

COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTIONS OF IDENTITY AND EMOTIONS WITHIN A
VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP FOR DISENFRANCHISED BEREAVED INDIVIDUALS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Millions of U.S. families care for pets, a joyous yet emotional experience. Following a pet loss, caregivers embark on the oft lingering and disenfranchised grief processes. Online support groups are helpful to the disenfranchised bereaved population as technology allows users to access similar individuals, acquire support, and make sense of their experiences. Throughout disenfranchised animal companion loss, bereaved online support group members engage in sensemaking (Weick, 1995) to reconcile their past and becoming selves, construct a community identity, and grapple with their emotion displays within and outside of the support group. Identity work and emotions are salient sensemaking processes among individuals processing disenfranchising discourses they encounter following the loss of a companion animal.

In this dissertation, I draw from netnographic fieldwork to explore the communication exchanged between virtual support group site facilitators and bereaved animal companion caregivers to broadly understand the communication that organized the virtual space and member experiences. In two empirical chapters, I articulate findings related to the virtual support groups' identity (chapter two) and emotion (chapter 3) sensemaking that coalesced to constitute (re)constructed caregiving identities, emotion rules following a disenfranchised loss, and a virtual safe space for engaging in authentic emotion displays. The first study (chapter two) explores sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking communication within the virtual support group to

understand how bereaved site visitors and facilitators co-constitute identity (re)construction. Findings detail the sensebreaking communication site members used to enact their ruptured identities, as well as the secondary sensebreaking communication other members used to discursively disrupt ruptured identity enactments and prime members for reconciling their overall identity narratives. Implications articulate the importance of attending to sensebreaking enactments as a process rather than a trigger, how workplaces may use sensebreaking and sensegiving communication to help bereaved members understand and heal their identities, and how social affordances may enable or constrain sensemaking processes in virtual spaces.

The second study (chapter three) details the disenfranchising discourses that bereaved site visitors drew on to make sense of their emotions in their personal and professional interactions, as well as constitute emotion rules within the support group itself. In this study, I articulate findings that foreground colonizing discourses that site members resisted, reified, and reimagined to make sense of their emotion displays, which communicatively constituted the virtual support group as a safe space for displaying their authentic emotions. Implications include theorizing about how transitory disenfranchising experiences layer onto other identity markers to complicate emotion rules, how safe spaces reify professionalism and managerialism, and how organized spaces (i.e., workplaces and virtual support groups) might actively work to enfranchise animal companion loss and support members throughout a variety of loss experiences. I address these two studies collectively in the fourth chapter to illuminate and contribute several theoretical and practical implications about how people navigate disenfranchised grief, enact emotions following animal companion loss, and facilitate identity (re)construction in various organized spaces. Further, I propose future research that continues to emphasize the communication that organizes virtual support groups and member experiences.

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Chapter One

Sutton: I'm definitely not the same person anymore... Everyone wants the old me back, my nephews want their fun aunt back, I've tried but they can't tell it's not genuine, so everyone just avoids me, I guess it's for the best, I don't have to try so hard to put up a front, the old me died with Riley, he was the joy of my life, we were mischievous together.

Cameron: You know, if [my partner] died, no one would be telling me 3 weeks later that I should be over it. But somehow people have the gumption to do so when it's our furry loved ones

Jay: I tried counseling, but the therapist said after a few sessions that pet grief was too different than human grief and that she couldn't help me

Sam: I find pet loss to be profoundly more difficult than human loss. They love unconditionally whereas humans place conditions on their relationships

(Human) animals are social beings. Individuals use communication to understand experiences throughout their life and the lives of their loved ones. People communicate to announce exciting changes, to organize meaning when their lives are in flux, and to understand identities throughout life's moments—good and bad. Regarding the latter, communication is integral to processing, interpreting, and moving beyond loss and suffering (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2005). Death and grief are socially constructed experiences (Charmaz, 1980; Doka, 1989) that often cause equivocality, prompting individuals to use communication to seek care and support, feel connected with deceased loved ones, and even (re)construct identities (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Thus, communication is the essence of more than just lived experiences; communication organizes meaning beyond corporeal existences and continuously organizes our becoming social worlds (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Nicotera, 2020a).

Communication is especially necessary to organize understandings of losses that are not understood by society or supported by workplaces, family, or friends. The quotes above illustrate individuals' struggles to understand pet loss and garner support. After losing a companion animal and disclosing grief to others, grieving caretakers often encounter communication that signals confusion, disapproval, or doubt about the bereaved caretaker's feelings (Park et al., 2021). Encountering apathetic and unsupportive communication can increase the caretaker's grief and isolate them from their perceived support networks, thereby compounding their suffering (Spain et al., 2019). Communication is then integral to individuals' sensemaking about their ostracized experience, redrafting how they understand and enact their identities, grappling with emotional displays in different contexts, and engaging with individuals and systems that marginalize their grief in the wake of their loss. The communication that bereaved individuals use to make sense of their loss, understand emerging enactments, and engage with disenfranchising discourses feeds back into organizations and their social world (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Weick, 1995), emphasizing the co-constitution of communication and organizations (Nicotera, 2020a).

This dissertation addresses how communication is central to organizing by exploring the experiences of caretakers who have lost their companion animal to understand how they make sense of dominant discourses and systems, resist colonizing discourses that perpetuate their suffering, and generate new identities and spaces that celebrate and support their authentic existences. With these goals in mind, I adopt netnographic fieldwork methods within a virtual support organization to *see* the communication that organized a virtual safe space, as well as the communication members used to organize their identities and emotions alongside their loss, their pursuit to healing, and disenfranchising discourses. In doing so, this dissertation attends to calls for engaged scholarship that connect communication theory back to sites of practice (Deetz &

Eger, 2014), as well as calls for nuanced theoretical development of communication that constitutes virtual sites (Borah, 2015; Fernback, 2007) and is exchanged across communication technologies (Ruppel, 2019).

In this introduction chapter, I first present disenfranchised loss and grieving as unique phenomena for exploring the co-constitutions at my research site—a virtual support organization—and my participants’ experiences as they grappled with their identities, the site’s discursively constituted emotion rules, and multiple external discourses. Then, I articulate overlaps between organizations and virtual communities to describe macro theoretical communication discourses underpinning this dissertation. Next, I present sensemaking as a specific theoretical frame that is noteworthy for understanding how bereaved individuals organize meaning about their identities and emotion displays following a disenfranchised loss. Finally, I conclude this introduction chapter with a preview of the remaining dissertation.

Organizing Understandings of Disenfranchised Loss

Disenfranchised grief follows losses that are not societally sanctioned or recognized as a legitimate cause of grief (Doka, 1989). Notably, anyone can experience disenfranchised grief despite their other identities. Whereas many individuals carry marginalized identity markers along with them throughout life, disenfranchised grief can present itself to anyone and at any time (Doka, 1989). Thus, disenfranchised grief can layer onto any body, making it a widespread and prevalent issue to explore (Doka, 1989; Eytsemitan, 1998; Park et al., 2021).

Disenfranchised grief and its subsequent complexities can present anytime a mourner’s relationship with the deceased, the mourner’s loss, or the mourner’s ability to grieve goes unrecognized (Doka, 1989). Individuals bereaving a disenfranchised loss can experience disenfranchisement from a variety of sources. Bereaved might experience disenfranchisement from

their loved ones (Packman et al., 2014), workplace policies (Wilson et al., 2021), and societal norms (Doka, 1989). Given the lack of support and social isolation associated with disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989), individuals who experience disenfranchised grief are largely constrained from engaging in healing and seeking relief from their suffering (Marton et al., 2020; Spain et al., 2019), which can stifle other mourning processes, such as making sense of suffering, identity, and emotions.

In this dissertation, I take up the disenfranchised loss experiences of individuals bereaving the loss of their companion animals. An estimated 68 million U.S. households care for animals (AVMA, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, n.d.), and caregivers often experience disenfranchisement following the loss of their companion animals (Park et al., 2021; Spain et al., 2019). A growing body of research attends to disenfranchised loss inputs, processes, and outputs through the unique context of individuals who have lost a companion animal and their related caregiver identity (e.g., Green et al., 2018; Marton et al., 2020; Spain et al., 2019).

Although Western society tends to celebrate human-companion animal bonds (Park et al., 2021), companion animal loss often goes unrecognized as a legitimate reason to grieve (Morris 2012; Packman et al., 2014). Grief over a companion animal is frequently not granted the same considerations or privileges involved with grieving a family member, such as having time away from work, holding memorials, or receiving social support from personal networks (Park et al., 2021). When grief regarding a companion animal is intense and the bereaved perceive they lack a geographically close support network (e.g., interpersonal connections, workplace support), they may struggle to process their grief and experience constraints to their posttraumatic growth (Spain et al., 2019). Further, disenfranchised bereaved individuals are often not granted the ability to express their emotions around others because their losses are not deemed as appropriate reasons to

grieve (Doka, 1989). Therefore, to cope with a disenfranchised loss, engage in healing, and express their authentic emotions, many disenfranchised bereaved turn to virtual support organizations, which often take the shape of text-based support groups (Park et al., 2021).

Online communities and virtual safe spaces have been explored as integral to supporting marginalized and disenfranchised communicators for several decades (Park et al., 2021). Recent scholarship demonstrates the ubiquity of online communities for making sense of marginalized experiences particularly. Scholars are increasingly exploring processes related to users forming their marginalized identities (Miller, 2016; Craig & McInroy, 2014) and accessing emotional support in virtual spaces (Park et al., 2021; Robinson & Pond, 2019), emphasizing virtual spaces as integral for many marginalized populations as they negotiate their identities (McInroy, 2020; Parsloe, 2015).

Relatedly, online communities enable bereaved to find likeness, access support, and reconcile their identities (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019). Bereaved individuals value online support groups and assign various positive attributes to online communities, including feeling similar to other community members, gaining emotional support, sharing information, remembering the deceased, and reconstructing identities (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Virtual communities are especially important for bereaved individuals who feel isolated from their geographically close support networks and unsupported at work (i.e., bereaving the loss of a companion animal; Duffey, 2005; Park et al., 2021). Bereaved caregivers often feel unable to connect with and express their authentic emotions around others after losing their companion animals, meaning virtual support organizations are integral for learning about their disenfranchised experience and engaging in support (Park et al., 2021), as well as expressing authentic emotions and (re)constructing their identities.

Recent research calls highlight the need to further understand the communicative processes involved in disenfranchising bereavement (Gilbert et al., 2021), healing from a disenfranchised loss (Park et al., 2021; Spain et al., 2019), and constituting safe spaces (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). Although virtual support organizations might enable disenfranchised bereaved individuals the ability to find likeness and engage in healing (Park et al., 2021), Robinson and Pond (2019) noted that there is much to be learned about *why* individuals attribute positive feelings to virtual support organizations and *how* healing is enacted. Thus, it is important to attend to the communication that bereaved caregivers use to grapple with their disenfranchised grief and emerging social worlds.

Before previewing my specific theoretical lenses, empirical studies, and subsequent implications, I first present a guiding organizational communication theory (i.e., the communicative constitutions of organizations (CCO); McPhee & Zaug, 2008) that calls attention to the co-constitutions between organizations (or virtual support groups) and members' communicative experiences. Given that disenfranchised loss is a socially constructed experience (Charmaz 1980; Doka, 1989) that takes and gives shape to emerging social worlds, it is pertinent to understand the various relationships between communication, members' experiences, and organized spaces. CCO theory emphasizes the discursive activities that create, maintain, and dissolve organizations (Weick, 1969) and identities (Weick, 1995), making it suitable for exploring the communication that bereaved individuals use to make sense of the disenfranchised loss of their companion animal, their ruptured caregiving identities, and their emotion displays within and outside of the virtual support space.

Theoretical Orientations for Understanding Disenfranchised Loss

Despite loss being generally regarded as a personal experience, individuals involve organizations in their grief in many ways (Eyetsemitan, 1998; Gilbert et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2021). Bereaved individuals engage with organizations to negotiate time away from work and manage their grief among coworkers (Hazen, 2009; Gilbert et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). People also involve organizations in their emotion displays and identity enactments outside of the workplace (i.e., enacting corporate and managerial perspectives; Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992), meaning organizations are woven into the fabric of Western society (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). Organizations and communication underpin our experience with grief and healing, and scholars are increasingly turning to understand the co-constitutions among organizations, emotions, and identities (Nicotera, 2020a).

Virtual support spaces, which have been demonstrated to be integral to supporting those experiencing disenfranchised grief following the loss of a companion animal (Park et al., 2021), are another type of organization individuals might involve in their grief. Virtual communities are embedded in our day-to-day experiences (Borah, 2015), and scholars have been called to further develop the underlying communication processes that occur when we engage in communication through technologies (Ruppel, 2019). Virtual community scholarship has generally followed the same broad path as organizational communication, and the two bodies of research are germane to understanding the far-reaching implications of organizational and corporate discourses that shape disenfranchised loss.

Today, the organizational communication discipline goes beyond understanding communication *within* organizations by studying communication as constitutive of organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2008; Nicotera, 2020b). In the organizational communication field,

the *communicative constitution of organizations* theory (CCO; McPhee & Zaug, 2008) reversed scholars' attention from communication as merely one activity occurring in organizations to understanding how organization happens in communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2019). Nicotera (2020a) noted, "'constitution' highlights the forming, composing, or making of something in addition to describing the phenomenon that is constituted" (pp. 3-4). In other words, communication is not a participant in organizations, rather organizations and communication are equivalents (Shoeneborn et al., 2019). CCO theory emphasizes the layered and coordinated activities that make, maintain, and dissolve organizations (Weick, 1969).

Relatedly, calls for multi-level theoretical development in online communities (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004; Fernback, 2007) are reminiscent of the relatively recent paradigmatic shift in organizational communication research that now explores how discourses (i.e., talk and text) are constitutive forces of organizations, which, in turn, comprise the ways social actors communicate. Organizational and virtual community scholars alike go beyond looking at communication contained within an organization by exploring how communication is integral to forming an organization, a virtual community, and, relevant to this dissertation, virtual safe spaces. Thus, CCO provides a framework and focused lens that illuminates the co-constitution of a virtual support group and its members' experiences.

I explicate the overlaps between online communities and organizations here to demonstrate how the two bodies of literature can inform one another, as well as guide theoretical development about communication as foundational to experiences with grief, healing, and organizations. Just as in other organizations (e.g., workplaces), online community members organize their memberships to accomplish their goals, which both necessitates and produces communication (Nicotera, 2020a). For example, in the case of virtual safe spaces that benefit

bereaved individuals navigating the disenfranchised loss of a companion animal, members might communicatively organize the space and its norms by resisting, reifying, or reimagining societal and organizational discourses. The space, in turn, shapes members' experiences, such as how they access and experience care, express or suppress their emotions, and how they make sense of their identities around similar others. Thus, bereaved individuals' experiences and the virtual safe space are *co-constituted*.

Guided by CCO theoretical assumptions (McPhee & Zaug, 2008), I attend to virtual support spaces that are discursively organized to support disenfranchised loss, which is a noteworthy extension to uncovering the mutually constitutive communicative forces that create, sustain, evolve, and dissolve (virtual) organizations. Applying CCO theory to online community research contributes theory that 1) recognizes communication is wholly constitutive of online communities, 2) emphasizes contextualist over structuralist thinking, and 3) disrupts prevailing temptations to take micro-level positions (McPhee & Zaug, 2008). Applying CCO theory to an exploration of a virtual community and community members' experiences responds to calls for understanding the communication that underpins organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2008; Nicotera, 2020b; Weick, 1969) and communication technology (Ruppel, 2019). Although my dissertation is broadly guided by CCO theory (McPhee & Zaug, 2008), Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory is particularly useful for exploring how individuals communicatively enact their experiences (i.e., identities and emotions) and environments (i.e., a virtual support group) following a disenfranchised loss.

Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory calls scholars to attend to the spaces in between experiencing a critical moment or change (i.e., disenfranchised loss), using communication to interpret paths forward to reduce knowledge gaps, and discursively constituting their social

worlds. Sensemaking aligns with CCO theory (McPhee & Zaug, 2008) by describing the social and systematic bracketing of cues within a sensible environment—discursively taking shape from and giving shape to structures—as individuals grapple with their equivocal experience, understand plausible interpretations of their enactments, and retain information for future use (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Weick (1995) noted that “people [create] their own environments and these environments then [constrain] their actions” (p. 31), which aptly summarizes the co-constitution between enactments and environments. A central question to sensemaking theory is “how they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Following the disenfranchised loss of a companion animal, for instance, individuals might use communication to interpret and understand their equivocality, enact their becoming identities, and discursively constitute environments that enable them space to perform such enactments.

Although the theory was formalized in Weick’s (1995) monograph, organizational communication scholars have been grappling with sensemaking theoretical processes since the 1970s (Anderson, 2006). Sensemaking theory has been widely used in organizational communication research to understand how members use their communication to organize meaning during times of flux (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick et al., 2005). However, individuals make sense of their feelings, actions, and identities beyond workplaces (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Rifortiate & Sepúlveda, 2021), and recent scholarship has turned to sensemaking within virtual support spaces for individuals experiencing the equivocal triggers of grief (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019).

Loss often causes individuals to feel stripped of their identities (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2005) and as if they must suppress their suffering and emotion displays around others and in organized

spaces (Blank et al., 2008; Gilbert et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2021). Thus, loss triggers bereaved individuals to experience a knowledge gap (Weick, 1995) between 1) who they have been and who they are becoming (Robinson & Pond, 2019) and 2) the emotions they have, when and among whom they should express their feelings, and how they should alter their authentic emotions (Gross, 1998). Disenfranchised bereaved individuals are particularly susceptible to experiencing knowledge gaps given that their grief is not sanctioned by society (Doka, 1989; Hazen, 2009), they do not have a collective network to make sense of their loss and emerging identities (Park et al., 2021), and they might lack prior experience navigating disenfranchising discourses that would otherwise be helpful to reduce their equivocality.

The loss of a companion animal can be a life-altering event that ruptures caregivers' sense of self and prompts them to take stock of their loss, reflect on their identities, and redraft how they see themselves in the future (Weick et al., 2005). Given that many bereaved individuals find value in online communities (Park et al., 2021) and utilize online communities to communicatively (re)construct their identities and sense of self (Robinson & Pond, 2019), it is relevant to understand how bereaved individuals communicate about their ruptured identities and communicatively (re)construct their sense of self around similar others. Following the loss of a companion animal, disenfranchised bereaved individuals may benefit from online support groups as they make sense of their experience because their identities are vulnerable and online communication may be less threatening (Park et al., 2021). Further, disenfranchised bereaved individuals may learn from site facilitators and other visitors who attempt to guide them back to their desired identity states and provide the social validation necessary for new identities to take root (Ashforth et al., 2008). Thus, there are dynamic communicative relationships to explore within virtual spaces for disenfranchised bereaved individuals and attending to these

relationships contributes to theory regarding how individuals navigate grief and healing in online spaces (Robinson & Pond, 2019).

Furthermore, emotions are another knowledge gap in the case of disenfranchised bereaved individuals. After individuals experience an equivocal moment, such as the loss of their companion animal, they likely contend with 1) the feelings they have, 2) the emotions they display, and 3) when and where they can display their emotions (Gross, 1998). The way individuals are socialized to experience and display emotions is, in large part, related to corporate and managerial expectations, which are classed, gendered (Hochschild, 1983), and racialized (Collins, 1983; Gist-Mackey, 2018). Rules that shape emotion displays are experienced differently among marginalized communicators who necessarily navigate difficult terrain as they consider their emotions alongside corporate structures that privilege white and patriarchal norms (Blithe, 2015; Collins, 1998; Gist-Mackey, 2018). It follows that individuals navigating grief following a disenfranchised loss likely grapple with their emotion displays alongside corporate and societal discourses that privilege normative experiences and prioritize rationality over emotionality (Deetz, 1992) within their workplaces (Blank et al., 2008; Gilbert et al., 2021), which can significantly and negatively impact organizations and organizational members (Gilbert et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). Relatedly, managerial emotion discourses extend beyond the workplace (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and likely shape how disenfranchised bereaved individuals enact emotions in a virtual support group and discursively constitute emotion rules that resist or reify these managerial discourses

Rules that shape workplace emotion displays likely give shape to communicatively constituted virtual spaces that benefit individuals experiencing a disenfranchised loss. Emotion norms and expectations that derive from corporate and managerial values are far-reaching

(Deetz, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1992). Despite virtual support spaces being agentively and communicatively constituted to celebrate the emotionality of life (Denker & Dougherty, 2013), virtual care organizations likely contend with many of the same colonizing discourses that constitute workplace norms and disenfranchise animal companion loss. As such, it is pertinent to understand how individuals managing disenfranchised grief navigate their emotions alongside corporate and societal discourses at work (Gilbert et al., 2021) and within the virtual safe space to provide practical guidance for supporting individuals bereaving the loss of their companion animals across contexts.

Taken as a whole, although scholars have associated sensemaking with online support groups, there is much to be learned about sensemaking following a disenfranchised loss, how sensemaking organizes identities in virtual support groups, and how individuals grapple with multiple disenfranchising cues as they make sense of their emotions and virtual environment. Applying a Weickian (1995) lens specifically and a CCO framework (McPhee & Zaug, 2008) broadly, I explore the communication that organizes virtual spaces and constitutes members' identities by attending to the enactments among site facilitators, site visitors, and the virtual structure. Specifically, I explore how bereaved individuals navigated two salient knowledge gaps—their identities and emotions—through grappling with multiple disenfranchising discourses, interacting with the virtual support group and its members, and enacting their becoming social worlds. In the following section, I preview the remaining chapters of my dissertation, including two discrete empirical research manuscripts (chapters two and three) and a discussion chapter (chapter four) that unifies my empirical findings, implications, and future research.

Dissertation Preview

Having reviewed sensitizing concepts and theories relevant to disenfranchised loss and virtual social support groups, it is important to understand how the interrelated topics will be utilized in my dissertation. I conceptualize virtual communities as a unique type of organization for extending communication theory and exploring the extent to which virtual sites and member communication processes (i.e., sensemaking about identity and emotions) are co-constituted. To this end, my dissertation broadly explores how individuals make sense of their identities and emotions in an online care organization following a disenfranchised loss. As part of my efforts to support disenfranchised bereaved individuals and enfranchise animal companion loss, I present two discrete—albeit related—qualitative empirical studies in the following chapters, followed by a fourth chapter that robustly connects my empirical findings and proposes future research.

In chapter two I present my first empirical study, which extends sensebreaking (Ashforth et al., 2008), sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, 442), and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) theories to virtual support groups by exploring how bereaving site visitors and facilitators communicate about their experiences and (re)construct their identities. Specifically, I present findings that explicate how bereaved site visitors recognized, enacted, and made sense of their ruptured caregiving identities, as well as detail how organizational members disrupted ruptured identity enactments and primed sensemakers to envision paths beyond their ruptured identity states. In doing so, I offer theoretical and practical implications regarding how organizations may engage in sensebreaking and sensegiving communication to realign members' personal identities rather than strip them away and replace them with pertinent organizational material (Ashforth et al., 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Further, I call scholars to attend to sensebreaking enactments as a process rather than solely as a trigger for motivating further identity exploration

(Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000). Additionally, I nuance sensemaking processes by considering the ways technologies and virtual sites might enable and constrain sensemaking. In doing so, I consider how my findings inform practical recommendations for virtual communities and site facilitators supporting disenfranchised identity (re)construction.

In chapter three, I attend to recent calls for understanding how to resist colonizing discourses to communicatively constitute “safe” emotional spaces (Denker & Dougherty, 2013) and how to support disenfranchised bereaved individuals at work (Gilbert et al, 2021). To do so, I explore disenfranchised bereaved individuals’ communication in a virtual support group regarding their feelings and emotion displays to understand how they discursively constituted their emotion rules and enactments alongside disenfranchising discourses in their personal interactions, at work, and within the virtual support group. Given that managerial discourses are far-reaching (Deetz, 1992) and constrain bereavement and related emotions for losses of all types (Wilson et al., 2021), I offer practical recommendations for supporting disenfranchised bereaved individuals from various standpoints, including workplaces, managers, virtual sites, and virtual site facilitators. Further, I call scholars to attend to the transitory disenfranchising events that trigger sensemaking about emotions in addition to considering the ways that sensemaking triggers emotions (Weick et al., 2005; Maitlis et al., 2013), emphasizing the co-constitutions among emotions, sensemaking, and intersecting identities.

Finally, my fourth chapter offers a robust discussion that connects my two studies and related theoretical frames. In this chapter, I consider my findings in relation to practical, methodological, and theoretical implications. In doing so, I offer opportunities for continuing to advocate for enfranchising companion animal loss—among other disenfranchised loss types—through proposing future research into emotions and identities within and outside of

communicatively constituted virtual safe spaces. Further, I consider how scholars might continue exploring disenfranchised loss and virtual spaces through other research methods and relevant organizational lenses, such as compassionate care and burnout.

Chapter Two

“Our world revolved around him, now what?”: Organizing Meaning and (Re)Constructing Identities in Virtual Spaces Following Disenfranchised Pet Loss

An estimated 68 million American households care for companion animals (AVMA, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, n.d.). The most liberal estimates by the American Pet Products Association (2021) suggested a significant increase in pet caregivers between 1988 and 2020, estimating that 70% of U.S. households include pets. Millions of Americans share the experience of caring for one or more pets, giving meaning to the phrase dogs are a “man’s best friend.” The intense bond between humans and animals is further signified through the ways people have mourned and memorialized pets throughout history (Mangum, 2007). Losing a pet is often accompanied by powerful emotions, guilt, and rituals to fill a new silence. Some caregivers even experience more grief over the loss of a pet than human companions (Mangum, 2007; Park et al., 2021).

Grief associated with pet loss has been described as “disenfranchised” and especially difficult because the bereaved may disconnect from others and experience a sense of isolation (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Archer and Winchester’s (1994) research examining pet loss found that over half of their bereaved participants reported being preoccupied with thoughts of their pets, a quarter experienced anxiety or depression, and many reported an absence of social support. Following a disenfranchised loss, individuals are particularly susceptible to experiencing disconnections from others, disconnections from themselves, and a sense of isolation (Duffey, 2005; Park et al., 2021). Clinical health professionals are attending to the niche experience of pet loss and searching for ways to support bereaved caregivers (Duffey, 2005; Hess-Holden et al.,

2017), and many note that online communities are promising avenues to seek support (Park et al., 2021).

As those who have lost a pet embark on the oft lingering and communicative grief processes, they may be well-served by online support groups. Online groups can enable the disenfranchised bereaved to access similar individuals, gain emotional support, share information, and (re)construct their identity (Robinson & Pond, 2019). In support groups, the bereaved can benefit from talking about the death, discussing positive memories, redefining relationships, and making meaning of their future selves (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004). Bereaved individuals have assigned various positive attributes to online communities, including identifying with other community members (Chang & Bazarova, 2016; Van Oerle et al., 2018), engaging in productive self-management work (Allen et al., 2016), and experiencing less loneliness and isolation (Bacon et al., 2000; Shaw & Grant, 2002). Considering this research, virtual support groups are a fruitful context to explore disenfranchised grieving and the ways that communication gives meaning to help individuals negotiate new identities.

Further, the communication of virtual support group mentors is important to study because these interactions are integral to healing (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Facilitators can help grieving site visitors make connections between past experiences and new understanding, provide coping resources, and potentially improve outcomes among individuals with stigmatized experiences (McInroy, 2020). Through communication, site facilitators and visitors organize their disenfranchised experiences and create new ways for the bereaved to understand who they were alongside who they are becoming considering their loss.

Taken as a whole, millions of Americans care for companion animals and inevitably experience a loss, triggering an equivocal moment during which the bereaved grapple with who

they were, the grief and loss that they experience, and who they are becoming. Given that pet loss has been described as a disenfranchised experience (Doka, 1989; Duffey, 2005; Park et al., 2021) and individuals grieving the loss of their pet and their past selves often turn to virtual communities to make sense of their experience alongside similar others (Park et al., 20221), it is pertinent to understand how bereaved virtual community members use communication to organize and enact identity work and healing. Therefore, in this study, I utilize qualitative netnographic methods alongside sensemaking theoretical concepts to understand how virtual communities organize meanings and (re)construct identities. In the following section, I explain the connections between identity and sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995) as a lens to examine communication exchanges in a virtual support group among grieving site visitors and facilitators.

Making Sense of a Disenfranchised Loss

Individuals bereaving the loss of a pet engage in identity work as they make sense of who they are without their companion, a process known as identity reconstruction (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Individual identity work is an iterative process that cannot be explained without group memberships and social practices (Tajfel, 1978). *Social identity* relates to the “aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself belonging” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Emotional involvement with groups is integral to how individuals define themselves. For instance, an individual might identify as a “dog dad” informed by companionship with his pet dog and their group membership at the local dog park.

Personal identities, on the other hand, regard “a person’s unique sense of self” (Postmes & Jetten, 2006, p. 260) and are made up of several attributes, including traits, abilities, and interests. Whereas social identities are distinguished by groups, personal identities are unique to

individuals and distinguished between individuals (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For instance, although many individuals care for animals in their homes or visit the dog park, not all caretakers identify their relationship with animals as a companionship nor see themselves as a caregiver.

In both personal and social identity, identity is not stable; rather identities shift as individuals' self-image and memberships change. For instance, losing a pet might break an individual's sense of personal and social identity, motivating them to understand "who they have been" and "who they will become." Sudden changes often trigger individuals to actively engage in cognitive processes involving communication and reflection to understand their experience in relation to their future self, known as sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Karl Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory offers a promising framework to explore coping, and ample research places sensemaking at the intersection of communicating about and recovering from a critical loss (for review, see Park, 2010). Sensemaking is a retrospective process during which an individual communicatively assigns meaning to a particular experience, such as a critical incident or troubling loss. Weick (1995) noted that sensemaking involves creating and communicating cognitive structures to shift our perception of events from incomprehensible into comprehensible. The phrase "how can I know what I think until I see what I say?" is a useful heuristic for explaining sensemaking (Weick, 1988, p. 307).

Theoretically, three points comprise the sensemaking process: enacting, selecting, and retaining (Weick, 1995). First, sensemaking occurs when a series of organizational processes are turned into words and salient categories through a process of bracketing (enacting); second, organizational members make meaning of their enacted environment using pre-existing interpretive schemes and communication (selecting); and third, individuals store their communication and editing for future use (retaining; Weick, 1995). Stored interpretations are

known as *causal maps* (Weick, 1969), which feed back into global experiences that shape enacting and highlight sensemaking's ongoing nature. Albeit often subliminal, sensemaking plays a central role in the determination of human behavior (Weick et al., 2005) and is the primary site of identity formation and action (Mills, 2003).

The sensemaking process takes many forms, such as talking to another individual, sharing experiences in a group, and even writing about traumatic experiences (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988). Communicating—talking or writing—about a critical loss, including the events leading up to and following the loss, can help the bereaved rationalize their grief. Regarding pet loss specifically, Clements and colleagues (2003) suggested several communicative interventions for ritualizing and coping with pet loss, including writing a letter expressing one's feelings for the pet, holding a memorial for a pet, and creating a personal scrapbook for the pet.

Communicating about an experience not only helps individuals understand and find meaning in the experience (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988), but can also lead to a reconstructed identity (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Identity is not stable, rather identity is an ongoing, social process (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Sensemaking theorizes that individuals communicatively interpret and assign meaning to a change or unexpected event in relation to their past experiences (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking organizes flux during organizational change and crisis (Weick et al., 2005), as well as personal experiences, such as losing a loved one or learning about a health diagnosis (for reviews, see Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019). For example, Cooper (2021) demonstrated the various ways individuals integrated a caregiver role into their identity by writing in an online forum about their experiences providing care for family members. Although sensemaking processes are ever-present (Weick et al., 2005), significant moments in an individual's life, such as a health concern or troubling loss,

can constitute a *sensebreaking* event that triggers a knowledge gap and requires significant re-negotiation of meaning.

Whereas sensemaking describes attempts at reducing a knowledge gap, sensebreaking describes individuals' efforts to accentuate a gap, thereby motivating further identity exploration (Ashforth et al., 2008). I contend that loss and its subsequent grief are an impetus for engaging in sensebreaking communication throughout which the bereaved struggle to find meaning and dwell in the in-between space as they seek to answer, "who have I been" and "who will I become?" Regarding identity reconstruction following a sensebreaking event, the more appropriate sensemaking heuristic is "how can I know who [I am] becoming until I see what [I] say and do with [my] actions" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). As characteristics that shape an individual's social and personal identities fluctuate, the stability of their self-image may decrease while their receptiveness to new meanings increases. Through communicating (i.e., enacting, selecting, and retaining information; Weick, 1995) with similar others, bereaved individuals make sense of their loss, reflect on their past, and redraft how they will define themselves in the future (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, "similar others" are more than an important component of experiencing support (Robinson & Pond, 2019), they also shape sensemaking efforts.

Sensebreaking communication following triggering events (i.e., disenfranchised loss) is often trailed by sensegiving communication, where an organization and its members attempt to guide the "meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Sensegivers attempt to guide sensemakers to the desired identity state and provide the social validation necessary for new identities to take root (Ashforth et al., 2008). Sensegiving has been studied in various workplace contexts (e.g., white- and blue-collar settings; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000); this study extends research on sensegiving to

a virtual organization to better understand how sensemaking functions in digital spaces for disenfranchised loss.

Virtual support spaces are particularly integral as supplemental resources for many marginalized populations (e.g., sexual and gender minorities or individuals with niche interests and experiences; McInroy, 2020; Parsloe, 2015). Supportive online communities enable disenfranchised bereaved to find other individuals experiencing similar challenges and access support despite feeling isolated from their geographically close network (Eason, 2021; Park et al., 2021). In online spaces, peer mentors and other site visitors can be particularly effective for co-constructing knowledge and support regarding stigmatized experiences (Cantrell et al., 2010).

Site facilitators, acting as sensegivers (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), can help site visitors make connections between past experiences and new understanding, provide resources for coping, and potentially improve outcomes among individuals with stigmatized experiences (McInroy, 2020). In other words, as site visitors actively make meaning by communicating with others, they are also given information about themselves and the experiences that shape their identity. Dailey (2016) demonstrated that technology and organizational members shape workers' knowledge and organizational identity, yet additional research is necessary to understand the dynamic relationships between virtual community, community site visitors, and site visitors' attempts at sensebreaking and sensegiving following a loss. Further, although the relationship between online mentorship and site visitors' outcomes (e.g., wellbeing) is well established (DuBois et al., 2011; Kohlstadt et al., 2015; McInroy, 2020), exploring site facilitators as sensebreakers and sensegivers further develops an understanding of sensemaking communication in online spaces.

Taken as a whole, organizational scholars have applied Weick's sensemaking theory in a variety of contexts to understand how communication organizes meaning, but online community scholars have just begun to understand how virtual spaces shape sensemaking processes (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Sensemaking, a highly communicative and ongoing process, is a valuable tool for understanding grief, healing, and identity developments following a life-altering loss. Despite the theorized importance of identity shifts (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), additional research is necessary to understand identity shifts as a processual component of sensemaking (Neimeyer et al., 2006; Park, 2010), as well as how sensemaking takes shape online and among others in virtual spaces (Robinson & Pond, 2019). As such, I seek to understand how the bereaved enact sensemaking communicatively through sensebreaking and sensegiving in online spaces to understand plausible interpretations of and heal from their disenfranchised loss.

RQ: How is identity (re)construction communicatively facilitated through sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking in online disenfranchised loss grief support groups?

Methodology for Understanding Sensemaking and Identity (Re)Construction

Qualitative methods are useful in bridging the scholarship on sensemaking and disenfranchised grief in the context of online support groups. Netnography is particularly well-suited for exploring personally sensitive topics, stigmatized phenomena, and marginalized experiences (Costello et al., 2017; Kozinets, 2010; 2015), such as disenfranchised identity work within online support groups. Netnography is a term to explain the ethnographic work of digital sites. Whereas ethnography is the study of a cultural system from which people glean resources, interpretive strategies, and identity (Spradley, 1979), netnography is an interpretive method that involves researchers immersing themselves in a virtual site—referred to as fieldwork—to understand embodied practices and meanings of a particular culture (Dirksen et al., 2010;

Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998). Therefore, netnography offers a beneficial approach germane to my research question.

Study Site and Members

To robustly explore sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking processes in virtual spaces, I collected and analyzed five months of netnographic data from a text-based virtual support group for individuals grieving the loss of a pet, referred to as Pawsitive Outlook¹. Before collecting data, I sought Institutional Review Board approval for my research protocol and received clearance to proceed. Pawsitive Outlook's chat room was publicly available for anyone to view, although individuals were required to create a username and account to engage with other site visitors through the discussion. The chatroom met three times weekly for one-hour sessions and was led by several recurring facilitators. The facilitator's role commonly involved welcoming the visitors, sharing ground rules, inviting members to share their stories, helping individuals understand their loss, and wrapping up the conversation. Once the hour elapsed, the facilitators shared the same scripted message inviting members to visit the next chat and reminding them that they could call or email the organization or a suicide hotline, if necessary. All chat room messages were text-based. However, site visitors frequently posted photos of their pets, distributed links to external resources, and shared emojis and emoticons.

On average, eight to 12 members shared their stories in the tri-weekly chat room on a given evening. For some, participation involved recounting events surrounding a recent loss, while others wrote about grief ensuing over a year or more as well as anticipatory grief. Facilitators encouraged participation at the beginning of the chats by asking site visitors to share how they were feeling or information about their experience, but the conversation quickly

¹ Site and member names included in this study are pseudonyms.

evolved into more natural exchanges within the first few minutes. A sidebar listed information about who was present in the chat. Generally, most site visitors contributed to the discussion and shared their experiences; however, some users opted out of participating. Many site visitors were regulars and appeared to develop close relationships with others, which allowed me to explore how their communication and sensemaking unfolded over a prolonged period.

In total, I encountered 98 site visitors and eight site facilitators throughout my netnographic observations. Site visitors joined the chat ranging from once to 33 times ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 6.30$), which demonstrates the tenuous membership balance between veterans and newcomers. Specifically, 57 individuals joined the chat just once and 41 individuals were recurrent members. However, for this research and understanding the communication exchanged within the virtual support group, I use the term “members” to describe individuals who actively engaged in the chat by posting. I did not place limitations on the number of posts, interactions, or visits necessary to deem a participant a member; all individuals who posted at least one message were included for analysis given that their communication contributed to the virtual organization. Site facilitators were relatively stable and facilitated the chat ranging from once to 13 times ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 4.98$). The organization encouraged members not to share personal information; consequently, demographic information is not included.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

While observing the chat, I typed fieldnotes focused on the interactions among and between site visitors and the chat facilitator(s). At the end of the hour, I archived the chat room transcripts for coding. In total, I collected 1,221 pages of site transcripts for analysis throughout 5 months (42 hours) of netnographic observations.

To manage such a large data set, NVivo software was used to code and organize information. Analysis began with primary-cycle coding (Tracy, 2020), which involved open coding individual exemplars, resulting in 50 densely populated codes, such as *framing loss*, *comparing grief*, and *sharing strategies*. I reached code saturation (Hennick et al., 2017) after two and a half months of observing—midway through my collected data—at which point I realized that the codebook stabilized, and no new codes were generated. At this point, I continued primary-cycle coding by simultaneously coding individual exemplars and lumping larger swaths of data with a code to capture the narrative dialogue that shaped my codes and members’ experiences. Coding all five months of data also helped me better understand the conceptual dimensions of my concrete codes, allowing for deeper meaning saturation. My primary coding cycle was iterative and reflexive (Tracy, 2020), meaning my emergent primary-cycle codes pointed me toward exploring meanings related to sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking processes among the support group members.

Next, I engaged in secondary-cycle coding by rereading my data and codes to identify relationships, organize, and thematize the primary cycle codes into broader conceptual categories (Tracy, 2020). At this stage, I utilized the constant comparative coding method (Charmaz, 2014; Tracy, 2020) to understand how codes were overlapping or distinct from one another, which helped me fracture or group together various codes. Additionally, I made note of member cases during my secondary-cycle coding to identify salient moments and shifts in their trajectories throughout the five months. For example, Cameron moved from enacting her ruptured identity (“I held in a lot yesterday but at night I just broke down. It’s almost as if grief is an urn that fills up with our tears inside until it just overflows”), to enacting plausible interpretations and paths forward (“we started walking yesterday on the same route we would have taken with Aston, so it

has been nice to do that with him by our side (spiritually) it is a nice way to connect with him”), to enacting a caregiving identity through offering strategies for incoming members (“one thing I learned about guilt is trying to seek forgiveness from your baby. after everything that happened, would they forgive you? and the answer is yes. all of their lives we forgave them and they forgave us”).

Throughout primary- and secondary-cycle coding, I engaged in memo-writing (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2021) by making notes of emergent themes, early connections between codes and extant literature, and unique cases. Memo topics included writing about my emergent codes and how they clustered together (e.g., the codes *memorializing*, *coping*, *triggering*, and *macro discourses*, clustered into *normalizing disenfranchised loss*), writing about when members’ identity enactments shifted (e.g., moving from enacting the bereaved caregiver to acting as a support facilitator), and reflecting on communication that was used to break and give sense to members (e.g., when facilitators and members used communication to affirm new plausible enactments, such as encouraging member to reframe their understanding of rescuing another companion animal as “care” rather than as abandoning their care for their deceased pets).

Next, I engaged in Tracy’s (2020) concept mapping process, during which I illustrated relationships among my data categories. Using pen and paper, I visually organized conceptual categories and utilized shapes and lines to demonstrate the relationships among concepts. For instance, the codes *understanding grief*, *comparing grief*, and *communicating with pets* coalesced to form the theme *sensebreaking talk*.

After conceptualizing my initial themes, I data-conferenced (Braithwaite et al., 2017) with colleagues familiar with my research context yet unfamiliar with my data and results. After data conferencing, I reconsidered the overall narrative and focused my results on sensebreaking,

sensegiving, and sensemaking discourses to better answer my research question and provide theoretical implications for virtual organizing. Finally, I named and defined my themes, selected representative vignettes, and wrote up my results, which are presented next.

Discursively Rupturing and Reconstructing Identities Following a Triggering Loss

My research question asked, *how is identity (re)construction communicatively facilitated through sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking in online disenfranchised loss grief support groups?* To answer this question, I present themes related to sensebreaking and sensegiving communication which coalesced to discursively enact ruptured and revised identity narratives. First, I present the theme “sensebreaking talk,” which captures the discourses the bereaved chat members utilized to recognize their equivocality and enact their ruptured identities. Chat members communicatively engaged in sensebreaking, discursively stripping away their identities, as they anticipated losses, reminisced about their routines, and enacted guilt. Next, I review the theme “secondary sensebreaking,” which captures the sensebreaking discourses utilized by site facilitators and other site members to communicatively break ruptured identity enactments. Finally, in the last theme, “making sense of future selves,” I detail how site members grappled with plausible courses of action that were proposed through others’ sensegiving communication. The virtual care organization members discursively reconstructed their identities by reframing caregiving, folding their loss into their overall identity narrative, and constructing an organizational caregiving identity.

Sensebreaking Talk

Members’ initial communication in the virtual support group was generally organized around enacting and interpreting their ruptured identities (i.e., sensebreaking), which emphasized ways communication was used to perform and understand identity following a triggering event.

The following vignette illustrates several implicit discourses that constitute the vulnerability of caregivers' identities following the loss of their companions. The intense bond between the caregiver and their companion, the social isolation, and the loss culminated in disenfranchised bereaved identity enactments that were distinct from—and ruptured out of—caregiving identities.

Olivia: I think I am also struggling with what is my purpose now. I am 72 years old and have been a caregiver a long time.²

Kris: same here. kind of like 'what now?'

Oliver: We cared for Miller so intently for so long, I don't know how to stop.

Kris: that lost feeling

Cameron: All I agree I miss having someone to care for, we have no other pets

Oliver: Our world revolved around him, now what? A huge void in our lives

Kris: To be honest, I have been treating life afterward as a prison sentence....just doing my time until I can see them again. not healthy but it's where Im at anyway

Cameron: I think I am getting to the point where people are sick of hearing about my grief not on here, but friends/family

Throughout the data, chat narratives demonstrated that members' identities were, in large part, constituted alongside their pets and performed as caregivers. Much of the chats contended with Olivia's question, "what is my purpose?". Members' communication functioned to emphasize their perceived disconnect between who they were (e.g., "a caregiver", "our world revolved around him"), who they are (e.g., occupying "a huge void"), and who they are becoming in the wake of losing their companion animal (e.g., someone who "people are getting

² Chat narratives were derived directly from site transcripts. Although identifying information (e.g., names, locations, veterinarian information) was altered to protect site members, the language—including grammar, punctuation, and emphases—used in this manuscript is consistent with the chat to help readers *see* the communication that organized members' identity enactments.

sick of hearing about [their] grief”). Their losses not only triggered sensemaking about plausible interpretations of their equivocality (e.g., “I don’t know how to stop caring”, “now what?”, “that lost feeling”), but also prompted sensebreaking *enactments* of their ruptured identities. For example, Kris enacted her ruptured identity by explaining she was serving a “prison sentence”, demonstrating the knowledge gap experienced between interpreting *who she was* with and without her pet. A prison sentence was a fitting analogy for emphasizing the knowledge gap members communicated about, existed in, and enacted through sensebreaking discourses as they made sense of their disenfranchised experiences. The absence of caregiving was often metaphorically compared to the end of an era, an experience, or a “life”, and members felt confined to an unfamiliar and ruptured identity. Members described feeling imprisoned as they explored how the loss of their companion animals and known identities were going to be folded into their overall identity narrative, enacting their “loss”, “void”, and “lack of purpose”.

This theme encapsulates the communication members used to enact their ruptured identities and dwell in the gaps between who they were and who they were becoming as they made sense of their disenfranchised experience. As site members struggled to organize understandings of their becoming selves (i.e., sensemaking), they simultaneously emphasized their identity gaps by enacting their ruptured identities (i.e., sensebreaking). Members’ identity work and sensemaking were messy; throughout the chats and over time, members oscillated between sensemaking and sensebreaking communication to enact, emphasize, and reduce their identity gaps as they grappled with their loss and becoming selves. As demonstrated below, sensebreaking enactments were organized by discursively anticipating and experiencing loss, reminiscing about routines that linked their identities to caretaking, and reflecting on their caretaking actions before their pets’ passing.

Anticipating and Experiencing Loss

Many members joined the group shortly after learning about their pet having a chronic illness and before their pet's passing. As members grappled with having just days or weeks left with their companion, they also signaled that they felt almost immediately stripped from their sense of self. In one instance, Lynn described,

My girl will be 10 next week. Stopped eating. Diagnosed with a very aggressive advanced stage cancer of her liver & spleen. Less than a month at best. Have to plan for her peaceful moment. But I can't stop crying. She's part of me. I wish i could be stronger . . . Her parting is killing my soul. It is life changing. She & I are bonded and like the anime and human version of each other. True meaning of loyal best friend. Can't imagine what it will be like without her.

Lynn's disclosure aptly situated loss (and anticipating loss) as life-changing and demonstrated that her companion was a salient part of her identity. Lynn describes her loss as detrimental to her soul and sense of self, and she articulates the search for meaning that was ever-present in the chat even before her pet passed away.

The intense bond between the chat members and their pets was evident in every session as members shared dialogue about who they were and how they felt (or anticipated feeling) without their companion, which coalesced to mark identity ruptures between who they were as pet caregivers and who they became or would become as a bereaved. Whereas Lynn's questioning about life without her companion functioned as sensemaking about her becoming self, the framing of her companion animal's untimely parting as "killing her soul" and familiar sense of self functioned as sensebreaking. This framing emphasized Lynn's ruptured identity as she tried to understand and anticipated her physical loss. Members regularly enacted their ruptured identities through communicating about the absence of caregiving (i.e., sensebreaking communication) and subsequently searched to reduce their knowledge gaps through sensemaking.

Specifically, members communicated that they felt as if they no longer understood who they were, what hobbies they enjoyed, and how to navigate day-to-day routines without their pets alongside them. Days after losing their dogs, Kirsty and Cameron commiserated about their shared experience of feeling as if their sense of self had been stripped from them and their communication functioned to discursively enact their ruptured identities and embody their loss.

Kirsty: I broke down yesterday because for almost 14 years I was Ron's mom and best friend, and I love getting my nails done and yesterday I had to take off my acrylics and I just sobbed like who am I? I am not Ron's owner anymore, I don't have my nails done how I have had for years and I just feel like I am not myself

Cameron: Kirsty, I know, a weird thought I had right after he passed last week was that I have a "world's best dog mom" mug and how I wasn't anymore.

Kirsty's and Cameron's experiences demonstrate the constitutive nature of identity markers, such as symbolic objects and companions, to members' sense of self. Kirsty's loss of Ron was coupled with her stripping her corporeal self of her acrylic nails to reveal another person or identity, one that she had not known for years. Similarly, Cameron's loss provoked her to take stock of her personal identity and objects that symbolized her caretaker identity. In many cases, members' enacted identity ruptures through communicating about personal effects, including their physical appearance and their pets' belongings, which served as constant reminders of their dual losses—their pet and former identity. As members made sense of their losses and evolving identities by taking stock of their physical caregiving manifestations (e.g., a mug in the kitchen cabinet, the untouched dog bed next to the couch, a cat laser lifelessly resting on the coffee table), they folded the symbols into their identity enactments which symbolically and discursively demonstrated their emptiness.

Reminiscing about Routines

Members also enacted their bereaved caregiving identities through the absence of routines and first encounters without their companions. Routines included day-to-day caregiving identity enactments, and the absence of those routines functioned as constant reminders of members' ruptured identities and sensebreaking gaps.

Sutton: Riley was diabetic as well. Is it weird that I miss giving insulin shots

Elaine: Sutton, I just miss the entire routine. Indigo was my wake up call, the dinner-maker reminder, and the bedtime ritual. I have woken up to him barking (not really him, just my mind) in the middle of the night.

Cameron: same here. I still fill his water bowl up, but no pushiness for his meal times, no walks around the neighborhood

Rory: ...I took care of Hanky 24/7. IV Fluids, meds at different hours, special foods. I worked from home and he was my priority. 10 straight months of doing IV fluids and treatments and then when he passed, I had to get used to what they call a new normal. I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt useless. I didn't want a new normal.

Throughout the chats, members situated themselves in tension with different identity markers. In many cases, routines served as emotional reminders of lapsed identities, whereas, in other cases, enacting routines were utilized as coping mechanisms to bring members closer to their caretaking identity. In both cases, routines underscored a breaking point and prolonged ruptured identity enactments as members engaged in sensemaking about who they were becoming.

Interestingly, Rory described "getting used to" two new normals in her comment. On the one hand, Rory adopted more caretaking responsibilities through administering IV fluids, scheduling medications, and offering special food to Hanky. Rory described this first new normal as an all-encompassing and welcomed responsibility, which is communicated to the group as a positive experience that increased the salience of her caregiving identity. Rory then described another identity shift following Hanky's death that is discursively symbolized by an absence of the routine she developed as a caregiver. The latter is communicated as an

unwelcomed “new normal” and, consequently, as a new and ruptured identity that emerged from her loss and former caregiving identity.

Thus, as members searched for meaning in their loss, attempted to reduce their equivocality, and struggled to incorporate their past and emerging identities, they engaged in sensebreaking by emphasizing their ruptured identities highlighted by a lack of routines and inconsistencies of a new normal. Chat members communicated about their caregiving identities by detailing the lengths to which they went to protect their companions from harm (e.g., providing veterinary care, adopting rigorous treatment routines), but also discursively stripped themselves from their past identities by communicating about their lapsed responsibilities and routines. Relatedly, chat members enacted their ruptured caregiving identities through reminiscing about guilt over how they enacted care for their companions when they were alive.

Enacting Guilt: Existing in Liminal Spaces

Chat members enacted their ruptured and liminal identities by questioning and problematizing their actions as potentially contributing to their pet’s death. For many, the hours or minutes leading up to their pet’s death proved to be critical moments during which the caregivers experienced fear, doubt in their decisions, and uncertainty in who they were given their actions. As the members recalled the way they behaved and felt during critical moments, they discursively performed their identity equivocality and ruptured enactments.

Anthony: Campbell passed 2 weeks ago right now...tonight’s her anniversary

Lennox: Why did Campbell die?

Anthony: Lennox I ask myself that same question...Why did she die now...why couldn’t it have been another 6 months or a year . . . The Vet told me that: She had a Grade 5 heart murmur, fluid was filling both lungs and she was suffocating with every breath. She’s a puppy mill survivor. spent the first 8 years there. I helped her get through so many medical ailments, I hate that I couldn’t get her past this one.

Peyton: Anthony, and we are certain Campbell is grateful for all of your loving care.

Anthony: Peyton, I let her down. I took her to an ER hospital and they made us wait 90 minutes...and still didn't help her. I wasted that 90 minutes while she was suffering instead of taking her to a different hospital. That's something I will NEVER forgive myself for.

Cameron: Anthony, there is no way to know what could have happened. If you had taken her to another clinic and she passed, you would have wondered if you should have stayed with the first clinic. Grief has ways of messing with our minds. I do it too

Peyton: All, yes, grief can make us irrational and confused. Then we doubt ourselves.

Dani: We all know that we loved our pets at their very last seconds of life, yet we feel guilty for choices we made.

Anthony: I'm afraid to stop feeling this kind of pain because if that happens it will mean i've somehow forgotten about her or it didn't matter that much or something i don't know...i fell like i deserve this pain for allowing her to feel more pain ...i need to feel that pain because i feel like i deserve to be punished for not doing more when I should have. Knowing where she came from I promised her I'd try my best to get her all the best life had to offer.

Anthony's exemplars emphasize the guilt and shame that was regularly present in the sessions, which complicated individuals' understandings of their experience, who they thought they were, and their ruptured identities following their pet's death.

Anthony suggested that adopting Campbell from a puppy mill was a salient component of his caregiving identity, which Peyton reinforced by noting how grateful Campbell likely was for Anthony's care. However, Anthony juxtaposed and challenged his caregiving identity against the hour leading up to Campbell's death, describing how Campbell "suffered" in the parking lot in respiratory distress while he was afflicted with the decision to stay or seek care elsewhere. Here, Anthony's caregiving identity began to discursively unravel as he made sense of his experience, folded his guilt into his identity narrative, and began to enact a ruptured identity. The group responded by providing support to challenge his ruptured enactment and reframe his interpretation (e.g., "there is no way to know what could have happened", "we are certain

Campbell is grateful for all of your loving care”), as well as reduce his knowledge gaps (e.g., “grief can make us irrational and confused. Then we doubt ourselves.”). Although the group attempted to ascribe sense to Anthony by reassuring him that there was no way to know what decision would be best for Campbell, Anthony disclosed that he felt deserving of punishment.

Even though Anthony resisted the group’s support and sensebreaking efforts during the chat as members attempted to jostle him from his ruptured identity enactment, Anthony likely retained the experience as he made sense of his guilt, grief, and identity outside of the chat. In the following chat, Anthony shared positive memories and photos of Campbell (e.g., describing glamour shots he organized for Campbell; affirming the ways he upheld his promise to give Campbell “all the best life had to offer”) and did not share doubt or self-shaming communication. Thus, this exemplar demonstrates the ruptured caregiver enactments that often-constrained individuals from understanding who they were becoming.

When individuals contended with their guilt and questioned who they thought they were as a caregiver, they communicatively enacted a ruptured caregiving identity. However, as other organizational members normalized members’ experiences and communicated care toward others in the group, members were often jostled from their ruptured caregiving enactments and prompted to explore plausible courses of action for healing to fold their loss into their overall identity narrative. Thus, a secondary organizational sensebreaking episode was an important precursor to motivating further identity exploration (e.g., sensemaking and sensegiving), which I detail in the following section.

Secondary Sensebreaking: Disrupting Ruptured Identity Enactments and Ascribing Sense

Whereas sensebreaking discourses are often followed with sensegiving and sensemaking to reduce the knowledge and identity gaps following a critical moment, Pawsitive Outlook

members often demonstrated a need to be jostled from their sensebreaking enactments before reconciling their loss into their overall identity narrative. Members were fixated on their equivocality and guilt, imprisoned by their liminal and ruptured enactments for some time until they were discursively freed by other members. As discussed, a primary way that members contended with their caretaker identity and enacted a ruptured identity was by questioning the decisions they made for their pets before their passing. Although members agreed that their caretaking identities were shaped by their opportunities to make decisions that lessen their companion's suffering (e.g., accessing multiple professional opinions, opting for medically assisted euthanasia), many individuals described being overwhelmed with the guilt that followed such decisions, which often constrained their abilities to move beyond their ruptured identity enactment. This presented the group with numerous opportunities for engaging in secondary sensebreaking communication to jostle members from their ruptured identity enactments.

Olivia: New to this group, thank you for accepting me. Recently lost my beloved dog Nico. My constant companion. Grief as I have never felt before.

Robin: I'm sorry Olivia. You are among friends here.

Oliver: Does anyone else replay the last few days/hours over and over again?

Lennox: YES---it is the broken record player that NEVER stops!!!!

Olivia: This is fresh for me. Saturday had to say goodbye to him. I understand you all. I likened it to the feeling of that Tracy Chapman song. "Fast car". You just want to travel somewhere else past the grief but the only way is to go through it.

Kris: yep you have to go through it not around it

Olivia: 3 years ago he was diagnosed with liver and bladder CA and the vet told me he would only live a month or so. I changed his diet and managed his symptoms and he was very happy, eating well. Living a good life . . . But the tumor started to impede his emptying of his bladder. He also started having back pain and weakness in his legs.

Sierra: Olivia, you are an incredible mother! you gave him so much extra time! thank you for sharing I can only imagine how hard it is to share when your pain is so great!

Olivia: I could not let him suffer like that.

Kris: Sierra is right....incredible mother you are.

Olivia: Thank you. But I am still reeling with questions if I did the right thing. Could I have done more.

Cameron: Olivia guilt is a normal part of the grief process. I think everyone here has their own story for that

Olivia's experience kindled a salient theme that burned bright throughout my tenure in the chat room. Chat members simultaneously expressed identification with the ability to care for their pets (e.g., "I could not let him suffer like that.") while also feeling burdened by the responsibility and difficult decisions they encountered (e.g., "I am still reeling with questions if I did the right thing."). When members contended with their grief and appeared to be struggling to incorporate their loss into their overall identity narrative (i.e., sensebreaking enactments), the group joined together to disrupt the members' ruptured identity enactment (i.e., secondary sensebreaking) and offer new plausible interpretations (i.e., sensegiving) through reframing their guilt (e.g., "you gave him so much extra time!"), interpreting their actions as care (e.g., "... you are an incredible mother!"), and normalizing their experience (e.g., "... guilt is a normal part of the grief process. I think everyone here has their own story for that."). Through providing support and offering alternative plausible interpretations of their actions, Pawsitive Outlook members simultaneously engaged in secondary sensebreaking and sensegiving communication.

Olivia's question about replaying the last few hours with her pet prompted Lennox to share the "broken record" metaphor, which signified the ways that members felt and enacted their ruptured identities in a loop. The data evidenced that chat members often felt "stuck" in their equivocality and ruptured identity enactments, unable to understand plausible paths forward. However, Olivia contrasted the ever-present narrative and ruptured enactments of

feeling “stuck” or “imprisoned” by the loss by interpreting her experience through a particular song: Tracy Chapman’s *Fast Car*. “Going through” the process in the Pawsitive Outlook community involved enacting ruptured identities (sensebreaking enactments), communicatively disrupting ruptured identity enactments (secondary sensebreaking), and normalizing members’ experiences to fill in their knowledge gaps with caregiving characteristics (sensegiving).

Whereas members engaged in self-sensebreaking to question if they could still ascribe to a caregiver identity, the secondary sensebreaking encouraged them to move beyond their ruptured enactments and see themselves as a caregiver (e.g., “an incredible mother!”) even without their pet. This allowed members to reconcile elements of their identity gaps by retaining some of their previous identities.

Sutton’s experience aptly demonstrates the overlaps between sensebreaking enactments, secondary sensebreaking, and sensegiving communication that coalesced to stabilize members’ identities. Throughout months of sessions, Sutton enacted her ruptured identity by communicating about harbored guilt, signaling the degree to which her bereaved caregiving identity had taken root. However, Sutton selected Emily’s sensemaking disclosure in a separate chat exchange, which functioned to normalize Sutton’s behavior, decrease Sutton’s guilt, and realign Sutton’s past and present caregiver identities. Sutton wrote,

Emily on Sunday you said that you still managed to have a life when Storm was sick, I was thinking about that. I hate myself for all the opportunities I had to spend with Riley but chose to go to work. I justified that by saying well that’s all I do, well one white water rafting trip in June for half day and right home while everyone else stayed overnight. I felt guilty about that. Idk you saying that you still managed to have a life made me feel the tiniest, itsy bitsy bit better

Sutton embodied a shift from enacting a ruptured identity to grappling with group members’ shared experiences, to re-envisioning herself as a good caregiver. Here, the links between “who I was” and “who I am becoming” are evident. Emily’s disclosure jostled Sutton

from enduring sensebreaking enactments and dwelling in the guilt (e.g., “I hate myself for all the opportunities I had to spend with Riley but chose to go to work”), and subsequently motivated Sutton to select a new interpretation of or plausibility for her actions. Doing so allowed Sutton to select a different interpretation (e.g., “still managed to have a life”) that challenged her ruptured identity (e.g., “I hate myself for all the opportunities I had to spend with Riley but chose to go to work”) and helped Sutton experience relief from her sensebreaking enactment (e.g., “made me feel the tiniest, itsty bisty bit better”). Sutton’s selection of Emily’s sensemaking communication was subsequently enacted and retained into Sutton’s overall caregiving identity narrative.

Further, Sutton’s disclosure illustrates how persistent messages enabled members’ sensemaking efforts throughout their tenure with Pawsitive Outlook. The dialogue messages were relatively stable and consistent across time, enabling members to interact with and ruminate over others’ sensemaking enactments even after the chat sessions elapsed. As members made sense of their own identity equivocality, enacted becoming selves, and grappled with plausible interpretations of their actions, their communication often functioned as sensebreaking and sensegiving communication for others. Thus, members’ secondary sensebreaking communication functioned to disrupt others’ ruptured identity enactments, as well as served to stimulate reconciling their past and present selves. The group members implored one another to disidentify with their ruptured identities through sensebreaking communication and simultaneously reframed members’ interpretation of their actions by normalizing feeling guilty and discursively realigning their decisions and actions with loving caregiving.

Although some discourses served the dual function of sensebreaking and sensegiving communication, others sensegiving discourses were explicitly offered after secondary sensebreaking communication. After members contended with their ruptured identity enactments

and layered their loss into their overall identity narrative, they continued to make sense of how their actions and communication threatened or affirmed their caregiving identities. In the following and final theme, I detail the communication that site members used after secondary sensebreaking to realign member enactments and interpretations with caregiving and reduced their equivocality.

Sensegiving Discourses: Reconciling Past, Present, and Future Selves

Following—and occurring throughout—secondary sensebreaking enactments, chat members regularly contended with who they were becoming and how that endangered, shielded, or bolstered their caretaker identity. One recurrent theme members grappled with was whether they should care for another companion animal and how to rationalize their decision by considering how their deceased companions would feel about their caregiver “replacing” them. Group members made sense of their overall caregiver narrative by grappling with the potential of caring for another pet in the future.

Cait: I will be getting another dog in the next 6 months because I honestly need a dog for my mental health (I'm a recovering addict, have anxiety, need structure that having a dog gives me) but it would NEVER be to replace Coco I know it's going to feel so weird. But I keep in mind that people have multiple children. and that doesn't mean they love the second or third one any less

Peyton: Cait, you will never replace Coco. Your next dog will be a new friend for you.

Violet: Cait getting another dog won't diminish the love you had for Coco

Emily: Clementine did not replace Storm at all. She has a totally different personality. I still grieve Storm while I have Clementine and sometimes Clementine helps me to grieve her.. I tell Clementine that is Storm's sister. I always tell Clementine stories about Storm

Cait: Emily that's helpful. I bet I'll do that with my new dog I just don't want Coco to think I love her any less

Marie: Cait not Replacing just expanding your heart

Violet: I personally feel that considering River's very very extreme jealousy issues especially with other dogs (even her own litter mate) she would not be pleased with me having another dog. She was just too possessive of my attention and jealous of sharing. Not getting another dog for me is just honoring her wishes in a way, alongside my feelings she's my forever dog

Emily: I felt the exact same way.. so I journaled about it for months. I put all that in the book I wrote for her too. I felt guilty, like I was forgetting her, like I was replacing her, like she would think I didn't love her, like I was supposed to be miserable forever. I wrote that.. "Storm would want me to be happy. She saw how sad Momma was & thought.. I can share my momma, if that would make her feel better!" I compared Clementine to Storm for months & still do in some ways. It's a hard hard journey, not going to lie.

Cait's attempt to rationalize her decision to care for another pet, thereby enacting a repaired caregiver identity, was met with competing discourses. Whereas some members agreed that caring for another pet helped reduce their equivocality and realize their caregiving identities (e.g., "getting another dog won't diminish the love you had for Coco", "not replacing just expanding your heart"), others saw their caregiving identities as tied to their deceased companions (e.g., "Not getting another dog for me is just honoring her wishes in a way"). Thus, there were numerous plausible actions for understanding their experience, reducing their equivocality, and reconciling interpretation of their enactments.

For some, caring for another companion was a way to stabilize their volatile caregiver identity and move forward. Others achieved similar outcomes by dedicating themselves to their deceased pets, which symbolized their capacity for caring through equivocal moments that challenged their self-concept. Regardless of the decisions members made, sharing narratives in the chat functioned as sensegiving communication that helped members understand the plausible interpretations there were for enacting care and reconciling their ruptured and caregiving identities. Further, other members provided diverse perspectives and were integral to affirming various interpretations of paths toward reconciling their identity narrative (e.g., "Your next dog will be a new friend for you", "I felt the same way.. so I journaled about it for months.").

Diversity of perspectives increased possibilities for exploring identities, and member feedback signaled the degree to which an identity enactment was valid as a caregiver and acceptable within the organization.

Sharing perspectives through sensegiving communication also constituted part of the organizational identity, and members nestled themselves in the organization as a way to further emphasize their caregiving identities to reduce equivocality. As individuals grappled with how their loss was different from others and plausible paths forward, they were able to enact care for others in the virtual space.

Sierra: Anniversaries can be so painful! Although having each other and support to share the burden can help provide some relief. We all have to take care of one another in tough times.

Jamie: Thank you, Sierra. I will be coming here. No one seems to understand. 😞

Sierra: We understand and we stand together! You can lean on us!

Robin: we understand

Lennox: I am glad so many people are here tonight for comfort from us

Although many of the bereaved site members suggested their caretaking roles ceased once their companions passed, site members enacted ongoing caretaking for other members (e.g., “We all have to take care of one another in tough times”, “You can lean on us!”, “we understand”), which enabled others a space to access support while also reconciling their past and emerging selves. Caretaking was an ongoing identity role for site members, further emphasizing how communication worked to collaboratively create meaning of loss and identity at the personal and organizational levels. Members who grappled with their equivocality clung to Pawsitive Outlook member conversations to reconcile their identity, and their interactions were integral to

disrupting ruptured identity enactments, ascribing sense to others, and shaping the organization's identity.

Discussion

This study contributes to understanding how identity (re)construction is communicatively facilitated through sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking in online disenfranchised grief support groups. Disenfranchised loss complicated the bereaved members' search for identity, and they benefited from care in a virtual support group to reconcile their past, present, and becoming selves. Findings demonstrate that bereaved individuals enacted a ruptured identity by reminiscing about symbols, routines, and guilt following the loss of their companion animal. A secondary and organizational sensebreaking process was integral to jostling members from their ruptured identity enactments and priming members for further identity exploration. Finally, as members grappled with the secondary sensebreaking communication, they began to develop understandings of their potential future selves through sensegiving communication, which allowed them to realign their interpretations with caregiving to nuance identity understandings through sensemaking.

This study further complicates understandings of identity and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) by demonstrating how identity is retrospectively perceived and communicatively enacted among a group of bereaved caregivers in a virtual organization. Although scholars acknowledge that identities are crystalized (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) and ever in flux (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987), this study demonstrates that a loss or similar incident can feel like a rupture to an individual's identity (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019). Responding to Park's (2010) assertion that literature tends to address sensemaking following a loss or crisis as an isolated event rather than a complex process, my study emphasized the sensebreaking, sensegiving, and

sensemaking communication processes involved in restoring identities in a virtual space over time. Understanding disenfranchised grief and subsequent sensemaking processes contribute knowledge to sensemaking theories and research in several ways.

Sensebreaking in organizations has been theorized for several decades (Ashforth et al., 2008; Pratt, 2000), yet there is much to be learned about sensebreaking functions and processes (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016). Specifically, this study provides support for 1) considering sensebreaking enactments as a process rather than a trigger for motivating further identity exploration (i.e., sensegiving), 2) conceptualizing distinctions among self (personal)-sensebreaking and other (organizational)-sensebreaking discourses, and 3) considering organizational capacities for using sensebreaking and sensegiving processes to stabilize personal identity ruptures. Further, my study provides an account of ways virtual site structures shape members' sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensegiving enactments, emphasizing how community member communication organizes and constitutes virtual organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2008; Weick, 1995).

First, two salient sensebreaking enactments were identified throughout chat sessions, the first of which emphasized how members might use sensebreaking communication to enact a ruptured identity. In the first sensebreaking enactment, members discursively deconstructed their interpretations of their past selves and caregiving enactments through reflecting on symbols, routines, and caregiving characteristics that emphasized gaps between who they were and who they may become. As members reflected and struggled to understand who they were in the absence of their caregiving identities, they grieved the loss of their pets and former selves, enacting a bereaved and broken identity before aligning ruptured identities with their broader identity narrative.

Sensebreaking broadly describes how others use communication to shape an individual's identity by accentuating knowledge gaps in organizations (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000). However, my study emphasizes how sensebreaking enactments are more than a "trigger" for motivating revised identity development (Ashforth et al., 2008). Members used sensebreaking discourses to enact a ruptured identity for some time as they processed their losses before they explored plausible actions for moving forward. As such, I argue that sensebreaking can go beyond others using communication to accentuate a knowledge gap (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000) by emphasizing the capacity for individuals to enact ruptured identities through sensebreaking communication.

As such, future research should consider how individuals enact ruptured identities for prolonged periods and attend to the liminal space that communicators occupy between experiencing a trigger and encountering sensebreaking communication, being offered sensegiving information, and processing their subsequent actions through sensemaking processes. I argue that individuals enact and self-impose sensebreaking communication as they process their triggering event, begin making sense of plausible interpretations of their experience, and grapple with who they might become. Attending to self-imposed sensebreaking enactments illuminates the communicative and transactional links between sensebreaking communication and sensemaking, emphasizing sensebreaking as a process rather than as an input or precursor to new identities (e.g., organizational identification; Ashforth et al., 2008).

In the case of Pawsitive Outlook, members performed ruptured enactments by discursively organizing their deconstructed caregiving identities, sharing communication about their uncertainty, guilt, and unrecognizable actions following their loss. However, as members consistently engaged with Pawsitive Outlook, they were more apt to be jostled from their

ruptured identity enactment. This finding relates to my second theoretical implication and further demonstrates the conceptual utility of distinguishing between self- and other-imposed sensebreaking.

Second, my study highlights the interplay between self (personal)-sensebreaking and other (organizational)-sensebreaking, as well as how secondary sensebreaking might be useful in disrupting ruptured identity enactments. Because individual sensebreaking communication indicated identity ruptures that could not be resolved (e.g., in a “prison sentence”), the role of Pawsitive Outlook members as secondary sensebreaking activators was important to help reconcile identities and move forward. Members actively engaged others in sensebreaking communication as they prompted one another to disidentify with the broken and disenfranchised identity by normalizing members’ experiences, acknowledging their suffering, and imploring members to reframe their loss and guilt. This finding supports Ashforth and colleagues’ (2008) review and other empirical accounts (Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000) by emphasizing how organizational sensebreaking enactment is crucial to motivate further identity development. My study nuances sensebreaking conceptualizations by demonstrating that dual sensebreaking enactments can occur sequentially—in this case one personal and one organizational—to prime members to stabilize their identity through forthcoming sensemaking and sensegiving.

It is important to take up potential distinctions between personal and organizational sensebreaking discourses to saturate theoretical understandings of how secondary (and organizational) sensebreaking processes might follow primary (and personal) sensebreaking enactments. Whereas some sensebreaking promotes organizational identification (e.g., divestitures; Tunstall, 1985; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), other sensebreaking processes involve organizational members disidentifying with the organization and grappling with who

they are outside of their workplace (Dailey, 2016). Thus, sensebreaking can be an organizational or personal endeavor, and this study highlights the interplay between personal and organizational life by depicting how individuals used their communication to disidentify (emphasize knowledge gaps) with their past selves (i.e., self-imposed and personal sensebreaking), but also to encourage others to disidentify with ruptured identity enactments by interpreting enactments through an organizational caregiving identity (i.e., other-imposed and organizational sensebreaking).

The dual sensebreaking processes identified in this study provide noteworthy implications for understanding how sensebreaking and sensegiving can motivate identity exploration to move beyond a ruptured identity. The secondary sensebreaking enacted by Pawsitive Outlook organizational members appeared to jostle others to understand both who they were not as well as who they were becoming. However, sensebreaking and sensegiving are relevant for more than describing how *new* identities take root (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth et al., 2008); rather, this study emphasizes sensebreaking and sensegiving as ways to stabilize or realign identities that are challenged by change and crisis. In other words, sensegiving communication might help individuals fold a critical experience into their overall identity narrative rather than solely function to direct individuals to a new identity state. Indeed, scholars have explored how identities and knowledge are communicatively stabilized through collective sensemaking during equivocal organizational incidents (Coffelt et al., 2010; Weick, 1993; Williams & Ishak, 2018). However, this study demonstrates the interplay between sensebreaking, sensemaking, and sensegiving that necessarily coalesce to generate an identity and stabilize personal identities in a virtual organization, which suggests collective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) alone might not account for the nuances involved in resolving identity gaps among a group of individuals who do not experience a shared organizational event.

Third—and related to using sensebreaking to stabilize identities rather than accentuate identity gaps (Ashforth et al., 2008)—this study illustrates the roles organizations might play in sensebreaking events that occur outside of organizational life. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) conceptualized sensegiving as an attempt to guide the “meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). Other literature pursued this line by exploring how sensegiving enables organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016, DiSanza & Bullis, 1999). Although Pawsitive Outlook members engaged in several sensegiving tactics to promote organizational identification (e.g., validating, expressing concern for individuals, uniting against common others; DiSanza & Bullis, 1999), I argue that members’ sensegiving enactments also promoted *personal* identity development and realignment. Thus, organizational members’ sensegiving enactments not only signal what it means to be a prototypical member of the organization (Ashforth et al., 2008), but sensebreaking and sensegiving can provide members with cues about their present and becoming selves outside of the organization.

Crystallized perspectives denote that identities cannot be demarcated along the lines of personal and professional (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005), yet organizational literature tends to conceptualize the interplay between workplace sensebreaking and sensegiving as a strategic measure to replace personal identities with organizational characteristics to promote organizational success (Ashforth et al., 2008; Pratt, 2000). In considering crystallized perspectives (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) alongside the theoretical function of sensebreaking and sensegiving discourses as ways to emphasize and resolve gaps between personal and organizational identities (Ashforth et al., 2008), my study suggests that organizations have the capacity to restabilize members’ personal identities following critical moments that occur outside

of organizational life. In other words, organizational members can challenge a member's sense of self and further accentuate personal knowledge gaps that take root to help members understand *who they are not* and prompt them to reconsider *who they are becoming* following a personal event that triggers sensebreaking enactments.

Finally, this study calls attention to identity development and sensemaking processes in virtual spaces (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019). The virtual care organization afforded members anonymity to enact their disenfranchised identities in a safe environment, persistent communication so that they could revisit and consider enactments in sessions they missed, and synchronous communication to provide momentous interpretations and affirmations of others' enactments. Thus, the utility of Pawsitive Outlook for disenfranchised bereaved grieving the loss of their companion animal went beyond providing members with a support group of similar others (Park et al., 2021); the text-based, synchronous chat also provided members with unique affordances enabling them to *see* their enactments (Weick, 1995), simultaneously *make* and *ascribe* sense to others, and a diverse array of experiences to select from to draft their interpretations.

Within Pawsitive Outlook chats, members enacted their identities, received feedback about identity enactments, and interacted with other members' sensemaking. The text-based chat enabled users the ability to *see* their identity enactments, which likely helped members understand their interpretations, select relevant information, and retain their enactments for future use (i.e., "how can I know how I feel until I see what I say"; Weick, 1988, p. 307). The chats also provided members with some opportunities to read and revisit members' dialogue, as well as interact with narratives at a later moment should they miss a synchronous support session. Pawsitive Outlook retained chats for approximately 48 to 72 hours after the session

ended, which enabled members some ability to engage in retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and reduce discrepancies in their past and present selves. Thus, this study contributes to existing sensegiving literature that suggests technology shapes members' identities within a virtual organization (Dailey, 2016) by demonstrating how virtual dialogue shared in organizations with varying degrees of persistence can enable sensegiving and sensemaking enactments.

Further, as individuals in the chat engaged in sensemaking through communicating about their identity equivocality, grappled with who they were becoming, and shared realizations they encountered within and outside of the chat, their communication served as sensegiving processes for other members (e.g., "you saying that you still managed to have a life made me feel the tiniest, itsy bitsy bit better"). Sensebreaking and sensegiving promote sensemaking (Ashforth et al., 2008). However, my study further demonstrates that when sensemaking enactments are communicated in a collective, this communication creates sensegiving opportunities for proximal others, thereby stimulating other members to explore their becoming identities. Relatedly, it is important to consider how the virtual chat collected and offered different experiences as interpretations for understanding disenfranchised loss, reframing guilt, and moving beyond ruptured identity enactments.

Ashforth et al. (2008) noted that "sensegiving may act as a sort of identity echo; the reverberations of projecting a new self, sensed in the form of colleague and customer facial expressions, off-hand comments, and the like" (p. 343). As such, sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking processes should be considered alongside the context and audience. Pawsitive Outlook members experienced similar, yet distinct crises that necessitated and produced sensebreaking, sensemaking, and sensegiving enactments as members grappled with their

knowledge gaps and explored identities. Weick's (1995; 2005) collective sensemaking processes differ from Pawsitive Outlook's sensemaking processes because members were unable to extract cues about a shared circumstance (i.e., loss of their pets), which might have constrained the collective from making plausible sense of their actions retrospectively. On the other hand, Pawsitive Outlook and its members likely benefited from the diversity of perspectives that generated the virtual organization and enabled members' sensemaking and sensegiving enactments.

Although members necessarily spent more time communicating about their circumstances to help others comprehend their experience, the diversity of perspectives likely enhanced the global experiences from which organizational members could draw as they enacted sensegiving and sensemaking. In other words, diverse perspectives coalesced, broadening the organization's causal map (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and charting new potential routes for plausible actions, which enabled members to understand different options for interpreting their experience and moving forward. Given the numerous potential benefits of using virtual support organizations to make sense of, stabilize, and generate identities following a disenfranchising trigger (e.g., providing members with a diverse array of experiences to draw on as they develop interpretations, facilitating less intimidating communication through anonymous chats, operationalizing persistent messages to enable sensemaking, using synchronous feedback to affirm or disrupt identity enactments), I next provide practical recommendations for virtual care organizations and their site facilitators.

Translating Sensemaking and Sensebreaking to Virtual Spaces and Practitioners

Findings demonstrate the utility of sensemaking and sensebreaking communication processes for disrupting ruptured identity enactments and stabilizing identities in flux. As such, I

provide practical implications for virtual support organizations and site facilitators as they attempt to organize meaning for disenfranchised and bereaved site visitors. Previous scholarship recommends that individuals might benefit from simply sharing their stories in online forums (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011) and encourages virtual organizations to provide writing exercises for individuals to effectively reduce stress and make meaning (Cooper, 2021). However, I advocate for virtual support organizations to also facilitate synchronous and anonymous (or pseudonymous) communication that enables members to explore identity enactments and retrospectively analyze the identities they communicate into existence. To this end, I highlight the importance of dynamic and interactional communication as ways for site facilitators to discursively disrupt members' broken identity enactments and stabilize their identity equivocality.

Site facilitators should encourage members to participate early by disclosing information about their loss and current state of mind to understand what members are retaining from their experience. For members who communicate about or enact ruptured identities (e.g., "I feel like I don't know myself", "I feel like a prisoner", "I don't even want to get better. I just want to get this life over with."), it might be important for site facilitators to communicatively disrupt the member's enactment by contradicting the discourses that perpetuate their ruptured identities, normalizing their experience, and encouraging the member to reframe their understanding of who they are becoming. In many cases, site facilitators might need to assist members to reframe their understanding (i.e., have you thought about how you are still a caregiver today?).

Interactional dialogue also provides bereaved members the opportunity to communicatively dabble in plausible identities (Weick et al., 2005), many of which they encounter through interactions with other members on similar journeys.

Further, because sensemaking is a retrospective process (Weick, 1995), virtual organizations might also catalog their chats and encourage members to revisit their identity enactments over a prolonged period. It can be difficult for members to understand where they have been and where they are heading, as well as who they were and who they are becoming. Visualizing their sensemaking communication and identity enactment can further motivate bereaved individuals to make progress toward healing and (re)constructing their identity, as well as understanding how they might support new members. Site transcripts might also be a promising opportunity for training new facilitators on sensemaking discourses and sensebreaking strategies.

Looking Forward

Support groups are particularly beneficial to disenfranchised grievers because they “provide the opportunity for the griever to make public what he or she feels must remain private elsewhere” (McKeon Pesek, 2002, p. 92). Virtual spaces connect marginalized individuals to similar others so that they may engage in identity formation (Miller, 2016; Craig & McInroy, 2014), access information (Nambisan et al., 2016; Tanis, 2008), seek emotional support, and (re)construct their identities (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Thus, virtual support groups are promising alternatives to traditional support structures (e.g., family or friends) for disenfranchised bereaved individuals. Although the present study illuminates communicative processes within a virtual disenfranchised grief space, findings should be considered and further explored concerning members’ particular grief experiences and the experiences organization members generate communicatively.

Not only do virtual organizations enable members to access a community to engage in identity work, but anonymous and pseudonymous channels are particularly helpful to

marginalized communicators (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998; McInroy, 2020). Whereas anonymous virtual channels tend to enhance members' social identity (e.g., members see themselves as a part of a unit), as well as communicate about group norms, group boundaries, and collective identity (i.e., social identity deindividuation effects; Lea & Spears, 1991), this study demonstrates that virtual anonymous or pseudonymous collectives also enabled members to make sense of their personal identities. Future research may compare identity work and identification among different disenfranchised virtual communities to determine the extent to which social affordances (e.g., anonymity, synchronicity, persistence; Gibson, 1979) shape sensemaking processes.

Further, scholars should continue exploring disenfranchised sensemaking processes in various contexts to generate theory that underpins marginalized experiences, grief and suffering, and healing. For example, scholars might explore how grief layers onto marginalized bodies and further compounds disenfranchised sensemaking, as well as grief and healing within relationships that are not well-understood or sanctioned, such as losing a partner in a queer relationship. Although such marginalized and disenfranchised experiences may culminate in virtual spaces to generate organizational identities and stabilize personal identity narratives, attending to different experiences will deepen theoretical understandings of how sensemaking is enacted among marginalized and bereaved communicators, as well as generate theory as to how organizations can support and react to and stabilize bereaved individuals' identities of various types.

Finally, organizations are enmeshed in day-to-day life, including memberships in workplaces, extracurricular organizations, and virtual organizations. Although this study conceptualizes sensebreaking enactments as efforts to stabilize identities and guide members

away from ruptured identity enactments within a compassionate virtual space, scholars should explore how other organizations (i.e., workplaces or corporations with profit interests) enact sensebreaking in similar ways. Compassion organizing (Dutton et al., 2006) is one fruitful lens for exploring affirmative sensebreaking enactments in corporate settings. Whereas compassion organizing has been explored in numerous workplace settings, attending to the compassionate processes through sensebreaking enactments is a potentially noteworthy theoretical extension for exploring the links between affirming sensebreaking enactments, stabilizing identities, and compassion among organizations and organizational members.

Virtual support organizations are sites in which sufferers and caregivers manage numerous relationships, making them an informative context for exploring how compassion is enacted within a community dedicated to emotional expression and healing. After organizational members recognize and relate to another's suffering (Way & Tracy, 2012), they might react by communicatively disrupting a sufferer's ruptured identity enactment (i.e., sensebreaking) before providing support and restabilizing their identity through sensegiving communication. Existing compassion scholarship denotes compassionate action as listening, mere presence, providing resources (Dutton et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000); donating or volunteering (Brief & Motowild, 1986); or providing companionship (Wills, 1991). This study demonstrates that compassionate organizational members and caregivers might also engage in sensebreaking and sensegiving enactments as they react to another's suffering, making further studies essential.

Conclusion

Responding to Robinson & Pond's (2019) call to explore *how* identities are reconstructed in virtual spaces, this study demonstrates the interplay between sensebreaking, sensemaking, and sensegiving that necessarily coalesced to stabilize personal identities following a

disenfranchising loss. Through enacting ruptured identities, encountering and making sense of secondary sensebreaking discourses, and grappling with interpretations for reconciling overall identity narratives, members communicated their way to identify with their becoming selves and the virtual care organization (Ashforth et al., 2008). Individuals discursively and symbolically perform, deconstruct, and reconstruct their identities through their interactions every day, emphasizing communication as foundational to understanding our identities and shifting our performances. As Weick (1995) put it, we can only know who we are becoming after we see what we say, and this study demonstrates that identities are further challenged, strengthened, and shaped by how others see us.

Chapter Three

“we have to share with our other grief friends”: Discursive Constructions of Emotion Rules and Displays Following Disenfranchised Animal Companion Loss

Sutton:³ I’m really not doing well at all. I’m downing myself with work, but having panic attacks and overwhelming grief every second of the day. I still can’t believe he’s gone. I don’t know what to say. I don’t even want to get better. I just want to get this life over with. I’ll keep working until I can’t anymore. No one at work has any idea that I’m still grieving. They just think I’m a rock star at worker. If Riley were her, I would be such a slacker, quarantined at home with him.

Emily: I’ve said.. I dont know why people dont tell you the gut level truth about grief.. That is feels like a cement coat and you feel like your back is completely broken & your heart is shattered in your body and you'll wish you died & will be so close to the edge but will somehow manage to stay alive like the walking dead. Thats just for me

The loss of a loved one can result in deep emotional pain that is often not captured or accounted for in organizational policies or societal expectations for mourning. Although grief can feel isolating, almost all individuals will experience loss and grief at some point in their life. Grief is an emotional response to a loss (Stroebe et al., 1993) that varies significantly from person to person, but the average grief recovery period is one to two years (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001). Nevertheless, Americans perpetuate cultural scripts about coping with loss and grief, such as expecting bereaved individuals to resume work duties while still experiencing grief and shock over their loss (Gilbert et al., 2021).

On average, Western organizations’ bereavement policies allow for two-and-a-half to three days off following the loss of a loved one (MacDonald et al, 2015; Wilson et al., 2021). Further, policies aimed at supporting individuals after they lose a loved one, albeit ambiguous, generally refer to “loved ones” as immediate family members (Gilbert et al., 2021). Workplaces

³ To honor participants’ voice, these are direct quotes from chatroom messages and have not been altered unless noted (e.g., to remove identifying information).

often grant little to no leave time or support for grief over losses that are not well-understood, such as the loss of a pet, ex-partner, mentor, or fetus (Gilbert et al., 2021; Hazen, 2009).

Bereaved workers in general can feel unsupported by work (Gilbert et al., 2021), struggle with managing their emotions at work (Blank et al., 2008), and experience stressors upon returning to work (Nieuwenhuijsen et al, 2004); however, workers who experience a loss not sanctioned by workplace policies can experience especially negative effects (Doka, 1989). Losses that are not sanctioned by society or recognized as legitimate reasons for grieving are referred to as “disenfranchised” (Doka, 1989). Considering the opening dialogue from individuals who lost their companion animals, grief was isolating, heart-shattering, and overwhelming, yet not acknowledged by their workplace. Indeed, animal companion loss can disenfranchise anybody and shape how grief is enacted and performed in a variety of contexts (Doka, 1989; Eason, 2021), emphasizing the importance of understanding such a loss. Considering almost 70% of Americans care for companion animals (American Pet Products Association, 2021) and are likely to experience some form of disenfranchised loss, this is an important topic to explore.

Scholars are increasingly attending to the meaning-making processes of bereaved individuals alongside various discourses about loss and bereavement (Kunkel et al., 2014; Park, 2010). Unsurprisingly, a loss is often coupled with intense emotions, which necessitate bereaved individuals to try to make sense of their emotions alongside numerous competing discourses that privilege rationality over emotions; doing so requires organizing these discourses to create meaning through communication. Societal norms complicate expressing and understanding emotions when individuals experience a disenfranchised loss and society does not sanction or recognize the loss and subsequent grief processes (Doka, 1989). After losing a pet, for example, many individuals feel grief-stricken, yet find themselves geographically isolated from

individuals who understand their experience and emotions (Eason, 2021; Marton et al., 2020). Because of challenges in accessing a supportive network and feeling misunderstood by friends and family (Spain et al., 2019), many bereaved benefit from seeking care and expressing their authentic emotions in virtual support spaces with similar others (Park et al., 2021).

Disenfranchised pet loss and associated emotions are noteworthy extensions of grief, emotion, and organizational communication research. As individuals manage emotions in different spaces and organize meanings through communication, the communication shapes understandings of the grieving process and felt emotions and perpetuates future communication expectations. Therefore, this study analyzes societal, organizational, and individual discourses in an online support group to advance understanding of how emotions organize and are organized by those experiencing disenfranchised loss and to make practical recommendations for virtual care organizations. Next, I review pertinent research on emotions as learned systems that are communicatively constructed and reinforced in macro, meso, and micro contexts. Then, I review emotions and sensemaking following disenfranchised pet loss alongside colonizing discourses to understand how a virtual safe space is constituted and enacted by its members.

Exploring Emotion Rules through Macro, Meso, and Micro Discourses

Life's emotions are managed alongside numerous competing discourses. As such, emotions are shaped by—and shape—macro (Deetz, 1992; Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020), meso (Hochschild, 1983; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Tracy, 2000), and micro discourses (Malvini Redden, 2013; Paul & Riforgiate, 2015). Whereas macro discourses refer “not only to talk and social texts but also enduring systems of thought” (Nicotera, 2020b, p. 46), meso discourses describe texts that are shaped at the institutional or organizational level and micro discourses describe talk that gives shape—affirms, resists, or reifies—discourses at other

levels. Thus, discourses discursively shape one another (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Nicotera, 2020b) and are integral to understanding and enacting emotions (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021).

Troth and colleagues (2018) argued that despite many researchers operationalizing emotion regulation at either the individual or interpersonal level, emotion regulation motivations and strategies are best understood through multi-level approaches. As Gross (1998) explains, individuals are motivated to consider “which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” in each context they encounter (p. 275). Emotional communication is guided by emotion rules (Kramer & Hess, 2002), which can be traced back to corporate structures (Deetz, 1992) and extend far beyond an organization’s boundaries. Below, I explain the various macro, meso, and micro discourses that shape emotions generally and grief particularly. Then, I present disenfranchised loss as a unique phenomenon that necessitates the bereaved to make sense of their new emotional terrain in different contexts, including at work and in a virtual support group.

Emotional Discourses: Rules, Displays, and Grief

Even though emotions are felt internally, they are expressed through communication (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Emotion displays are shaped by emotional discourses and societal, organizational, and relational rules about what is and is not appropriate to share, including how grief is communicated and for how long. The fabric of Western society is woven with discourses that privilege professionalism, rationality, and efficiency (Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021), and these macro discourses shape emotion rules. Corporate American life has been prioritized over other systems inherent to the human experience, such as genuine emotional expressions (Deetz, 1992). More specifically and pertinent to this study, Americans are socialized to express (and, in many cases, suppress)

emotions in ways that adhere to corporate and managerial expectations (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). For example, despite grief being difficult work that takes considerable time (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001), individuals might perceive they are expected to get back to work and suppress their grief (Gilbert et al., 2021) based on messages they encounter about emotions being unproductive. Thus, macro discourses bleed into meso discourses, such as how workplaces shape their bereavement policies.

Meso discourses often take shape in the form of formal policies, rules, and socialization material (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020). Organizations discipline members' emotions through organizational material (e.g., recruitment material, performance evaluations; Rivera, 2015; Tracy, 2000) to teach members to "think and act rationally to maximize their gains" (Fineman, 2000, p. 10). Bereavement policies—or lack thereof—are another meso discourse that guide grief responses (Eyetsemitan, 1998) and privilege rationality and "goal-directed behavior" (Fineman, 2000, p. 210). Organizational members' use of and communication about meso discourses tend to perpetuate professionalism, emphasizing the interdependence between macro, meso, and micro discourses (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021).

Organizational and societal discourses privilege neutral or positive emotional expressions, over extreme or negative emotional communication, creating rules for emotion displays (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Macro and meso discourses are apparent in communication as flight attendants perform happiness through a smile (Hochschild, 1983), elementary school teachers put on a happy face to avoid conflict (Paul & Riforgiate, 2015), and passengers regulate their stress and anxiety to navigate airport security (Malvini Redden, 2013). Regarding bereavement and subsequent emotions, workers' communication functions alongside meso (e.g., bereavement policies) and macro (e.g., assumptions about grief) policies to organize

bereaved individuals' understanding that they should "stifle their grief" and spend more time on work (Eyetsemitan, 1998).

Further, individuals enact corporate values through their communication not only in public spaces and to meet organizational goals (Putnam & Mumby, 1993), but also within their homes to maintain personal relationships and manage household responsibilities (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Sotirin et al., 2007). Deetz (1992) aptly argued that the culturally normative emotion rules which emerged from and alongside corporate values are an element of *corporate colonization*. Corporate colonization is demonstrated through micro-discourses that privilege management and analytical-driven decisions over emotions. These micro-discourses manifest into day-to-day practices, such as how couples' relationships are communicatively maintained through appropriate and rational interactions (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). From childhood, Americans are socialized to privilege rationality over emotionality (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and edit out negative emotions in the pursuit of rational decision-making (Denker & Dougherty, 2013), which primes cognitive frameworks and the way individuals enact their emotions (Weick, 1995).

Thus, emotions, behavior, and communication in personal and professional realms are grounded in managerialism and corporate objectives (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Hochschild, 1983). Managerialism and rationality pervade day-to-day life, existing quietly in the background (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and guiding decisions about which emotions are appropriate, as well as when and how emotions can be expressed (Gross, 1998). Navigating emotions following a disenfranchised loss requires negotiating emotional rules and creating strategies to understand emotions that, to date, have been underexplored by communication scholars.

Disenfranchised Grief

In general, grief is a social emotion and interpersonal process that can be coupled with intense feelings and displayed emotions (Jakoby, 2012). Societally, individuals expect that losing a loved person will be followed by various emotion rules and scripts, such as displaying grief by “falling apart” (Árnason, 2007), reconstructing oneself (Bradbury, 1999), and taking time away from organizational roles and other responsibilities (Wilson et al., 2021). Even enfranchised bereaved individuals often feel that they need to get back to work (Gilbert et al., 2021). This feeling of needing to return to normal is complicated for disenfranchised bereaved individuals who often feel constrained regarding when, where, how long, and for whom they should grieve (Doka, 1989). Thus, all bereaved emotional displays are negotiated alongside micro, meso, and macro discourses that sanction emotions in personal and professional life, and grieving a disenfranchised loss is qualitatively distinct from normative loss in several ways, further complicating emotion rules and displays.

Disenfranchised grief follows losses that cannot be socially sanctioned or publicly mourned (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Doka, 1989; Duffey, 2005). Numerous factors may foreground disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989). The bereaved might perceive that society does not recognize their relationship with the deceased (e.g., relationships with an ex or mentor), the loss (e.g., the loss of a pet), their grief (e.g., grieving for longer than expected), their identity (e.g., incarcerated individuals or persons with diverse abilities), or their companion’s death event (e.g., losing someone to suicide or HIV/AIDS). Disenfranchised loss and the subsequent grief are cultural experiences that complicate emotion rules. Bereaved animal caretakers, for one, are often expected to suppress or resolve their grief quickly or heal their suffering by replacing their companions (Cordaro, 2012). It follows that disenfranchised bereaved individuals often must

perform considerable work to negotiate their grief and emotional displays alongside competing discourses that privilege rationality (Deetz, 1992; Denker & Dougherty, 2013), managerialism (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), and normative grief (Doka, 1989; Park et al., 2021).

Although disenfranchised grief has been explored in clinical contexts (Duffey, 2005; Hess-Holden et al., 2017) and it is well-understood that society does not sanction disenfranchised loss (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Castle & Phillips, 2003; Doka, 1989), it is pertinent to explore how cultural contexts shape sensemaking about disenfranchised emotional communication to better understand the implications of emotion rules across societal, organizational, and interactional levels. Thus, one goal of this study is to understand how disenfranchised bereaved individuals grapple with societal discourses—which are guided by corporate values (Deetz, 1992)—as they manage communication of their disenfranchised emotions in their personal and professional lives. Whereas existing literature demonstrates that disenfranchised grief is isolating and difficult to manage (Doka, 1989; Hazen, 2009; Park et al. 2021), considering emotions alongside multiple levels of discourse (Troth et al., 2018) provides a way to understand the ways communication constitutes understandings and expressions of emotions and grief in personal and professional lives.

Further, given that many disenfranchised bereaved individuals turn to and find value in online communities for engaging in grief work and expressing their emotions (Castle & Phillips, 2003; Döveling, 2017; Park et al., 2021), it is also relevant to explore how emotion rules organize virtual spaces dedicated to emotional topics, emotion communication, and healing. Cultural scripts that constitute emotion rules across numerous contexts are far-reaching (Deetz, 1992). However, spaces dedicated to authentic emotional expression, such as virtual support groups, provide potential sites for resisting colonizing emotion discourses and communicatively create, or

constitute, a supportive forum for authentic emotional expression to better understand a) the reach of macro discourses and b) the capacity for resisting colonizing discourses.

Virtual Spaces for Resisting and Reifying Emotion Discourses

Given that society and Western workplaces do not sanction disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989; 2002) and emotions are often negotiated within managerial and rational boundaries (Deetz, 1992; Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Mumby & Putnam, 1992), disenfranchised bereaved individuals often turn to virtual sites that are dedicated to emotional expression and healing, such as virtual grief support groups (Park et al., 2021; Robinson & Pond, 2019). Virtual communities for bereaved individuals are emotional spaces for site visitors and facilitators, making them unique contexts for exploring emotion rules that reify, resist, and reimagine managerial discourses. Denker and Dougherty (2013) advocated for such “safe spaces” that are free of managed emotion performances to break the cycle of privileging rationality. However, there is much to be learned about how safe spaces are constituted, as well as how members discursively resist (or reappropriate) societal discourses.

Responding to Dougherty and Drumheller’s (2006) call for scholars to explore the interplays between emergent sensemaking and emotions, this study analyzes emotion displays and rules within an online space dedicated to disenfranchised pet loss. Virtual support spaces have been celebrated for their ability to engender social validation, social integration, and healing among disenfranchised bereaved individuals (Castle & Phillips, 2003; Eason, 2021). For instance, individuals grieving the loss of their companion animal value virtual support groups because they perceive that they are unable to express their emotions or talk about their experience to their friends, family, and coworkers (Park et al., 2021). Given that personal homes and community life adhere to managerial discourses that privilege rationality, Denker and Dougherty (2013) noted that

considerable effort must be spent to normalize emotion displays and create opportunities for engaging with authentic emotions. Without safe spaces to act out or acknowledge the emotionality of life, individuals may become trapped in roles that normalize rationality (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). However, colonizing discourses that suppress emotion displays may create surreptitious barriers to discursively constituting safe spaces that acknowledge the emotionality of life.

Cultural scripts for emotion rules are far-reaching (Deetz, 1992) and it is pertinent to understand how virtual spaces that are dedicated to emotional expression (i.e., virtual support groups) are organized alongside or against macro discourses. Disenfranchised bereaved individuals are often driven to virtual sites to make sense of their loss, communicate with similar others, and engage in healing (Castle & Phillips, 2003; Eason, 2021; Robinson & Pond, 2019). In attending to the micro, meso, and macro level discourses that constitute virtual safe spaces, this study contributes to understanding how macro discourses shape emotional expression outside of work and the home. Thus, Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory is a useful lens for exploring emotion displays (and emotion suppression) in a virtual space as individuals bereave the loss of their companion animal while managing competing external responsibilities.

Sensemaking and Emotions

Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory calls scholars to attend to the spaces in between experiencing a critical moment or change (i.e., disenfranchised loss), communicating about the experience, and understanding paths forward to reduce their knowledge gap. Emotions are one such knowledge gap in the case of disenfranchised bereaved individuals. As individuals encounter equivocal moments and spaces (e.g., a disenfranchised loss and virtual space), they are prompted to communicate about how their actions align with their past experiences as they

grapple with their perceived knowledge gap. After experiencing an equivocal moment, such as the loss of their pet, the bereaved likely contend with 1) the feelings they have, 2) the emotions they display, and 3) when and where they can display their emotions alongside societal discourses that privilege normative experiences and prioritize rationality over emotionality (Deetz, 1992).

Disenfranchised bereaved individuals who seek virtual support are in a layered equivocal space that necessitates levels of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The disenfranchised bereaved populations not only make sense of their emotions in day-to-day personal and professional interactions but also make sense of emotion rules as they discursively display their emotions in a virtual space. Importantly, sensemaking enactments within and outside of virtual spaces must be negotiated against dominating societal discourses and familiar enactments (Weick, 1995). On the one hand, virtual sites and members might resist societal discourses that privilege rationality (Deetz, 1992) and managerialism (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) as they engage in authentic emotional expression. On the other hand, it is also possible that group members regulate their emotions—and others' emotions—to reify corporate emotion discourses that are engrained in their day-to-day enactments.

Although existing scholarship has evidenced that individuals make sense of their emotion displays alongside numerous macro, meso, and micro discourses, many questions remain regarding the co-constitutive relationships among colonizing discourses, emotion displays, and disenfranchised emotion rules. Further, the extent to which emotion discourses pervade virtual spaces dedicated to authentic emotion displays is a noteworthy extension to understanding the co-constitutions among sensemaking, disenfranchised emotions, and colonizing discourses. To further understanding of disenfranchised loss and subsequent emotions in organized spaces,

generally, and understandings of colonization and managerial enactments in virtual spaces designed for authentic emotion displays, specifically, I ask: *What discourses do disenfranchised bereaved individuals draw on as they enact emotions and constitute emotion rules for disenfranchised grieving within and outside of a virtual support group?*

Method

My attention to sensemaking communication, virtual organizing, and disenfranchised emotions necessitated emergent online data to explore how emotions were dynamically structured among virtual community members over a prolonged period. As such, I utilized netnographic fieldwork to understand the embodied practices—which drew from and sometimes resisted broader emotion discourses—to constitute the virtual space and its emotion rules (Dirksen et al., 2010; Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998). Netnographic observations and related data points (e.g., site transcripts, analytic memos, data mapping) were germane to answering my research question. Next, I review my site, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Site for Understanding Disenfranchised Emotions

Pawsitive Outlook⁴ is a virtual organization that houses grief support groups, resources, and a hotline for individuals grieving the loss of their pets. Although the organization offered many opportunities for members to learn about their grief and emotions, a virtual synchronous, anonymous, and text-based support group was particularly suitable for exploring emergent and communicatively constituted emotion rules that guided disenfranchised emotion displays. After locating Pawsitive Outlook and the relevant support group, I sought and obtained Institutional Review Board approval before engaging in site observations and collecting data.

⁴ Site and participants are pseudonyms

The support group was text-based and met for an hour three times a week. At the beginning of each session, a site facilitator would open the chat with a message encouraging members to share their experiences and discuss the emotions that came before, after, and during the loss of a pet. In general, the virtual chat members used the hour to share their stories and current emotions, make sense of their experiences within and outside of the chat, and support other bereaved individuals. There were approximately eight to 12 individuals in the chat during each session.

I observed 106 site members in total, most of which were bereaved site visitors ($N = 98$) compared to site facilitators ($N = 8$). Demographic information was unavailable because the chat was anonymous and site facilitators discouraged sharing personal information. Although many of the site visitors frequently attended the support group, others attended just once. Visits ranged from once to 33 times ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 6.30$). Whereas many individuals engaged with the chat just once ($n = 57$), others were recurrent members ($n = 41$), and the tenuous membership was integral to understanding how members were socialized into the group, how members displayed their emotions over time, and the various discourses that guided the group's emotion rules.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I observed Pawsitive Outlook's synchronous, text-based chats for five months. During each session, I observed site members' text-based interactions and typed field notes. At the end of each chat, I archived the chat transcripts, which I analyzed alongside my fieldnotes. In total, I collected 1,221 pages of typed messages and images from member interactions for analysis.

NVivo software was used to house and analyze my data set. Primary coding (Tracy, 2020) involved open coding each communicative event (e.g., posts, pictures, emoticons) and yielded 50 densely populated codes (e.g., macro discourse, site norm, suppressing emotions). After coding half of the data—two and a half months of site interactions—I recognized that my data did not

generate new codes and that I reached code saturation (Hennick et al., 2017). However, I continued primary-cycle coding in pursuit of meaning saturation to better understand the conceptual dimensions of my codes and how the codes were (dis)similar to one another (Hennick et al., 2017).

Once I completed my primary coding cycle, I engaged in secondary coding (Tracy, 2020), by rereading data and codes, engaging in constant comparative coding (Charmaz, 2014; Tracy, 2020) to understand overlaps or distinctions among my codes, and collapsing primary cycle codes into broader categories. At this point, I coded larger chunks of discourse in my codebook to understand how the codes were situated in context and how codes overlapped or were distinct. Initial conceptual categories began emerging, such as positioning companion animal loss as different, grappling with grief expectations, performing emotions in diverse contexts, and resisting managerial discourses.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I also wrote analytic memos (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2021) to help me make sense of emergent themes, connections among my codes, and relationships between my data and existing literature. Additionally, I utilized pen and paper to visualize relationships among my initial categories (Tracy, 2020). I worked through several iterations of concept maps by making different connections between conceptual categories using different shapes, colors, and lines. I read through my analytic memos as I concept mapped (Tracy, 2020), and my illustrations helped me visualize my understanding of the data across my project, as well as my overall understanding of how individuals grappled with various discourses as they made sense of their experiences with emotions following a disenfranchised loss.

Once my initial analyses and themes were written, I data-conferenced (Braithwaite et al., 2017) with colleagues who were familiar with emotion discourses yet unfamiliar with my data, which helped me make sense of my thematic trajectory. Although my data conference colleagues

confirmed that my themes were theoretically sound, resonant, and rich, we discussed alternative ways of presenting the data and exemplars to enhance coherence (Tracy, 2010). Through my analysis, I arrived at three themes related to bereaved caregivers' disenfranchised grief and emotions across different spaces, including their personal lives, their workplaces, and the virtual space.

Making Sense of Disenfranchised Emotion Displays Across Contexts

My research question asked, *what discourses do disenfranchised bereaved individuals draw on as they enact emotions and constitute emotion rules for disenfranchised grieving within and outside of a virtual support group?* Throughout my 5-month tenure in the virtual care organization, chat members dedicated space to detailing their feelings and emotion displays across different contexts, which gave shape to my analysis and findings. In the following pages, I present themes organized around the discourses members drew on to make sense of their feelings and shape their emotion displays 1) in their personal lives, 2) at work, and 3) within the virtual support group. First, I detail how participants organized their understandings of disenfranchised emotions by drawing on familiar discourses in their professional and personal lives. Second, I depict how Pawsitive Outlook members utilized the virtual space and other members to communicate about emotion rules within their workplaces and professional interactions. Finally, I articulate site members' communication that discursively constituted emotion rules within the virtual space through resisting and reifying far-reaching emotion rules.

“Get another dog”: Rationalizing Animal Companion Grief

Group members generally agreed that prolonged and normative grief assumptions did not apply to their experiences navigating the loss of their animal companions. Virtual group members commonly cited societal discourses that made them feel as if the prolonged and intense

grief they experienced should be reserved for other people, such as family members and close friends. Members' grief assumptions were often derived from their past experiences with loss (e.g., personal loss, witnessing another's grief). For instance, Olivia shared how her occupational experience constrained her understanding of grief and related emotion rules as other group members drew on societal discourses that framed their grief and emotions as unwarranted.

Olivia: I am a retired hospice nurse and have seen many deaths but I have never had a grief like this. He was my best friend and constant companion.

Cameron: Olivia you had a very strong bond

Kris: Losing a pet has affected me as much as losing human. The loss of a companion animal is especially tough because they give us unconditional love. We as humans place conditions on our personal relationships

Oliver: I was thinking the same thing last night, I have lost many relationships but none have hit me like losing Miller.

Lennox: Olivia---there is NO other grief like this--we "share a soul" with our guys

Cameron: our companions get us through some of our hardest times, with forgiveness, patience, and unconditional love it is like nothing else

Emily: As always, its just nice to have a forum to cry and share about it with you guys without hearing.. "Its been a year & a half.. " BLAH BLAH BLAH

Nicole: when I told my doctor that I was worried about my mental health after Millou passes, he just said "get another dog" and Millou is still here!

Kris: "Get another dog" I hate that. As if it's like replacing an old worn pair of shoes or something. Ppl don't get it. as if I'm supposed to sprout a new heart or something

Olivia's disclosure emphasized the tensions between her anticipated and experienced grief, which was considered alongside broader discourses about loss and related emotions. Olivia was conditioned through her experience as a hospice nurse and familiarity with human loss to expect grief and emotion displays to feel and look a particular way. However, losing her pet disrupted

Olivia's expectations and prompted her to contend with her "different" grief, emotions, and loss that she had never before experienced.

Olivia's disclosure also prompted the group to discuss discourses that shaped their disenfranchised experience and controlled their emotion displays outside of the group. The interaction communicated to the chat members that their grief and feelings were deviant. Chat members positioned their animal companion losses as potentially more difficult than losing another human (e.g., "The loss of a companion animal is especially tough because they give us unconditional love" and "there is NO other grief like this") against discourses that disenfranchised their emotions (e.g., "'It's been a year and a half...' BLAH BLAH BLAH" and "'get another dog'"). In doing so, the bereaved caregivers described emotion rules they encountered in their personal interactions, which they often described as suppressing their authentic feelings (e.g., "as if I'm supposed to sprout a new heart or something").

Through comparing loss types and subsequent emotion rules, the members grappled with how and why they suppressed their emotions following the loss of their animal companions. As the group grappled with their "especially tough" grief, they regularly selected how others responded to different losses and grief displays as salient experiences, which shaped members' interpretations of their emotion rules and how others perceived their emotion displays. In doing so, members' interpretations of others' discourses about grief generally and responses to animal companion grief, specifically, constructed their emotions as irrational and counterproductive to moving forward. Kirsty and Emily, for example, shared how their grief and emotions after losing their pet were overshadowed, complicated, and warranted by the proximal loss of a family member.

Kirsty: It is difficult to comprehend when people cannot relate to your pain! My cousins have all been texting about our grandmother and I feel like Ron got lost in the shuffle and

it upsets me because I am struggling to mourn my best friend and everyone else is focused on their own pain instead

Emily: Kirsty, I totally identify with that. Its almost like now.. My grief is valid. It was valid with Storm! Like now it makes sense that I'm so upset & posting all this grief stuff and crying etc.. Now I get to have a memorial.. Why couldn't I have a memorial for Storm? Although I did sneak a line about Storm into my mom's obituary.. When I talked about who passed before her.. I said Her mom, dad, aunts, uncles & her favorite granddog, Storm <3

Dani: Our pets can be a more devastating loss than some people in our lives. Unless you are a pet lover, you don't get that.

Lex: Often our relationship with our pets is the most unconditionally loving and uncomplicated that we have. Their loss is therefore extremely deep.

Peyton: sometimes we have well meaning friends who say "oh, don't cry" ... well, for me it is harder to hold back tears than it is to let them flow.

Emily: Yes, a lot of friends & family dont know how to hold space. My family did that too.. Thats why we have to share with our other grief friends

Jan: The further out, the more you have to fake your pain to others. That's why I love this group!

Kris: No faking here Jan thank God

Emily's and Kirsty's compounded losses cultivated space for the group to discuss how their friends and family members attempted to subjugate members' emotion displays following the loss of their companions. As the group members commiserated about how their friends and family managed members' emotion displays (e.g., "Unless you are a pet lover, you don't get that.", "oh, don't cry..."), they shed light on how the discourses they encountered their day-to-day life disenfranchised their feelings and shaped their emotion displays (e.g., "the further out, the more you have to fake your pain to others"). Friends and family members' discourses organize grief over an animal companion as different and "invalid", suggesting to the bereaved members that they should approach their loss from a rational standpoint and "hold back their tears" to navigate their loss in a more productive, efficient manner. These discourses were

largely drawn from members' experiences with corporate processes and workplace interactions, which I review in more detail next.

“People at work don't value pets”: Performing Emotions in the Workplace

In addition to grappling with the internal equivocality they experienced from their disenfranchised loss that was shaped by discourses in their personal lives, the group also contended with their interpretations of emotion rules in their workplaces. Generally, members agreed that their feelings and related emotion displays should be managed to perform their work efficiently. Members' decisions to manage their emotions were guided by numerous discourses, such as assumptions that others at work would not understand their grief over their companion animals, workplace policies that did not acknowledge their losses, and broader discourses that implicitly suggested they should “be strong to get through meetings”.

A day after losing her cat, Lemon, Audrey joined the chat and shared how she was concerned about returning to work despite her feeling “crushed” by her loss. As other members chimed in to care for Audrey and share their strategies for engaging in their grief given that their work did not formally offer support, they shed light on how their interpretations of others' discourses shaped their emotion enactments at work.

Audrey: I try to remember good times with my Lemon. But, all I can do it think about how I will never hold him again,. And, the most recent picture I took of him was the last. I will never smell his fur or hold his paw. It feels crushing . . . It's tough for me to focus on going to work tomorrow. I can barely handle daily chores. I don't know how I can think about anything else.

Lex: Is there anyone who might be supportive at your work, Audrey? Please just do what you are able and forgive yourself as you grieve your baby.

Lynn: You do whatever you need to do to get through this. when I took my kitty in, I had to take two days off work. I was a mess! Even when I went back, I had a breakdown at work.

Audrey: I'm in HR and its not a very forgiving time to take off. Even when I said I needed off on Friday, the reaction was that my cat was nothing in the face of a global crisis. I understand that but I feel like my world is crashing down

Dani: That is what irks me - when people act like your pet dying is no big deal. Well, it is a big deal

Lynn: oh, Audrey, I am so sorry you didn't get the support you needed!

Jude: It does seem like people at work don't value pets

Lynn: thats why this group is good, others are feeling or have felt the same pain you are going through. This room understands.

Lex: That is why is so good that we have each other. We do understand and support one another.

Audrey: Some people think an animal is less and disposable. My cat is my family. I am very glad people here understand

Audrey's experience grappling with returning to work and setting aside her grief were shaped by messages she received from her company and coworkers (e.g., "the reaction was that my cat was nothing in the face of a global crisis", "people act like your pet dying is no big deal", "some people think an animal is less and disposable"). Similar to Audrey, Lynn suggested that she was expected to return to work shortly after losing her cat and when she "was a mess", noting that she "had a breakdown at work." Thus, chat members described tensions between their expected and experienced emotions based on messages from others who minimized their pain and the intense grief they experienced (e.g., "It does seem like people at work don't value pets"). Workplace expectations and interactions discursively constructed pet loss as "less than", "nothing", and "no big deal" in comparison to other types of loss, thereby perpetuating rationality and efficiency, as well as privileging commerce over grief and unproductive and unwarranted emotions.

Relatedly, the group discussed elements of workplace policies that contributed to or shaped their emotion suppression, which further illuminated the relationship among macro and meso discourses that constituted their emotion displays.

Violet: Sam I lived in [state] for a while and some companies there actually have something called fur-ternity. Where you get time off if you have a puppy or dog new to the household. I think it's an amazing thing. I'm sad that most people don't understand how much our animals mean to us

Emily: [my company] said "It only applies to Family"

Cameron: Sam a couple states have, but most don't

Emily: Luckily, my job considered Storm family and gave me the bereavement days off for her

Sam: My company doesn't have good bereavement policies in place for humans - certainly not animals. Again, I have alerted my company of a family member impending passing and I will use PTO. They don't need details and it's my PTO so I can use it as I need it.

Workplace policies that sanctioned grief layered onto other micro and macro discourses that constituted "appropriate" emotion expression for the disenfranchised group. The group commiserated about bereavement policies which, in general, and, at best, applied to human companions (e.g., "my company said 'It only applies to Family'", "My company doesn't have good bereavement policies in place for humans – certainly not animals."). Some members were able to negotiate leave with their managers despite their lack of formalized workplace support (e.g., "Luckily, my job considered Storm family and gave me the bereavement days off for her"). However, others had to develop strategies for navigating leave on their own by framing their animal companions as family members (e.g., "I have alerted my company of a family member impending passing and I will use PTO"). In both cases, members' messages about workplace policies emphasized how others' interactions shaped their emotion displays and actions following the loss of their companion animals. Members perceived others saw their loss and

grief as different and, consequently, demonstrated how members privileged rationality over felt emotions by planning ahead to engage in their grief while not interfering with commerce.

In another instance, the chat members grappled with performing their grief within other organizational roles, including work and school, demonstrating that they perceived their emotions were subject to corporate and managerial expectations while simultaneously reifying those same discourses.

Emily: In my book it says.. “People will tell you to be strong. Ignore them. You are allowed to fall apart, feel bad, and struggle because when you need to be strong again, you will. For now, cry. Be angry, Go ahead and fall apart because thats how you become whole again”

Alina: so true. I think the worst part is most people don’t understand it made it harder to go through classes. and i cried through a company meeting

Peyton: Alina, sometimes we have to be strong to get through class or a meeting... later we can let out our emotions.

Emily: Alina, sometimes we just have to allow ourselves to not be at our best

Alina: at times i think that i would just rather step aside and not be in charge, so i can take care of situation. problem is, i don’t think other company members are ready to step in so i don’t take time off

Following Emily’s advocating for authentic emotional expression and resistance to societal discourses that suppressed emotion displays, Alina disclosed having trouble navigating grief alongside work and school roles. Alina’s struggle was met with competing discourses. Whereas Emily resisted societal grief assumptions that privilege rationality over emotionality (e.g., “People will tell you to be strong. Ignore them.”), Peyton perpetuated and privileged suppressing emotion displays in public spaces (e.g., “...sometimes we have to be strong to get through class or a meeting...later we can let out our emotions.”), thereby reifying managerial and rational discourses. Rationality underpinned Peyton’s supportive recommendation, suggesting that it is sometimes best to silo disenfranchised emotions—and perhaps grief and emotions, in general—

to the home or other safe spaces, such as the virtual chat. Alina confirmed honoring work through managerial discourses when responding, “i don’t take time off.”

Further, although some members were able to sidestep emotion rules that suppressed others’ emotion displays at work (e.g., framing animal companions as family, utilizing PTO) and in their personal lives (e.g., experiencing the loss of family members and companion animals around the same time), most agreed that they felt they had to suppress their emotions outside of the support group (e.g., “a lot of friends & family dont know how to hold space. My family did that too.. Thats why we have to share with our other grief friends”). As such, the group agreed that the virtual chat was a space in which they did not have to “fake” their grief, discursively creating Pawsitive Outlook as a vital safe space for expressing their authentic emotions. As the group drew comparisons between loss types to make sense of and normalize their felt grief, they also discursively organized their understanding of emotion rules that guided their disenfranchised grief displays in the virtual chat. Thus, I next articulate how the group discursively constructed the virtual space through resisting and reifying societal grief and emotion assumptions.

“Sorry, I’m of no help to anyone”: Emotion Rules Within the Virtual Space

Generally, categories that spoke to themes of physicality and grief were about emotion displays that occurred outside of the group, such as questioning grief performances in front of others or contending with a member’s behavior within their home. However, members also contended with performing their grief in the chat, which discursively constructed emotion rules and socialized members to proper emotional expression within the chat.

Jessie: It really stinks to have to go through this alone...I’m a complete train wreck with no light at the end of the tunnel . . . just when you think you have gotten past the hurdle, you sink back down...I don’t know how much more I can take of this...

Lynn: Jessie it's still so raw. Know that with friends, family, and this group - you will get through this. Just be kind to yourself.

Jessie: I'd like to think so Lynn...but with this virus crap and being cooped up at home...it's really bad . . . I'm afraid I'm going back into hermit mode...Sorry Everyone...I just cannot do this. I'm too depressed and don't want to bring the room down with me...Stay Safe!!

Ken: Stay strong Jessie

Lynn: Take care, Jessie. Come back again, it helps to know you're not alone. fyi: it's not bringing the room down, it is what the room is for.

Lex: So true, Lynn.

Jessie disclosed feelings that culminated from two recent losses and the COVID-19 pandemic before expressing concern about isolation. Although the group rallied around Jessie and members disclosed parts of their experiences to help support Jessie, Jessie abruptly left the chat, citing concern about bringing the chat down. In doing so, Jessie signaled to the group that there were unspoken norms and limits to displaying emotions in the chat, which hinged on rationality and efficiency. Despite others noting Jessie would not “bring the room down” and that emotions are “what the room is for”, Jessie’s exit and suppression of their emotions implied the belief that emotions constrained others’ healing (i.e., the “commerce” of the virtual care organization). Thus, Jessie’s assumption emphasized the reach of managerial discourses that privilege rationality and organizational prosperity. Although rationality constrained the group’s objectives to celebrate and express their authentic emotions, some members expressed concern that their emotion displays were either unwelcomed or harmful to other progress (e.g., growth, healing, support). Jessie’s emotional expression and subsequent disclosure of concern suggest that some group members perceived limits to their emotion displays even among a group of similar individuals.

Others reified the idea that Pawsitive Outlook's objectives were to support members in their pursuit of healing, noting that these processes were constrained by overt emotions.

Sutton: Hello everyone. I feel the same as always. Sad, Guilty, Regrets, wanting a do over but just want my dog back. 6 months and counting, counting for what bc nothing will make it better. I always had him to look forward to and now I don't.

Rory: Sutton, six months is still fresh too. Grieving the loss of our loved one takes a long time. Sadness, guilt, regrets, wanting to do over...all of those emotions do eventually fade with time, a long time sometimes, but please know that the pain lessens. YOU wanting your Riley back does not lessen, it is the pain that lessens. I promise.

Sutton: Rory I haven't learned anything. I'm a mess. I consume myself with work. There are times I do get so engrossed in work that I am not thinking about Riley being dead and if all the flashbacks of his last day. On the other hand, I hate work bc it took me away from Riley when he was here. Sorry, I'm of no help to anyone.

Lennox: Sutton you are always a help when you are HERE for us

Kris: Sutton it's OK to be a mess. I was a mess for a very very long time after Cosmo. I'm just starting to get to an OK place again. It takes a LOT of time.

Rory: Sutton, that is ok, maybe you will learn something from one of us. I understand how you would want to consume yourself with work. to distract yourself from feeling what you need to feel. YOU are of help to me because you have made me realize that Hanky is with me, whether I am working or not. He is in my heart, just as Riley is in yours.

Cameron: Sutton, we are glad you are here!

Rory: Sutton, I couldn't function. I couldn't work. I couldn't shower. nothing. I was such a mess. still am in a lot of ways. Please if you have to cry cry. Don't hide it. Don't prevent it. I went to the beach and screamed and cried and screamed and cried. and Sutton.... your words and being here help others. trust me on that.

Kris: Being honest about your feelings helps yourself as well as others.

Rory: yes, there are others that don't write and just read. then someone see they feel just as you do Sutton and they start to feel comfortable and will chat. YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE to us!

Sutton shamed and sanctioned her emotions and lack of progress (e.g., "I haven't learned anything", "Sorry, I am of no help to anyone."), framing her feelings and emotion displays as

unproductive and unhelpful to the group. However, the group members actively worked to uplift Sutton as a productive group member (e.g., “you are always a help when you are HERE for us”, “YOU are of help to me”, “...we are glad you are here!”), celebrate emotionality (e.g., “It’s OK to be a mess”, “Grieving the loss of our loved one takes a long time”), and described how Sutton’s participation helped others resist the assumptions that underpin their emotion suppression (e.g., “Being honest about your feelings helps yourself as well as others”, “there are others that don’t write and just read. then someone see they feel just as you do Sutton and they start to feel comfortable and will chat.”). Thus, whereas Sutton suggested that emotions and prolonged suffering constrained group members’ progress, the other members communicated that all feelings and emotions are acceptable, normal, and even advantageous.

Taken as a whole, members’ struggle with their disenfranchised feelings and emotions, as well as the group’s attempts to normalize and communicate support for authentic emotional expression, were discursively situated around prevailing assumptions about grief, emotions, and healing. Although the chat was discursively constituted as a supportive environment and safe to share emotions, members sometimes communicated regret for their emotional expression and concern that they were “taking up too much of the group’s time”, “bringing the group down”, and “no help to the group” given their overt, irrational, and unproductive emotions. In doing so, the group contended with tensions between being a safe space for emotional expression or being a safe space for healing. Whereas the former celebrated and foregrounded authentic emotional expression as the primary organizational objective, the group members that aligned their membership with the latter perceived that emotion management (e.g., rationality, efficiency, professionalism) was necessary to support member healing. Thus, even a virtual organization

constituted by and dedicated to disenfranchised and authentic emotions drew from—resisted, reified, and reimagined—corporate emotion discourses.

Discussion

This study inquired into the discourses disenfranchised bereaved individuals drew from as they enacted emotions and constituted emotion rules for disenfranchised grieving within and outside of a virtual support group. Individuals' day-to-day communication, organizational memberships and structures, and cultural identities shape how they structure and make sense of emotions (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020; Weick et al., 2005). Although scholars have explored how emotions are co-constructed through communication and established structures in corporate environments (e.g., Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Malvini Redden, 2013; Paul & Riforgiate, 2015), as well as how organizations colonize behavior in the home (e.g., Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Medved & Kirby, 2005), exploring how emotions are performed, constitutive of, and sanctioned in other organizational structures (i.e., virtual support groups) and personal experiences (i.e., disenfranchised grief) is germane to understanding the far-reaching implications of corporate colonization and macro emotion discourses (Deetz, 1992).

Emotions are contextualized alongside enduring societal discourses that tend to privilege rationality, efficiency, and control (Deetz, 1992; Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006). For disenfranchised bereaved individuals, however, emotion rules and subsequent emotion displays are further complicated because the grief is not sanctioned by society (Doka, 1989). Thus, disenfranchised bereaved individuals navigate an emotion double-bind that prompts them to contend with their emotions, generally, and disenfranchised emotion displays, particularly, in a variety of settings. As Pawsitive Outlook members engaged in the chat about their feelings and

emotions, they actively made sense of emotion displays within the workplace and the virtual support group.

Given that my findings are situated at the intersections of work, life, and other organizational roles, I first offer implications for understanding how disenfranchised loss might layer onto different identities and trigger sensemaking about emotion displays across different contexts. Then, I offer my interpretation of emotion discourses that were reified, reimagined, and resisted within the virtual support group, and attend to the capabilities of virtual organizations to operate as “safe spaces” that celebrate the emotionality of life (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). Finally, I offer practical recommendations for workplaces to discursively enfranchise animal companion loss, as well as recommendations for ways that virtual support groups might resist corporate colonization in support of caring for members’ disenfranchised experiences.

Sensemaking, the Body, and Disenfranchised Emotions

Sensemaking and emotions go hand-in-hand (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Maitlis et al., 2013; Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) noted, “an interruption to a flow typically induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking. It is precisely because ongoing flows are subject to interruption that sensemaking is infused with feeling” (p. 45). A growing body of research contends with the emotionality of sensemaking, theorizing that emotions trigger, shape, and conclude sensemaking (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Maitlis et al., 2013; Weick et al., 2005). This study expands this research by emphasizing that sensemaking shapes emotion rules in different organized spaces (i.e., work and virtual support groups) pertaining to disenfranchised loss.

This study articulated the communication bereaved individuals used to actively grapple with overlapping discourses and make sense of their disenfranchised emotions concerning

dominant expectations in the workplace, personal life, and even virtual support groups. Whereas equivocal events can trigger emotional responses (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and emotions are salient components of sensemaking processes (Maitlis et al., 2013), this study evidences the utility of sensemaking as a tool to understand emotions and constitute emotion rules. Thus, rather than theorizing about emotions as a component of sensemaking processes (Weick et al., 2005), I emphasize the ways that individuals might make sense of intense emotions alongside various discourses, especially when the sensemaker is marginalized or experiencing a disenfranchised event.

When individuals experience equivocality or do not know which emotions to express, in what places, or when, they are triggered to use their communication to construct meaning and organize their interpretations of plausible actions (Weick, 1995). Part of sensemaking involves individuals drawing on familiar discourses to understand their interpretations (e.g., “why do I think this?”) and enactments (e.g., what they say) following a triggering event. As such, multiple discourses (e.g., managerialism, professionalism; Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and personal experiences (e.g., race, class, gender; Gist-Mackey, 2018; Hochschild 1983) are integral to “organize meaning to understand emotions in context” (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021).

Societal discourses guide emotion rules in personal (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Medved & Kirby, 2005) and professional contexts (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Malvini Redden, 2013; Paul & Riforgiate, 2015), but also enable or constrain the extent to which different bodies can engage in authentic emotional expression (e.g., Collins, 1983; Gist-Mackey, 2018). Emotional displays are classed, gendered (Hochschild, 1983), and racialized experiences (Collins, 1983; Gist-Mackey, 2018), which suggest that different marginalizing and

disenfranchising experiences complicate emotion rules for minority group members (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021).

Although anonymity masked gender and race within the virtual support group, potentially enabling authentic emotional expression for marginalized chat members, bereaved site members commiserated about another identity marker that constrained their emotional displays within their workplaces: disenfranchised loss. Site members shared their frustrations about not being understood, being expected to “get back to work”, and having to suppress their emotions for commerce following the loss of their pet. Their frustrations were often displaced toward other types of losses that garnered more acknowledgment and formal support. The disenfranchised bereaved acknowledged that others who suffered the loss of a human family member were able to display their authentic emotions around others, which further communicatively marginalized their grief, suppressed their emotions, and triggered sensemaking about uncharted emotion rules for their new experience. Thus, this study demonstrates that personal experiences (i.e., disenfranchising pet loss) aside from and in addition to demographic identity markers (e.g., gender, race, class; Hochschild, 1983; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020) necessitate individuals grapple with expectations for emotion displays they have not previously encountered. Disenfranchised loss can layer onto any body (Doka, 1989; Eason, 2021), emphasizing that potentially transitory disenfranchised experiences that might shape emotion displays alongside macro, meso, and micro discourses.

Given the co-constitutions among emotions, multi-level discourses, and personal experiences, scholars should continue exploring how intersecting discourses discipline emotional expression among disenfranchised groups. For instance, future research could attend to emotion displays and rules that are communicatively constituted following the loss of a mentor or

marginalized friend (Doka, 1989) to understand how emotions and disenfranchising loss layer onto bodies—marginalized and otherwise—to generate insights as to how organizations might support authentic emotional expression or resist dominant emotion rules that perpetuate gendered, racialized, and disenfranchised emotion double-binds. Such research should aim to decrease organizational and patriarchal perspectives that are privileged (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and highlight the possibilities for “a more diverse lifeworld . . . with space created for emotions” (Denker & Dougherty, 2013, p. 257).

Resisting and Reifying Emotion Rules Within Virtual Safe Spaces

Members’ disenfranchised experiences (e.g., emotional suppression among family and friends, lack of formal workplace bereavement policies) were precursors to seeking out and joining Pawsitive Outlook, but their experiences also discursively constituted the virtual support group’s emotion rules and socialized members’ emotion displays. In other words, the virtual support group was more than a site for collective sensemaking about members’ (disenfranchised) emotion displays (Weick et al., 2005), the support group was also a salient space for making sense of emotion rules that organize and were organized by the “safe” structure. Thus, this study adds to a growing body of literature exploring the colonization of emotions and behaviors in various contexts (e.g., Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021), by exploring the communication in a virtual support group. Members’ communication demonstrated how they actively grappled with, resisted, and reified colonizing discourses (i.e., managerialism, professionalism; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) as they managed a virtual safe space for celebrating the emotionality of life (Denker & Dougherty, 2013).

Generally, members created a shared understanding about when they should express, mask, or alter their negative emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Tracy, 2000), and the chat was

frequently celebrated as a safe space for authentic emotion displays (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). For instance, in many of the group's chats, members grappled with and problematized grief expectations that they encountered in their personal interactions (e.g., "'It's been a year and a half...' BLAH BLAH BLAH", "'get another dog'") and professional lives (e.g., "'my company said 'It only applies to Family'", "'the reaction was that my cat was nothing in the face of a global crisis'"). In doing so, the group discursively constructed the virtual support group as safe for expressing negative emotions (e.g., "'that's why this group is good, others are feeling or have felt the same pain you are going through. This room understands.", "'It's OK to be a mess'") and expressed gratitude for having such a space (e.g., "'I am very glad people here understand'").

However, in some cases, Pawsitive Outlook chat members relegated their emotions and disciplined themselves by leaving the chat when they perceived they were overly, inappropriately, or irrationally emotional, signaling a degree to which chat members were conditioned by corporate and managerial proclivities. This study demonstrates that like employees within a workplace setting, chat members were disciplined to "think and act rationally to maximize their gains" (Fineman, 2000, p. 10). Thus, the commerce of the virtual support group is a noteworthy consideration, and chat members were often situated in tension between understanding the goals of the support group as 1) to celebrate the emotionality of life or 2) to engage in productive, rational, and efficient healing. In the virtual care organization, healing was likened to corporate profits, and members sometimes expressed that they perceived their negative emotion displays were irrational and unhelpful to the organization because they constrained other members' healing. Much like organizing home life to privilege rationality (Denker & Dougherty, 2013) or work to "efficiently and economically produce goods and

services” (Fineman, 2000, p. 10), suppressing negative emotions within the chat seemed to help members abstain from precluding the organization’s goals and inhibiting members’ success.

Denker and Dougherty (2013) argued that without safe spaces to act out or acknowledge the emotionality of life, individuals may become trapped in roles that normalize rationality. However, my data demonstrates that even in discursively constructed safe spaces, individuals grappled with managerialism, rationality, and far-reaching patriarchal emotion rules. Further, even in anonymous spaces in which individuals should, in theory, be able to authentically express their emotions without concern for other-imposed repercussions, emotions were riddled with competing discourses. Given that individuals draw on past experiences and “faith” in a known world as they make sense of new experiences (Weick, 1995, p. 37), it was difficult for members to consistently resist the colonizing and managerial discourses in pursuit of maintaining the virtual space as safe. Thus, this study emphasizes the communication that constitutes safe spaces (Denker & Dougherty, 2013) is organized by corporate and patriarchal systems that privilege rationality over emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Even support group members are privy to perpetuating discourses that disenfranchise their grief and drive them to a safe space.

Supporting Disenfranchised Bereaved Individuals at Work and in Virtual Safe Spaces

Given that emotion rules are communicatively constituted by organizational, interactional, and societal discourses (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020), it is pertinent to consider how we can begin shifting the narrative regarding disenfranchised emotions in various contexts. In 2021, Wilson et al. suggested that organizations need more procedural support for bereaved workers, in general. As evidenced, the sentiment persists—and is arguably imperative to consider—among disenfranchised populations. Therefore, I provide practical recommendations for organizations for supporting disenfranchised bereaved organizational members, as well as for

virtual safe spaces dedicated to authentic emotional displays. Given that communication and organizations are co-constituted (McPhee & Zaug, 2008), my recommendations span meso and micro coordination efforts.

First, my data provide an empirical report of members struggling to manage their organizational roles alongside their disenfranchised loss and emotions. Approximately 68 million U.S. households care for one or more companion animals (AVMA, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Despite the large and growing population of companion animal caretakers and the inevitable loss they experience, organizations rarely sanction pet loss (Society for Human Resource Management, 2017). Given that negative emotions can harm organizations and workers (e.g., burnout; Maslach, 1982; Tracy, 2017) and my participants demonstrated their organizations do not provide leave for disenfranchised losses, it is intuitive that bereaved individuals suppress their emotions to perform the prototypical organizational member roles.

To protect and support organizational members, as well as protect the bottom line, organizations should consider the benefits of formally sanctioning disenfranchised losses. For one, providing leave and encouraging organizational members to utilize leave for disenfranchised experiences might communicate a supportive organizational identity into existence. Formalized policies should aim to protect organizational members and the organization. Having time away to cope with a loss and feeling supported by an organization would likely increase wellbeing, decrease the likelihood of burnout, and increase productivity (Gilbert et al., 2021; Kindler & Cooper, 2009) among disenfranchised groups.

Second, organizations should consider how to celebrate animal companionship and support pet loss, specifically. Whereas embedding policies into the fabric of organizations is one step to shaping meso and micro coordination efforts that might aid in enfranchising pet loss,

organizations should also consider how to shift the cultural narrative regarding emotion displays and pet loss from bottom-up approaches. For instance, policies and other socialization efforts might subliminally (or perhaps explicitly) encourage organizational members to adopt a compassionate mindset, enabling organizational members to support their colleagues and constitute a caring environment that resists colonizing discourses. Organizations may begin shifting their cultural narrative by identifying colonizing policies and discourses, acknowledging their power regarding marginalizing emotion displays, and creating space for dialogue about emotions and compassionate acts.

Further, organizations should create environments that celebrate pets, which can generate several benefits for organizations and organizational members. For instance, regarding companion animals, 82% of employees surveyed from a wide range of U.S. organizations and industries reported greater loyalty to companies with pet-friendly policies (Banfield Pet Hospital, 2016). Further, having pets at work improves morale (Banfield Pet Hospital, 2016) and might signal to bereaved individuals that their loss and emotions are valid. Organizations and members might shift their cultural narrative and enfranchise companion animal loss by allowing pets in the office, scheduling animal therapy days, arranging volunteer opportunities, offering pet insurance, and, importantly, providing bereavement leave (SHRM, 2017). However, organizations need to negotiate these policies and the use of such policies alongside other competing needs, such as how allowing animals at work might harm employees with allergies. Nevertheless, consideration of inclusive policies and discussion among organizational members might signal a degree of acceptance and support for animal companionship, which is an important input for enfranchising animal companion loss.

Finally, my study points to the need for virtual safe spaces to acknowledge and protect against colonizing discourses. Because colonizing discourses are woven into the fabric of society (Deetz, 1992; Denker & Dougherty, 2013), it can be difficult for organizations and virtual safe spaces to identify and acknowledge oppressive acts. Aakhus & Rumsey (2010) noted that virtual support groups should not necessarily create more rules, but rather explicitly communicate with members about their roles, who their community is, and what their goals are. Thus, my recommendations are aimed at supporting authentic emotional expression through communicating about objectives and site facilitator intervention.

I recommend that virtual support groups share information with their chat members about their spaces being dedicated to authentic emotions and emotional expression, as well as share information about being socialized to suppress emotions (e.g., *we are often taught from a young age to suppress our emotions in interpersonal interactions, at work and school, and sometimes even at home. We want this space to celebrate your true emotional experiences that you might feel the need to suppress in other spaces.*). Virtual organizations can embed information about colonizing discourses in their site material (e.g., FAQs or ground rules), but facilitators should also consider sharing a consistent scripted message at the start of each session that acknowledges these discourses and prompts members to resist them. Site material should also encourage members to support one another and normalize the emotionality of their experience. Lastly, because colonizing discourses are likely inescapable and site members might occasionally sanction their emotion displays by leaving the chat, site facilitators should consider individually reaching out to those members to educate and encourage them to experience and display their authentic emotions within the chat whenever possible.

Conclusion

Emotion rules that privilege rationality and control (Deetz, 1992) are shaped by and experienced alongside numerous factors, including societal, organizational, and relational discourses (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Rationality is not only discursively constructed as the key to organizational success (e.g., Putnam & Mumby, 1993) and relational efficiency and success in family interactions (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Sotirin et al., 2007), but also to effective virtual support groups. My study demonstrates how societal emotion rules were communicatively experienced and displayed by individuals navigating a disenfranchised loss, which I argue is another personal experience that prompts sensemaking about emotion displays within workplace environments and various interpersonal interactions.

Further, the disenfranchised loss and related emotional suppression relegated individuals to a virtual support group for expressing their authentic emotions and healing. Although the virtual organization was discursively constituted against overarching emotion rules that guide emotion displays at work and in interpersonal interactions, the virtual organization also contended with dominant perspectives as members self-disciplined their behavior or disciplined others' emotions. Discursively constituted safe spaces for authentic and raw emotional displays, although helpful for jostling members from the emotional suppression performed at work (Denker & Dougherty, 2013), are not always safe from colonizing discourses.

Chapter Four

Organizations are embedded in our day-to-day lives and the very fabric of Western society (Deetz, 1992; Denker & Dougherty, 2013). Research is increasingly uncovering the communication that is used to discursively constitute organizations while simultaneously emphasizing the ways that organizations shape individual experiences (McPhee & Zaug, 2008; Nicotera, 2020b). This dissertation extends this research agenda to the specific organizational experiences of a virtual support group for individuals bereaving the loss of a companion animal.

Virtual community research has experienced marked growth over the past two decades (Borah, 2015), and online community research trajectories generally follow that of organizational communication. Alongside calls for understanding the communicative constitutions of organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2008; Nicotera, 2020b; Weick, 1995), there have also been calls for nuanced communication theory within online communities (Borah, 2015; Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004; Fernback, 2007). Throughout the past two decades, online community scholars have worked to further develop theoretical and conceptual rigor in online community research (Borah, 2015; Fernback, 2007) and attend to the intersubjectivities among macro, meso, and micro discourses that give shape to online communities (e.g., Goldberg, 2011; Yuan, 2013). A tendency to explore online communities solely from a structural perspective (i.e., a container in which communication is exchanged) or an interactional perspective (i.e., how members communicate with others) has limited understanding of the multifaceted, socially constructed cultural processes foundational to online communities (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004; Fernback, 2007).

Further, calls for understanding the communication involved in organizing and (re)constructing identities in online communities following a loss (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond,

2019) have emphasized the importance of attending to the discursive co-constitutions between virtual sites and members' communication. This dissertation responds to these calls by exploring how individuals 1) use their communication, 2) to organize virtual spaces and discursively enact sensible environments, 3) that draw from—resist and reify—colonizing organizational discourses, 4) and afford disenfranchised bereaved individuals a space to make sense of their emotions and identities. Specifically, I utilized netnographic fieldwork within a virtual care organization to understand how two organizational theoretical processes—sensemaking about identity and emotions—take shape in virtual spaces and give meaning to disenfranchised bereaved individuals in personal and professional contexts.

This dissertation evidenced that online community members' communication organized the virtual site and shaped members' experiences within the community, but the virtual site also gave shape to members' enactments. Pawsitive Outlook members actively grappled with their personal and organizational identities, thereby communicating their identities and the virtual space into existence, while also contending with virtual site features. Thus, online communities and member communication are co-constituted, aligning with communicatively constituted organization (CCO) theory (McPhee & Zaug, 2008) and related organizational communication models (e.g., the four flows model, sensemaking; MCPhee & Zaug, 2008; Weick, 1995).

In the following sections, I first revisit and extend the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of my two empirical studies. In doing so, I demonstrate virtual communities as sites for extending and enhancing organizational communication theory, explore how using virtual communities and netnographic qualitative methods connect communication research and sites of practice, and implore scholars and practitioners to enfranchise losses of

various types in professional contexts. Further, I call for future research into the communicative constitutions of virtual organizations and present numerous opportunities for future research.

Co-Constitutions of Disenfranchised Loss and Virtual Communities

Through netnographic fieldwork data, chapter two explored the interplay between sensemakers, sensegivers, and the site structure in a virtual disenfranchised grief support group, situating communication at the core of identity reconstruction. In chapter three, I explored how disenfranchised bereaved individuals grappled with multi-level discourses to make sense of their emotions in personal interactions, at work, and within the virtual space. Taken as a whole, this dissertation evidenced that members' disenfranchising loss was not only a trigger for motivating further identity exploration through sensebreaking and sensegiving (chapter two), but members' losses also disenfranchised their emotions and necessitated they contend with their emotion displays across contexts (chapter three). My dissertation demonstrates that sensemaking is indeed embedded with emotions as individuals grapple with their equivocality and plausible interpretations (chapter two); however, individuals are also prompted to make sense of their emotions following triggering events (chapter three).

The two chapters coalesce to present theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for understanding communication processes that shape and are shaped by organizational structures, how scholars should continue attending to the communicative constitutions of virtual communities, and how organizations and practitioners can support disenfranchised grievers in a variety of contexts. First, I address this dissertation's theoretical implications and consider overlaps between understanding sensemaking, sensebreaking, and multiple discourses as they relate to understanding identity reconstruction (chapter two) and emotion displays (chapter three) of disenfranchised bereaved individuals within and outside of a

virtual support group. Then, I articulate my methodological processes for understanding communication as the essence of the virtual community and members' experiences, and I offer implications for scholars undertaking communication research in virtual sites of practice. Finally, I review the practical implications offered in chapters two and three and address how organizations might holistically support disenfranchised bereaved individuals by acknowledging, sanctioning, and celebrating their experiences.

Theoretical Implications

I designed my dissertation studies with several theoretical implications in mind, including understanding how sensemaking unfolds in virtual support spaces, how sensemaking about disenfranchised loss shape identity reconstruction (chapter two), and how sensemaking about emotion enactments gives shape to emotion rules in different contexts (chapter three). To this end, my dissertation extends organizational communication research and theory about identity and emotions to a qualitatively new context, virtual support groups, thereby attending to the organizing features of communication (Weick, 1995). In what follows, I articulate and extend my theoretical implications by first addressing how sensemaking gives and takes shape from virtual sites. Next, I detail how my findings complicate sensebreaking and sensegiving conceptualizations. Finally, I address how my data nuances understandings of the discourses that individuals grapple with as they encounter transitory disenfranchised experiences and discursively shape virtual safe spaces.

Extending Sensemaking to Virtual Spaces

First, it is pertinent to discuss how sensemaking in virtual spaces unfolds and organizes members' understanding of their experiences. Although organizational communication scholars have been grappling with sensemaking theoretical processes since the 1970s (Anderson, 2006),

online community scholars have just begun to understand how virtual spaces shape sensemaking processes (Robinson & Pond, 2019). Sensemaking has been demonstrated to be a valuable tool for managing distress and grief following a significant loss (Clements et al., 2003; Park 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019), and disenfranchised bereaved individuals might especially need virtual communities to engage in sensemaking processes because it allows them to locate similar others without being limited by geographic location. Following Robinson and Pond's (2019) call for using interpretive qualitative methods to understand the communicative links between experiencing a loss and reconstructing identity in an online support group, this dissertation evidenced that bereaved individuals grapple with their disenfranchised identities (chapter two) and emotions (chapter three), enact ruptured and reconstructed caregiving identities (chapter two), and draw on familiar discourses to shape the virtual safe space (chapter three).

As individuals move through various spaces and group memberships their identities fluctuate and are communicated into being (Ashforth et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Relatedly, emotion rules layer onto identities and implore individuals to grapple with their emotion displays in various spaces (e.g., personal and professional interactions; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Individuals bereaving the disenfranchised loss of their companion animals engaged in sensemaking as they grappled with their change, unexpected equivocality, and unrecognized grief (Weick, 1995). This dissertation offers important implications for understanding how the structure of the virtual site shapes sensemaking processes, furthering understanding of sensemaking in understudied text-based virtual communities (Park, 2010; Robinson & Pond, 2019). First, I address how Weick's (1995) seven sensemaking processes unfolded in the virtual spaces before offering my interpretation of how social affordances might shape the sensible environment of virtual spaces.

Sensemaking is comprised of seven properties (Weick, 1995) which can be demonstrated through the Pawsitive Outlook chat members' communication. First, sensemaking is grounded in identity construction. Through observing and making sense of others' identity enactments—including enacting ruptured and reconstructed identities (chapter two)—and emotion displays (chapter three), bereaved members were able to understand who they were and who they were becoming opposite of normative and enfranchised bereaved individuals. Second, sensemaking is retrospective, hence the famous phrase, “how can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (Weick, 1988, p. 307). Through relatively persistent communication exchanged within the virtual chat, members were able to communicate their identities, emotions, and interpretations of their enactments after seeing their communication. Third, sensemaking is enacted of sensible environments. Weick posited that communication is foundational to constituting the environments that shape sensemaking. In other words, “we make that which we sense” (Nicotera, 2020c, p. 30). The bereaved individuals communicatively constructed Pawsitive Outlook as a virtual space dedicated to understanding their grief, making sense of their identities (chapter two), and engaging in the emotionality of life (chapter three), and their sensible environment simultaneously enabled and constrained their sensemaking. Fourth, sensemaking is social and systematic, meaning individuals derive meaning from encounters with other social actors and known systems. Pawsitive Outlook members' plausible identity enactments (chapter two) and opportunities for authentic emotion displays (chapter three) were multiplied by seeing other members' communication, encountering sensebreaking communication, and grappling with sensegiving communication. Fifth, sensemaking is ongoing, meaning it is an iterative process and has no beginning or end. Pawsitive Outlook members enacted several iterations of plausible identities and subsequent emotions, from enacting the ruptured caregiver identity (chapter two)

to contending with different opportunities for understanding and expressing their authentic emotions (chapter three) to reframing how caregiving might be enacted following the loss of their companion animals (chapter two). Sixth, sensemaking is focused on and by extracted cues. Sensemaking begins with noticing and bracketing, meaning an event must be recognized and set apart from other predictable stimuli. The disenfranchising cues—what made companion animal loss qualitatively different from other loss types—were important to site members as they discursively created the sensible environment (Pawsitive Outlook) as a supportive space for grappling with identities and authentic emotion displays. Seventh, sensemaking is driven by plausibility, rather than accuracy. Weick and his colleagues (2005) noted the first question of sensemaking is “what is going on here?” and the second question is “what do I do next?” Through asking the second question, Pawsitive Outlook members developed a shared understanding of their disenfranchised experience, emotions, ruptured identities, and plausible interpretations.

Although my data demonstrates that Weick’s (1995) seven original sensemaking processes are relevant to virtual organizing, I argue that another property—the communicative mode and related affordances—is an important consideration deserving of further research. Sensemaking, or the social and systematic noticing and bracketing of cues following an unpredictable event to understand plausible interpretations, both gives shape to and takes shape from the structure. As Weick put it, “people [create] their own environments and these environments then [constrain] their actions” (Weick, 1995, p. 31). Given that the site structure (or organizational container) both takes shape from and gives shape to members’ experiences, including their identities (chapter two) and emotions (chapter three), properties that give and take shape from the sensible environment are important considerations. To this end, my data

evidenced that various social affordances (Evans et al., 2017; Gibson, 1979) were integral to participants' sensemaking in the virtual space.

Social affordances are generally defined as the relationships between the object, its features, and the user (Evans et al., 2017). Affordances emphasize the connection between the actor and object (Gibson, 1979), underscoring the co-constitutions among members and their virtual site (McPhee & Zaug, 2008), as well as between sensemakers and their sensible environments (Weick, 1995). For instance, persistent communication might enable users to revisit their identity enactments throughout equivocal moments, such as disenfranchised grief, and emphasize the links between "seeing" who they were and who they are becoming (Weick, 1988). Further, the synchronous exchanges between members signaled the degree to which identity (chapter two) and emotion (chapter three) enactments were appropriate (Ashforth et al., 2008). And, given the disenfranchised nature of their grief, users would likely not have had the space to make sense of their loss, identity (chapter two), or emotions (chapter three) without the potential for anonymous, flexible, and private communication (Park et al., 2021).

Whereas clinical health professionals have explored how writing might help individuals cope with losing their animal companion (e.g., writing a letter, organizing a memorial, creating a scrapbook; Clements et al., 2003; Park et al., 2021), my dissertation highlights the utility of seeing sensemaking enactments both synchronously and over a period in a group of individuals experiencing a similar, albeit distinct, equivocal, and unpredictable event in a flexible environment. The persistently available sensemaking—what members enacted, selected, and retained as salient cues for understanding their identities and emotion displays—enabled users to interact with multiple plausible interpretations that prompted them to communicatively disrupt ruptured identity enactments (chapter two) and understand their emotion displays (chapter three).

Pawsitive Outlook members regularly referenced others' enactments from earlier chats, offered interpretations of others' enactments after observing for a prolonged period, and discussed how others' enactments gave shape to their interpretations, highlighting the unique structural features and social affordances that organized and were organized by the chat and members' experiences. The ability to write and then read and re-read communication may have provided more opportunities for reflexive interpreting. Therefore, text-based support groups may offer important features not available in face-to-face groups and interactions, which have been linked to memory decay (Canary & Lakey, 2013) and possibly subsequent loss of opportunities for secondary interpreting. Further, the flexible and private environment afforded members the space to discuss their disenfranchising experiences that occurred in their corporeal interactions, as well as perform their plausible and emerging identities without being sanctioned by members of their offline networks (Miller, 2016; Valkenburg et al., 2005).

Thus, my dissertation data points to the importance of exploring the interplay and co-constitutions among the site structure and members' communication (McPhee & Zaugg, 2008; Weick, 1995), suggesting that the social affordances give and take shape from the sensible environments that are produced through communication (Weick, 1995). Future research should pursue validating the capacity to which a site structure and perceived affordances give shape to members' sensemaking dependent variables, such as reconstructed sense of identity, realized changing nature of grief over time, normalized disenfranchised experiences, or increased emotional wellbeing (for review, see Robinson & Pond, 2019). Relatedly, research should (in)validate the possibility for virtual support groups and perceived affordances to compound negative or disenfranchised experiences among bereaved individuals by way of social affordances, such as prolonging grief due to "miscommunication, technical issues, or distress

from reading others' messages," (Robinson & Pond, 2019, p. 58). Ultimately, social affordances are an important consideration in understanding sensemaking processes and properties within virtual communities, and this area offers abundant possibilities for future research.

Rethinking Sensebreaking and Sensegiving Conceptualizations, Motivations, and Outcomes

Identity reconstruction—including identity and emotion enactments provided by sensemakers and sensegivers—following a significant loss is a relatively understudied sensemaking outcome (Park, 2010), and qualitative methods help theorize how grief, emotions, and identity are co-constituted alongside and within an online space. Although the relationship between online mentorship and members' outcomes (e.g., wellbeing) is well established (DuBois et al., 2011; Kohlstadt et al., 2015; McInroy, 2020), there is much to be learned about the relationship between sensemakers, the site structure, and other communicative agents. As I detailed within my empirical studies, bereaved Pawsitive Outlook members relied on others to rupture and validate chat members' identities (chapter two) and emotion enactments (chapter three). My findings emphasize chat members' roles in discursively guiding (i.e., sensegiving) or rupturing (i.e., sensebreaking) a sensemaker's interpretations and enactments. Further, although sensegiving and sensebreaking have been studied in various workplace contexts (e.g., white- and blue-collar settings; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000), my findings demonstrate the utility of exploring these processes in an online community.

First, Pawsitive Outlook members utilized sensebreaking and sensegiving communication to actively disrupt sensemakers' ruptured identity enactments, highlighting sensebreaking as a process rather than a trigger for motivating further identity exploration (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000). Through discursively disrupting members' ruptured identity enactments (i.e., "this is not who you are or who you are becoming") and ascribing personal and

organizational caregiving identities (i.e., “you are still a caregiver, as demonstrated by your care for other bereaved site members”), Pawsitive Outlook and its members were able to reconcile personal identities, reduce equivocality, reduce members’ suffering, and promote the organization’s agenda to support healing. Members’ communication highlighted the ways that organizational members might discursively sit in their equivocality and enact ruptured identities (i.e., self-imposed sensebreaking), as well as necessitate an external force (i.e., another organizational member; secondary sensebreaking) to discursively jostle them from their ruptured identity enactments. Thus, despite sensebreaking and sensegiving communication being articulated as a colonizing and commandeering communicative practice, my study emphasizes the capacity for organizational members to realign bereaved and ruptured personal identities.

Extant literature suggests that sensebreaking communication might constitute a salient rupture in a newcomer’s identity (Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016), emphasizing sensebreaking as a precursor to an emerging identity rather than an ongoing, interpretive, and reflexive process. Given that identity work is iterative and ongoing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it is important to understand how individuals grapple with and perform ruptured identities before taking up new identities through sensegiving communication. In chapter two, I argued that sensebreaking goes beyond accentuating knowledge gaps (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Dailey, 2016; Pratt, 2000) and should account for how members enact ruptured identities through self-imposed sensebreaking communication before adopting a new identity or realigning ruptured identities with their overall identity narrative. As such, I call scholars to attend to the liminal space that communicators might occupy between experiencing sensebreaking processes and taking up sensegiving efforts.

Second, it is important to consider the potential relationship between emotions, sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking communication. A growing body of scholarship is attending to the links between emotions and sensemaking (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Maitlis et al., 2013; Weick et al., 2005), suggesting that sensemaking draws on and produces emotions that shape interpretations (Weick et al., 2005). To this end, my data suggest that members engage in sensemaking about emotions themselves, including how, when, and where to express and suppress their disenfranchised emotions. Emotions and sensemaking are entwined and co-constituted. And, given that Pawsitive Outlook members were embedded in an emotion-laden space following an emotional crisis, it is worthwhile to consider the capacities to which sensebreaking and sensegiving communication might be enabled and constrained by emotions.

Ashforth (2001) argued that cognition and affect might serve as “first movers” to organizational identification (p. 210). Relatedly, Harquail (1998) posited that emotions can prime the heart for adopting a new identity and drive behavior, furthering Tajfel’s (1978) idea that social identity includes “the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 63). Identification engages our hearts (Harquail, 1998) and produces strong emotions (Ashforth et al., 2008). As Pawsitive Outlook members engaged in sensemaking about their personal identities following their unique sensebreaking events (chapter two), they also grappled with their emotions (chapter three) and attached value to the superordinate organizational caregiving identity and virtual space, enabling them to discursively define and align their emerging personal and social identities.

However, given that individuals have a degree of agency in performing, revising, and adopting identities despite the power of emotions in such decisions (Ashforth et al., 2008), it is important to consider the extent to which emotions shaped participants’ understanding of

sensebreaking and sensegiving communication. Ibarra (1999) noted that organizational members might need courage to experiment with provisional identities. Therefore, organizational members utilize emotions to drive behavior and affirm tentative identities (Harquail, 1998). With regards to virtual support organizations, specifically, it is important to further understand the emotions incoming members bring to the organization and how those emotions shape identities. How do emotions and sensemaking about them bring about virtual organizations (chapter three), and how do an organization and its members harness incoming emotions to shape or realign incoming members' identities (chapter two)? Through parsing out the different emotions involved in developing and enacting identities, future research might nuance which emotions prime persons for identification (through sensebreaking and sensegiving communication), how emotions and sensemaking communication facilitate virtual support groups, and how emotions might be harnessed for the perceived interest of the organizational member, rather than the organization itself.

Understanding the Structuration of Emotions in Virtual "Safe" Spaces

Finally, my dissertation points to noteworthy implications regarding the relationships between sensemaking and communication about emotions, which discursively constitute emotion rules in various organized spaces (Kramer & Hess, 2002; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Organizations are sites for myriad emotions (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2011), and there is much to be learned about how emotions are organized (Hochschild, 1983). To this end, it is important to understand how emotions are expressed, experienced, and limited in various settings (i.e., online communities, spaces dedicated to emotional expression; Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Dutton et al., 2014). I utilized netnographic data in a virtual support group for disenfranchised grievers to understand the various discourses that shape the bereaved individuals' experiences, their emotion

displays, and the site's emotion rules. As such, my findings offer theoretical implications for 1) understanding how disenfranchised grief triggers sensemaking about emotions, 2) understanding how the commerce of virtual support groups might shape the site's discursive emotion rules, and 3) considering the capacity for constructing "safe" spaces that enable members the ability to celebrate the emotionality of life (Denker & Dougerty, 2013).

First, Pawsitive Outlook members' experiences demonstrated that a disenfranchised loss triggers emotion equivocality and prompts members to grapple with how to display their emotions in various settings. Although extant literature has demonstrated that disenfranchised loss is coupled with isolation, intensified grief, and posttraumatic stress (Doka, 1989; Eason, 2021; Spain et al., 2019), my findings contextualize understandings of animal companion loss by pointing to emotions as a salient experience that specifically disenfranchises bereaved individuals. Relatedly, my findings speak to the interplay between macro (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992), meso (Malvini Redden, 2013; Paul & Riforgiate, 2015), and micro discourses (Little et al., 2012; Troth et al., 2018) that coalesce to shape emotion rules in organizational settings and disenfranchise or marginalize bodies that fall outside of the professional and managerial molds that constitute corporate norms (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2020). As such, my dissertation further demonstrates that individuals grapple with emotion discourses alongside their identities to make sense of appropriate emotion displays in context (Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021). Future research should continue exploring how disenfranchising events (e.g., the loss of a mentor, ex-partner, incarcerated friend; Doka, 1989) trigger sensemaking about emotions in different contexts to understand how sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking communication can enfranchise emotion displays and resist dominant emotion rules.

Second, my dissertation questions how the commerce of an organization might shape emotion rules and displays. Despite Pawsitive Outlook being discursively constituted opposite of the disenfranchising forces that suppressed bereaved individuals' emotions, organizational members occasionally suppressed their authentic emotion displays in the chat. As site members disciplined their emotion displays and behavior within the chat, they reified assumptions that emotions should be eradicated for the success of the safe space and members' goals (Paul & Riforgiate, 2015). Despite the organization's goals often appearing to be emotional rather than financial, members' communication demonstrated that some believed their overt and negative emotions were harmful to what they perceived as the virtual support group's commerce: healing through rational decision-making. Thus, the organization was constituted in tension between members' discourses. Whereas some enacted authentic emotional communication and saw the organization as a safe space dedicated to the emotionality of their experience, others selected colonizing discourses (e.g., managerialism, rationality, professionalism; Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992) as salient cues for understanding their enactments, thereby perceiving that their negative emotions were unproductive and harmful to the organization.

Future research should continue exploring how emotions are colonized in virtual support groups and online communities to understand how organizational discourses shape communication and perceived goals when the space is not motivated by commerce. Whereas profit-oriented organizations sanction emotions to further the organization's bottom line (Fineman, 2000; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021), my study provides insight into how virtual care organizations perform similar strategies to further their mission of helping individuals heal from their loss. Therefore, future research should take up how healing and emotions intersect, how

individuals understand their role in others' healing, and how individuals might perceive their emotions constrain healing in organized spaces.

Finally, despite Denker and Dougherty's (2013) call for constructing safe spaces that enable members to celebrate the emotionality of life, my data suggests that virtual safe spaces are not necessarily *safe* from corporate influence and colonizing discourses. Weick (1995) noted that as people enact their sensible environments, they rely on the notion that a world exists "with pre-given features or ready-made information, because to give up this idea of the world as a fixed and stable reference point is to fall into idealism, nihilism, or subjectivism, all of which are unseemly" (p. 37). Faith in a known world is instrumental to sensemaking, and it is necessary to believe in something—be it an experience or a system—to start sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In the context of emotions and virtual safe spaces, then, it becomes clear that as individuals agentively resisted colonizing and managerial discourses in pursuit of celebrating and understanding their equivocal and disenfranchised experiences, they necessarily drew from those same discourses as they enacted, selected, and interpreted their emotions. By aligning emotion displays with familiar structures and past enactments, Pawsitive Outlook members were able to reduce the equivocality they experienced by merely existing in the virtual safe space, as well as continuing to understand plausible enactments and interpretations of resistant emotion displays.

Methodological Implications

My dissertation employed netnographic fieldwork methods to respond to recent calls for connecting research back to organizations (Deetz & Eger, 2014), understanding the organizing features of communication (Weick, 1995), and contributing theory that emphasizes the communication that occurs across technology (Borah, 2015; Ruppel, 2019; Fernback, 2007). Specifically, I sought to understand a unique experience (i.e., disenfranchised loss and related

processes) in a distinct organized setting (i.e., virtual support group) to understand how organizational processes (i.e., sensebreaking, sensegiving, and sensemaking) unfolded in a qualitatively new context. Netnography enabled me the position to understand my site's history (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998) and attend to the social construction of members' experiences as they unfolded over time. Thus, my approach allowed me to explore participants' identity reconstruction (chapter two) and emotion communication (chapter three) in real-time, which also helped me understand how the virtual support group was discursively constructed through members' discourses. My method was not only guided by my social constructivist approach to understanding how individuals communicatively grappled with their disenfranchised loss, thereby extending communication theory in online communities, but my methods for gathering and analyzing my data were also guided by my members' sensitive experiences.

Although my methodological choice enabled me the ability to see communication unobtrusively, I took considerable care to protect my participants, their information, and their identities to avoid further disenfranchising their experiences and interfering with their pursuit to heal and engage in the emotionality of their experience. My netnographic approach, focus on disenfranchised experience, and emphasis on a virtual support organization shed light on the possibilities for utilizing nonobtrusive methods to see communication as it unfolds in real-time while protecting the potentially sensitive experiences of disenfranchised, marginalized, or understudied populations. Specifically, the "unobtrusive and noninfluencing monitoring of communication and participation of community members to gain practical insights into their usage behavior" (Pollock et al., 2014, p. 2) should be considered with respect to members' safety, their (disenfranchised) identities, and their perceived privacy.

Organizational scholars have been called to sites of practice to uncover the co-constitution between organizations and members' communication (Deetz & Eger, 2014), but netnographers should foremost consider how their presence and practices protect organizational members and enable organizational processes to unfold (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998). I encourage other netnographers and researchers situated in online contexts, from quantitative content analysis to interpretive discourse analysis, to follow rigorous ethics of care. In many qualitative research cases, an ethic of care is preferred and provides higher quality support to virtual site participants than policies formalized at the institutional review board level (Miller-Day, 2012). Thus, below I detail the steps I took for conducting my research and protecting members throughout the process to guide future netnographers.

Whereas some researchers believe the Internet is a public domain and site visitors should anticipate their messages will be intercepted by researchers, others believe there is a fine line between public and private groups (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010). To better determine the degree of publicness, I utilized Sveningsson Elm's (2009) queries into the exclusivity, membership, and content of the environment. Following this line of questioning, I concluded that Pawsitive Outlook qualified as a public research site, or site that was "open and available for everyone, that anyone with an internet connection can access, and that does not require form of membership or registration" (Sveningsson Elm, 2009, p. 76).

Nevertheless, I was careful to ensure participants' identities were concealed and protected throughout collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. Additionally, I was careful to consider my virtual sites' members' perceived privacy, or the likelihood that site visitors believe their communication was confidential (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010). For potentially sensitive topics (i.e., communication exchanged in emotional support groups for disenfranchised bereaved) and

smaller groups, the need for informed consent is greater (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010). Pawsitive Outlook was characterized by a high level of accessibility and messages can be read by anyone. However, the perceived privacy was likely high given the low number of participants and emotional and stigmatized topic of focus. As such, I followed an ethic of care to inform key members of the group of the research before retrieving data (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010).

Further, whereas some scholars recommend altering the content of the messages to ensure it cannot be traced back to the user (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2010), I considered paraphrasing content neither necessary nor useful to protecting participants' identities since a Google search would not yield Pawsitive Outlook chat room results. Pawsitive Outlook chats were retained for approximately 48-72 hours before being scrubbed from the public site, meaning all data included in these studies are no longer publicly available to the average users. Further, the Pawsitive Outlook site closed shortly after I concluded my data collection, and the web pages were no longer accessible upon finishing this dissertation. Thus, data included in this dissertation were protected by external factors, including the site procedures and site closure.

Despite the content being scrubbed from the site and publicly available search engines, I nevertheless emphasize the importance of protecting site participants' identities and I diligently considered the content of the virtual data to further safeguard site visitors' identities. Although consent was not necessary or useful given the publicly available site and my objectives for researching from an unobtrusive standpoint, it was important for me to consider how to treat usernames and data. Pawsitive Outlook site visitors generally utilized pseudonyms to ensure their identities were camouflaged and remain anonymous (e.g., not sharing personal information, not sharing photos), but even so I took the additional step to conceal usernames in my data and studies. At times, users shared enough information for readers to make connections between their

online and corporeal selves, such as sharing information about their legal names, animal companion names, location and veterinarian information, and profession. Further, many users visited the group consistently for prolonged periods which enabled me the position to understand how participants' enactments shaped the organization and unfolded over time (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998). However, this also increased the likelihood that their identities could be discursively revealed or uncovered in my manuscripts. Thus, I found it important to alter the site name, site members' names, animal companion names, and other potentially identifying information (e.g., veterinarian information, location, family names) in pursuit of my ethic of care.

Finally, it is important to consider the purpose of netnographic research as a method for gaining "practical insights into [members] behavior" (Pollock et al., 2014, p. 2). Here, I emphasize the importance of sharing "practical insights" with sites of practice. Although Pawsitive Outlook closed before I completed my dissertation, I nevertheless dedicated significant consideration to the practical insights generated from the data and hope that practitioners (e.g., managers, site facilitators, clinical health professionals) will find value in my data and recommendations, which I review next.

Practical Implications

My dissertation points to practical implications, further emphasizing the importance of connecting organizational research to practice (Deetz & Eger, 2014). As evidenced, disenfranchised loss and subsequent grief processes are shaped by numerous discourses (Doka, 1989), many of which are produced within and through organized settings. Therefore, in pursuit of supporting disenfranchised bereaved experiences in organizational life, I offer practical recommendations for workplaces, virtual care organizations, and leadership in both settings.

Organizational scholars have become enamored with preparing organizations and their members for a “tsunami of bereavement grief” (Wilson et al., 2021, p. 1) given COVID-19 deaths and the increasingly aging population (Gilbert et al., 2021). Bereavement and subsequent leave can be detrimental to organizations, costing U.S. organizations up to \$75 billion annually (Hazen, 2009). Importantly, these costs concern organizationally sanctioned bereavement types, suggesting that there are many death and bereavement experiences that remain unaccounted for. Although organizations might not lose money for disenfranchised losses because they do not provide disenfranchised bereaved individuals with paid leave, acknowledge their loss, or support their healing (Hazen, 2009; Park et al., 2021), grief has a significant impact on work (Gilbert et al., 2021).

Although individuals might experience grief for six months (Shear et al., 2011) to two years (Zhang et al., 2006), the average Western bereavement policy permits two-and-a-half to three days of leave (Gilbert et al., 2021). Returning to work while grieving can negatively affect the employee’s productivity and ability to engage in positive social interactions (Kindler & Cooper, 2009) among many other negative personal and organizational outcomes (for reviews, see Gilbert et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). These concerns might be especially salient among disenfranchised bereaved workers given that their healing and post-traumatic growth are constrained because they lack support (Park et al., 2021; Spain et al., 2019). Thus, workplaces should explore ways for supporting organizational members through bereavement generally and disenfranchised grief particularly because it is the compassionate and right thing to do, but such considerations may need to be justified as a way to protect their “bottom line.”

A growing line of research attends to how organizations and managers might respond to grief (Gilbert et al., 2021; Hazen, 2009; Wilson et al., 2021). Generally, organizational

recommendations include considering mid-level managerial communication (i.e., recognizing symptoms, reflecting, acting, and educating to support employee grief; Hazen, 2009) and organizational-level communication (i.e., providing accommodations, recognizing suffering, providing emotional support upon returning to work; Gilbert et al., 2021). Although these recommendations and care models are noteworthy starts to supporting bereavement in the workplace, it is also important to consider how organizations might support disenfranchised bereavement because it is a discourse-dependent and underexplored experience (Gilbert et al., 2021). Below, I consider the ways that organizations might intervene before grief by 1) making employee policies more inclusive, 2) shifting the disenfranchising discourses that are embedded in organizational culture, and 3) engaging sensebreaking and sensegiving communication that enables organizational members to move beyond ruptured identity enactments. In doing so, I attend to how organizations might enable productive identity work (chapter two) and authentic emotion displays (chapter three).

First, organizations should interrogate and problematize colonizing and managerial assumptions that shape their bereavement policies to diversify bereavement options to an array of loss types and experiences, thereby protecting organizational members and the organization alike. Members who take time away from their workplaces following a loss are more likely to report increased wellbeing and productivity, as well as fewer burnout symptoms than those who are not permitted time off or return to work before they are ready (Gilbert et al., 2021; Kindler & Cooper, 2009). Thus, from a top-down perspective, organizations should consider ways in which they can formally sanction disenfranchised grief by considering the various losses that might lead to bereavement, including experiencing the loss of a relationship (e.g., an ex-partner or companion animal), a person (e.g., incarcerated individual or fetus), or an identity (e.g., learning

about a chronic illness) that are not acknowledged as legitimate reasons for grieving (Doka, 1989; Hazen, 2009). Further, organizations should dedicate space to reviewing bereavement policies regularly and encouraging members to utilize organizational support when possible (Hazen, 2009). Through providing support and educating members about how their organization acknowledges different loss types, celebrates relationships and identities that might lead to bereavement, and advocates for the wellbeing of its members, organizations can take a first step in enfranchising all loss.

Second, whereas organizations might manufacture support at the meso level, it is also pertinent to attend to the micro coordination efforts that might lend a hand in enfranchising loss and supporting organizational members throughout their bereavement. Organizations—workplaces and other organized spaces—should consider how sensebreaking and sensegiving communication might be used to promote personal identity realignment following identity ruptures that occur outside of the organization. For instance, training on recognizing colonizing behaviors and discourses and enacting compassion in organizations could give members the language and awareness necessary to enact compassion, adopt a caring mindset, and resist colonizing and managerial language. Thus, compassionate communication training should be provided to 1) enfranchise emotions following a disenfranchising trigger (chapter three), 2) help members recognize when another organizational member is suffering (chapter two), and 3) help members support others who are navigating challenges to their identity through their sensebreaking and sensegiving communication (chapter two).

Further—and regarding pet loss, specifically—organizations should consider ways to embed companion animals in their culture, which could frame the ways organizational members think about how they might communicate with individuals about identity work (chapter two) and

emotions (chapter three) following the loss of a companion animal. Working from the Society of Human Resource Management's (2017) recommendations, I advocate that organizations consider allowing pets at work, facilitating animal therapy days or sessions, encouraging volunteering at animal welfare organizations, and offering pet insurance. However, efforts for celebrating animal companionship should be considered with respect to others' needs to avoid disenfranchising other groups, such as those with allergies or aversions to animals. For instance, an organization might implement a designated pet-friendly workspace and retain other areas as pet-free. By attending to organizational policies that might enfranchise grief (e.g., providing leave, offering pet insurance, allowing companion animals at work), organizations will at the very least signal that these considerations and their employees' wellbeing are important, thereby providing a foundation for members to use their micro-level discourses (i.e., enacting compassion; Way & Tracy, 2012) in support of their coworkers before, throughout, and following various losses.

Finally, virtual care organizations should take up concerns about ways to support disenfranchised loss by considering how facilitators can productively manage identity development, encourage and support authentic emotional expression, and resist colonizing discourses. Denker and Dougherty (2013) advocated for safe spaces to celebrate the emotionality of life and I argue that virtual communities are rife for contending with and resisting managerialism and professionalism that neutralize emotional expression in other organized spaces (Deetz, 1992; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Further, virtual spaces provide users with numerous social affordances (e.g., flexibility, anonymity, privacy, synchronous communication) that might help members to grapple with and perform their authentic emotions. To this end, my recommendations target constituting virtual safe spaces and supporting members' experiences.

Limitations and Future Directions

Thus far, I have detailed several trajectories for future research to develop theory about sensemaking about identities (chapter two) and emotions in online spaces (chapter three), thereby extending understanding of the communicative constitutions of organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2008). My studies demonstrate the communicative practices of individuals bereaving the loss of a companion animal as they grappled with their identities (chapter two) and emotions (chapter three). However, although my netnographic approach enabled me the ability to see communication unfold in real-time and avoid interfering with site processes, my data cannot fully speak to individuals' interpretations of their experiences. To this end, it is also pertinent for future research to utilize qualitative interviews to understand individuals' interpretations of the communication they enact (e.g., sensebreaking communication, revising identities, expressing emotions), cues they select (e.g., various personal experiences and discourses), and how the information they retained shapes their understanding of and enactments in future events. Further, future research should explore how individuals' intersecting identities layered onto their disenfranchised experience, their identity reconstruction (chapter two), and their emotion displays (chapter three).

Additionally, this dissertation project highlights tangential research objectives that might shed additional light on communication in virtual organizations. Specifically, I first call scholars to deepen theoretical processes of compassion communication in virtual spaces to better understand the overlaps between compassion (i.e., recognizing, relating, and responding to another's suffering; Way & Tracy, 2012), sensebreaking, and sensegiving communication. Then, I present future research to understand the potential for burnout and preventative strategies among virtual site facilitators.

First, future research should attend to and deepen the theoretical understanding of compassion in virtual spaces. *Compassion*, a “feeling and acting with deep empathy and sorrow for those who suffer” (Stamm, 2002, p. 107), is integral to organizing (Frost, 1999) and has been explored in numerous organizational contexts with a particular emphasis on workplaces (e.g., Miller, 2007; Tracy & Huffman, 2017; Way & Tracy, 2012). As theorized in chapter two, compassion, sensebreaking, and sensegiving communication might inform one another; as chat members encountered others’ enactments (i.e., recognize suffering), they made sense of their relationship with the sufferer (i.e., relating to the sufferer), then enacted sensebreaking and sensegiving communication to realign their identities (i.e., responding to the sufferer). Further, chapter three detailed chat members’ emotions following their disenfranchised loss, which were likely vital and necessary resources for responding to human suffering (Dutton et al., 2006; Dutton et al., 2014; Way & Tracy, 2012). However, future research should purposely explore compassion communication processes in virtual communities to further detail how compassion is enacted in collective spaces, as well as how virtuality shapes compassionate communication.

Many compassion extensions are focused on the dyadic level (Huffman, 2017; Tracy & Huffman, 2017; Way & Tracy, 2012); however, compassion can also be studied at the collective and organizational levels (e.g., Dutton et al., 2006). As is likely the case in virtual support groups, individuals outside of the dyadic relationship (sufferer and caregiver) can experience the compassion subprocesses and form a “larger web of relationships” in which multiple compassion episodes unfold simultaneously (Dutton et al., 2014, p. 296). Pawsitive Outlook members and caregivers manage numerous relationships, making virtual support groups an informative context for how compassion is enacted at a collective level within a community dedicated to emotional expression and healing.

Further, how compassion is facilitated via communication technology (e.g., Dutton et al., 2006) is understudied relative to offline enactments of compassion. Existing scholarship suggests that physical closeness might be necessary for compassion (Huffman, 2013; Tracy & Huffman, 2017), which could contribute to a double bind for the disenfranchised bereaved population. Not having a geographically close support system necessitates disenfranchised individuals to seek care in virtual spaces, which might constrain how compassion is expressed and received. However, communication technology has a promising capacity to facilitate emotional expression (Derks et al., 2008). Numerous factors such as social affordances (e.g., synchronicity, perceived immediacy, flexibility of the environment) and group norms could shape how compassion is expressed across communication technology. Thus, an online community and the communication technology site visitors use to form it are a noteworthy extension of existing compassionate care models.

Second, future research should pursue understanding burnout among virtual site facilitators. In synchronous and asynchronous virtual spaces alike, site volunteers or community mentors are fixtures and play an important role in shaping sensemaking processes and identity (re)construction (chapter two) in emotion-laden environments (chapter three). Albeit integral to site visitors' progress, virtual support groups are a probable source of emotional work outcomes for facilitators (e.g., burnout, compassion fatigue). Pawsitive Outlook relied on eight site facilitators to manage members' discussion, which suggests that facilitators regularly encountered "emotion at work" (Miller et al., 2007; Riforgiate & Sepúlveda, 2021) and potentially grappled with outcomes of such work (e.g., burnout; Maslach, 1982).

Tracy (2017) explained that emotionally exhausted workers distance themselves from work as a defense mechanism, resulting in experiencing increased cynicism, callousness, and

alienation, which causes decreased job performance and satisfaction. Such outcomes relate to burnout, which is characterized by (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization or a negative shift in responses to others, and (3) a decreased sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). However, virtual support group sites are crafted with emotional display in mind and are not always tied to commercial organizations. Thus, future research might explore the capacity for virtual site facilitators to experience burnout despite their positions being voluntary and virtual.

Research might also uncover what strategies virtual site facilitators use to prevent burnout or compassion fatigue, if any. The discomfort of working in emotional spaces results in emotional exhaustion, and workers will seek to ease the discomfort (Tracy, 2017). Engaging coping techniques can help employees prevent or treat burnout symptoms, such as setting boundaries, maintaining a sense of privacy, and drawing from their social support network. Further—and related to virtual support groups—in industries where compassion is draining (e.g., human-service industry; Snyder, 2009), employees might balance their involvement with detachment. For example, as my data previewed, virtual support group facilitators may use their work to reinforce their caregiving identities rather than experiencing their work as exhausting. Alternatively, virtual support group facilitators might strategically use the communication technology to distance themselves from their work or manage the emotional tugs of grief-laden discourses. In attending to these future research calls, scholars should also consider the ways that virtual volunteers' experience with and management of burnout symptoms shape community members' experiences and the virtual support group's structure.

Conclusion

Individuals grapple with loss and subsequent equivocality every day, and communication is integral to reconciling identities, making sense of emotions, and reshaping emerging social

worlds throughout grief experiences. Communication is particularly important for individuals managing animal companion loss, who must navigate their grief alongside disenfranchising structures and discourses. This dissertation articulated my efforts to comprehensively enfranchise animal companion loss by theorizing about supporting bereaved caregivers in their personal, professional, and virtual support group interactions. Specifically, I attended to the ways that individuals made sense of their disenfranchised experiences, reconciled their past and present identities, and grappled with their emotion displays across contexts. In doing so, I shed light on the co-constitutions of grief, healing, and emerging social worlds. Communication is more than the essence of lived experiences; communication is the substance of our becoming social worlds.

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Curriculum Vitae

Education

- Doctor of Philosophy, Communication* May 2022
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
Specialty: Organizational Communication and Communication Technology
- Master of Arts, Mass Communication* Fall 2017
Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
Specialty: International Media
Thesis: "Transitioning online: A study of the transgender community's digital evolution and self-portrayal practices in an online setting"
- Bachelor of Arts, Mass Communication; Concentration: Broadcast Journalism* Fall 2014
Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
Magna Cum Laude

Academic Appointments

Boise State University

Department of Communication
Assistant Professor July 2022

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

Department of Communication
Graduate Teaching Assistant August 2018- Present

Marquette University

Diederich College of Communication
Adjunct Lecturer Spring 2022

Texas State University

School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Adjunct Lecturer Spring 2018
Graduate Instructional Assistant 2016-2017
Graduate Research Assistant 2017
Department of Communication Studies
Graduate Instructional Assistant 2016-2017

Huston-Tillotson University

Department of Humanities and Fine Arts: Communication
Adjunct Lecturer Summer 2018

Awards and Recognition

Overall

Renee A. Meyers Graduate Student Award 2021

Research

| | |
|---|------|
| Top Three Paper, Organizational and Professional Communication Interest Group, CSCA | 2022 |
| Top Overall Student Paper, Mass Communication Division, NCA | 2021 |
| Top Overall Paper, Organizational and Professional Communication Interest Group, CSCA | 2021 |
| Top Panel, Organizational and Professional Communication Interest Group, CSCA | 2021 |
| Top Three Student Paper, Human Communication and Technology Division, NCA | 2020 |
| Top Student Paper, Organizational Communication Division, NCA | 2020 |

Teaching

| | |
|---|------|
| Melvin H. Miller Graduate Teaching Award, Department of Communication | 2020 |
|---|------|

Service

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| Melvin H. Miller Graduate Service Award, Department of Communication | 2021 |
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Grants and Funding

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee | 2020 |
| Top GPA in Communication Studies, Department of Communication | 2020, 2021, 2022 |
| Communication Student Support Award, Department of Communication | 2019 |
| Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee | 2018 |

Writing and Research

Refereed Academic Journal Publications

- Coker, M., & Kahlow, J. (2021). Extending SIT to niche networks: The effect of group commitment on sexual identity commitment among men who have sex with men. *Human Communication & Technology*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://journals.ku.edu/hct/article/view/15183>
- Godager, E. A., Coker, M. C., Davis, B. L., & Pink, K. (2021). Making sense of leaders' exits: Extending exit socialization research through sensemaking. *Communication Studies*, (online), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2021.2011354>
- Coker, M. C. (2021). What to withhold and when to disclose: Gender transitions and privacy management on social media. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17459435.2021.1929425>
- Coker, M. C. (2021). Experiencing group belonging and member attraction: Activating systems within common-bond and common-identity groups. *Communication Teacher*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2021.1905169>
- Kahlow, J. A., Coker, M. C., & Richards, R. (2020). The multimodal nature of Snapchat in close relationships: Toward a social presence-based theoretical framework. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106409>

Competitively Selected Research Based Case Studies

Coker, M. C. (2021). Laborious leadership: Exploring member identity and work-life boundaries in gendered organizations. Wrench, J. (Ed), *Casing organizational communication* (2nd ed.). Kendall Hunt. (In press; expected fall 2021)

Book Chapters

Coker, M. C. (2019). Technology and social media in the workplace. In M. Allen & S. Sepulveda (Eds.), *Business and professional communication* (4th ed., pp. 257-265). Pearson.

Coker, M. C., Sepulveda, S., & Cloitre, A. (2019). Organizational theory and leadership styles. In M. Allen & S. Sepulveda (Eds.), *Business and professional communication* (4th ed., pp. 177-184). Pearson.

Articles Under Review

Shin, I., Riforgiate, S. E., **Coker, M. C.**, & Godager, E. *Communication Technology and Supportive Communication to Navigate Work-Life Conflict During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

O'Neill, G., **Coker, M. C.**, Quinn, S., & Ruppel, E. K. "*it allows me to be 'me'*": *Self-presentation, authenticity, and affordances among LGBTQ+ social media users*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Manuscripts in Progress

Pink, K. J., **Coker, M. C.**, & Godager, E. "*How much of my free time do I wanna sell?*": *Discursively navigating conceptualizations of work-life as an adventure worker*. [Manuscript in preparation].

Shin, I., Riforgiate, S. E., **Coker, M. C.**, & Godager, E. *Communication Technology and Burnout During the Covid-19 Pandemic from the Job Demand and Resource Perspective*. [Manuscript in preparation].

Coker, M. C. *Work and Life Off of the Grid: Representations of the Ideal Worker in the Series Life Below Zero*. [Manuscript in preparation].

Coker, M. C. *Hate(rs) in online groups: A systematic review of online hate research related to religion, gender and sexual orientation, and politics*. [Manuscript in preparation].

Conference Presentations

Pink, K. J., **Coker, M. C.**, & Godager, E. (2022, April). "*How much of my free time do I wanna sell?*": *Discursively navigating conceptualizations of work-life as an adventure worker*. Paper accepted to the Top Three Paper panel in the Organizational and Professional Communication Interest Group at the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.

- Coker, M. C.** (2022, April). *Work and life off of the grid: Representations of the ideal worker in the series Life Below Zero*. Paper accepted to the Graduate Student Interest Group at the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.
- Coker, M. C., Kane, S., & Riforgiate, S. E.,** (2022, April). *Connecting and re-connecting the community and organizational collaborations with the university and the classroom*. Discussion panel accepted Organizational and Professional Communication Interest Group of the Central States Communication Association, Madison, WI.
- Coker, M. C.** (2021, October). *Exploring sensemaking and compassion organizing among disenfranchised bereaved individuals in an online community*. Paper accepted to the Organizational Communication Mini Conference, Kansas City, KA. Virtual.
- Coker, M. C. & Richards, R.** (2021, November). *Exploring the relationship between hookup applications for men who have sex with men and endorsement of traditional masculine roles*. Paper awarded Top Student Paper in the Mass Communication division at the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA.
- Coker, M. C.** (2021, March). *Experiencing group belonging and member attraction: Activating systems within common-bond and common-identity groups*. Paper accepted to the Great Ideas for Teaching interest group at the Central States Communication Association, Virtual.
- O'Neill, G., **Coker, M. C.,** Quinn, S., & Ruppel, E. K. (2021, March). *"it allows me to be 'me'": Self-presentation, authenticity, and affordances among LGBTQ+ social media users*. Paper accepted to the **Top Paper Panel** in the Communication and Technology interest group at the Central States Communication Association, Virtual.
- Riforgiate, S. E., Shin, I., Godager, E., & **Coker, M. C.** (2021, March). *Resetting Time: Remote Workers' Work-Life Communication about Time During Covid-19*. Paper accepted in the **Top Panel** in the Organizational and Professional Communication interest group at the Central States Communication Association, Virtual.
- Shin, I., Riforgiate, S. E., **Coker, M. C.,** & Godager, E. (2021, March). *Communication Technology and Supportive Communication to Navigate Work-Life Conflict During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond*. Paper accepted to the **Top Paper Panel** in Organizational and Professional Communication interest group at the Central States Communication Association, Virtual.
- Coker, M. C. & Kahlow, J.** (2020, November). *Extending SIT to niche networks: The moderating effect of group commitment on sexual identity commitment among men who have sex with men*. Paper accepted to the **Top Three Student Papers** in

Human Communication and Technology at the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Coker, M. C., & Kahlow, J. (2020, November). *Affording diversity: A comprehensive literature review of diverse online groups and technological affordances*. Paper accepted in the Human Communication and Technology Division at the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Godager, E. A., **Coker, M. C.**, Davis, B. L., & Pink, K. (2020, November). *An assessment of team communication after a leader's organizational exit*. Paper accepted to the **Top Student Paper Panel** in the Organizational Communication Division at the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Coker, M. C. (2020, November). *Crossroads in the classroom: Navigating graduate teaching assistant inclusive teaching practices*. Discussion panel accepted in the Student Section at the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.

Coker, M. C. (2020, April). *Cultivating hypermasculinity through hookups: An examination of GPS-based hookup applications for men who have sex with men*. Paper accepted in the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Caucus at the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. *accepted, but not presented due to COVID-19 cancellation

Riforgiate, S. E., Sepulveda, S., & **Coker, M. C.** (2020, April). *Attending to the health of graduate students who live "in-between": Developing healthy social-support and strategic course planning to reduce GTA role strain*. Discussion panel accepted in the Health Communication Interest Group at the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. *accepted, but not presented due to COVID-19 cancellation

Coker, M. C. (2019, November). *A strategic exit from the digital closet: A qualitative inquiry of gender transitioning on social media*. Paper presentation at the 105th National Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.

Coker, M. C. (2019, November). *Exploring the relationship between sexting, sexual identity, and group commitment among men who have sex with men*. Paper presentation at the 105th National Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.

Kahlow, J., **Coker, M. C.**, & Richards, R. (2019, November). *Snapchat is multimodal: A daily diary examination in closeness in interpersonal relationships*. Paper presentation at the 105th National Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.

Richards, R., Kahlow, J., & **Coker, M. C.** (2019, November). *The interpersonal process model of intimacy: The importance of reciprocity and perceived partner response in romantic relationship sexting*. Paper presentation at the 105th National Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.

Hackenburg, L. W. & Coker, M. C. (2018, November). "Are you a weird boy?" A qualitative examination of how non-parental gay men talk about their sexual orientation with children family members. Poster presentation at the 104th National Communication Association, Salt Lake City, UT.

Coker, M. C. & Hackenburg, L. W. (2017, October). *Social media or social equality? A study of the use of digital media to improve LGBT acceptance in Singapore*. Paper presentation at the 10th Annual Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication, Phoenix, AZ.

Coker, M. C., Salinas, B. A., Price, D. M., Fidler, A., & Mosley, R. M. (2016, November). *Negative effects versus gratifications of maintaining a social media persona*. Paper presentation at the Eighth Annual International Research Conference for Graduate Students, San Marcos, TX.

Blog Posts

Coker, M.C. (2017, September 1). SJMC student Jay Martinez and band 'Across the Atlantic' sign record deal [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://sjmcnews.wordpress.com/2017/09/01/sjmc-student-jay-martinez-and-his-band-across-the-atlantic-signs-record-deal/>

Coker, M.C. (2017, July 13). SJMC graduates develop new LGBTQ magazine 'BRUNCHCLUB' [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://sjmcnews.wordpress.com/2017/07/13/sjmc-graduates-develop-new-lgbtq-magazine-brunchclub/>

Coker, M.C. (2017, June 22). SJMC grad students got Seoul [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://sjmcnews.wordpress.com/2017/06/22/sjmc-grad-students-got-seoul/>

Courses Taught

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

Face-to-Face Courses

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| COM 300 Interviewers and Interviewing* | Fall 2019-Spring 2021 |
| COM 105 Business and Professional Communication* | Fall 2018-Summer 2018 |

Online Asynchronous Courses

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| COM 313 Human Communication and Technology* | Fall 2021-Spring 2022 |
| COM 310 Organizational Communication* | Spring 2021 |
| COM 300 Interviewers and Interviewing* | Fall 2019-Spring 2021 |
| COM 105 Business and Professional Communication* | Fall 2018-Summer 2018 |

Marquette University

Face-To-Face Course

| | |
|---|-------------|
| CMST 3200 Organizational Communication* | Spring 2022 |
|---|-------------|

Huston-Tillotson University (Face-to-Face Course)

Public Speaking*²

Summer 2018

Texas State University

Face-to-Face Courses

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| MCOM 1301 Introduction to Mass Communication* | Spring 2018 |
| MCOM 4381 Fundamentals of Digital and Online Media** | Fall 2016-Spring 2018 |
| COMM 1310 Fundamentals of Human Communication** | Fall 2016-Fall 2017 |
| MCOM 4307 Advertising Campaigns** | Summer 2016 |

Hybrid Course

| | |
|---|-----------|
| COMM 1310 Fundamentals of Human Communication** | Fall 2017 |
|---|-----------|

* Indicates role as lecturer or instructor responsible for course design, assignment development, and evaluation

** Indicates role as instruction in lab sections, recitations, and grader

Invited Lectures on Pedagogy

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Active Teaching Lab – Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Facilitating Student Community-Based Service-Learning February 16, 2021

Teaching Certifications and Trainings

| | |
|--|------------|
| Trauma Informed Care Workshop | 2021 |
| University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Dean of Students Office | |
| LGBT+ Workshop & Trans 101 | 2019 |
| University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee LGBTQ Resource Center | |
| Active Teaching Workshop | 2019 |
| University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning | |
| TA Professional Development Certification | 2018 |
| University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Excellence in Teaching | |
| Poynter-Cronkite Certificate for Adjunct Instructors | 2016 |
| Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication | |
| Teaching & Learning Academy Certification | 2016, 2017 |
| Texas State University, Department of Communication | |
| Allies Training of Texas State University | 2016 |
| Facebook for Journalists Certificate in conjunction with Poynter | 2016 |

Service

Departmental

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

- Vice President, Communication Graduate Student Council 2020-2021
- Ph.D. Mentorship Coordinator, Communication Graduate Student Council 2019-2020
- Awards Committee Rep., Communication Graduate Student Council 2018-2019
- Representative for the NCA Graduate Open House 2019, 2021

- Judge for Communication 103 Public Speaking Showcase 2018, 2019, 2020
- Communication Representative for the Graduate Open House 2018

Texas State University School of Journalism and Mass Communication

- Panelist for “Timing is Everything: What I need from My Grad Degree” 2017
- Panelist for “Why go to Grad School?” during Mass Comm Week 2016
- President, Journalism and Mass Communication Graduate Association 2017-2018

Texas State University Department of Communication Studies

- Panelist for “Dark Side of Instruction” 2017

Institutional

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

- Student Member, Institutional Review Board 2020-Present

Texas State University

- Judge for forensics at annual UIL regional tournament 2017
- Judge for forensics at annual Hill Country Classic tournament 2017
- Judge for forensics at annual Speech by the Beach 2017

Communication Discipline

National Conference Paper Reviewer

- NCA Human Communication and Technology Division
- Mass Communication Division

Regional Conference Paper Reviewer

- CSCA Graduate Student Interest Group
- CSCA Instructional Communication Interest Group

Journal Reviewer

- New Media and Society

Edited Volume Reviewer

- Cases on Organizational Communication and Understanding Understudied Groups

Community

UWM Make a Difference Day Nov. 2021

Estabrook Park Cleanup May 2021, 2022

Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity ReStore Aug. 2020-Feb. 2021

Professional Memberships

National Communication Association

Central States Communication Association

Consulting and Media Experience

Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity ReStore

Management Training Consultant, 2020-2021

- Observed daily operations and interviewed members to determine organizational needs
- Proposed training program for developing management communication competencies
- Created and implemented six training modules measured by pre- and post-assessments

South by Southwest

Social Media Content Creator, 2017, 2018

- Attended high profile panels to transcribe, gather media footage, and interview panelists
- Corresponded with lead social media producer and team to recommend posting ventures
- Produced content consistent with the 'attendee experience' of SXSW for social platforms

Texas State University

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Digital Content Coordinator, 2017

- Created and posted original content for department website
- Managed department's digital presence
- Collaborated with social media coordinator to construct promotional posts

TEDxTexasStateUniversity

Department of Communication Studies

Social Media Manager, 2017

- Created and posted original content aligned with the TEDx brand on multiple platforms
- Collaborated with Communication Coordinator to design and implement paid promotions
- Lead and delegated a team of 5 social media content creators during fall event