

**NOT JUST A DOG:
AN ATTACHMENT THEORY PERSPECTIVE
ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH ASSISTANCE DOGS**

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Abstract

I explored individuals' relationships with an assistance dog and their experiences of loss from an attachment-theory perspective. I used a hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic methods to analyze semi-structured interviews with 25 participants. These analyses revealed genuine attachment processes of safe haven and secure base. Although attachment dynamics were an important feature of these relationships, caregiving appeared to be an equally important dynamic. When confronted with the loss of their dog, the vast majority of participants experienced intense grief. In some cases, these responses were consistent with the experience of losing an attachment figure. However, most responses were consistent with the loss of a caregiving relationship. Participants reported using a wide variety of strategies to cope with the loss of their assistance dog; some strategies involved attempts to avoid painful emotions, whereas others involved confronting the loss. The application of an attachment-theory perspective to the human-animal bond suggests that intense grief is a natural response to the loss of a beloved companion who fulfilled fundamental human needs for attachment and caregiving.

Keywords: Attachment; human-animal relationships; grief; caregiving; qualitative methods; assistance dogs

Subject Terms: Attachment behaviour, assistance dogs, human-animal relationships; pets; bereavement

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Introduction

Buck was not just a dog...He was my confidant, my hand extension, my confidence, my motivator, and my pride and joy....He was my big baby; the first face I saw in the morning and the last face I saw at night.
(Wilson, 2002, p. 18)

Buck and Ms. Wilson had spent 6 years together until Buck, her assistance dog, succumbed to cancer on an August afternoon. The night before, knowing Buck had to be euthanized the next day, Ms. Wilson slept beside him on the floor. The next day she hand-fed Buck his last meal and gathered with trusted family and friends to say good-bye. In her article she wrote, "Buck passed away in my arms. I miss him terribly" (Wilson, 2002, p.18).

When faced with cases of intense reactions to the loss of a companion animal, people's reactions seem to fall into one of two camps: those for whom a sense of empathy comes naturally, and those who are bewildered by the intensity of the grief response. At the base of this bewilderment is the question: Why do people love their companion animals and mourn their loss as intensely as they do? Research on this topic is primarily descriptive, documenting that people are indeed bonded with companion animals and do feel grief when a companion animal dies. However, little research has addressed *why* people so love and miss their animal companions from a theoretical perspective.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) may help to address this question because it is a theory of close relationships founded on understanding the development of deep emotional bonds, and reactions to the loss of these bonds. Thus, attachment theory offers a coherent way of organizing knowledge about human-animal relationships by clarifying the functions that these relationships may provide, and enhancing our understanding of why individuals may experience intense grief when these relationships

end (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001). In this paper, I explore the human-animal bond, and experiences of loss and coping, from an attachment theory perspective in a sample of individuals who have assistance dogs.

Bonds between People and their Dogs

An extensive literature has established that many people form strong emotional bonds with companion animals. People often consider their companion animals to be family members and some even perceive them to be child, parent, or partner substitutes (Archer, 1997). Surveys and qualitative studies show that people gain companionship, affection, and love from their relationships with companion animals (Enders-Slegers, 2000; Peretti, 1990; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994). Furthermore, numerous empirical studies show that companion animals can have positive physiological and psychological effects on their owners (e.g., Allen, Shykoff, & Izzo, 2001; Friedmann & Thomas, 1995; Siegel, 1990; Siegel, Angulo, Detels, Wesch, & Mullen, 1999).

Given the strong bonds forged between people and their companion animals, an even stronger bond is likely to exist between people with disabilities and their assistance dogs. A major dynamic of this relationship is a deep inter-dependency between dog and owner in which the owner depends on the dog for daily functioning and the dog depends on the owner for daily care. People with disabilities often spend more time with their assistance dog than with other people, even close others.

Although the literature on this topic is limited, studies have shown that people with disabilities reap substantial functional and psychological benefits from assistance dogs. Sachs-Ericsson and colleagues (Sachs-Ericsson, Hansen, & Fitzgerald, 2002) reviewed published and unpublished studies on the benefits of assistance dogs and found preliminary evidence for improvements in the psychological functioning of disabled individuals, which included decreased stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression, as well as improved social relationships and increased self-esteem and life satisfaction. For example, a randomized trial on the benefits of assistance dogs for people with ambulatory disabilities found large effect sizes for improvements in self-esteem, psychological well-being, community integration, and educational or occupational

involvement (Allen & Blascovich, 1996). Research has also shown that disabled owners identify the relationship with their dog as one of the most important benefits of an assistance dog (Camp, 2001). Most owners consider their assistance dog as a valued family member, think their dog is more important as a friend than as a working dog, and turn to their dog for comfort, esteem and support (Lane, McNicholas, & Collis, 1998).

An Attachment Theory Perspective on Human-Animal Bonds

Although many studies support the existence of strong emotional bonds between humans and animals, this literature lacks an organizing, theoretical explanation. Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory appears to be appropriate for explaining the human-animal bond because it applies to non-human mammals, such as primates, as well as humans. The fact that attachment processes are observed across a number of mammalian species, including humans, raises the possibility that attachment relationships may develop not just within particular species, but also across species.

Attachment theory proposes that infants of many mammalian species are born with a behavioural system that has evolved to protect them from danger and maximize safe exploration by regulating proximity to a caregiver. Attachments to caregivers are comprised of four components: proximity seeking, separation anxiety, safe haven, and secure base. Infants tend to approach and stay near their attachment figure (*proximity seeking*), resist and become distressed by separations (*separation anxiety*), use their attachment figure as a base from which to explore (*secure base*), and turn to their attachment figure for reassurance and comfort when distressed (*safe haven*) (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994).

Most studies exploring the emotional bond between humans and animals have used the term "attachment" in a general way to refer to an emotional connection and have employed either a single-item rating scale or short questionnaires that do not ask questions about specific attachment components (see Archer, 1997). Recently, however, Kurdek (2008) published a quantitative study comparing the extent to which the four components of attachment are present in relationships with humans and companion

dogs. Relationships with mothers, friends, significant others, fathers, and siblings exhibited features of secure base, safe haven, and separation anxiety more strongly than relationships with companion dogs. Secure base and proximity maintenance were the most salient attachment features of human-dog relationships, with dogs similar to fathers and siblings on proximity maintenance.¹

Although these results show some evidence for features of attachment in human-dog relationships, it was unclear to what extent participants actually used their companion dogs as a source of emotional security and comfort. Not only did companion dogs tend to be rated lower than human attachment figures on the attachment components, but mean ratings on the attachment components were moderate at best. Specifically, 3 out of 4 mean attachment component ratings fell at the midpoint (around "4" on a scale of 1 to 7), which is considered to be neutral (with the exception of a mean proximity maintenance rating of 5.21). The relatively low ratings on attachment components in this study could be because of the young college sample. As Kurdek acknowledged, these students may have been describing a family dog rather than their own companion dog. Another limitation of this study is that the meaning of some of the items on the attachment measure was unclear. For example, the secure base item "I can count on my dog to be there for me" does not necessarily indicate that respondents derive a sense of emotional security from their dog.

Kurdek (2008) found that high levels of human caregiving were positively associated with high levels of global attachment to companion dogs, suggesting that caregiving toward dogs may facilitate the formation of a mutual attachment bond. Bowlby (1969) proposed that the attachment behavioural system is complemented by a reciprocal caregiving system. These systems are complementary because, just as a dependent seeks protection from an attachment figure or caregiver, the caregiver seeks to protect the dependent (George & Solomon, 1999). Bowlby was referring to unilateral relationships (e.g., parenting) in which partners are focused on either caregiving or attachment, but typically not both. However, theory and research on reciprocal adult

¹ Kurdek's attachment measure assessed proximity maintenance (the extent to which the physical presence of an attachment figure is enjoyable) rather than proximity seeking (searching for the attachment figure to gain physical proximity).

relationships (e.g., romantic relationships) indicate that both of these systems may be operative within each partner (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2006). Thus, humans and companion dogs may form reciprocal, inter-dependent relationships in which both attachment and caregiving are important components of the emotional bond.

Research on the interrelated dynamics of attachment and caregiving in reciprocal adult relationships has demonstrated that felt security enhances one's ability to offer sensitive and responsive care, whereas feelings of insecurity impair effective caregiving (Feeney & Collins, 2006). Thus, activation of the attachment system appears to inhibit activation of other behavioural systems and to interfere with nonattachment activities, including caregiving (Mikulincer, 2006). Hence, in adult relationships, attachment appears to take precedence over caregiving during times of threat. However, Solomon and George (1996) proposed that in prototypical parent-child relationships, parental caregiving takes precedence in threatening situations. If parents' attachment systems are triggered in such a situation, they should turn to their own attachment figures, such as spouses, for emotional support (Solomon & George, 1996). Concomitantly, from the children's perspective, situations of threat should activate their attachment systems so that they seek protection from their parents, and it would be inappropriate for children to feel compelled to care for their parents' emotional needs. Thus, the attachment and caregiving systems may interact differently depending on the particular relationship context.

The attachment and caregiving systems share two key features: Both systems are activated by separation from the relationship partner and deactivated by regaining proximity. However, the separation anxiety experienced by a dependent is focused on the well-being of one's self, whereas the separation anxiety experienced by a caregiver is focused on the well-being of the dependent. Thus, the presence of separation anxiety and proximity seeking are not unambiguous indicators of an attachment bond. Instead, they may indicate a unilateral caregiving bond, as shown, for example, in a parent's fear of separation from and desire to be reunited with a small child. As well, separation anxiety and proximity seeking may be motivated by either the attachment or caregiving systems in reciprocal relationships. Therefore, to understand fully a close relationship

from an attachment perspective, it is essential to consider both attachment and caregiving dynamics.

The human-assistance dog relationship is an appropriate context in which to examine reciprocal attachment and caregiving given that inter-dependency between the person with disability and their assistance dog is a key feature of this relationship. Moreover, the organizations that match owners with their dogs, and train the owners and dogs to work together, emphasize that caring for the dog is essential for developing the bond required to form a working alliance. Therefore, in addition to the four defining components of attachment, I will explore the role of caregiving in the human-assistance dog relationship.

Grief

The death of an attachment figure or dependent is likely to trigger an intense grief response (Bowlby, 1980). To the extent that companion or assistance dogs fulfill attachment or caregiving needs for their owners, intense grief responses over the loss of such dogs can be understood from an attachment perspective. According to Bowlby (1980), grief is experienced as the emotional states of protest and despair that include waves of pain, yearning for the deceased, and seemingly interminable stretches of despair. Weiss (1993, 2001) speculated that the nature of grief might be linked to whether the self is the recipient or provider of protection. The loss of an attachment figure tends to trigger the attachment system, giving rise to a sense of abandonment and concern for the well-being of self. Prototypical attachment-based grief is observed in children who have lost a parent. In contrast, loss of a dependent tends to trigger the caregiving system, giving rise to strong emotions and concerns regarding the well-being of the dependent rather than oneself. Prototypical caregiver-based grief is observed in parents who have lost a child. In these instances, parents experience an intense wish to soothe and protect their child as well as anger, anxiety, guilt, and despair when their ability to protect their children is threatened or blocked. Hence, responses to loss may be influenced by the nature of the relationship.

Although the human-assistance dog relationship likely involves both the attachment and caregiving systems, it is difficult to predict how the systems may interact when owners are confronted with the loss of their dog. In adulthood, spousal relationships are a common context in which both attachment and caregiving dynamics are present. Weiss (2001) postulated that the primary concern of the bereaved spouse could be focused on either the self or the other. However, the theoretical and empirical literature on loss of a mate from an attachment perspective has tended to emphasize loss of an attachment figure rather than loss of a recipient of caregiving (Fraley & Shaver, 1999). Thus, grief triggered by loss of an assistance dog may reflect the activation of either the attachment or caregiving systems (or both).

Numerous studies have established that many people experience grief following the death of a companion animal (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Grief symptoms are similar to those experienced after the loss of a significant person and include crying, depression, guilt, and loneliness. People who appear most vulnerable to strong grief reactions are those who are most closely bonded to their companion animal, those who live alone or have limited human social support, and those who have experienced multiple losses close in time. Grief reactions are also impacted by the circumstances of the animal's death (e.g., whether death was sudden or prolonged, the cause of death, and whether euthanasia was considered) (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). The process of mourning can be hampered by a lack of validation for the expression of grief over loss of a companion animal and the absence of socially sanctioned grief rituals that typically accompany human losses (Donohue, 2005; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

To my knowledge, only one study has explored the loss of assistance dogs (Nicholson, Kemp-Wheeler, & Griffiths, 1995). This study provided descriptive information on grief symptoms (e.g., crying, feelings of sadness, numbness/emptiness) and psychological components of ill health (e.g., anxiety, depression). Notably, 71% of participants who had lost contact with their dog through death or retirement rated their grief experience as similar to the loss of a close friend or relative. Although this finding suggests some similarity in responses to loss of an assistance dog and loss of a human relationship, the authors did not conceptualize the emotional bond between dog and owner in attachment-related terms.

Although studies have shown that grief over the loss of a beloved animal is similar to grief over the loss of a beloved human, no research to date has investigated how people cope with loss of a companion or assistance animal. Such information may have practical implications for helping individuals cope with such loss. The majority of people cope effectively with grief over the loss of human relationships (Raphael, Minkov, & Dobson, 2001; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007). Coping strategies in response to grief are variable and include avoidance, active distraction, keeping busy, involvement with others, rationalization, expression and exposure, and faith (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). As well, maintaining psychological and emotional ties to the deceased can be associated with positive adaptation to bereavement (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). In this study, I will explore how individuals cope with the loss of an assistance dog, and how these strategies may be similar to and differ from coping strategies observed in those dealing with human losses.

Initial Research Questions

I sought to understand whether the human-dog bond could be understood from an attachment theory perspective. Therefore, I explored attachment components, caregiving, and grief responses in a sample of participants who had established, and subsequently lost, a relationship with an assistance dog. In addition, I wanted to understand how disabled individuals cope with such a loss, especially because some research indicates that grief over the loss of a companion animal is less likely to be acknowledged than grief over the loss of a significant human (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). As with human bereavement, applying a theoretical perspective to loss of an assistance dog could help to organize the descriptive findings, and provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of these relationships and what is lost when a beloved animal dies (or retires as in the case of a working animal). Ultimately, a theoretical framework could also inform practical interventions in the form of support services and other resources (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001). The following is a list of my initial research questions:

1. What is the nature of the human-assistance dog relationship?
 - a. Is there evidence that the attachment components of safe haven, secure base, and separation anxiety are significant features of this

relationship? If so, what do these attachment processes look like?²

- b. What role does caregiving play in this relationship?
2. How do people experience loss of an assistance dog to retirement or death?
 - a. Are their grief responses consistent with responses expected with loss of an attachment relationship and/or a caregiving relationship?
 - b. How do people cope with their loss experiences?

² Proximity seeking was not specifically explored in this study because the nature of the relationship between individuals and their assistance dogs requires that they are almost always in close proximity to each other.

Method

I chose a qualitative methodology for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative methods can be used to better understand phenomena about which little is known, and to gain new perspectives on phenomena about which much is already known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative methods are suitable for these inquiries because they employ more open and exploratory approaches than quantitative methods (Maxwell, 1996). With respect to existing knowledge about the human-dog bond in general and the human-assistance dog bond in particular, it appears that both much is known and little is known. Previous studies have shown that many people feel a strong emotional bond with their companion or assistance dog and mourn their loss; but there is little in-depth knowledge about the particular nature of the bond and the experience of grief (beyond symptom lists). Furthermore, no research has addressed coping strategies in response to the loss of such animals. Although attachment theory guided my research, I was seeking to be open to any other factors that may contribute to strong bonds and strong grief reactions. Hence, though guided by a theoretical perspective, many of the questions I posed were exploratory in nature. The use of qualitative methods allows for open-ended questions and the discovery of new and unexpected themes.

Second, this study involved a new extension of attachment theory—to human-dog relationships. Currently, measures exist for assessing attachment in adult human relationships. At the time this study started, there was no established method for assessing attachment in the human-animal bond. Kurdek (2008) has since published a study in which he adapted human attachment measures to assess human-companion dog relationships. However, simply changing the wording of measures designed to assess human attachments requires making an assumption that the meaning of the items remains the same when applied to cross-species relationships. A qualitative approach enabled people to talk openly and in-depth about their relationships with their

dog. In turn, I was able to use this qualitative data to consider whether current ways of conceptualizing adult attachment are appropriate for human-dog relationships, and to better understand the meaning of these relationships for participants in the study (Maxwell, 1996).

Finally, qualitative methods more fully describe a phenomenon than do quantitative data. Qualitative methods generate in-depth information that may be difficult to gain and convey quantitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985), "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (p. 120). Qualitative research reports are highly descriptive and give participants the ability to express themselves in their own words (Eisner, 1991). As mentioned in the introduction, the intensity with which some people love their companion animals and grieve their loss can be difficult to understand. The meaning and emotion encompassed in these bonds can be lost in quantitative research, where researchers typically collect data with close-ended questions and report results in aggregate form, stripped of participants' individuality and expression. A qualitative report may enhance understanding by allowing for deeper and richer expressions of participants' experiences.

The primary qualitative research tradition I was operating from was phenomenology, which seeks to understand the nature and meaning of a particular lived experience for individuals (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell, 1998). Emphasis is placed on understanding a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those being studied. This tradition strives to leave the reader with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne, as cited in Creswell, 1998). Although some forms of phenomenological inquiry emphasize bracketing out researcher preconceptions in order to understand the essence of an experience from the informant's perspective, more interpretive forms of phenomenology allow interpretations to be drawn from various theoretical perspectives, as long as it is developed around a central account of the participant's experiences (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

Given the interpretive nature of this methodology, it is important to establish some standards for evaluating the soundness and quality of the research. Though this

issue is widely debated by qualitative researchers, some specific techniques for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative studies have been established (e.g., Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell recommends using at least two of these procedures in any given study. I used five verification methods: triangulation, negative case analysis, peer review, saturation, and rich, thick description. First, I used researcher triangulation in the coding process by working with a group of research assistants to independently code the interviews. Second, I searched for discrepant data and negative cases and included my interpretations of these cases in the report. Third, I sought feedback on my codings and interpretations from my research supervisor as an external check of the research. Fourth, I interviewed a relatively large number of participants to ensure that I had reached a saturation of themes. Fifth, I included a wide range of direct quotes in my report, and in the appendices, in order to present the reader with detailed description so that he or she could evaluate the validity of my interpretations.

Participants

Research participants were recruited from two Canadian dog-training organizations: Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Lions Foundation of Canada. Eligibility criteria were that the individual must have experienced the loss of at least one assistance dog, and that he or she could be interviewed by phone or in person. Two people were interviewed in person, and the remaining participants were interviewed by phone. The study focused on experiences of loss by physically disabled and legally blind people. People with hearing impairment were not included because the telephone interviews for hearing impaired participants would have required special equipment unavailable to me. I conducted 26 interviews. One interview was eliminated due to equipment failure. Therefore, the sample consisted of 25 individuals: 16 women and 9 men. Women averaged 44.88 years of age (range 27-78 years); men averaged 52.22 years (range 44-68 years) of age. All participants identified their ethnicity as Caucasian with one participant also noting the “possibility of Aboriginal blood” in her background. The sample included 8 single participants (2 divorced; 6 never married) and 17 in a current relationship (1 living alone, 3 living common-law, and 13 married and living

together). Three participants had a service dog and 22 had a guide dog. Service dogs assist people with ambulatory difficulties, whereas guide dogs assist people who are legally blind.

Dog Loss Interviews

A Dog Loss Interview (see Appendix A) was developed specifically for this research. This interview contained general questions pertaining to the research questions but was sufficiently open-ended to enable exploration of themes that came up during interviews.

Procedure

To preserve privacy, potential participants were contacted by an employee or volunteer of the organization that matched them with their assistance dog. Upon contact, participants were read a short paragraph about the research and asked if they were interested in participating. Those who expressed interest were asked for consent to have their contact information forwarded to me. Interested individuals were contacted by me to schedule the interview and answer any questions about the research. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that the interviews would be recorded for future transcription and analysis. Prior to the interview, participants were read an informed consent form that told them that this research was approved by the SFU Research Ethics Board and that asked for their verbal consent. One participant who was interviewed in person had some vision and was able to sign the consent form. Interviews typically took 1 to 1½ hours to complete. Each interview was transcribed by a research assistant. The transcription was edited by a second research assistant to check for errors.

Qualitative Analysis of Interviews

I analysed the interview data using a thematic analysis procedure (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 20006; Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This method involves the

identification of themes, or patterns in the data, that emerge as important features of a phenomenon through a recursive process of careful reading and re-reading. The specific method of analysis I used was a hybrid approach that incorporated both deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductive analysis uses a codebook that has been developed *a priori* and is usually based on a theoretical framework (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Codes are a list of the themes or indicators that represent the theory they are based upon. I used this method to code responses to research questions derived from attachment theory. Specifically, I used a deductive approach to assess whether attachment components were present in participants' descriptions of their relationships with their assistance dogs.

The drawback of the deductive approach is the potential for missing important information and for merely confirming hypotheses without allowing for alternative interpretations. To guard against this limitation of the deductive approach, a data-driven inductive coding method was used to further analyze responses to the theoretically derived questions for new and unexpected themes, and to analyze responses to questions for which I had no pre-existing coding frame (e.g., coping strategies). Thus, an inductive approach was used in two ways: to look for themes in responses to broad research questions (e.g., what role does caregiving play in this relationship), and to look for themes within deductive codes (e.g., if secure base was evident, what did it look like?). This hybrid approach allowed me to ask questions derived from attachment theory while also allowing me to be open to new and unexpected themes. It also enabled me to ask open, exploratory questions. For example, I included very broad, open-ended questions (e.g., Tell me about [dog's name]; What impact did [dog's name] have on your life?) to explore the nature of the human-assistance dog relationship.

For the deductive process, a codebook was developed based on the research questions and theoretical framework. In this approach, the codes are defined *before* an in-depth analysis of the data. For this phase, I used attachment-related concepts as my codes: safe haven, secure base, and separation anxiety. Meeting with a group of three research assistants, we then examined the verbatim transcripts in detail to identify any passages that appeared to be consistent with the codes. These passages were grouped

into themes that were organized under the relevant, over-arching codes. All text segments relevant to these codes were copied and transferred to a new file that organized the interview segments under their relevant codes. To test the reliability of the codes, the research team met weekly to compare and discuss the results. Modifications were made until all parties could agree on the match between codes and the supporting quotes.

The inductive process was used to analyze sections of the interview that were exploratory and less theoretically driven: subthemes of attachment components, the role of caregiving, grief experiences, and coping strategies. For this process, quotes relevant to a particular research question were identified and separated from the original transcription. Each quote was placed on a separate piece of paper. Each research assistant organized the quotes into groups that appeared to represent the same concept (e.g., type of coping strategy) and provided a label for the theme. The research team then met to compare and discuss the new themes. Through this discussion, the research team sought to identify the key feature of the theme (e.g., avoidance of grief, spiritual beliefs) and to compare that with other examples described by the participants. This process was repeated until consensus was reached.

The themes presented in the results section are not necessarily mutually exclusive; rather, they often overlap with one another. For example, the themes representing safe haven and secure base often coincide because a person is likely to seek comfort from a source (human or non-human) that they can count on for a sense of security. Thus, some participant quotes may represent more than one theme.

Results and Discussion

Safe Haven

One of the guiding research questions of this study was whether close human-dog bonds could be conceptualized as an attachment relationship. Safe haven is one of the key components of an attachment relationship and refers to the extent that participants turn to their dog for comfort when distressed. Most participants (21 of 25) clearly indicated that their dog provided a safe haven during times of emotional upset and distress:

[Dog] was a comfort. Just by being there, you could literally talk to the dog. Sure, the dog's not going to answer you, but it responds. It'll come up and put its paw on you, or its muzzle, or whatever. You could talk to the animal, they would understand. And just being there comforting you... giving you the affection. (171)

Well, I think for anybody that likes dogs, or animals, even if you're in the depths of despair, when you get that lick, or he just comes up and bumps you, or something, "Come on!" you know, whatever, it knocks you out of it, gets your mind off it. Sorta like your psychiatrist in fur, I suppose. (160)

Safe haven and secure base often coincided because a sense of felt security develops from having a reliable source of comfort:

Once you live with an animal that long, it's almost like a man and a woman, you know, when you're living in a relationship and it's a good relationship, you know you can, that other person being there is a comfort and you, lots of times you don't even have to say anything. Just have to know that that person is there. (152)

An important feature of the safe haven component of these relationships was contact comfort. This paralleled the cuddling, kissing, prolonged skin-to-skin contact and extended mutual gazing that characterizes the infant-caregiver relationship. Hazan and

Zeifman (1994) point out that these behaviours are typically restricted to infant-caregiver and romantic relationships. However, the human-dog bond is another context in which physical contact freely occurs:

And just the warmth, the physical warmth, and the tactile kind of things, the fur.... but he would do that, and kinda lean on you, and the warmth, and the fact that there was another living creature there that cared for you. (167)

Thus, it appears that assistance dogs met these individuals' basic attachment-related need for comfort and closeness when upset or distressed. In many cases, the dogs appeared to be so attuned with their owners' emotions that the owners did not even need to seek out the support:

It was good because he always knew when I was upset. I didn't have to say a word. If I was extra down and I decided "look you rest, here's your chew bone, I'm going in here," he was right by my side, like... "Chew bone can wait woman. You feel like crud and I'm right here for ya." (151)

Although the safe haven component was evident in the large majority of cases, in four cases the individuals reported that they did not derive a sense of comfort from their dogs. For one of these participants, there was a strong emotional bond but the relationship was primarily a caregiving relationship in which the owner focused on the dog's emotional well-being:

If you were upset, he wouldn't eat. He knew, so with T you really had to keep a cool head 'cause there were times when things were going on and that, where I would literally have to hand feed him. (153)

A few other participants described a similar concern about their dog's emotions, though they also described using their dog as a source of comfort. (See the caregiving section below for further discussion and quotes.) Another participant, who did not seek comfort from his dog when upset, perceived his dog as a friend who was very consistent but who had only a small impact in times of stress compared to other people in his life. In a third case, the participant did not report having a strong bond with the dog; rather, the dog appeared to fulfill primarily a functional role. Finally, in the last case, the participant

described himself as “very independent” and stated that he did not seek comfort from others when upset. See Appendix B for additional safe haven quotes.

Secure Base

Secure base is another essential component of an attachment relationship, and refers to the extent that participants perceive their dog as a dependable source of comfort and support that enables them to venture into new pursuits or cope with stressful experiences. Just over half of the participants (13 of 25) clearly indicated that they derived a sense of felt security from their dog. This sense of felt security came from knowing that the dog was always there and from the dog providing a steady and stabilizing presence:

I would say almost constantly, she was always there with me. So there was always that bond, that comfort, that person to speak to. You could classify her as being another person. You could get the affection, the bond, to speak to and they listen and they give you their muzzle or their paw, and they do understand, so you do have that constant feeling. (171)

Oh, he's better than red wine (laughs). No, he was good, he really was, because again, he was so steady and he had this manner that was solid. So, if I tended to get rattled by something, he was such a good calming influence, because he didn't get rattled by things. He was just kind of there, feet firmly planted, being my pillar, kind of. But that's more of a, I don't mean a physical pillar, it wasn't that I was unsteady on my feet, it's a very philosophical kind of pillar. I just knew that if R was there, everything was going to be okay. (167)

One participant talked passionately about how her dog helped her through a series of trials and tribulations. These life events appear to represent the true exploration that becomes possible only when attachment needs have been satisfied (Feeney & Collins, 2006). The following quote encompasses both themes of a stabilizing presence and exploration:

What I liked about B was she had the rare opportunity of going through what I call my growing years, I guess. When I say growing years, I'm talking about she went to work with me, she was the one that was by my side as we got involved in the community and volunteer work, she was by my side when I got married, she was by my side when I was going

through some of my family crises, she was by my side when I went from one job to another. She was there for almost every important event in my life as a young person, growing up, working and leaving work, through all the ups and downs of my life. B basically gave me a lot of confidence. She showed me loyalty and love in every sense of the way. She made me want to go for another job, because she was so good. (173)

Some participants reported that the relationship with their dog enabled them to feel confident in their abilities and to explore and engage more fully in the world compared to before they had their dog:

It just gave me a lot more confidence to get out and do things. I wasn't laid-back and reserved like I was [before]. When I had the dog, I was more outgoing and more venturing all over the place when I had C. (154)

Many of these participants also indicated that they experienced their dog as more accepting and nonjudgmental than other people in their life. This "unconditional love" appeared to nurture their feelings of felt security:

You knew she was there for you emotionally. At least for the dogs, you know they are always there for you...I can talk to them, and I know that they accept me for who I am, for the person I am. I don't have to dress a certain way, or look a certain way, or act a certain way. They love you unconditionally. (170)

Some participants also spoke about the development of self that comes with having a deep emotional bond with another being who can be trusted to take care of them when needed, even in their weaker moments:

...because of the dog I have more empathy...he just brought that out in me because he was so wise. He allowed me to screw up, and he was still there. He wasn't critical, and even if I got frustrated, and was mean to him because I was frustrated with myself...But he'd still be there, looking at me, wagging his tail. He said, "yeah, you didn't really need to give me that shot, but, I love you anyway." It makes you re-evaluate so much. I think, had I not had the dog, because it's a living thing, if I was still a cane user, that would have never happened. I'd still be a cane user, and my intelligence level would be the same, but I'd still be angry. I'm no longer angry...because I have the opportunity to meet the world through my dog's eyes. (167)

Although the preceding examples clearly demonstrate the presence of secure base, in several cases it was difficult to distinguish between the emotional (secure base) and functional benefit of the dog's presence. The following example is representative of this mix of functional and emotional benefits in that it is not possible to attribute the participant's community involvement to just one factor:

Well, I'm that much more active in the community. With him, I felt that, you're like, I say so much more relaxed, and your mobility is back. There's no barriers in your road. Like he just opened up things, like "I can do this. Sure we can do that." (158)

It is likely that the increased mobility and functionality derived from an assistance dog gives rise to emotional benefits that are inseparable from the dog's physical assistance. However, participants also clearly described an emotional benefit that appeared to stem solely from a deep sense of being watched over and cared for:

She gave it 100%. I've never known B to fail me, ever. Never. Even when she was sick, to the point of her dying day. Even when she was within two hours of her dying, she actually got up to make sure that I got to the door. And that tells me a lot (sounds teary, emotional). (173)

Oh, well, like I said, he was my friend, he was obviously my eyes, he was just there for me all the time. He was just so much of what I was all about....he was always there, he was always watching, but he seemed to know that I needed him. (167)

During the interviews, I also noted that, compared to safe haven, the concept of secure base was harder to ask about and harder for participants to talk about. People could easily report on whether they found their dog comforting when they were upset. However, some found it hard to report on how the dog affected their willingness to do new things in a purely emotional sense. See Appendix C for additional quotes for secure base.

Separation Anxiety

An individual's resistance to separation from an attachment figure and their experience of distress when separated are a reflection of separation anxiety. In the

current sample, the assessment of separation anxiety was complicated by the fact that many participants reported that they were either never separated from their dogs, or had separations of only a few hours when going to a crowded environment that would make getting around with the dog difficult (e.g., shopping). These people commonly felt that there was no reason to separate from their dogs because they relied on their dog for mobility, or other types of assistance, and could legally bring their dog to most public places.

Well for a couple hours. But really, besides for a couple hours—which you have to get away from the dog because they have to have a break away from you. But, otherwise, I never had to put her in a Kennel due to a vet or because I had to be hospitalized, because there's never been a real reason for a separation. (171)

It was not always clear whether the lack of separations were due to pragmatic reasons, emotional reasons, or a combination of both. This participant, however, clearly stated his reason:

Well she was uh, well, I called her my soul-mate. Because we were very close, and never, we were never separated. She even went into an operating room with me. (152)

Participants described two primary reasons for separations: they needed to go to the hospital and it was either impractical or impossible to bring their dog, or they had to leave the dog behind when visiting family members or friends who did not want the dog around:

I went to a Christmas dinner up at my sister's house. And she said, "Please don't bring the dog," and I thought, "You nutball, that's like asking somebody with glasses, hey, don't bring your glasses, OK?" So, I thought "Well, in the interest of keeping the peace, I'll put the dog in his crate and I'll go up there, be there, what 2, 3 hours tops." I came back, the crate mat was shredded. I thought, "That's it, we're a package deal. No dog, no me. That's it." After that, I didn't go up to my sister's. She didn't want the dog there. I thought "Fine, then I'm not there either." (151)

Participants also reported missing their dog during separations:

Well it's almost a lonely type feeling. You hate to say it (laughs), you're always calling for him, even though you know he's not there. I've been fishing and they don't want—I made the decision—but afterwards I found out they don't want you taking them fishing, things like that, cause of the hazards, so that worked out anyway. But you sit and you call for them, "A, oh yeah, oh yeah, he's not here." So you do miss them, there is a sense of, "Oh, where is my buddy, why isn't he here, why didn't I bring him, he'd love it here." (160)

A few participants had separations from their dog that lasted for a few days to a couple of weeks and did not report any feelings of separation anxiety. In three of these cases, the individuals would go on vacations without their dog. These individuals reported that they did not experience any stress, worries or negative feelings about the separations. Two participants reported that separation from the dog sometimes offered a relief from responsibility:

It's kind of nice. I mean I miss her but I know, we [participant and friends] do things together. There's a bunch of us girls who go up every year. Oh yeah, we have fun, and you don't want any responsibility, absolutely none....it's a nice break. Don't have to worry about taking them out to pee and poop and feeding them and this and that. (159)

In a fourth case, multiple hospitalizations necessitated the separations and the owner reported that he did not experience any worries or negative feelings over the separations because he knew that the dog was being well cared for by close family members.

From an attachment theory perspective, separation anxiety in an attachment relationship serves to maintain proximity to the caregiver for protection and safety. Therefore, the focus of concern in this relationship dynamic should be on one's own well-being. In this sample, a few participants experienced mild discomfort focused on their own well-being during short separations from their dog:

It's kind of like, for a couple hours, if you lost all your hair, just for a couple hours, you have no hair. You've lost a part of yourself, a part of something that's always been. (156)

However, the majority of participants who described separation anxiety with their dog expressed that their primary concern was focused on their dog's well-being:

Oh I found it very difficult. I was always phoning to see was V taken care of, did they feed her, did they give her water? I was always worried because I do everything on time. I kept wondering if she was getting all that attention. (157)

Separation anxiety that focuses on the other's well-being is characteristic of a caregiving relationship in which the caregiver desires close proximity to the dependent, and resists separation, in order to provide protection and security. Hence, many participants experienced a form of separation anxiety suggestive that their caregiving system had taken precedence over the attachment system. (See Appendix D for additional examples of separation anxiety.)

Many participants either did not experience extended separations from their dogs for functional reasons or, when separated, experienced distress focused on the well-being of their dog rather than themselves. Therefore, separation anxiety may not be an appropriate way of assessing the dynamics of attachment in this population. However, from an attachment perspective, death can be considered the ultimate separation and grief represents another form of separation anxiety. Therefore, an exploration of grief responses offers a means of assessing the attachment dynamics in this population. However, because I sought to explore the question of whether grief symptoms reflect either an attachment or caregiving relationship, I will discuss the results for caregiving before the results for grief responses.

Caregiving

Caregiving proved to be a central feature of participants' relationships with their assistance dogs. The majority of participants expressed great pleasure in caring for their dogs and spoke about a variety of mutual benefits that came from caregiving.

One common theme in the interviews was the importance of daily grooming and care of the dog to develop the emotional bond that was essential for a good working relationship. The dog organizations emphasized this point during their training sessions:

That's part of the bonding and, if they know you're taking good care of them, then they're gonna take good care of you. It works both ways. (159)

Although caregiving was important for the dog's enjoyment and bonding, a sense of mutual pleasure and pride was evident in many cases:

Oh I love it, I still do. Like I get out and brush them out every day. I like to make sure that my dogs look nice and they're healthy and it's just something that needs to be done. And I don't mind doing it. It's a mutual thing that dogs can give me what I need as far as being a working dog and I reciprocate because I love them to pieces. And I reciprocate because I know J loves to be brushed and so you know it's a give-give situation. (170)

For many participants, the importance of caregiving extended beyond the enhancement of the working relationship to being an essential role for the individual. For a few individuals, having their dog to care for gave them a sense of purpose in life. For this individual, the value of caring for his dog could not have been higher:

For sure, I would not be alive without the dog....because it's an avenue of relief for your love. (152)

...as far as emotional goes, like, I get very depressed sometimes, and the animal is what brings me back out of it, because the animal needs my care, and I know that I cannot skip out on the animal. (152)

For some participants, becoming physically disabled was associated with a number of losses in addition to the loss of physical abilities. Many participants spoke about their struggles with their loss of independence, confidence, and their sense of self, as well as emotional losses. As one participant explained, "You're almost an emotional cripple when you go blind." Having a dog that needed their care provided a sense of responsibility that helped to offset these losses:

I think [caregiving] was very important for me. To have it, I think it gave me again another sense of having some responsibilities again back in your life. And that responsibility gave you something back so I think it was very, very important. (157)

Other participants observed that they enjoyed being needed:

I think that, especially now, I need to be needed. Even though my son was small, when I have all my dog stuff, I still had that need to be needed. It was great for me, especially now that I'm on my own, it's better because at least my dogs need me. (170)

Several participants expressed that having a dog was like having a child. This was the case for people who already had children, but was especially salient for those who had no children of their own:

Well I guess maybe because my husband and I are both disabled, and with great difficulty, we kind of made this decision that we wouldn't be having children. Because although we felt that we could take care of a baby, running after a toddler is not as easy, and we didn't want to hinder a child—we didn't want to stop the child from doing what a child does because we are disabled. So D was it for us. (168)

For two participants who were caring for young children of their own while also caring for their dog, caring for the dog appeared to provide less pleasure. Instead of being an essential role, caring for the dog simply added to their workload.

Although the majority of participants enjoyed caring for their dogs, a few acknowledged the stresses of providing such a high level of care for an animal. These stresses typically revolved around toileting the dog (e.g., harsh weather conditions, picking up after the dog when legally blind) and caring for the dog during times of illness or fatigue:

Sometimes you're tired, physically tired. You know, having a dog is a huge responsibility. They don't take themselves outside to the bathroom. They don't pick up after themselves. They don't brush themselves. You have to go and bring him for a bath, and pay for it in their vet bills and that sort of thing. It's a big commitment and it's a big responsibility. What you get in return—I shouldn't talk for everyone—what I got in return was all of that, 100 fold. (156)

Although many participants spoke about their dog providing comfort when they were upset, several participants also spoke about their sensitivity and concern for their dog's emotions:

I knew that if I got upset, he'd get upset. So again, probably like having kids. You don't wanna freak the kids out even more, so if you're trying to stay calm, then he'll be okay. (168)

Such a focus of concern on their dog's emotional well-being is a clear indication of caregiving. Several participants attempted to protect their dogs from distress by controlling their own emotions, whereas one individual removed her dog from emotionally stressful situations.

Only two participants expressed little interest or pleasure in caring for their dog. In one of these cases, the participant described an emotional bond with the dog but felt that caregiving was not important for maintenance of the bond once it was established. In the second case, the participant did not describe a strong emotional bond with the dog and this appeared to be reflected in the low enjoyment and low importance of caregiving for this individual. See Appendix E for additional quotes for caregiving.

Grief

One of my research questions was: How do people experience the loss of an assistance dog? The majority of participants reported that their dog had died due to sickness or disease; about half of these deaths were sudden and half were gradual. One dog died after being hit by a car. Several participants lost their dogs to retirement. Some were able to maintain some form of contact with the dog, whereas others had no contact. Contact ranged from being kept informed about the dog's well-being to caring for the dog when the new owners went on vacation.

The majority of participants experienced feelings of sadness or distress during the interview, even though, in many instances, they had experienced the loss many years ago. However, participants still varied considerably in the degree of descriptiveness they used in portraying their emotions, and in how emotionally

expressive they were during the interview. Some participants wept openly while talking about their loss, whereas a few participants were emotionally reserved. Some participants described their grief responses at length, whereas others offered only a few words. A small number of participants stated that they could not talk about the loss in detail, as it was too difficult. The following two quotes demonstrate these individual differences and the difficulty in evaluating the intensity of grief experienced by each individual:

When I lost B, first, as soon as the vet told me she was going to die within 24 hours, I never left her side. Never, ever. Even to the point where I would not eat my meals. I waited for her to die (emotional)...one thing I really remember a lot about her death, and I've never experienced it ever again, um (pause), when my husband told me that the dog was gone, 'cause I didn't hear her take her last breath 'cause I'm deaf, he said, "B is gone," I know I cried in such a way I'd never cried before. I also remember that (pause, emotional) my heart jumped in my chest. It flicked. I never had that before, and I've never had it since (crying). So it's like my heart broke in two. I've never experienced that kind of chest pain again...'cause I had B in my arms at the time. I didn't experience it when O died. I cried, but I didn't have the chest pains that I had at that time. (173)

The next quote is from a woman who described herself as a person who has experienced many losses in her life, but does not readily share her emotions with others:

Participant: I felt lost, totally lost. I missed feeding her, I missed grooming her. It was all of a sudden a big loss....I would say almost the same [as losing significant others]. It was pretty hard when I lost my son unexpectedly, so hard, but yeah S was part of my life too and losing her was really really hard for me.

Interviewer: So you compare it to something as difficult as losing your son?

Participant: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. (155)

Many participants reported that their experience of loss was similar, or in some cases more difficult, when compared to the loss of a significant other, often a family member:

Probably a lot more emotions when I lost my dog, I don't know if that's right to say but...Yeah, just because of the time frames. Yeah, like 16, sure you still need your dad around quite a bit. I know it was hard when my dad passed too. But then I say, this time in my life, I dunno, it just seemed it was harder when we had to put Q down. (158)

Many participants commented that they experienced the loss of their dog as a loss of a close relationship. The type of relationship loss that individuals described included the loss of a child, a good friend, a loved one, and part of oneself:

She was a piece of me. I don't know how to explain it, but she was a piece of me. She's not just a dog, she's not just a companion, she's not just there to help you, she's there through all thick and thin of your life. (173)

Totally because it's like your world has come to an end. And your child is gone. You don't have anybody to look after and there's nobody there to give you the love back. (154)

Overall, the experience of loss was intense for the vast majority of participants. Consistent with previous research on grief over the loss of a companion animal, participants described a variety of emotions including shock, sadness, anger, guilt, and depression:

It was horrible. I cried. You'd be fine, and then all of a sudden you'd find yourself crying, which is standard grief. I found a bunch of pictures, the other day I was clearing up and I found a bunch of pictures of her, and I was crying. You don't get over it, ever. (174)

In a few cases, the response to loss was especially intense and clearly resembled the strong attachment-related emotions proposed by Bowlby (1980). For example, some participants described symptoms of protest or intense yearning and preoccupation with the deceased, accompanied by a sense of the deceased's presence:

But there was times when I went outside (choking up, crying) and I'd think to myself "At least I don't have to pick up dog poop at the moment," but I wanted to look at the sky and scream, "I want my W back!" (151)

It was pretty sad and I could still feel that he was around, even though he wasn't, and I guess you're just expecting that to happen, expecting him to

be around and stuff. It's almost like he was actually here, it's really weird. Even though I know that he wasn't. (172)

Although these emotions may be reflective of the loss of an attachment relationship, no participants described feelings of abandonment that might be expected on loss of a primary attachment figure. The most striking finding was that many participants focused on the well-being of their dog during and after loss, suggesting that caregiving took precedence over attachment during times of loss, even in relationships that exhibited strong attachment dynamics. This concern was often reflected in participants' wishes to soothe or comfort their dog:

Because when I had to put him to sleep, the morning I was going to do that (crying), he wouldn't play, he was real lethargic. And I thought, look at me, and he did, and I could see everything in his eyes. It was just like, "Mom, it's time to say good-bye." (Crying hard) And I knew I was doing the right thing, because he was in pain. He was hurting. And I wasn't going to prolong that. (151)

I stayed up with him the night of the 14th, all night, just sitting next to the couch talking to him, trying to tell him why I was going to do what I had to do and that it was the right thing. He understood, I know he did. I know he knew that it was the right thing, although he was on medication too, eh, he was pretty drugged up. So anyway she arrives about 10:30 that morning and we talked for a while and, about five after 11, she said "It's time." I thanked him, I thanked him again (crying), he was sitting there looking at me and I said "C, I have one more command for you. You go now and be happy" (whispering due to emotion). And I handed her the leash and away they went. (156)

The participant in the following quotes spoke clearly about her dog as the child she and her husband could not have due to their disabilities. She expressed many of the prototypical grief responses of the bereaved parent described by Bowlby (1980) and Weiss (1993, 2001):

A wish to soothe:

I said to him, "D, mummy and daddy love you, and we'll be okay, but if you've got to go, go. Because you've done your job." See, now I'm going to cry. But we just talked to him, made sure he knew we loved him, and gave him permission to go....The vet picked him up, and D rolled his

eyes, and he looked at me for a second, and I kissed his nose and I said, "You just go to sleep, baby, it's okay."...D looked at my husband, and he closed his eyes, and that's the way it stayed. To him maybe it meant we were there. I'm hoping that he thought we were there. (168)

A sense of guilt and helplessness about being unable to protect the dependent from pain and death:

One of my first responses was, "Did I do this? Did I miss something? Did I not call the vet enough? Is there something I did or didn't do that caused this?"

Protest of the loss and vigilance about the dependent's possible return:

Still, I wake up in the middle of the night screaming that something's wrong with D, wait, I think I hear him in the other room, you know.

And, finally, the continuation of despair even when a potentially substitutive relationship is available:

Most of the time it's still pretty raw. There's some guilt there, because I went and brought another one [service dog] home, and does D know we're not replacing him....Still miss him very much. It was very hard to bring a new one home because this is D's territory.

As to be expected for individuals who must rely so heavily on an assistance dog, participants also talked about the impact that losing their dog had on their physical functioning:

It was very hard. I was lost, because it was about three weeks to a month before I could get another dog, and I was lost. I had to go back to relying on people. And I found that very difficult. I couldn't do what I wanted to do, and I had to rely on somebody else and that person was not always there to give me what I needed. So I was lost. Plus, even just sitting at home, my wife was out working. I'm sitting at home. I didn't even have someone there to talk to or give a hug. I was lost. (171)

Only two participants reported low levels of grief. Several features distinguished these cases from the rest. First, attachment and caregiving were not important features

in these relationships. Second, both dogs were retired and alive at the time of interview. Third, both participants appeared emotionally reserved. In one case, the participant stated that he loved the dog and continued to care for the dog when the new owners went on vacation. This participant reported that he missed his dog initially but, once he was confident that his dog was being well cared for, these feelings subsided. In the second case, the dog's role in the participant's life appeared to be primarily functional and there was little evidence of emotional bonds in the form of companionship, attachment, or caregiving. See Appendix F for additional quotes for grief.

Coping

Although previous research indicates that many individuals experience intense grief on losing a companion animal or an assistance dog, no research to date has explored how people cope with such a loss. The participants in the current study described a variety of coping responses that appeared to reflect either strategies that served to avoid painful feelings, or strategies directed at confronting the loss. Though a few participants talked primarily about avoiding the pain of grief, most described a mix of avoidant and confrontative strategies.

Strategies that focused on avoiding painful emotions included not talking about their dog, avoiding reminders of their dog, keeping busy to avoid thinking about their dog, and focusing on the future:

Oh yeah. Anything that was connected to the dog was gone. Like I put everything away, took it away so I wouldn't see it, or, well we use the word see but, all that stuff. (157)

Having so much to do also kept me focused, because, it wasn't a situation where I could just throw up my hands and say, you know what, I can't do this. Because I don't like to let people down. And if I have taken something on then I will see it through. So in a way, I thought, Lord, I don't wanna wrestle with this schedule. Stay tough, you just do it. And that helped a lot too; having that much to do. Because it kept me from dwelling on the grief as well. (151)

One participant dealt with the loss of his dog pre-emptively:

I put it to the training center, that I could not, I could NOT see her die....So what happened is I retired her, so that she was, we had a good parting. It was quite emotional, but at the same time I was in for my new dog right away, so there was no time lapse. (152)

Participants also described coping strategies that were focused on confronting the loss. One of the most common strategies was seeking social support from family, friends, and co-workers. Almost half of the participants mentioned that the support they received from their training centre was helpful, indicating that this was a key resource. Veterinarians were also commonly mentioned as a source of support. A few participants also reported that they received support from other organizations such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, guide dog support groups, and an online pet loss bereavement group. For the few participants who were socially isolated, organizational support was often the only resource available.

Most participants reported at least some satisfaction with the support they received from close family or friends. Several individuals mentioned that they chose their social support network carefully to ensure that the people within their network understood their relationship with their dog. However, many participants pointed out that they had been confronted with a lack of understanding from people with whom they were not so close:

And then I started telling anyone who would listen, the doctor, my brother-in-law, people in the waiting room, "You don't understand what this dog has done for me. You people don't understand, you think he's just a working dog, and he got me from one place to another. He's more than that and you just don't understand where I'm coming from." And they don't want to hear it. You know, they just think "He's emotionally distraught," you know, "You'll get another dog and everything will be okay." (156)

Well, a lot of my friends can understand, especially the dog guide users. I think that they can understand....like the public, a couple people I mentioned it to, are like, "Oh well, it's a dog," and I said, "Excuse me?" It's usually other people who have been in a similar situation or other dog guide users who can...they usually support you and they know what you're going through because they've probably been there themselves. (170)

Several participants reported great difficulty going out in public after their dog had died:

I wish...I had a nickel for every time somebody hit me with "Where's your dog?", "You getting another dog?", "When you getting another dog?"...I couldn't go anywhere without that several times a day. It was hard to be home, because he wasn't here. It was hard to be out, because he wasn't there...I just felt out of place. I didn't belong any place. No place felt right to be. (151)

Although participants experienced these questions as insensitive and unsupportive, many participants reported that getting their next assistance dog was one of the most helpful ways they coped with their loss. Part of the benefit of having a new dog was distraction:

Probably the [grief was most intense the] first month until I got Z, and then, not that the feelings aren't as intense, but you don't focus on it as much cause you have now this new puppy that needs your attention. (165)

The maintenance of functionality was also a key component in getting another assistance dog:

I think the best thing I could have done was getting back on my feet again and go get myself another service dog. I think that's the best thing. It's like falling off a bike, the best thing you can do is get right back on and do it again. (171)

There was also a strong emotional component to having a new dog. In many cases, the emotional benefit appeared to come from having an alternative safe haven source:

Actually [getting a new dog] was comforting too. Because I could always talk to J (new dog) and I'd talk to him about Q (deceased dog). (158)

Spiritual beliefs provided another means of coping with loss. In some cases, this took the form of social support because the participant felt the support of others who

shared their faith. In other cases, the participant felt that the circumstances of their dog's death were positively influenced by a higher power:

But I did say to God, when I knew things were going to change, that if she was going to die, she was going to die in my house. Because I think it would have actually bothered me more—not that it didn't, it bothered me greatly that she died—but I think it would have been more hurtful for me to have to have her leave my house and go somewhere else. (169)

Consistent with the strong caregiving component in many of these relationships, having spiritual beliefs provided some participants with the comforting notion that the deceased dog was no longer suffering:

Oh yeah, well, I wasn't crying all the time. Just, you know, "he's in a good place now and he's not hurting." That's my attitude. (153)

Several coping strategies appeared to serve as ways to maintain a bond to the lost dog. These included reminiscing about the dog and enjoying good memories, either with supportive others or alone:

There were a couple people who remembered a lot of stories about him and they witnessed some of his goofy stuff and we would talk about that, and laugh about it. So that was helpful. (156)

Having a keepsake of the dog was a way of maintaining the bond by keeping a physical reminder of the dog such as pictures or the dog's ashes or collar. This participant chose a unique keepsake:

The morning before I took him up to the vet's, I trimmed a lock of hair from over his heart, because he was the most faithful-hearted dog. And I kept that lock. I keep it with me in my purse. And where I am, that purse is, and, he's there. (151)

Sometimes, the continuing relationship participants kept with their dog was psychological:

But I walk around the house and something'll pop into my head, and I'll talk to R. Yes, it's just like he's on my shoulder. (167)

In some of these cases, the deceased dog provided a legacy that continued to operate for the participant in a positive manner, somewhat like a psychological representation of a secure base:

In his memory, I walked the row with my long cane. It was important for me to do that in his honour because, if he was human, he would've told me, "I always respected your mobility and don't you ever stop being mobile."...It was hard to do, but I wanted to do it for him...I hoped that somehow he would get the message: "No C (name of dog), B (name of participant) is not going to throw seven years away, he's not going to. He's going to still be mobile.".... It made things better, it really did. I felt a whole lot better when I got home that day. "I did it C, I did it. I will never stay home, I will get another dog, and I will stay mobile, and I am not taking that seven years and all we did together, and the difference that you made in my life, and putting it in the garbage can. It's not going to happen." (156)

One issue that must eventually be confronted for many individuals who have an assistance dog is euthanasia. In this sample, nine participants had to decide whether to euthanize their dog. What appeared to help these individuals cope with this decision was the perspective that this was their final act of caring and the only means of offering comfort to a dog that was suffering and otherwise sure to die a painful death:

I knew that R knew that it was time for him to go. And short of letting him out the back and letting him go wander off, which I couldn't do that cause I needed to know where he was, euthanasia was the best gift I could give him at that point. (167)

Several participants lost their dog to retirement. Some of these dogs eventually died, whereas others were still alive at the time of the interviews. For participants who were able to maintain some contact with their dog, the knowledge that their dog was being well cared for helped them to cope with the loss:

Like I'm a pretty, for a big guy, I'm pretty emotional. It's still hard to talk about. But, like I say, mostly I knew that was for the best, for him. That was my main concern right—what's best for him. I wanted to make sure that he got the best. (158)

Two participants were not able to maintain contact with the person who adopted their dog. For one individual, who appeared to have a limited emotional bond with his dog, the lack of contact was not difficult. However, for the other individual, who had a very strong attachment and caregiving bond with his dog, the lack of contact was emotionally painful:

I'm bitter with the woman that has him. She has the option of calling me and filling me in and letting me know how he is, but she has chosen not to. And I question that. I know I couldn't do it. I wonder how, when she knows how long he was with me, she can do that. When she knows how long he was with me, how can she do that? How can somebody be that cold? But she may have other reasons for it, I don't know. (156)

See Appendix G for additional quotes for coping strategies.

General Discussion

What is the Nature of the Human-Assistance Dog Relationship?

The primary purpose of this study was to explore whether the human-assistance dog relationship exhibits the dynamics of an attachment relationship. I analyzed interviews for evidence of three attachment components: safe haven, secure base, and separation anxiety. Proximity seeking was not assessed because dog owners depended on their dogs for functional assistance and thus spent most of their waking hours in close proximity. However, many participants talked about enjoying the dog's company and few, if any, expressed any negative feelings about spending virtually all of their waking hours in the presence of their dog.

Key features of attachment were evident in a large majority of participants' relationships. The majority of participants indicated that their assistance dogs provided comfort during times of distress. Many spoke about their dog being attuned to their emotions and being highly and effectively responsive by noticing when their owner was upset. They also described their dogs as providing comfort in the form of physical contact and being available to "talk to." Perhaps because of their dogs' responsiveness, participants rarely needed to seek out their dogs for comfort. These patterns indicate a high quality of safe haven similar to that expected with responsive human caregivers.

Secure base was apparent in about half of participants' descriptions of their relationships with their assistance dogs. Similar to human relationships, participants reported that their dogs provided them with a sense of comfort and calm, confidence, positive self-development, and a sense that somebody cared about them. The concept of secure base was difficult to both ask about and to report on, thus making this attachment component more difficult to identify in the interviews than safe haven.

Several participants described a mix of secure base and safe haven that I did not code

as a clear indication of secure base. There were also cases in which I experienced difficulty separating the functional support from the sometimes less obvious emotional support that the dog provided. In total, eight participants described relationships in which the presence of secure base was unclear due to the complications in identifying secure base in the interviews. There were only four participants who clearly stated that their dogs did not provide any secure base functions.

Separation anxiety was also challenging to assess because temporary separations of more than a few hours were rare due to participants' dependence on their dog for functional purposes. However, many participants expressed emotional responses to separation such as missing their dog and worrying about their dog. Most notably, concerns about separation were focused on the dog's well-being rather than participants' own well-being, reflecting that caregiving took precedence over attachment during separation. Experiences of the ultimate separation of death will be discussed below.

Given these findings, it does appear that human-assistance dog relationships exhibit genuine attachment processes. However, as the results on separation anxiety demonstrate, caregiving emerged as an equally, if not more, important dynamic in these relationships. During training, participants were informed that caring for the dog was essential for the dog to bond to them and to form a good working alliance. The majority of participants reported that they enjoyed caring for their dog and they expressed a deep concern for their dog's emotional and physical well-being. A concern for the dependent's well-being reflects the goal of the caregiving system to provide protection (Bowlby, 1969). Caregiving also provided participants with a variety of important roles that extended beyond protection of the dog to the benefits of having a sense of responsibility, of being needed, and of having a purpose in life. The presence of both attachment and caregiving dynamics in these relationships suggests that the human-assistance dog relationship is a reciprocal relationship, in which both partners care for one another.

How do People Experience Loss of an Assistance Dog?

For most participants, the permanent loss of their dog through either death or retirement was an intense, emotional experience. Particular symptoms of grief were variable but typically included feelings of deep sadness and despair. Participants who experienced the most intense grief responses often described attachment-related emotions such as protest and vigilance about the dog's return. Participants did not describe feelings of abandonment, though many reported feeling concerned about the loss of their physical functioning. Just as with temporary separations, participants focused primarily on their dog's well-being, indicating that the caregiving system took precedence over the attachment system during times of loss. Additional evidence of the impact of loss for these participants was their emotional state during the interview. Many participants became emotionally distressed while talking about their loss, even though many of these dogs had died several years ago. Many participants also said that the loss of their dog was as distressing as losing a significant person in their life.

From an attachment perspective, grief is a natural and normal response to the loss of an attachment figure or dependent (Bowlby, 1980). Because human-assistance dog relationships involve attachment and caregiving bonds, intense grief is the expected response. Sbarra and Hazan (2008) state that "separation, loss, and recovery are best understood by first considering the nature and function of intact attachment bonds" because this helps us to understand what exactly is lost when an attachment bond ends (p. 142). They argue that separation and loss result in a state of distress and physiological dysregulation because bereaved individuals lose an efficient means for maintaining their sense of felt security, the availability of their attachment figure. Sbarra and Hazan underscore the biological processes that may underlie the intense grief responses of individuals confronted with the loss of an assistance dog who provided an important external source of affect regulation. A complementary framework to understand the loss of a caregiving relationship would further enhance our understanding of separation and loss.

Participants reported using a variety of coping strategies to deal with their grief. The strategies described were remarkably similar to those reported in the human

bereavement literature, suggesting that the same psychological processes are activated. Literature on human bereavement has identified a range of coping strategies that reflect two powerful and opposing forces designed to shut off emotional pain (e.g., emotional control and keeping busy) or face the reality of the loss (e.g., emotional expression and acceptance) (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Both of these processes were evident in the coping strategies described by participants. Although I did not design this study to compare the effectiveness of different coping strategies, I observed that participants appeared to derive a sense of comfort from having a positive legacy from their dog. This is consistent with emerging literature showing that bereaved people do not sever bonds with the deceased but, rather, continue their relationship through various means including talking to the deceased and deriving moral guidance from them (Klass & Walter, 2001). Moreover, maintaining bonds with the deceased can help the bereaved with grief resolution. From an attachment perspective, such a bond may operate as a comforting mental representation of the deceased that continues to provide secure base and safe haven functions for the bereaved as they confront a new life without the physical presence of their loved one (Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005).

Implications for Attachment and Caregiving

The finding that both attachment and caregiving are key features of the human-assistance dog bond raises some interesting conceptual issues. Both the attachment and caregiving systems play integral roles in these relationships by operating in a reciprocal fashion, with both partners in the relationship providing care for each other and depending on each other. Although it was not the purpose of this study to examine how these systems interacted, it is likely that caregiving is established first for each partner because care is emphasized in training. Assistance dogs must care for their owner's functional needs and owners must care for their dog's daily needs. The development of attachment likely grows from the sense of being well cared for, as shown in the safe haven and secure base results. During times of separation and loss, the caregiving system appeared to take precedence over the attachment system, as reflected in participants' primary concern about the well-being of their dog.

The development of attachment bonds between humans and assistance dogs suggests that our needs for attachment and caregiving are so fundamental to our well-being that they can be sought and satisfied in relationships with other species. Archer (1997) has speculated that human-animal attachment and caregiving dynamics are most likely to be elicited if the nonhuman species has certain characteristics that facilitate this type of bonding. Some of the features that make companion animals so appealing to people are that they possess baby-like features, which elicit parental feelings, that they are warm-blooded and fur-bearing, which makes them appealing to touch, and that they treat their owners with love and affection. These features, combined with the human tendency to project feelings and thoughts onto animals, provide the ideal conditions for triggering human attachment and caregiving systems.

It may be especially easy to form secure relationships with companion dogs given their accepting, nonjudgmental, and social nature. Further, some people may prefer the support of their dog when their human relationships are lacking. An experimental study by Allen and colleagues (1991) indicates that companion dogs act as sources of security for their owners. Notably, participants exhibited less physiological reactivity in the presence of their companion dog than in the presence of a close friend when required to perform a stressful task. The authors speculate that participants perceived their companion dog as nonevaluative, whereas friends were perceived as evaluative, even though the close friends were instructed to be supportive. Thus, the nature of dogs may make them well suited to fulfill human attachment needs for support.

In my study, the majority of participants described remarkably secure relationships with their assistance dogs. Participants clearly stated that they could rely on their dog, and they did not express anxiety about their relationship with their dog or avoid closeness with their dog. Many participants also spoke about increased exploratory activities (e.g., community involvement) and positive self-development as a result of having their dog. The easy, secure relationship that participants enjoyed with their dogs, and the related emotional benefits derived, are consistent with extensive research showing the positive psychosocial benefits of having secure human attachments (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Relationship partners who are available and supportive foster a sense of felt security that promotes exploratory activity, high self-

esteem, and relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Collins, 2006). The psychosocial benefits derived by participants in the present study are also consistent with research indicating that dogs provide physiological, psychological, and social benefits to their human companions (Wells, 2007).

An important factor in the security of human-assistance dog relationships may be the high level of selection and training of the dogs and owners, along with the careful matching process. The most popular breeds for assistance dog training are Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers because they are known to bond easily to humans (R. Workman, personal communication, September 16, 2008). In addition, the dogs are carefully matched to the temperament and needs of their future human owner and many participants commented positively on the sense that their dog cared for and about them. This is in contrast to companion animals where serious discipline problems and subsequent relationship difficulties may arise once the dog has been chosen. It is also in contrast to typical human attachment/caregiving relationships, such as parent-child and romantic dyads, in which the two partners in the relationship may not be well matched. Parent-child dyads typically do not choose one another, and romantic partnerships often involve competing needs that can give rise to conflict.

Limitations and Future Directions

I chose to study the human-dog bond in a sample of individuals who had assistance dogs because I expected that if humans do form strong attachment bonds with companion animals, this would be an ideal sample in which to observe the phenomenon. However, I did not anticipate that participants would rarely separate from their dog, hampering my ability to assess separation anxiety separately from the physical dependency of the person on the dog. This feature of the relationship also prevented me from assessing proximity seeking. However, the findings related to grief clearly indicated that, although physical functioning was a concern, the grief response was largely due to the loss of an emotional bond. For instance, several participants already had a replacement dog yet still felt grief about the loss of their previous assistance dog. Future work with community samples of adults with companion animals may enable separation anxiety to be assessed more clearly (independent of physical needs) and allow for

proximity seeking to be investigated. Another drawback to the sample, and methods, that I chose is that the results are not generalizable. Research with a community sample would also help indicate to what extent the components of attachment, including safe haven and secure base, are observed in human-companion animal relationships in the broader community.

The use of qualitative methods in the present study helped to clarify the attachment dynamics present in human-dog relationships and highlighted the meaning and importance of caregiving. Moreover, these methods vividly conveyed participants' unique experiences of relationship and loss. However, one drawback to qualitative methods is that they are not designed to investigate cross variable questions (to what extent variance in x is associated with variance in y). A common hypothesis regarding human-animal relationships is that people develop attachment bonds with companion animals to compensate for insecure human relationships (Archer, 1997). A strong interpretation of this compensation hypothesis presumes that any case of a strong emotional bond to an animal indicates a compensation for deficient human relationships. Kurdek (2008) investigated this question most directly by looking at associations between participants' general attachment styles in human close relationships and their degree of attachment to their companion dogs. Attachment insecurity was unrelated to degree of attachment to companion dogs, leading Kurdek to conclude that people who have strong attachments to their dogs do not turn to their pets as substitutes for poor human relationships. Although I did not seek to investigate how participants' relationships with their assistance dogs related to the security of their human relationships, I observed that most participants' relationships with their dogs functioned similarly, regardless of the quality of their social networks. In other words, the majority of participants described attachment and caregiving as important features of their relationships with their dogs, regardless of their satisfaction with their close human relationships.

A more subtle interpretation of the compensation hypothesis suggests that *in some cases* animals can compensate for insecure human relationships. Studies of vulnerable populations such as sexual abuse survivors and the elderly have shown that a companion animal can be an individual's sole source of support and appears to play a

compensatory role (see Barker, Barker, Dawson & Knisely, 1997; Garrity, Stallones, Marx, & Johnson, 1989). In my study, I observed that, for a few participants who were socially isolated, their dogs were their only reliable source of emotional support.

Howes (1999) has suggested that multiple attachments are the norm in both childhood and adulthood and that they are helpful for psychological adjustment. Kirkpatrick (1999) has identified attachment dynamics in peoples' relationship with God and has argued for the importance of considering God as a potential attachment figure. Results from the present study suggest that companion and assistance dogs should also be considered as part of human attachment hierarchies because, for some people, they fulfill the same attachment functions as human relationships. Future studies could examine the validity of expanding attachment hierarchies to include dog companions through methods that assess where dogs are placed in participants' attachment hierarchies (cf. Kurdek, 2008). A dog's placement within the hierarchy may differ depending on the specific attachment component the dog fulfills, the quality of the attachment network available to the individual, and the complexity of the caregiving that is required by the individual. For example, dogs may be very effective in providing basic comfort, but not so helpful in situations that require more active assistance.

Clinical Implications

Many of the participants in the current study described benefits of having an assistance dog that went beyond functional assistance to improvements in their psychological well-being. One participant commented that, after 22 years of disrupted human relationships, her dog "taught [her] how to bond." Research and anecdotal reports attest to the pivotal role played by animals in helping people with traumatic or criminal backgrounds to foster self-esteem, social skills, and meaningful relationships (Fournier, Geller & Fourtney, 2007; Turner, 2007; York, Adams & Coady, 2008). One question worthy of further exploration is whether relationships with animals may encourage individuals to develop satisfactory human relationships by helping them to gain a sense of interpersonal trust that may generalize to human relationships.

The finding that dogs can fulfill fundamental human needs for attachment and caregiving highlights the potential harmfulness of current policies that make companion animal ownership difficult for vulnerable people. For example, many senior care facilities require that patients surrender their companion animal when admitted, subjecting the elderly to the stress of finding a satisfactory home, the emotional pain of loss, and increased social isolation. Given the growing literature showing the value of companion dogs for human well-being (e.g., Wells, 2007), it is imperative that these facilities be encouraged to develop new policies and procedures that enable people to keep their companion animals. At the very least, these facilities could provide a resident companion animal that may give elderly patients a means of fulfilling their attachment needs and provide an opportunity to care for another. This could have therapeutic effects that would be especially important for vulnerable individuals (Sable, 1995).

In addition to gaining a deeper understanding of the bond between humans and their companion animals, I had sought to learn whether participants had recommendations for helping others with assistance dogs recover from loss. Most participants said that nothing could have prepared them for their loss or prevented the painful feelings. However, the grief experience can be validated as the natural outcome when one has lost an animal that fulfilled an innate human need for attachment and caregiving. Giving people information about the varied responses to animal loss may help to normalize feelings and reduce feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement. Also, providing bereaved individuals with examples of a variety of coping strategies may help them find something that is beneficial. Grief therapists may also benefit from being informed about the meaning of companion or assistance animals to their owners and of the similarity between grief and coping over a beloved animal and a significant human relationship (Sable, 1995). Notably, for people with assistance dogs, the training facility was a very important source of support and, for isolated individuals, sometimes the only source of support. I would also encourage bereaved individuals to find a way of forming a continuing bond with the animal they have lost. Participants in the current study who were able to form a continuing bond appeared to find solace and a sense of meaning that they carried with them:

I think about B and the good things that she did, and that she's not suffering anymore, and that she worked her job really well, and she showed me what love can do. Dogs will be loyal, and dogs will always love you no matter what. She also showed me what I can do to keep my independence and gave me the courage to keep on going and be confident. (173)

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Interview Outline

Demographics

- Note Gender _____ Female _____ Male
- What was your first language?
- What is your educational background?
- What is your current employment situation?;
If employed, does your assistance dog join you at work?
- What year were you born?
- How would you describe your ethnicity?
- How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- What is your relationship status?
- What is your current living situation?

Background

- Do you have pets (other non-service animals)?
- How many service dogs have you had? _____
- (If multiple dogs): For this interview, we'll focus on your most recent loss.
What was the name of this dog? Male or female dog?
How old was (dog) when you lost him/her? How long ago did this happen?
Could you briefly describe the circumstances around losing (dog)?
- Please tell me about how you came to decide that you would like to have a service dog.
- Could you briefly describe your living circumstances during the time that you were with (dog)
- How much family/social contact did you have then?

Past Relationship with Lost Assistance Dog

- Please tell me about (name of dog).
- What was it like for you when you were first paired with (dog)?
- After this transition period, how would you describe the working relationship you had with your dog?
- What impact did (name of dog) have on your life?
- How would you describe how you felt about (name of dog)?

Attachment and Caregiving

- What was it like to have (name of dog) around when you were upset?
How comforting was (dog) when you were upset?
- How did (name of dog) influence your willingness to do things?
To what extent did (name of dog) help to keep you calm during potentially stressful situations?
- Tell me about a time when you were separated from your dog.
What was it like for you to be away from (name of dog)?
- What was it like for you to have (name of dog) to take care of?

Loss and Coping

- Please tell me about your experience when you lost (name of dog).
- How did you cope with your loss?
- How did people respond to you when they found out about your loss?
- How satisfied were you with the social support you had during this time?
- If multiple losses: How did the loss of this dog compare with your previous losses?

Evaluation of Experiences

- What have you learned from this experience?
- What advice would you give to other people who experience the loss of their assistance dog?

Ending Questions

- Do you have any questions about this research?
- Once I'm finished my research, I will be writing up a summary of my findings.
Would you like to receive a copy? Where should I send it?
- Would it be OK to contact you in the future if I have any further questions?
- If anything comes to mind that you'd like to add after I've left,
please feel free to contact me.

Appendix B.

Safe Haven Quotes³

Source of Comfort

152	Like if you're sitting there and you're feeling emotionally drained, and feeling weepy or something, and the dog comes over and senses that, and they stick their head under your hand, or something. You know, you got something else to do, something else to think about, and it helps.
158	Actually it was comforting too. Because I could always talk to J [current dog], and I'd talk to him about Q [deceased dog]. So like I say, when my lifestyle, like stress or whatever, he's not long bringing me out of it. Like all you have to do is sit down beside him and give him a few strokes, and talk to him a little bit, and he can sort of bring you out of it pretty quick.
161	Well it's true when (pause) she was a very responsive dog in that way. Like it's funny how animals, I think, do know. I would cuddle her if ... my mom went through a really hard time, my stepfather died and things that I remember happening, and I remember she was a source of comfort for sure.
165	I'm not a person who talks a lot to other people if I'm upset, so A was wonderful for me. There was never any feedback, no comment, so it was a good sounding board for me. So, yeah, she was very important emotionally, extremely.
167	He was my sounding board. I cried on that dog's shoulder more times than I can remember.
173	She would be number one. If I need comfort anyway, she'd be the one I'd turn to.

Contact Comfort

151	This 97 pound moose would climb up in my lap...just, "Hey, I'm right here." There's the fur, there's the comfort.
152	I: Was there anything that you did to try to cope with that loss of B [deceased dog]? P: Mmm I hugged my [new] dog.
154	She had told me what had happened and I burst into tears, and right away C started pawing at the bed. She wanted to come up but she couldn't jump up there because the bed was too high. But she wanted to be with me so I sat on the floor and she was <i>right</i> there with me. She just huddled <i>right</i> into me, and just sat there with her head on my shoulder, like, "Don't cry, Mum." So, she was very very close, and always gave me her paw. Sometimes I would say "No, I don't want the paw, I just want to sit there." She was <i>right</i> there with contact.
159	I talked to her, I'd hug her, I'd cry. She was comforting.
165	The thing that immediately pops into my head is the last competition I did at work and I had to do the interview and I was very nervous about it. But she was with me and I remember just (<i>indecipherable</i>) grasping and she was under the table, but she was sitting beside me and I kept petting her as I'm answering. And I guess that's like a stress reliever and I often say to people, "A helped me get that competition because the interview board <i>loved</i> her." And also sometimes if you're really stressed out, like even at work now, people—when Z's in my office—I take his harness off and people will come if they're having a really bad day, or really stressed out or something, and just pet him. And people will often say to me, "It just helps so much just to pet him."

³ Participants by number and their safe haven quotes.

168	He was a great comfort. He would not always know what to do, so he would jump up and give me kisses or snuggle in...
171	Emotionally yes, once again, the comfort issue. You know, if you're feeling sad or stressed or whatever, you can always give your dog a hug. When I was upset? It was a comfort...It'll come up and put its paw on you, or its muzzle, or whatever.
173	B was very good. She wouldn't nudge you when you were upset, she would quietly lie in the area. If she knew I needed someone to cuddle, she would. She was a very cuddly dog, so you could really get close to her.

Attuned to Owner's Emotions

155	Well, dogs seem to know that. She would come very close to me, lick my hand and, when she had a chance, she would lick my face and laid in front of me. Dogs seem to feel that. Dogs feel that you're upset. Oh yes, do they ever feel that. You know, I could talk to her too and you almost had a feeling that she understood you. When I was depressed, and I would talk to her, she was there. 'Cause I was often alone, being the guys were in the barn or in the field, you know. When I was upset, I would talk to her. It was almost like she understood, you know. And that helps, if you can talk it out. And I talked to her and it was just, like, she listened to me. She didn't say anything but she stayed close to you, and you know she did understand you.
156	No, he was super good during stressful times. It's like he knows that, that this is not the time to be goofy, you know, "[participant's name] needs me and I'm being really, really good today." He was like that. I mean there was the 1998 Canadian ice storm...during that week he would never leave my side...He was always on my heels, not for his sake but for my sake...I knew it. How do I explain this, because I have no scientific proof and it's very difficult to prove something when you don't have it. There is a connection, your dog knows and you know your dog. And without saying a word, he knows by your actions and I know by his actions, that something is up. And he knew that this was an extremely unusual circumstance and it's time to be very alert. In those five days I don't think he slept. If he did at all he must have snuck a nap in somewhere because he was always at my side. It was incredible.
157	Oh, she'd come around and ... they know exactly, right away, if something goes wrong. That dog knew right away if I was upset. She'd come and lick your face and lick your hands and stay right beside you.
160	Well he was always there to work. That was his <i>main</i> role. But he was there, too, for emotional stuff. He'd come up, say you were down; he'd come up and give you the big lick. That was, he knew kinda, that you were having a hard day, or a bad day.
163	She knew whenever I was upset. She always came over to me. She always liked the belly rub or the back scratch. Yeah, she was good therapy I can say that.
167	Yes, and maybe he had a sense of when I was getting really spun. "Okay, now it's time for me to move in here. She's not gonna calm down by herself, maybe I'd better saunter over there and give her a little nudge." He knew, he was very intuitive, he would just kinda appear... I could be anywhere, I could be standing at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes, crying over anything, and I would just feel fur on the side of my leg. He would just come and check me out, "What's wrong?" He would just kinda be there, and in a very quiet, passive way, wouldn't come up and start pawing at me, or jumping on me or anything, I would just feel this slight pressure on my leg, and "I'm here. I don't know what's bothering ya, but I'm here."
168	He always seemed to know what I needed, and sometimes it was a kiss, sometimes he'd do something silly and make me laugh.

169	Oh, she was amazing. I mean she could tell right away. She would sometimes come and sit right on my lap as if to say, like, "I'm here," or lay across my stomach and stuff. And she'd make me laugh and that was her whole, like it's like, "No! Don't be upset, I'll just lick your face and you can giggle, right?" And as soon as I started to giggle, she was like "Okay, my job's done." It was not something that she was trained to do, that's just something she did.
170	It's very comforting knowing that she is there. Like I said, she's very in-tune with my feelings. She can pick up on my feelings as far as if I'm upset or if I'm sad, plus, if you're happy. Dogs can pick up on that right away. But she seems to be very in-tune with my feelings and what I need at that time. Like she'll put her head in my lap to kind of say, "Hey mom, I'm here" kind of thing.

Appendix C.

Secure Base Quotes⁴

Felt Security

152	Yeah, we put her on the floor beside the door where you come into the operating room, and she stayed right there with me when I had my procedure done, and she walked me out of the building.
154	She was my friend. She was there when I needed her. She was bonded to me. She was like my other half. Where as now, there is something missing.
155	You know, you have them sleeping in the bedroom and in the morning, when you wake up, there's the dog giving you a big lick, and you got the paws on your knees and they say "I'm still here."
156	"I've got C and everything is going to be fine," and everything was. He stuck by me through a lot of things.
160	I always talk to [dogs] all the time. People think I'm nuts maybe, but they're there, you can communicate to them. A lot of it seems to sink in too, it's amazing. You just call them and they're there. They like to relax, but if you need them, they're there.
165	Yeah, it's the contact. And I was at university away from home, I was living alone. I didn't have family around but she was my support, she was my family. I depended on her to be there for me. Just having her there, it's nothing that she did specifically, just her being there and knowing that she ... like she'd cuddle up to me and want me to pet her and that cool kind of thing.
167	My kids are grown up, and they're doing their own thing, but the dogs are always there. And they'll always be there. That's kind of a reassuring thing because I know I'll never be alone, cause I'll always have a dog. And knowing that allows me to let the people around me.
169	She was kind of a stabilizing... I wouldn't know how to put it, but she was like a stabilizer for me when things were really, really loud. So not just the physical stuff but also the psychological stuff as well.
173	I guess, in so many ways, she was there and I knew that I could count on her, yeah. So it's very different, because my family here, well they're my family, but they weren't <i>there</i> . They weren't the people who were there to make sure I was able to proceed to do these things. I guess B helped me to succeed. And not only to succeed, but she was there through my failures and stuff like that (<i>sounds emotional</i>). She was just a part of me. A part of me, and I can't explain it

Confidence & Exploration

151	He made me more confident. He's almost like a little suit of armor. He made things a lot easier. I used to be scared to death to speak in front of large groups of people. And when I first got him, I was the first person in my small N town to have a service dog. And so different service organizations would call and say, "Hey, would you come and do a program about what these dogs do for you?" But I thought that the dog is there with me and I'm not up there by myself. So <i>that helped a lot</i> . Oh, yeah! Not that he was there in terms to protect me, but I was invincible. I didn't need protecting. I was invincible. I was right there, and I could go anywhere and <i>do anything</i> .
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⁴ Participants by number and their secure base quotes.

156	Yes, he did [increase willingness to do things]. Actually, I think the willingness was always there, he gave it the jumpstart that it needed. Myself and two other blind people here in town, we created our own drama group...It went really well. So that was one of the things I got involved in. And other public speaking things, presentations with both dogs, those were things I never imagined I would be doing.
168	I think I was more confident. I'd be asked to do—not many—but I'd be asked to do a presentation here or there, or an interview, or whatever. And I hate public speaking. I think it's evil. But because it was him, and I felt so strongly about what he was doing, I just said, "Fine, yeah I'll talk about it."
169	Just the confidence building and being able to try different things. Like I never thought I would ever do pastoral visiting with people who were dying, right? And just seeing how she made people's faces light up, just having her in the room actually kind of made it easier for both of us to kind of have dialogues.
172	He was my best friend and I didn't know how much I loved him until I lost him and didn't have him around anymore. And he was with me when I left home, and I gained my independence with him, and gained confidence with him.
173	Oh he definitely, he gave me so much more confidence in myself and...openness, like I am a very outspoken person to begin with but he just made me feel that much more comfortable with my, I hate calling it a disability, but with my sight the way it is. Like I don't care what people think or say. Like I'm who I am and this is my dog, and we're here to stay. I don't care what you think and that's just the attitude that I sort of get. They bring with them more than loyalty. They give us independence, they give us courage to try things, and be outgoing.

Accepting & Nonjudgmental

151	He was always there. He was never judgmental. He didn't question it. If you wanted to go see Pirates of the Caribbean 5 times, he wouldn't say "Aw s---, Johnny Depp again? Man, pick something else". You know? He was always there for anything.
152	Well, I found that the animals, they're always willing to forgive. You know, you may have had a bad day or something like that and you might snap at the dog, you know, but they're always willing to forgive. And they're always willing to go at any point in time. Where with, in a relationship, there is not that forgiveness. All it is is a, is a bicker and argument. It's horrible. That's why I really don't miss them types of relationships.
156	Because I will tell you something about dogs compared to people. Dogs don't judge, they have no inhibition, no need to stab anyone in the back. They are what they are, and they accept you for what you are. They don't care where you work, they don't care how much money you have, they don't care how you dress, they don't care if you're blind or in a wheelchair. If you're their friend then you're their friend. And that's a lifetime thing. They don't abandon you when things go wrong.
163	Just being there, like, I was able to talk. I didn't have to worry about her judging me if I said something. She was always there to hug and kiss and stuff like that.
168	Where there was no judgment, you didn't have to explain it, it didn't have to make sense, it was just what it was. And unlike people, he was there all the time.

Development of Self

156	He saved my life as far as I'm concerned. I mean he made me a better person. He helped me because of the way he was; I became more like him than he became like me.
157	I felt that I became myself again. Actually with the cane I didn't feel much like I was my whole person.
162	Z helped me be a little bit more human, softer on people, a little more understanding, a little more ... just plain human, not as ambitious, not as aggressive, not as intellectual...by putting things in perspective.

167	My personality came back. No question. You could ask anybody who knows me. I just started not being so angry. I started sharing my experiences more. I was more willing to express my feelings to other recipients, to other blind, visually-impaired people... I just wanted to give back so much because I knew that I could, and I was enthusiastic, and I just wanted to share this wonderful, wonderful animal so much....My life has turned around totally. Because now I have a focus, I have a purpose...
169	I moved 22 times when I was growing up. I lived with 22 different families. So (pause) my dog was really the only first thing I really bonded with. She taught me how to bond to people. Does that make sense?... I can honestly say that probably she was the first, I call her a person...She was with me 24/7 for 9 years. I lived in 22 different places and two institutions so I learned a lot from her about bonding and connecting and stuff.
170	I used to be really shy and I think my dogs kind of brought me out of that shell, and maybe caused me to be a different person in that...having the dogs has basically allowed me to be a person I probably wouldn't have been without them. I think I was a more positive person and I wasn't as hard on myself.
171	[Dog] gave me my self-confidence and my self-worth. I am able to go out and do something for myself without having to rely on another person. So it makes you feel better about yourself because you're able to go and do something for yourself.

Mix of Function and Emotion

152	Yeah, because I'm being so cautious at the beginning, and not really knowing how much freedom you could be given. And then to, once you got working with the animal, to strike out on your own and not have any fear about what you're doing. So, it was great in that respect.
161	The biggest [benefit of dog] would be stress reduction. I did find a difference in getting out. Walking on my own primarily...When I'm on my own, or when I was on my own with D, it was much better than me with a cane, emotionally just feeling much more secure. But on the other hand, the other thing that came to mind when you asked the question is also just the companionship of having a dog. Even if she wasn't doing a good working job, I just loved her anyway. I would have anyway.
172	I think I would have gone to college (without dog) but I probably wouldn't be living on my own. But, it's hard to say what would have happened, but I don't think I'd live by myself if I didn't have a dog. I just knew that he was with me, and he was big, and that I felt safer with him. And I don't think that I was as scared as I would have been to go off to college and leave home if I had not had him.
174	Because I fed off her confidence. In situations like, I was going into a situation like a new Skytrain station, which can cause some anxiety, I was reliant on her confidence. So that lowered my stress level quite a bit.

Feeling Cared For

151	He watched out for me. If we were going to go outside, I mean I hadn't turned on the TV, I didn't know what the temperature was, and if I started heading for the door, and if it was autumn, he would go grab my jacket and just hold it up like "Ahem! Aren't you forgetting this? It could be cold out." I didn't give him that command. He just took it upon himself to bring me my jacket. It was like "alright".
156	He was a very determined dog, very determined. Even during seizures he tried to get up and respond to me, and even in front of the vet, even the vet commented to me that he was trying, that he was really trying for me, he's trying to walk towards me. He had a heart as big as all of the outdoors. He would let them know, in no uncertain terms, that "You know what, don't pull anything with us." Because he had my back is what I am saying, and I had his too.
165	Yeah. But I think she took care of me though emotionally, like having her there, I wouldn't have done so well I don't think if I didn't have her there.

167	Just his presence [made things easier]. He was not threatening in any way, he was totally giving, he was not about to ask any questions (<i>chuckles</i>), he was <i>always</i> on my side. No matter how upset I was, he was always on my side. And just the warmth, the physical warmth, and the tactile kind of things, the fur.... but he would do that, and kinda lean on you. And the warmth, and the fact that there was another living creature there that cared for you, and because I did a lot of travelling with him too, on my own, he would be in a hotel room with me, he was company for me.
170	Well, basically by just being a working dog in harness, but like I said, she took care of me emotionally.

Appendix D.

Separation Protest Quotes⁵

Never Separated

151	There wasn't times when he wasn't accompanying me. He was with me 24-7... (laughing). He let me know very early on that, as a service dog, he was not designed to be left behind.
152	No, we were never apart. Didn't matter whether I was going to the bathroom, or going to the hospital, or going to, going to the bar or...oh yeah, I did do things without her [goes on to explain he would take dog to dance hall but would go on the dance floor without dog].
155	No [never separated]. Because you can take her everywhere. I have always taken my dogs everywhere. I still do.
158	No, no. He was with me all the time

Separation Due to Family and Friends

154	Like I said to my sister, "If you can't accept my dog to come in to the house, then I won't bother coming either, then you don't want <i>me</i> ." ...I didn't go over to my other sister's nearly as much.
168	It was different because I didn't have him to help take care of me because my friend's children are allergic to dogs. But the thing is, her house is not accessible, so even if I could have taken the dog, it would have been harder for me to have taken care of him there.
170	<p>It was a really awkward kind of situation after I got P because the couple I drove with stopped allowing me to bring the dog because their son had allergies, and I had to start leaving my dog at home. And that was a really hard time for me because I don't like to leave my dogs home. I like my dogs with me all the time...I wouldn't go because I didn't want to leave my dog home for 3 days in a row.</p> <p>...if I started a relationship with somebody and they said "Do you have to bring the dog?" I would say "Yes I do. This dog is part of my world and this dog is a part of my life, and if you don't like it, well then see you later." That's how I feel.</p> <p>We come in a pair, the four-legged version of my other half. If the other person could not accept my dog into the relationship then I'm sorry. No, my dog is very important to me. The dog's part of my life and my world and if you can't accept that then sayonara!</p>

Missing Dog

154	I missed her a lot, <i>a lot</i> . I couldn't wait to get out with her again. And then there was that excitement. When I was going home to be with my baby, and that was basically tears of joy.
167	Horrible. Horrible. And I missed him so much....The first time was the worst. So the second time, I just didn't let myself think about him until the day before we came home. As soon as he would start to creep into my mind I'd just shut it off. Just shut it right off.
	It was like somebody took my wheels away. But also my best friend, too.
170	...and I missed her terribly I couldn't wait to get her home.

⁵ Participants by number and their separation protest quotes.

Focus on Own Well-being

157	[Separation] was completely devastating actually. Well you can tell, it was devastating.
158	Well, when I first started talking about retiring him, well then the same thing took place, "Well what the heck am I going to do?" Well, I know I can go get another dog, but then the thoughts started coming, "Well, Q was so amazing. So what if the other dog is not as good?"
163	I felt lost, cause I'm so used to her being at my left side all the time, I definitely realized she wasn't there.

Focus on Dog's Well-being

151	Basically worried about him. It was almost like having a kid. You know, you and your hubby go out for the first time after you've had the baby and it's like, "Is the baby okay? He was maybe sniffling when I left!" (<i>laughs</i>)
154	I would worry, and I'd be stressed, "Was she being taking care of properly, has she been out for her walks, has she been relieved properly, has she been fed on time?" All these things would bunch up and then, of course, I would end up crying, or the stress would come out in other ways. And then I would end up phoning the person, whoever was taking care of her, and find out if they were doing everything the way I had told them to do it. And, oh yeah, she was being well looked after (<i>chuckles</i>), but it was because she wasn't with me that I would worry about her.
156	My biggest worry was that somebody was going to try to hurt him.
158	Actually, he was having trouble with his stomach, and I had to take him to the vet, and he ran some tests on him and he still wasn't just right. I had to take him back but then they wanted to keep him there and, boy, that just ripped my heart out.
165	I think the worst part was when I had to leave for the hospital and she had to stay at home ... wondering "Where are you going with your bag? Why aren't I coming?" Other than that, I've never been apart from her. Well, I worried about her worrying about me ... that would make her very nervous, like "Where is she?" Knowing that we're always together and this would be a huge impact on her as well, not having me around.
166	I would go to the movies, 'cause she couldn't make it around the seating floor, but I'd feel bad that I left her at home, 'cause I would get attached to her and I'd worry about her. I would still go, but I wouldn't be as happy as if she came along with me.
168	Well, because I hadn't left him [before], it was like, "Is he lonely, does he feel abandoned?" 'Cause you can't explain to them, "Yes, mummy's gone away, but mummy's coming back." I felt guilty. I felt like maybe I was doing some damage, just to his security. In fact, he died in December and, in January, I was going away for a month. And I always wondered, "Did part of him know that momma was leaving for a long time?"
169	I was actually more concerned about what she was doing than what I was doing.
170	It was horrible, because I was worried about her because I knew she had this kennel stress. And so she was going to be in a kennel because, you know, I had tried training her a couple times in the house but that didn't work. So I was just worried about her, and I missed her. Like if I could've taken her into the hospital, I would've taken her into the hospital with me. That's just the bottom line. I didn't want to be away from her, and I was constantly wondering how she was doing, if she was okay, and if she was getting enough exercise. Because I knew the school, like I bordered her at the school in O. But, you still worry, even though, you know she's going to be taken care of. She's still my girl.
172	It probably upset me as much as it upset him... Well, I felt bad for leaving him because he didn't want to be left.

Appendix E.

Caregiving Quotes⁶

Reciprocal Caregiving

158	...because the more you take care of him, the more he takes care of you.
160	You try to bond with them as much as you can at that moment. It's kinda heart-rendering, too, 'cause you know both of you are dependent on each other. You hope that trust and bond takes. It's sort of a slower process, over time. The dog'll work for you, but it takes a while for him to get used to you. Well, again, that's part of that <i>bonding</i> that comes in. They tell you this. They say [care] only brings on the bonding <i>quicker</i> .
170	It's a mutual thing that dogs can give me what I need, as far as being a working dog, and I reciprocate because I love them to pieces. And I reciprocate because I know J loves to be brushed, and so you know it's a give-give situation.
173	[Caregiving was] very important because, if I didn't take care of her, she wouldn't work for me.
174	Well, yeah, because that's part of it, caregiving's part of that bonding thing. Caring for her was bonding, that touch, the combing, the brushing, feeding.

Mutual Pleasure and Pride

151	It was, it was not that big of a deal. I mean it was a labour of love.
152	Yeah, like I used to love to groom her, and just to feel her enjoyment of it. Either dog, either dog, you know, like you, say you'd go out for a walk and you come home and you had a good walk, and it was a nice day. You come home, you take the harness off, you put the animal up on the grooming table. They sprawl out 'cause they're just enjoying that attention so much.
154	Yeah, she was a beautiful dog, and everybody complimented me on how well she was groomed and "How much time do you spend on grooming her?" And then, I would get into a conversation on how long I would spend grooming her and making sure her nails were kept up and everything like that. It was my <i>world</i> . It literally was my world, because I enjoyed it so much.
158	...when they're well-groomed and well-taken care of, when you're in town, "Oh, that dog is so nice and groomed" and they're steady, the comments.
165	...the time that I am the happiest is when I'm at the park and my dogs are running free...Of course you have the responsibility of having to get up at 6:00 in the morning, even on a weekend, to take them out to the bathroom, but I love them so much that doesn't bother me.
174	Well, I enjoyed it, too, 'cause you enjoy their company. I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it. I wouldn't have one. Everything has a price, and the price of the level of mobility, is that you have to care for the dog. You have to. It's like anything. You have a car, you have to wash it once in awhile too (<i>laughs</i>). It's obligation, but you also enjoy it.

⁶ Participants by number and their caregiving quotes.

Purpose

160	I guess it gives you a little purpose, in life. That's another thing. It's like men and their cars. Well, it's man and his dog. So I guess it's that idea of it. It gives you—like you're <i>doing</i> something now.
168	Because I think mostly, <i>he</i> helped me. But I was his mum, and he needed me to take care of him, and play with him, and work with him, and I had a purpose now.

Responsibility

156	I was involved in a lot of self-destructive behaviour.... That was what my life amounted to. Then I went to go train with C and then, all of a sudden, I had a responsibility. And I took it very seriously. I had a dog that was counting on me, and I was counting on him. And then it just <i>improved</i> my life, not just in terms of getting down the street. There is much more than that. And it just pulled me out of a hole, it really did.
165	Yeah, exactly, and it gives you a sense of responsibility.
171	I would say yes [caregiving was important]. To take care of her is a responsibility and I have no problem accepting responsibility. I would say it is important, most certainly.

Being Needed

165	... she relies on me, this is my ... I feel important because I know she needs me, just the same as I need her. It's like a dual caregiving, 'cause she took care of me as well.
168	One of the first little things that she did was she stood up, put one paw on one shoulder, the other on the other one, and she laid her head down, and she gave me a hug. That's sorta, my defenses dropped right there. Right there. I thought, "Okay, she needs me, I need her, it's gonna be okay"... Yeah, because she needed me. I'm just one of those people that likes hugs and cuddles and likes to be taking care of something.
170	...I needed the dog and the dog needed me, so it was a mutual relationship.
172	It gave me, he needed me. It gave me someone that needed me too. I needed him as much as he needed me kind of thing.

Surrogate Child

154	C was like having a child, a child that I never had. And it was like my baby, and I would say to everybody, "I talk to my child"... I said, "My guide dog is my child," and I said, "Even if my family doesn't believe that, she is my baby." And no matter what I did, she was my baby, and I would do anything for her that needed to be done.
159	They're like having kids, they're all different but they all mean the same. They're part of you and part of your family. You want what's best for them and you know that they know what's best for you.
165	I would never give her to a member of my family because it's kind of like having a son or a daughter, you never think a partner is good enough for them. My mom's not strict enough, and my dad's too strict, and my brother wouldn't take her for a walk enough. I would be so concerned to give her to a family that I didn't really know well. Maybe she wouldn't be treated properly, that would be my biggest fear.
169	I mean, I don't have family and she was family to me, and it was just like taking care of a child.
173	Oh, wow. She was my baby, put it that way. She was my real baby, she was my first baby, and she's still my baby. We had an extremely close and novel, unusual relationship in that we were so close.

Stresses of Caregiving

151	Only in terms of toileting him sometimes. Because he had the lovely idea that since he's Labrador, and his breed came originally from a colder climate, that it was OK to stand outside for 45 minutes in a 40 mile an hour wind, with chills below zero, finding the exact, <i>right</i> spot to poop.
159	It's a responsibility. I wouldn't say burden. It's just more responsibilities that you have on a day to day basis. I wouldn't call it a burden. Except when it's snowing and then they don't want to go and you're standing there, "oh come on, hurry up."
160	Like I used to do it for my own dogs, but I guess just making sure I got it (<i>laughs</i>). I was self-conscious, I guess you'd say, about picking up after him, and that sort of thing. But that went away. Say you had to do it on-the-spot downtown, or something. Well people are pretty good at telling you you're missing it.
168	There were days when it was almost too much, because we live in an apartment, and we're on the second floor, to take him out five or six times a day. That's very draining. Especially in our winters. It'd just be terrible. It wasn't really hard taking care of him, but just like any other mother, you worry. Have I brushed his teeth enough, you know, it's time to cut his nails. And some of those physical things, like cutting his nails, my husband would have to help with, 'cause I just wasn't strong enough.
172	Sometimes I didn't really want to take care of him and I still had to even though I was feeling depressed or whatever.

Concern for Dog's Emotions

159	...sometimes she would be upset and she didn't really know how to deal with it. "Mom's upset, oh my gosh, what can I do?" And they were all like that. "What's the matter with her?" They were all very sensitive that way... She'd maybe nudge me, and if I saw that she was kind of upset, cause I was, then I'd try to snap myself out of it.
173	If I was angry, or I was having a disagreement with someone, generally I tried to move her out of the way. Because if B used to feel anxious, I think, sometimes when a disagreement became of a high note, then I knew. So at those times, I tried to put her outside, or somewhere other than where I was if the disagreement came to such a point, because they do make the dog anxious. She did get anxious when I had those moments.

Appendix F.

Grief Quotes⁷

Comparison with Other Losses

151	...his death hit me harder...(crying)...than anyone's, even my parents. (Crying) He was always there.
154	There was more love with the dog than even with my mother, which is sad to say. But because the dog is around me 24/7, and her and I walked together, and we spent hours and hours walking and sitting and talking.
156	Anyway, it was more emotional. And I am not ashamed to say that. What happened to C hurt me more, and that's the truth.
157	I would say, yeah, for three months, yeah, off and on, almost like a family...like same as you grieve a family. And I really grieved the same as losing my family members, for me.
160	'Cause they are like a family member....Hate to say it, almost as important as your spouse. Basically, you're with them more time than you are with your spouse....I'm not trying to diminish the human aspect of it, but the amount of time they're with you becomes so important. I've said that to people and they kinda look at you like you have two heads, "It's a dog, man." Well, you just don't realize how important they are to you.
171	I would say it virtually compares the same as losing a loved one, a brother. Just about two years ago, I had lost my mom. So, you know, it was just months after I lost my mom, I lost S. So, you know, they're both drastic. They're about equal. They're a loved one, they're your family, they're your life. And, in my eyes, it's no different than losing a loved one.
173	I lost my mother when I was young, but too young to remember. I've lost my father in recent years, and I've lost a large number of my social friends. No, I've never grieved for them as much as I did for B. Even for my father, who I'm very close to, I didn't cry and grieve for him like I did. It didn't have the same intensity. When I talk about my father, I don't have tears, I don't have an emotional upset. Whereas when I talk about B, I get very emotional. So, that's a difference, I think.

Loss of Close Relationship

153	Oh, just very sad. You know, my good friend was gone and he died a terrible death.
160	Ugh, that was like you lost your best friend.
168	People used to laugh at me when I called him my kid 'cause, they'd say to me, "It's a dog, it's not a baby." But to us, he was. Our whole world was around him, and he's gone in a heartbeat. So it was like, first of all, it's somehow my fault. Second of all, I'm not doing it again.
171	I still feel it. She was a part of me. I lost a loved one. That feeling is always going to be with you.
172	Um, he was my best friend and I didn't know how much I loved him until I lost him and didn't have him around anymore.
173	Devastating. I guess as much as what a parent would go through when they lose a child. She was part of me. She was my first. She was a special one, I guess. She showed me the way.

⁷ Participants by number and their grief quotes.

Intense Emotions

152	Oh, the emotional, emotional drain that I knew she was, that she had to retire and that I was going to lose her. It was nice that she was still alive. Like, I could not have dealt with her dying. That's, that's the part that I could not have dealt with her dying. It would have been too emotional on me. It's hard enough now....
154	There was a lot of sadness. I cried and cried. I wanted to die. That was it. I didn't want to live anymore. I wanted to die.
159	I felt guilty [about euthanasia]. I felt (pause) I think guilty was the most... "Should I have done this, should I have done this?"
163	Whew, oh boy. I don't think I stopped crying that whole night. I just felt so empty and lost, just numb all over. It was a hard hit.
165	Well, I guess the principle feeling was shock. This time four days ago she was fine. How could this happen so quickly? Shock was probably the biggest, but also just that fear.
167	Oh, I would catch myself, I would just cry. All of a sudden I would just start crying.
172	Um, it was really hard. It tears your heart out to lose (pause) it took a long time to heal from losing him. And people kept saying, "When are you going to get another dog?" And "I'll get one when I'm ready," but I never ever told them that, and I should have I guess.
173	They've just never gone, I don't think. I don't know if you can hear it in my voice, but I'm a little bit emotional right now. I have tears running down my face.

Caregiving Responses

152	So, just knowing that she was well taken care of in her last time, is, it was a relief.
153	Oh yeah, well, I wasn't crying all the time. Just, you know, he's in a good place now and he's not hurting. That's my attitude.
156	When he had his seizures that day, I was fit to be tied. And I will never forget the helpless feeling that I had that day. It's kind of like watching your toilet overflow. There is nothing that you can do about it. All I could do was hold his head in my arms and stop it from banging on the floor, or hitting the walls, and that's all I could do. He was under attack from something and I couldn't help him. And that hurt me worse than anything anyone could do or say to me.
159	And then I was holding her, and then he gave her the second shot. He just left me there to have my time with her (sounds upset), and I cried and held her, and I think everybody in the place was crying...(heavy sigh) It wasn't ... but I wasn't just gonna take her in and walk away. I couldn't do that to her. I wanted her to know I was going to be with her all the way. It was like she knew. I don't know how that dog knew.
167	[I felt] relief, for him. Relief that he wasn't suffering anymore, and that we didn't have to watch him be sick and everything.
168	I'm sorta relieved that D went as quick as he did. That means he didn't spend 24 hours suffering.
171	We can be thankful that she didn't suffer.

Impact on Physical Functioning

151	It was not just hard emotionally, it was hard physically, because I had to do the things that he's been helping me with. It put me right back. I don't know. It would be like a blind person losing their guide dog and having to go to a blind cane. It's....that's making me go blind all over again. It was like making me go back to even more crippled, and much less independent.
155	I was lost myself. I missed her so much. For a couple months I had to use a cane, and I had to depend on people, and I couldn't go out by myself. And I would get lost. And I couldn't call her and say "Come on S, take me home." Oh yeah, that was difficult, I'm telling you. I miss her very much.

165	And then afterwards it was like, "She's gone, and I'm always gonna miss her, but what am I going to do about getting around?" There were other things that had to be dealt with as well. Within two or three days of A passing away, I called the guide dog school and I said, "I know she just passed away, but I need a dog. I need to be able to get around."
168	And then he was gone, and I realized how much he <i>did</i> do, and how automatic it was. And, all of a sudden, my husband would leave the house and I didn't have my walker. So it was a shock that way, to realize just how much you physically needed what he was doing.

Appendix G.

Coping Quotes⁸

Avoidance of Grief

157	I think by not talking about the dog at all. And, when I saw some people with dogs, I wanted to get out of there, go the other way. I didn't want to go to the vet, over to the vets where I always go. I stayed away.
159	I just focused more on my other responsibilities, my daughter, being a single mom, all of a sudden working with this new dog, getting prepared to go to college and how I'm going to get there.
161	I think I just mainly slept a lot for one thing.
169	I swam. I swam 5 days a week.
170	I tried to focus on the future after a little bit. I had to give my head a shake and say, "Well, you know what, this is the way it is. You can't turn back time. You can't put her back in the harness. And it wouldn't be fair to her to do that."

Helpful Social Support

151	I got hooked up with other people who had lost their animals, and that helped immensely. (<i>Crying</i>) Because it's like we're in this boat together. And the camaraderie from that, and support, you know, reaching out, even when you're in pain, reach out to somebody else who's hurting too. (<i>Crying</i>) And you'll both stay afloat. That makes such a difference.
155	Well, one thing, my mobility instructor wrote me about dogs going to heaven too. And [she] was really good. That really helps you know.
156	There is good support at the training center, at the guide dog training center. The head trainer there, I talked to her a lot about it and they were very supportive because they deal with this every day. I counted on their expertise and their wisdom and whatnot.
158	Comfort from family was the biggest part of the whole thing, and talking about him. Then [sister-in-law] did us a whole complete album from the time she got him [upon dog's retirement], like all the pictures she's done with him and like every month. She had them all dated and where they were.
165	The guide dog school was terrific. The school is amazing to me, even the night that A was really sick. It was the night before I actually had to put her down, when they first told me she had cancer. The owner of the school came to the vet just to be there as a support, 'cause she knew that I would be going through a hard time. So I had her there, and my mom and my dad, and my brother and my stepmom, and my boyfriend and my boyfriend's parents. Everybody was there.

Unhelpful Support

154	I mean everyone is asking the question, "Where is C? Where is C?" And it's very hard for me to explain that she has been retired and why she's been retired. "Well, when are you getting another dog?" And that's just really upsetting.
162	My wife was not understanding about it. And my brother and sister, for example, I don't think they...they're not real dog people. I don't think they would appreciate it.

⁸ Participants by number and their coping quotes.

168	For the most part, it was almost harder socially because, for awhile, everybody said, "Where's D?" And I quit going out. I didn't want the questions. In fact, I said to my husband, the first couple weeks, "If they ask you where D is, just say he's not here."It was easier not to go anywhere, not to answer all the questions. Who was I if I wasn't the blond girl on the scooter with the Golden Retriever? I didn't want to explain it to everybody, so I didn't leave.
172	...different people that I know, but I'm not really close to and stuff, they never really understood. And, I don't think they know what to do if they have never experienced that type of loss. They wouldn't know what to do. So probably "Get another dog" was the only thing that they knew what to say, although it was not the right thing to say.

New Dog

152	I took her into the training center with me the time when, the day when I went in to get L. So I started my training course with L at the same time as I let B go...it focused my, my thoughts on the new animal, and, but I still think about her all the time. I hugged my [new] dog... Oh yeah [it was helpful]. Knowing that my other dog cared as much as my first dog did, and to know that he was there, and in good shape and everything. And knowing that he was always willing to do his best too.
158	See the biggest thing is I didn't have to go through a period without a dog. That's the big thing that I found which made it easier. 'Cause if I would have had to go a month, or two months, or whatever without a dog, well then that would have <i>really</i> been hard I think.
165	Because for me, emotionally, I know that it's not good to replace them. But really that's what I was doing. I needed that replacement emotionally as well. I know it wouldn't replace A, but I needed another dog emotionally and functionally.
167	But you remember I still had [new dog] already in place, so that helped too.

Spiritual Beliefs

151	I don't have the option of bringing him home and burying him. And I didn't want to have him cremated because I didn't want to look at a bunch of ashes and think, "Yeah, that used to be my dog." (Crying) I said, "Nope, no, his spirit is free and that's the way it should be."
168	I had some good friends that really understood that this was my baby, and that it wasn't just a dog....To even know that they were praying for me meant the world. Because at that point you don't even feel like you can pray, or whatever your religion is, it's just something that strong.
169	And my faith had a lot to do with it as well, (pause) and a faith community that I am very much a part of had a lot to do with that as well.
173	I had the same bond with O, but with her, it was a gradual separation when she was dying because I knew it was time. And, I was happy to see her go because she was suffering....And I knew she was going to be joining B [previous dog], and she was B's niece.

Reminiscing

156	There were a couple people who remembered a lot of stories about him and they witnessed some of his goofy stuff. And we would talk about that and laugh about it. So that was helpful.
165	Just holding her ashes when I got them, but also telling stories about her, talking about her helped a lot as well.
171	...just sit there and have my thoughts and my memories of her, of the good times and the bad times. Just time to sit back and reflect on what I had, what I've done, what I'm going to do now in the future.
173	So that's how I coped a little bit, with B's death, in trying to think of some of the funny things, of the good things, because that helps you get through it.

Keepsakes

165	And also one thing that I think really, really, <i>really</i> helped me dealing with it is that I kept her ashes. And I have that, so I felt like at least I have part of her. She wasn't completely gone.
167	I would hold his collar. I kept his choke chain. And I would just kinda—almost like the worry bead thing—I would hang on to it. And from my own body heat, it would get warm, cause it was a metal chain, and I'd get that same sensation from when I'd remove it from him because it was always warm, because it was hanging on his neck.
171	I do have pictures and stuff. I have her choker and stuff to remind me of her. You know, you have those few things to remind you of her and, well, she is passed on but she is still with you.
173	I have a piece of B with me. She was cremated. Unknown to me, my husband and my nephew, who is an undertaker, they had taken out a knuckle bone, and my husband had a knuckle bone made into a pendant that he put onto a necklace. He presented it to me the day I flew up to school to get my second dog. So, the note was in the package, you know, what this was and what they did. Here I was crying all the way up there. So I have a piece of B with me always, as well as her ashes.

Psychological Connection

152	Yeah, because I, I felt like she was still alive. You know even, even, even when I knew she was dead, I still felt that she was there, kind of like I said, my soulmate.
160	Well...I guess I just kept telling myself, "He's gone." I've got his remains there, if I wanna talk to him, he's there.
171	I've got my beliefs, and she's naturally still with me. And that comfort zone is still there for her.

Legacy

151	...having my new dog now, it is such a good tribute to W's beginning. I mean, he's the beginning of a beautiful legacy of canine assistance for me, and he left big, fuzzy footprints to fill. And C is doing it. (<i>Chuckles, sort of</i>). And he is <i>doing</i> it. And that's a great tribute to W.
156	Definitely, the most helpful thing to me was C's memories and the memories of those seven years. I just kept telling myself there's no way that I'm ruining those seven years. It's not going to happen and it didn't happen.
167	Even though it's a different dog, what I do is an awful lot a result of what that first dog taught me. So I continue to do it.

Euthanasia

151	And I knew I was doing the right thing, because he was in pain. He was hurting. And I wasn't going to prolong that. There comes a point when you have to say, "OK, would I be keeping him alive for him or for me?" And I couldn't do that to him. I thought, "He's given me so many years of such faithful service, I can't not do the right thing for him now."
153	I had to go, plain and simple, or he would have died a terrible death otherwise. I had to have him put down. I did him justice you know. It was unfortunate. It would have been nice if he died in his sleep, an old dog, but that's not the way it went.
167	Relief for him. Relief that he wasn't suffering anymore, and that we didn't have to watch him be sick and everything...But mostly, that he was at peace. I felt good about that.

Good Retirement

152	Umm, just knowing that the animal is going to be well looked after in their final time, and knowing that I didn't have to be the one. Because, being totally blind, I couldn't see what difficulty that she might be dealing with. Like, I could hear the whimper when she tried to get up. I used to have to try, I used to have to lift her back end up off the floor for her. So just knowing that she was well taken care of in her last time is, it was a relief.
154	It's more comforting to know where the dog is, and that occasionally you could see the dog if need be.