalizable childhood experience. Children's primary caregivers are a source of security and knowledge, including historical knowledge pertaining to self and family (Nelson, 1999). Yet the accuracy of these memories—while important for children—may be of secondary concern here. What is perhaps more important is that children feel connected with others through the sharing of memories and the overlapping of lives. Children's relational dynamics—with parents, caregivers, siblings, and even me as interviewer—influence their trust in those others, their desire to share events, and even the accuracy and meaning of their recollections. When children told me they remembered everything and yet faltered on details or admitted they had forgotten something, I often recognized an underlying desire to hold on to the past, to get it right. Juliet's clarification with her parents was more than an opportunity to prove her brother wrong or to give me precise details for my research. She was tying the dog's death to her own experiences of self in time.

The Pedagogy of Memory Work

Anna: And what happens everytime the sand cherry tree blooms, what do we say?

Sister: (indecipherable)

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Mac: Suri is coming back, I don't know.

Anna: Mmhmm.

I: Oh yeah?

Anna: We say "Hello Suri" and there she is!

The social process of remembering is not necessarily just about accuracy of content. In the excerpt above, Anna is utilizing a seasonal event, the blooming of a cherry tree where some of the dog's ashes were scattered, to prompt her children's memory of their deceased dog. At this point, Anna had partially taken on the role of interviewer; I would ask questions and she would help Mac to answer them. While a more positivist or reductionist approach to qualitative research would suggest this data is made useless by Anna's presence and participation, I found it a useful, first-hand opportunity to witness what may be taking place within parent-child interactions more privately. On the one hand, Anna may have wanted to help Mac answer "correctly" for the benefit of my research or to account accurately for the dog's behaviour out of some sense of fairness or rightness. On another level, we might see this sharing of events as a way for her to reminisce about the dog *with* him. Regardless of her presence, parents like Anna use memory work and personal storytelling pedagogically. Anna's interventions are shaping not only the content of Mac's memory but his evolving ideas about animals, values, and himself, all the while strengthening his relationship with his mother through shared experiences. Such interventions and clarifications can be seen as a pedagogical in myriad ways. First, they help to

prioritize particular details and events that are central in one's own life and in social or communal living. In a related manner, they work to exclude superfluous or undesirable memories. Finally, sharing memories and working through them can help to negotiate or reflect upon values, emotional responses, and ethical priorities.

There were several examples of others intervening during the interviews in order to influence children's responses. In particular, several of the mothers who were present or nearby often spoke up and prodded children to recall happy memories with their pets. In this excerpt from my interview with Chloe, 12, her mother—who was sitting at a nearby table in the restaurant but not directly involved in the interview—interrupted us to clarify one answer about where Chloe's guinea pigs were kept and subsequently decided to also return to a previous question, reminding her daughter of her playful activities with her pets:

I: And what kinds of things did you do with your guinea pigs?

Chloe: Nothing. They didn't do very much.

I: No? (*giggle*) Did you have them in your room?

Chloe: Uh, no.

I: No. Where did---

Mom: (*interrupting*) You did for a while! Sorry, I just…

Chloe: (*tone rising*) For like a week.

I: No you can (inaudible, fixing microphone)

Mom: You had them in your room for like a year before I said I couldn't stand the stink anymore!

I: Oh really?

Mom: And you did so do things with them, I have pictures of you dressing them up.

I: (giggles)

Chloe: I did?

Mom: Yes!

Chloe's mother was seemingly biting her tongue, but decided she would interrupt in order to clarify and challenge Chloe's answers to my questions. Certainly this is an opportunity to correct her, but it is also pedagogical in the sense that she has a desire for Chloe to accurately recall the past and to remember playful or enjoyable moments such as dressing up her guinea pigs. I interpret such passages as evidence of children's ongoing development—in the joint sense of narrative capabilities (Engel, 1995) and autobiographical sense of self (Fivush, 2002; Reese, 2002). I envision this process taking place "behind the scenes" of those other interviews I conducted without parents or guardians present, as in Sabrina's response above.

The sharing of memories over time also presents an opportunity to articulate the family's moral values regarding animals, or the emotional significance given to relationships with their pets. While talking about her deceased guinea pig Cotton, Lily, age nine, briefly hinted at the importance of such sharing:

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I: When you talked to your parents about it, what kinds of things did they say?

Lily: Um, (pp) they were (p) they loved Cotton and (p) they had good memories of her as well.

I: Yeah (p) well that's good.

Lily: So, they kind of felt the same way as I did.

I interpret this passage as a prime example of what Van Manen refers to as "pedagogical competence… a kind of thoughtfulness, a form of praxis (thoughtful action: action full of thought and thought full of action)" where those adults who are living with and caring for children work to engage fully and thoughtfully with those children's concrete lives, relationships, activities, and situations (1990: 159-160). Whether Lily's parents loved Cotton or felt the same as her is not important in this sense; for Lily, she has learned that her own feelings and memories are validated through the sharing of those affects with her parents. As vital parts of her developing sense of self, Lily's parents have clearly taken on the responsibility of fostering not only their own sense of the value of animals' lives, but encouraged her in formulating and articulating her own thoughts, ideas, feelings, and memories.

Conclusion: Co-Authoring the Past

How do we make sense of the past, as it recedes from the present? Jean-Paul

Sartre describes the relationship between past and present as an ontological

problem:

> The past, it is said, is no longer. From this point of view it seems that being
> is to be attributed to the present alone. This ontological presupposition has
> engendered the famous theory of cerebral impressions. Since the past is no
> more, since it has melted away into nothingness, if the memory continues to
> exist, it must be by virtue of a *present* modification of our being… Thus
> everything is present: the body, the present perception, and the past as a
> present impression in the body—all is *actuality.* (1984, p. 160, emphases
> original).

Sartre's insight provides a starting point for my inquiry into the problems of

childhood memory: the events and beings we spoke about in our interviews may

be relegated to the past, but meaning often belongs to the present. This is why I

have set aside questions of validity or accuracy throughout this chapter, focusing

instead upon the sociality of meaning in recounting or sharing an event. Sartre

also explores the role of death, which is relevant here. Through death, he

suggests, beings are threatened with "annihilation," except for those "survivors"

who choose—freely—to be responsible for the dead; those who remember them

and keep them in mind. In many instances, children indicated that this

responsibility to remember their pets was important to them.

Sartre's description of the past also suggests that memory is about more

than events within a temporal past. Memory is spatial, embodied, and perhaps

most of all, relational. Gaston Bachelard writes at length about the

phenomenology of memory in *The Poetics of Space* and *The Poetics of Reverie*,

suggesting that poetic language in particular provides deep insights into adults'

reconstruction of their own childhood (Philo, 2003). Bachelard alludes to the

centrality of relationships in our remembering of the past, especially our

childhood:

> When, all alone and dreaming on rather at length, we go far from the
> present to relive the times of the first life, several child faces come to meet
> us. We were several in the trial life (*la vie essayée*), in our primitive life. Only
> through the accounts of others have we come to know of our unity. On the
> thread of our history as told by the others, year by year, we end up
> resembling ourselves. We gather all our beings around the unity of our
> name. (1969, p. 99)

Mostly, Bachelard was interested in the geography of memory, the role of space

in our recollections of the past. Yet, whether through the imaginative

engagement of one's own past self or through an active engagement with others,

he acknowledges the role of relationality. Mikhail Bakhtin draws a similar

conclusion about the roles of others in establishing an overarcing unity within

individual histories, a process he refers to as "consummation" (1990: 13). We co-

author our life stories with the help of others and their reflections upon ourselves

and the events of our pasts. Such co-authorship is perhaps especially vital for

children. Within my analysis of interview data, I found several examples

indicating the importance of others—notably primary caregivers and family members—within children's acts of remembering.

Throughout this chapter, children's experience of remembering their pets has been described and interpreted as a largely relational phenomenon. My observations and interpretations of children's reliance upon others—particularly caregivers, siblings, and even myself in the role of researcher—suggests that memory is a highly social experience, but why is this relationality significant in a study seeking to understand the *meaning* of experiences? As I have argued elsewhere, co-authored experiences are meaningful (Russell, in press). Life is given partial meaning through the recognition, re-creation, and repetition of narratives lived with others and shared with others (Nelson, 1999; Kearney, 2002). In the forthcoming chapters, I suggest that this recounting of the past intimately involves the agencies and communicative contributions of non-human and human beings alike. For children, as for adults, the presences of others impacts the stories we tell, the details we incorporate, and the overall messages our narratives convey.

Returning to Ricoeur's dual sense of memory—as a kind of knowledge and a kind of action—provides a further point of reflection here. I asked children to describe past events, feelings, stories, and perceptions in order to develop a descriptive account of what it was like for them to experience both living with their pet and to experience the death of their pet. My initial expectation, my hope as a researcher, was that children would remember the past as accurately as

possible, a desire that is perhaps traceable to my background in more quantitative, psychological beginnings. I have learned, however, that there is no guarantee of the veracity of memory. So, I returned to Van Manen's (1990) core analytical question—"What is happening here?"—to reassess my own biases. Upon revisiting and re-reading the transcripts, my field notes, and my lists of emergent themes, I became less interested in children's accurate *knowledge* of the past and more aware of how memory is an *active* process engaged in with others. The presence of the double-hermeneutic—children interpreting their own experiences and a researcher interpreting participant experiences—suggests that the *meaning* of an experience arises within the present moment. Memory and meaning are not simply a matter of the temporal present, but also a matter of presence: where we find ourselves, our embodied experience within a particular lifeworld, and perhaps most of all, the others with whom we share and understand the past.

Chapter 4. Life: Children's Relationships with Companion Animals

At the end of our interview, I asked ten-year-old Ophelia if she had any advice for other children who were experiencing or might experience the death of their beloved companion animal:

> Ophelia: Mmm, (p) that, don't be sad that your animal died.
>
> I: Why?
>
> Ophelia: Cuz, you'll still remember her and all the, and all the times that she was alive.

Ophelia's desire to focus upon life was echoed by many of the children with whom I spoke. While death was the overarching topic of our conversations, roughly half of each interview was spent sharing stories and memories of children's lived relations with their pets. On the one hand, this occurrence was a matter of my research design. Each interview was loosely structured and the schedule of questions was front-loaded with questions about children's experiences with animals (see Appendix A). Following these general knowledge questions, the children and I typically spent time exploring their relationships with various pets, both living and deceased. Only after discussing their lived experiences would we turn to discuss events leading up to, including, and following a pet's death. Often times, conversations about life and death blended together within the same passage. Each child took time to explain some fundamental aspects of their pets' lives, their relationships, and the time they spent together.

In this chapter, I explore children's experiences of *living with* companion animals. To understand what the death of a companion animal means to children—to gain insight into what they feel was lost—it is vital to explore children's experiences of the relationship as they remember it to have been lived. This chapter presents phenomenological descriptions that are at the centre of children's developing sense of self as a social being, including intersubjectivity and empathy. While each of Van Manen's "lifeworld existentials" (1990) is present to some degree, the most prevalent existential themes tied to living with pets are lived embodiment and lived relationality. Through a hermeneutic interpretation of those descriptions, I explore the significance of three abstracted, super-ordinate themes, or clusters of meaning (Van Manen, 1990; Smith et al, 2009): shared intentionality, empathy, and intimacy. While I explore each theme individually, it will become clear that they are closely tied together. For example, each theme presents something akin to children's "theory of mind" concerning their pets. "Theory of mind," or "theory-theory," describes an awareness that others have cognitive and perceptual experiences of their own (Suddendorf & Whiten, 2001). Typically, theory of mind is limited to interpersonal knowledge, but its presence in child-pet relationships is evident in the data described below.

The first theme describes the presence and significance of shared intentions within child-pet relationships. Many children spoke about the roles of touch, play, and love in their time with their pets, but what is most noteworthy is the overwhelming sense that actions, and their associated affects, were mutual,

or *shared*. The second theme is built around empathy, or empathic understanding. Empathy is described as a state of feeling, knowing, or responding to another's inner, affective state (Gruen, 2009). Children often displayed a wide range of responses when asked to imagine or describe their pet's mental, perceptual, and emotional lives. The code "On animal minds/being animal" was applied within every interview at least once, and is the second most applied code overall (see Appendix B). Some children were more reluctant to describe their pet's experiential lives, noting that it was difficult to imagine the ways in which animals see the world and those around them. Despite this ambivalence, children regularly anthropomorphized their pets, speaking for them or describing—often with a great deal of certainty—their emotional and cognitive states in human terms. Children's use of anthropomorphism effectively demonstrates an empathic understanding across species boundaries. Finally, children often described a close, intimate experience of embodiment shared with their pets: touching, cuddling, holding, being close to each other, and even learning to respect each others' bodies and space were important experiences. Intimate embodied acts are tied to a strong sense of familiarity between children and their companion animals that was significant for establishing the closeness of their relationships as well as their own sense of self as both caring and cared for, and as observant or knowledgeable.

In the fourth section, entitled "We Had a Nice Connection," I explore another theme that surfaced during my analysis: children's felt sense of being

"connected" with their pets. My analysis of this theme builds upon the three superordinate themes of shared intentionality, empathy, and intimacy. I suggest that these felt experiences and meanings are core parts of an overall experience of relationality that some children describe as being "connected" with a companion animal. Borrowing from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Melson, 2003; Walsh, 2009a), I describe a connection as a series of actions and behaviours as well as a state of being that incorporates the themes of shared intentions, empathic understanding, and intimacy. The term "connection" was used spontaneously by three of the children, and while 25 percent constitutes a small number of the participants, I find the metaphor of a connection aptly describes the kind of union or bond that many children remembered experiencing or desiring with their pets. In the course of this study, connections seem limited to child-pet relationships. Some children even articulated the (im)possibility of connecting with animals outside of the home—e.g., wild animals or farm animals. A few children articulated a sort of scale of "connectability" with larger, longer-living animals such as dogs or cats being described as easier to connect with than, say, aquarium fish, hamsters, or sea monkeys. In addition, some children's descriptions of their relationships provide counterpoints to this concept of feeling connected. In the end, I suggest that "connections" are similar to attachments in several ways. First, children described their pets as very significant figures in their lives; they described seeking out their pets to share embodied intimacy or for emotional security (Holmes, 1993). On the other hand,

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I also explore how the theme of "connection" differs from attachment. In particular, I suggest attachment theory is in many ways too narrow, considering children's highly variable descriptions of their pet relationships. Children labeled pets as friends, as family, as babies, or as elderly. Children also described feeling a desire to care for their pets at times, and at other times the suggested that *they* were cared for by companion animals. Some children were even dismissive about various pets. While attachment theory is ultimately about evolutionary survival and security (Bowlby, 2004), "connections" seem to be more related to sharing an interest in each other, affective alignments, or simply "fitting together" in the right ways. I also ask in what ways companion animals' own agency figures into the theme of connections.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with a reflection upon the interplay between self and other. Children's descriptions of living with pets provide insight into their sense of lived relationality within multispecies environments, but they also reveal a sense of individuality and personal identity. Children often answered questions about their pet relationships by describing *themselves* as playful, caring, knowledgeable, observant, experienced, and even morally superior in comparison to others. Some children described themselves as "a person who loves animals," a reasonable assumption given the content of my interviews and the recruitment process. Others found themselves to be central figures in their pets' lives. These are not mutually exclusive experiences, and I do not espouse the view in developmental psychology that individuation is the

proper or logical end point of childhood. I suggest that the child-pet relation

provides an unique opportunity for exploring the embodied and emotional

meaning of an ecological, self-in-relation in addition to a felt sense of

individuation, difference, and personal identity.

Shared Intentionality: Being and Doing Things "Together"

The super-ordinate theme of shared intentionality is perhaps the strongest

undercurrent within many of the children's lived experiences with pets. This

theme arose through my use of "abstraction," whereby excerpts, transcript notes,

and emergent themes are compared and re-organized under a newly developed

heading. I utilize the concept of "shared intentionality" throughout this section

in reference to moments and excerpts where children described sharing in

activities with their pets (see Box 4.1). Children described shared intentionality

with pets in several ways, including the desire to interact (e.g., through play), the

act of coming together in shared spaces, and various enactments of care (e.g.,

feeding, walking, comforting each other). The focus here is on those *actions* that

are interpreted as being the result of shared desires or aims.

Box 4.1 - *Superordinate Theme: Shared Intentionality*		
Emergent theme:	Excerpt count:	% of coded interviews:
Focus on play	13	70
Mutual recognition/desire	10	70
Pets and affection	9	50
Mutual sense of respect	10	40
Self as central figure for pets	7	40
Connection' with pet(s)	8	30
Pet's perception of self	3	30
Pets provide comfort	3	30
Mutuality of care	3	20
Pet cares for self	3	20

Erica Fudge's (2008) analysis of the popular novel *Lassie Come-Home*

examines the felt sense of "shared intentionality" within child-pet relationships.

In a critical response to Yi-Fu Tuan's insistence that "domestication means

domination" (in Fudge, 2008, p. 28), Fudge suggests that there is actually a vital

experience of mutual recognition at the heart of the child-pet relationship, one

which plays out within Eric Knight's 1940 novel, *Lassie Come-Home*. Fudge points

to the central, cyclical theme within the novel: Lassie, a beloved collie, is

repeatedly given away by young Joe Carraclough's father and mother to a

wealthy duke because they cannot afford to care for her anymore. Yet the dog

returns again and again, and in the penultimate journey, Lassie makes a

particularly long-distance trip from the duke's Northern estate all the way back

to the boy and his family's humble home in the south of England. It is Joe who

recognizes Lassie's intentionality and agency in these acts, reacting against his own Mother's insistence that Joe's singular desire for his dog is causing the problem:

> The boy's response to this adult reality is not childish; it is, you might say, ethological—it speaks of the actions of the dog and not the human and thus appears to offer up a significant perspective on the nature of the bond between the human and the pet… This assertion of canine desire transforms the relationship between the dog and the humans around her in that it ensures that we recognize the mutuality of, rather than the dominance inherent in, that relationship. (Fudge, 2008, p. 27)

Fudge's description of the human-pet "bond" draws attention to the enactment of shared intentionality at work in *Lassie Come-Home*. For Fudge, the underlying essence of the relationship between Lassie and Joe is built upon mutuality and the child's embodied awareness of the animal's intentions. They share a goal: to be and live together. It is predominantly Lassie who engages in a series of repetitive actions that reveal her intention to be with Joe, but Joe not only recognizes Lassie's behaviour as intentional, but he also shares in her desire to be together again.

[Bracketing 4.1 – *My childhood was filled with fantasies of mutual desire. For years, I often sat in the woods behind our home, quiet patiently waiting for an animal—birds, deer, rabbits, squirrels, or the dogs and cats that lived in our neighbourhood—to approach me in friendship. This was perhaps partly a result of my predilection for*

Disney movies, many of which depict humans and animals in friendly relationships. Snow White (1937) could simply walk into the forest and sing, calling the birds and small woodland creatures to her. It seemed to me that it was a matter of the right kind of comportment; if I sat still enough, was quiet enough, had enough love in my heart, exuded a sense of welcome, or even sang the right songs, the animals might come to me. Despite what amounted to constant disappointment, at least in terms of wild animals, I maintained that practice for several years, sitting on tree stumps or exploring the woods on my own. Very rarely did I engage in such activities with other children, but I do recall sharing in those hopes for animal friendship with my cousins Kimberly and Colleen, twins who lived in another city but often visited us throughout the year. As I grew older, I began to see such acts and desires for animal kinship (Fawcett, in press) as appropriate only for girls and hence, inappropriate for me. I remember feeling self-conscious about my desire to play animal games when other boys wanted to play sports. Given the relationship between Joe and Lassie, it would be interesting to explore the possible impact of gender on enactments of interspecies friendships; but that is not the goal for this study.]

During my interview with Chloe, age 12, a similar sense of shared desire emerged. Chloe described the moment she and her family "got" her cat, Cookie:

I: Cookie. Alright, so when, what is your first memory of Cookie?

Chloe: When we got her.

I: Can you tell me about that?

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Chloe: Um, we were having a garage sale and then she came up to us and just, like, stayed with us.

I: What do you mean she… came up to you? Was she a neighbourhood cat?

Chloe: Uh, I'm not sure, cuz she was just walking around the street and came up to our house.

I: Yeah? And what do you remember thinking when she first came up to you?

Chloe: Um, well I always wanted a cat, so like, (pp) um, (pp) I thought "Oh I hope we can keep her."

According to Chloe, Cookie came up to and stayed with her and her family. At a more interpretative level, Cookie chose Chloe and her family, and Chloe in turn hoped that Cookie could stay. The family put up flyers and when no one "claimed" Cookie, they kept her. When she died they buried her in her "favourite" spot, under a bush outside of the family home; for Chloe, her cat's repeated returning to the home after being away all day was a sign of a shared desire. The desire to be together was mutual for Chloe and her cat, indicating a kind of connection emphasized by the desire to return to each other after being physically apart. Chloe was perhaps the most shy and reserved of all the participants, but while sharing this memory she was very responsive and engaged as indicated both by the tone of her voice and the lack of pauses that are prevalent throughout the rest of her interview. In comparison to describing her earlier pets—two guinea pigs she lived with and who died prior to Cookie's

arrival—Chloe was more interested in talking about the cat. The experience of being chosen, of desiring and being desired in return by the cat is a strong one.

Adele also described a mutual, repetitive desire to be near each other, which she shared with her cat Quinn:

> Adele: …most of the time when I came home [from school] she'd either be at the door or on the couch near the door and stuff, and so, everyday I came home and she was there, like, waiting for me, she'd be like "Huh, hey you're home!"
>
> I: Yeah, how do you know that that's what she was thinking? Do you think she was excited?
>
> Adele: Well, I mean, every, she would, she would see me walking up the stairs and run to the door and sit there while I unlocked it.

On a lesser scale perhaps than Lassie's monumental journeys or even Cookie's neighbourhood wanderings, Adele's description of Quinn's ritualized greeting at the end of every school day outlined the cat's repeated desire to see her. Adele noted that "every day," Quinn was there "waiting" for her, a sign of their shared sense of time, space, and affection. Quinn might have chosen other places to be when Adele arrived at home, she might have hid somewhere in the house, or paid no attention whatsoever. For Adele, however, Quinn wanted to be and repeatedly chose to be at the door when she arrived home from school.

The desire for mutual recognition was so strong that some children actually described their pets' seemingly-avoidant behaviour in peculiar ways. Kristina, in particular, interpreted the behaviour of several of her pets according

to variable degrees of mutual recognition or desire regarding herself, her mother, and her brother. When I asked her how she "knew" that her pets recognized her as their caregiver, she responded:

> Kristina: Well, because like, if I say their name or if I'm like talking, they'll like come out or something, except for my snake cuz like, he's usually sleeping.
>
> I: (*giggling*) Yeah.
>
> Kristina: But, like, my hamster, if like me and my Mom go up to the cage and we like like, say her name she'll come out and—
>
> I: (*interrupting*) What's your hamster's name?
>
> Kristina: Uh, Matilda.
>
> I: Matilda.
>
> Kristina: Yeah. And my cat, um, she like, if we call her name, she'll come to us so…

Kristina emphasized the role of name and voice recognition throughout this excerpt, but of particular note is the moment she suggests her snake does not always respond or come to her because "he's usually sleeping." She does not suggest that perhaps the snake is avoiding her or uninterested, but rather, that he does not hear her or is otherwise occupied. Kristina's response reminds me of a scene within the Pixar movie *Finding Nemo* (2003), when the community of aquarium fish with whom Nemo lives in a dentist's office comes to anticipate the somewhat frequent visits by the dentist's niece, Darla. The other fish warn Nemo about Darla's recklessness—she killed a former tank member named "Chuckles"

by shaking him to death—and when Darla arrives, they all hide in an attempt to avoid her. Darla's desire is unidirectional, and the fish community's avoidance of her is undesirable; yet, while Darla responds by shaking and shaking her pet fish hoping for a response, Kristina is interpreting her pet snake's behaviour as sleeping rather than avoidance.

Another particularly strong example of mutuality comes from children's description of play. As noted earlier, play was a significant theme across interviews, with nine of the 12 children (in seven of 10 interviews) mentioning play as a regular activity they engaged in with their companion animals. What often constitutes play, however, requires a degree of observational and communicative sophistication. Animal behaviourist Marc Bekoff (2007) notes that play is marked by a series of cues, behaviours, and boundaries that denote various activities as playful rather than aggressive or threatening. Children often described their playful encounters with pets as mutually desirable or even as initiated by the animal. Chloe suggested that her cat Cookie frequently wanted to play with her:

I: …so how would you describe Cookie's personality?

Chloe: Um, (ppp) playful?

I: Playful? How do you, like, what do you mean?

Chloe: Like she would always try and play with you and like, pounce on things.

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While Chloe is not suggesting that she and Cookie always wanted to play

together *at the same time*, one can infer that they shared such desires often.

These children's experiences of shared intentionality reveal continuities

and discontinuities across species lines that have ethical implications. Over time,

both children and their pets learned to communicate desires, negotiating a

shared sense of meaning. Val Plumwood writes:

> our openness to the non-human other's potential for intentionality,
> including their potential for communicative exchange and agency... is
> important ethically not as evidence of "qualifications" for moral status but
> primarily because it is part of providing a counter-hegemonic alternative to
> the hegemonic stance of reductionism and closure. (2002, p. 181)

Plumwood notes that even if one argues that non-human species' intentionality

is of a lesser order, it does not necessarily follow that mastery or domination over

them is justified. Rather, she espouses a recognition of and respect for difference

that will lead toward higher orders of ethical complexity rather than hierarchy.

The children and pets in this study often struggled to maintain this openness

within their relationships, recognizing that intentionality is not *always* shared

and that communication is often difficult. Still, their striving to understand and

share in each others' lives suggests that their relationships are a potential

cornerstone for understanding and openness in other human-animal relations.

Empathy: "What Animals Think"

One of the most commonly coded themes within my analysis was "On Animal Minds/Being Animal." This code was applied to 27 excerpts and was present within every interview (see Figure 4.2). Using the thematic process of "subsumption"—where similar codes are lumped together under a common heading already present (Smith et al, 2009)—I noticed several links within my transcription notes between emergent themes such as "animal minds/emotions," "animal experiences," and "ideas about animal minds." While similar to the previous theme of intentionality, in this section I focus more upon children's experiences of animals as thinking and perceiving subjects.

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Box 4.2 - Superordinate Theme: Empathy

Emergent themes:	Excerpt count:	% of interviews:
On animal minds/being animal	27	100
Observations of animals/pets bodies	24	70
Different animals elicit different perceptions	17	60
Difficult to imagine animals' experience	11	60
Thoughts about animal suffering	5	50
Pet's experience of dying	9	50
"Animal talk"	7	50
Mutual sense of respect	10	40
Animals' awareness of death	7	40
Animals and language	6	40
Connection' with pet(s)	8	30
Pet's perception of self	3	30
Interaffectivity	1	10

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Within some of these excerpts, children shared what they imagined their companion animals actually experienced, felt, or thought about while suffering,

dying, or being euthanized. In other excerpts, they described what pets felt or experienced while they were alive. In this excerpt, ten-year-old Mac considered the family dog, Suri's, needs and desires in her day-to-day life:

> Mac: Um (pp) I don't know. Family. Friends. She always, like, dog parks… she always used to try to be like, the best, she was just… (*imitating dog in voice and in bodily posture*) "no, you're just way too little, I don't think you can play!"

Mac provided a cautious response to my generalized question about dogs' needs. Dogs, he suggests, need family and friends; he recognizes that they are social creatures. He then turned to a more specific response, reflecting upon his own dog Suri and her way of seeing others and the world around her. He noted that she liked going to dog parks, something they did together often as a family. He immediately began to imitate her typical behaviour within the dog park, embodying the dog by sitting up straight and looking down at an imaginary dog, saying "you're just way too little, I don't think you can play!" In recounting his dog's desires, he also represented her personality and took on her point of view. Suri liked to play, presumably with dogs of a particular size. Mac's perspective-taking, while certainly playful both in terms of content and performativity, brings together his observational, imaginative, and empathetic skills in expressing his knowledge of his dog's thoughts and desires. It is a solid representation of children's attempt to imagine and embody their companion animal's perspective, and while it is anthropomorphic in its tone and structure,

anthropomorphism has been recognized as a strong and valid way of connecting across species lines (Bekoff, 2009; McHugh, 2011).

There were also more direct, explicit excerpts of children reflecting on animals' thoughts or feelings. Lily linked the act of observing animals with understanding and knowing more reliably what was going on in their minds:

> Lily: Sometimes with dogs, you can kind of see what they're thinking (I: mmhmm) like, with my other dog Allie, whenever you say you wanna go for a walk, she kinda like tips her head (I: yeah) or she kind of begs to go for a walk (I: yeah) and you can tell, kinda tell when they're hungry, and when they're not.
>
> I: They act a specific way (L: yeah) and you kind of learn, learn what those things mean? Yeah. Can you do the same with guinea pigs?
>
> Lily: Uh (p) well, I found with Buttercup and Cotton that whenever they squeak and climb the cage, they are hungry or thirsty, or just want a treat (I: yeah) so…

Lily provides a good example of a kind of empathic understanding that is often the basis for communication within human-animal relationships. While Lily described an ability to perceive what animals wanted, she also suggested it is not always so easy to connect their embodied actions with what they are thinking, saying "Um (pp) I don't really know what animals think, it's kind of weird, of what animals think."

Adele expressed perhaps the greatest range of ambivalence regarding her cat Harley's experiences, feelings, and thoughts. When I asked Adele about their relationship, she offered the following reflection:

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Adele: She was pretty well behaved. (p) Um, but occasionally, but most of the time when I came home she'd either be at the door or on the couch near the door and stuff, and so, everyday I came home and she was there, like, waiting for me, she'd be like "Huh, hey you're home!"

I: Yeah, how do you know that that's what she was thinking? Do you think she was excited?

A: Well, I mean, every, she would, she would see me walking up the stairs and run to the door and sit there while I unlocked it.

I: Oh yeah?

Yet, when I asked Adele to describe what Harley thought about her, she backed off a bit, describing a relationship that was more utilitarian and somewhat impersonal:

I: Mmhmm, and was Harley, (p) uh, what do you think Harley thought about you?

Adele: I think Harley sometimes thought of me as um, something that she liked and was happy to be around and other times I think she might have just thought of me as food giver.

I: As food giver?

Adele: Yeah, or a heat spot.

…

I: (*giggling*) How do you know?

Adele: Well I mean sometimes, she would like come up and like be really respectful to me, and other times she would um, just come up into my bed in the middle of the night, and then sit there, and then when I got up, she'd be, and she'd walk to her food bowl and just sit there.

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I: (*giggles*) Was she trying to tell you something I think?

Adele: Yeah, because her food bowl was normally empty.

I: Oh yeah.

Adele: So, she'd just be like, "Give. Me. Food."

I: (*giggling*) Did you talk to her?

Adele: Mmm, no, because I knew that she probably wouldn't understand me, so, I mean sometimes I would be like "Hey Harley" (I: Yeah) or like, stuff like that, but like, never really like, talk.

For Adele, a key to their relationship and to her own ability to recognize or understand Harley's thoughts seemed to be the manner in which they communicated. Adele suggested, like Lily and other children, that observing an animal's bodily gestures and movements is key to recognizing their desires and needs. Yet, Adele also believed that talking to her cat would not lead to any deeper understanding between them; she believed that her cat could not really understand her own verbalized, human language. She reiterated this belief later in the interview when I asked whether she thought Harley knew she was dying:

I: …so, what do you think an animal experiences when it dies, or what do you think it feels when it dies?

Adele: Mmm. Well I wouldn't really know, because I'm not an animal and I can't imagine it (I: Yeah) I don't know whether they feel pain or relief, I mean, it depends on how they die or when they die or, (I: Yeah)

I: What do you think Harley, do you think Harley knew that she was sick?

Adele: I think, I think Harley knew that the end was coming (I: Mmhmm) but I don't think she knew when. I think that in those last few minutes before they gave her that final shot, I think she knew that something was going to happen (I: Mmhmm).

Neville provided a unique reflection on animal minds that he used as an important guide within child-pet relationships, and in human-animal relationships more broadly:

Neville: I think they [animals] are just like human beings, they live just like we live (I: Mmhmm) but, (pp) um, I don't think they should be treated as different animals, I think they're all, basically the same.

I: Yeah. (N: Yeah) what do you mean by that? Like, cats and dogs and other kinds of animals, all sort of…

Neville: Yeah, I wouldn't, um, how should I word this? (*both giggle*) Doo-pa-doo-pa-doo. Um, they're all kind of (p) they're all, what should, I… could you repeat the question? (both laugh) I just get a little, so, yeah, okay.

I: So, um, let's say when you read a book (N: Mmhmm) like, um, and you are imagining things from another person's or, other…

Neville: (*interrupting*) Perspective!

I: … yeah, perspective, right, what kinds of things do you think that Thunder experienced in his day, in her daily life, or in the day that she died, what kinds of experiences do you think she had?

Neville: (p) I think that her daily experiences, (p) um, I think she just lives like every other cat (I: Yeah) um, just um, counting it, I mean, basically just living through your life, like, getting along with humans, just kind of, chilling out (I: Right) in a way.

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For Neville, thinking about animals' minds, experiences, or feelings is not necessarily difficult or complicated; we all "basically" live in similar ways according to him. While this excerpt is perhaps simple in scope, if we consider it in light of Neville's entire interview, it is clear that he was careful to imagine what other animals' lives are like in order to "get along" with them in respectful and caring ways. He alluded to this connection earlier in the interview, declaring that animals are unique subjects, and that an ethical view of animals comes from an ability to empathize with them. He suggested we need to recognize their emotional existences through our language *and* our actions:

> Neville: … if we were just to call them [animals] like, an object, I don't think that would be um, too specific to them, I think they should be… all animals should be called like, uh, have feelings and, um, really to show you um, not to like, because yeah I have a microphone and a watch and, they're things (I: Yeah) I mean, a cat, I mean, living animals aren't (I: Yeah) if you know what I'm saying?

In this difficult passage, Neville displayed a bit of frustration trying to articulate himself. His main point, however, was that animals' emotional lives are a key part of their experience. They are subjects in their own right, and not objects such as "microphones" or "watches." Neville implied that how we speak *about* animals has implications on how we interact with them.

Intimacy: "Cuddling," "Holding," and Familiarity

The final superordinate theme comes from children's frequent descriptions of physical contact and their experiences of embodiment with their companion animals. "Embodied experience" quickly emerged within my notes during the analysis of interview transcripts, as children often described touching, holding, and cuddling with their pets. Yet, to better understand the nuanced experience of lived embodiment (Van Manen, 1990), I re-arranged a series of interrelated emergent themes and re-read and analyzed the relevant excerpts to understand children's experiences more fully (see Box 4.3). These themes come together in expressing the significance of intimacy in child-pet relationships.

Box 4.3 - Superordinate Theme: Intimacy

Emergent theme:	Excerpt count:	% of interviews:
Describing pet	24	90
Relationships built on care/love	10	70
Observations of animals/pets bodies	24	70
Pets and intimacy	15	70
Importance of touching animals	13	60
Pets and affection	9	50
Mutual sense of respect	10	40
Knowledge of pets' history	5	40
Desired avoidance of harm/suffering	4	30
Pet cares for self	3	30
Mutuality of care	3	30
Intimate knowledge of pet	2	10
Interaffectivity	1	10

At the top of the list of emergent themes are children's descriptions of their pets. The term "description" is admittedly vague, and could be understood in a

variety of ways. In fact, most of these excerpts actually provide multiple types of description within the same passage, e.g., personality, appearance, and behaviour. Take Oscar's description of his hamster, "Fuzzy:"

I: What did you say?

Oscar: No I mean, his whiskers, his whiskers nice and long.

I: Oh yeah, he does have long whiskers.

Oscar: And, and he whiskers everybody that comes.

I: Yeah?

Oscar: He goes like (p) and crawls up their shirt and you know (p)

I: (*giggles*) Can I say hi? (p) Hi Fuzzy (pp *as I pet hamster*)

Oscar: He won't bite, he's very cute (*voice raises higher as he speaks to hamster*)

Oscar was holding Fuzzy in his lap for most of this interview, and in this passage he takes some time to explain a physical attribute, typical behaviours, and even Fuzzy's "cute" personality. He also assures me that the hamster will not bite me. His description combines all of these elements together, indicating what it is that is most appealing about Fuzzy and their relationship. His rising tone of voice, combined with his repeated references to the hamster's diminutive size throughout the interview suggest that cuddling and holding are experientially meaningful. Cuddling and holding were common "touching" experiences, and most of the children described touch as important and desirable.

Touching often involved an empathic awareness of animals' different sensory abilities and embodiments. Seven-year-old Juliet expressed this awareness of animal bodies in terms of her own hypothetical interactions with them:

> I: So, do you like um, um (p) so tell me about the relationships that you have with different animals. Are your relationships with your dog the same as relationships with, when you see birds outside or when you go to the zoo? Or do you treat them differently?
>
> Juliet: I kinda treat different animals different. So like, (p) well I kinda treat them sometimes the same, cuz it kinda matters which animal it is.
>
> I: Okay, so, can you give me an example?
>
> Juliet: So like, if it was a cat, then (p) it was like (p) hmm, yes, like its kinda hard to explain, so, if it was a bird, I wouldn't like, like, grab it and hug it and (I: Right) all that stuff like a cat or a dog or something.
>
> I: Why wouldn't you hug a bird?
>
> Juliet: Because it has feathers and they're pretty sensitive and it has feet and they're kinda sensitive (I: yeah) and its not like dogs, cuz they can like run around and they're all fluffy (I: Mmhmm) and their hair isn't so sensitive.

Birds, she notes, are "pretty sensitive" and thus not appropriate for grabbing and hugging as compared to a "fluffy" and less-sensitive dog. While Juliet was speaking generally, her awareness reveals a desire to connect to animals through intimacy and touch that most of the children described at some point.

Adele also described how she might interact with various animals differently by performing intricate hand gestures and bodily movements:

I: Um, and so, are your animal relationships, so are your relationships with animals all the same or do you treat some animals differently than others?

Adele: Mmm, I treat some animals differently than others because sometimes they can't handle to be, like, if I had a cat and a lizard, would I be like, rubbing and like picking up the lizard and being like (*rising tone of voice*) oh, you're such a cute lizard (*I giggle*) and like squeezing it and hugging it (I: yeah) and whereas if I had a cat, I wouldn't be holding it on my hand and being like (*tone softens*) oh, nice cat, nice cat.

I: (*laughing*) Well yeah, that's obviously like, holding an animal is very different. (p) Um, and obviously you couldn't, well, you could hug it... why wouldn't you hug a gecko?

Adele: Well I mean like, they're this big.

I: Yeah, that's true, I guess you'd smother it.

Adele: And, they can't really even be survive like holding them like this.

Interestingly, Adele previously noted that her two favourite animals were "cats and crested geckos." She does not suggest that she would not hold a lizard or gecko, but rather, that it would be held with her hand stretched out in front of her, palm up. She even speaks to it differently, in a softer tone of voice, calmer, reminiscent of the kind of "interaffectivity" that Gene Myers (2007) describes in his research with pre-school children and animals in the classroom. Myers acknowledges that true interaffectivity—sharing feelings while *understanding them as shared*—is difficult to perceive in child-animal relationships, but he does point out that children often align their own vitality affects with those of animals. For instance, while encountering a slow-moving, cautious turtle, Myers

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witnessed children become slow, quiet, and deliberate in their movements (2007). When I asked Adele why she could not hug a gecko, she gestured to me with her hands that a gecko's small size meant such interaction was inappropriate, even threatening to their well-being and survival. Cats, according to Adele, can be rubbed, squeezed, hugged, and spoken to in an excitable manner.

Juliet and Adele's comments both describe how they approach touching companion animals from a kind of epistemic awareness of animal embodiment; but how and why do animals reciprocate touch? How is embodiment a *shared* experience within the relationship? Interestingly, many of the descriptions of touching positioned the children themselves as the initiators of physical contact with their pets. Jim's story at the beginning of this chapter, when his cat used to come to him in bed and lie around his head, is one of only a few coded examples of touch being initiated by the animal. Ophelia provided a brief, albeit incomplete, insight into why animal-initiated touch was particularly meaningful while describing her pet, Denny, as "happy:"

I: Happy? (O: Yeah) How did you know that she was happy?

Ophelia: Cuz she'd always like, come up to me and my Mom, and yeah, my Dad.

I: Yeah, and do what?

Ophelia: And like, like, I really don't remember, but… yeah. Yeah, I don't remember.

While she stopped short of describing their physical interactions, the fact that Denny approached Ophelia and her family members provided them an indication of the cat's emotional state and personality. For Ophelia, Denny's desire to be close to and perhaps touch her, was evidence that Denny was happy living together.

The code "pets and intimacy" was applied to excerpts that exemplified mutual enjoyment of or interest in close physical contact. For example, Oscar described snuggling with his dog Sneakers during thunderstorms:

I: What did you used to do with him when he was scared of the thunder and lightning?

Oscar: Mmm, I would just quiet him down with treats.

I: You'd give him treats? (Oscar: Mmm) Is there anything else you would do?

Oscar: Um, I would just like snuggle with him on the couch (*Mom sighs*)

I: Yeah? And that worked?

Oscar: Um, or put, watch some TV with him.

I: Yeah? And did he calm down?

Oscar: Yep.

According to Oscar, snuggling with Sneakers on the couch helped to calm the dog down during bad weather. Touch here is described as beneficial for the dog, Sneakers. There were several other examples of children feeling physically comforted by their pets, and so perhaps Oscar's act of snuggling with Sneakers during storms brought him some comfort as well.

The theme of intimacy also covers children's personal knowledge of their pets. In particular, emergent themes such as "describing pet," "knowledge of pet's history," and "intimate knowledge of pet" reveal children's awareness of what their pet is like and perhaps *who they are*. This second point is covered in my recent writings on "animal narrativity," describing a phenomenon that recognizes non-human animals as having unique life histories and identities (Russell, in press). Oscar provided a clear example of this intimate knowledge regarding his dog, Sneakers' past:

> I: And what did Sneakers, what do you think Sneakers thought of you?
>
> Oscar: Um, that I would be nice, um, and because the last few years he was getting tortured by other people, um, for the last few years he was an outside dog and we would, um, and he was being called a bad dog um, before we got him.

Sneakers had been rescued from a home where he was beaten and abused. Oscar's awareness of that past reveals an awareness of Sneakers' history that he suggested impacted their relationship; in comparison to previous experiences, Sneakers thinks of Oscar as "nice."

"We Had a Nice Connection"

During the course of the interviews, three children spontaneously used the term "connection" to describe the quality of their relationships. Two of those children are siblings, indicating that the term may be used within the family or in common linguistic experiences. Still, despite the scant use of that particular

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terminology, the description of a "connection" implied a profound sense of relationality that often encompassed themes of shared intentionality, empathy, and intimacy described above. Most of the children described one or more of their relationships with companion animals as deep, intimate, and mutually fulfilling, suggesting that the possibility of connecting, or fitting together, was meaningful.

A *connection* can be defined as "the action of connecting or joining together; the condition of being connected or joined together" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n. 1.a.). The etymology of connection comes from the Latin *cōnexiōn, meaning "bound together" or "close union" (OED).* Gene Myers utilizes the term "connection" often, (Myers, Saunders, & Garrett, 2004; Myers, 2007; Clayton & Myers, 2009) suggesting that the sense of connection that humans feel for nature or for animals relates to a sense of belonging or experiences of transcendence. He claims that children's connections with animals can be deep and profound:

> …the animal provides an intense sense of *connection across essential differences*… Much of the sense of connection and meaning on the animate level is apprehended in an immediate manner without conscious inferences, but realized through interaction. It may later be made conscious and manifest in pretend or reflection. The fact that animate properties are possessed by both child and animal is not incidental. It means that a common reality is felt to define both the child's and the animal's experience. (Myers, 2007, p. 87)

Connections thus describe both unconscious actions and orientations as well as conscious reflections on shared states, experiences, and desires.

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Eleven-year-old Lily was one of three children who described having a "connection" with her pets, as seen in the following excerpt:

I: So what kinds of things did you and Buttercup do?

Lily: Um, well, I used to take her out and put her in the hall a lot, just play with her (p) and we just loved each other, we had a nice connection, we (pp) were perfect for each other from the beginning, so…

For Lily, the "nice connection" she described having with her guinea pig Buttercup was mentioned in response to my question about their typical shared activities. At first, she provided a specific answer: she and Buttercup used to play together in the hallway. After a brief pause, Lily turned to a somewhat broader reflection: they "just loved each other." She then introduced the concept of a "nice connection." It seems that the felt sense of connectedness is, as the definition suggests, a matter of particular actions—both playing together and in the active sense of loving she describes—as well as a condition or state of *being* connected. Lily suggests that she and Buttercup were "perfect for each other from the beginning," describing a kind of instant union between them. People often describe meeting their significant others as "love at first sight," and perhaps for Lily this is an apt way of reflecting upon of her relationship with Buttercup. What is it like to feel *perfectly* matched with another being? When I asked her that question, Lily actually turned the conversation to the story of Buttercup's death. Later on, while speaking generally about what guinea pigs are like as companion animals, Lily provided insight into the beginnings of her

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relationship with her first guinea pig, Buttercup. Lily indicated that she had always wanted a rodent, a pet that would be "fun and playful," and that guinea pigs are "fun animals for little kids." Lily and her family decided that a guinea pig would be the best pet for her. In a sense, Lily already anticipated that Buttercup would be a "good pet" for her after researching guinea pigs with her family.

Lily referred to this idea of a "connection" two more times during her interview. In the first instance, Lily described the lack of a connection with a dying fish that she found near her home. This excerpt will be explored more fully in the next section. In her final use of the term, Lily suggested that shared emotions and affects are central to the felt experience of a "connection." In response to my appeal for her advice to other children who may be experiencing a similar death-related event with their pet, Lily responded in the following way:

> Lily: Um, I would say its okay, they've lived a great life, you can always get another one and um (ppp) that, they've (p) that they love you and they will always love you when, even if they're dead and you had a great connection with them, so… .

Lily's ambivalent use of language is particularly noteworthy. She described both the pet's life and the child-pet connection as "great," and yet indicated that children can always get another pet. To what extent does the concept of "connections" describe the felt sense of the relationality and intersubjectivity experienced between two unique beings? Might such feelings be solely a product of children's projections? Perhaps, but even if children are projecting their own

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hopes and desires onto their pets, they are based upon interpretations of memories and experiences that are meaningful in a relational context. Lily further described the child-pet connection as a thing of the past, as something they "had," while suggesting to other children that their pets will "always love" them. While the connection itself may be broken, love endures throughout time. Lily's description of love makes reference to its eternal quality. Lily brought up love several times during our interview. In fact, there were at least nine instances of her describing her love for animals in some way. For Lily, love is a vital and seemingly universal component of the child-pet connection: pets will "always love" the children with whom they lived. Lily's message is possibly meant to provide comfort for those who grieve, as it arises in the context of her advice to other children. She even shared with me that while talking to her parents about the death of her second guinea pig, Cotton, they acknowledged their own love for the guinea pig. Lily seems to believe wholeheartedly that love is an important and enduring aspect of being connected with another being.

The two other children who explicitly employed the concept of "connection"—thirteen-year-old Sabrina and eleven-year-old Jim—are a brother and sister I interviewed together. Sabrina and Jim had multiple experiences with companion animals and with death. Each of them also described experiencing a range of connections. Jim in particular described a connection with one cat that "stood out" from other relationships. In the following excerpt, Sabrina, Jim, and I

discuss the different experiences and qualities of relationships they had with various animals:

Interviewer: (p) um, so you've had a lot of experiences with animals dying.

Sabrina: Mmhmm.

Interviewer: Alright, so, why don't you tell me about one that is particularly, well, I'll start with Sabrina and then I'll ask you, tell me about one that was particularly (p) uh, interesting or particularly, like, stands out in your mind.

Sabrina: Uh, well, definitely the cats and the rabbits I think.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sabrina: Cuz they're just like, bigger animals and they're kind of like, the ones that you'd connect more with, like hamsters are really like, cute and stuff but you don't expect them to last very long because that's kind of what's normal (I: Mmhmm) like, its normal that they only last like a little while (I: Yeah) but like cats and bunny rabbits they last like, a few years and stuff and then you don't always realize that they're gonna disappear (I: yeah) they're just gonna be gone, right? So…

Interviewer: Yeah, and was there like, one particular story that you could tell me about one of those animals?

Sabrina: Not really. I don't know. (pp)

Jim: Me?

Interviewer: Jim?

Jim: Um… (pp) well (p) one that particularly stood out in mind was definitely the cats, um, most I think most prominently, our, one of our cats named Pip (I: Mmhmm) cuz I mean that was the cat at that time that I

connected with the most like, and one of the things I really missed was um, he'd always um, he'd always when I was sleeping he'd like wrap himself around my head (I: oh really?) and he would like sit on my head, um (p) that was, it took me a while to get used to not having a cat doing that (I: yeah) and like, even the cat I have now doesn't do that (I: yeah) um (p) well, then one of our, the first bunny that died (p) I don't think any of us would've saw that one coming.

There are several moments within this passage that stand out. The very first reference to connections comes from Sabrina, who makes a distinction between various kinds of animals and what we might call their "connectability." Sabrina's response distinguishes among various companion animals and their connectability. She differentiates between cats and rabbits on the one hand, and hamsters on the other. First, Sabrina implies that connection is somehow related to an animal's body size. Cats and rabbits are "bigger animals," and thus easier to connect with as opposed to hamsters, even though hamsters are "cute." She does not fully explain that notion of embodiment here, but it is perhaps relative to her second point, that connection is also a matter of shared time. Sabrina suggests that one is more likely to make a connection with animals that live longer. Perhaps an emotional bond is easier to cultivate with another when each subject's life is anticipated to be of a sufficient length. There is, of course, no guarantee of the length of any being's life; a fact with which Sabrina has been obviously been confronted when she suggests you "don't always realize that they're gonna disappear." Sabrina suggests that the anticipation of death plays a

role within this temporal sense of connecting. She admits that she was not always aware that her pets would die, or "disappear." A connection is easier to make if one feels that a good deal of time will be shared together.

Whether following his sister's lead or not, Jim also makes a reference to his connection with his pets. However, Jim specifically names one cat, Pip, with whom he connected "the most." For Jim, his connection with Pip was significant partly because of the level of physical intimacy they shared. Linguistically, it is interesting to note that Jim is the object of Pip's actions. The cat wrapped itself around his head while Jim was sleeping. Pip wanted to be close to Jim, and that was a powerful experience for him. In addition, Jim describes their connection as something he misses. In particular, he seems to long for the physical contact and touching between him and Pip. The cat's behaviour and presence was something he had grown to enjoy, and once Pip died, it took Jim "a while to get used to not having a cat" sleep with him. Something intimate, comforting, and personally gratifying was lost when Pip died. Connections, it seems, are something we become accustomed to and by extension, their loss takes time to process.

In my analysis of the excerpts above, the experience of being connected with a companion animal links the three superordinate themes described earlier. The first theme, shared intentionality, is evident from Lily and Jim's descriptions of feeling as if their pets shared the same desires and feelings within their relationships as they did. Their relationships were not unidirectional, in fact, they were fulfilling for both individuals in various ways. The relationships also

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involved a shared affectivity. When I asked Sabrina to describe how her

relationships with her pets might be different from others'—say, her parents or

adults—she offered the following response:

> Sabrina: Um, I really don't know (giggles) (I: yeah) I mean, I feel like I
> connect with my pets, but I'm not sure that I connect like, more than some
> people, that are adults (I: mmhmm) I feel like it could be the same, or it
> could be different depending on like, what your life is like (I: yeah) like, if
> you're going through like lots of hard things then like, your dog could be
> very affected but like also, that's kind of the same with adults too (I:
> mmhmm) like they can have connections with pets.

It is interesting that Sabrina described the sharing of affect here, particularly

when she suggested that one's dog could be affected by one's emotional troubles.

Sharing intentions and negotiating activities are part of the experience of

connecting. In addition, the felt sense of connecting was partly a product of

children's capacity to observe and empathize with their companion animals.

Most of the children described communicating with animals, observing them,

and struggling to understand their pets' own experiential lifeworlds and desires.

Finally, there was a strong embodied component to connecting with a

companion animal, as seen in Jim's description of his connection with Pip. His

description of longing for that lost, intimate relation is reminiscent of the

descriptions of intimacy laid out above. Many of the children spoke of touching

their pets, holding them, cuddling, or sharing intimate spaces like their bed or

their room. Sabrina also described how body size is tied to the potential for

connection: larger animals, which one can hold or cuddle, are easier to connect with than smaller, more fragile animals.

When no connection was there

The children in this study recognized that a range of relationships with animals are possible. As a result, not every child-animal or child-pet relationship entails what Lily referred to so optimistically as a "great connection." For example, early in our interview, Lily described finding and catching an injured fish near her home and watching it die. She then offered the following reflection when I asked her what that experience was like: "I was kinda sad, but it wasn't like, a real pet of mine. I didn't really have a connection with it, but I was a little sad." Lily implies that because the fish was not a "real pet of hers," she could not "really have a connection with it." Is the applicability of the term "pet" to an individual animal itself a prerequisite for the felt experience of connecting? Yi-Fu Tuan, in his exploration of pet keeping practices and domestication of animals, suggests that children's relationships with their pets constitutes a "blend of affection and condescension" (1984, p. 163), drawing upon themes of intimacy, dependency, and familiarity. A child, he argues, is predominantly engaged in playful activities that explore ambivalent feelings and desires, including love and care as well as mastery and superiority:

> Sticks and stones, toy soldiers and teddy bears, kittens and pups are all his [*sic*] subjects, pliant to his imagination and obedient to his command. When a doll or a pup turns recalcitrant, it can be punished. This power to

dominate another—including the power to inflict pain and humiliation on another—is vaguely pleasurable. And yet there is also *deep attachment*. A child is attached to his toys as extensions of himself. They are his possessions… praise for them is praise for him. Of course, genuine affection also exists. In the unequal relationship with toys and small animals, the child can develop feelings of protectiveness and nurture—feelings that interpenetrate with his awareness of superiority and power. (Tuan, 1984, p. 164)

There was no evidence in my interviews with children that pets were considered as objects to be dominated, and none of the children described punishing their pets. Juliet, in a moment that perhaps supports Yi Fu-Tuan's (1984) theory of dominance as the root of domestication, described her dog Flash's perception of her and her brother Charlie:

I: And what do you think Flash thought about you two?

Juliet: Hmm. I think she thought we were pretty good owners.

I: Yeah?

Charlie: Um…

Juliet: (*talking over*) even though sometimes she did some bad things or like she digged things in the yard (I: yeah) or she made a big mess or she went through the garbage…

I: Yeah (*giggles*)

Juliet did refer to herself and her brother Charlie as "good owners," and although such language refers to the conception of possession, she never described ownership as a matter of domination. Her description was also from

her dog Flash's point of view, which raises questions about companion animals'

perception or experiences of power within child-pet relationships. The use of the

term "connection," while certainly evoking a sense of "genuine affection," only

emerged in a few instances across two of the ten interviews. It is possible that

some children struggled with issues of power. As Juliet later acknowledged,

living with her dog Flash did often entail moments of frustration, as

demonstrated by her comment that Flash's often "bad" behaviour made things

difficult from time to time. As Nel Noddings (1984) notes, such challenges are

also at the root of experiences of care and do not need to be seen as evidence of

the "vaguely pleasurable" experience of domination. Care itself is aligned with

experiential qualities as diverse as guilt, an overwhelming lack of reciprocity,

and the felt compulsion to outline limits within a relationship (Noddings, 1984).

Juliet recognized that her relationship was ultimately perceived as "good" by

both her and Flash, despite the difficulties that her dog sometimes brought in her

life.

The term "pet" is also applicable to such a wide range of beings, making it

unlikely that each pet relationship is experienced in the same manner. Sabrina's

earlier response about the connectability of some pets over others based on

length of life or size supports this claim. Lily's description of her experience with

the dying fish also provides insight. Lily suggested that if she had a connection

with the fish, she would have been more upset about its death. Fish were a

curious case within my interviews. Many of the children described having

relationships with *pet* fish—that is, fish that live in an aquarium within the home—and those relationships were typically described are less intimate and less interesting than their relationships with other animals. Perhaps the lack of "connections" described with fish across the participant interviews emphasizes the importance of intimacy, touch, empathy, and shared intentions. Fish live behind glass, in an entirely different kind of environment, and so perhaps the inability to hold them, cuddle, and even the difficulty in imagining their lifeworlds all contribute to their "unconnectability." While justifying her consumption of fish, Adele provided a further insight into why a connection may not be possible:

> Adele: … That's, when I think of fish they can only remember every three seconds, so it probably doesn't hurt that much [when they are killed for food], I mean, (p) um, they might be feeling that they're dying and then, they forget that they're dying, and then they feel that they're dying, and then its dead.

If shared intentions, affects, and intimacy are vital for "connecting," and if a child believes that fish's memories are effectively erased every three seconds, then perhaps connections with fish are unimaginable, or impossible.

Importantly, children also recognized that connections with pets were not present even when they were possible. An excerpt of my conversation with Kristina exemplifies one particular insight as to why a connection was not made, namely, that the family pet has developed a deeper connection with someone else:

I: And what's your cat's name?

Kristina: Jujubee.

I: Jujubee.

Kristina: Yeah, my brother named her. Cuz we had like, um, we had, cuz we fostered cats (I: Yeah) we had three kittens and a Mom. And the Mom was like, she was like, hurting the kittens like, she was like ripping them off the couch and stuff (I: Oh wow) and so like, the um, shelter thought that she didn't like, want them anymore, cuz she wasn't producing enough milk (I: Mmm) for them, so we took the Mom back and then so, when we had to give all three of the kittens back, we kept one, because it like, imprinted on my brother (I: Oh yeah?) yeah, so like, he would like, follow around my brother everywhere, and whenever my brother went to bed she would sleep with him.

Kristina's use of the term "imprinted," echoes the ethological concept introduced by Konrad Lorenz in his famous research with grey-lag geese (Hinde, 2006). Lorenz found that if their parents were not present, newly-hatched goslings would follow another moving object as they learned to walk. John Bowlby was highly influenced by Lorenz's ethological theory while developing his theory of "attachment systems" between infant humans and their mothers. Bowlby's most significant contribution was to extend ethological concepts such as imprinting into the realm of infant-mother relations, challenging concepts such as Freudian's libidinal drive theories. For Bowlby, attachment behaviours by infants were not simply a way to satisfy sex drives or food drives, but rather existed for a variety of reasons, including the need to be close to a caregiver, physical and

psychological security, and avoidance of threatening situations (Holmes, 1993; Bowlby, 2004).

Kristina's story interestingly explores many of the themes present within attachment literature: the importance of the mother-infant bond not only for physical satisfaction but for psychological well-being. There is a "mother" cat in this story who displayed a lack of desire, and who was replaced by human caregivers. At some point, Kristina and perhaps her mother observed that one kitten—Jujubee—began to imprint on her brother, and recognizing the importance of that relationship, the family decided to keep the kitten. There was no tone of jealousy or envy when Kristina told me about her brother's relationship with Jujubee, although she described her brother at some point as more interested in "computers" than in animals. While Kristina's use of the term "imprint" was casual and spontaneous, it indicates an awareness that close psychological, physical, and emotional bonds are vital and desirable aspects of lived, relational experience across a spectrum of animality. Kristina's statement shows that if or when one relationship fails, another can arise in its place. Deep relationality is ideal, and yet sometimes we are not the primary object of others' affections.

Lastly, there were some instances of children expressing a lack of interest or depth in their relationships with companion animals. My interview with twelve-year-old Chloe was perhaps the most difficult. It was at a somewhat crowded Tim Horton's off the highway, and her mother told me afterward that

Chloe was highly anxious about the interview. As a result, the interview was brief and Chloe appeared stressed throughout our time together, responding often in one word answers or saying "I don't know" frequently. Yet, one particular passage of Chloe's interview provides an interesting example of how children might downplay a pet relationship as banal or unremarkable:

I: And what kinds of things did you do with your guinea pigs?

Chloe: Nothing. They didn't do very much.

I: No? (*giggle*) Did you have them in your room?

Chloe: Uh, no.

I: No. Where did---

Mom: (*interrupting*) You did for a while! Sorry, I just…

Chloe: (*simultaneously*) For like a week.

I: No you can (inaudible, fixing microphone)

Mom: You had them in your room for like a year before I said I couldn't stand the stink anymore. (I: Oh really?) And you did so do things with them, I have pictures of you dressing them up.

I: (giggles)

Chloe: I did?

Mom: Yes.

Chloe's mother interjected often, a point that must be considered in the analysis. However, several important elements still emerge within this passage. On the one hand, Chloe likely forgot particular details of her relationships with her guinea pigs. She might have been embarrassed to share with me that she

"dressed them up," as her mother so freely offers within the interview. Chloe also may have wished to avoid providing details that might prolong a stressful situation—the interview—for her. Yet her relationship with her guinea pigs ended not long prior to the interview (roughly three years), and her detailed description of their deaths suggests she does recall various aspects of their relationships. In addition, despite the exchange above, Chloe insisted later that the guinea pigs were "kind of" boring. There are several reasons why Chloe may have felt or responded as she did, including the possibility that she never developed a strong sense of relationality with her guinea pigs.

Contrasted with Sabrina's classification of hamsters and other short-lived animals as less "connectable," than longer-lived animals, Chloe's comments make sense. Yet, as seen above, Lily disagrees about what guinea pigs are like, describing them as "good pets" and her own connections with her guinea pigs as deep, emotional, and loving. Perhaps the relationships themselves are as unique as the personalities, interests, fantasies, and desires of the humans and animals within them. What the children—and the individual animals—bring to the relationship and what they hope to experience is important in exploring what that relationship feels like and means to each of them. In some ways, my only access to the child-pet relationship as a researcher is through the children themselves, given that many of the pets I am interested in are now deceased. So, it is on the individual and unique children, and their sense of self, that I focus in the next section.

Animal Agency, Part 1

Erica Fudge (2008) questions the need or desire behind the historical, and increasingly popular, human decision to live with pets. Citing Jacques Derrida's philosophical contemplation of standing naked before his cat (2002), Fudge proposes that "pets are good to think with," but she also indicates that pets are, "as many of the households that include non-humans tell us, good to live with" (2008, p. 13). While it may be true that non-human animals are "good to live with," I wonder to what extent animals may consider humans as good to live with, or if they consider such things at all. Throughout this chapter, examples of animal agency emerged in various ways. There were both animal presences—Oscar held his pet hamster Fuzzy for part of our interview—and also rich descriptions of actions engaged in by now-deceased pets. I argue that such excerpts are not only examples of children's beliefs in animal subjectivity, minds, or emotions, but also important, material examples of animals' intentional acts within an interspecies relationship. In order to de-centre the role of humans in this project as much as possible, I want to focus attention on those examples now.

All of the children I interviewed still had at least one pet living in their home. Six of the interviews took place in the actual presence of non-human animal others, and a range of interactions took place.[1] Neville took a brief opportunity to stop our interview and find his cat Dizzy, so that I could see her. He brought her down in a makeshift bed he created. Lily's dog, Zelda was

present and interacted with both Lily and me at certain moments during the interview as did Mac's dog, Alice. While interviewing Sabrina and Jim at their mother's store, the family dog Chester was present and often stopped by to visit them or me and receive a scratch or a pet on the head. Chester had free run of the store and often greeted patrons.[2] Kristina's cat Jujubee came out to interact with us at the end of her interview, jumping up onto the furniture and sniffing my face. Such interactions are not trivial, and need not be backgrounded. They were entered into my field notes and became useful experiences for witnessing first-hand the kinds of interactions that children engage in with pets. In addition, the animals who were present—with the exception of Neville's cat and various pet fish perhaps—chose whether or not to interact with us.

Oscar's interactions were the most significant in terms of time and range of actions. He held his pet hamster, Fuzzy, during our second interview. Oscar often stopped to speak to Fuzzy in a high pitched tone, resembling the upward-inflected, singsong voice that some researchers call "doggerel" (Hirsch-Pasek and Treiman, 1982). Doggerel itself is a play on the term "motherese," which child development researchers observe in mothers talking to newborns and infants. In the example presented earlier, Oscar spoke about Fuzzy, not necessarily to him, in a high pitched voice. He described Fuzzy as "very cute" and indicated that he often "whiskers" people and crawls up their shirts. The term "whiskers" denotes a sense of active engagement by Fuzzy. It is something Fuzzy *chooses* to do to people whom he meets. Fuzzy initiates touch, and Oscar

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implied that such behaviour is a nice, friendly way of interacting. Oscar's new family dog, Ginger, was also present. Ginger tried at various times to interact with us, but Oscar's mother, Heather, typically shooed her away. When our interview was over, Oscar went outside to play with Ginger while I spoke to Heather about her own childhood experiences.

Children also spoke about intentional acts that their now-deceased pets engaged in, including regular routines. Like Oscar, Jim described the initiation of touch as an important act engaged in regularly by his pet cat, Pip. Pip slept around his head every night, an activity that Jim admitted he has missed since Pip died. Neville similarly suggested that his cat Thunder used to sleep under the covers next to him at night. Adele told me that her cat, Harley, came to the front door every day to greet her when she came home from school. Adele's account provides an example of temporal and spatial accounting by her cat. Harley's regular, repeated action was part of her routine. Adele, who was otherwise reluctant to make inferences about her cat's experience or mind, suggested that this was a simple greeting ritual; not a conditioned response for food, but an active choice made by Harley.

These examples foreground the intentional acts that companion animals regularly engage in across species boundaries. Often, such acts become routine and are overlooked. Admittedly, my own analysis tended to focus on the children's description of pets rather than my observations of their interactions with pets who were present. Yet both what was said and what was observed

indicate that children acknowledge and *value* animal agency in the form of pet initiated touch and proximity seeking. Within attachment literature, this might suggest that children are interested in being attachment figures themselves (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992; Melson, 2003). Attachment typically occurs within a dyad (Burman, 1993) and is the display of an emotional need for security and comfort (Holmes, 1993). Do pets then see children as attachment figures? It is difficult to say with any certainty whether the animals that were present or the deceased animals children described desired comfort and security from children; but it is at the very least not a hypothesis to discount. More observational research will help to illuminate what animals enjoy, desire, or even disdain in their relationships with children. Still, companion animals' active engagement with children—their desire to touch them or be close to them—is a strong indication that relationships with human others are important and significant to pets, for a variety of reasons.

Conclusion

This chapter focused upon children's memories of living with companion animals. Children's descriptions of their pet relationships explored themes of shared intentionality, empathy, and intimacy. Children and their pets engaged in embodied, shared activities within their homes, establishing familiarity and often a deep sense of relationality over time. Some children described their relationships through the concept of "connectedness," which became a useful

heuristic for exploring the range of child-pet relations. Children recognized that deep bonds were a possibility when living with companion animals and they suggested that connecting with a non-human other was often, though not always, a desirable achievement. Children's explorations of relationality also highlighted the primacy of connecting with others, not only for feeling good or being loved by another, but for developing a sense of themselves as unique, caring, observant, and knowledgeable individuals. Examples of animal agency throughout this chapter suggest that pets do indeed play an active role in connecting or otherwise relating with children by initiating play, touch, and even in aligning their actions with children's schedules. Children recognize such actions as intentional, and some even acknowledge their relationships with pets are built on love.

Notes

[1] My interview with Charlie and Juliet took place at their home, and while there were two dogs living with the family, the dogs spent the entire interview outside.

[2] In my experience with my own dog, Penny, I find that the presence or allowance of pets is an increasingly common occurrence. Many local businesses throughout Toronto even hang signs in the window that they have dog treats inside, and make an effort to learn the names of "regular" canine customers, perhaps even more so than their human counterparts.

Chapter 5. Death: Experiencing the End of a Companion Animal's Life

Greta got dead by the British. They hate dogs. – David, age 5

A few years ago, one of my parents' two pet dogs, a small Maltese named Greta, went missing. She was in the backyard with their Great Dane, Elsa, and then suddenly, she was gone. They drove around the neighbourhood, put up signs, and contacted the local animal shelters, but she was never found. A hawk or a coyote may have killed Greta. It was also possible that she ran away, got lost, and/or died somewhere. When my brother told his young son, David, about Greta, he randomly replied that the British had something to do with it. "They hate dogs," he insisted. No one in my family quite knew where David's idea about the British came from, but in a way, my nephew's reply aligned with some of Jean Piaget's theoretical suggestions about children and death (2004). Piaget argues that one particularly difficult lesson that comes from reflecting upon death is that there is not always a sufficient cause, a reasonable or acceptable explanation for why a thing happens. Piaget claimed that death was a phenomenon "par excellence" for children because, in exploring death, they were confronted—suddenly, cruelly—with the world of chance. According to Piaget, the prevalence of causality in the belief systems of a child is predicated on an extremely artificial notion of reality, one that begins and ends with some inventor's intentions, most likely God or human beings. Ultimately, then, a child looks for intentionality within a given event. "Organic life is, for the child, a sort

of story, well regulated according to the wishes and intentions of its inventor"
(Piaget, 2004, pp. 180-181). When David learned that Greta was missing, and
possibly dead, he sought out a story and a reason, and at the centre of that story
was a human actor—however vaguely described—whose intent was to "get
Greta dead." Beneath the surface of the comment, however, David may have
been struggling to understand how such a senseless series of events might come
to be in an otherwise intentional, teleological, and perhaps controllable world.

*[Bracketing 5.1 – At the start of this project, I became aware of a great irony at
work, an incongruity between my own personal experience and my academic curiosity
about children's experiences of pet death: I never experienced a major pet death
event in my own childhood. Yes, like the children I interviewed who had pet fish or
invertebrates, there had been countless fish and even a few dead hermit crabs
scattered throughout my childhood. I will explore this puzzling theme more below, but
interestingly, none of our family's longer-lived, tactile, and arguably more personable
pets ever died while I was a child. My pet cockatiel (Gus), my cat (Scamper), and
three of our dogs (Mandy, Daphne, Matilda) were all given away or sold by my
parents before they died. In fact, only one dog—a peek-a-poo named Cocoa—lived
her whole life with us. Cocoa was a gift for my fifth birthday, but she died 13 years
later when I was away at university, well past the age of my own participants. I look
back on those relationships as failures. I did not do all I should have to care for those
animals, and my parents could not or would not go out of their way to keep them in the*

house. Now, as an adult, I look back and recognize that death is not the only significant form of loss experienced in childhood: losses of childhood pets and even significant places are quite common. While some children did discuss non-fatal losses within the interviews, this study mainly focused on their experiences of being witness to the end of a companion animal's life.]

The emergent themes and superordinate themes presented in this chapter show how children reflected upon the temporal and spatial experience and ordering of a companion animal's death, the social contexts in which the children experienced a pet's death, the overarcing emotional mood or tone of the experience, and even thematic issues of morality and care surrounding death and euthanasia (see Box 5.1).

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Box 5.1 - Superordinate Theme: Experiencing a Pet's Death

Emergent themes:	# of coded excerpts:	% of interviews coded:
Temporal Experience of Death/Loss	31	100
Cause of Death	16	100
Emotional Experience of Death/Loss	24	90
Social Context of Death/Loss	16	90
Metaphor Use re: Death	20	80
Narrative of Death	16	80
Concept/Meaning of Death	11	70
Interaction with/Curiosity about Dead Bodies	10	70
Spatial Experience of Death/Loss	19	60
Observations of Pet's Decline	12	60
Witnessing Death/Euthanasia	11	60
Describing Euthanasia	10	60
Ideas about Death are Contextual	13	50
Thoughts about Death and Lifetimes	12	50

</div>

The top four themes across all interviews dealt specifically with temporality and causality, emotion, and social context. Other highly coded excerpts include children's spatial and embodied experiences of death.[1] Max Van Manen refers to these components of felt experience as "lifeworld existentials," defined as fundamental themes "by way of which all human beings experience the world, although not all in the same modality" (1990, p. 102). Following each exploration of an existential as described by children, I will focus more specifically on the emergent and abstracted thematic elements: what does a particular description of temporality, affect, relationality, or spatiality convey about the felt meaning of an

experience? My decision to separate these existentials and their thematic elements comes from a recognition that children's descriptions were rarely, if ever, all-encompassing.

To better understand the thematic aspects of the experiences shared by other participants I will outline each existential individually, working from the most prominent to the least. Each of these lifeworld experientials blended into the others to varying degrees, so while the first section deals with temporality specifically, it is clearly bound to other sections as well. In phenomenological literature, temporality is often tied intrinsically to causality (Ricoeur, 1992), and within the interviews I conducted, time and space were often two deeply interconnected experientials that were hard to separate. Of all my analytical codes, the existentials tied to death displayed the most co-occurrence (see Box 5.2). As an example of co-occurrence, many children made references to temporality regarding their experience of pet death, which overlapped or directly related to a particular description of space. Typically, temporal details often served as indicators of where children were when a pet died, although not all children referenced both time and space. Mac and Chloe, for example, described finding out about or witnessing the death of a pet in reference to school and a typical school day. Chloe found out about her cat Cookie's death "after school," and Mac witnessed his dog Suri's euthanasia at home, during his school-appointed lunch hour. Lily's guinea pig Cotton died during a summer morning, and she was away at camp. Neville was also at summer camp when his

cat Thunder died. Co-occurrence in and of itself is not significant, but considered within the context of the entire experience certain interesting factors arise: for example, Lily and Neville both implied that being away when their pet died was difficult for them, and as a result they both stayed home from camp the next day.

Box 5.2 – Death Code Co-Occurrence

	Death tied to suffering	Ideas about death are contextual	Cause of death	Deciding on another being's life/death	Distinct moment of death	Emotional experience of death/loss	Euthanasia	Narrative of death	Observations of pet's decline/illness	Social context of death/loss	Spatial experience of death/loss	Temporal experience of death/loss	Metaphor usage re: death	Totals
Death tied to suffering		1	1	3	1	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	4	22
Ideas about death are contextual	1		1		1	5	2				1	1		9
Cause of death	1	1		2	2	7	5	6	5	3	10	8	3	49
Deciding on another being's life/death	3		2		2	1	4	1	2	2	2	2	4	26
Distinct moment of death	3		1	2		2		5	2	3	7	6	1	34
Emotional experience of death/loss	1	5	7	1	2		3	5	1	7	10	7	4	50
Euthanasia	5		2	5	4	5		3	2	3	3	4	7	38
Narrative of death	1		6	1	5	5	2		3	7	11	10	2	54
Observations of pet's decline/illness	2		5	2	3	7	3	3		2	2	3	2	25
Social context of death/loss	1		3	2	7	10	3	7	2		10	7	4	50
Spatial experience of death/loss	1	1	10	2	6	7	4	11	2	10		14	4	76
Temporal experience of death/loss	1	1	8	2	1		7	10	3	7	14		3	66
Metaphor usage re: death	4		3	4	1	4	7	2	2	4	4	3		38
Totals	22	9	49	26	34	50	38	54	25	50	76	66	38	

Temporality: A "Good (Long) Life"

For the children I interviewed, the most prevalent emergent theme concerned the temporal experience of a pet's death. Using the emergent theme "Temporal Experience of Death/Loss," I coded 31 total excerpts, with at least one excerpt in each interview (see Box 5.1). Most references to temporality—21 out of 30—dealt explicitly with the timing of a pet's death, whether on a specific date, at a particular time of day, a given season, a specific age in the child's life, or in comparison to other events or pet deaths. Sabrina and Jim, who had experienced several deaths over the past two years, provided a good example of this kind of temporal accounting:

> I: …um (p) so, are there different animals that you know that have died?
>
> Sabrina: A lot. (*I & S giggle*)
>
> I: Have you experienced different like, tell me about your experiences with animals and death.
>
> Sabrina: Okay, well we had three cats, and they're all gone. And we had, we've had I think five hamsters and they're all gone.
>
> Jim: (*interrupting*) And they died all within like a week.
>
> Sabrina: And then we had…
>
> Jim: …which was weird.
>
> Sabrina: I don't know how many fish and they all died.
>
> Jim: Yep. Fish don't live very long.

Sabrina: And then we've had two ra--, or, we've had three rabbits, one's still alive (I: Mmhmm) but the first (Jim: two) two died, one died really recently like… (Jim: yeah) a few days ago.

I: Oh really?

Sabrina: Yeah.

I: (p) um, so you've had a lot of experiences with animals dying.

Sabrina: Mmhmm.

For Sabrina, the death experiences became lumped together: three cats are "gone," five hamsters are "gone," countless fish have died, and two rabbits are dead. Interestingly, Sabrina's use of language in this passage also ties temporality together with spatiality through a death metaphor: she describes her dead pets as being "gone" on two occasions. This spatial metaphor—"and then so and so was gone"—was used often throughout the interviews, tying time, sequentiality, and even embodied/spatial elements together within children's experiential accounts. There was a presence *and then* there was an absence. Only at the end of this excerpt did Sabrina explicitly mention a unit of time, noting that one rabbit died a few days before the interview.

In a more specific example, Charlie and Juliet argued at length over the timing and exact dates of recent dog deaths, specifically Chip and Flash. After leaving the room to check with her parents about the death of her dog Chip, Juliet returned, satisfied that she finally had it right:

Juliet: (*door opening again*) Yeah, I was thinking about Flash, it was actually he [Chip], um, died this year, February, February 22nd he died.

I: That was Chip?

Juliet: Yeah.

I: Okay, February 22nd, so that was pretty recently?

Juliet & Charlie: Mmhmm.

Other children chose to focus on their own age when a pet died, especially if that event occurred further in the past. Ophelia, for example, remembered that her cat Denny died when she was four. Kristina likewise remembered her dog Lassie dying when she was seven years old.

At times, children qualified the timing of a pet's death as either expected or unexpected. In the earlier excerpt, Jim interjected various temporal markers and comments to his sister Sabrina's account of their pets' deaths. In particular, he noted that the hamsters all died within a week of each other, and offered a reflection upon that experience as "weird." Shortly after the above excerpt, however, Sabrina provides a different reflection on the hamsters' deaths:

Sabrina: … like hamsters are really like, cute and stuff but you don't expect them to last very long because that's kind of what's normal (I: Mmhmm) like, its normal that they only last like a little while (I: Yeah) but like cats and bunny rabbits they last like, a few years and stuff and then you don't always realize that they're gonna disappear (I: yeah) they're just gonna be gone, right? So…

For Sabrina, hamsters don't "last very long," in comparison to say, cats or

rabbits, and so the anticipation or expectation of death may coincide with one

kind of animal and not another.

The age expectancy of animals—at least as it was normalized—played into

children's experiences of their deaths, becoming a common theme. For Sabrina, a

short life is normal for hamsters. Jim makes a similar suggestion about the

temporality of fish lives, claiming that fish do not live very long. As a result, his

comment suggests that the deaths of their fish were not "weird" or unexpected,

unlike the hamster deaths (at least for him). Twelve-year-old Kristina shared a

similar response about fish deaths, as did six-year-old Oscar. They shared

experiences of several fish dying in relatively quick succession, and here, Oscar

shares his experience:

> Oscar: Mmm, I used to have a fish… First I had three, then I got another
> three.
>
> I: So you had six goldfish?
>
> Oscar: Mmhmm, because first three died and then the other one died and
> the other one died, and then I didn't have any goldfish, and then we
> decided not to get anymore goldfish because we don't I got them in the
> winter and they die in the winter.
>
> …
>
> Oscar: Like one day (*H: indecipherable*) the one was dead, the next day the
> other was dead, and then next day the other was dead and I went to the
> shops and got some more fish, and then the next day the other was dead,

and the next day the other was dead, and the next day the other was dead
(*H giggles*)

I: And what did you do with all those fish?

Oscar: Um, just put them down the toilet.

Oscar describes his fishes' deaths as being a seasonal event: fish "die in the winter." Kristina and Jim, on the other hand, chose rather to describe fish as short-lived animals. In each case, there was an oversimplification of causality: fish die often or at predictable times, and so the experience became either mundane or was to be expected. Oscar's use of repetitive phrasing captures this sentiment particularly well: "one day the one was dead, the next day the other was dead… and the next day" and so on ad infinitum. We laughed, but to him, no single experience of fish death stood out from the rest.

Over the course of analysis, the emergent theme of life expectancy evolved into the concept of "lifetimes," describing those instances where children were concerned with the length of their pet's life, whether it was unfairly or cruelly cut short by some tragic event or illness. A good life, children seemed to indicate, was marked by reaching some pre-defined or standard age expectancy. I discovered a children's book, which explains death through the concept of a "lifetime," suggesting that all living things have lifetimes, at the end of which they die (Mellonie and Ingpen, 1983). In the book, beautiful illustrations accompany a rather factually presented description of age expectancies: insects typically live for only a few days, many fish and birds for a few years, and longer

lived beings like humans and whales can live over one hundred years. Long-lived trees can live significantly longer, for hundreds or even thousands of years, indicating temporalities of completely different scales. Still, every living being reaches an end in death:

> Fish, swimming in lakes and rivers or in the sea, can be so tiny it is hard to tell that they are there at all, or so big that the only way to describe them is enormous. Again, as far as we know, it seems that the smaller they are, the shorter will be their lifetime, but that is how it is for fish. Their lives can be as little as a day or so, or as long as eighty or ninety years. It is the way they live, and those are their lifetimes. (Mellonie & Ingpen, 1983, p. 27)

The book's explanation parallels what children often described or felt about life. Some animals lives longer than others, and size seemed to at least be a partial indicator. Children in this study often added a further insight to the length of an animal's life, however, as in Lily's description of Cotton's death:

> I: How long did you have Cotton for?

> Lily: Oh, about six or seven years (I: oh) which is pretty much a good life span of a guinea pig (I: yeah) so…

Knowing that a pet lived out the full of extent of its potential "lifetime," or even beyond, provided Lily with comfort. Cotton lived as long as could be expected, and so she had a good (read: appropriately long) life.

Adele similarly referred to the length of her cat's life when she died. Harley was already present in the family when Adele was born, and according to Adele, Harley always seemed "older." When discussing Harley's death,

however, Adele introduced the concept of "cat's years," an expression of time that is somehow different experientially or at least in measurement from human years:

Adele: Mmm. I calculated she's approximately 95 years old in cat's years.

I: Oh, how do you do that?

Adele: Well, I mean, its five years for every human year, so you divide 12 by 5 to see how many months and at that point you just go onto days and hours and minutes and stuff.

I: So she lived to be 95 in human years?

Adele: 95, 94 around there.

I: Is that, cat age?

Adele: Yeah.

When Adele explained her calculations, she spoke in a very matter-of-fact manner. Cat years, it seemed, are common knowledge. Still, much like Lily, Adele implied that Harley had reached quite an advanced age.

Another temporal element that arose throughout some interviews was children's own felt sense of the passing of time. Many children described the sequence of events that occurred while witnessing a pet's physical decline and the actual moment of death. Lily provided a particularly powerful account of her pet guinea pig, Cotton, dying in her arms:

Lily: Cuz, the day I knew she was gonna die was because um (p) she (sighs) started having spasms, she kinda was like, having her head up and down, like a lot, and she wasn't moving very fast like she was (I: yeah) and then I

gave her a carrot cuz I thought she was hungry, cuz I hadn't fed her in a few days (I: yeah) and she didn't finish it (I: yeah) she didn't eat it all, she took a few bites out of it. And then, um, (p) after dinner I grabbed her and we were watching TV downstairs and that's when she kinda started taking her last few breaths…

I: *(tone lowers)* Oh really?

Lily: *(makes swallowing sound)* …and kind of (p) died. Her heart beat was kind of faint (I: yeah) but then it (p) was gone.

I: Wow.

Lily: And it was very, it was like a slow death (pp) so… (ppp) then we put her (p) in a box. (p) We put her back in her cage. (I: Mmhmm) and I recently cleaned out her cage so we, her cage was nice and clean.

Lily was quite clear about that day's events. First, she indicated that she "knew" Cotton was going to die because of various bodily observations. She then described how she attempted to help her ailing pet, and even accounted for the fact that she had not "fed her in a few days." Lily then skipped ahead temporally to the next relevant plot points, describing the time (after dinner), location (downstairs), and sequence of Cotton's death (she took her last few breaths, her heartbeat grew faint, and she died). In the narrative, Lily does not indicate much of the passing of time outside of mentioning that Cotton had not been fed "for a few days," and that she died "after dinner." Curiously, however, Lily's conclusion in the story was that Cotton's death was "a slow death," indicating that for her, the experience was one of long duration. As a process, death can be quick or it can be slow. Lily paused after describing Cotton's slow death, and in

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my field notes, I indicated that she was rubbing her legs vigorously with her hands when telling me this story, and that she "teared up" a little bit while sharing these events. A slow death is painful to witness. In the end, Cotton died, and Lily's family put Cotton's body in her newly cleaned cage. Despite earlier admitting to not feeding Cotton for a few days prior to her death, here, Lily indicated that she had recently cleaned Cotton's cage. Putting her body in a clean cage seemed to be a mark of respect for Cotton as well as a final indication that Lily truly cared for her guinea pig.

Cause of Death: "Good" and "Bad" Ways to Die

Another dimension of children's descriptions of companion animal deaths entailed the cause of death itself. Causality is often tied to the lived existential of temporality through the felt sense of sequentiality, or of cause-and-effect. Paul Ricoeur, for example, (1992; 2004) highlights *muthos*, or emplotment as a central phenomenon in memory and the formation of narrative accounts of the past. Emplotment describes the temporal ordering of beginning, middle, and end. Ricoeur further elaborates:

> It is indeed in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure, and completeness which are conferred by *emplotment*, that the character preserves throughout the story an *identity* correlative to that of the story itself. (1992, p. 143, emphasis added)

The children in this study focused upon causality in such a way that revealed a desire for fairness and care amidst often difficult choices or experiences. Events were ordered so as to show that individual and family discussion of emotional

challenges led to the "right" decisions regarding a pet's life and death. The children often described themselves as good and caring, so deciding to euthanize a beloved pet was an action emphasized that sense of identity.

I applied the emergent theme "Cause of death" at least once within each interview and it was coded a total of 16 times overall (see Box 5.1). On the one hand, the question of how a pet died was present within my interview script (See Appendix A) and so it was a likely topic of conversation. Still, the actual description of causality in each interview coincides with a wealth of meaning below the surface. In particular, a *sense of fairness* was attributed to different kinds of death, euthanasia and accidents being the two predominant causes. Children often described a death as being "good" or "bad," based upon notions of suffering tied to the cause of death. Euthanasia, for instance, was typically described as a necessary decision made by the family, the parents, and sometimes even involving the children themselves. Euthanasia was a very prevalent cause of death across my interviews. In total, there were ten excerpts describing euthanasia, and the topic was discussed at varying lengths in six of the ten interviews. Each of the children that described euthanasia indicated that euthanasia is a decision that is made to avoid an animal's suffering. While it was difficult for children to speak about euthanasia—as conveyed through the heavy use of euphemisms designed to remove the starkness of the act, e.g., "put to sleep," or "put down"—they mostly remained confident that such a death was preferable to living in pain. Six-year-old Oscar, using the familiar metaphor of

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"putting to sleep," even described a neighbour's decision to euthanize her pet hamsters as a kind of "sweet" release from the pains of life:

I: What does that mean, put it to sleep?

Oscar: Um, like, like, they'll give it some medication that puts it to sleep, but like, um, like next, like, like my friend Elena had a hamster, um, two hamsters (I: Oh yeah) with her sister, um, and and they're both going to die and then they're going to bury, uh, and they're gonna give it sweet nmmnmm, some sweet medication.

I: Yeah?

Oscar: They don't want it, them to die in pain.

The use of euphemisms for death has been frowned upon in much of the bereavement literature, suggesting that it misleads children into believing that death and sleep are equivalent; or that if they fall asleep themselves, they may end up dead (Ross & Baron-Sorensen, 1998). Oscar's response indicated his awareness that the phrase "put to sleep" is not simply about sleeping. In fact, he was aware of death as the outcome, and implied that euthanasia provides a death free of pain. Still, he described euthanasia in a rather fantastical manner. The youngest of my participants, Oscar suggested that euthanasia entailed delivering "sweet medication." Why "sweet?" While there was no follow up explanation of "sweetness," at the time Oscar said this, my notes indicate he was holding his pet hamster, Fuzzy, close to his own face; he used the same tone of voice to describe the "sweet nmmnmm," as he did when he spoke directly to his hamster. Was Oscar speaking this way to soothe himself, the hamster, or was he

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just keeping things less serious? Regardless of the reason for this tonal shift, the meaning of Oscar's response remains clear: euthanasia is preferable to dying in pain. It is the right thing to do when an animal is suffering.

In the following excerpt, ten-year-old Ophelia shared what happened when her cat, Denny died:

I: So what do you think happens to an animal when it dies? Like, what, what happened to Denny?

Ophelia: I don't know but some--, oh, I kind of know, like, she was going through pain, so instead of like, the day before my birthday, um, my Dad took her to the vet and put, they put her to sleep.

I: They put her to sleep? (O: *indecipherable*) What does that mean?

Ophelia: So like, when an animal, like they go through pain, instead of making them have the pain longer, they just put them to sleep.

I: Mmhmm.

Ophelia: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and how do you feel about that?

Ophelia: Mmm, well, its better than her going through a lot of pain.

I: Yeah.

Ophelia: Yeah, so…

Like other children, Ophelia tied euthanasia—here again through the metaphor of "putting to sleep"—to the end of suffering. Unlike Oscar, however, Ophelia never actually referenced death in this passage. Based on other passages, it is

clear that Ophelia did understand death as separate from sleep, but regardless, the underlying meaning of her response was thematically the same: pain is undesirable, and in some instances at least, death is preferable. Euthanasia was presented as better than the alternative of living "through" pain. Given the ubiquity of this response, I am curious as to whose pain is being ended when the decision to euthanize a pet is made? For whom is euthanasia the preferable choice?

The code "Describing euthanasia," was concurrent 50 percent of the time with another code, "Deciding on another being's life/death." This linkage suggests that a preference for euthanasia is at least somewhat tied to children's perception of their own roles in a relationship. This group of children was typically aware that living with animals entails responsibility. By implication, they often recognized their own role in the quality of life of their pets. Yet this theme of deciding on life/death for a companion animals suggests they were also aware of their role in the quality, method, and timing of a pet's death. It is possible that the use of metaphors, undoubtedly passed along from family members, is a way of coping with the difficulty of making a decision to euthanize a pet. One participant, Mac, demonstrated a more complete linguistic approach to the reality of euthanasia:

I: Um, so yeah, so tell me about what happened when, when, when Suri… died.

Mac: (p) um, she, because she's um, so, she was so old that, I already told you this, her leg was bad, so, and she couldn't walk anywhere. So we thought it was better to just like, put her down. (I: Mmhmm) And then, so these doctors came over and they got the needle and stuck it into her (*rising inflection at end of each sentence*) and then she died, but (p) yeah.

While Mac does refer to the decision to "put her down," he is straightforward in his description: doctors stuck a needle into Suri and she died.

Also of note is that within this excerpt, Mac used the pronoun "we," including himself as part of the decision to euthanize Suri. Many of the children spoke in this inclusive tone, using "we" or "us" to describe the decision-making process leading up to euthanasia. Adele was more descriptive than Mac about her participation in the family's collective decision to euthanize her cat, Harley:

I: So tell me then about what happened when uh, Harley died.

Adele: Well, we were really sad and we didn't do much that day.

I: How did, how did she die?

Adele: We, put her down.

I: Mmhmm. Was there a reason why?

Adele: Um, she had a lot of problems with her health like, her kidneys were failing, she had a tumour in her stomach, her blood pressure was really high (I: yeah) and because her kidneys were failing it was letting off like, gases, and wasn't cleaning her blood properly (I: Oh) so, um, she started getting nauseous, at least that's what the vet told us, and she stopped eating entirely so, it was about the fourth day that she hadn't eaten.

… and she, you had to put like, little bowls for her all the way around the house filled with water (I: mmhmm) um, because, because her kidneys

were failing and everything else was just going wrong with her, her, she had to drink like, three times as much as a normal cat would (I: Yeah) and even then it, her water, the water was just enough to keep her alive when it comes to the water, like, this might sound kind of weird, but her poo (I: yeah) it was like, rock hard, because like, I change her litter (I: yeah) and the one kernel I found was like rock hard and nothing would (p) (I: Yeah) it was just, like, alright we, it would be animal cruelty to keep her alive much longer.

I: Yeah, so you and your Mom decided, like recognize that she was sick, and you took her to the vet.

Adele: Well, we didn't take her to the vet, we were out, and on our way back, we went to the vet on, last Thursday (I: Mmhmm) and asked them what we should do, and um, he looked at some of the files and was like, uh, yeah, her kidneys are failing and she has a tumour, so it could be either one, and then we eventually looked into it some more and found out that it was the tumour that was the problem, I mean, the kidneys that were the problem.

…[the vet] said, would you like us to give uh, your cat, a couple more, we could, we can arrange something tonight, or we can arrange something on Saturday, and give her a chance to, see if she'll eat more, and we decided to do it on Saturday.

For Adele, based on the level of information she and her family received from the veterinarian, the decision became clear: euthanasia was the right thing to do. She even indicated that it would be "animal cruelty" to keep Harley alive. Adele was the only child to use that exact phrase, although other children spoke of contexts for animal death or suffering that they found reprehensible. Typically, those

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children described issues of companion animal abuse, or in Neville's case, the suffering of animals in factory farms. Adele's description was unique not only because she made a reference to "animal cruelty," but also because she suggested that it was cruel to keep Harley alive while she was suffering. Her belief is in line with animal welfare and animal rights literatures, which suggest that fair treatment is not only a matter of avoiding harmful actions, but also a matter of recognizing and easing another being's suffering (Singer, 2009). Adele's belief may be a matter of social significance, as she indicated earlier that both her mother and her best friend share many of her views on animals.

In contrast to the inclusiveness of Adele and Mac, other children spoke more vaguely about the decision to euthanize, or passed the responsibility for the decision on to other family members. In Ophelia's excerpt above, she used the pronoun "they" to describe the actors or decision makers in her story; in particular, she referenced her father as the one who took the cat, Denny, to the vet to "put her to sleep." Interestingly, Ophelia earlier indicated an anxiety at the time of her cat's death that she was to blame:

> I: …if you could, tell me about what happened when Denny died. (O: Uh) Do you, how old were you?
>
> Ophelia: Probably like, around 4.
>
> I: Four? Yeah, and do you remember what happened?
>
> Ophelia: Uh, I thought that I fed her too much treats and killed her but no, it wasn't that (*Everyone giggles*)

I: That's what you thought?

Ophelia: (*giggling*) Yeah.

I: Why did you think that?

Ophelia: I don't know, I don't know, I just did.

I: How long did you think that for?

Ophelia: Probably just when I was like, four.

In light of her belief and guilt, one might interpret Ophelia's use of the pronoun "they" rather than "we" as self-comfort or assurance: she thought she was to blame for Denny's death. Later, upon accepting her lack of blame, she spoke of her father as the person who made the distinct decision to end Denny's suffering and pain. It is also likely that, given that Ophelia was only four at the time, her parents did not actually involve her in the decision-making process to euthanize the cat.

In contrast to euthanasia as the cause of death, two children described incidents where pets died as a result of an unexpected event or tragedy: Neville and Chloe. In my interview with thirteen-year-old Neville, the experience was described as an epic, world-ending tragedy:

I: Do you remember what you thought about it [the cat's death] like, about what they told you?

Neville: I think I was like so, so sad I just didn't think, I just thought I just think, my, the world's gonna end, its so, its so sad that I just can't do anything, (I: Mmhmm) I... it was kinda like the same with when my newt died (I: Yeah) it was just, um, it was just like, my life is over, I can't do

anything, this is just… a dead end. Everything shouldn't have stopped here, because she was only one and a half (I: Right) yeah, and, she had, and so my Mom saw her like five minutes before (I: Yeah) she died and she was driving back from the grocery store like, cuz she, my Dad saw her like five minutes before and then my Dad drove, my Mom drove back and she saw a cat, just like, someone's cat just died and then it was, Dizzy (I: Yeah) I mean, Tul--, I mean, Thunder, sorry.

Neville used three particularly powerful symbolic statements to convey the impact of Thunder's death: "the world's gonna end," "my life is over," and that the experience was "a dead end." The immensity of the tragedy is accounted for through a few kinds of temporal accounting: Thunder was young ("only one and a half") and she had just been seen alive ("five minutes before").

In contrast, twelve-year-old Chloe was more reserved in her description of her cat, Cookie's sudden death:

I: Okay, um, and so tell me about when Cookie died. What happened when Cookie died?

Chloe: Um, (pppppp) she got hit by a car.

I: Oh she did. And how did you find that out?

Chloe: Um, I was at school and my Mom was at home and she was going to get something from her van, and then Cookie walked off the road and sat in our lawn.

I: Mmmhmm ,and so, do you remember what your Mom said to you? You were in school, so she told you while you were in school?

Chloe: Um, when we got home.

I: When you got home, okay. What did she say to you?

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Chloe: (p) That Cookie had died.

I: How did you feel?

Chloe: Sad.

I: Yeah? What does that feel like? (p) Can you describe what that feels like for me, be more specific?

Chloe: No.

Generally speaking, Chloe was less talkative and quieter than Neville. When I asked her what happened, she paused for over six seconds before responding in a low tone of voice. In my field notes, I described her as "upset," noting she "mostly looked away from me." Chloe's mother suggested afterward in private conversation than her daughter was quite anxious about talking to me, and had been throughout the school day. In addition, the location of her interview—a Tim Horton's off the highway—did not help to establish a comfortable interview setting. Yet, it is clear that Cookie's death was a painful experience for her, and given earlier interview excerpts in which she declared her joy at being "chosen" by Cookie and getting to keep her, the cat's death just a few years later was tragic.

In a few instances, the distinction made between a "good death" and a "bad death," was less about the cause of death than the children's perception of the animal's own experiential reality and its preparedness:

I: Um, so I'm gonna ask you a weird question, so, is it the same when a dog dies, sometimes people kill animals on purpose (A: Mmm.) (M: Mmhmm) do you know that?

Mac: Yeah.

I: For like different reasons (M: Mmhmm) what, what kind of reasons might that be?

Mac: To make clothing (I: Yeah) to, make food, stuff…

I: Yeah, is that different than when a dog dies?

Mac: Yeah. Cuz, when, cuz when a dog dies it's ready to die.

I: Oh yeah.

Mac: When you kill a dog, its not ready to die. Most of the time.

Here, Mac made a distinction between a dog dying, presumably of old age, and someone killing a dog. The important distinction, for Mac, was whether or not the hypothetical dog was "ready" to die. While not straightforwardly empathetic in terms of his experience, Mac's response suggests a need for attending to the desires of animals; his reply stands against the long-held belief that animals do not anticipate their own death (Buchanan, 2008).

In a somewhat related theme, there were some questions within my interviews surrounding the death of animals for the food industry, research, and clothing. In the following excerpt from my conversation with Lily, she actually becomes confused about the question, misinterpreting my own and her Mother's (indicated by M) phrasing for a metaphorical reference:

I: …so, let me ask you a follow up question to that, cuz that's about an animal on a farm dying, so animals die on farms, animals die um, for food and for clothing and all kinds of things. Do you think that that's – different,

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or do you think that that's the same as when a pet dies? Do you feel like they have different kinds of lives, or (L: um) what do you think about that?

Lily: (pp) what do you mean like, wild animals?

I: Wild animals dying versus domestic animals dying or pets dying, like, do you think that that's all the same kind of thing? Maybe I'm not asking that kind of (p) I don't know.

Mom: Like a chicken dying for food (I: yeah) is that the same as Rosie dying?

Lily: (p) I don't think it's the same, cuz (p) ooh, cardinal, that was a bright cardinal (*all laugh*) um, well, when a chicken dies for food, like, what do you mean like, I'm dying for food?

Mom: No, a chicken that…

I: Like when, you know, when a farmer goes out and they've raised chickens and

Lily: (*interrupting*) and they don't feed them?

I: the chickens go to market, and they take it to the market for people to eat. (L: Um) Is that different than when Rosie died, or?

Lily: That is different, because they kill 'em when they're not ready to be die---when their life isn't, when their life is done, and um, when Rosie died, she's lived a long life (I: yeah) and it's a natural death (I: yeah) rather than killing them by chopping their heads off (I: right) or, I think that's cruel (p) really cruel, and I don't think it should be done, so (ppp)

Lily believed that animals are not always ready to die. Their deaths can be

unnatural, cruel, and even immoral considering whether their "life is done."

Much like in the previous section, here Lily makes reference to the importance of

a "long life," as a key component for judging the moral quality of an animal's death. Causality and temporality become linked together again to understand what it means when a being dies—whether the timing and the reason for death match up, are justifiable, or even *feel* right.

Peter Singer's often controversial utilitarian view suggests that there is a difference between a "timely and an untimely death" (2009, p. 576), while questioning the implications of such an axiom for animals. Singer indicates that the basis for a death to be considered tragic and untimely is the capability of a being to make plans for the future; as a result, when those plans are made impossible because that being dies, it is considered tragic. On the contrary, beings incapable of making plans or imagining future goals—whether they are of advanced age, expecting death, or simply incapable—may die less tragic deaths. Further, beings that suffer endlessly may even be given a "timely" death, in the event that it ends their pain. Singer has often been criticized for a depersonalized, overly general, and mathematical approach to ethics that can be read as ableist (Wieseler, 2012), a view he has addressed by considering widely held humanistic morals as crucial for any understanding of ethics (Singer, 2009). Still, his exploration of "timely and untimely deaths" reveals an underlying speciesism—defined by Singer as the belief that membership in one's own species, typically *Homo sapiens*, is the sole condition for moral dignity and worth—that some of the children above eschew. In short, children such as Lily, Adele, Neville, and Mac feel and acknowledge animals' moral worth, regardless

of the kind of speciesist, capabilities approach that requires beings to be like humans in some regard before receiving moral consideration.

Affect: "A Bunch of Different Feelings Mixed Together"

Another predominant theme within the interviews was children's affective responses to the death of their pets. Reading through and comparing the interview transcripts, it would seem that largely, children described their immediate emotional response to a pet's death as "sad." While sadness was the most common emotion—it was present in 15/24 of the "emotion" excerpts—children's accounts of their affective experiences differed in important ways. There were a variety of physical, cognitive, and metaphorical descriptions of sadness across each interview. In addition, children's emotional experiences were not limited to feeling sad over the loss of a pet. There were also wonderful descriptions of emotions such as worry, guilt, anger, despair, curiosity, love, and even relief.

Still, sadness was a prevalent emotion among the participants. Descriptions of sadness ranged from strictly embodied accounts, to explanations based on other emotions, as well as metaphorical portrayals. When I asked Charlie and Juliet—a brother and sister I interviewed together—to describe their reactions to the death of their dog Flash, Charlie provided the following explanation:

I: Charlie, how did you feel?

Charlie: Um, well I wasn't really crying, I was just a bit sad, and I was sad inside my body, but not on the outside.

I: Yeah.

Charlie: Mmhmm.

I: So, if, pretend that I'm an alien from outer space or a robot, and I don't know what it means to be sad, cuz I've never felt sad before, how would you describe sad as a feeling? Like, what do you feel when you're sad?

Charlie: I just feel like, my body just (p) literally doesn't (p) care, they just (p) don't really want talk about it and it gets this like, really shaky feeling.

I: Mmhmm.

Charlie's description of sadness was particularly physical. Not only did Charlie indicate that he was sad only "inside" his body, but also he suggested that sadness is predominantly an embodied emotion: when he is sad his body gets "shaky feeling." Kristina also described sadness through physicality, suggesting that sadness makes her "stomach hurt." Charlie even personified his body, saying that it "literally" does not care and does not want to talk when he (or it?) is sad.

Charlie's description also made reference to the act of crying. Charlie was clear that he did not cry when Flash died, although later he changed his answer, claiming that he cried the next day and that he never cried when their other dog, Chip died. Crying, a physical action tied to the feeling of sadness, is sometimes socially undesirable. Mac, for instance, noted that he had to leave the house while his dog Suri was euthanized because he did not "want to cry." It would

seem that leaving the house has nothing to do with crying, unless Mac did not want to be *seen* crying. Other children, however, spoke freely and unreservedly about crying. Neville, for instance, explained that he cried "for hours and hours," and even into the next day. Lily also remembered "crying a lot." There was no clear indication of who admitted crying and who did not; age, gender, and type of pet did not seem to influence a child's willingness to share their immediate, emotional response. This falls in line with various psychological studies that indicate pet care as a domain often free from gendered patterns, where both young boys and girls recognize that loving and nurturing a pet is not necessarily a "female" role (Fogel, Melson & Mistry, 1986; Melson & Fogel, 1989).

Often, sadness was referenced as part of or an addition to another, more specific emotion. For example, Adele described feeling both sad and "worried" about her cat being euthanized. Adele's experience of Harley's death was the most recent in terms of timing between the death and our interview, at just five days. As a result, her account of Harley's illness and death was highly detailed. Emotionally, Adele described feeling worried about Harley:

> I: Yeah, and how did you feel going into the vet that day?
>
> Adele: I felt really worried (I: yeah) and sad.
>
> I: Yeah, and how, so, this might sound silly, but describe to me how worried feels.
>
> Adele: Worried as in like, I was worried that maybe Harley would hurt when she died and stuff (I: Mmhmm) and, I was worried that it wouldn't be peaceful for her, and yeah.

I: Yeah, and so after that happened… um, are you okay?

Adele: Yeah.

I: Do you wanna stop?

Adele: No.

My intention in asking Adele how it feels to be worried was to gain a more phenomenological insight: what does it feel like to *be* worried? Adele's response, however, suggests that she was focused within the interview on *why* she was worried.[2] She was worried because of the uncertainty of knowing how Harley would experience being euthanized. Would it be peaceful? Would Harley be in pain? At another point in our conversation, we focused upon her feeling just after Harley died:

I: Oh Saturday, so it was only like, five, six days ago. So how do you feel now?

Adele: I'm pretty upset, I mean, I haven't cried in the last few days (I: Mmhmm) in the last two days, but (p) I'm still really sad. It's strange coming home and not seeing Harley.

Adele described the intensity verbally, saying she was still "pretty upset" and "really sad," and physically, she had not cried for a few days. Crying, it seems, is one of the most immediate physical responses to experiencing the death of a loved other, and yet it is the action that subsides more quickly than the associated, internalized emotion. Finally, Adele noted that it is "strange" for her to not see Harley, a phenomenologically noteworthy response that suggests we

become accustomed to visual presences in our lives in terms of space and relationality; the loss of those presences impacts us emotionally.

Kristina's dog Lassie died roughly five years prior to our interview, at the opposite end of the time spectrum between death and interview from Adele. Below, she described a series of events around Lassie's death:

I: Yeah, that's kind of a long time ago. (K: Yeah) Um, do you remember how you felt when Lassie died?

Kristina: I was like really sad because, it was like, sudden, because we just like, cuz she was like crying and like scratching her back (I: Mmhmm) so like, I was really sad cuz like no one really saw it coming (I: Yeah) it was just, like, out of nowhere.

I: And, since you were seven did you know what it meant when, when they told you that she was dead?

Kristina: I don't think I really did, but they gave me like a book (I: Oh yeah) and then, it wasn't really a good day, because the book, it scratched my eye, cuz I was reading it and like, I was putting it down and it like, scratched my eye (I: Ouch) and so we went to go get ice cream (I: yeah) and the ice cream spilt on me, so we just decided to go home (*both giggling*) because…

I: That was a bad day! (K: yeah) and so, what kinds of things were in the book, do you remember what the book was called?

Kristina: Um, the book (p) I don't know what it was called, but it was like, just telling you that like, like, um, your animal's like, gone to a better place, and like, it will still always be there with you (I: Mmhmm) even though its not like physically there.

I: Yeah. And, do you, did that make you feel better?

Kristina: A little bit, yeah.

I: Yeah.

Kristina: Until it scratched me.

I: Until the book scratched you.

Kristina: (*giggling*) Yeah.

Kristina's emotional experiences had less to do with her sense of Lassie's suffering. Instead, she was focused upon how her dog's death impacted *her.* On the one hand, Kristina described Lassie's death as sad because it was unanticipated. She and her family were not prepared, a detail she ties to her emotional response of sadness. On the other hand, Kristina described Lassie's death as the beginning of a series of emotionally upsetting events: she got a book to help her cope and the book scratched her eye, and then she got an ice cream and it spilled on her. At the end of this excerpt, she even repeats that the book scratched her, negating any comforting effect it had had on her. While Kristina and I were both giggling at various points of her story, it is clear that this more distant memory is associated with a variety of bad feelings and events, mainly focused upon Kristina as a victim and/or the subject of folly.

Finally, some of the children described their emotional experiences as different from one death to the next. While talking about the death of his cats, Jim described feeling both sad and "disappointed" that euthanasia was seemingly the only option left to them:

Jim: There was like (p) they came to our house the vets, and like, we all knew what was gonna happen so we were all really sad, and like, we put them on the uh, we had an island (I: Mmhmm) so we put them on the island and then the vet (p) the vet shaved off a bit of their leg or something and then the needle in and they were like, stressed for a few seconds and then it was, they died, and for Pip, we went to the vet and um, we were all there and it was (pp) sad and he was like (p) trying to get off and everything (p) and then um, yeah…

I: And so how did you feel, when that happened, when it was happening?

Jim: Sad and kinda disappointed I think.

I: Disappointed?

Jim: Well (p) disappointed that we had to put them down.

I: Mmhmm

Jim: And um, (pp) I wanted to be there cuz I just felt like you know, I should be seeing this (I: Yeah) as like a neat experience to make it easier later in life.

I: Were you, are you glad now that you were there?

Jim: I think so, yeah.

Jim wished that there was another way to help his cats, and yet his disappointment turned eventually to a sense of opportunity: in witnessing the euthanizing of his cats, he could learn about death and gain valuable experience. Jim's sister Sabrina echoed his sentiment, agreeing that she was glad she was present when the cats were euthanized. Later, as Jim described what sadness feels like, he again referenced disappointment:

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Jim: Okay, um (p) its (p) I think its kinda smothering, like it kinda smothers all other feelings (p) um (p) its sometimes, like there's different kinds of sad, you can feel sad and you start crying, or you can feel sad and you just kinda (p) you feel like you've never felt like that before, you and um (p) its kinda like (pp) its not necessarily like, dark, like its not like you feel like you just don't think anything else, but its like, why does it have to be like this (I: Mmhmm) sometimes (I: yeah) so, its kind of like a (pp) disappointing, mad, and like, (pp) its like a bunch of different feelings mixed together to make one sad feeling.

For Jim, sadness feels different each time, and it is composed of a "bunch" of feelings.

In a similar vein, Kristina described the "lessening" of her own emotional response from one experience of death to the next. In the excerpt below, we were talking about the death of her hermit crabs. Her first three hermit crabs died rather quickly, something she believed at the time was a result of their dislike for her. When she got a second group of hermit crabs, they died as well, and she provided this reflection:

I: And when they died, do you remember, what you, how you felt about that?

Kristina: Well, the first ones, I was really sad, but the second ones I wasn't really surprised cuz like, my other ones died too (I: Yeah) but like, the second ones were like really gross, cuz like, I went to pick up the shell, and like the body came out of the shell (I: Oh, really?) so it was really, gross.

I: Yeah?

Kristina: Yeah.

I: And what did you do with them?

Kristina: Um, (p) I think we threw them out. (I: Yeah) But I think, I buried one inside a plant and my Mom got mad at me cuz it was like, (*laughing*) smelling up the house.

I: Oh (*laughs*) Yeah, well, when their bodies rot, I guess they kinda stink.

Kristina: Yeah.

In the first experience of hermit crabs dying, Kristina noted she was really sad. Yet, just a short time later, she forgoes any description similar to sadness, suggesting she was not surprised that her second hermit crabs died. Once again, life expectancy, death, and emotional response seem to be linked somehow. Kristina learned first-hand that hermit crabs are fragile, and so the death of the second group was both less surprising and less emotional. Kristina also explored a curiosity about animal bodies when the second hermit crabs died. She described their corpses as "really gross," and recounted a moment where she got in trouble with her mother for burying a hermit crab's body in a potted plant. Her laughter is indicative of the overall emotional response, at least regarding the second group of crabs: she was not *as* upset.

Spatiality & Embodiment: The Importance of "Being There"

Finally, I will briefly explore two themes that emerged within my analysis of children's experiences of pet death. These themes are connected to children's experiences of spatiality and embodiment. The primary spatial components of

most children's accounts entailed both where a pet died and where they were when it happened. Typically, pets died either in or around the home or at the veterinarian's office. As for the children's location when death occurred, they described being at home, at school, away at camp, or at the veterinarian's office. Essentially, children emphasized whether they were bodily present or absent when a companion animal died. Both Chloe and Lily shared distinct memories of where they were when each of their guinea pigs died, and each compared how their own locations impacted their overall experiences, whether emotionally, or simply in terms of their knowledge of events:

> Chloe: Um, we were away when Angel died, and then Twinkie died wi, when um, when I was with her.
>
> I: Mmhmm, what was that like?
>
> Chloe: Um, sad, but not as hard as… (*loud background noises*)
>
> I: (*interrupting*) Sad but not what?
>
> Chloe: Sad but not as hard as you know, not being there (*banging*) when she died.
>
> I: So it was different when, the two guinea pigs died, because one you were there for and one you weren't there for. Why was it more sad that you couldn't be there, you said, when Angel died? Why would you think that's more sad?
>
> Chloe: Cuz you couldn't say goodbye to her (*rising inflection suggests a question?*)

Chloe's absence at the death of a pet had an actual emotional impact. When Angel died, she was not there, and so she "couldn't say goodbye to her." While

she uses the pronoun "you" in her reply, suggesting a general response, it was actually Chloe who suggested that Angel's death was more difficult than Twinkie's because of her inability to "be there." Lily provided a similar response regarding her own guinea pigs:

> Lily: I was at camp when Buttercup died and I had know, I had knew nothing about, but when Buttercup, but when Cotton died I kind of braced myself cuz I knew she was gonna die so…

Lily's experience was highlighted earlier because she was actually holding Cotton in her hands when she died. It was a powerful moment both in Lily's life and within the interview setting. Her description of intimate embodiment with Cotton—sitting on the couch together, actually in contact—at the very moment of death was unique. When Buttercup died, however, Lily described being away at camp, and not knowing anything until she came home that day.

It is unclear whether "being there" is always desirable. Both Chloe and Lily imply that being present when a pet dies made it easier for them to say goodbye or to be prepared. In the previous section, recall that Jim and Sabrina described a desire to be present when their cat Pip was euthanized, hoping that it would prepare them for future experiences. Several children described euthanasia as occurring within the home, a relatively new trend within veterinary practice, according to my interview with Helen Hobbs. Helen is a licensed (human) funeral director who opened up her own side business dealing directly with companion animal deaths, memorials, and services. Helen has

made a successful business in the east end of Toronto, recognizing the increased

desire to honour pets' roles in the family. The desire to have a pet euthanized in

the home suggests on the one hand a recognition and sensitivity to the animal's

own comfort. People want to feel an animal's death will be easier if it is in

comfortable, familiar surroundings. It also suggests that there is a desire to

experience the pet's death together, as a family, and the home is a secure place

for such an experience. While some children described being there as important

or desirable, others, such as Mac, told me that they did not want to be present:

> I: So, were you there?
>
> Mac: Um, yeah. And then we went to go get jawbreakers. Me and my Dad? We went there (I: Yeah) because we didn't want to see it.
>
> I: Yeah. And how did you feel about the whole thing?
>
> Mac: I was sad (I: Yeah), it was at a lunchtime at school, so…
>
> I: Oh, you came home from school.
>
> Mac: I didn't want to cry… (p) Uh-huh.

Mac's family decided to euthanize their dog, Suri, at home. Yet Mac's decision at

the time was to leave with his father because they "didn't want to see it."

Psychological literature regarding children and pet loss typically suggests that

each family take care to consult with children as to whether or not they wish to

be present when an animal is euthanized. In *Pet Loss and Human Emotion: Guiding*

clients through grief (Ross & Baron-Sorensen, 1998), the authors share a story of a

two-child family—Brandon and Katie are the children—and their 17-year-old

dog, Peanut:

> The family gently stroked Peanut while the veterinarian administered the
> injection. Peanut slowly wagged his tail against the table. In a matter of
> seconds, Peanut's body became still. The veterinarian listened to Peanut's
> heart. Everyone in the room was silent. When the veterinarian said that
> Peanut was dead, Katie began to cry. Joyce held her close as she wept.
> Brandon was silent and looked from one person to another in disbelief.
> Tim told Brandon that Peanut was gone now and that he was relieved of
> the pain he had felt. Brandon pressed his face against his mother's skirt
> and silently sobbed. Tim's eyes filled with tears. The children slowly
> moved from their mom and went to Peanut's body. (Ross & Baron-
> Sorensen, 1998, pp. 75-77)

In this story, the children chose to be present when the veterinarian gave Peanut

his shot. A subtle variety of spatial elements are described including the overall

felt experience of the room "silent." In addition, Brandon and Katie's movement

through space is highlighted. They both sought comfort through being close to

their mother, Joyce, and when they felt the need, they "slowly moved" away

from her and toward Peanut's body, now still upon the table.

Metaphors of Death

In this section, I will present several metaphors that arose within my interviews

with children. A metaphor is defined as "a figure of speech where a word of

phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable" (*OED,* n. 1.)

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest that metaphors are not merely "devices of the poetic imagination," but actually "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (1980: 1). Paul Ricoeur (1978) also suggests that metaphors are not only linguistic, but perceptual as well. Ricoeur cites Aristotle's claim that metaphors are effective not for their grammatical qualities, but because they have a "pictorial function" (1978: 144). Each of these senses of metaphor arose in my conversations with children about the death of their pets.

Juliet's description of her dogs' deaths relied on a mixture of emotional words and metaphors. I asked her how she felt about her family's decision to euthanize her dog, Champ:

Juliet: It was sad and good, because he, you didn't want to see your dog die, so you just wanna put him down.

I: Yeah.

Juliet: And, so it didn't die.

…

I then asked Juliet to describe "sadness:"

Juliet: I think it would kinda like (p) mean or feel like (p) you feel like really down and you don't feel happy at all, or something.

I want to focus for a moment upon Juliet's brief description of sadness through the use of two directional metaphors: she described sadness as feeling "down," just as she described euthanasia as putting the dog "down." What does this

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directional metaphor convey about sadness? Lakoff and Johnson describe this as an "orientational metaphor," which arises "from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (1980: 14). The example they give is that happiness is often described as upward.

One can thus imagine that the embodied experience of feeling sad connotes a downward orientation. When one is sad, their body "feels heavy," or as Charlie stated in his description, "it feels like it does not care." As a result, one experiences the pull of gravity downward toward the ground. Artists often depict sadness through subjects that are slouched over, looking down, or lying on their backs. In *Melancholia's Dog*, Alice Kuzniar (2006) references a painting by Lucian Freud, the grandson of Sigmund Freud, entitled "Triple Portrait." The painting depicts a woman reclining on her bed with her two whippets, looking down some distance in front of her, with her head propped up by her hand. The overall effect of the painting is heaviness, a sense of the subject being pulled down by sadness. Sabrina echoed this description, providing a more physical and—like Charlie—internal account of sadness as a directional experience:

> S: Um, well for me its [sadness] kind of like a heaviness, where you can just kind of feel it weighing down on you, but its not as much like, on the in— outside, its more on the inside (I: yeah) like, parts of you just become heavy and then, often I just feel like crying and stuff and then my throat gets a little tight or something and then, I can feel it (I: yeah) (p) and its, its just like, yeah… um…

Perhaps for similar reasons, death itself was often described through a downward directional metaphor, as we have seen throughout this chapter in describing euthanasia as "putting an animal down." In addition, there were moments when I asked children what death meant to them, or how they defined it. Lily's answer also explained the directionality of death:

I: …what does that mean, "death"?

Lily: Um (p) death kinda means when a person or an animal or a thing, like plants (J: yeah) (p) stop growing and just kinda stop breathing and stop producing oxygen (J: mmhmm) and they just kinda fall down or (p)

I: Yeah. (p) What happens? What do you think happens after… like a lot of people believe different things about what happens…

Lily: I believe that the spirit goes up to heaven (J: mmhmm) and the body stays down.

I: Yeah.

Lily: So.

I: And what happens to the body?

Lily: The body gets buried or burned.

Lily's explanation of death as a "split" between the spirit and the body, coinciding with a cultural belief in heaven, partially explains another layer of this metaphor. In defining death, she used the word "stop" three times before concluding that dead things "fall down." Finally, she noted that while the spirit rises, the body stays down to get buried—even further downward—or burned. Feeling sad about death, in a sense, aligns our emotions with the same

downward trajectory experienced by the object that has died and has stopped, fallen down, and been buried. As we watch significant others in our lives fall, die, and become buried, our attention becomes focused downward, our bodies become heavy, and we feel pulled down with them.

The story of Peanut above (Ross & Baron-Sorensen, 1998) also highlights a common metaphorical description of death, one that ties embodiment and spatiality together. Just as children described sadness and death through downward directional metaphors, children often described death as a state of "being gone," "away," or "not there." In Peanut's story, it is the father, Tim, who uses the phrase, "Peanut [is] gone now." In my interviews, children themselves applied this spatial and embodied metaphor to their experiences, indicating an intergenerational transmission of language use. After I asked Oscar if he talked to anyone when his dog Sneakers died, he described how his parents taught him about death:

> I: Yeah? Did they teach you anything about, what it is that, when an animal dies?
>
> Oscar: Mmm, mmhmm.
>
> I: (*nervous giggle*) Um, do you remember what that was?
>
> Oscar: Um, how an animal dies and never comes back.

Kristina shared a very similar experience, regarding a conversation with her parents about her dog, Lassie:

I: Um, (pp) so, so a lot of people share their feelings when somebody dies or when an animal dies with somebody else, do you remember who you shared your feelings with, if you did?

Kristina: Um, probably my Mom. (I: Mmhmm) Like, I told her like a lot of stuff. And, maybe my Dad a little bit.

I: Do you remember some of the things you asked them, or said to them?

Kristina: (p) I think I asked them if um, she would ever come back? (I: yeah) and she said no.

I: Yeah. And how did that make you feel?

Kristina: Really sad.

Experiencing the death of a loved one is often described as "losing" them. Physically, they are no longer with us, even if their bodies remain. Kristina's curiosity about death when Lassie died was directed at the possibility of Lassie's return. She asked her parents if Lassie " would ever come back." She may have known that death is not a *place,* per se, but in using the metaphor, Kristina conveyed the felt sense that the deceased have left, that we have lost their presence in our lives. Adele's earlier suggestion that it felt "strange" to not see her cat Harley at home is similar. For many of the children, a pet's death was made sensible through this metaphor of "being gone," and never returning. This coincides with the perceptual dimension of metaphors that Ricoeur (1978) highlights. Death means being gone, because one no longer sees the deceased, at least not as the embodied presences one knew when they were alive.

Animal Agency, Part 2

Beth Chittik Nolan (2008), a veterinarian who interned at the New England Aquarium, tells a story about a green moray eel who came to the aquarium after living in a tank at a bar in a nearby state for many years. The bartender recognized that the eel had outgrown her surroundings, and promptly donated her to the aquarium. Upon arriving, the eel began to refuse any attempts to feed her over the course of days, and eventually weeks. The concerned aquarium staff called the bartender for ideas, and he travelled back to the aquarium to see if he could help. Nolan describes what happened next:

> At the bottom edge of the rockwork, in the far corner of the tank, a small head appeared. It hesitated, surveying its surroundings, and then slowly, ever so slowly, pulled its lean body from its lair. It cautiously moved directly in front of the man. The eel paused. Its round lidless eyes focused intently on the man's face. Then, to my amazement, the eel began to undulate its body back and forth in a smooth, calm rhythm, maintaining eye contact with the man the entire time. The man's worried look softened as the corners of his mouth lifted. Here was his old friend again. (2008, p. 18)

The bartender later fed the eel directly by hand, and from that point forward she ate regularly. Despite serving as a veterinarian for many years, Nolan admits that she never considered the possibility of "such a connection between man and fish" (2008, p. 19), at least not until that day. Her story not only accounts for the possibility of human-animal connections, but also draws a sharp contrast with

the accounts given by the children in this study, who often described their relationships with fish as less significant than other pets in their home. Whether this description of fish was socialized or not, it seems to be a commonly held belief.

Nolan's story also raises questions about non-human animals' complex lifeworlds as well as their relational and existential experiences. According to Heidegger, humans encounter animals phenomenologically in a wide range of contexts, such as in nature, in domestic environments, and even in the home. Heidegger even claims that animals are not "reducible to the status of human creations," (Calarco, 2008, p. 16) and that they are agential and subjective beings in their own right. Yet Heidegger also suggests that humans and non-human animals are significantly different both in their "worldhood" and in their "modality of death" (Calarco, 2008, p. 16). "Worldhood is 'that referential totality which constitutes significance'" (Evernden 1986, p. 65). Heidegger claims that only humans *truly* experience and form "world." Non-human animals in contrast are relatively poor in world, and inanimate objects like rocks have *no* world. He never considers that non-human animals have worlds that we do not or cannot understand, or that their worlds impact us in meaningful ways. Heidegger's description of animal death is also highly relevant for this study. In Heidegger's ontological and existential view, human beings are the only life forms who are orientated toward their own mortality and finitude; we are "beings-toward-death," because of our ability to recognize death as the completion of our

existence (Buchanan, 2012). Non-human animals, on the other hand, do not experience this same temporal orientation toward longevity, or so he claims. As a result, Heidegger claims that animals simply perish (Calarco, 2008; Buchanan, 2012).

Yet, there are undoubtedly mindful, intentional actions that animals engage in that cannot be dismissed as mere coincidences or approximations of human, existential experiences. The moray eel in the story above chose not to engage in feeding behaviours. Why? Nolan admits that there are many examples of fish being transported and taking a period of time to adjust to new surroundings, but she also acknowledges that it was a particular relational presence that may have been preventing the eel from eating. When she was finally reunited with the bartender, she emerged from hiding and engaged in what one could describe as celebratory behaviour. After seeing him again, she decided to eat. Was she contemplating suicide over the longing she felt for her old friend? Does she have the proper cognitive apparatus and linguistic capabilities to imagine her own future demise? Such questions of animal intelligence or capacities seem important in scientific circles and in moral discussions of animal welfare, as Singer (2009) acknowledges.

The children in this study often found it difficult to imagine or understand what an animal thinks when it is suffering or dying. Lily admitted that "its kinda weird what animals think," and throughout my interview with Adele, she suggested that it is perhaps impossible to know what an animal experiences or

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thinks. In this excerpt, she echoed that belief while answering a question about death:

> I: …what do you think an animal experiences when it dies, or what do you think it feels when it dies?
>
> Adele: I wouldn't really know, because *I'm not an animal* and I can't imagine it (I: Yeah) I don't know whether they feel pain or relief, I mean, it depends on how they die or when they die.

Note that while I asked Adele what an animal thinks, her response focused more upon affect. She doesn't know what they *feel*, suggesting that it is possibly a matter of context. This empathetic uncertainty matches up with Adele's emotional response to taking her cat Harley to the vet to be euthanized: she was worried. She could not imagine *being* an animal, because she is not an animal herself, and so she did not know what Harley was experiencing in those final moments. Yet in the very next passage, Adele changed her reply:

> Adele: I think, I think Harley knew that the end was coming but I don't think she knew when. I think that in those last few minutes before they gave her that final shot, I think she knew that something was going to happen.

Adele's ambivalence reflects Heidegger's uncertainties in many ways. Obviously something in Harley's behaviour led Adele to believe that Harley "knew that the end was coming." Perhaps Harley was moving erratically, avoiding people, or even moving lethargically in a way that suggested acceptance of her fate.

If it is unclear to human beings what non-human animals *think* about

death, it is because our lifeworlds do not overlap perfectly (Uexküll, 2010).

Ethologists and literary authors provide a wealth of observations, often in

narrative form (McHugh, 2010), that many animals indeed have a sophisticated

awareness of death, loss, and grief. Nolan's story of the moray eel is a story of

loss. Allan Kellehear (2007) outlines several examples of animals engaging with

their own mortality and the death of others, including dogs, vervet monkeys,

elephants, horses, and snakes. His most interesting point addresses those animals

who, when frightened by a predator, pretend to be dead. Such behaviour is

known as "thanatosis," and has been observed in a wide range of species.

Kellehear cites a rather unethical study on opossums, whose ability to appear

dead is made famous in the popular term, "playing possum:"

> Norton and colleagues (1964) measured brain wave and behavioural
> activity in opossums attacked by dogs in an early experiment unlikely to be
> repeated today. The opossum curls itself up, the limbs become limp or
> flaccid, the body is motionless and the animal is apparently insensitive to
> external stimuli. The electroencephalograph recordings, however, show the
> animal to be in normal cortical activity. In other words, the opossum really
> is "playing possum." (Kellehear, 2007, p. 14)

Without some intelligent, cognitive awareness of what being dead means, what it

looks like to predators, and how it serves as an effective survival strategy, why

would opossums engage in such behaviour? Kellehear concludes that while

human linguistic modes, cultures, and technologies make us different from non-

human animals in some interesting ways, "simple awareness of mortality is not responsible for our uniqueness" (2007, p. 15).

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the predominant experiential components that emerged from children's descriptions of companion animal deaths, specifically temporality and causality, affect, and embodiment and spatiality. I also presented main thematic elements that arose in parallel with each of those lifeworld existentials (Van Manen, 1990). While these existentials were somewhat separate in my analysis here, the overall hermeneutic strategy I employed requires a dialogical exploration between individual parts, utterances, or phrases, and the wider experience under investigation. What, then, is the larger picture of children's experiences of pet death that is being portrayed across these existential elements and themes?

At the most basic level, it is clear that children's experiences of animal deaths are highly contextual, both in terms of the details they remember and share with others, and in terms of the overall meaning of the event. Children whose pets lived long lives or were euthanized expressed a kind of acceptance of death. They suggested that euthanasia was preferable to pain, or that living as long as can be expected implied that one's life was "good." On the other hand, children who expected their pets to die within a relatively short period of time—especially children who spoke about fish—did not express highly emotional

responses. For the children I interviewed who experienced the sudden death of a long-lived pet, such as Neville and Chloe, the death was a more tragic, emotionally upsetting experience. Chloe was unable to share much about her experience with me, while Neville expressed a wide range of metaphorical, emotional, and moral responses about fairness and the end of the world.

Moving beyond a descriptive analysis of context, however, children's interpretation—and my own, within the double hermeneutic—of the meaning of an animal's death was not fixed or predictable. When I asked children to define death, I was given a variety of responses. Some children described death as the cessation of bodily function, such as Adele who noted that the "body stops working." Others appealed to an ecological sensibility, describing death as a natural process: Jim even used the ecological metaphor "circle of life." Other children relied upon metaphors, such as "permanent sleep," "gone away," or "fallen down." Chloe declined to answer my question about the definition of death, and Ophelia's response highlighted the ineffability of death when she said "I really don't know how to describe it."

Death *is* a difficult phenomenon to contemplate. Heidegger suggests that for humans, death is the most significant existential theme throughout one's lifetime. In his view, the death of another human is meaningful only insofar as there is "one less person in the world," but one's own death means losing "everything" (Hoy, 2006, p. 281). Humans are "beings-toward-death," and death is an issue for us throughout our lifetimes (Hoy, 2006). However, I presented

several instances from various literary and scholarly sources, as well as responses from children that significantly challenge Heidegger's view of death and animality. While some children referenced their own mortality during our interviews, most of our conversations were focused upon the significance of experiencing the death of animal others. The children in this study suggested that the death of a companion animal is meaningful for many reasons, and not just for themselves or for their families, but for their pets as well.

Notes

[1] Co-occurrence counts the number of instances when two codes were applied to the same excerpt. Co-occurrence was automatically tabulated within DeDoose qualitative software.

[2] Adele also experienced a great deal of emotion within the interview itself, as seen in the last four lines when I asked her if she was okay and if she wanted to stop. In my notes, I indicate that her tone of voice was very quiet and slow at that point, and that there were tears in her eyes. Each child was given the option to stop the interview at any time, and in fact, we practiced both saying "I do not want to answer that question," as well as "I would like to stop now" prior to beginning the recording. Adele was a forthcoming and confident girl, and so I have no doubt she would have stopped if she needed to at any point.

Chapter 6. After: Children's Reactions to a Companion Animal's Death

> There's a funny thing about love. Love can twist you and tie you in a knot.
> Love can make your heart burst and your eyes fill with tears, and love can
> make you so jubilant even when there's a tornado outside. Love can bring
> you together and tear you apart. Love did all of these to me when my dog
> Breeze came along. I loved Breeze. He was my dog and we were
> inseparable. Now he is an image in my brain and an echo in my heart.
> -- from "Breeze," by Sarina Rani Deb, age 10 (2012)

The epigraph above is an excerpt from a short story printed in *Stone Soup*,

a literary magazine that publishes creative work by children, ages eight to 13.

The story, written by ten-year-old Sarina Rani Deb, is a first person narrative of

the relationship between a young boy named Jay and his dog Breeze. After the

intro above, Jay describes his relationship with Breeze, from his desire to get a

dog, to picking Breeze out at the shelter and giving him a name. Jay describes

Breeze as his "best friend." They go everywhere and do everything together.

After recounting an instance of Breeze's unique selflessness and bravery to save a

young boy who fell through the ice while skating, Jay tells another story about

Breeze being stuck outside and injured during a blizzard. The injuries the dog

sustained cause him months of suffering, and eventually, he succumbs and dies.

In the conclusion of the story, Jay shares what happened after Breeze passed

away:

> That time was hard for me to believe. Every day I would mope around and
> expect Breeze to curl up beside me. I couldn't live without Breeze. I went
> through some awful stages. I was mad at Breeze, then guilty, then sad, then
> upset, then just miserable.

Time passed and everything changed. We moved away from Crestfall and into a big city. I made friends but was still upset every day when I had time to think. One day, I was sitting on my back porch and the light breeze was drifting by me. I heard Breeze's cry. And I understood. I may not have Breeze with me, but I would always hear his soft sweet cry drift through the breeze, and his voice echo in my heart (Rani Deb, 2012).

When Breeze dies, Jay experiences a series of emotions akin to Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief, including guilt, sadness, disappointment, and misery. Even after his family moves, Jay admits he is still upset from time to time, especially when he has "time to think." In the end, an emblematic experience—feeling the breeze—helps Jay to recognize that his memories of Breeze will persist, not physically, but in his mind and in his heart. He understands and accepts his loss.

In the previous two chapters, I explored children's experiences of their relationships with companion animals and the meanings surrounding those animals' deaths. In this chapter, I continue to trace the story-like structure of the interviews. Each interview followed a similar arc: children and I spoke about their relationships with animals both generally and specifically, they recounted the death of various pets, and we discussed what happened in the days, months, and years after their companion animal died. This chapter focuses upon children's reactions and reflections following the death of a companion animal. Maintaining an interpretative phenomenological framework (Van Manen, 1990; Smith et al, 2009), I first looked through transcripts for the emergent existential themes (see Box 6.1). I found that grief was a highly relational experience,

commonly shared with significant figures in children's lives, including parents,

siblings, friends and even other pets. The children in this study also highlighted

various spatial components of their experiences, including locations of pet

memorials and the locations they found comforting. The existential theme of

embodiment also arose in a variety of ways.

Box 6.1 - Existential Themes: "After"		
	Code count:	% of interviews coded:
Relationality		
Social context of grief/loss	18	90
Social context of memorializing	9	70
Grief is personal	12	50
Witnessing others' grief	4	30
Experiencing sympathy from others	3	30
Spatiality		
Spatial context of memorialization	12	80
Home as safe space	4	30
Spatial experience of grief/loss	3	30
Embodiment		
Embodiment of grief/loss	14	60
Experience of 'absence'	6	50
Cremation	5	30
Embodiment and ritual	5	40
Affect		
Emotional experience of grief/loss	13	60
Describing 'sadness'	6	40
Grievability	5	40
Temporality		
Time passing & grieving activities	7	40
Temporal experience of grief/loss	4	40
Grief is bounded; it ends	6	30

Building on these existential themes, I focused more interpretatively on connections between various themes. I used hermeneutic phenomenological methods such as abstraction and free imaginative variation, where different instances of a phenomenon are considered in order to establish a core understanding of it, in order to cluster various themes together (Smith et al, 2009). The predominant existentials that emerged from my analysis suggest that grief is a highly relational and social experience. Most children explored the meaning of death through various shared memorial enactments, including cultural traditions such as storytelling, the creation of various artefacts like photo books or letters, burial rituals, and even prayers. Interestingly, another predominant theme illustrates that grief is simultaneously a very personal experience, one that children might not talk about or share with others for various social or psychological reasons. Also, children regularly explored themes related to spatiality, both in terms of where they grieved—at home or in their room for example—and regarding the location of various pet memorials. Many children spoke of picking a good burial spot for their pet, such as the animal's "favourite spot," an important family setting, or an aesthetically pleasing location. Finally, there were varied embodied themes that arose throughout my interviews. A few of these themes are present within the epigraph to this chapter, as the fictional main character Jay describes his relationship with Breeze as being physically inseparable. After Breeze died, Jay described feeling his presence still, as "an image in my brain and an echo in my heart." The children I interviewed

shared similar themes, including the experience of memory as being "inside" one's head and the theme of absences and presences. In addition, some of the children shared embodied descriptions of their pets' cremation, burial, and even bodily decay.

[Bracketing 6.1 – Between the ages of 8 and 10, I lost two of my grandparents. My paternal grandmother, who lived in an apartment above our garage, died of cancer when I was in Grade 3. The next summer, my maternal grandfather died suddenly of a heart attack. These events exposed me to various cultural and religious practices surrounding death. My large, Roman Catholic family attended wakes, funerals, and masses dedicated to the memories of my grandparents in the days, weeks, and months that followed. In the process, I learned a great deal about my family's beliefs concerning life and death. After the death of my grandfather, I began to experience chest pains quite frequently. I was taken to various doctors and specialists. I remember receiving an electrocardiogram, with sensors hooked up to my chest to analyse my heartbeat. In the end, it was determined that I was physically healthy. The pain I experienced was tied to my emotional state. I remember spending many hours with my parents, holding hands, hugging, and talking about my feelings on the couch in our living room. I became close with a parish priest who helped me work my way through my grief. Eventually, the physical pain went away.

My childhood experiences of animal loss, as mentioned previously, were largely non-fatal. That is perhaps the reason behind why I cannot remember being offered

comfort or support in the same manner as when my grandparents died. Perhaps, to my wider family and community, the losses of my pets were not seen as important. Certainly, within our religious practice, animals were of a different category of being. My father often told me that animals do not have "souls" as humans do. Yet, whatever the beliefs I held at the time, the loss of various human and animal companions in my life always struck me both emotionally and physically. For me, coping requires comforting my mind, spirit, and my body as well. As a result, I needed to bracket aside my own experiences and my expectations for similar responses when I interviewed these children. I was surprised that none of the children described needing to be held, hugged, or comforted by their parents, but perhaps the lack of such responses is not indicative of the absence of those experiences or of the children's needs for physical comfort. Perhaps the children I interviewed simply chose to focus on other aspects of their experiences, or wanted to share other feelings with me. Perhaps they felt a need to keep more intimate details and longings private. I cannot blame them.]

This chapter's title suggests a focus on children's *reactions* in order to draw attention to the variety of responses and reflections that emerged throughout the interviews. Not all children described what happened after a pet died in a manner consistent with literature and research grief or mourning. Certain themes do deal directly with grief, such as "grievability," or those themes linked with social, embodied, emotional, or temporal experiences of grief. Still, a more nuanced approach is necessary for understanding children's experiences and their significance. Terminology is vital to the task of interpretation. As such, I use

the term bereavement ontologically, or in reference to a state of being. When one

experiences the death of a parent, child, friend, sibling, or pet, they are in a state

of bereavement and may feel or experience a variety of emotions, including

sadness, anger, or fear (Corr & Balk, 2010). Grief, however, refers to a more

specific group of actions and responses to a significant loss:

> Encountering any significant loss or death can be an important experience
> for a child. It is likely to generate a *grief reaction*, one that is typically
> distinctive for each individual child and may have special meaning for that
> child's subsequent development. Children experience and express grief in
> many ways, some of which are distinctive of their developmental
> situations… children's grief may have psychological (emotional or
> cognitive), physical, behavioural, social, and spiritual dimensions and may
> be expressed in a variety of ways (Corr, 2010, p. 14, emphasis original).

Dubose describes grief phenomenologically as gazing "at an ever-receding

present as it moves further and further into the past" (1997, p. 368). Sartre (1984)

describes grief as a reaction to the existential absence of others, particularly

others to whom we find ourselves deeply attached (Tomasini, 2009).

Sigmund Freud describes mourning is a kind of "working through grief"

(Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010, p. 257) that one engages in after the loss of a

beloved object, i.e., the breast, the mother, and even significant persons (Freud,

2005). Freud claims that healthy mourning entails a total severing of one's bonds

with the lost object, leaving the ego "free and uninhibited once again" (2005, p.

205). When grief as a process fails or comes up short, depression or melancholia

are often the result. In psychoanalytic terminology, melancholia is the

pathological state that follows from an inability to let go of the lost object,

leading to an unconsciously driven and profound depression (Kristeva, 1989;

Freud, 2005). While my own approach is phenomenological and not necessarily

psychoanalytic, a notion of grief as an active process or as "work" is intriguing in

its implications for education.

Relationality: "He Felt Bad for Us and Stuff"

The predominant existential theme that children conveyed about their

bereavement of a pet's death was that of sharing in the experience with others.

Sociality typically focused upon sharing loss with family members: parents,

siblings, grandparents, and other companion animals in the home. Often, sharing

feelings with others amounted to acknowledging or discussing various

emotional responses to a pet's death. The shared experience of living with a

companion animal in the home suggests that parents are an important primary

source of information and comfort for children when that pet dies, and yet of the

18 excerpts coded for "social context of grief/loss," only five of those passages

(roughly 28 percent) made reference to parents. Those five passages, however,

referenced children's conversations with parents, while other excerpts accounted

for witnessing parents' grief.

Kristina, for example, recalled the need to reach out to her parents—who

are divorced—after the family dog, Lassie, died:

I: Um, (pp) so, so a lot of people share their feelings when somebody dies or when an animal dies with somebody else, do you remember who you shared your feelings with, if you did?

Kristina: Um, probably my Mom. (I: Mmhmm) Like, I told her like a lot of stuff. And, maybe my Dad a little bit.

I: Do you remember some of the things you asked them, or said to them?

Kristina: (p) I think I asked them if um, she would ever come back? (I: yeah) and she said no.

I: Yeah. And how did that make you feel?

Kristina: Really sad.

Kristina's tentative reply, as well as the potentially leading form of my question (I asked her "if" she shared with someone and she replied with "probably") indicates that parents may be seen as a reasonable figure to talk to about one's feelings, even if one did not do so.

Oscar also described sharing his feelings with his parents:

I: Yeah. And sometimes when animals die (*Sister interrupts*) um, people talk to someone about their feelings or talk to them about what it means. Did you talk to anybody about it?

Oscar: Um, (p) my Mom and my Dad.

I: Yeah? And what kinds of things did you say?

Oscar: Like, I miss him and stuff like that.

I: Yeah? And did they say anything?

Oscar: Mmm, yeah.

I: Like what?

Oscar: The same thing.

Oscar recalled his parents sharing in his grief; they too "missed" Sneakers. Lily
shared a similar sentiment, recounting conversations she had with her parents
after her guinea pig Cotton died:

> I: And then, when you talked to your parents about it, what kinds of things
> did they say?
>
> Lily: Um, (pp) they were (p) they loved Cotton (I: Mmhmm) and (p) they
> had good memories of her as well.
>
> I: Yeah (p) well that's good.
>
> Lily: So, they kind of felt the same way as I did.

These two excerpts explore the importance of intersubjective experience, in this
case the alignment of affects between children and parents. Both children sought
comfort from their parents and discovered that they "felt the same way." While
Oscar recalled sharing a sense of loss, Lily's response focused more upon the
positive affects she shared with her parents—particularly love and good
memories. Regardless of the emotional tone, however, it seems that the
mutuality of an affective response was a key aspect of the grieving experience for
several children.

Developmental literature focused on bereavement suggests that parents
serve as primary role models for grieving children. Children witness parents'
own grief over shared losses, talk with their parents about the meaning of death,
and often share in mourning rituals within immediate and extended family

settings (Ross & Baron-Sorensen, 1998; Koehler, 2010). Three of the four children who spoke about another person's grief over a deceased pet—Sabrina, Jim, and Mac—recalled one or both parents' reactions. Sabrina noticed her mother's emotional response to their cats' and rabbits' deaths:

> Sabrina: (*interrupting me*) Well, like, I found that… my Mom and stuff like, she was very upset like, a lot before and after like, the first, like the first two died because like it was planned more (I: yeah) and we knew exactly when it was happening (I: yeah) but like, I didn't really think about it except for when it was actually happening.

Sabrina recognized her mother being upset both before and after the "planned" deaths of their pets. Interestingly, she contrasted her own experience with her mother's, as she only thought about each pet's death "when it was actually happening." For Sabrina, temporality was a common theme. She often repeated her belief that she only grieved for a short amount of time; that she moved on and didn't "really notice" after the animals died. She typically emphasized, however, that she still cared for her pets, even if she got over their deaths quicker than others.

Mac similarly described witnessing his mother Anna's grief over the death of the family dog Suri:

> I: So what happened, so, after Suri died (M: Yeah) you did some sort of ceremony?
>
> Mac: Uh, we got a plant and planted it.
>
> Pete (*mother's partner*): Tree.

Anna (*Mac's mother*): Cherry blossom.

Mac: A tree. Yeah.

Anna: A sand cherry.

I: Yeah, whose idea was that?

Mac: Um, my Mom's. (I: Yeah) She was crying the whole time (I: Yeah) so I didn't get to… talk too much.

I: Did you say anything at the ceremony?

Mac: Nope. (*Anna giggles*)

There were interesting social dynamics at work throughout this exchange. On the one hand, Mac was being corrected by both Pete and Anna, a common occurrence throughout Mac's interview as he often parroted Pete or Anna's replies. At other times, Mac spoke up in unexpected ways despite his mother's presence. He recalled his mother's grief in temporal terms, noting that "she was crying the whole time." In my notes, I questioned whether his tone of voice belied a sense of frustration. Was he upset that she was crying? Did he want to contribute something at the ceremony, and if so, was he unable to because of his mother's emotional response? Despite mentioning that he "didn't get to… talk too much," his final one word answer, "Nope" does not provide enough further insight into his desire to participate in the experience. Regardless of how Mac wished he could have contributed or not to Suri's memorial, it is significant that he remembered witnessing his mother's grief in some detail.

After interviewing Oscar, I spent some time interviewing his mother, Heather. Heather's interview revealed that Oscar became aware of her emotional responses even though she tried to hide her feelings. Heather recalled a moment shortly after Sneakers died when Oscar drew a picture of her crying with Sneakers' spirit hovering in the air. She recalled feeling upset that Oscar had to witness her grief. When the interview started, we spoke about Heather's need to "keep it together," and the fact that Heather had tried to hide her feelings from Oscar and his sister:

> I: When he died, so, you were just describing like, not being able to sort of, the idea of keeping it together, (H: Mmhmm), how, do you feel like you were able to grieve for the dog, or was it more like—
>
> Heather: (*interrupting*) Yeah, I, I, I (p) whatever, I cried every day for at least a month driving to and from work (I: Yeah), every day, like because I just didn't, I didn't want them, I wanted them to go through whatever they had to go through, you know, and it was, yeah, it was hard (I: Yeah), it was hard.

For Heather, the experience of the family dog's death was wrapped up in her various roles and relationships. She felt the need to honour her relationship with Sneakers, who she described as her and her husband's "first born." On the other hand, I found that Heather had a strong desire to prepare her children for the realities of Sneaker's death, even a year prior to making the decision to euthanize him. Heather shared that she loved dogs ever since she was a child. She told me about two dogs that from her childhood and adolescence that were euthanized.

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One dog—Chance—died when she was nine years old, and the other dog was

euthanized in her early twenties:

> Heather: …my brother and I were the ones who ended up taking her to the
> vet and (*door opens and daughter starts talking*) you know, now I know never
> to hold a dog by the chest, cuz I felt that last heart beat, you know (I: Wow,
> yeah) that was, that was (*makes a loud swallowing sound*) and I've always like
> sort of, been that big, big dog, dog lover so that was really difficult.

> I: Were you, who did, who did you talk to, did anyone teach you (H: No,
> no) about death or anything when you were, when that happened?

> Heather: No, (I: No?) not really. No. I don't remember anybody really
> talking to us, and I uh, I uh, its funny cuz some people like, I had a friend
> who had to put her dog down and she it, was her child (*giggling*) (*I: laughs)*
> it, she didn't, she doesn't have kids and she's in her mid-60's and she is
> going through a tough time and she's like, some people are just like, 'It's a
> dog! Like, (I: Yeah) what's wrong with you?'

> I: Right, yeah.

> Heather: And she, is you know, so she just keeps quiet and I said 'listen
> like, this was your, this was your partner (I: Yeah) this was your companion
> (I: Yeah), your child, partner, everything, you know, like, you label,
> whatever you wanna put on it is significant.

Heather did not recall talking with anyone about her feelings during her own

childhood experiences with animal death. In a sense, those feelings might not

have been validated for her, and yet in this excerpt and the previous one she

displayed a sensitivity to the possibility that emotions between humans and

companion animals run deep. She used various relational metaphors to describe

her friend's relationship with her dog—companion, child, partner, and even the word "everything." It is possible that her desire to avoid displaying "too much" emotion in front of her children led Heather to pay special attention to their own need to grieve.

Some children also made reference to sharing their experience of pet death outside of the immediate family. Juliet suggested that there was in fact, a family routine for sharing bad news regarding their pets, something like a phone tree used to spread information:

> I: And so, when you were feeling sad, did you talk to anyone about it?
>
> Juliet: Um, I kinda talked to my Mom about it or I talked to some friends about it, because they heard about it (I: Yeah) because I sometimes, when (p) so (p) like we've (pp) um (p) when like (p) um our dogs die or like any kind of pet dies then we just call them, we call different kinds of people and then we just tell them (I: yeah) and (p)…

This excerpt raises several questions, not only about grief, but about the pet's lived role within those relational networks. While Juliet first acknowledged talking to her mother after a pet died, she continued on, suggesting that they typically "call different kinds of people." Presumably, calling others to share news of a dog's death implies that the dog was a significant presence beyond the confines of the home; that the family perceived the dog's death as meaningful for others as well.

Sabrina and Jim recounted burying their pet cat, Pip, at their grandparents' farm. While Jim referenced the importance of the location, which I

will discuss more below, Sabrina indicated that for her, the experience brought about a new kind of emotional encounter with her grandfather:

> Sabrina: It was also really nice you could tell that my 'Opa really cared about it and he like, really like, took time to make sure everything was really nice and stuff and he's not really like the kind of person who usually just like tells you he loves you or just like hugs you all the time and stuff he's just less, he's more subtle so that, that was like one of the things were you could like really tell that he cared about us and that he felt bad for us and stuff so he was like and that was good…

As noted already, Sabrina often described her emotional response to the death of her pets as limited to short periods of time. She did not report experiencing as much grief as others, but this passage suggests that the relationality of the experience was itself profound. Pip's death gave Sabrina new insights into other family relationships. Her grandfather—whom she described as typically stoic or aloof—expressed a newfound diligence and care as he tried to comfort them. For Sabrina, "that was good."

Lily also indicated that sharing the loss of her guinea pig Cotton allowed her to receive sympathy from others outside of the home environment:

> Lily: Um, I talked, the first person who pretty much knew was (p) my Dad (I: yeah) and then also (p) Abby (I: mmhmm) and on the bus that next morning I told her how it happened and how she died (I: yeah) so…
>
> I: And what did people say to you when you told them?
>
> Lily: They were very, they felt very sorry for me (I: Mmhmm) cuz they know, cuz Abby knows how (p) it feels when an animal dies

I: Yeah, oh has she had a…

Lily: (*interrupting*) she had a guinea pig and it died when she was at gymnastics (I: Oh yeah) so…

I: So it was good you were able to talk with somebody who went through a similar experience (Lily: yeah)

Lily's guinea pig Cotton died in her arms. It was a powerful experience for her, and here, she recounted sharing the story with her best friend Abby the next morning on the bus. Lily connects the sympathy she received from Abby to her awareness that Abby experienced a similar event. They shared both the experience of losing a guinea pig as well as the emotional response. Abby "knows how it feels."[1] This kind of empathic connection with others was a highlight of Lily's interview. In an earlier excerpt, Lily explored sharing her love for Cotton with her parents. Here, she expressed sharing in her emotional response with Abby, who had a similar experience. Later in the interview, we even discussed what it was like to experience animals dying in literature:

Lily: Yeah I read *Charlotte's Web* as well

I: Yeah, yeah *Charlotte's Web* is good, there's a couple movies about *Charlotte's Web* as well, a cartoon I know. Um (p) do you feel like, if you read a book about an animal dying, do you feel you would feel the same way as when Cotton and Buttercup died?

Lily: Yes.

I: Yeah, why might that be?

Lily: Um, (p) cuz its an animal, and I know that character who has that animal as a pet (I: yeah) I know what relationship they kind of have and

when their pets or farm animals die (I: yeah) I know that it's a hard time for them (I: yeah) and its like, it feels like the world will end or you'll die without them.

The theme in this excerpt again seems to be the felt importance of empathic understanding, an ability or desire to relate to others—here, fictional others—through shared emotional experience (Gruen, 2009). Lily generalized while comparing the kinds of relationships involved. She suggested that whether it is between children and pets or children and farm animals, the experience of death is still "a hard time… like the world will end or you'll die." Curiously, Wilbur does not die in E. B. White's novel, *Charlotte's Web* (1980). The young girl in the novel, Fern, does save Wilbur from her uncle, Homer Zuckerman, and later, the spider Charlotte saves him a second time. The death actually entails Charlotte, who dies of old age, shortly after laying a mass of eggs (White, 1980). It is unclear whether Lily found that particular moment of the story to be upsetting, or whether she simply was identifying that the experiences of literary characters in general can be felt in much the same way as our own. The phenomenon itself is noteworthy, however, as it broadens the scope of relationality and the shared experience of grief to include non-human animals within popular culture or fiction.[2]

Finally, two children—Neville and Sabrina—described instances of sharing their sorrow with other pets. While these comments were made briefly, I

found them significant within the scope of my research. Neville's description was particularly thorough:

> I: How did you sort of help yourself learn to feel better after it happened?
>
> Neville: I think the main thing, was um, hugging my cat, um, Dizzy. Because, she reminded me so much of Tulip, but, um, I mean, Thunder, and for seconds I felt like she was still alive but she just wasn't.
>
> I: And you said they look a lot alike right?
>
> Neville: Well this cat looks like, T, Dizzy, I mean, Thunder, but Thunder was a lot more striped.

Neville suggested that the "main" way he found comfort after the death of his cat, Thunder, was to hug the other family cat, Dizzy. His response draws upon several embodied themes as well, including touch, intimacy, and the experience of Thunder's physical absence. Still, the predominant theme within this excerpt was that Neville sought out Dizzy for comfort. He claimed that Dizzy reminded him of Thunder—the cats were siblings—so much, that for a short time he "felt like she was still alive."

Bereavement, Grief, and Privacy

In contrast with the predominant theme of bereavement and grief are social or relational experiences, many children concurrently expressed the sentiment that the experience of loss is very personal and private. Typically, children drew various lines of inclusion and exclusion regarding with whom they chose to express their sadness or grief. On the inside, as stated previously, were parents,

members of the immediate family, best friends, and even other pets. On the

outside were often friends, teachers, and classmates. Yet, some children said that

they did not share their feelings with anyone.

The children who described their experience of grief as a private matter

sometimes suggested that they simply did not *need* to talk to others about their

feelings, or that there were no feelings to share at all. In particular, Sabrina and

Jim indicated that their feelings were either limited to the immediate experience

of death itself, or kept within the confines of the home:

> I: And did you, did either of you talk to anybody about it when it
> happened, or after?
>
> Sabrina: Mm, not really I don't think.
>
> I: No?
>
> Jim: I don't think we really needed to…
>
> Sabrina: (*simultaneously*) I don't remember that much, but…
>
> I: Like friends at school or teachers or anybody?
>
> Sabrina: No.
>
> I: No.
>
> Jim: Mmmnmm.

Charlie also claimed that he did not talk to other people about his dogs dying,

even though his younger sister Juliet described talking to her mother, some

friends, and calling other people on the phone:

> I: What kinds of things do people say to you? Who did you talk to Charlie?

Charlie: Um…

I: Did you talk to anybody?

Charlie: No, not really.

One might interpret these passages as evidence that some children do not grieve the loss of certain pets, at least not extensively. Charlie and Sabrina in particular shared very little about their emotional responses to pets' deaths, although both admitted to experiencing sadness at some point. Both children also indicated that their grief was a temporally bounded experience. Sabrina suggested that she "got over it pretty fast," and "a little while after" her pets died she "didn't notice" any more. Charlie was more specific, claiming he was only sad for "a day or two," and not for "a really really really long time."

Kristina also suggested that she did not share her experience with people outside of her family, at least not while she felt sad:

Kristina: Mmm, I don't think I did. (I: Or friends?) cuz I think I was too upset. I think I stayed home from school after

I: Oh really?

Kristina: Yeah.

I: Did you have any friends that you talked to about it?

Kristina: No.

I: No? Okay.

Kristina: But when I got older I would like, tell them that my dog died. But like, I never like, said it like, then, when I had like, all the feelings.

I: Mmhmm. (p) Has any, have any of your friends ever told you about any of their pets dying, or?

Kristina: No.

She noted that when she "got older" she would tell them about Lassie's death, but immediately after she did not; she was "too upset" and so she "stayed home from school." Kristina also indicated that her friends had not told her about the death of any of their pets. On the one hand, it is possible that such experiences are not common, at least not among Kristina's social groups. Statistics indicate, however, that the prevalence of pets in families with children is quite high. Between 70 and 80 percent of North American households with young children have a companion animal within the home (American Veterinary Medicine Association, 1997; Melson, 2005; American Humane Association, 2012). It is also possible that grief is not an emotion that enters into children's conversations or peer culture.

Adele's recent experience with animal death—her cat, Harvey, died five days prior to our interview—provided insight into a more subtle approach to what is shared and what is kept private:

I: Yeah. Have you talked to people about it?

Adele: Mm, not really, I mean, I said that I'm upset and stuff, but no I haven't really talked about it.

I: You didn't tell your friends at school or…

Adele: I mean, my friends at school know that she's dead and stuff, I mean, they knew on Friday (I: yeah) they knew that she was going to go to the vet on Friday, but I haven't really talked about it.

At first glance, it seems Adele was ambivalent about what constitutes "talking to people." She admitted telling her friends at school that Harley would be euthanized prior to the event, and she said that she told people she's "upset and stuff." Still, Adele ultimately concluded that she had not "really talked about it," a phrase which she used twice within the above excerpt. What might constitute "really" talking about it with others? Perhaps Adele was suggesting that she had not gone into detail about her experience or her emotional state.

Neville expressed a similar kind of ambivalence regarding the level of sharing he engaged in with others after his cat Thunder died:

I: So did you tell your friends about the cat?

Neville: Yeah.

I: And what did they say? (N: Um) How did they react?

Neville: I don't think I actually talked about it that much, because in the weeks after I really didn't do much (I: Mmhmm) I kind of just stayed inside and um, watched movies and (pp)

I: Yeah

Neville: Yeah, and was sad.

The basic theme within Neville's reply was similar in many ways to Adele's. He initially admitted telling others about the cat's death, but then provided a more nuanced reply, claiming that he didn't "actually" talk about it much. Instead, he

focused upon the fact that he stayed at home and watched movies. This statement also came prior to his claim above that his main method of coping was to hug his other cat, Dizzy. Later, we actually returned to this same question and Neville provided a more direct answer:

> Neville: I actually don't, I don't think I talked to anyone, I think I just sort of bite the, bit the bullet, I don't think I really um, when I get sad, I seem to keep it to myself (I: Yeah) usually I keep a lot of things to myself (I: Yeah) and, so, I don't think I really, from other people's perspective reacted too much (I: Mmhmm) but really um, even if you, you, um, anything like, deaths always remind me of Thunder.

Perhaps what Neville shared with his friends was limited to the news of his cat's death, rather than his own emotional state. Staying inside, watching movies, hugging his other cat; these were more private ways to express and deal with his "sadness." Curiously, Neville also used an idiom to describe his response: he "bit the bullet." This response could have several meanings, although the phrase itself tends to imply that one must endure a difficult situation with bravery or stoicism. In light of the rest of Neville's comments, in particular his notion that he did not react too much "from other people's perspective," it is likely that he sought to avoid any public display of his inner emotional struggles. Thunder's death was traumatic for him. He described it earlier as feeling almost apocalyptic, like the world would end, as if life could not go on anymore. Yet, in this passage, he suggested he kept those feelings to himself so that others would not notice. He desired privacy during his bereavement.

Spatiality: "We Put Her In Her Favourite Spot"

Another predominant, existential theme concerning children's description of pet

bereavement was that of spatiality. Among the sub-themes involving spatiality

(see Box 7.1 above), the most prevalent was children's description of spatiality

regarding their pet's memorialization. Children often explained particular

choices they made while creating a memorial space, burying their pet, or even

erecting a monument. As a wider, abstracted theme, memorialization was also

tied to the existentials of temporality, embodiment, and most of all, relationality.

Given that memorial services were often culturally and religiously influenced, it

is no surprise that others—particularly family members—were present and

involved in the process. I have chosen to pay more attention to the secondary,

abstracted theme of memorialization in this section on spatiality because it was

more commonly tied to notions of space than to relationality or the others.

Again, I want to reiterate that separating these lifeworld existentials (Van Manen,

1990) is largely a heuristic move, as they are mutually implicated and

intertwined in many ways. As such, while the spatiality of memorializing

deceased companion animals will be emphasized here, other existential

components will be discussed periodically.

The first example of spatiality regarding pet bereavement came from

twelve year old Chloe. Chloe was one of the quietest children I interviewed. She

had a very difficult time articulating her thoughts, and according to her mother

was very nervous about the interview throughout the day. One of Chloe's most notable responses was in reference not only to where her cat Cookie was buried, but also to the ongoing importance of that place:

I: And, did you do anything when Cookie died?

Chloe: Uh, (p) we had a funeral and we put her in her favourite spot.

I: What was her favourite spot?

Chloe: Under a bush.

I: Under a bush? Yeah, and what did you do for the funeral?

Chloe: Um (pp) we said something from the Bible and planted flowers around her.

I: Yeah, and are the flowers still there?

Chloe: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and do you ever visit those spots now?

Chloe: Yeah.

I: Yeah? Why do you do that?

Chloe: (ppp) *I don't know.*

It is interesting to note that Chloe and her family's memorial entailed reading from the Bible. When I interviewed Helen, the owner of "Pets at Peace" memorial services, she noted that it was common for families of various religious backgrounds—she referenced Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim families—to request traditional funerals. Chloe's family listed their religion as Roman Catholic, and so a burial with readings from scripture fit within that model. Beyond the religious tone of the funeral, however, Chloe's family chose Cookie's "favourite

spot" for her burial site. Not only did they recognize Cookie's lived agency to return to the same spot "under a bush" with regularity, they also decided that they would honour her memory by placing her body there. Aesthetically, they decided to plant flowers, which Chloe noted are still present. Finally, Chloe answered that she still visits Cookie's burial site. Chloe indicated that the bush in question is near her home, making it an easy place to notice or dwell for a moment. We did not discuss the length of time of her typical visits to Cookie's grave. When I asked *why* she visited, however, Chloe paused for a while before saying "I don't know." Perhaps Chloe was simply giving me the answers she assumed I was looking for, and yet there is a possibility that she does not know what draws her back to Cookie's burial location. Grief has been described as a persistence, a desire to keep present what continuously recedes into the past (Tomasini, 2009) and if Chloe visits Cookie at all, it may be to keep her present.

Other children also described creating makeshift gravesites for their deceased companion animals around the house, including Lily, Neville, Kristina, and Mac. In Neville's case, the cat was buried after being found dead by his parents; and so the choice of location was determined before he even knew that Thunder was dead. The choice to mark the location's significance with a gravestone, however, was made by Neville, his sister, and various friends:

I: Did you do anything to keep uh…

Neville: (*interrupting*) We made a gravestone (I: Yeah?) its out there right now.

I: Yeah, and when did, when did you do that?

Neville: Well, it was kind of a rock that we just carved into with some stones.

I: Yeah.

Neville: And we just popped it there like a couple days after.

I: Yeah. What does it say?

Neville: It says, "To Thunder" um "she was lightning fast, but not fast enough."

I: Oh wow.

Neville: Yeah.

I: Who thought of that?

Neville: Um, me and um, a couple other friends, me… and my sister.

There is a poetic quality to the gravestone that Neville described. Playing with the name of his cat, Thunder, he made reference to her own uniqueness ("she was lightning fast") as well as the tragedy of her death in a short epitaph ("but not fast enough"). He described the relational quality of creating the inscription with some friends and his sister—contrary to his comments above that he kept to himself after the cat died—and even referenced temporality when he said they "popped it there like a couple days after."

Some children chose other locations for pet memorials. Oscar and his mother, Heather, described choosing a suitable burial spot for their dog, Sneakers. They chose the family cottage, a location outside of the city and away from their home. Oscar and Heather told me that Sneakers often went with the

family to the cottage, and there were pictures of them together walking through the woods. Heather also shared with me that when the performed the memorial, Oscar actually spread Sneaker's ashes on the ground with his bare hands, which surprised her. She was also touched that he thought it was important that Sneakers and Jerry—a dog whom Oscar never knew—should be together. For Oscar, choosing the space was possibly more a matter of finding somewhere that Sneakers would not be alone rather than somewhere that Sneakers had enjoyed during his life.

Aesthetics also played a strong role in the choice, as children often implied that a beautiful or serene location honoured the memory of their pet more than anything. Several children made links between spatiality, ecological thinking, and aesthetics regarding their pet's burial. Mac shared that his family dog, Suri, was cremated after she died. They took her ashes and mixed them with the soil in his father's back yard before planting a cherry tree on top. The tree serves as a reminder of Suri for the whole family:

> Anna: And what happens everytime the sand cherry tree blooms, what do we say?
>
> Sister: (*indecipherable*)
>
> Mac: Suri is coming back, I don't know.
>
> Anna: Mmhmm.
>
> I: Oh yeah?
>
> Anna: We say "Hello Suri" and there she is!

Aesthetically, they chose a "sand cherry tree," which is actually a native deciduous shrub with white flowers that blooms in April or May (Petrides, 1972). The shrub presumably blooms every year, and so in a very regular, cyclical pattern, the family chooses to remember Suri with the flowering of her memorial.

Sabrina and Jim described picking the right spot for burying their cats. Sabrina and Jim reflected both upon the location of the cats' burial and on the fact that they were buried together, which Jim described as "sweet." As part of the ceremony, their grandfather became involved and helped them to mark the location with makeshift gravestones. The spot at their grandparents' farm was chosen because it was "open," "pretty," and quiet, as opposed to the city, which Jim remarked "doesn't feel like a burial place." Later in the interview, both Sabrina and Jim described their practices and intentions to visit the burial sites differently. For Jim, it was a priority, something he had done in the past and plans on doing in the future. Sabrina, once again, felt differently from her brother:

> Sabrina: I haven't, that much, I've visited them a few times I think, but…
>
> Jim: Yeah, whenever I go to the farm like, we, I visit them, except for last time we went it was like, my grandpa's birthday party so, we didn't really get time (I: yeah) but, but like, if when I'm going over in the summers I'm gonna visit them a bunch of times probably (I: yeah) and like, some, we got like a four-wheeler sometimes and our Dad will drive us over there on it (I: yeah) and like, kinda, pick some flowers and (indecipherable…)

Sabrina: For me I think its still one of those things like I said, I don't really think about it that much (I: yeah) so then I kind of don't really, it doesn't really come to me that I should go visit them or anything (I: yeah), like I don't, I don't think about it, I just don't really notice and then every once in a while someone, like, when I'm there, they'll just be like, oh yeah, wanna go visit the cats and I'm like, 'oh yeah, sure, let's go' (I: yeah) or lets look and see what it looks like now and stuff…

In distinguishing herself from her brother, Sabrina was not suggesting that the cats' deaths are any less meaningful. On the contrary, she suggested that she just did not think of them as often. She has been agreeable in the past when others prompted a visit to the grave site, but in her last sentence within this passage, it is interesting to note that she was focused more on the way the space "looks" over time instead of the ritual Jim described of visiting and picking flowers.

The Home Space: Comforting and Safe

In the previous section on the relationality of bereavement, both Neville and Kristina mentioned that their private experiences of sadness and grief coincided with a desire to "stay home" or "stay inside." Their descriptions explored the need to feel sheltered, safe, or even secluded while dealing with emotionally difficult times. When I started my fieldwork, I expected to see more of these kinds of spatial representations regarding the grieving experience. Expectations aside, I only coded for the theme "Home as a safe space" on four occasions. Even as statistical "outliers," I find that those four excerpts provide interesting links

between the spatiality of memorialization and the previous section's exploration of the privacy of grief.

The first comments came from Neville, who in earlier sections described his experience of and need for privacy during his bereavement for Thunder. Neville drew up a kind of embodied geography of grief, one that was limited to the home space. Given that Neville also found comfort from his other cat, Dizzy, it also makes sense that he spent more time at home, because that was where he could find and hold Dizzy. Stepping back from the context of each comment, Neville's description of his spatial response to Thunder's death reads like variations on a theme:

> Neville: I couldn't do anything for the rest of the day. I was just crying for like, hours and hours, (I: Mmhmm) and I basically just couldn't do anything.
>
> …
>
> Neville: And, so I didn't go to camp the next day (I: No?) because I was just still crying and I was still really upset.
>
> …
>
> Neville: I don't think I dealt with anything.
>
> I: No?
>
> Neville: That's what happened, I didn't do anything.
>
> I: Yeah.
>
> Neville: I just sat there crying.
>
> …

Neville: I don't think I actually talked about it that much, because in the weeks after I really didn't do much (J: Mmhmm) I kind of just stayed inside and um, watched movies and (pp)

I: Yeah

Neville: Yeah, and was sad.

For Neville, being at home or staying at home was described as "not going anywhere" or not doing anything. Yet the home is certainly a meaningful place, and dwelling there, watching movies, feeling sad, and grieving are meaningful actions. Still, Neville spoke about being at home in a rather neutral way. Why? Perhaps his comments are indicative of a felt sense that activities engaged in at home are not particularly noteworthy. Kristina responded similarly, suggesting that she simply "stayed home from school" after her dog Lassie died. As a result, she did not share the events or her feelings with her schoolmates.

Lily's description of home as a safe space was somewhat anomalous. While the majority of our conversation focused upon her guinea pigs, Cotton and Buttercup, Lily also shared the following story:

Lily: Um (p) well, my Mom hit a deer.

I: Oh really?

Mom: Yeah I did with the car.

I: Yeah?

Lily: And…

I: (pp) what was that like?

Lily: It was (p) I was fine until we got home (I: yeah) and then the hydrenaline [*sic*] started kicking in.

I: Yeah, its different when you're in a car, and you're worried about like, car safety when you see something like that happen. How did you react?

Lily: When we got home?

I: Yeah.

Lily: I was just freaking out, I was scared to go anywhere (I: Yeah) cuz I thought a deer would jump out and come and hit me (I: Yeah) (p) so (pp) couldn't sleep for a week, well, I could sleep, I just couldn't go anywhere for like a week or so.

I: In the car?

Lily: Yeah, we couldn't, I didn't want to take the back roads (I: yeah) especially at night (I: yeah) so (p)

I: Yeah, I get that, I had that happen to me as well, I hit a deer, but it wasn't that bad. I don't think the deer died.

Lily: No, the deer had glass in its chest and it (p) kinda died.

Lily's story adds a dimension to the felt spatiality of the home. Certainly, Neville and Kristina's descriptions imply that the home is a comforting space, and allows one a degree of privacy for experiencing emotions away from others. Yet for Lily, the home became a place of security, even survival. After Lily's mother hit the deer with her car, and Lily witnessed its death, they returned home. At home, Lily's "hydrenaline" (presumably she meant adrenaline) began to kick in and she experienced panic and "freaking out." For "a week or so," she claimed she could not leave the house in the car, fearing the experience would recur. Some of Lily's

language may be interpreted as mirroring her parents' responses, for example, the passage "I didn't want to take the back roads," reflects the kinds of choices a driver may make, and Lily is too young to drive. Lily's wording also belies a fear for her own safety. She described being afraid that "a deer would jump out and come and hit me," despite earlier stating that it was her mother and the car that struck the deer. It is possible that she felt badly for the deer, but her language speaks to a more personal vulnerability. Staying at home not only ensured Lily that she could avoid witnessing that traumatic event again, but perhaps more so, that she herself would be safe. Feelings of safety are considered important, especially in literature that deals with children's traumatic experiences, such as witnessing terrorism or war (Berson & Berson, 2001). Some educational researchers even focus on children's ability to cope with trauma and feel safe in light of difficult curricular subjects (Simon & Eppert, 1997; Walcott, 2000; Britzman, 2000). Children often feel vulnerable after witnessing or experiencing death and may become aware of their own mortality for the first time. As a result, personal vulnerability is typically a part children's experiences with death (Corr, 2010).

Finally, I would like to explore an example from a children's book that emphasizes the spatial experience of the home space in light of a pet's death. In *Dog Breath* (2011), the author Carolyn Beck presents a simply worded story addressed by a young child to his or her unnamed, deceased dog. The illustrations by Brooke Kerrigan juxtapose present scenes with past memories as

the child recounts the "mischievous" dog's life. The story starts with a spatial accounting of the dog's favourite objects and places:

Your favourite bone sits

on the edge of the rug

at the foot of my bed

in that spot where the sun

makes a big, warm puddle

in the middle of the afternoon.

Just the way you left it. (Beck, 2011, p. 2)

Later, the child describes sharing his or her bedroom with the dog:

We slept here

every night—

you in your basket,

curled nose to tail

on your dug-bare cushion,

me in my bed,

tucked into my quilt.

Sometimes you twitched and

Woofed inside a dream.

Squirrels. (Beck, 2011, p. 5)

The story continues on, describing various mischievous events; knocked over dinner plates, muddy paws on the carpet, and even a time when the dog ran away "for hours and hours," causing the child and their family to "fear the

worst." After accounting for some moments of laughter and joy, the narrator

shares a recent story of the dog eating his or her birthday cake. In that passage,

the dog's current state is revealed. The child states, "I was so mad I yelled, "I

hate you!" not knowing you'd never steal another birthday cake" (Beck, 2011, p.

24).

The story concludes with the child describing how the dog's memory

remains within the home, and how his or her own actions continue to account for

the dog's presence even though the dog is no longer around:

Even now

I still remember

To push a cake

Way back

From the edge of the counter

So your big pink tongue

Doesn't get a swipe. (Beck, 2011, p. 26)

The final image of the book is of the faceless child, reclining on a chair with their

back to the reader and a smiling kitten on his or her lap. On the table next to the

narrator is a partially covered, framed photo of his dog. The only words on the

final page—a description of the dog's bad breath—simply say "the worst."

The story of *Dog Breath* is solemn, producing an overall sense of longing

for the deceased dog whose life was often associated with "trouble." It is a story

told by a faceless, nameless and even gender non-specific child who can, in fact,

be any child. The dog, despite its representation as a scrappy, white and brown

dog, could just as easily be any dog. Ultimately, the images and narrative

account for the deep connection between a dog's life and the domestic space,

family life, and even childhood. When the dog was not at home, the family

feared "the worst." When the dog was at home, the human imposed "order" was

often interrupted by the dog's own agency and actions, at times causing

frustration and at other times making the family laugh together. Now that the

dog has died, the child longs for the beloved pet to return to fill that empty space

in the home. For Sartre (1984), a discrepancy between expectation and experience

is a primary existential component of loss. He gives an example of waiting to

meet a friend, named Pierre, at a café:

> It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its
> mirrors, its light, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling
> saucers, and footsteps which fill it—the café is a fullness of being… But we
> must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure
> on a ground… When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a
> synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which
> Pierre is given as about to appear. (Sartre, 1984, p. 41)

Sartre suggests that when Pierre fails to arrive, the experience of his absence

highlights the felt sense that the café is now only a "ground" or a "background."

He attributes a great deal of significance to his own expectation that Pierre

would be present in that space and so the space of the café is given its meaning

because of Sartre's relationship with Pierre. Reflecting on this passage, Tomasini

writes that "it is our attachments in our relationships to others that raise the spectre of dashed hopes and thwarted expectations, on which the possibility of existential absence depends" (2009, p. 441). In a similar way then, the child in *Dog Breath* is expressing a felt sense of space that reflects the "dashed hopes" of losing their beloved dog who was a prominent figure within the background of the home space. Adele exemplified a similar experience while reflecting upon the death of her cat, saying "I'm still really sad. It's strange coming home and not seeing Harley."

Embodiment: "You Are Still Always in My Head"

Not all of the children ascribed significance to the location of their pet's memorial or burial place. Charlie and Juliet, in particular, noted that their family did not want their dogs' cremated remains—sometimes referred to as "cremains" (interview with Helen Hobbs, 2011)—returned to them:

> Charlie: I think they have burned him but I don't really know because my Mom and Dad haven't gotten the ashes.
>
> I: Oh, oh they burned them and they get the ashes, do you have Flash's ashes?
>
> Charlie: No.
>
> I: No.
>
> Juliet: No, we don't have…
>
> Charlie: I don't think they want them.

Juliet: Yeah, we don't have, um (p) um, any of their ashes because like, if we saw the ashes then (*deep inhale*) it would make us feel sad and sadder and then we would keep on minding it (I: yeah) and then we wouldn't feel happy at all (I: yeah) even on your birthday you'd think of that and you wouldn't feel happy about it.

Charlie responded to my questions about what happened after their dogs Flash and Chip died by suggesting that the choices were made by his parents, twice using the pronoun "they" and never involving himself as part of the decision making process. Juliet's comments, however, aligned her own feelings with those of the rest of her family, as she used the pronoun "we" exclusively in this passage. Furthermore, Juliet provided a link between the spatial aspects of bereavement and memorialization and a felt sense of embodiment. For her, having the dogs' ashes present in the home would make her feel "sad," causing them to "keep on minding it." She suggested that the physical presence of the dogs' cremains would be a hindrance to future happiness, stressing that "even on your birthday" it would be difficult to avoid thinking sad thoughts. These comments blend spatial and embodied elements: while being at home and talking about the dogs is one thing, it seems that having what was left of their bodies present would be different and more upsetting for her and her family. On two other occasions, Juliet used the phrase "mind it" or "minding it," likely in reference to the phrase "I do not mind x." To "mind" something means to pay attention to it, to think about it, and to let it linger in one's thoughts. Earlier,

Juliet described sadness as being "down" or "not happy at all," which is not to suggest that there is no embodied connection to those emotions.

A few children more directly spoke to their embodied experience of bereavement. One example comes from Mac's letter to his deceased dog, Suri:

> Mac: Um… (*starts reading letter*) Dear Suri, I miss you so much. I wi—I miss you so much, I wish you were here. I got a new dog named Lu—no, (*giggles*) we got a new dog and Lulu had to go to a new home. You are still always in my head. The new dog's name is Alice. She is very nice. But not as nice as you. You will always be in my dreams. With love, Mac.

After taking a washroom break, Mac returned to our interview spontaneously holding this letter. He noted that he wrote it to his dog Suri when he was in school. Mac insisted that the letter was part of an assignment given by his teacher. In other words, he did not write it spontaneously. Still, the message provides some insight into his emotional experience through the language of embodiment. The phrase "You are always in my head" in particular, illuminates the felt sense that thoughts, dreams, and reveries are an internal, physical manifestation. Mac missed Suri when he wrote that letter, and even with a new dog in the family, he wanted to tell Suri that she would "always" be in his mind and in his dreams. He could not forget her, in a sense, because she would remain inside of his body.

Oscar made reference to the embodiment of bereavement early on in our interview:

I: What kind of animals do you see around your house?

Oscar: My hamster, my dog, and sometimes, sometimes I can picture
Sneaks in my head.

J: Sneaks? And who's Sneaks?

Oscar: My dog. My old dog that died.

Using a familiar, shortened version of his dog's name, Oscar answered a

question about animals he perceived around the home by suggesting that not

only his living pets, but even his deceased dog Sneakers can be seen. While Mac's

explanation articulated a felt sense of Suri dwelling inside of his head, Oscar's

reply was more active; he "sometimes… can *picture* Sneaks" in his head. In this

passage, Oscar implied a choice as to when Sneakers is present in his head,

producing the image in a bodily location. In a later exchange, Oscar described

"seeing" Sneakers in his dreams:

Oscar: Um, like, when an animal dies it never comes back, but in your
dreams you might see it.

Oscar described dreaming as "seeing," as a perceptual act. Indeed, dreams come

to us as images, pictures, and scenes we perceive. Oscar knew that death meant

an animal would "never" come back. Its body is dead, but the possibility of being

with a beloved companion animal in one's dreams, perceiving it again, makes its

presence and spirit endure.

Kristina made a similar reference to the enduring presence of an a

deceased pet despite the loss of its physical body. Her description came from a

book she was given by her parents after their family dog, Lassie, was euthanized:

I: What kinds of things were in the book, do you remember what the book was called?

Kristina: Um, the book (p) I don't know what it was called, but it was like, just telling you that like, like, um, your animal's like, gone to a better place, and like, it will still always be there with you (I: Mmhmm) even though its not like physically there.

I: Yeah. And, do you, did that make you feel better?

Kristina: A little bit, yeah.

I: Yeah.

Echoing the spatial metaphor discussed previously—that of death as somewhere else or "a better place"—Kristina also acknowledged that death is a physical loss, though not necessarily a total loss or erasure of being. Endurance of being, it seems, is not limited by physical life or embodied presence.

Animal Agency, Part 3

Alice Kuzniar describes the process of mourning and the potentialities of melancholia in interspecies relations—including child-pet relationships—throughout her book, *Melancholia's Dog* (2006). Her analysis of D. H. Lawrence's short story, "Rex," concludes that "the identification between Canid and child represents an ongoing melancholic mourning for one's absent childhood, the loss of which is represented in the dog's death" (Kuzniar, 2006, p. 140). I find that this psychoanalytic, meta-level abstraction—the story is ultimately symbolic of Lawrence's or the adult reader's longing for childhood, and not the fictional

children's loss of their dog—diminishes the felt experience and significance of real and material attachments between children and pets. Gene Myers (2007) likewise acknowledges the tendency of psychoanalysts to focus on non-human animals as symbolic or representational rather than as vital, material presences in human lives. As a result, my own analyses tend to shy away from discourses of mourning and melancholia within the psychoanalytic tradition.

While the focus of this chapter is on what happened *after* a companion animal died, there are important examples of non-human animals exhibiting agency and engaging intersubjectively with children. In the story *Dog Breath* (Beck, 2011), the dog acts in a variety of ways that the child interprets as mischievous, playful, or loving. The nameless dog regularly escaped the family's home, and yet she returned, indicating her choice to *be* a part of the family. In the introductory story, "Breeze," written by ten-year-old Sarina Rani Deb (2012) the main character Jay describes Breeze's heroics in saving a young boy who fell through the ice while skating. While these are fictional narratives, they convey a sense that canines and other non-human animals possess unique characteristics and personalities that influence their own choices.

During some of my interviews, I asked the children whether they witnessed any of their remaining pets grieve the loss of companion animals who died. The code "Other pets' reactions to death" was applied six times, and only in the two interviews which were conducted with siblings (Sabrina and Jim as well as Charlie and Juliet). Those children spoke at length of the presences of

multiple pets within their homes. Charlie and Juliet's responses were predominantly behavioural in focus. Juliet, for example, inferred that on the day that Chip died, the other dogs Harpo and Bobby "minded it," because "they didn't run around that much." Charlie agreed, noting that they simply walked around that day in a seemingly uncharacteristic display of lethargy. Juliet suggested that their response only lasted for the rest of the day, however, and that the "whole rest of the year they felt better," indicated by her observation of the dogs' continued "running around." Later, Charlie also tentatively considered his dog Chip's feelings after their dog Flash died, saying "I think cuz, Chip was pretty sad because he, it was like, Chip and Flash who would sometimes play together."

Jim also provided a behavioural description of the reaction of his cat Pip to the loss of two other cats, Ducky and Tiger:

> Jim: …he um, a lot of the time like, he slept in my room a lot and he was, most of the time, like he (p) well all the time he slept in my room and then like, when he was (p) when like, I think it was just before no, or just after the other two cats died, cuz they kinda all at the s—at different times, well, two at the same time, anyway, um, he kinda got like he would wake up at night and then he would go up on my shelves and start knocking things down so I'd wake up at like, 3 in the morning with stuff crashing to my floor um, that was a bit annoying at the end…

Jim implied that Pip's behaviour was a response to Ducky and Tiger's deaths, which happened relatively close together. Unlike Charlie and Juliet's description

of these "annoying" behaviours coincide with developmental literature on

children's attention-seeking behaviours in response to grief (Corr, 2010).

Jim's sister Sabrina described emotional responses in their family's pet

rabbits, who mostly lived in their mother's store, a children's bookshop:

> Sabrina: [Acorn] was the brother of Bigwig, who just died a little while
> ago…
>
> Jim: Yeah.
>
> I: Oh?
>
> Sabrina: Bigwig was pretty like, sad, so then we got him Fluffy to be his
> little buddy (p) so now that he's died, Fluffy's sad (J: yeah)
>
> I: He's all alone.
>
> Sabrina: Yeah.
>
> Jim: It's a big circle.
>
> Sabrina: And now we're thinking of either getting a new rabbit or just
> bringing him er, Fluffy home (I: Oh) and you know cuz I'd be like, at home
> she'd probably get a little more attention and stuff…

Sabrina's attentiveness to her rabbits' emotional states displayed an interspecies,

empathetic understanding (Gruen, 2009). She suggested that the rabbits had

profound relationships. When Acorn died, Bigwig became sad. Recognizing her

relational need for comfort and attention, Sabrina's family got Fluffy to keep

Bigwig company. Now that Bigwig is dead, Fluffy is sad and in need. Are these

anthropomorphic descriptions? Is Sabrina projecting her own emotional

responses onto the rabbits?

Non-human animals' complex emotional lives have been well documented (Bekoff, 2007; Balcombe, 2007; Masson, 2009; Dawkins, 2012). While claims remain that non-human animals are incapable of thinking about or experiencing their own mortality (Calarco, 2008), ethologists and animal researchers increasingly present evidence of many animal species' experiences of grief, including elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, pilot whales, bottle-nosed dolphins, ravens, and many more (Alderton, 2011; King, 2013). Barbara King's new book, *How Animals Grieve* includes a story about cat grief:

> Willa, a Siamese cat, wanders from room to decorated room, pausing first at the ottoman in front of the fireplace. With a glance at the soft, warm cushion, she lets out a wail. Moving on to the master bedroom, she jumps to the head of the bed and pushes her face and body into a cozy cave-space behind the pillows. She looks, and looks; another wail escapes her. It's sudden and terrible, not a noise one would expect from a cat… She is searching for her sister Carson, who died earlier in the month. For the first time in fourteen years, Willa is no longer a sibling, no longer the more outgoing and dominant half of an enduring partnership. She's Willa, alone. And she grieves. (2013, p. 11)

For several weeks, Willa displayed this wandering behaviour, only comforted when she was held by her human companions Ron and Karen. King reflects on the tendency to decry anthropomorphism in cases like Willa's. She acknowledges that while scepticism has its role to play, it should not diminish the very real, very emotional connections that non-human animals make within and across species boundaries. King suggests that animal's cognitive capacity to anticipate

or think about death conceptually is not a requirement; she defines grief instead as an affective phenomenon, concluding that "grief blooms because two animal bond, they care, maybe they even love—because of a heart's certainty that another's presence is as necessary as air" (2013, p. 14). Many of the children in this study felt grief for companion animals in the same way, and some even recognized that feeling between their pets, whose relationships with each other were often essential aspects of their own lives.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have presented various examples of children's experiences of grief and actions tied to bereavement or memorialization. The predominant existential components—relationality, spatiality, and embodiment as well as temporality and affect—merge together, creating an overall sense of children's experiences and the felt significance of companion animal death in the days, weeks, and months beyond the cessation of a pet's life. Children's families seemed to have an impact not only on how children felt about a pet's death, but on how they enacted those feelings.[3] As Erica Fudge notes, companion animals are intricately bound with the meanings, economics, and practices of domesticity and the home space (2009). Yet, from the descriptions above, it seems that while a companion animal's presence—and absence—within the home space is clearly important, pets live and die as members of a meaningful family structure. The family unit is perhaps the primary dwelling of companion animals.

I am not suggesting that spatial concerns are unimportant, but rather that they flow from relationality. After all, the choice of a pet's memorial location or burial site was mostly careful, deliberate, and meaningful, whether it was in the home, near the home, or elsewhere. Some locations were chosen by the children, and others were chosen by their parents or even their grandparents. Children described burying their pets with toys or food, setting up gravestones, planting flowers or trees, and visiting those spots repeatedly to remember their companion animals. Yet almost all of the locations centred upon a place that was meaningful within the family context, if not especially meaningful to the pet. Sabrina and Jim, for instance chose their grandparents' farm even though it was not a place their cats had been when they were alive. Mac's family chose a place near the home and even planted a cherry tree on top of Suri's ashes, but it was the shared experience of burying her there and the annual return of flowers and celebration of her life that was perhaps most meaningful. Mac's mother, Anna, suggested in our follow up conversation that pets had been given such reverence within her family for several generations.

Likewise, embodiment also seems to be an important aspect of the grief experience. Again, when considered in conjunction with relationality and spatiality, it would seem that children come to understand death through various presences and absences in their perceptual and domestic spheres. They discussed the bodies of deceased animals and whether they were cremated, buried, or simply "went away," and yet, something vital remained. It was not

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mere memory that the children described. Children articulated a felt endurance of being when they told me that their pets would "always" be in their heads, dreams, or just "there." The meaning of death is clearly not reducible to biological description, but is bound with the myriad meanings attributed to relational life and being.

Notes

[1] Interestingly, Lily even remembered where Abby was when her guinea pig died, reinforcing the theme of spatiality explored in the previous chapter.

[2] This particular excerpt was unique. Lily was the only child who made a distinct empathic connection between herself and a character in a book. When children did mention popular culture or literary references, they tended to simply focus on the titles of stories. Chloe, for example, told me she had seen the movie "Marley & Me," (2008) about a … When I asked her further about the narrative, she claimed she could not remember. Kristina also mentioned "Marley & Me," but said she never saw the movie. Mac mentioned seeing the movie "My Dog Skip" (2000) but his mother Anna provided the details. Mac only agreed that he had seen it.

[3] I mention socio-economic status because several of the children spoke about burying pets at family cottages. Clearly, home burial is not a possibility for all children, and while my goal in this research is not to generalize findings, I feel this peculiarity should be mentioned, however briefly.

Chapter 7. "Everything Has to Die One Day:" Reflections, Conclusions, and Future Directions

At the end of each interview, I asked the children to think about and offer advice to other children who may be experiencing the death of their companion animals. I wanted to emphasize the connections between experience and knowledge while encouraging the children to share their wisdom with others. Ten-year-old Adele, whose cat Harley died just five days prior to our interview, offered the following advice:

> Adele: I would probably say to them that, if your animal dies, um, and they're old, its okay, I mean, they died, and everything has to die one day and its just the natural cycle of life for other things to come into the world. Maybe you'll get a new kitten or dog someday and it will be better again, you can start over.

I often found that the children's responses to this last question revealed a great deal about the meaning of a pet's death in their own lives. The children succinctly summarized many of the larger themes that emerged from their own interviews within these short responses. Adele, for example, had spoken several times during the interview about death as an ecological "necessity." On one occasion, while discussing her doubts about an afterlife, she suggested that death's purpose is to make room for new life:

> Adele: I mean, I don't really believe in heaven or hell or stuff. Because, I kinda find it strange. That you would die and then go somewhere else, I mean, if, if there was such thing as heaven or hell, then they would

constantly be expanding and stuff, and that's why things die in the first

place so that there's enough room on Earth for the new things.

Adele's response suggests that death is a kind of prerequisite for novelty in the

world. Adele pointed out that death makes room for "new things" to enter the

world, which may provide new opportunities for building relationships or

"starting over." Further, Adele's response suggests a wide, biocentric view of life

and death, one that includes non-human animals and focuses upon the centrality

of multispecies relationships. Adele's comments echo Deborah Bird Rose's (2013)

articulation of death as a kind of debt that the living owe to those who came

before. Rose suggests that this entails a wide, more-than-human, ethical relation

to the deceased, describing it as a "multispecies shadow, immensely great and

never fully knowable" (2013, p. 2).

In this concluding chapter, I will summarize the findings from previous

sections in order to present an interpretative response to my guiding research

questions. What does it mean for children to experience the death of a

companion animal? What do children's experiences with companion animal

deaths reveal about their perceptions of and relationships with the more-than-

human world? Following my methodological approach, which borrowed from

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al, 2009) and other

hermeneutic approaches (Van Manen, 1990; Ricoeur, 1992; Kearney, 2003), the

previous chapters presented descriptive, interpretative, and thematic analyses of

children's experiences of pet death. Here, I return to the double hermeneutic

circle, engaging with various discourses in order to place the findings—both the

children's descriptions and my own analysis—within a larger context of felt

meanings and knowledges. I engage in what Richard Kearney refers to as

"diacritical" analysis:

> Obviating both the congenial communion of fused horizons and the
> apocalyptic rupture of non-communion, I will endeavour to explore
> possibilities of intercommunion between distinct but not incomparable
> selves. The diacitical approach holds that friendship begins by welcoming
> difference… it champions the practice of dialogue between self and other,
> while refusing to submit to the reductionist dialectics of egology. (2003, p.
> 18)

A diacritical approach recognizes that intersubjective understanding and

meaning is partial, incomplete, and messy, while also suggesting that differences

between selves and others are not the deep, uncrossable chiasms that are

proposed in a radical hermeneutics of alterity (Kearney, 2003). Within the twists

and turns of this project's double-hermeneutic, a diacritical approach highlights

both the potentiality in child-pet encounters for kinship (Fawcett, in press) and

friendship, and also the presence of frustrations, miscommunications, or other

enactments of difference that stand in the way of intimate relationality or

"connections." Kearney's diacritical approach also highlights the researcher-

participant relationship, prompting reflection on the convergences and

divergences between myself and the children whom I interviewed. Where do our

horizons of understanding come together and where do our views of the world, self-and-other, and meaning diverge?

While the bulk of this conclusion is dedicated to a reflexive account and discussion, I will also engage in three other vital analyses. First, I will take an opportunity to reflect upon the potential impact of this work, highlighting what I believe to be the pedagogical implications, as well as this work's contributions to the rapidly growing field of human-animal studies. Second, I will reflect upon missed opportunities or weaknesses within this research project, including the possibility of a more active, child-led approach that is both trending within child studies and education (Hacking et al, 2013) and also well suited to a phenomenological approach. Third, I explore the need for future linguistic analyses on this data, including methods that engage with poetic, rhetorical, and structural considerations. The final discussion is concerned with future directions and possibilities that I would like to see arise from this research. For future work, I propose broadening the scope to increasingly distant relations—between children and domesticated animals, "wild" animals, "extinct" species, and various places and landscapes (Gruenewald, 2004)—while deepening my focus on children's emotional experiences of relationality and morality.

Intersubjectivity & Interanimality: Selfhood Amidst Animal Otherness
In classical approaches to psychology, it was believed that the psyche exists and is experienced only within the individual; a general, universalized vision of the

self (Code, 2006). Within this view, the experience of others within one's lifeworld is a "problem" for children, and the solution is largely described as an acceptance of this self-other separation, sometimes referred to as individuation (Damon, 1983; Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Developmental theory and psychoanalysis generally address these problems with various stage-based theories of individuation, referring to a person's gradual distinguishing of self from others over time, an "epigenetic" process that foretells one's direction in life: namely, to self-actualize while integrating one's unique character and talents into a suitable position within society (Damon, 1983). Stages are often presented sequentially, with children learning to distinguish the boundaries of one's self or ego in infancy, and subsequently becoming aware of, or learning about, various sociocultural and moral cues throughout the rest of one's development.

Lorraine Code directs a critical, feminist, and epistemological inquiry at these "discourses of development and maturation," in child psychology, arguing that they "work with a conception of 'the child' who is every child and no child in particular, details of whose identity or location should make no difference to the processes or products of inquiry" (2006, pp. 130-131). In the place of ahistorical and flat understandings of childhood, Code proposes ecologically-focused studies and theories of child development, noting:

> there are practices, myriad practices, communal, collective, and loving
> practices, isolated, fearful, and desperate practices: these are the places
> where ecological subjectivity begins and is encouraged, ignored, or

impeded; where knowledge is produced and where… it has to be studied, developmentally. (2006, p. 161)

While Code does not reference the developmental work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, his work is most often associated with an ecological consideration of childhood. Bronfenbrenner's "ecological systems theory" (1979) highlights various environments wherein child development takes place, starting with the microsystem (family, school, peers) and moving in concentric circles outward toward higher level cultural environments in the macrosystem.

Paul Shepard (1982) suggests that humanity's ecological heritage is one that sees children reach maturity through the negotiation of three matrices of relationship bonding and separation:

1. Matrix I: bond to principal caregiver;

2. Matrix II: bond to nature (natural history of home); and

3. Matrix III: bond to community and cosmos.

Rather than an epigenetic approach, with set developmental markers indicating the beginning and ending of a "stage," Shepard argues that these matrixial relations are negotiated and developed on an ongoing basis. His work is similar in many ways to attachment theory, both as it was originally conceived of by John Bowlby (1969) and as it was subsequently taken up in interpersonal psychology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012) and in human-animal studies (Melson, 2001; Walsh, 2009a; Walsh, 2009b). One sees similarities in the terminology first and foremost, with Shepard, Bowlby, and other attachment theorists borrowing

from Konrad Lorenz's ethological notion of "bonding." Echoing Shepard's human ecology, Walsh also traces the evolutionary success of human beings to ancient and historical relations with non-human animals generally, and companion animals in particular:

> In ancient times and in cultures worldwide, animals have been respected as essential partners in human survival, health, and healing… The domestication and socialization of animals was an interactive process of mutual cooperation and coevolution based on a shared need for shelter, food, and protection. (2009a, p. 463)

In her co-evolutionary account of humans and companion animals, however, Walsh (2009a; 2009b) neglects to expound upon the developing psychogenic connections that were surely part of these interspecies communities. I suggest that my own research fills such gaps.

In *Rogue Primate*, John Livingston further suggests that bonding with nature and landscapes is an activity "common to most mammals and birds" (1994, p. 122). Livingston proposes four forms of self-consciousness, namely individual, group, community, and biospherical forms that arise from children's appetites for the experience of connection in various relationships and communities. At all times, Livingston argues, these "self-awarenesses are… simultaneously and spontaneously available to the mature, wild animal according to the dictates of the moment" (1994, p. 123). I argue that phenomenological reflection on embodied experience and intersubjective relationality in childhood and throughout the lifespan offers experiential

grounding for the kind of ecological subjectivities that these authors propose. In his phenomenological exploration of human cultures and the ecological crisis, Evernden (1993) suggests that the embedded, Cartesian, and largely Western view of the human self as separate or individuated from others and from the world not only undermines the environmental movement, but counters our lived experience of relationality. Following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others, Evernden offers an alternative view, based on a sense of the self as profoundly interrelated. He describes this felt relation between a subject's embodied self, intimate others, and the surrounding lifeworld as one's "field of care:"

> One does not really experience the boundary of the self as the epidermis of the body, but rather as a gradient of involvement in the world. But instead of considering the extension of the self into the world as akin to the making of a body image or a "phenomenal body," here we are talking about a field of concern or care. *The child recognizes the primacy of relationship, that its parents are an intimate part of the event that is itself.* This may not be altogether unlike the experience of persons who are moved (often to their own surprise) to defend the useless, non-human world around them. Each "secretly hears his [*sic*] own name called whenever he hears any region of Being named with which he is vitally involved." (Evernden, 1993, p. 64, emphasis mine).

Evernden exemplifies this notion of a field of care by describing a child who, upon learning his name, comes to associate it with others first, and only later limits his name to the boundaries of his distinct, embodied self.

[Bracketing 7.1 -- I was roughly four years old when my family moved to the suburbs of Buffalo, New York. The house my parents built was surrounded on all sides by trees, densest in the back and on one side, and obviously thinnest between our house and the road and our house and the next-door neighbours. In fact, the back edge of our lot was a forest that led all the way to the next street over, inside of which was a large (or so it seemed) wetland, maybe more of a swamp. It was among those trees that I regularly played, often changing my very identity and becoming a cat-boy.

As a cat-boy, I was relatively tame. I was neither a jungle beast nor a savannah king. I was more affable; a companion perhaps, or maybe a stray. I remember it felt good to indulge in felinity, to leave behind the restrictions of upright, two-legged embodiment and to get down closer to the earth. A whole new world appeared in my transformation, one attuned to the very different sights, scents, sounds, and sensations given by my feline embodiment.

The stories that I played out as cat-boy varied, and I certainly don't remember them all. I recall a great number of them being rather mundane: a search for food, the exploration of new territories in search of a home or private space, or looking for others with whom I could interact. I often solicited friends or my brother to play along, to little avail. I repeatedly fell for the bargain of playing some sport first, and seeing what we could decide upon afterward. There was never really an "after." And so, much like a typical cat, cat-boy was often alone.

Interestingly, despite my obvious intrinsic fascination with felinity, I was not allowed to have a pet cat for most of my childhood. My father was allergic, and we already had a small dog and some fish. This never stopped me from asking for a cat,

however. Christmas is coming, how about a cat? You know, for birthdays this year, a kitten is the gift of choice! I got an A on my report card, cats for everyone! Eventually it worked, though only for a short while. One Christmas I got my very own cat, a gray Himalayan named "Scamper." I was enthralled. I played with Scamper, held him, and trapped him in my room just to be near him as much as I could. But the business of taking care of a cat became problematic, and I believe I have repressed a large amount of my memory as to why I neglected that work. In the end, after just a couple years, the cat was given away to someone else. I was deeply saddened. This was just one in a line of pets that was given to me and taken away, many times because of my own neglect at the responsibility of pet ownership.

During the time we had Scamper, I gradually evolved from cat-boy into mostly just "boy." The pressures of being just one thing became quite enough; besides, Dutch elm disease and the building of new houses were slowly thinning the woods out. As cat-boy (now "with a cat!"), I learned for a time to play on the stumps of those old trees, to explore them as perches or places to set up ambush. But I also found a new sense of exposure in the lack of cover. Others could see me and would notice my movements and my self-talk and scrutinize. I was caught on one occasion by a neighbourhood "friend" and ridiculed for quite some time when she told other kids what I had been doing. After we got rid of Scamper, I cannot recall ever embodying cat-boy again.

While not a conscious decision, I relegated that part of myself into the past. Animals were still a large part of my life, but over time I thought less and less about cat-boy. Yet, when I return to my parents' home and look around at where the trees

used to be, or when I look past the fence into the woods that remain at the end of their lot, I recall my inner feline, and perhaps just slightly I stretch my back and dig my claws into the earth of my childhood, and I remember... and it feels good.]

French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty actually spent much of his career considering child development, and the "problem of others" was a central concern in his writing. Merleau-Ponty describes this problematic along four lines of experience: "(1) *my body as an object,* (2) *my sense of my own body* (interoceptive image of my own body, (3) *the other's body that I see* (visual image), and (4) *the feeling the other has of his* [*sic*] *own existence*" (2010, p. 246, emphasis original). Merleau-Ponty's work, often in opposition to the popular work of Jean Piaget, establishes a line of phenomenological critique in developmental psychology. While Piaget (2002) posits an epigenetic or stage-based theory of development which moves from an enclosed, ego-oriented self in infancy toward a socialized, though logical and "detached," adult self, Merleau-Ponty highlights that our earliest consciousness is a "psychogenesis," beginning "in a state where the child is unaware of himself [*sic*] and the other as different beings" (Merleau-Ponty, 1982, p. 73). For Merleau-Ponty, an intersubjective beginning remains central to humans' embodied, perceptual, linguistic, and cognitive development throughout their lives. Merleau-Ponty (2010) was particularly influenced by work in *gestalt* theory, emphasizing the figure and ground of self-and-other, particularly within infant/caregiver dyads. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's

descriptions of "Flesh of the world" and "Chiasm," Eva Simms provides an overview of infancy and early childhood development that is decidedly phenomenological:

> The infant's body, from the beginning, transcends the matter it is made of by having an intentionality that ties it to the body of the (m)other. Flesh here means the intentional *chiasm*, or entwining, between dyadic bodies, the invisible form of the other that is inscribed in each. (2008, p. 19).

Simms contends that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides a situated, lived focus for exploring and understanding wider, cultural contexts of childhood. Exploring children's embodied experiences with others—mothers, caregivers, more-than-human beings, as well as "blankies and teddy bears" (2008, p. 9)— helps to address questions related to not only children's well-being, but also the well-being and flourishing of others in their worlds.

Phenomenological explorations of childhood build upon an assumption that children's interactions with animals, plants, landscapes, and even technological and virtual others are significant, and are therefore worth exploration (Griffin et al, 2010; Clayton & Myers, 2012; Hacking et al, 2013). In later works, Merleau-Ponty drew upon the ethological work of Jakob von Uexküll to describe both the "being" experienced by members of individual animal species and the quality of interspecies relationality. He claims that relations exist between species and among species as they do among part of each animal's own body. Ontologically, Merleau-Ponty implies that "what exists are not separated animals, but an inter-animality" (2003, p. 189). Merleau-Ponty's

work on interanimality was not directed toward child development per se, but it

fits within his relationally based, embodied and perceptive phenomenological

ontology, and provides a link that is valuable in this research project. While

Merleau-Ponty did not establish a complete phenomenology of interanimality

before he died (Dillard-Wright, 2009), his use of the phrase suggests a kind of

communicative, intersubjective co-existence not only within species, but between

them as well:

> We must understand life as the opening of a *field* of action. The animal is
> produced by the production of a milieu, that is, by the appearing in the
> physical world of a *field* radically different from the physical world with its
> specific temporality and spatiality. Hence the analysis of the general life of
> the animal, of relations that it maintains with its body, of the relations of its
> body to its spatial milieu (its territory), of inter-animality either within the
> species or between two different species, even those that are usually
> enemies, as the rat lives among vipers. Here two *Umwelten*, two rings of
> finality… cross each other. (quoted in Buchanan, 2008, pp. 135-136,
> emphases mine)

Again, this notion of "field" arises as a central theme; perhaps because of

Merleau-Ponty's interest in gestalt theory (Fisher, 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 2010).

For Merleau-Ponty, the notion of "field" was both descriptive of divergences

between selves and others, while also indicating a location for possible unity of

meaning or mutual understanding (Buchanan, 2008).

Furthermore, David Abram provides a phenomenological reflection on childhood relations with the more-than-human in his latest book, *Becoming Animal*:

> For little Hannah, stumbling giddily across the ground, each stone that catches her eye, each bird that swoops or tree that rises up before her is a ready counterpart of herself… Particular plants, specific landforms, and especially other animals seem to incarnate and make visible, for the child, particular impulses that she also senses within herself, empowering the small human to begin to notice and differentiate among various elemental forms of feeling, enabling her to begin to navigate a sea of ambiguous moods, emotions, and impulses whose unruly power could easily overwhelm the child. (2010, pp. 41-42)

Arguably, Abram's anecdote provides an example of sensuous experience similar to the concept of interanimality and extends it to encounters between children and more-than-human life forms in a way that is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's earlier work on children's relations with others. Abram further argues that children's emotional and embodied fascinations and connections, if encouraged, might develop into an empathetic awareness of the very different experiences, sensations, and perceptions of non-human others; one that allows for a tentative, partial, and yet meaningful connection across species boundaries. Abram laments the ways in which Western, capitalist culture renders non-human beings inert, and suggests that indigenous cultures provide evidence that this need not be the way that human relationship with the more-than-human is framed.

The often deep, intersubjective child-pet relationships described throughout this dissertation provide a context or milieu out of which various meanings emerge or are negotiated between multiple selves and others. If one considers the sharing of space, intimate touch, interaffectivity, and significant periods of time that children spend with companion animals, it would seem necessary to rework Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as well as both Shepard (1982) and Livingston's (1994) to include non-human animal bodies. Others (see Johnson, 2010) have considered the technological interfaces that children engage with from a very young age, including computers, cell phones, the internet, and television. I suggest building a similar model starting with the intimate, embodied pairings of children and pets in family contexts, and moving outward to consider wider ecological relations, as well as cultural and historical discourses that provide a framework for understanding those relationships. Such a model recognizes child-pet relationships as embedded within multiple cultural systems and socio-historical narratives of understanding, imagination, and affect.

The phenomenological approaches to childhood as well as the ecological model offered above establish horizons for interpreting the data presented in this study. In the subsection that follows, I return to the data and text of my interviews to explore the ways in which the children articulated a felt sense of self and other in their relationships with companion animals. I contend that children's relationships with pets were profound because of the practices,

actions, and meanings that emerged in intimate, familial, and cultural contexts.

Such profound relationality is a basis for "ecological subjectivity" as Code (2006)

describes it, and positions children—as well as humans and companion animals I

would add—as both "creatures that connect" and as beings living amidst "an

ecology of subjects" (Myers, 2007).

Thematic Connections: Self-and-Others and Shared Connections

Connected. Best friends. Siblings. Babies. Family members. Pets. The children in

this study described their companion animals using a variety of these terms and

metaphors, often signifying how profound and meaningful those relationships

are (or were) to them. Relationality was a significant existential theme (Van

Manen, 1990) within each chapter, and yet, there were many moments when

children explored their individuality or their personal identities. Those excerpts,

abstracted under the super-ordinate theme of "Focus on self," accounted for 24

percent of the overall data. I argue that the children's focus on their own

characteristics, qualities, knowledge, and abilities does not take away from the

primacy of relatedness in their lives. Rather, many of the excerpts indicate that

even within shared existences or the deepest intersubjective moments there

remains a feeling of distance or difference between one's unique self and the

significant others in one's life. Children are working out where they stand as

unique individuals within various relationalities, including among family,

friends, wider human communities, as well as in relationships with more-than-

human animals and environments. It is an understatement to say that developmental literature tends to ignore these last two relational spheres—animals and environments—as being important.

Typically, I started my interviews by asking whether children thought of themselves as a person who was interested in animals. Given that the participants and their parents agreed to an interview focused on pets and death, I assumed that most of the children would respond in the affirmative; so I tried to get a sense of the extent to which they considered themselves "animal people" by drawing and describing three individuals and asking them to choose the individual that most represented themselves. In my interview with Sabrina, 13, and Jim, 11, I hastily drew three stick figure representatives and asked them to choose which character best described them:

> I: Okay, um, so I'm gonna draw you something. I should've done this as a picture because I keep drawing stick figures for everyone, but, I'm gonna draw you three people. I was gonna use the toys as props maybe, but um, alright, so person #1, person #2, person #3, that's my best writing upside-down. Person #1 really loves animals um (p) they have pets at home, or, they go to the zoo a lot, or they go out hiking so they can see birds and deer and things. Person #2 just feels so-so about animals, like, they like to see them, and they don't have any pets, and, they're more interested in people, and, people things. Person #3 hates animals, like, they don't like animals at all uh, they don't want to be around them, they don't want to be in people's houses when they have pets and things like that. So, (p) are you most like person #1, person #2, or person #3?
>
> Jim: Definitely person number one I would have to say. (*giggling*)

I: Okay, Sabrina?

Sabrina: Number one.

In all, I coded 19 distinct instances of children describing themselves as someone

who likes animals, and 10 of those examples actually arose at moments other

than as a response to the direct question above (see Box 7.1). Of the 12 children I

interviewed, only Juliet suggested she was not necessarily like person #1—she

said she was somewhere between person #1 and person #2—and the only child

not coded as describing themselves this way was Oscar, my first interviewee.

However, when I interviewed Oscar, this question was not part of my list. Suffice

to say, Oscar displayed a deep interest in animals throughout our interview.

Box 7.1 - Superordinate Theme: "Focus on Self/Self Context"

Emergent theme:	Excerpt count:	% of interviews:
Self as knowledgeable/experienced	23	90
Self as caring	21	90
Self as "animal person"	19	90
Self as observant	23	80
Family context of animal/pet interest	17	80
Wider social/peer experience of pets	11	60
Self as concerned for others	11	50
Self as victim	5	40
Self as different from sibling	5	30
Self as fun	5	30
Self as vulnerable/mortal	4	30
Self as afraid	3	30

While the "animal person" question was itself narrowly conceived—only three options were given, and children might have been telling me what they thought I wanted to hear—it still led to interesting points of conversation. My follow up questions with Sabrina and Jim sought to explore the roots of their proclaimed animal interest:

I: And why do you think that is, where do you think that comes from?

Jim: Sabrina?

Sabrina: Mommy. She's…

I: What do you mean?

Sabrina: Well, she's like, a big animal person so we've had pets like, a lot, and they, I don't know, I like them I guess?

Sabrina's response fits within the model of intersubjective relations I propose above. Sabrina suggested that her love of animals came from her Mom, within the context of her family and home. Many of the children provided similar responses, as there were 17 total responses coded with "family context of animal/pet interest," across eight of the ten interviews. In these excerpts, children typically described their parents' shared love of animals. There were another 11 excerpts across six of the ten interviews that received the code "wider social/peer experience of pets" (see Box 7.1). These responses ranged from sharing a general interest in animals or pets with various friends, knowing about friends' specific relationships with companion animals, and even sharing stories with each other about pets' deaths. While other people did not always provide

the basis for children's interests in animals, they did often serve as reinforcers of children's attitudes toward companion animals.

Sometimes children's descriptions of their relationships with animals would come in the form of comparisons with others in their social network—parents, friends, and especially siblings. Neville described himself as particularly patient and adept at earning the trust of his family's cat, Dizzy, as opposed to his younger sister Jenny, whom he felt lacked that awareness and capacity:

> I: Yeah. Yeah, so tell me then, some more about when you first got Thunder, and what kinds of things, you did, you did with her.
>
> Neville: So, um, usually what I would do is, I was really gentle with the cats, not like my sister, but, not to point any fingers, but she would like chase after them. (I: Yeah) Cuz she was a lot younger than me (I: Right) but usually what I would do, like I do now, is I would let them have their own way, and maybe if I were feeling good I would pick them up and cuddle them and then put them back down (I: Mmhmm) and, I think that really has affected the relationship between me and Dizzy, my other cat (I: Yeah?) because Dizzy can't sleep with Jenny, because if Jenny like tries to pick Dizzy up, she'll run away (I: Yeah) but if I try to pick Dizzy, she won't go for me as much, and I'm like, she like comes and tries to lie on top of my bed, and I pet her and she's really fine with it, but she doesn't usually go on top of Jenny's bed because I think she's like afraid that she'll like jump at her or something…

Neville felt that physical contact was an important part of his connection with his cat. When he felt good, he picked the cat up and held her. He was also careful to articulate his own attitude and approach throughout this excerpt, suggesting that

he is uniquely familiar with and attuned to Dizzy's needs and desires. His own comportment afforded him the opportunity to make a close connection with Dizzy. As a result, he experienced a greater amount of intimacy with Dizzy than his younger sister, Jenny, who was portrayed as less kind and gentle than Neville.

In addition to describing themselves as persons interested in animals, children often focused upon their knowledge and experience, their keen observations of animals, and their caring nature. For example, Adele's response to my question about her interest in animals was rooted more in the desire to be a caregiver, with a focus on animals' emotional needs:

> I: Yeah, um, and do you think that you're the kind of person that, some people really like animals, some people don't. Would you describe yourself as a person who really likes them, who kind of likes them, or…
>
> Adele: (*interrupting*) I really, really like them.
>
> I: You really like them. And why do you think you really like animals?
>
> Adele: Um, I just really like them because, they're living beings and I find that all living beings should be liked by something. Why shouldn't I be that something?

While simplified under the guise of being "liked," Adele was more deeply alluding to a kind of perceived need for relationality that exists among all "living beings." She stopped short of describing it as care, perhaps because of the way in which I worded the question. Kristina, during a similar point in our conversation, actually described herself as someone who likes to "care" for

animals, although her notion of care was epistemological. For Kristina, care entailed knowing about her companion animals; what they needed to eat, what kind of habitats they preferred, essentially the "how to" of caring. Adele's response described a more emotional connection. Beings should be "liked by something." Why not her? Adele's interest in animals provided, in a sense, a potentiality for connecting with them. She was perhaps acknowledging her own desire to be liked as a feeling shared with her pets, or other animals generally.

These self-defined characteristics are part of children's sense of individuality, but they also describe and emphasize their need for relationships. At various points in the preceding chapters, I explored the meanings surrounding the relationality between children and pets. In Chapter Four, I worked through the concept of "connections," as described explicitly by three children. I suggested that connections are deeply relational experiences entailing various intersubjective conditions: shared intentionality, empathic understanding, and embodied intimacy. Not all of the children felt these connections the same way, and some of them described feeling connected to certain animals more than others. As a result, I argue that John Bowlby's (1969) concept of attachments, which is used to describe child-pet relationships (Melson, 2001; Walsh, 2009a; Walsh, 2009b), is perhaps too narrow. Children's relationships with pets and animals in general cover a wide range of possibilities. Yet children's potentiality for connections or the desire to feel connected in one or more of those intersubjective ways was present in most of the interviews. I

found deeper connections were articulated by children based on experiences of home space, quality and length of time spent with companion animals, social sharing of animal interests, and the shared intentions of the pets themselves. Such connections are important and formative experiences for an ecologically situated self's matrixial relations with the wider, more-than-human world as described by Shepard (1982), Livingston (1994), Code (2006), and Myers (2007; Clayton & Myers, 2011).

Often, children recognized that relationality was not based on complete understanding or total knowledge of a companion animal's experience. Lily admitted that it was "weird" to consider what animals think. Sabrina and Jim expressed some trepidation about their cat Pip's ability to foresee his own death. Adele suggested she could not know what Harley experienced because she did not think of herself as an animal. Chloe responded to questions of empathic understanding with silence or uncertainty. Yet despite these ambiguous replies, most of the children freely described what their pets were thinking in other contexts, speaking for them or describing how they viewed the world and various people. I suggest that this ambivalence is not indicative of some developmental stage or difficulty children have in acknowledging animals' otherness. Rather, I argue that it is an important experiential aspect of interanimality and ecological subjectivity. Insofar as one self can "know" another—particularly a non-human other—and build or share a mutual understanding through various communicative efforts, embodied gestures, or

affective alignments, such knowledge and intersubjective relationality remains uncertain and contextually specific. Sean Blenkinsop (2005) draws upon Martin Buber's description of his own experience with a horse at age 11 as evidence of such possibilities:

> [I] felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of *Thou* and *Thou* with me. (Buber, quoted in Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 287, emphases original).

Buber's distinction between *I/It* and *I/Thou* provides a point of reflection for this project. As Buber notes, the *I* is experienced differently in various kinds of relationships, especially whether in communion with objects (*I/It*) or with other subjects (*I/Thou*) capable of engaging with the self (Blenkinsop, 2005). It is unclear why or how Buber knew that the horse saw him as a *Thou* rather than an *It*, but perhaps some aspect of their intersubjective relating was not fully articulated. Blenkinsop (2005) also explicitly acknowledges the role of education in supporting the development of this *I/Thou* relationality with the more-than-human world. Following Buber's writing in his essay *Education*, Blenkinsop suggests that education ought to begin with "the presupposition of creative powers already in existence" (2005, p. 297) rather than believing that education develops or trains creativity into children. Likewise, Blenkinsop emphasizes that relationality is itself tied to creativity within the developmental process of self

discovery amidst a community of others. Educators, he suggests, are tasked with a pedagogical sensitivity reminiscent of Van Manen's (1990) "pedagogical tact." In presenting opportunities for relational experiences, reflection, and in establishing an environment for connecting with otherness, educators help learners to build upon certain biophilic tendencies. In a similar way, Abram (2010) implies that encouraging and supporting children's affinities for relating with other-than-human beings, including rocks, trees, and animals is vital for a continued felt sense of connection across the lifespan. Abram does not explicitly name the encouragement of children's interest in natural forms as an educational endeavour for teachers or parents, but the implication remains.

In my study, the children certainly explored ways in which other humans—particularly parents, siblings, peers, and extended family members—influence their experiences of and ideas concerning animals. As the interviewer or researcher, I became directly implicated in this process. I was, in a sense, a facilitator of remembering, a "social companion of loss" who helped children to think through their experiences of grief, loss, care, relationality, selfhood, and otherness (S. Alsop, personal communication, October 9, 2013). I took this pedagogical role seriously throughout my fieldwork and analysis, striving to remain reflexive about my own participation and my relationship to both the children and the data. The child-pet relationships described in this study emphasize that children often feel strongly connected with other beings, especially when supported by influential human beings in their lives. Children's

encounters with animal otherness allow them to reflect upon their sense of a self that emerges over time, but also requires of them a flexible, attentive integration of self and other that implies a developing ethical point of view. There are varying degrees of felt relationality or connectivity with pets, other animals, plants, and even landscapes, and these feelings can be challenged or enhanced when one experiences loss or death.

"Life Goes On:" Companion Animals and Grievability

In *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009), Judith Butler explores how the phenomenon of relationality is politically and ethically framed in order to situate various others as non-existent, faceless, voiceless, and even ungrievable. In *Precarious Life,* Butler's specific concerns flow from her experiences as a critic of the United States' response following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. She and other critics of the "war on terror" were chastised according to the American moral paradigm presented in politics and in media, namely, "you're with us or you're against us." Butler suggests that the either/or thinking in such paradigms frames some lives as recognizable, and hence grievable, while other lives are left outside of the margins of public perception and are thus rendered ungrievable (Butler, 2009). Key to Butler's response is her description of "recognizability," a Hegelian concept which she defines as "the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition—the general terms, conventions, and norms "act" in their own way, crafting a living being into a

recognizable subject, though not without errancy or, indeed, unanticipated results" (Butler, 2009, p. 5).

Butler's arguments explore what it means to recognize a living being as having a life, an epistemic endeavour that echoes the animal rights philosopher Tom Regan's (1987) notion of moral subjects, including certain "higher" animals, as being "subjects of a life." Regan's metaphysical argument for animal rights suggests that beings capable of individual beliefs, desires, and a sense of self that extends both into the past and into the future, are "subjects of a life," and hence deserve moral recognition. The children in this study seem to recognize that this is the case with their companion animals, and often expressed those observations while describing the death of their pets. Why might such apprehension of animals' lives and subjectivity coincide with the witnessing of their suffering or death? Butler (2004) claims that human beings' fundamental relationality and existential awareness of vulnerability leads to the possibility of recognizing others' lives as "precarious." Precariousness is a condition of being born, she claims, and as social beings humans experience this precarity in recognizing that their lives are highly dependent upon others (Butler, 2009). Is it possible then to recognize precariousness in other kinds of beings? While Butler maintains an anthropocentric focus, concerned with how human lives are subject to the production of normative frames, she does acknowledge briefly that precariousness is "a condition that links human and non-human animals" (2009, p. 13). Butler has been criticized for establishing a line of inquiry and argument

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that maintains and reinforces the primacy of "humanness" (Iveson, 2012), but I suggest that Butler's arguments encourage a hermeneutic, phenomenological line of inquiry into the experience and meaning of interspecies relationality. In forthcoming work (Russell, in press), I argue that mutuality and intersubjectivity between humans and non-human animals—and perhaps even landscapes—often leads to a sense of narrativity experienced in relational spaces between subjects. I call this phenomenon "animal narrativity," acknowledging that other beings' lives are stories both in and of themselves, and in ways that converge and diverge with the stories and histories of my own self and communities. To illustrate, I describe witnessing the death of a dog on a highway near Toronto. Those of us who witnessed that event felt that there was not only a sequence of happenings that led to the dog's presence there, but that the dog was a unique subject, tied to an ecology of others, with a life history of its own. Our grief was partly attributable to the fact that we would never know that story, that we would be yearning to make sense of what happened both in the immediate sense and in extended temporal frames (Russell, in press).

Likewise, my research with children in this study provides various narratives, anecdotes, and descriptions, which highlight the potential for recognizing non-human animals as having meaningful lives that are interdependent with human being(s) and subject to the same conditions of life. Building on Butler's descriptions of recognizability and precariousness, I argue that the children in this project often recognized vulnerability in their

relationships with companion animals in several, mutually significant ways. Ophelia spoke about her cat, Denny, saving her life when she was an infant. In the fictional story from *Stone Soup*, Rani Deb (2010) wrote about a dog, Breeze, saving a young boy who fell through the ice. Many of the children described euthanasia as a responsible choice made by members of the family out of care and concern for their pet's perceived suffering. Adele even referred to prolonging Harley's suffering as "animal cruelty." Extending Butler's terms, companion animals lives become "grievable" because of what is profoundly shared with others: space, time, bodily awareness and touch, and shared affects such as care, love, joy, and even sorrow.

Butler actually describes this precariousness as built upon affective apprehension of life's fundamental relationality, the fact that we emerge from social conditions and attachments. This affective knowledge surfaces in the experience and expression of grief:

> It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the *attachment* to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you?... What grief displays… is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. (Butler, 2004, pp. 22-23, emphasis mine)

I highlight Butler's use of the term "attachment" here to draw attention to the deeply affective, relational identification that occurs between the self and particular others. While I argue that attachment theory is in some senses a narrow or confining approach to child-pet relationships (see Chapters Four and Five), the model of grief that Butler proposes does emphasize the ways in which one's account of oneself is challenged when a significant loss occurs, and draws on similar intersubjective conditions of selfhood as attachment theory.

Bowlby's third major volume in his attachment theory "trilogy" is entitled *Loss: Sadness and depression* (1980). In that work, Bowlby describes the loss of a significant attachment figure as a painful yearning that elicits actions, particularly seeking out the lost other. In comparisons between human reactions to the loss of human attachments and pet attachments, it was found that similar grief reactions are observed, including "searching behaviour, obsessive rumination of the events leading up to the pet's death, thoughts of previous significant losses both animal and human, and fears of losing control or 'going crazy'" (Field et al, 2009, p. 336). Human-animal attachment research also highlights the differences in attachment styles, which has not been touched upon in my analysis. Field et al (2009) note that individuals can develop insecure attachments to pets, particularly bonds that fit the anxious or avoidant model presented by Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991). Individuals who exhibited certain attachment styles—secure, insecure avoidant, insecure anxious—in human relationships displayed corresponding responses at the loss of a pet. Anxiously

attached individuals experienced chronic grief, feelings of hopelessness and despair, and searched continuously for the lost pet. Avoidant individuals typically display a delayed onset of grief reactions, although in this particular study no significant responses were found, and many individuals resorted to anxious type responses (Field et al, 2009). Again, these patterns were observed and reported in adults, not in children. Of particular significance are the mediating factors that influenced participants' grief reactions. The authors describe the importance of social supports who acknowledge the importance of pets in individuals' lives, noting "social support can provide the bereaved with a sense of felt security in being able to appeal to others for comfort to help him or her process the loss," while a lack of such support can "increase the likelihood that the bereaved will avoid processing the loss because the emotions, aroused by reminders of the loss, are too overwhelming to bear alone" (Field et al, 2009, p. 339).

Grieving for others is often difficult work, and at times it is a morally significant endeavour. Paul Ricoeur (2004) suggests that grief and mourning are, in essence, memory work, often built upon a sense of duty, obligation, and responsibility for others, particularly in a historical sense. Taken together, Butler's notions of precariousness and grievability and Bowlby's ontology highlight the primacy of affective and embodied relationality, out of which a self emerges. This selfhood is always in relation to others, and when others die, the self is often left to carry on their memory, values, or traditions. This is not always

easy, or even appropriate, but it is a felt response to the loss of someone or something significant. In a sense, when a significant "other" is lost—whether it is a mother figure, caregiver, partner, or companion animal—the self struggles to maintain an identity, longing to feel and experience the connection that was definitive of one's lifeworld. Now deceased, what part of a beloved other can I carry forward within my own life? How (if at all) will I tell their story?

Interpersonal social supports within various communities as well as normative frames expressed in media or other cultural institutions influence how individuals processes loss. I do not wish to get away from the specific hermeneutic inquiry I am engaged in here regarding children's experiences of pet loss; but these frameworks emphasize the complexity of such phenomena at various levels of sociality, from the micro to the macro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Certainly their descriptions of their grief were variable and contextual, but as Bowlby (1980) notes, this is common in the mourning of children: their social conditions, particularly within the family structure, have a strong influence on their grief response. What children are told about the events surrounding a significant loss, how caregivers themselves respond, and how caregivers expect children to respond are important factors (Bowlby, 1980). In the next section, I recap how grief and precariousness arose within the interviews and analysis, connecting those themes to the theoretical work set forth here.

Thematic Connections: Replaceability, Anxiety, and Grief

Children examined and described their grief over a pet's death with as much variety as they described their particular relationships. Similar to the results reported by Field et al (2009), it seems that social support from family members, friends, and even other pets was a significant factor in children's response to bereavement. Other significant individuals helped children to cope with the loss of a beloved pet. Given that many children described sharing their interest and knowledge of animals with these same "others," it makes sense that processing the death of a pet entails relying on that same network to develop an understanding of that loss. In a sense, social networks serve as a kind of epistemic base for children, allowing them to explore the meaning of death and loss as part of their lifeworld. Attachment theory suggests that primary caregivers ideally provide a secure base from which children can move out and explore the world, knowing that they can return to safety and comfort in the event of a strange or threatening situation (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Attachment is understood, in part, as a set of actions and affects. In this study, I suggest that children's attachments were illustrated ecologically, as a web of place-based and intersubjective relations rather than in the form of a single caregiver. As noted above, children acknowledged particular individuals or communities that they sought out after a pet's death or during their own grief. Some children acknowledged the importance of sharing affects or embodied encounters (e.g., hugging, cuddling) with others, which allowed them to feel comfortable with their own sorrows or joys. Spaces such as the home or the

bedroom or even the bed were also significant for establishing a sense of security, as when Lily, Neville, and Kristina described not wanting to leave the house. Rituals often centred around spatially secure locations: the home, a family cottage, or even familiar natural settings.

My goal in this project, however, is not to diagnose children's relationships with companion animals, or other significant individuals in their lives, as "secure" or "insecure." Rather, I want to acknowledge that the embodied, affective experience of death and grief occurs within a network of meaningful and influential relationships in shared times and spaces. Beyond the immediate relationships within various family and community structures are larger cultural frames and institutional discourses that impact children's lives with companion animals. As a result, children's meaning making in light of a companion animal's death is often complex and ongoing. As Lily noted, "its kind of weird what animals think." One particular emergent theme from this study that highlights this felt difficulty with death and relationships is "replaceability." Replaceability refers to children's descriptions of replacing a deceased companion animal with a new one; it is a phenomenon that was often tied to an internal ambivalence between remembering a beloved pet and moving on from

his or her death (see Box 7.2).

Box 7.2 - *Superordinate Theme: "Replaceability"*

Emergent theme:	Excerpt count:	% of interviews:
Replaceability	9	80%
Moving on	9	40%
Emotions and (ir)replaceability	2	20%

Several children, including Kristina, Lily, and Ophelia, explicitly linked getting

new pets with feeling better. Adele described it as an opportunity to "start over"

again, suggesting that replaceability had more to do with the form of relationship

rather than erasing differences between individual animals. Other children, such

as Mac, Sabrina, and Juliet, explained how grief was a temporally bounded

experience that often ended when new relationships began.

While replaceability may seem to be a matter of indifference to a

companion animal's unique identity, it does not necessarily constitute an

unemotional substitution of one individual being for another. Rather,

replaceability was often seen as a way of dealing with the pain of loss. The notion

of replaceability often coincided with children's recognition that death, loss, and

grief are difficult, yet inevitable, aspects of life and important relationships.

Furthermore, children acknowledged that loss is an emotional experience that

they are likely to experience again, especially in the context of future

relationships with non-human animals. Juliet proposed that with experience, grief might become easier to cope with over time:

> Juliet: Say like, (p) one time you were really really sad because your like hamster or someone died and then you got millions more and then, one of them died, and then like all of those ones died and you know, you knew how to deal with it and you didn't mind it as much because you kinda know how to deal with it because you've been through it more.

Replaceability might also be seen as part of a felt need to move on from a bereavement, to recognize, as Neville stated, that even in the face of death and grief, "life goes on." Neville also acknowledged that grief is not always easy, and perhaps that is something one must learn, a kind of awareness or acceptance of life's darker side. He even expressed a particular disdain for the notion of replaceability while providing advice to other bereaved children:

> Neville: I think its important to tell them that, um, life goes on even though your pet is dead, its not the end of the world, and I know how it feels like, that to happen to you (J: Mmhmm) and, that if it does happen to you, then you can't think of it um, and go into depression about it because its um, life goes on, you, um, even, pets are not replaceable so don't go telling people that, that you just got a replacement.

Neville was alluding to a felt moral sense described above, a sense of responsibility to the lost other, to their memory and unique being. Mac expressed frustration when his mother, Anna, brought home a new dog shortly after his dog Suri died, saying she "shoved it in [their] faces." Mac's response implied that he was not ready for a new pet, that his pain was still present to some extent. When considered in concert with his letter to Suri, where he wrote to the dog that she will always be in his head, one might interpret his frustration over the

new dog as a sense of guilt or as perceived pressure to forget his beloved dog and move on to a new relationship.

These children's explorations of replaceability do not disclose the primacy of relationality, nor do they necessarily diminish the meaning of lost relationships. Children's explorations of replaceability simply acknowledge that death's presence in one's life requires varying, contextual responses. One cannot feel each death with the depth described by Neville as "the end of the world," without becoming swallowed up by fear, anxiety, or depression. So while Oscar's description of his pet fish dying ("then the other died, then the other died, then the other died…") exhibited a nameless, faceless, and identity-less articulation of death as a mundane or replaceable event, it is possible to read such a response as a protective detachment. Juliet's hypothetical description of experiencing "millions" of hamsters dying above revealed a desire to learn how to cope with death over time. These children were protecting their own emotional vulnerability. Neil Evernden's description of a "field of care" articulates a felt sense that one's own name is called when bearing witness to the vulnerability of significant others, beings and places to which one feels connected:

> One does not really experience the boundary of the self as the epidermis of the body, but rather as a gradient of involvement in the world. But instead of considering the extension of the self into the world as akin to the making of a body image or a 'phenomenal body,' here we are talking about a field of concern or care… whether it is the housewife who defies the chainsaws to rescue a tree that is beyond her property yet part of her abode, or the

elderly couple who unreasonably resist expropriation of their home, or the
young "eco-freak" fighting to preserve some vibrant, stinking bog… each
has heard his [sic] own name called, and reacts to the spectre of impending
non-being. (1993, p. 64).

I suggest that children—indeed all humans—live within embodied, relational,
and *emotional* landscapes much like Evernden's fields of care, with peaks, valleys,
and even dark, hidden spaces in the terrain. Yet, as Oscar and Juliet revealed, life
and death can become replaceable events when the lives lost are not recognized,
framed, or felt as part of one's own field of care. Some places and beings are kept
close through intentional and mutual acts of agency or through unconscious
forces of desire or repression, while other beings will always exist at the
periphery.

Despite our globalized, highly technologically connected society, I argue
that we cannot devote an endless amount of emotional energy to all beings
everywhere. In the fictional novel *Amphibian,* Carla Gunn (2009) explores the
impact of such hyper-awareness through the point of view of a nine-year-old boy
named Phin. Phin has a wide ranging knowledge of animals, and obsessively
watches TV shows on the "Green Channel," and regularly tunes in to the sounds
and sights of a far-away African pond that is streamed live on the internet; but
Phin experiences things deeply and is profoundly impacted by all of his
knowledge. He feels helpless about the plight of animals all over the world, and
while a parallel plot line in the novel sees Phin reacting to his parents' recent
divorce, the reader does not need to see his grief for the natural world as

symbolic of the loss of his parents' relationship. Phin is genuinely concerned about planetary suffering, and is unable to process his own grief and helplessness, despite his mother's attempts to curtail his access to television and the internet and his regular trips to a psychiatrist. In the end, with the help of his grandmother and his mother, Phin learns to channel his anxieties into a local amphibian rescue organization, illustrating the importance of a felt connection to one's immediate surroundings. Phin's emotional landscape shifts throughout the novel, from an overwhelming global anxiety to a more local, and more manageable perhaps, sense of responsibility. Phin's journey in *Amphibian* highlights how our emotional landscapes are carved out relative to a wide range of others, including parents, friends, teachers, counsellors, and more-than-human beings and landscapes. As a result, our emotional and ethical engagement with otherness is shifting and dynamic. What or who one feels and experiences as their companions or connections as children can become validated, lost, or even erased in light of various social and cultural pressures. Fawcett (in press) suggests that part of our Western, cultural heritage entails a categorization of non-human animals as childish concerns, noting that as children develop, they are encouraged to erase not only their own animality but their curiosity, wonder, and concern for the more-than-human world. Companion animals seem to challenge that argument, as not only the economic boom of pet care products but also the omnipresence of pets in public places (off-leash dog parks, pet-friendly stores) and in media (LOLCatz, youtube categories

dedicated to "pets") suggests a lifelong commitment to human-pet relationships. My interview with Helen Hobbs, founder of *Pets at Peace*, provided insight into the growing desire to practice religious and cultural rituals when a companion animal dies. Are pets then symbolic of a lengthening neoteny in middle-class Western society (Shepard, 1986)? Are those of us who live with companion animals and who grieve their death being childish? I would argue against such thinking. As the children in this study articulated, there are no easy answers when thinking about and living with companion animals or "other" more-than-human beings. They recognized companion animals as vulnerable subjects and as agents with their own desires and intentions—including the desire to connect (or not) with humans—as part of the complexity of these intimate, interspecies relationships.

Animal Agencies: On Narrativity, (Inter)Subjectivity, and Animals as Teachers
In Chapters Four through Six, I provided space for reflecting upon the subjectivity of more-than-human beings, in particular the companion animals— living and deceased—whose presences and absences were felt and explored within the interviews and observations that comprised my fieldwork. Here, I will briefly return to those passages and conclusion in order to provide both a summary account as well as an indication of future directions. I will also place those findings in dialectical relation with other research and writing that I have done recently and which is forthcoming (Russell, in press). What I want to

propose in this section is that animal subjectivity is not reducible to some epistemically refined presentation of data, whereby living beings prove themselves capable of cognition, contemplation, language, or some other marker. Rather, I suggest that subjectivity is a perceivable phenomenon that arises most evidently within lived relations. In this study, children's memories of living with pets, witnessing their deaths, and coping with their loss revealed an underlying recognition of companion animals as subjects and agents within their own lifeworlds.

Early in my research process, I became aware of a particular assumption that was underlying my work. I was convinced that deceased animals could not or would not be present in the interviews, and that as a result, animal subjectivity would be difficult to discuss. I assumed that death marked the end of one's subjectivity and agency, and that the "only" animal subjectivity I would experience would be a result of the presence of any living animals during the course of my interviews or fieldwork. My narrow vision of subjectivity as a property of the living perhaps belied a Western bias, one that sees death as a total physical annihilation (Sartre, 1984; Rose, 2013). Other epistemologies and cosmologies, however, do not consider death to be a total finality of being or subjectivity. There is an abundance of anthropological evidence in which living members of a community treat with the deceased in meaningful ways, suggesting a belief in their continued subjectivity (Kellehear, 2007). Literature and the arts provide further insight into Western culture's particular fascinations

and trepidations about the limits of subjectivity in light of life and death. In Sharon Patricia Holland's (2000) reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, she acknowledges that critics of Morrison challenged her for blurring the lines between death and life. Beloved is presumably the risen ghost and embodiment of main character, Sethe's deceased two-year-old daughter. Holland's reading focuses both upon the literary difficulty of encountering a character who has crossed an uncrossable boundary (e.g., death), as well as upon Morrison's resurrection of a historically fraught and largely ignored subject within American culture, namely black women. The main characters in Morrison's novel are challenged by Beloved's revived agency, as she threatens both their homes and their lives. In a similar way, Western readers are challenged by the presence of a black, female ghost who actively calls into question "the American imaginary and its subconscious machinations to disremember a shared past" (Holland, 2000, p. 2). While Holland's analysis is literary, it calls into question various difficulties that one might have with acknowledging agency and subjectivity in the deceased that I believe is relevant in this study. In Chapter Three, I discussed the lived experience of remembering, acknowledging that memory is shaped in an ongoing process that is influenced by others, both living and deceased. The children in this study spoke of their deceased pets as unique subjects, describing actions, intentions, and affects that have historically been denied to non-human beings. Such denials persist into present literatures, despite a growing trend both inside and outside of critical academic scholarship

that recognizes animal subjectivity (Castricano, 2009). Here, I suggest that recalling and remembering the subjectivity of deceased, non-human animals is only possible and meaningful because of intersubjective experiences across species boundaries. One does not need to believe in an afterlife or an eternal, spiritual state for deceased pets to recognize that they may be recalled as agents or subjects to whom we owe some debt, whether that debt is simply gratitude or something more profound, like our own livelihood (Rose, 2013). Adele emphatically rejected the possibility of an afterlife, and while she expressed ambivalence about her cat Harley's thoughts and experiences, she readily served in the role of ventriloquist when describing Harley's day-to-day thoughts and actions. Ophelia expressed the importance of her cat Denny's agency both in the story she wrote about Denny saving her life in her school publication and in the version of the story she shared with me. In doing so, I argue that Ophelia was emphasizing Denny's agency, allowing it to live on in her own words. Such representation calls into question the presences and absences which one feels regarding the deceased; much like the "black female ghost" in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Holland, 2000), more-than-human spectres are often denied the ability to maintain active, subjective presences in the worlds of the living. The companion animals in this study call such assumptions into question.

In a forthcoming chapter entitled "Animal Narrativity: Engaging with Story in a More-than-Human World," (Russell, in press) I suggest that there is an ontological basis for interspecies narratives. I further suggest that perceiving and

recognizing animal lives as story has ethical implications. Humans and more-than-human beings live in communion with each other to varying degrees. Within this study for example, some children described their relationships as "connections," while others claimed that companion animals were their friends or family members. Such profound relationality draws living beings together, not in a totalizing way, but in ethically meaningful ways. I suggest that the children in this study experienced varying degrees of animal narrativity (Russell, in press). As noted earlier, I was perhaps a companion or facilitator within this process, but I would argue that the companion animals were as well. Children's ongoing memory work occurred prior to me in the presence of a whole web of otherness—parents, siblings, friends, and both living and deceased companion animals—and undoubtedly continued even after I left their homes. However, it was in their memories of shared, intentional action in their relationships with companion animals that children discovered a diversity of subjectivities. Companion animals are often present in children's lives from a very early age (Melson, 2005), and as a result, they provide experiences that are educational and developmentally meaningful. It might even be said that companion animals are educators themselves, facilitators of significant interspecies experiences. Through their own embodied forms of language and action, companion animals convey something of their own selfhood, while providing dialectical opportunities for children to do the same. Is that not a task of education?

Further incorporation of these children's descriptions with the phenomenon of "animal narrativity" that I propose is required, and it is a task I look forward to addressing in future work. At present, however, I believe that the children's stories and utterances point to the importance of perceiving subjectivity in more-than-human beings, both living and deceased. I argue that the children in this study also call into question our ethical responsibility toward the deceased. While children often expressed difficulty in imagining and articulating their companion animals' mental or experiential lives, none of them refused subjectivity to their pets. I suggest that the children's recognition of animal subjectivity was a result of their meaningful experiences with companion animals, of recalling a life with other agential beings. Children's relationships with companion animals can provide opportunities for witnessing and acknowledging such subjectivity, and for being deeply impacted by the presences and absences of more-than-human beings in their lifeworlds.

Implications

With a strong sense of humility, I now offer some reflections on the implications of this work across several relevant disciplines. First, I want to re-establish the interdisciplinary nature of my research, as my work draws upon a multiplicity of knowledges in both its theoretical framework and its methodology. Frodeman and Mitcham write of interdisciplinarity that it requires researchers "to take the effort involved in mastering or going deep in any one discipline and spread it

over a number of disciplines, going just as deep in a discipline as is necessary or appropriate to grasp the essentials" (quoted in Handy and Bunch, 2009, p. 513). While their use of the term "essentials" is perhaps misleading, I find that their approach to interdisciplinarity helps illuminate the complexity of both local and global issues. The result of such a process is a commitment to a breadth of "pertinent" knowledge frameworks that does not sacrifice depth, but rather seeks to make connections where disciplines or traditions may tend to remain inward looking.

As stated in the introduction, my work covers a broad range of disciplines that are themselves "interdisciplinary," including environmental studies, human-animal studies, child studies, and environmental education. The implications of this project then are directed toward audiences that seek to understand childhood experiences in multispecies communities. Within human-animal studies (HAS), my work contributes a series of counterpoints to the framework of human-pet relationships as attachment systems (Melson, 2002; Walsh, 2009a) similar to the infant-caregiver dyad theorized by Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991). As stated earlier, I find attachment theories and the behavioural systems that are the markers of such systems to be limiting in terms of the vast array of relationships that children described regarding their pets. I do note that my research, being interview-based, perhaps missed some of the observational and ethological methods that Bowlby himself presented as key to understanding children; but then again, much of the research on human-pet attachments is itself

quantitative, relying on self-reporting according to various pet attachment scales (Anderson, 2007). For that reason, I do not wish to disclose or set aside the similarities between infant-caregiver attachments and child-pet attachments, but rather to see them as convergent and divergent in several ways. Further research into this topic, including an investigation of children's internal working models of pet relationships may help illuminate these questions and concerns.

My research also provides new insights in HAS into questions of pet death and its importance within children's lives and within the domestic sphere. I argue that the children in this study articulate a contextually sophisticated, emotional description of the meaning of companion animals in their lives. It is possible to think of such relationships, and their losses through pets' deaths, as formative in children's ever-widening spheres of relationality with the more-than-human. While speaking with children about farm animals or wild animals that die, many nuanced descriptions arose that deserve further investigation, including comparisons and contrasts between various "categories" of animals and their moral consideration. Differences between death, euthanasia, and killing also arose in several interviews, and children expressed nuanced, ethical concerns regarding such topics. There remains much to be explored here.

As a work of environmental education, this research also presents a foray into the importance of children's relationships with non-human animals within the home that is currently lacking. Phillip Payne argues that families and homes are vital in children's environmental learning:

this moral space, as found everyday in the home place between parent and child, or siblings, or partners, may be of still invisible intercorporeal or intersubjective and intergenerational value to environmental education and its research. (2010, p. 210)

Payne's focus on the home space and its impact on learning objectives in formal and non-formal settings follows from Dewey's vision of curriculum as a "course of life," with multiple subjects and locations providing experiences that contribute to learning (Clandinin et al, 2010). The curricular life within the home is often the site of embodied, social learning in light of the "fortuitous and mysterious" (Piaget, 2004, p. 181). While I do not wish to sketch a picture of home life that is uniform, heteronormative, or "traditional," home spaces are nonetheless important sites for learning about the worlds in which we live and for practicing such living.

As such, I describe my project as an ecopedagogical endeavour. I describe this work as "ecopedagogical," following Van Manen's (1990) description of pedagogy as a vital and yet, ineffable aspect of educational and child-focused theory and research. Pedagogy is neither simply what one does in educating nor what ought to be done given various theoretical approaches. Rather, it entails a reflective, dialectic approach:

Learning to understand the essence of pedagogy as it manifests itself in particular life circumstances contributes to a more hermeneutic type of competence: a pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. And it is characteristic of pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact that it always operates in

unpredictable and contingent situations of everyday living with children.

(Van Manen, 1990, p. 143)

The addition of "eco-" in ecopedagogy reveals a commitment both to the embodied knowledge of a self that is in relation to a web of more-than-human otherness (Payne & Wattchow, 2009) and toward a humane, environmental movement that seeks not only to explore human-animal relationships, but to strive for liberation of oppressed groups, including children and animals (Fawcett, 2002; Kahn and Humes, 2009; Kahn, 2010; Oakley et al, 2010). Children are often positioned as the objects of research (Cutter-MacKenzie, 2009) and my work is part of a growing trend that takes their own thoughts and ideas as central (Hacking et al, 2013; Fawcett, in press). In addition, my approach to incorporating animal subjectivities and agency works to dislodge the centrality of human voices that is criticized in posthumanism and critical animal studies (Castricano, 2009; Wolfe, 2010).

Research Gaps & Future Directions

My interviews with children provided a rich set of textual data from which various fascinating and compelling themes emerged. At a methodological level, I originally planned to conduct two interviews with each child as well as observations of them constructing "memory boxes." My hope was to build familiarity and trust across each interview and to establish a pedagogical practice through the creation of memory boxes. The memory boxes would have provided

additional data, opportunities for observation, and transcript material. As noted

in the methods section, however, recruitment was a difficult process. I set up two

interviews with my first interview participant, Oscar, planning to draw and

create a memory box in the second interview, but he expressed unease at the end

of his first interview. Oscar liked to draw by himself, and he was not interested

in the memory box idea. Given that I was honouring children's wishes

throughout the fieldwork process (Greene & Hogan, 2005), his second interview

entailed a brief conversation about the specific details of his dog Sneaker's death.

As the process moved forward, the singular, semi-structured interview became

the most viable option for data collection.

In future approaches, I plan on utilizing a more child-centred approach,

with children serving as co-researchers (Hacking et al, 2013) who will be allowed

to pursue their own investigative trajectories and even methods, with my

assistance. While my research does place the voices, text, and descriptions of

children centrally, the single interview strategy is limited and becoming dated in

childhood research (Greene and Hogan, 2005). In addition, an increase in

observational opportunities might afford new insights that will help clarify

questions surrounding experiences of attachment and loss in child-pet

relationships, as Bowlby's (2004) ethological method for child study criticizes the

lack of child observation in the work of Freud and others. I also plan to return to

this research data, as well as a series of stories and poems I collected from the

online children's magazine *Stone Soup,* in order to engage in an analysis of the

structural components of children's narratives and poetry. Such an investigation, placed alongside my largely thematic analysis, will provide a fuller understanding of what is often left unspoken or unsaid in interviews (Riessman, 2008). I am drawn to methods of analysis that utilize a poetic approach, such as the "interpretive poetics" presented by Rogers, Casey, Ekert and Holland:

> interpretive poetics traces individual, subjective, and layered experiences of 'felt life' in interview narratives and written texts… [it is] an associative process whereby layers of meaning in narrative texts are interrogated and interpreted in a way that mirrors a sophisticated reading of a poem. The method is artistic, but also, crucially, raises questions about how interpretations are made. (2005, p. 160)

The authors present four areas of interpretation: story threads, relational dances, languages of the unsayable, and woven and torn signifiers. The poetic approach is built on the fundamental beliefs that knowledge is relational, understanding is conveyed metaphorically, there is a dynamic unconscious at play in the mind, and that the mind is inherently embodied in a "unique physical, relational, and cultural world" (Rogers et al, 2005, p. 162).

Thematically, my investigations followed the course of children's interests as they arose within the semi-structured interview. While the interpretative phenomenological analysis process I drew upon (Smith et al, 2009) encourages idiographic considerations and an emphasis on "outliers," not all of the themes could be explored within my allotted space. In addition, there are certain questions relative to this topic that may require further investigation, given the

changing landscapes of childhood, including technological mediation of child-pet or child-animal relationships (e.g., through the use of cell phones, digital cameras, or other recording devices, and through the creation of websites, YouTube videos, and Facebook pages as memorials). I would also like to engage other family members in the interview process. I interviewed two mothers during my fieldwork, Oscar's mother, Heather, and Mac's mother, Anna. Those interviews provided a deeper insight into the children's responses, but also revealed the importance of intergenerational learning and meaning making. Pets are unique for their inclusion in the domestic, family sphere (Fudge, 2009) and observations and interviews within those settings will improve knowledge of human-pet and child-pet relationships.

Finally, I want to comment on the demographic makeup of my study. The children that participated in this project were generally white, middle-class children of educated parents (most attended post-secondary schools, university, and a few had graduate degrees). Seven of my participants were female and five were male. My demographic strategy was partly intentional, to maintain a focus on children whose experiences aligned with my own (Greene & Hogan, 2005), and to maintain an equal distribution of gender. Yet the demographics also reveal a large gap in my research in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicity, religion, and place. As a result, this study misses opportunities for important critiques that are called for in environmental education, environmental justice, and postcolonial theory. There are limits to a study,

however, and I did not actively avoid participants of different racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. In a sense, my challenges with recruitment left me with no choice but to follow any opportunity that arose.

Moving Forward/Outward

Arguably, there is no more pressing concern today than humanity's response to the growing and complex dilemmas of climate change, poverty, war and environmental crisis. Concerns about the impacts these crises have on the lives of children are increasing among parents, educators, conservationists, psychologists, and scholars alike (e.g., Sobel, 1995; Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2005; Charles, 2009). Current academic and non-academic literature provides emotional, political, and practical support for parents and teachers seeking to protect their children from environmental dangers. Certain texts also highlight the emotional and psychological traumas that children experience as a result of environmental crisis discourses in popular media and education programs (Gunn, 2009; Steingraber, 2011). At the same time, growing bodies of literature emphasize the importance of child-animal relationships (Fawcett, 2002; Melson, 2005; Myers, 2007; Walsh, 2009; Pedersen, 2010) and with places (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Sobel, 1995; Coleman, Hall & Hay, 2008; Pedersen, 2010; Greenwood, 2013). In *Raising Elijah*, Sandra Steingraber (2011) draws upon government reports, academic literature, and popular media to explore the impact of these anxieties on parents. Citing crises such as the disappearance of

endangered species to rising autism and asthma rates and the increasing toxicity of children's bodies, she focuses on the despair found among parents and asserts that the sheer amount of information about real and perceived threats often leads to feelings of helplessness, what she calls the "well-informed futility syndrome" (Steingraber, 2011, xvi). At the same time, popular literature such as Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, focuses on the damaging effects of what Louv refers to as "nature deficit disorder," defined by "the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses" (2008, p. 34). What are the implications for children's experiences of the more-than-human of utilizing such pathological language to describe the human-nature relationship?

Awareness of global crises is nothing new within Western experiences of childhood. I was nine years old when the Cold War was declared to be over, and I remember feeling anxious about the threat of mutually assured destruction between the U.S.A., where I grew up, and the former U.S.S.R. That was before the omnipresence of the internet, YouTube, or 24-hour news organizations that endlessly frame and debate various international crises. Today, technological interfaces allow children access to a constant stream of virtual, detached information ranging from the funny or absurd (i.e., LOLCatz) to the grim, violent and unjust realities of war and terrorism. My seven-year-old nephew David lives in Boston and found out about the bombing at the 2013 Boston Marathon while walking past a wall of televisions tuned to various 24-hour news channels in a

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department store. His parents were upset, as they had made every effort to protect him from the images, though they knew that he would eventually find out from classmates or other sources. Narratives of violence and trauma also abound within the classroom space as children learn about various historical injustices, including slavery (Walcott, 2000), the Holocaust (Simon & Eppert, 1997; Britzman, 2000), or even contemporary issues, such as terrorism following September 11th (Berson & Berson, 2001; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). In her Levinasian analysis of education, Sharon Todd (2003) explores questions of guilt and moral responsibility that children experience in light of such knowledge of past or current suffering.

My research suggests that within the confines of many children's home spaces, experiences with non-human animals are rich and meaningful. While Kellert (2002) refers to these as "indirect" experiences because of the historical and technological institutions responsible for "creating" companion animals, I find there is much oversight in terms of pets' own agency, power, and influence in the lives of their human companions. I envision these intimate relationships between children and non-human animals within the home as a starting point for exploring wider, more distant relations. John Dewey argues that experience and knowledge are continuous:

> Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point

has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Without falling into the trap of "extensionism," as outlined by Mick Smith's (2001) critique of axiological environmental ethics, I believe that relationships and experiences in childhood and within primary locations—the home, classroom, communities at large, etc.—can provide a great deal of insight for those who acknowledge the debt we owe to the multispecies "shadows of death" that are present in our world (Rose, 2013).

As Sabrina noted at the end of our interview, we cannot hold the lives and deaths of all beings everywhere within our minds:

> Sabrina: I feel like pets is different because you have like, a connection with them and like specific people will like, be sad about it and stuff, but I try not to think about like, the animals that are killed for food and stuff and then (p) then like the wild and stuff you don't really notice as much when they're killed because you don't really watch them die or anything and so then you kind of, its like not the same because you don't really think about it. You don't really like notice, cuz I'm sure there's like lots of animals who have died like, really recently, like in the past hour or something but you just like don't, you don't know cuz you don't know specifically each animal.

Perhaps what Sabrina's reflections call for is a deeper sense of connection with others; one that will not overwhelm us with the omnipresence of death and suffering, but rather will allow us to situate ourselves ethically within various more-than-human relationships, places, and worlds. Maybe then death can be

seen not as some cruel evil, or as "the end of the world," but as an opportunity

for reflection, growth, and possibly new beginnings.

Appendix A. Participant Forms, Interview Schedule, & Research Advertisement

Guardian Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: On Lifetimes: Children's Experiences of Animal Death

Researcher: *Joshua Russell, PhD Cand.*
Faculty of Environmental Studies, 4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, ON   MJ31P3
E-mail: joshuajr@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research: PhD Dissertation

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: *Each child participant is asked to participate in at least one interview, approximately 40 minutes long. Before the interview, participants will be sent a form to fill out, as well as a pre-interview questionnaire. Any photos, items (leashes/toys/urns/etc) that might be relevant would be great to have at the interview. As part of the process, children may be asked to join the researcher in drawing pictures, writing stories, writing a poem, or looking through a picture book in order to elicit responses or stories. These will be collected by or photos of them taken (if the child wishes to keep them) by the researcher.*

Risks and Discomforts: There is a minimal amount of risk to participants and to guardians, however, sharing stories about animals that have died can be stressful for any individual. Particular care will be taken in gathering stories from children regarding such sensitive subject matter; children will be able to stop at any time and guardians may request to be present as observers. Further, guardians may experience an increased frequency in questions, concerns, and stress after children have spent time with the researcher. Information about further resources and support will be made available.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This research is being undertaken to gain a better understanding of the ethical, emotional, social, and cognitive impacts of experiencing and telling stories about animals that have died. As such, it promises to provide educational value and possible new insights into children's needs during such moments in their lives. The very act of discussing their experiences and stories may help children learn more about their own emotional, social, and ethical lives and to share their concerns and ideas more clearly in various social environments. This research may also create new

opportunities for children and caregivers to discuss sensitive subject matter in a positive way.

Voluntary Participation: You and your child's participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the treatment that either of you receive or relationship you have with the researcher, nor will it affect the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You and your child can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the promised pay for agreeing to be in the project. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you and your child supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, neither your name nor your child's name will appear in any report or publication of the research. Data will be collected using a digital voice recorder, handwritten journals, and the researcher's own observational journal. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. Data will be stored electronically as well for a period of no more than five years, unless further consent is requested. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research
This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____ give consent for my child _____
to participate in *"On Lifetimes: Children's Experiences of Animal Death"* conducted by *Joshua Russell, PhD Cand*. I have understood the nature of this project and

wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____   **Date** _____
Guardian

Signature _____   **Date** _____
Principal Investigator

Children's Assent Form

Date:

Study Name: On Lifetimes: Children's Experiences of Animal Death

Researcher: *Joshua Russell, PhD Cand.*
             Faculty of Environmental Studies, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON
   MJ31P3
             e-mail: *joshuajr@yorku.ca*

Purpose of the Research: PhD Dissertation

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: I am asking you to participate in an interview lasting about 40 minutes. You will be asked to share your ideas stories about animals and death. Before hand, I will ask you and your parent/guardian to fill out a small questionnaire to prepare all of us for the interview. I might also ask you to collect items, photographs, and drawings you might have to help us talk about your experiences, like "Show and Tell." During our interview, we will talk and I will ask you some questions, but we can also draw, write a story, write poems, or look through books.

Risks and Discomforts: It is not easy for anyone to talk about death. You may be uncomfortable telling a stranger about your own experiences, you may be unsure about what happened, what you believe, or you may not really know what to say. That is fine. We will talk about the experiences in whatever way is most comfortable for you, and you can stop the interviews at any time if you need.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: I am studying children's stories of animal death in order to better understand their ideas, experiences, and feelings. I think it is important for parents, guardians, teachers, and many other people to hear what children have to say about animals in their lives. Your stories may help you and other children make sense of death; they may teach people who live and work with children how to help children learn about death; and they may help many people see animals in new ways.

Voluntary Participation: Being a part of the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be a part of the study, you will not be treated differently by either the researcher or anyone else involved with this research, including York University.

Confidentiality: All of the ideas and stories you share during the research will be kept confidential, and your name will not appear in any publications. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. Laws are in place for your protection, and the researcher will follow those laws at all times.

Questions About the Research
You may ask any questions you have about this research at any time. If you need information that I cannot provide you, then you may contact York University with your guardian.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____ consent to participate in *"On Lifetimes: Children's Experiences of Animal Death"* conducted by *Joshua Russell, PhD Cand*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____   **Date** _____

Pre-Interview Information Checklist

The following information may be helpful in the researcher's preparation for the interview and in analysing the interview later on. Feel free to go over these questions together, leaving blank any questions you cannot or do not wish to answer. Thanks!

1: Name of child: _____

      Nickname or preferred name: _____

2: Address: _____

_____

_____

3: Date of birth: _____

4: Ethnic origin and religion: _____

5: Is English spoken regularly in the home (Yes or No)? _____

      Other languages spoken: _____

6: Details of people important to the child (Name, Age, Amount of Contact):

Mother: _____

Father: _____

Siblings: _____

Grandparents: _____

Other Family Members: _____

Friend(s): _____

Babysitter/Nanny: _____

Schoolteacher(s): _____

Family Pet(s): _____
Other Animals: _____

7: Names of places important to the child (Name, Amount of Time per Week, No Addresses are needed)

Home: _____

Schools: _____

After-School Locations: _____

Relatives: _____

Friends homes: _____

Other: _____

8: Activities the child enjoys

Favourite School Subjects: _____

Favourite TV Programs: _____

Favourite Games: _____

Favourite Sports: _____

Favourite Books: _____

Other Activities: _____

9: If there is any other information or detail you think might be important for this project, please feel free to provide it in the space below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interview Schedules

Pre-Interview: Give parents and children pre-interview checklist and consent/assent forms. Come up with a schedule for an interview, approximately 45 minutes in length. Children and parents will be asked to come up with dates and locations that would allow for comfortable interactions with minimal distractions.

Interview: To start we will go over some guidelines to make everyone more comfortable. We will briefly review the assent form and sign it together, and then make sure everyone is comfortable with the setting/subject matter.

1. I will NOT get angry or upset at you for anything you say.
2. You can choose whether to answer a question or not. If you don't remember something or don't want to talk about a specific subject, just say, "I don't want to answer this question" and we will move on.
3. If you can't remember something, that's okay. Just tell me what you do remember.
4. Its okay to use any words that you want to use.
5. If I misunderstand something you say, please tell me. I really want to understand everything you say correctly.
6. The more you can tell me about what happened, the better… tell me everything you can remember even if you don't think something is important.
7. If you don't understand something I say, please tell me and I will try to say it using different words.
8. Its okay to say "I don't know" or "I don't remember" if I ask you a difficult question.
9. Even if I already know something, that's fine, just tell me anyway.
10. We can stop at ANY time for ANY reason. It is important that you are comfortable and relaxed during our conversation.

Introduce the Voice Recorder, is it okay?

Practice Questions:

1. What is your favourite colour? Why?
2. Who is your best friend? What are some fun things you do together?
3. When you blow out the candles on your birthday cake, what do you wish for? (Practice saying "No thank you, I do not want to answer this question")

Potential Interview Questions: The research interview will be semi-structured. I have some questions I always like to ask, but basically, we tend to have a conversation that follows the child's ideas/thoughts/experiences. I'll ask for clarification, more detail, a sequence of events, etc. If a particular line of questions runs dry, we'll go back to this list, but my hope is that the interview takes place as a conversation more than a question-and-answer session. Still, here are some sample questions:

Q1: What is an animal?

Q2: What are some of the animals that you see in your day-to-day life?

Q3: Are your relationships with these animals the same? Different? Explain how you might act toward one animal that is different from another.

Q4: What kinds of things do you know about animals?

Q5: Where do you learn about animals? Are there people who teach you things about animals?

Q6: Do you know any stories about animals? Tell me your favourite animal story.

Q7: I do research about children and animals. Many people think children have a more special bond with animals than adults do, what do you think? Why might adults think that way?

Q8: I'd like to talk about animals and death. Is that okay? What kinds of things might you want to talk about? Are there different kinds of animals that you know about that have died?

Q9: One way to help children talk is to do activities like telling stories, writing poems, or drawing pictures. Do you want to do any of these things?

Q10: I'm interviewing children about what happens when animals die… do you remember any times when an animal died? Tell me what happened…

Q11: Tell me a story about an animal dying.

Q12: Sometimes things happen in movies or in books and they can make people feel the same as if they happened in real life…. Have you ever read about or saw an animal dying on TV or in a movie? Tell me what happened… (how did it make you feel?)

Q13: Can you think of places that different kinds of animals live? Tell me a story about one of (or more) those animals' lives.

Q14: Animals live all over the world in very different places. What kinds of animals do you see in *your* life? What do you know about them? Where do they live? Do you remember any interesting stories about animals in your neighbourhood? Tell me…

Q15: Lots of people share their feelings when someone or something dies to help them understand what has happened. Thinking about a time when an animal you knew died, do you remember talking to anyone about it? What did you talk about?

Q16: What do you think happens to animals when they die?

Q17: What do you think an animal experiences/feels when it dies?

Q18: Tell me a story about an animal dying from the animal's point of view.

Q19: When someone or something dies, those that are still alive might do things to "remember" them. Have you ever done something to remember or honour an animal that died? Tell me about that… (do you think its important? Why?)

Q20: Some animals die because people use them for food or clothing or research. Can you think of some examples? Do you think it is different when animals die in the wild? Is it different when our pets die? Why/why not? Do you have any experiences of that?

Q21: Where do you learn about animals? What things do you like to know about animals?

Q22: Who teaches you about animals? What things do they teach you about?

Q23: Tell me a sad/scary/funny/nice story about an animal.

Q24: Tell me about your relationship with _____. (Narrative accounting… When did you first meet? What did you do? Significant events? Every-day events? Care? Play? Ending?)

Q25: Tell me a story about the typical life of a farm animal/pet/wild animal? How does it begin/end?

** Always the last question ** Q26: I always like to ask, "What would you say to another child who is going through or may go through a similar experience with their pet or with animals dying?"

Research Advertisement

On Lifetimes:
Children's Experiences of
Animal Death

For 80-90% of Canadian children, their first encounter with
loss is the death of a family pet. Yet little is known about
how children experience that loss or how it
influences their perceptions of and beliefs about
animal and human lives.

I am looking for research participants ages 8-12 who have
recently experienced the loss of a companion animal
to participate in a 30-45 minute interview.
Each participant will be entered into a draw to win an iPod nano.

Please contact me for more information or to set up an interview.

Joshua Russell
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Environmental Studies
York University
joshuajr@yorku.ca
416.319.9629

This research project has received ethical approval from York University.
Qualifications available upon request.

Appendix B. Master Table of Themes & Demographic Data

Master Table of Emergent Themes

Early in my analytical process, I created these charts from the data in DeDoose. The charts indicate the codes or themes on the left hand side, with larger organizing categories in **bold** and emergent themes in regular font. "Subjects Coded" refers to those participants whose interviews contained at least one instance of that code (A=Adele, L=Lily, N=Neville, C=Chloe, K=Kristina, O=Ophelia, Os=Oscar, S=Sabrina, J=Jim, Ju=Juliet, Ch=Charlie). The column "%" refers to the percentage of interviews (x/10) where the code was present. Column "≥50?" refers to a code application threshold of greater than or equal to 50 percent of interviews, with Y=Yes and N=No (Smith et al, 2009). Themes with a ** are duplicated, as I was unable to easily sort them into larger categories.

| Themes & Sub-themes	Subjects Coded	%	≥ 50?
Focus on Self & Self-context			
Self as animal person	All	100	Y
Family context of animal /pet interest	A, L, K, O, S/J	50	Y
Self as observant	A, L, N	30	N
Self as (in)attentive	A	10	N
Self as knowledgeable /experienced	A, L, N, S/J	40	N
Self as part of decision making process(use of "we")	A, Os, Ch/Ju	30	N
Self as "cat person"	N	10	N
Self as caring	N, K, Os, Ch/Ju, A	50	Y
Self as vegetarian	N	10	N
Self as victim	K	10	N
Self as fun	M, Ch/Ju	20	N
Familial practice of meat eating	M	10	N
Self as vulnerable/mortal	O, Ch/Ju	20	N
**Focus on self in other's death	O	10	N
Self-awareness/shy	O	10	N
Differentiating self from sibling	Os, N, Ch/Ju, S/J	40	N
Focus on Animals			
Thoughts about animal suffering	A, N	20	N
Eating animals	A, N	20	N
On animal minds/being animal	A, L, N, C, K, M, S/J, Ch/Ju	80	Y
Human/animal distinctions	A, S/J, Ch/Ju	30	N
Animals deserve moral recognition	N	10	N

Cultural concepts of animals	N, K	20	N
Thoughts about animal cruelty	N	10	N
**Observations of animals/pets	K, L	20	N
Interest in dynamic/exotic /charismatic animals	K, Ch/Ju	20	N
Concept of animals	Os, S/J	10	N
Literary animals	Os, L	20	N

Focus on Pet Relationship

Relationships with pets are emotional	A, N, S/J, Ch/Ju	40	N
Relationship entails mutual recognition/desire	A, C, L, Os, S/J, Ch/Ju	60	Y
Self as central figure for pets	A, N, S/J	30	N
Describing pet	A, O, N	30	N
Relationship narrative	L, N, Os, C	40	N
Individual animals are unique	N	10	N
**Pets as "responsibility"	N, Ch/Ju	20	N
Connections with pets	L, S/J	30	N
Pets are family	N, M	20	N
Pets as children or child-like	N, K	20	N
Relationships are built on care	N	10	N
Relationship with pet(s) as personal	C, K, M, Os, S/J	50	Y
Relationships with pets and family /social network	M, O, S/J, Os, C, Ch/Ju	60	Y
**Pet caring for self	O	10	N
**Dreams/imagining pets	Os, M	20	N
Aesthetic engagement	Os	10	N
Focus on play	M, Os, Ch/Ju, K, S/J	50	Y

Focus on Care/Relationality

Focus on/experience of care	A, K, Os, O, N, S/J	60	Y
Life as relational experience	A	10	N
Care as specific to being/animal	A	10	N
**Relationships are built on care	N	10	N
**Pets as "responsibility"	N	10	N
**Personal responsibility for death	K, O	20	N
Mutuality of care	K, O	20	N
**Pets as children/small	K, N	20	N
Pet care as a social /family experience	M	10	N
Pet keeping requires rules	Os	10	N
Preoccupation with safety of pets/concern	Os	10	N

Focus on Language

Metaphors	A, L, N, O, Os, S/J, Ch/Ju	70	Y
Recognizing importance of language	N	10	N
Ideas/beliefs are difficult to express	N	10	N

Focus on Embodied Experience

Interactions with/curiosity about dead bodies	A, L, K, M, S/J, Ch/Ju	60	Y
Desired avoidance of harm and suffering	N, Os	20	N
Pets and intimacy	N, L, K, Os, S/J	50	Y
**Embodied memory	A	10	N
**Observations of animals/pets	K, L	10	N
**Embodiment of grief	K	10	N
**Embodied ritual	Os	10	N

Focus on Death

Death as ecological	A, Os	20	N
Beliefs about death	A, L, O	30	N
Belief in afterlife	S/J, Ch/Ju	20	N
Concept/meaning of death	A, N, C, M, O, S/J, Ch/Ju	70	Y
Concept of life	N, A	20	N
Death as bodily failure	A	10	N
Thoughts about life/death and time/lifetimes	A, Os, K, L, S/J, Ch/Ju	60	Y
Life is precarious	A, K	20	N
Moral sense of death	A, L, N, M, Ch/Ju	50	Y
Beliefs about death	L	10	N
Ideas/feelings about death are contextual	L	10	N
Death can be violent	N	10	N
Death in media	C	10	N
Death as difficult to understand	K, Os	20	N
Difficulty with finality of death	K, N, L	30	N
Describing death	Os, L	20	N
Describing euthanasia	A, O, Os, M, S/J, Ch/Ju, K	70	Y

Details of Death Event

Narrative of death	A, N, C, M, Os, S/J, Ch/Ju	70	Y
Temporal experience of death	A, L, S/J, Ch/Ju, M, K	60	Y

Spatial experience of death	C, L, M, A, S/J, Ch/Ju, N, K	80	Y
Distinct moment of death	L, M, S/J	30	N
Details of story are important	N	10	N
Social context of death experience	M, S/J, Ch/Ju, N, O, K	60	Y
Emotional experience of death	M, Os, S/J, Ch/Ju, N, A, K	70	Y

Preparation/preparedness/anticipation

Anticipation of death	A, S/J, Os, M	40	N
Saying goodbye/preparedness	C, A, S/J	30	N

Focus on Memory

Memory of pet/death	All	100	Y
Memory has limits/should have limits	N, Ch/Ju, S/J	30	N
Memory tied to objects	N, K, O, Os, Ch/Ju	50	Y
**Embodied memory	A	10	N
Memory is difficult/challenging	C, O, N	30	N
Memory as contextual/contingent	K	10	N
Configuration of memory	K	10	N
Memory as a social process	M, O, Ch/Ju, S/J, K, N, A	70	Y
Remembering as internal /unconscious	M, Os	20	N
Remembering life over death	M, K	20	N
Remembering is important	O, A, Os	30	N

Ritual/Memorialization

Memorializing as important	A	13	N
Burial practices	C, Os, S/J, A, N	50	Y
**Desire to remember dog	M, Os	20	N
**Embodied ritual	Os	10	N

Pets' experiences

Dying animal's experience	M, S/J, Ch/Ju, L	40	N
Replaceability	A, S/J, K, L, M, Ch/Ju, O, Os	80	Y
Emotions surrounding moving on /irreplaceability	M	10	N
Moving on	L, Ch/Ju, M, N	40	N

Experience of grief/loss

Thoughts about grief	A	10	N
Experience of grief	L	10	N
Emotional experience of loss/grief	A, L, C, K, N, O, S/J, Ch/Ju	80	Y

Home as safe/secure	N, L, A	30	N
Grief is personal	N, K, S/J, Ch/Ju, A	50	Y
Loss feels uncertain	N	10	N
Grief is bounded; it ends	N, Ch/Ju	20	Y
Temporal experience of loss/grief	K, O, Ch/Ju, S/J, N, A	60	Y
Experience of guilt	K	10	N
**Embodiment of grief	K, Ch/Ju, S/J, L, N	50	Y
Spatial experience of grief	K, S/J, Ch/Ju, L, A	50	Y
Non-fatal experiences of loss	K, M	20	N
Social context of loss/grief	L, N, C, K, O, Os, S/J, Ch/Ju	80	Y

Interview context

Wants me to see cat	N	13	N
Interviewing as pedagogy	A, C, K, O, Os, Ch/Ju, S/J	70	Y
Interview challenges – hesitant/ silent/I don't know	C, O, Os	30	N
Social context of interview	M, O	20	N
Avoidance/Deflection/Regression	Os, C, O	30	N

Mother/guardian involvement

Mom present	C, Os, O, M	40	N
Mother's anxieties about decisions re: pets	M	10	N
Mom guiding narrative /narrative development	M, Os	20	N
Mother's educational/pedagogical influence	M	10	N

Focus on Knowledge

Knowledge of environment	A	13	N
Source of animal knowledge	O, S/J, Ch/Ju, A, K	50	Y
Ecological sense	Os, A, M, S/J	40	N

Advice

Advice	All	100	Y

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