

1 **Tattoo narratives: Insights into multispecies kinship and griefwork**

2

3 **Author:** Kristine Hill

4 **Email:** kh458@exeter.ac.uk

5 **Affiliation:** University of Exeter, UK.

6

7 **Conflicts of interest statement**

8 The author declares no conflict of interest.

9

10 **Abstract**

11 This paper explores multispecies families and non-human kinship through the lens of tattoo
12 narratives, namely those that accompany designs dedicated to a companion animal. Although
13 some tattoos are purely aesthetic, many embody deep personal meanings. Humans use narrative
14 as a tool to endow meaning to experience, and the visual nature of a tattoo invites the telling of
15 a story. Participants in this study were compelled to commemorate a special bond shared with
16 their companion animal in the form of a tattoo. A discourse analysis approach was applied to
17 examine narratives under the framework of ‘nurture kinship’ and the theory of kinship as
18 ‘mutuality of being’, as well as the role of memorial tattoos in griefwork and the theory of
19 ‘continuing bonds’. Through embodied story-telling, tattoos can help the bereaved maintain an
20 absent presence with the deceased. This study supports the conclusion that humans can and do
21 form kinship bonds with other animals, and that memorial tattoos serve similar functions,
22 regardless of the species of the deceased loved one.

23

24 **Keywords**

25 Kinship, multispecies families, tattoo narratives, griefwork, continuing bonds

26

27 **Introduction**

28

29 People living with companion animals typically describe them as part of the family (Charles
30 2014; Charles & Davies 2008; Finka, Ward, Farnworth, & Mills 2019; Owens & Grauerholz
31 2019). Despite this, large numbers of companion animals are relinquished to shelters each year
32 (Coe *et al.*, 2014). If they are so easily disposed, are non-humans ever really part of what we
33 consider family? Shir-Vertesh (2012) describes companion animals as being ‘flexible persons’
34 or ‘emotional commodities’ because of how they are loved and incorporated into the family,
35 but at any moment may be demoted or rehomed. However, the increasing popularity of
36 commemorative tattoos represent permanent and personal declarations of love and devotion
37 (Quan-Haase 2017). This paper examines non-human kinship through the lens of narratives
38 accompanying tattoos dedicated to companion animals.

39

40 Kinship systems represent a fundamental cohesive social institution, but a cross-cultural
41 explanation of what constitutes kinship is less straightforward. Nineteenth-century
42 anthropologists conceptualised kinship ‘as a way in which people everywhere cope culturally
43 with the universal natural processes of procreation’ (Holy 1996, p.3). The ‘procreation model’
44 began losing favour as kinship studies instead turned to specific cultural conceptualisations of
45 kinship (Holy 1996; Read 2007; Schneider & Shimizu 1992). This shift was led by Schneider
46 (1984), who is critical of the ethnocentric view and argues that kinship can only be understood
47 from the perspective of a given culture. Schneider’s constructionist position forms the basis for
48 ‘new kinship studies’, which challenges the various notions of procreation being the natural
49 foundations of kinship. New kinship studies examine kinship in the context of families built
50 around LGBT relationships (Weston 1991), adoption (Logan 2013), and reproductive
51 technologies (Clark 2015), and argues that such connections are not substitutes for biological
52 bonds, but are kinships in their own right. Nelson (2013) describes kinship as something more

53 than friendship or acquaintanceship, whereby a person is ‘treated as if they were family’
54 (p.263). Essentially, the act of treating each other as kin gives rise to kinship. This idea of
55 kinship being actively produced is echoed in the words of Haraway (2015) in her slogan ‘make
56 kin, not babies! It matters how kin generate kin’ (p.162), meaning that reproduction is not
57 necessarily a ‘stronger’ form of kinship, or that kinship is confined to humans. Indeed, it may
58 be more useful to consider kinship in terms of emotional attachments and nurturement. The
59 concept of ‘nurture kinship’ describes how kinships are formed through acts of nurture between
60 individuals (Holland 2012). Sahlins (2011a) proposes kinship as ‘mutuality of being’, meaning
61 ‘people who are intrinsic to one another's existence are thus mutual person(s)’ (p.2). Mutuality
62 of being is a ‘conjoined existence’ that includes taking responsibility for the wrongful acts of
63 relatives, as well as sharing in their joys, sorrows, and successes (Sahlins 2011b). This
64 definition applies regardless of whether kinship emerged from procreation or social
65 construction. Although procreation is a strong biological driver in the formation of kinship, it
66 is not essential. Nor, based on the ethnographic record, is it inevitable that the kinship that
67 emerges from procreation is essentially different from relationships created post-natally
68 (Sahlins 2011a).

69

70 Kinship studies have recently been extended to include animal others (Charles 2014; Charles
71 & Davies 2008; Haraway 2003, 2006, 2016; Owens & Grauerholz 2019; Shir-Vertesh 2012).
72 Charles (2014) argues that non-human animals have always been ‘part of the social groups that
73 we refer to as families’ (p.727), but close affinities with other animals have been hidden by the
74 species barrier. Sociologists and anthropologists invariably focused on human-human kinship
75 bonds, and only recently has the animal other received academic attention (Hurn 2012). Just as
76 Schneider (1984) challenged ethnocentric view of kinship, anthrozoologists should now
77 challenge the anthrocentric view. From a practical perspective, recognition of these interspecies
78 kinship bonds is perquisite for building social support and initiatives aimed at keeping

79 multispecies families together during times of hardship. There are many actions that could be
80 viewed as making, reaffirming, or celebrating kinship (Holland 2012; Sahlins 2011a, b). One
81 potential indicator is that a person is compelled to commemorate that relationship in the form
82 of a tattoo.

83

84 To fully appreciate the significance of the tattoo narratives examined in this study requires
85 positioning the practice of tattooing within the broader cultural context. The term ‘Western’ is
86 used throughout to refer to contemporary cultures born out of civilisations that were historically
87 dominated by the hegemonic fluence of Judaeo-Christian doctrine and entrenched in European
88 colonialism (Birken 1992; Hurn 2012). In eighteenth century Europe, tattooing was perceived
89 as a practice of ‘primitives’ (native peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas) who were
90 opposed to colonisation (Fisher 2002). This demeaning attitude persisted, and until recent
91 decades, tattoos predominantly belonged to marginalised groups, such as criminals, gang
92 members, bikers, as well as sailors, working-class males, and more recently, youth-led
93 countercultures (Caplan 1997; DeMello 2000; Gilman & Caplan 2001; Govenar 1981). By the
94 late 1990s tattoos were increasingly being embraced as a form of expression among the middle
95 classes (DeMello 1995, 2000, Irwin 2001). The media was instrumental in rendering tattoos
96 ‘mainstream’ by positively portraying tattooed actors, musicians and athletes (Kosut 2006;
97 Roberts 2012). The popularity of tattooing is both reflected and further popularised by various
98 reality TV-style shows that highlight the self-storying aspect of tattooing (Hennessy 2011;
99 Woodstock 2014).

100

101 Despite the growing acceptance of tattoos by mainstream society, tattoos continued to be
102 ‘perceived as a social marking that, if not inscribed on the bodies of deviants, then constitutes
103 a deviant practice on the bodies of individuals’ (Fisher 2002, p.97). Correlations have been
104 reported between having a tattoo(s) and lack of religious affiliation, lower academic

105 qualifications, extended jail time, excessive drinking, recreational drug use, and risk-taking
106 behaviours (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong 1999; Heywood *et al.* 2012; Laumann & Derick 2006;
107 Silver, VanEseltine, & Silver 2009). Survey-based studies suggest a connection between
108 tattooing and a tendency towards self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, and reduced mental health
109 (Birmingham, Mason, & Grubin 1999; Dhossche, Snell, & Larder 2000; Stirn & Hinz 2008;
110 Stirn, Hinz, & Brahler 2006). However, critiques of quantitative-based studies point out how
111 they fail to capture ‘the more nuanced reasons that individuals get tattooed as well as the more
112 diverse personalities that undergo the process’ (Strohecker 2011, p.11). Associations between
113 tattoos and deviance or mental illness may not be symptomatic, but rather a mechanism for
114 coping by marking significant life events or transformations, such as overcoming addiction, or
115 coping with illness (Claes, Vandereycken, Vertommen 2005; Preti *et al.* 2006; Strubel & Jones
116 2017). Strohecker (2011) argues that qualitative research ‘provides a much more nuanced look
117 at the practice of contemporary tattooing’ (p.14) than quantitative studies, which lack depth and
118 context. Contemporary psychology now largely rejects the notion that tattoos should be viewed
119 as a sign of pathology or deviance, but instead advocate embracing them as opportunities to
120 explore core aspects of self-identity (Preti *et al.* 2006; Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre 2017).
121
122 ‘Commemorative tattoo’ is a broad term encompassing tattoos dedicated to deceased persons,
123 special relationships, meaningful locations, precious memories, or life-changing events (Quan-
124 Haase 2017). What I call ‘commitment tattoos’ mark a presumed permanent bond to another.
125 These include tattoos honouring the birth of child, the traditional ‘I love Mum’ tattoos, spousal
126 or sweetheart tattoos, as well as tattoos celebrating a close connection to a companion animal.
127 A memorial tattoo is one dedicated to a person, human or non-human, after they have died.
128 Here I explore how commemorative tattoo narratives might be indicative of ‘nurture kinship’
129 and fit the criteria of kinship as ‘mutuality of being’ (Holland 2012; Sahlins 2011a, b). I address
130 the role of memorial tattoos in grieving for non-human kin, focusing on the ‘continuing bonds’

131 theory of grief-work (Davidson 2017; Letherby & Davidson 2015; Packman, Horsley, Davies,
132 & Kramer 2006).

133

134 **Methods**

135

136 Ethics approval for this research was granted by the University of Exeter College of Social
137 Science and International Studies (SSIS) Ethics Committee. Data collection (interviews) took
138 place between March and June 2018, and recruitment of participants ran concurrently from
139 March 2018 until the final interview took place. Visual data includes photographs shared (with
140 permission) by participants, who were recruited via social media and from leads obtained while
141 informally discussing my research. Social media recruitment consisted of open posts on
142 Facebook and Twitter (using accounts specifically used for academic purposes and identifying
143 myself as a research student) that provided a short explanation of my research interest, followed
144 by an invitation for potential participants to volunteer themselves. My networks were
145 predominantly comprised of individuals with animal and tattoo interests, as well as other
146 academic human-animal studies accounts. Upon request, my posts were subsequently shared
147 with their audiences and beyond until I had sufficient volunteers. This snow-ball sampling
148 generated self-selecting individuals who were all from English-speaking nations (Table 1). I
149 specifically sought individuals who had tattoos dedicated to an animal companion. Thus, I
150 created a bias towards those with ‘a story to tell’, as opposed to individuals who considered
151 their body-art predominantly aesthetic. Four of the participants were academics, thus some of
152 the discussions may be more informed and reflexive than the general population. Unstructured
153 interviews were performed in-person or using video Skype, and prolonged written exchanges
154 via Email or Facebook Messenger. Prior to interviewing a list of key points was devised (Table
155 2), and although these were not asked directly as questions I guided the conversations to ensure
156 that they could be answered during analysis. I avoided asking explicit questions, such as ‘do

157 you consider your dog a family member?', and instead encouraged participants to explain why,
158 for example, they chose to dedicate a tattoo to their dog. As much as possible I allowed
159 participants to lead, only intervening if the conversation dried up or went too off-topic. Where
160 relevant I shared personal details and experiences, because the goal was to recreate as much as
161 possible an organic conversation that encouraged the participant to share their own narratives.

162

163 The term '*homo narrans*' has been used to emphasize the universal importance of narrative to
164 individual humans and societies, because storytelling is quintessentially human (Czarniawska
165 2004; Fisher 1984; Gottschall 2012; Irvine 2012). Humans use narrative as a tool to endow
166 meaning to experience, and as Woodstock (2014) noted, tattoos are not simply 'visual
167 shorthand' but invite the telling of a story. A number of researchers have explored the
168 significance of tattoos in relation to the process of identity construction by examining how
169 people talk about their tattoos (Bell 1999; Dey & Das 2017; Hennessy 2011; Kosut 2000, 2006;
170 Oksanen & Turtiainen 2005; Sims 2018; Sweetman 1999; Woodstock 2014). In this study I
171 explored narratives constructed around tattoos that signify a personal relationship with a
172 companion animal. A form of 'discourse analysis' was applied to the tattoo narratives as a
173 methodological tool to examine language usage and context. The relationship between language
174 and the context is fundamental to discourse analysis, which is concerned with language use
175 beyond the boundaries of a sentence structure, the interrelationships between language and
176 society, and the interactive or dialogue properties of communication (Fairclough 2003; Gee,
177 1999; Philips 2013; Ruiz-Ruiz 2009). Essentially, discourse analysis is interested in what the
178 person really means, rather than what they actually say. Thus, in addition to information
179 regarding the context in which a discourse takes place, the cultural background, emotional state,
180 and the personality of the various participants needs to be taken into consideration. Ruiz-Ruiz
181 (2009) believes that to understand discourse from a sociological perspective requires analysis
182 of both textual content and contextual information, followed by interpretation, an approach I

183 chose to adapt to study tattoo narratives. The contextual information extends to the tattoo itself,
184 as well as the person to which the design alludes, and broader social interactions that may have
185 shaped the narrative. The narratives were interpreted under the framework of new kinship
186 theory, specifically ‘nurture kinship’ (Holland 2012) and ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins 2011a,
187 b), and/or the concept of ‘continuing bonds’ as tools for navigating grief (Davidson 2017;
188 Letherby & Davidson 2015; Packman *et al.* 2006).

189

190 **Companion animal tattoo narratives**

191

192 Debbie told me she loves her dog Foxy so much she felt compelled to have her immortalised
193 on her skin, an unprompted sentiment shared by all my participants. The question of whether
194 or not they considered themselves ‘pet parents’ or simply ‘parents’ in the conventional sense,
195 was less straightforward. Defining a relationship with a non-human as being similar, if not
196 exactly like that of a child-parent is not uncommon, and the term ‘fur baby’ has grown in
197 popularity (Bradshaw 2017; Greenebaum 2004; Owens & Grauerholz 2019; Schaffer 2009).
198 Several of my participants used the words ‘baby’ or ‘fur baby’ and described themselves in a
199 nurturing role. Mary had kept rats all of her adult life, including rescue lab rats. She said of her
200 rat-dedication tattoo, ‘I am currently mum of four fur babies, so this is a memory for all of
201 them’. However, usage of terms like ‘mum’ or ‘child’ does not necessarily mean the
202 relationship is synonymous with human parent-child relations (biological or adopted) (Shir-
203 Vertesh 2012). In a study of interspecies families, Owens and Grauerholz (2019) found that not
204 everyone who included non-humans in their description of ‘family’ considered themselves ‘pet
205 parents’. Of the self-identified ‘pet parents’, those without human children drew heavily from
206 larger cultural narratives surrounding parenting to construct their relationship, and while those
207 with older or grownup children emphasised similarities, those with younger children talked
208 primarily from a place of difference (Owens & Grauerholz 2019).

209

210 Charlotte's first tattoo is a minimalistic-style drawing of her dog Mack (Figure 1). In contrast
211 to a portrait, which can fade with age, an outline is sharp and can be redone. Her design choice
212 was symbolic, and she explained she never wants her connection with Mack to fade. When
213 Charlotte first scheduled an appointment with a tattoo artist she had in mind 'something fierce
214 like a lion or a cheetah', which was a deliberate move against being 'predictable and cutesy'.
215 However, during the interim she came across a line drawing of a dog on Pinterest and felt
216 compelled to instead get a design dedicated to her beloved Mack. The artist was surprised
217 because this was so different from her original big cat idea, but helped her modify the design
218 to capture the personality of Mack. Now in his late teens, Mack was adopted just after Charlotte
219 had gotten married. Several years later, following a rough divorce, the ex-husband got
220 everything else and Charlotte kept Mack (which she said is all she really wanted). Charlotte
221 described Mack as her 'child and best friend'. She said he is her 'most favourite person', and
222 after looking around to check her partner is out of hearing range, told me she would choose him
223 over anyone. Her current partner has two human children, but Charlotte said 'Mack is my child,
224 and I do not want human children'.

225

226 Victoria has several tattoos dedicated to the memory of her beloved Cole, but also talked about
227 the cats she adopted after his death. She struggled to define exactly how the relationships she
228 shares with her cats fits into the concept of 'family'. Victoria described them as being 'a special
229 kind of family', saying 'I'm by no means their parent, but the bond is stronger than with friends
230 and involves a caring aspect that goes beyond what I've experienced in human friendships'.
231 Although Victoria was not framing herself as a parent, she did identify as a caregiver. She
232 appreciates them for their individuality and friendship, but acknowledged this is complicated
233 by the power balance of the caregiver-dependent dynamic. Fox (2006) recognised that the
234 human-companion animal relationship 'inevitably involves some forms of restriction, power

235 and control and a certain degree of guilt, worry or uncertainty about what the animal is thinking
236 or feeling' (p.529). This is reflected in how Victoria talked about the health issues one of her
237 cats was experiencing: 'I feel the great burden of giving her the best vet care possible and
238 making the right decisions for her life because she can't make them herself.'

239

240 Simona has a tattoo depicting her dog Poppy curled up on a bed of wild flowers. She described
241 Poppy as her 'travelling partner' and told me how they have lived in several different countries
242 together. Simona explained Poppy is a rescue dog, but said 'really she rescued me'. Following
243 an abusive relationship, this dog provided unconditional love. Haraway (2003) is contentious
244 of the notion that dogs love unconditionally, but the devotion and affection bestowed on the
245 human by certain companion animal is undeniably comforting. Although Simona is responsible
246 for the care of Poppy, she describes herself as more of a care-receiver, at least in terms of
247 emotional support. This type of relationship often forms between a child and a companion
248 animal, where the animal other provides a source of comfort and stability (Bryant 1990). A
249 common motivation for tattooing is to embrace a personal narrative, which can be an expression
250 of personal values and experiences (Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler 2007). Simona proclaimed
251 'home is where my dog is', and her tattoo reaffirms the significance of her relationship with
252 Poppy and their shared experiences. This narrative, similar to others described here, fits into
253 the framework of kinship being a state of 'mutuality of being', where kin are produced through
254 shared experiences, memories, and cohabitation (Sahlins 2011a).

255

256 Central to theory of 'nurture kinship' is the idea that the making of kin is an active process,
257 fostered by nurture and 'treating kin as kin' (Holland 2012; Nelson 2013). Essentially, by
258 welcoming someone into your family they can become kin. Anna describes her animals as being
259 'family by choice', but goes on to stress that she has a 'good human family', and uses the term
260 'multispecies family' to incorporate the non-humans into her narrative. The deliberate use of

261 these terms supports the notion that companion animals are not necessarily substitutes for
262 human friends or family. Furthermore, even though Anna was familiar with terms such as
263 ‘multispecies family’, she still failed to define a specific role, like ‘mother’, ‘sibling’, or ‘child’,
264 that would describe how she related to all her non-human family members.

265

266 Without prompting, all participants referred to their non-human household members as
267 ‘family’. But what exactly is family, and how do non-humans fit into the framework of
268 ‘family’? As a child Constance said she believed Boo was her ‘guardian angel in dog form’.
269 She described him as ‘a part of me, a soulmate but without the romantic love part’. Her
270 connection to Bailey she likened to an older family member because ‘he was strong and there
271 for me when I began a new life pathway’. Constance acknowledged her relationships with non-
272 human family members are not all the same, ‘just like you have a different relationship with a
273 sister compared to your dad’.

274

275 The true significance of what Victoria attempted to articulate as a ‘special kind of family’ is
276 borne out by her burial plans. She told me she keeps the ashes of her beloved cat Cole in an
277 urn, rather burying him, because she could not bear to leave him behind when she inevitably
278 moves. Victoria plans to ultimately have Cole’s ashes buried alongside her own. However, she
279 was clearly conflicted when she considered the two cats she adopted after Cole died. She said
280 ‘Cole was something special’, but then paused before saying ‘although I do feel the same way
281 about the two I have now’. Together with friends and family, Anna held a burial ceremony for
282 Petey before interring his remains in a public cemetery, a practice that has become increasingly
283 more common and elaborate in recent decades (Brandes 2009; Collier 2016; Pręgowski 2016;
284 Redmalm 2015; Veldkamp 2009). Burials, burial-related rituals, and grave markers have long
285 been part process of grieving for humans and non-humans, and recently there has been a boom
286 in dedicated cemeteries (Brandes 2009). This may in part be driven by the nature of modern

287 life, which frequently involves moving house, area, or even country. Constance became quite
288 upset when her parents sold her childhood home because Boo was buried in the garden there.
289 Charlotte has also contemplated how she will cope when Mack dies, especially as she
290 recognises he may not have much longer. She said she does not want to bury him as they too
291 will likely move. Other memorial options include having a diamond made from cremation
292 ashes, or a piece of jewellery containing fur, but as Charlotte pointed out, these bring the dread
293 of losing something so special. Unlike a ring or an urn, a tattoo is hard to lose.

294

295 Memorial tattoos are often first conceived as the companion animal ages, and like Charlotte's
296 tattoo of Mack, sometimes leads to a design honouring a lifelong bond. Melanie, who
297 participated in a broader study on animal-themed tattoos mentioned 'I intend to get a piece
298 modelled after my Pekingese one day, as he has been with me through my entire adult life' (Hill
299 2018, 2019). Although a number of persons I have spoken with, myself included, plan to get a
300 tattoo honouring a special non-human animal(s), there is often no sense of urgency and an extra
301 significance placed on getting it right. When a companion animal has died, the significance of
302 a tattoo goes beyond commemorating a shared bond and can function as a means of adjusting
303 to loss. Davidson (2007, 2008) developed a concept of griefwork as 'shared labour' that is
304 negotiated by grieving persons and others, and recognises the importance of continuing bonds.
305 Rather than attempting to move beyond grief by 'letting go', the 'continuing bonds theory'
306 recognises and supports a bereaved person in maintaining an ongoing relationship with the
307 deceased (Letherby & Davidson 2015; Packman *et al.* 2006). The deceased is ever present for
308 the bereaved, while for others they are the 'elephant in the room' that no-one talks about.
309 Memorial tattoos can be important tools for maintaining an 'absence presence' by opening
310 dialog through embodied storytelling (Letherby & Davidson 2015). Using interview and focus
311 group data, Davidson (2017) studied the meanings behind memorial tattoos and found five
312 central features: permanence, continuation of bonds, adjustment to loss, an opening of dialogue,

313 and visual representations of change. In this study I wanted to understand how similar memorial
314 tattoos dedicated to animal others are to those honouring human loved-ones.

315

316 Constance has two memorial tattoos, one in honour of Boo, an Italian Greyhound cross who
317 she called her 'first love', and another for her greyhound, Bailey (Figure 2). Both tattoos are
318 pawprint replicas from Boo and Bailey, done in watercolour. Boo was given to her as a child
319 and died when Constance was a young adult. Bailey lived with Constance for twelve years, and
320 died a year prior to our interview. Constance believes her tattoos helped her deal with the pain
321 of loss by serving as a physical mark and continued presence. Boo had a long illness, and prior
322 to being euthanised he and Constance spent a final weekend together. During this time, she
323 painted his paw and made a print. Because Bailey was older when he died, Constance felt she
324 had time to prepare and had even considered a tattoo while he was still alive. In the end he only
325 suffered a short illness and died within a week. As with Boo, Constance wanted his pawprint
326 as a tattoo and not a stylised version. She visited several local tattoo artists, one of whom
327 recognised the emotional investment and confessed to being too nervous of getting it wrong.
328 The investment in time and thought that went into the designs perhaps helped by providing
329 some structure to dealing with the emotional pain of loss. Schiffrin (2009) recognised that
330 people often 'experience their memorial tattoos as offering structure to an experience of grief
331 that can be characterised as overwhelming, disempowering, and chaotic' (p.38).

332

333 Constance's tattoos provide a means of 'continuing bonds' with Boo and Bailey. The end of a
334 life is not necessarily the end of a relationship, and through the process of continuing bonds
335 'the bereaved remains involved and connected to the deceased and can be emotionally
336 sustained' (Packman *et al.* 2006, p.817). Through the tattoos, Constance is able to maintain a
337 connection and derive strength and comfort from that connection. During his lifetime, Boo
338 helped Constance get through a lot of pain and trauma, and she says 'sometimes I touch my hip

339 and feel like he is still with me'. Constance was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder
340 (BPD) and started self-harming at a young age. However, she told me she did not self-harm
341 after Boo's death, and partly attributes this to the tattoo: 'I can be on the verge and look at the
342 paws and gain strength not to do that because Boo, and now Bailey, would be unhappy'. A
343 number of studies found positive correlations between mental illness and tattooing
344 (Birmingham *et al.* 1999; Dhossche *et al.* 2000; Stirn *et al.* 2006), including an association with
345 self-harm (Stirn & Hinz 2008). However, the correlation need not be symptomatic, but rather a
346 mechanism for coping. Davidson (2017) reported a narrative similar to that of Constance, from
347 a participant whose tattoo, dedicated to her late father, provides her the strength to overcome
348 the urge to self-harm. In support of this therapeutic role, a study of patients struggling with
349 eating disorders concluded that tattooing may be symbolic of 'self-care' and an antidote to the
350 urge to self-harm (Claes *et al.* 2005). The process of acquiring the tattoos may to help with the
351 immediate grief and emotional pain. Constance said 'the pain of getting tattooed helped ease
352 the emotional pain and it did not hurt as much as I imaged it would - like people say it does
353 with the ribs.' This is interesting because people often claim the ribs are the most painful,
354 including several participants in my wider study of animal species-themed tattoos (Hill 2018,
355 2019). However, like Constance, I would describe my ribcage tattoo as being the least painful,
356 perhaps because the whole process was about embracing the scars of surgery and letting go of
357 emotional pain. I would describe the experience as a 'worthwhile pain', not unlike struggling
358 through the final miles of a marathon. Indeed, the practice of tattooing has been likened to
359 transformative pilgrimages because 'subjects who experience pain pass through various kinds
360 of ritual death and rebirth, and redefine the relationship between the self and society through
361 the skin' (Schildkrout 2004, p.320). In 'non-Western' cultures tattooing is often a rite of
362 passage, and the pain and suffering experienced is a necessary element of the transformation
363 (Rush 2005). 'Pain alters awareness; it is a focal point that turns us inward, into the psyche'
364 (*ibid*, p.178), thus the process of getting a tattoo can be transformative.

365

366 Memorial tattoos can also function as a means of opening of dialogue (Davidson 2017;
367 Letherby & Davidson 2015), and Constance stated she likes her tattoos to be visible and to talk
368 about Boo and Bailey. However, like other participants, she has experienced the occasional
369 negative response. For example, the mother of a friend told Constance her pawprint tattoo was
370 'stupid', even knowing what it represented. A general disregard and trivialisation of grief for
371 non-human animals is unfortunately not uncommon (Chur-Hansen 2010; Packman *et al.* 2014).
372 Although grieving for companion animals is a widespread phenomenon that is recognised in
373 'Western' societies and provided for by counselling services, books, funeral services, and
374 online support groups, there still exists a reluctance to grieve openly (Demello 2016; Eason
375 2019; Redmalm 2015). There are people who feel no particular affinity for animals, and this
376 failure to appreciate the connection others may have can result in a lack of compassion towards
377 those grieving companion animals (Chur-Hansen 2010; Packman *et al.* 2014; Serpell 2004).
378 When someone trivialises a loss by saying 'it's just a dog, you can get another', it is not only
379 cruel to the grief-stricken individual, but also perpetuates a narrative that renders a dog's life
380 meaningless (Eason 2019). Thus, grief is suppressed and a narrative of death emerges that
381 renders that life less worthy.

382

383 In Australia, many more men than women have tattoos, but the highest rates of tattooing are
384 among young women (Heywood *et al.* 2012), and Constance said she feels a connection to that
385 'tattoo community'. She described her father as being from a working-class background that
386 embraces tattoos, but only in men. Her mother does not like tattoos on women either, but
387 seemed to accept the Boo pawprint, perhaps because she understood it was so personal.
388 However, her mother did not approve of the cartoon character tattoo Constance had done later.
389 But again, her mother said nothing negative about the second pawprint. Constance's mother
390 recognised the significance of the pawprint tattoos in the grieving, and was able to detach from

391 her disapproval of tattoos on females. This suggests the tattoos are effectively facilitating
392 'griefwork as groupwork' (Davidson 2017; Letherby & Davidson 2015), by demonstrating the
393 significance of relationship and the loss.

394

395 Anna has a tattoo of Shamus and Petey. Done in the style of a prehistoric cave painting it
396 signifies 'forever' and 'running free' (Figure 3). Shamus is the horse, and although Anna has
397 other horses, who she says are all special, he was her first and has been with her since foal-
398 hood. Anna had been planning to have the horse part of the tattoo done for some time. However,
399 when Petey died unexpectedly, she had the design done one week later to including Petey
400 running alongside. Anna explained that the horses were a big part of his freedom, which he first
401 experienced in a horse field. Petey had been badly abused, and Anna described him as 'a brave
402 little dog who was all about overcoming adversity'. I asked Anna if she believed the tattoo
403 helped in the grieving process. She was not sure if it did, but felt she 'needed to do it for him'.
404 The need to mark a death is a reoccurring theme, also reported for memorial tattoos dedicated
405 to human loved-ones (Davidson 2017; Letherby & Davidson 2015; Schiffrin 2009). Although
406 Anna is not convinced the tattoo helped with the grieving process, she does like to talk about
407 Petey. In this respect the tattoo functions as a means of opening of dialogue. Unlike some of
408 the other participants, Anna has experienced no negative reactions expressed either towards her
409 tattoo or the subject. This is perhaps because she told me tattooing is relatively common in her
410 family and immediate community.

411

412 Sandra, a friend of Anna's, also has a tattoo in remembrance of Petey. She told me she is a big
413 fan of tattoos, and chooses designs to represent the things she loves. For Petey she had a bone
414 motif to represent a favourite plaything of his. She says that 'even though he wasn't mine',
415 Petey was 'a boy that I generally loved and when he died it was so horrible and upsetting for
416 everyone because he was a family member'. Sandra acknowledged her position as a close

417 family friend, and the description of Petey as a ‘family member’ was unprompted. It is
418 interesting that Sandra used the phrase ‘he wasn’t mine’, as she seemed to be using it in the
419 same context as one might say ‘he wasn’t my brother’. Sandra said talking about Petey is not
420 painful, but more like a celebration of who he was. She said she loves talking about the tattoo
421 because it is ‘a way to make sure I remember how great Petey was and to tell other people about
422 him’. Sandra told me how Petey was ‘very inspiring because he had a horrible start, but learned
423 to trust again and really grew as an individual’. This narrative is not dissimilar from that of a
424 participant in my broader study (Hill 2018, 2019), who talked about a tattoo dedicated to a
425 deceased human friend. Furthermore, it highlights how bonds with non-humans can form that
426 are not necessarily kinship, but are none-the-less meaningful. Just as we have human friends
427 and family, we can also have other animal friends along with our non-human kin.

428

429 Victoria has several tattoos dedicated to her Cole, who as was with her from kittenhood and
430 lived to be 21 years of age. When he died Victoria was devastated, and a month after his death
431 she got her first tattoo in his memory – an outline of a black cat (Figure 4). However, she
432 explained that this was not enough and next came the cat eye, followed by other ‘black cat’
433 designs. Cole’s death was traumatic for Victoria. Cole was dying from kidney failure, and when
434 he became dehydrated Victoria took him to the vet hoping they could stabilise him so he could
435 come home to die with her by his side. However, she was at work when the vet called call and
436 Cole died before she arrived. Victoria’s narrative suggests her tattoos are visual representations
437 of change and an adjustment to loss, two themes identified by (Davidson 2017). Victoria feels
438 like she betrayed Cole, because she had promised to be with him at the end, and the tattoos may
439 represent an attempt to make amends. Some of her tattoos are often visible. However, unlike
440 other participants, Victoria said she is less keen to talk about Cole, and now finds it painful.

441

442 Schiffrin (2009) reported almost all her participants described a change in their relationship to
443 their memorial tattoo as their grief became less acute, albeit to becoming more comfortable
444 talking. For Victoria, the memorial tattoos became more emotionally private, and she is not
445 engaging in griefwork as groupwork (Davidson 2008, 2017; Letherby & Davidson 2015). This
446 reflects the unique and individual experiences of loss and grief, and her journey may or may
447 not lead her to being more open to dialog in the future. Regardless, the significance of her bond
448 with Cole is unlikely to change. Victoria said the first tattoo she got is most significant, and she
449 often looks at it and thinks of him: ‘like a part of him will always be with me’.

450

451 Joanna has a portrait of her cat Marmalade tattooed on her back (Figure 5). Joanna was five
452 years old when Marmalade first came into her life, and died when Joanna was in her late teens.
453 This is her first tattoo, which she got a few years after Marmalade died because she wanted her
454 to always be with her. A visible tattoo like Joanna’s boldly asserts of the significance of the
455 relationship she had with Marmalade, and at the same time embodies the assertiveness and
456 confidence Joanna strives towards. Joanna described Marmalade as ‘a very sassy cat’ and felt
457 she ‘needed to take on some of her [Marmalade’s] characteristics into my own life’. Joanna
458 described Marmalade’s bold and ‘bossy’ personality as being the opposite of her own shy and
459 anxious self, and says ‘the tattoo reminds me to be more like her’, as well as ‘helping me feel
460 that she is with me’. Marmalade was a constant comfort during childhood, and Joanna describes
461 how she suffered from severe anxiety and couldn’t bear the thought of Marmalade not being
462 there. Similar to Constance’s relationship with Boo, Joanna derived emotional support from
463 Marmalade that seems to have had a positive impact on her mental health. The subject of
464 ‘emotional support animals’ has received a lot of attention recently, and the concept of
465 assigning animals the job of emotionally supporting humans is controversial (Glenk 2017).
466 However, the benefits described by Constance and Joanna derive from the organic nature of the
467 relationship itself –much like a close friend or family member provides support.

468

469 Joanna sometimes receives comments or questions asking if the tattoo was her cat, or just a
470 random picture, and unfortunately, some will people laugh and tell her it is a ridiculous idea for
471 a tattoo. Disenfranchised grief is ‘the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that
472 is not, or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported’ (Doka
473 1989, p.4). Disenfranchisement can result from unrecognised relationships, or trivialised
474 relationships. Not everyone experiences bonding with a non-human animal (Herzog 2014;
475 Jacobson *et al.* 2012; Serpell 1996, 2004), and consequently people mourning the loss of a non-
476 human companion are vulnerable to insensitive comments.

477

478 **Discussion**

479

480 Fox (2006) points out that ‘one of the major dilemmas posed by the pet–human relationship is
481 the pet’s dual status as both a ‘person’ and possession’ (p.528). The human is invariably the
482 dominant partner, and even a service animal is governed by their human. An exception might
483 be the relationship formed between human children and family ‘pets’, but even then, the non-
484 human is not dominant. In this study some of the relationships were first established in
485 childhood (Constance and Boo, Joanna and Marmalade), and these reflected a greater
486 dependence on the non-animal for emotional support. Conversely, those established during
487 adulthood tended to describe a role more like that of a parent or carer (Charlotte and Mack).
488 The tattoo narratives examined in this study exhibit elements of child-parent, dependent-
489 caregiver, friend, confidant, and soulmate-type relationships, and support the idea that there is
490 no single type of human-companion animal bond (Cain 2016; Quackenbush 1985; Walsh 2009).
491 Victoria’s intention to be ultimately buried with Cole’s ashes, something normally reserved for
492 family members, implies a kinship bond. That participants that felt compelled to immortalise
493 their living companion animal on their skin (Debbie and Foxy, Charlotte and Mach, Simona

494 and Poppy) is counter to the notion of companion animals as being ‘flexible persons’ or
495 ‘emotional commodities’ that at any moment may be demoted from their ‘family’ status or
496 rehomed (Shir-Vertesh 2012).

497

498 Memorial tattoos dedicated to animal others seem to function in much the same way as those
499 dedicated to humans (Davidson 2017; Schiffrin 2009). They may be particularly helpful in
500 coping with disenfranchised grief. Davidson (2017) writes about her own suffering following
501 the deaths of her prenatal children, which at the time were not fully acknowledged by the
502 medical profession, nor society. She recounts her personal experience of being told to ‘go home
503 and have another one’ and how she grieved alone because ‘others did not consider my babies
504 part of my family’ (Davidson 2017, p.38). Having her babies memorialised on her skin enabled
505 Davidson to claim assert her identity as a bereaved mother, something she felt previously
506 denied. People mourning the loss of a non-human companion often encounter insensitive
507 comments. However, the grief experienced following the death of a beloved companion animal
508 can be just as real and intense as that experience in response to human death, particularly
509 amongst lonely and socially isolated individuals (Eason 2019; McCutcheon & Fleming 2002;
510 Redmalm 2015; Wrobel & Dye 2003). Eason (2019) explored how cyberspace provides a
511 platform for enabling the validation of companion animal lives and community building, which
512 can provide a lifeline to those suffering alone. Participants in my study had tattoos that, although
513 sometimes concealed, were oftentimes part of the public-self (Bell 1999; Roberts 2012).
514 Furthermore, many had shared their tattoos on private and public social media spaces, engaging
515 with a wider community.

516

517 **Concluding remarks**

518

519 The tattoo narratives presented here reveal strong emotional connections and shared
520 experiences with non-human animals, which is unsurprising given my participants chose to
521 immortalise these relationships on their skin. Are human-companion animal relationships
522 distinct, similar, or identical to those you share with your mother, your offspring, your siblings,
523 or your mother-in-law? The answer to this depends on who you ask, because there appears no
524 one type of relationship (Cain 2016; Quackenbush 1985; Walsh 2009). The nature of the
525 human-companion animal bond is not so much determined by the species of either actor,
526 although more often than not the assumed roles of caregiver and dependent renders it most
527 similar to that of parent and child. Combined with the provision of care and dedication to their
528 well-being, I argue that these are kinship bonds born out of nurturement, but none-the-less
529 exhibit the ‘mutuality of being’ that Sahlins (2011a) posits to underpin all forms of kinship.
530 This study supports the conclusion that humans can and do form kinship bonds with other
531 animals, and memorial tattoos serve similar functions, regardless of the species of the loved
532 one. Recognition of non-human kinship bonds by carers, professional counsellors, and society
533 should facilitate better services and care for the bereaved (Eason 2019; Gosse & Barnes 1994;
534 McCutcheon & Fleming 2002; Wrobel & Dye 2003).

535

536 **Acknowledgements**

537

538 I am grateful to Julien Dugnoille and Samantha Hurn for their valuable comments, support, and
539 advice throughout this project, and to Thomas Aiello and Tiamat Warda for careful reading of
540 the manuscript. The Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics (EASE) working group
541 provided support and feedback on various elements of the project. Two anonymous reviewers
542 provided constructive comments and insights, and their valuable input is much appreciated.
543 This project would not have been possible without the participants, who kindly shared their
544 tattoos and stories with me.

545 **References**

546

547 Bell, S. (1999). Tattooed: A Participant Observer's Exploration of Meaning. *Journal of*
548 *American Culture*, 22(2), 53-58.

549

550 Birmingham, L., Mason, D., & Grubin, D. (1999). The psychiatric implications of visible
551 tattoos in an adult male prison population. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 10(3), 687-695.

552

553 Birken, L. (1992). What Is Western Civilization? *The History Teacher*, 25(4), 451-461.

554

555 Bradshaw, J. W. S. (2017). *The Animals Among Us: How Pets Make Us Human*. New York:
556 Basic Books.

557

558 Brandes, S. (2009). The meaning of american pet cemetery gravestones. *Ethnology*, 48, 99-118.

559

560 Bryant, B. K. (1990). The Richness of the Child-Pet Relationship: A Consideration of Both
561 Benefits and Costs of Pets to Children. *Anthrozoös*, 3(4), 253-261.

562

563 Cain, A. O. (2016). Pets as Family Members. In M. B. Sussman (Ed.), *Pets and the Family*
564 (pp.5-10). New York: Routledge.

565

566 Caplan, J. (1997). 'Speaking scars': the tattoo in popular practice and medico-legal debate in
567 nineteenth-century Europe. *History Workshop Journal*, 44, 107-142.

568

569 Charles, N. (2014). 'Animals Just Love You as You Are': Experiencing Kinship across the
570 Species Barrier. *Sociology*, 48(4), 715-730.

571

572 Charles, N., & Davies, C. A. (2008). My Family and Other Animals: Pets as Kin. *Sociological*
573 *Research Online*, 13(5), 4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.5153/sro.1798>

574

575 Chur-Hansen, A. (2010). Grief and bereavement issues and the loss of a companion animal:
576 People living with a companion animal, owners of livestock, and animal support workers.
577 *Clinical Psychologist*, 14(1), 14-21.

578

579 Claes, L., Vandereycken, W., & Vertommen, H. (2005). Self-care versus self-harm: Piercing,
580 tattooing, and self-injuring in eating disorders. *European Eating Disorders Review*, 13, 11-18.

581

582 Clark, J. L. (2015). Uncharismatic Invasives. *Environmental Humanities*, 6(1), 29-52.

583

584 Coe, J. B., Young, I., Lambert, K., Dysart, L., Nogueira Borden, L., & Rajic, A. (2014). A
585 scoping review of published research on the relinquishment of companion animals. *Journal of*
586 *Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 17(3), 253-273.

587

588 Collier, I. D. (2016). More than a Bag of Bones: A History of Animal Burials. In M. DeMello
589 (Ed.), *Mourning Animals* (pp. 3-10). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

590

591 Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

592

593 Davidson, D. (2007). *The emergence of hospital protocols for perinatal loss, 1950–2000*. (PhD
594 Thesis), York University, Toronto, Canada.

595

596 Davidson, D. (2008). A technology of care: Caregiver response to perinatal loss. *Women's*
597 *Studies International Forum*, 31(4), 278-284.

598

599 Davidson, D. (2017). Art embodied: tattoos as memorials. *Bereavement Care*, 36(1), 33-40.

600

601 DeMello, M. (1995). "Not Just For Bikers Anymore": Popular Representations of American
602 Tattooing. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 29(3), 37-52.

603

604 DeMello, M. (2000). *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo*
605 *Community*. Durham: Duke University Press.

606

607 DeMello, M. (2016). *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death*.
608 East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

609

610 Dey, A., & Das, K. (2017). Why We Tattoo? Exploring the Motivation and Meaning.
611 *Anthropology*, 5(1), 174-189.

612

613 Dhossche, D., Snell, K. S., & Larder, S. (2000). A case-control study of tattoos in young suicide
614 victims as a possible marker of risk. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 59(2), 165-168.

615

616 Doka, K. (1989). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*. Lexington: Lexington
617 Books.

618

619 Eason, F. (2019). "Forever in Our Hearts" Online: Virtual Deathscapes Maintain Companion
620 Animal Presence. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, Epub ahead of print.

621

622 Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London:
623 Routledge.
624

625 Finka, L. R., Ward, J., Farnworth, M. J., & Mills, D. S. (2019). Owner personality and the
626 wellbeing of their cats share parallels with the parent-child relationship. *PLoS One*, *14*(2),
627 e0211862.
628

629 Fisher, J. (2002). Tattooing the Body, Marking Culture. *Body & Society*, *8*(4), 91-107.
630

631 Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral
632 argument. *Communication Monographs*, *51*(1), 1-22.
633

634 Fox, R. (2006). Animal behaviours, post-human lives: everyday negotiations of the animal–
635 human divide in pet-keeping. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *7*(4), 525-537.
636

637 Gee, J. P. (1999). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis Theory and Method*: London:
638 Routledge.
639

640 Gilman, S., & Caplan, J. (2001). *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American*
641 *History*. London: Reaktion Books.
642

643 Glenk, L. M. (2017). Current Perspectives on Therapy Dog Welfare in Animal-Assisted
644 Interventions. *Animals*, *7*(2), 7.
645

646 Gosse, G. H., & Barnes, M. J. (1994). Human Grief Resulting from the Death of a Pet.
647 *Anthrozoös*, *7*(2), 103-112.

648

649 Gottschall, J. (2012). *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston:
650 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

651

652 Govenar, A. B. (1981). Culture in Transition: The Recent Growth of Tattooing in America.
653 *Anthropos*, 76(1/2), 216-219.

654

655 Greenebaum, J. (2004). It's a Dog's Life: Elevating Status from Pet to "Fur Baby" at Yappy
656 Hour. *Society & Animals*, 12(2), 117-135.

657

658 Greif, J., Hewitt, W., & Armstrong, M. L. (1999). Tattooing and body piercing. Body art
659 practices among college students. *Clinical Nursing Research*, 8(4), 368-385.

660

661 Haraway, D. (2003). *The companion species manifesto: dogs, people, and significant otherness*.
662 Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

663

664 Haraway, D. (2006). Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons,
665 Philosophers, and Biologists. *Configurations*, 14, 97–114.

666

667 Haraway, D. (2015). Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.
668 *Environmental Humanities*, 6, 159-165.

669

670 Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke
671 University Press.

672

673 Hennessy, D. (2011). *Ankhs and anchors: tattoo as an expression of identity - exploring*
674 *motivation and meaning*. (PhD Thesis), University of Wollongong, Australia.
675

676 Herzog, H. (2014). Biology, Culture, and the Origins of Pet-Keeping. *Animal Behavior and*
677 *Cognition*, 1(3),296-308.
678

679 Heywood, W., Patrick, K., Smith, A. M. A., Simpson, J. M., Pitts, M. K., Richters, J., & Shelley,
680 J. M. (2012). Who Gets Tattoos? Demographic and Behavioral Correlates of Ever Being
681 Tattooed in a Representative Sample of Men and Women. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 22(1), 51-
682 56.
683

684 Hill, K. (2018). *Animal-themed Tattoo Narratives: Insights into Ontological Perspectives and*
685 *Multispecies Families*. (Masters Thesis), University of Exeter, UK.
686

687 Hill, K. (2019). *Animal-themed tattoo narratives: Insights into ontological perspectives and*
688 *multispecies families*. Paper presented at the ISAZ 2019: Animals in the Public Eye:
689 Interactions and Perceptions of Animals, Orlando, Florida USA, Orlando, Florida USA.
690

691 Holland, M. (2012). *Social Bonding and Nurture Kinship: Compatibility between Cultural and*
692 *Biological Approaches*. London: Createspace Independent Publishing.
693

694 Holy, L. (1996). *Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship*. London: Pluto Press.
695

696 Hurn, S. (2012). *Humans and other animals: cross-cultural perspectives on human-animal*
697 *interactions*. London: Pluto Books.
698

699 Irvine, L. (2012). Sociology and Anthrozoology: Symbolic Interactionist Contributions.
700 *Anthrozoös*, 25(S1), s123-s137.
701

702 Irwin, K. (2001). Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction.
703 *Symbolic Interaction*, 24(1), 49-73.
704

705 Jacobson, K. C., Hoffman, C. L., Vasilopoulos, T., Kremen, W. S., Panizzon, M. S., Grant, M.
706 D., . . . Franz, C. E. (2012). Genetic and Environmental Influences on Individual Differences
707 in Frequency of Play with Pets among Middle-Aged Men: A Behavioral Genetic Analysis.
708 *Anthrozoös*, 25(4), 441-456.
709

710 Kosut, M. (2000). Tattoo Narratives: The intersection of the body, self-identity and society.
711 *Visual Sociology*, 15(1), 79-100.
712

713 Kosut, M. (2006). An Ironic Fad: The Commodification and Consumption of Tattoos. *The*
714 *Journal of Popular Culture*, 39(6), 1035-1048.
715

716 Laumann, A. E., & Derick, A. J. (2006). Tattoos and body piercings in the United States: a
717 national data set. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 55(3), 413-421.
718

719 Letherby, G., & Davidson, D. (2015). Embodied Storytelling: Loss and Bereavement, Creative
720 Practices, and Support. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 23(4), 343-360.
721

722 Logan, J. (2013). Contemporary adoptive kinship: a contribution to new kinship studies. *Child*
723 *& Family Social Work*, 18(1), 35-45.
724

725 McCutcheon, K. A., & Fleming, S. J. (2002). Grief resulting from euthanasia and natural death
726 of companion animals. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 44(2), 169-188.
727

728 Nelson, M. (2013). Fictive Kin, Families We Choose, and Voluntary Kin: What Does the
729 Discourse Tell Us? *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5, 259–281.
730

731 Oksanen, A., & Turtiainen, J. (2005). A Life Told in Ink: Tattoo Narratives and the Problem of
732 the Self in Late Modern Society. *Auto/Biography*, 13, 111–130.
733

734 Owens, N., & Grauerholz, L. (2019). Interspecies Parenting: How Pet Parents Construct Their
735 Roles. *Humanity & Society*, 43(2), 96-119.
736

737 Packman, W., Carmack, B. J., Katz, R., Carlos, F., Field, N. P. & Landers, C. (2014). Online
738 Survey as Empathic Bridging for the Disenfranchised Grief of Pet Loss. *OMEGA--Journal of*
739 *Death and Dying* 69(4), 333–356.
740

741 Packman, W., Horsley, H., Davies, B., & Kramer, R. (2006). Sibling Bereavement and
742 Continuing Bonds. *Death Studies* 30(9), 817-841.
743

744 Philips, S. (2013). Method in Anthropological Discourse Analysis: The Comparison of Units
745 of Interaction. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 23(1), 83–96.
746

747 Pręgowski, M. P. (2016). All the World and a Little Bit More: Pet Cemetery Practices and
748 Contemporary Relations between Humans and Their Companion Animals. In M. DeMello
749 (Ed.), *Mourning Animals* (pp. 47-54). East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
750

751 Preti, A., Pinna, C., Nocco, S., Mulliri, E., Pilia, S., Petretto, D. R., & Masala, C. (2006). Body
752 of evidence: tattoos, body piercing, and eating disorder symptoms among adolescents. *J Journal*
753 *of Psychosomatic Research*, *61*(4), 561-566.

754

755 Quackenbush, J. (1985). The Death of a Pet: How It Can Affect Owners. *Veterinary Clinics of*
756 *North America: Small Animal Practice* *15*(2), 395-402.

757

758 Quan-Haase, A. (2017). The coming together of a community of practice: Commemorative
759 tattoos as visual culture for community engagement and identity formation. In D. Davidson
760 (Ed.), *The Tattoo Project: Visual Culture and the Digital Archive*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars'
761 Press.

762

763 Read, D. (2007). Kinship Theory: A Paradigm Shift. *Ethnology*, *46*(4), 329-364.

764

765 Redmalm, D. (2015). Pet grief: when is non-human life grievable? *The Sociological Review*,
766 *63*(1), 19-35.

767

768 Roberts, D. (2012). Secret Ink: Tattoo's Place in Contemporary American Culture. *Journal of*
769 *American Culture*, *35*, 153-165.

770

771 Roggenkamp, H., Nicholls, A., & Pierre, J. M. (2017). Tattoos as a window to the psyche: How
772 talking about skin art can inform psychiatric practice. *World journal of psychiatry*, *7*(3), 148-
773 158.

774

775 Ruiz-Ruiz, J. (2009). Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic. *Forum Qualitative*
776 *Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(2). [http://www.qualitative-](http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882)
777 [research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882](http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882)
778

779 Rush, J. (2005). *Spiritual Tattoo: A Cultural History of Tattooing, Piercing, Scarification,*
780 *Branding, and Implant*. Berkeley: Frog Books.
781

782 Sahlins, M. (2011a). What kinship is (part one). *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological*
783 *Institute*, 17(1), 2-19.
784

785 Sahlins, M. (2011b). What kinship is (part two). *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*,
786 17(2), 227-242.
787

788 Schaffer, M. (2009). *One Nation Under Dog: America's Love Affair with Our Dogs*. New York:
789 Holt & Company.
790

791 Schiffrin, E. (2009). "This so clearly needs to be marked" : an exploration of memorial tattoos
792 and their functions for the bereaved. (Masters Thesis), Smith College, MA, USA.
793

794 Schildkrout, E. (2004). Inscribing the Body. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, 319-344.
795

796 Schneider, D. M. (1984). *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan
797 Press.
798

799 Schneider, D. M., & Shimizu, A. (1992). Ethnocentrism and the Notion of Kinship. *Man*, 27(3),
800 629-633.

801
802 Serpell, J. A. (1996). *In the company of animals: A study of human-animal relationships*.
803 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
804
805 Serpell, J. A. (2004). Factors influencing human attitudes to animals and their welfare. *Animal*
806 *Welfare, 13*, 145–151.
807
808 Shir-Vertesh, D. (2012). “Flexible Personhood”: Loving Animals as Family Members in Israel.
809 *American Anthropologist, 114*(3), 420-432.
810
811 Silver, E., VanEseltine, M., & Silver, S. (2009). Tattoo Acquisition: A Prospective Longitudinal
812 Study of Adolescents. *Deviant Behavior, 30*, 511-538.
813
814 Sims, J. (2018). “It Represents Me:” Tattooing Mixed-Race Identity. *Sociological Spectrum,*
815 *38*, 1-13.
816
817 Stirn, A., & Hinz, A. (2008). Tattoos, body piercings, and self-injury: Is there a connection?
818 Investigations on a core group of participants practicing body modification. *Psychotherapy*
819 *Research, 18*(3), 326-333.
820
821 Stirn, A., Hinz, A., & Braehler, E. (2006). Prevalence of tattooing and body piercing in Germany
822 and perception of health, mental disorders, and sensation seeking among tattooed and body-
823 pierced individuals. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 60*(5), 531-534.
824
825 Strohecker, D. (2011). Towards A Pro-Social Conception Of Contemporary Tattooing: The
826 Psychological Benefits Of Body Modification. *Rutgers Journal of Sociology, 1*, 10-36.

827

828 Strubel, J., & Jones, D. (2017). Painted Bodies: Representing the Self and Reclaiming the Body
829 through Tattoos. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 50(6), 1230-1253.

830

831 Sweetman, P. (1999). Anchoring the (postmodern) self? Body modification, fashion and
832 identity. *Body & Society*, 5, 51-76.

833

834 Veldkamp, E. (2009). The Emergence of “Pets as Family” and the Socio-Historical
835 Development of Pet Funerals in Japan. *Anthrozoös*, 22(4), 333-346.

836

837 Walsh, F. (2009). Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family
838 therapy. *Family Process* 48(4), 481–499.

839

840 Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York: Columbia
841 University Press.

842

843 Wohlrab, S., Stahl, J., & Kappeler, P. M. (2007). Modifying the body: motivations for getting
844 tattooed and pierced. *Body Image*, 4(1), 87-95.

845

846 Woodstock, L. (2014). Tattoo Therapy: Storying the Self on Reality TV in Neoliberal Times.
847 *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 47, 780-799.

848

849 Wrobel, T., A., & Dye, A., L. (2003). Grieving Pet Death: Normative, Gender, and Attachment
850 Issues. *OMEGA--Journal of Death and Dying*, 47(4), 385–393.

851

Tables

Table 1. Participants in this study as they first appear in the text

(*names of participants and their companion animals have been changed)

Participant*	Nationality (all she/her)	Species, status, pronouns	Name*	Tattoo(s)
Debbie	British	Dog, living (she/her)	Foxy	Stylised caricature
Mary	American	Rodents (multiple)	-	Cartoon rat
Charlotte	South African (living in UK)	Dog, living (he/him)	Mack	Outline
Victoria	British	Cat, deceased (he/him)	Cole	Outlines, cat eye
Simona	British	Dog, living (she/her)	Poppy	Stylised caricature
Constance	Australian	Dog, deceased (he/him) Dog, deceased (he/him)	Boo Bailey	Paw print Paw print
Anna	British	Dog, deceased (he/him) Horse, living (he/him)	Petey Shamus	Line drawing
Sandra	British (friend of Anna)	Dog, deceased (he/him)	Petey	Dog bone
Joanna	British	Cat, deceased (she/her)	Marmalade	Portrait

Table 2. Checklist used by interviewer to ensure sufficient coverage of key information

Checklist of points to cover
Establish if the tattoo is a memorial tattoo or not, and if the subject of the tattoo is living or deceased.
Who is the subject of the tattoo? Encourage narratives about that tattoo subject as an individual, their history, and the relationship.
How old is the tattoo?
What was the motivation behind the tattoo?
What was the thought process behind the chosen design?
Where is the tattoo located on the body, and why was this location chosen?
Do they have other tattoos? And if so, did these come before/after the dedication tattoo?
What sort of reactions towards the tattoo do they encounter (positive, negative, or neutral)?
How do they relate to non-humans, particularly the tattoo subject, in relation to family dynamics?
How do they generally feel talking about the tattoo and its significance?
For memorial tattoos: what role did the tattoo play during grieving process?
For memorial tattoos: Were there other forms of memorial?

Figures

Figure 1. Charlotte’s tattoo of Mack.



Figure 2. Paw print tattoos for Boo (left) and Bailey (right).

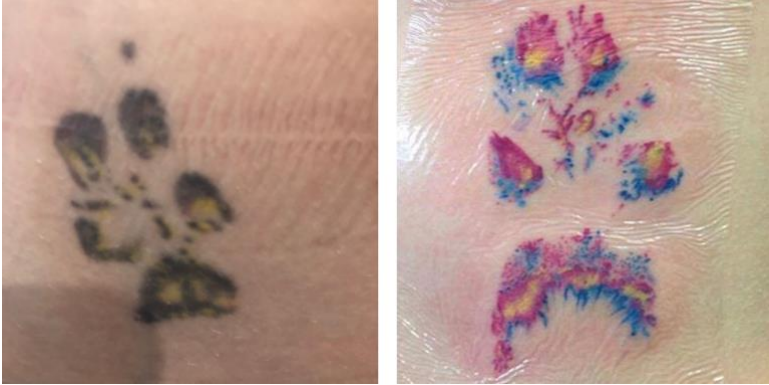


Figure 3. Petey and Shamus ‘running free’.



Figure 4. Victoria's tattoos dedicated to Cole.



Figure 5. Joanna's cat Marmalade.

