

Disruptive Solidarity or Solidarity Disrupted? A Dialogical Narrative Analysis of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults' Efforts to Age in Place with Pets

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Over one-third of older adults in many countries have a companion animal, and pets may harbor health-promoting potential. Few studies have considered pet-ownership in relation to economic vulnerability, and pet-ownership has not been often considered within policy efforts to promote ageing-in-place. We conducted a mixed methods case study to understand perspectives of both community agencies that support ageing-in-place and older adults themselves. A shortage of affordable, appropriate pet-friendly housing emerged as a challenge, even when framed as a legitimate choice and preference for many older adults. In this manuscript, we share the trajectories of three economically vulnerable older adults whose affordable housing needs became entangled with commitments to pets. Guided by dialogical narrative methodology, we offer each narrative as a short vignette to (i) illustrate the extent to which older adults will practice 'more-than-human solidarity' for a pet, even when their own well-being is compromised as a result; and (ii) highlight incongruence between the underlying moral values that shape solidaristic practices of individuals versus solidaristic arrangements that shape affordable housing opportunities. We suggest that housing rules and legislation that disrupt, rather than confirm, more-than-human solidarity may render older adults susceptible to, rather than protected from, deteriorating physical, mental and social well-being. We propose that collective solidaristic practices must reflect and subsume the moral complexity of solidarity practiced by individuals, to enable fair and equitable ageing-in-place.

Introduction

Over one-third of older adults in many countries live with a companion animal (or 'pet'), and there is evidence that relationships with pets may harbor health-promoting potential. Yet, few studies to date have considered pet-ownership in relation to economic vulnerability, and pet-ownership has not been often considered within public policy efforts to promote ageing-in-place. We conducted a mixed methods case study in our local Canadian setting to better understand

this gap in knowledge. Our study considered perspectives of both community agencies that support ageing-in-place and older adults themselves. As our research progressed, a shortage of affordable, appropriate pet-friendly housing emerged as a challenge, even when framed as a legitimate choice and preference for many older adults (Toohey and Krahn, 2017; Toohey *et al.*, 2017). This situation is not unique to our own local setting, and a lack of pet-friendly, affordable housing available to older adults living in lower-income circumstances has also been raised as an issue in countries such

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as the USA, the UK and Australia (Ormerod, 2012; Huss, 2014; Power, 2017).

In this manuscript, we explore the moral underpinnings of this troubling situation. We situate our analysis using the concept of solidarity, as an evolving moral value that is relevant to public health ethics. Thus we explore practices of solidarity in relation to experiences of economic vulnerability later in life. Specifically, we explore the extent to which ethical values may be shaping older adults' experiences of their relationships with companion animals, particularly when faced with barriers like pet-prohibitive housing. To do this, we share the trajectories of three older adults whose affordable housing needs became entangled with their individual commitments to companion animals. As we recount each story, we consider the different solidaristic arrangements that may have shaped each circumstance and the public health implications of the consequences of these arrangements. We seek to understand the extent to which honoring older adults' relationships with companion animals must also be subsumed within enactments of solidarity for older adults themselves, and how such solidaristic arrangements may serve broader public health interests in supporting an aging population.

Theoretical Orientation

Solidarity is increasingly recognized as a value that underpins public health ethics, although definitions of solidarity remain subject to debate (Baylis *et al.*, 2008). In an effort to spark conceptual advancement, Prainsack and Buyx (2012: 346, emphasis in original) proposed that solidarity may be conceived as 'signify(ing) shared practices reflecting a collective commitment to carry "costs" (financial, social, emotional, or otherwise) to assist others'. They then differentiated three 'tiers' of solidaristic practices, i.e. interpersonal, communal and institutionalized solidarity. Ideally, these tiers will encompass a progression of moral values, from individual commitments 'to assist others one recognizes sameness with' (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012: 347) to a collective willingness to do the same. Importantly, Prainsack and Buyx suggest that their proposed understanding of solidarity reflects the historic evolution of solidarity as a societal value (Prainsack and Buyx, 2016).

Responding to Prainsack and Buyx's initial conceptual contribution, Dawson and Verweij (2012: 2) introduced the idea of 'constitutive solidarity'. They suggest that constitutive solidarity is a social, versus rational, value, and is thus grounded in 'shared values, meanings, and identity'. They conceptualize constitutive solidarity

as a quality that transcends any given individual actor or rational and economic interests but instead rests upon moral judgments on what 'should' be done. Having established this conceptual definition, Dawson and Verweij question the extent to which Prainsack and Buyx's definition served to posit solidarity as 'a normative moral concept' rather than as a value-laden decision that fluctuates, depending upon individual tolerances for 'carry(ing) costs' (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012: 346) at any given time. In particular, they question whether interpersonal solidarity can be distinguished from concepts like altruism or beneficence, given the likelihood that 'one-person-to-one-other relationships ... (preclude) some idea of a *group* in which people *share* commitments to others' (Dawson and Verweij, 2012: 3, emphasis in original).

In our study, we interweave elements of both conceptualizations of solidarity by proposing that institutionalized solidarity aimed at supporting an ageing population must also be anchored in normative moral values. Additionally, to be morally congruent, institutional solidarity must encompass interpersonal solidarity practiced by older adults. In addressing Dawson and Verweij's (2012) concern regarding the conceptual acuity of interpersonal solidarity, our analysis hinges upon a specific form of interpersonal solidarity, namely, 'more-than-human' solidarity. More-than-human solidarity has recently been proposed by Rock and Degeling (2015: 62) as an extension of the Prainsack and Buyx conception of solidarity offered above, but '...whenever the cared-for others in question include non-human animals, plants, or places'. We suggest that acts of solidarity made by individuals toward non-human entities are conceptually distinct from benevolence or altruism. In other words, we propose that there is a duality inherent to more-than-human solidarity that may be aimed at one particular companion animal but that also subsumes a sense of belonging to distinct groups (i.e., species), yet groups that have similar needs (Fox, 2006; Rock and Degeling, 2013).

Within this manuscript, we thus further explore practices of more-than-human solidarity in relation to companion animals, or 'pets'. In doing this, we reframe the motivations that underlie some older adults' willingness to put their own well-being in peril (i.e. carry costs) to fulfill commitments to their animal companions. Within academic research on pets and ageing, such actions have been proposed, by some scholars, to reflect unhealthy levels of attachment (Beck and Katcher, 2003; Chur-Hansen *et al.*, 2009). We posit, however, that these decisions might also be understood in reference to constitutive solidarity, with pet-owners "seeing" what

ought to be done' (Dawson and Verweij, 2012: 2) while also 'recogniz(ing) sameness or similarity' (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012: 346) that—importantly—crosses species boundaries. We also pay attention to the extent to which these acts of solidarity are reflected in, or absent from, the highest tier of solidarity proposed by Prainsack and Buyx (i.e. institutionalized solidarity). We consider how a disconnection between more-than-human solidarity practiced by older adults and institutionalized solidarity aimed at enabling older adults to age in place may exacerbate socially patterned inequities in health (Whitehead, 1991). Thus we also consider the extent to which social arrangements ultimately disrupt the progression of the moral underpinnings of solidarity for companion animals from interpersonal to institutionalized practices, and highlight the consequences of such disruptions for achieving public health goals of promoting ageing-in-place.

Background

Academic interest in the ways that pets may support older adults' physical, mental and social well-being first emerged in the 1960s and continues to evolve. This interest builds upon the notion that animal companionship can help to assuage or counter the often-isolating effects of growing old, a period of life when, for many, idle time expands while fulfilling social relationships wane. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that having an animal companion is both meaningful and health-promoting, to the extent that these relationships may support both psychological health and physical function among older adults (Garrity *et al.*, 1989; Raina *et al.*, 1999; Thorpe *et al.*, 2006). Examples of recent advances in knowledge include evidence that older adults who spend more time in the company of their pets appear to have better mental health (Bennett *et al.*, 2015); that pets may protect lonelier older adults from depression (Krause-Parello, 2012); and that animal companionship may ameliorate loneliness for older adults over time, even as lonelier people tend to seek out pets (Pikhartova *et al.*, 2014).

Still, some studies suggest that companion animals may have a mixed, null or even negative influence on older adults' health and well-being (Wells and Rodi, 2000; Parslow *et al.*, 2005; Himsworth and Rock, 2013; Enmarker *et al.*, 2015). Several researchers have suggested that the mixed findings reflect methodological diversity in approaches used to study human–animal relationships, compounded by the complexities of the relationships themselves (Morley and Fook, 2005; Fox,

2006; Franklin *et al.*, 2007; Chur-Hansen *et al.*, 2010; Himsworth and Rock, 2013; Putney, 2013; Rock and Degeling, 2013; Ryan and Ziebland, 2015). Notably, few studies have explored the influence of context, including social conditions and physical environments, on salient outcomes, given that relationships with pets are experienced *in situ* within communities where older adults are ageing-in-place.

Since 2011, when the oldest members of the post-second world war 'baby boom' generation began to turn 65, the proportion of older adults living in neighborhoods and communities has been rising. At the same time, a substantial and plausibly growing proportion of older adults' homes include a companion animal. Approximately one-third of older adults in Western countries report having a companion animal (Peak *et al.*, 2012; Himsworth and Rock, 2013; McNicholas, 2014; Bennett *et al.*, 2015), and pets are also becoming increasingly prevalent in non-Western countries (Headey *et al.*, 2008; Hansen, 2013). In response to the aging of the population, many communities worldwide have begun to adopt and tailor an 'age-friendly' approach to promoting ageing-in-place. According to the WHO, 'an age-friendly city *adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities*' (World Health Organization, 2007: 1, emphasis added). The intent of age-friendliness is itself underpinned by predominant and recognizable public health interests, with strategies aimed at addressing social determinants of health that otherwise serve to perpetuate health inequities later in life (Pavalko and Caputo, 2013; McGovern and Nazroo, 2015). Yet even as these global efforts to optimize communities to support ageing populations have intensified (Plouffe and Kalache, 2011; Steels, 2015), little attention has been paid at the policy level to the ways that companion animals fit into peoples' lives and ageing experiences.

Housing is a key priority when it comes to supporting the health and well-being of the ageing population and is ubiquitously recognized as a priority for age-friendly communities (Menec *et al.*, 2011; Plouffe and Kalache, 2011; Steels, 2015). Housing is also recognized as both a human right and a social determinant of health, and thus to age in place, older adults require access to safe, appropriate and affordable homes (Plouffe and Kalache, 2011; Lehning *et al.*, 2015; Leibing *et al.*, 2016). A disproportionately low supply of rental housing in several different countries, whether aimed at older adults or not, is welcoming of pets (Ormerod, 2012; Huss, 2014; Power, 2017). Older adults in particular regularly encounter an implicit expectation that their pet is

dispensable when seeking appropriate and affordable housing in which to grow older (Morley and Fook, 2005; Ormerod, 2012; Huss, 2014). Indeed, moving, rental or housing issues are among the most commonly cited reasons for pet relinquishments to shelters (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Shelter statistics further suggest that between one-quarter and one-third of relinquished pets, which number in the millions each year, will be euthanized rather than re-homed (Coe *et al.*, 2014; ASPCA, 2017).

Thus for older adults with pets, contemplating housing options that exclude a longtime companion animal may be complicated by feelings of guilt and grief (Adams *et al.*, 2000; Morley and Fook, 2005), given the possibility that euthanasia may be their relinquished pet's fate. Such experiences may also be exacerbated by the conflicting ethical values at play, with older adults feeling morally bound to protect and care for their companion animals, yet with housing providers viewing non-human animals as a liability that is also dispensable (Power, 2017; Toohey and Krahn, 2017). Few studies have considered the impact of enduring such situations on older adults' physical, mental and social well-being.

To help to elucidate ways that pet-prohibitive housing rules may be experienced by older adults living in economically vulnerable circumstances, we offer accounts of three specific cases where matters of housing affordability and availability were enmeshed with personal attachments and commitments to animal companions. Each of these stories offers insights into different ways that individuals may negotiate their constrained capacities, as they make active efforts to maintain their relationships with, and fulfill their commitments to, companion animals while ageing-in-place. Our interpretation of these stories is shaped by our interest in advancing evidence around manifestations of solidarity, as conceptualized using the different theoretical orientations discussed above, and in relation to perpetuation of socially patterned health inequities across the ageing population.

Methodology

For this study, we have drawn empirical material from a comprehensive, mixed methods case study (Yin, 2009), using an approach that also drew closely on tenets of ethnographic research (Stewart, 1998; LeCompte and Schensul, 1999; Schensul *et al.*, 1999). Our case study garnered a range of perspectives that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of ageing-in-place with pets. These included in-depth interviews with six administrative, front-line and volunteer representatives

of social service agencies that support vulnerable older adults; five administrative, front-line and volunteer representatives of local animal welfare organizations; two family physicians who treat older patients; one policy analyst involved in housing provision for older adults; six administrative or front-line employees representing two state-subsidized seniors' housing providers; and a socioeconomically diverse sample of 14 older adults who were living independently with pets at the time of our interviews. The perspectives of service providers informed, but are not the focus of, this manuscript, and thus a detailed description of our recruitment and sampling strategy for that component of our study is offered elsewhere (Toohey *et al.*, 2017).

Our sample of older adults was purposively recruited via posters displayed at a prominent and centrally located seniors center, public libraries, a prominent animal shelter and our city's primary central food bank. Snowball sampling also took place, as a small number of both service provider and older adult study participants voluntarily recruited additional participants from within their social or professional networks, which resulted in representation of harder-to-reach voices in our study (i.e. those older adults who do not frequent public venues).

Our fieldwork was conducted in Calgary, Canada, between January 2015 and October 2016. In addition to conducting participant observation, semi-structured interviews and facilitated meetings, the first author also organized a research symposium on companion animals and ageing, which took place under the umbrella of a national gerontology conference held in October 2015 in the city where our research took place. The symposium brought together both academic and community agency perspectives on ageing-in-place with pets, thus helping to establish contextual currency for our case study (see Supplementary File).

Based on our data-gathering, a stark shortage of affordable, pet-friendly housing within our city was repeatedly highlighted as an overarching problem for both lower-income older adults and, often, for organizations that were assisting them (Toohey *et al.*, 2017). In this article, we delve more deeply into understanding tangible ways that this housing supply shortage may be affecting older people's lives, as well as the lives of their companion animals.

All interviews were conducted by A. M. T., at a location of the participant's choosing. Often, these took place in the homes of our participants, or in a nearby public location that they enjoyed and frequented. The participants were often accompanied by their companion animal during the interview, which offered valuable

opportunities for A. M. T. to observe these relationships *in situ*, as captured in field notes (Emerson *et al.*, 1995) and in reflective research memos that A. M. T. created as data collection progressed. Interviews were designed to begin by establishing a comfortable rapport, before posing a series of experiential and reflective questions (Spradley, 1979). Interviews invariably began with the participant describing how their companion animal fit into their typical day. The conversations would then move onto topics, including: the nature of the participant's relationship with their pet (or, occasionally, pets); caregiving activities, challenges and costs; social networks and social support; housing; and, finally, perceived benefits and challenges of animal companionship later in life.

Over the course of interviews with our full sample of 14 older adults, three participants described for us experiences of a major housing transition. These three were also living in economically vulnerable circumstances and were thus dependent upon our city's affordable housing stock to establish a home where they could grow older in a safe and meaningful way. We therefore selected these specific and deeply personal ageing-in-place accounts for deeper analysis, drawing upon a socio-narratology approach (Frank, 2012) as described below. Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was provided by all individuals who participated in our study.

Digital audio recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy by A. M. T., who also wrote extensive research memos to capture post hoc reactions and reflections. Throughout this process, A. M. T. drew iterative comparisons both within each interview and between interviews, while also maintaining reflexivity and self-awareness of both scholarly knowledge and evolving understandings of the range of experiences that emerged as data collection progressed. M. J. R. reviewed all written materials, and both authors met frequently as data collection and analysis progressed to discuss the cases individually, and also as a subset of the wider data set.

Based on the content shared by each participant, we present their stories as reconstructed vignettes that remain as close as possible to their own accounts. In doing this, our approach was guided by Frank's (2012: 105) conception of dialogical narrative analysis, with our vignettes becoming the '...retelling (of a story) in a varied form to create new connections'. We have reorganized the original stories somewhat to clarify context and chronology, so as to render these understandable to others. Yet in doing this, we have also asserted a layer of

interpretation, by making decisions about which details constitute meaningful representations of our theoretical interests in solidarity, health equity and the ethical principles that underlie active promotion of ageing-in-place. We have aimed to do this responsibly, thus respecting these tales as belonging to our participants (Frank, 2012).

We do not speculate on the extent to which our participants' accounts are typical ageing-in-place situations; yet Frank (2012) attests that extreme stories enable deep understandings of social arrangements that affect all, thus invoking a 'movement of thought' (Frank, 2012: 74) that is both informed and shaped by such accounts. Accordingly, in our analysis, we have critically engaged with the stories so as to draw out plausible understandings of ways that moral values may be understood in relation to lived experiences of ageing-in-place and relationships with companion animals, and have also drawn links between these underlying ethical considerations and health equity. We were also attentive to the intermingling of human and companion animal interests within activities that our participants described, given the centrality of these considerations to establishing or maintaining a home in which to age in place.

Findings

Because our overarching intent was to explore older adults' experiences of ageing-in-place with pets, we initially identified age and pet-ownership as primary determinants of eligibility for our study. While we harbored a theoretical interest in older adults' experiences of economic vulnerability, we also acknowledged that many retired persons may be negotiating fixed incomes and shifting needs. With our broader case study findings pointing to housing as a key determinant of ageing-in-place with a pet (Toohey *et al.*, 2017), we were privileged to have had the opportunity to speak with three participants who related to us their first-hand experiences of—and in all cases, challenges with—housing transitions. These three participants were dissimilar in many respects: yet all were renters, and none owned a home when we spoke; all were single and somewhat socially isolated, with no spouse or immediate family (siblings, children, etc.) available to provide symbolic or material support; and all were living in lower-income circumstances, with minimal or non-existent investments, equity or savings. Finally, each also felt an unequivocal commitment to a companion

animal, who was also viewed as an integral and dependent member of their household.

As we present our participants' situations below, we use vignettes to highlight the complicating ethical dimensions of their relationships with their animal companions, which factored into their efforts to secure an appropriate home in the community. We also consider how each participant negotiated their particular ageing trajectory, as constrained by reduced capacities in relation to both autonomy and agency. Pseudonyms have been assigned to our human participants, but at their respective requests, their companion animals' names have remained unchanged.

Being Housed versus Having a Home: More-than-Human Solidarity and Agency

Alice, a petite woman with greying hair and an intensity about her, lived in a local trailer park alongside her cat, Kismet. And truly, they did live alongside one another in those early days. Alice felt responsible for, but not particularly fond of, her feisty feline companion.

Alice owned her trailer and had lived there for several years. She was not quite 60 when the trailer suffered irreparable water damage and was condemned. Living on a very low income, she and Kismet were suddenly homeless and in need of affordable housing. Alice hunted the private market for something affordable and cat-friendly, but with no luck. She also began applying for seniors' housing, but was regularly turned down for being under 65. None of the leads she followed accepted cats, either. She described herself as being 'stuck'.

Temporarily, Alice and Kismet were able to move into another trailer that was being rented by a girlfriend, who was living there with her two dogs. This was not optimal, though—the dogs chased Kismet at any opportunity. Alice's view of Kismet began to transform: she was impressed by the small cat, holding her own in the face of canine adversity. She also admitted that Kismet spent a lot of time living out-of-doors, which was not ideal.

And, more to the point, the trailer was on the market. Alice recounted how she and her roommate would hide the 'for sale' sign whenever they could, as both knew that it was next-to-impossible to find affordable homes for their multi-species families. So, Alice continued to seek more permanent solutions.

As her own level of desperation grew, so did her anxiety about Kismet. Aloof and independent, Kismet did not have a temperament that would easily lead to rehoming, plus she was an older cat,

which cut her chances even further. And then, there were the stories in the news about adopted animals being horribly mistreated. With these thoughts weighing heavily upon her, the specter of euthanasia began to haunt Alice.

Finally, Alice had her break, and was offered an apartment in a seniors housing facility. With a strict no-pets policy. Alice resolved to have Kismet euthanized. Desperation gave way to devastation as she took her small cat, by taxi, to a veterinary clinic. But her request was refused. Not just once, but by two different veterinarians. 'They did not understand my story', Alice said. Both accused her of viewing her cat as 'inconvenient', and both asked 'Don't you have friends?' So—two of her nine lives spent, Kismet survived, although finally, Alice was left with no choice but to surrender her to a shelter. To Alice, this felt like a fate worse than death. Another cab ride, some paperwork, a hand-off, and that was that.

Alice truly was devastated at this point. Yet, as she made arrangements to move into her new home, she decided to get Kismet back. And as soon as she had settled into her new home, she took a city bus back out to the shelter and pleaded with the personnel. One refused outright, stating 'Sorry, you gave her up'. But another, acting upon her own discretion, returned Kismet to Alice. Alice did not, at this tenuous point, reveal the truth, that she would be keeping Kismet illegally in her new home. Instead, she lied and said that they would be going back to a rental at the trailer park. The implicit understanding, though, was that Kismet was not to be brought back again.

All went well for Alice and Kismet for the first few months in their new home. Until a complaint from a neighbor, who heard the pitter-patter of feline feet through his ceiling, brought Alice's cat to the building manager's attention. He, in turn, was sympathetic: Alice was a model tenant in all other ways. But the facility's board of directors was adamant. The building manager was overruled, and Alice was given one month to vacate the premises with her cat.

Alice offered few details about this next phase of her life. A man had moved into the trailer park shortly before she had left. She knew that he had problems with alcohol. Still, Alice approached him to see if she and Kismet could share his trailer, as roommates. They had nowhere else to go. Not even a drop-in center would let Alice stay together with Kismet. The man agreed. Alice admitted vaguely that 'there were problems, but I dealt with them'. But she also recounted, of her continued efforts to find housing, that 'I was looking furiously, 'cause things were getting kinda heated in the place I was living'.

Eventually, Alice found herself in downtown Calgary, with a friend, celebrating Canada Day. She loved the vibrancy of the area, and noticed that several of the high-rise buildings housed state-subsidized units. She tracked down the managing organization. It was sheer luck that one of these was an affordable housing facility for seniors that allowed pets—the only one in the city to officially sanction cats. It was also sheer luck that Alice met the criteria for tenancy in terms of her age and her income-level, and that an apartment was available for immediate occupation, once her application was accepted.

Alice had been in limbo for 3 years, from the time that her trailer was condemned until the point when she found her new home. ‘And my cat, you know, she was the saving grace, really, because she was so resilient. And I knew once we got into the building, we—it was gonna be fine’.

Alice’s story offers a glimpse into the indomitable resolve that underlies active, if constrained, efforts to establish a stable home in which to grow older with a companion animal. While much of the literature on human–animal relationships has focused on emotional and psychological factors, Alice’s story reveals the extent to which moral considerations also underscored her actions. In particular, we were struck by Alice’s shifting sensibilities around manifestations of solidarity for her feline companion. For Alice, the types of costs she was willing to carry were wide-ranging and evolved as her situation progressed. At different points throughout her trajectory, she was willing to accept the mental anguish of ending her cat’s life; the risk of being ‘caught’ breaking housing rules; and the physical danger and emotional strain of living in an unsafe situation. Indeed, her understanding that even drop-in shelters would not accommodate her pet has been confirmed as a commonly encountered situation (Labrecque and Walsh, 2011).

Alice’s active agency, as manifest in the strategies she used to protect Kismet, may be understood in terms of constitutive solidarity (Dawson and Verweij, 2012), via her sense of having a moral obligation to a dependent ‘other’ belonging to a separate species. Simultaneously, her actions align with Prainsack and Buyx’s (2012) definition of interpersonal (Tier I) solidarity, as in Kismet she recognizes similarity (for instance, resilience) and is willing to carry costs that she believes are in her cat’s interests, which she prioritizes even over protecting her relationship with Kismet. Still, as Alice sought housing that would enable her to age in place and *also* maintain her commitment to protect her cat, her opportunities to do this were limited by her position within a social

hierarchy, and particularly being a lower income, less educated, single female, as well as a renter (Power, 2017). The factors that held her in this disadvantaged social position also served to constrain her autonomy (Baylis *et al.*, 2008) and shaped her limited opportunities for agency, as she desperately sought a home for herself and for her cat.

If we view solidarity as a moral value that underscores society’s willingness to provide subsidized and affordable housing opportunities for those living in economically disadvantaged circumstances, Alice’s situation serves to point out its failure to appropriately serve this population’s interests. Housing providers in our locality currently stop short of carrying the perceived costs of protecting older adults’ desires to maintain relationships with pets as they age in place, regardless of the potential health benefits that these relationships may proffer and the unfairness to a population within which autonomy is already highly constrained. Furthermore, disrupting more-than-human solidarity creates a moral conundrum for such older adults, whose moral commitment to a companion animal must be considered alongside the experienced benefits of the relationship itself and weighed against the basic and urgent need for a home. The systemic factors that conspire against older adults’ desires to maintain a relationship with a companion animal, as illustrated throughout Alice’s story, raise questions around social justice for this population (and for their companion animals), since they serve to both negate the potential benefits of animal companionship and curtail access to affordable and appropriate housing. In the end, Alice literally stumbled upon a rare situation where re-establishing a home for ageing-in-place would not preclude fulfilling her moral commitment to Kismet.

Negotiating Changes in Status: More-than-Human Solidarity and Dignity

Jack is a well-educated man, holding two different bachelor’s degrees. He had lived in several different cities across Canada, and worked professionally in several different sectors—including education and journalism—before settling into a 30-year career in the auto industry. Throughout his tenure, Jack was, by his own admission, exceptional at his job and regularly outperformed his colleagues. Thus he lived comfortably, and easily found employment wherever he elected to live.

At the time when he recounted his story, Jack and his cat, Kleo, had been together for about 8 years. Jack had adopted Kleo from an Ottawa shelter.

The moment he set eyes on her, he knew that he had found his cat, and Kleo seemed to have chosen Jack as well. Kleo was very young, under a year old, and had suffered abuse and neglect in her previous situation. Jack admired her resilience, and—keenly aware of the cruelty she had been subjected to—he doted on her from the start. Kleo, in return, gave him her exclusive trust. Jack viewed his relationship with Kleo as equivalent—or even preferable—to any human companionship that he has ever experienced. He reflected that, ‘My life would be very empty without her’.

Prior to relocating to Calgary, Jack had owned a condominium unit in Ottawa. After choosing to move to Calgary in the early 2000s, Jack found property values to be inordinately expensive, and opted to rent rather than purchase another home. Because he earned a comfortable salary, he was able to acquire a private-market, cat-friendly rental in the southwest quadrant of Calgary. But, as Calgary’s economy boomed, his rent rose steadily. Tired of this, Jack moved with Kleo into a more stable and affordable rental situation, near downtown. This is where Jack and Kleo lived quite happily for about 5 or 6 years, until Jack’s circumstances changed.

In May of 2012, Jack was sitting at his desk at work when he suffered a stroke. Recognizing the signs, he was able to call 911, and credits the quick response time of the paramedics with the extent to which he has been able to recover. Still, 3 years later and in his early 60s, Jack walks slowly and with a distinct limp. He has lost hearing and feeling on one side of his body, and simply cannot process information as quickly as he once could. After his initial recovery, Jack tried to resume his career, where years of hard work had led to a respected and responsible placement in a fast-paced, competitive environment. But his efficiency had slowed considerably, and he second-guessed his ability to be thorough and accurate. He began to face scrutiny and criticism from his colleagues, and soon left again. He explored alternate employment options, but with no luck. He quickly realized that he could no longer work. As he put it, ‘I had gone through over \$50,000 in savings in 3 years, keeping my lifestyle afloat, figuring I’m going back to work tomorrow. Not happening’.

During those years, Jack experienced increasing constraints. He had less and less money for the modest extras that he had always enjoyed, and his savings were put towards the basics: his rent, his medication, food on the table, and of course Kleo. She asked for little, and yet Jack took great pride in maintaining an exceptional level of care for his feline companion. The efforts he made to maintain his attentive caregiving routine also salvaged

for Jack a sense of purpose and self-efficacy, as he has struggled to come to terms with his own diminished abilities and uncertain future.

Eventually Jack could no longer pay his rent, and was forced to face the reality that he and Kleo must move elsewhere. A neighbor recommended that he contact a local seniors center for assistance, which he did. Jack was directed to consult with one of the housing advisors. When he mentioned Kleo, the advisor exclaimed, ‘Well, that narrows the search!’ Jack had exactly one option to consider. So there he went. ‘I left 1,020 . . . to come to 400 square feet. Talk about a furniture sell-off and giveaway!’ And at the time when we spoke, Jack was still struggling to adapt to the constraints of his new, impoverished existence. He described a pervasive frustration with the relentless sound of sirens, which flood his new home at all hours of the day and night.

In arranging his affairs, Jack had always planned to work well into later life, as had his father, his uncle, his grandfather. Jack had led his life accordingly, putting a modest amount of savings aside while anticipating several years of income still to come. Instead, he found himself embroiled in a struggle even to access the disability income that he is due. His initial application was rejected, much to the disbelief of his two attending physicians, both of whom supported his (eventually successful) appeal.

As he listed the many ways that his life was irrevocably changed by his stroke, Jack reflected that he had fallen far, and had landed in a place where he never expected to find himself—a place that is destitute of the choices and privileges he once had. Yet there is one choice that he refuses to relinquish. ‘I wouldn’t be living (in this affordable apartment), or anywhere without Kleo. I’d be renting a room somewhere for \$500 a month. In a basement. Probably an illegal suite. Because there’s no way I would give up the cat!’

Jack’s story illustrates the extent to which a close bond with a pet may underscore unprecedented transitions in ability, identity and status, thus offering a source of continuity that maintains an important link to one’s former identity and, ultimately, dignity. Jack’s story does not encapsulate the raw vulnerability of Alice’s, and yet his trajectory was steeped in social decline in a way that Alice’s was not. Prior to his stroke, Jack had led a life that reflected normative middle-class status. As a result, Jack was accustomed to a level of autonomy and choice akin to such a social position. Alice, in contrast, had not attained such cultural markers as university-level education, property-ownership or a competitive and economically valued career. Both Jack and Alice

(coincidentally) arrived in the same cat-friendly and affordable haven. Yet even as Alice struggled, she had ultimately moved laterally across her available social spectrum and was grateful for the stability of her eventual resolution. Jack, on the other hand, was keenly aware of his downward fall. With his physical and mental ability severely compromised, his financial resources depleted and his social resources few, Jack was acutely affected by the absence of choices remaining available to him.

We suggest that Jack's story illustrates the incongruence between moral values felt by individuals and those that shape institutionalized practices. Having found himself in a new and unfamiliar socio-economic situation, Jack was astute to what he viewed as an ungrounded and puzzling absence of compassion on the parts of housing agencies in Calgary for older tenants who wish to have a pet. Many older adults, like Jack, will inevitably be navigating changing physical, emotional and material circumstances, as their lives transform in unpredictable ways that are often outside of their control. Throughout the challenges that Jack experienced following his stroke, the continuity provided by his relationship with Kleo became steeped with symbolic meaning around ability, achievement and identity. At the same time, as all other aspects of his life continued to decline, Jack's sense of the importance of doing whatever it took to ensure that her needs were being met and well-being assured became non-negotiable. Thus Jack's story interweaves his sensibilities around having a moral responsibility to care for and earn the trust of a formerly mistreated and abandoned creature (i.e. constitutive solidarity) with an acute recognition of his and Kleo's own particular inter-dependencies (i.e. more-than-human solidarity at the interpersonal (Tier 1) level). Overall, the circumstances brought on by Jack's stroke and resultant impairment forced him to endure a series of transitions that stripped away layers of dignity, as his own autonomy was eroded by loss of wealth, profession, ability and identity. Remaining insistently committed to Kleo was one of the few ways that Jack was able to assert control and choice as he negotiated his new reality.

Nowhere to Go: More-than-Human Solidarity and (Relational) Autonomy

Hank and Jellybean, a 3-year-old labradoodle, lived in an old, run-down apartment building located on a side street of a gentrifying neighborhood. In fact, they lived almost directly across the river—about two kilometers as the crow flies—from the building where Jack and Alice (and their

respective cats) finally found their new homes. On his street, Hank's home stood out for its shabbiness and disrepair—but also for the ways that he had put his own personal signature on the postage-stamp-sized yard that lay between his front door and the street. During the summer, his garden comprised a colorful tangle of wild flowers and tomatoes, bursting from a ramshackle collection of flower pots. It also held a large bowl of fresh water adorned with a cheeky, hand-written sign that read 'Dog water - no cats'. It was impossible to sit out in Hank's tiny front yard without bearing witness to a steady stream of spontaneous greetings and conversations, as both regular and transient passers-by would stop to say hello to Hank and to the affable Jellybean.

Indoors, Hank's apartment was neatly kept and might even be described as cheerful, in spite of its cluttered dimness. Over the years, he had filled it with an array of contents that were rife with meaning, and that also helped to mask signs of overwhelming neglect on the part of the landlord. In the 35 years he had lived there, Hank's carpet had never been replaced; his walls never painted. Hank had covered his dingy walls with ageing photographs of family members, most of whom were now gone. Hank had no spouse, and having been predeceased by most of his relations—including his parents, all four of his siblings, and his two sons—he lived alone with Jelly. Yet he was also fortunate to have had a dedicated, if informal, network of neighbors keeping their eyes on him—occasionally enlisting him for small jobs or favors, but also ready to step in when he needed support.

At 81 years of age, Hank's daily existence generally revolved around two priorities: taking care of his dog, and dealing with his own deteriorating health. Hank was managing ailments like blood clots and blocked arteries. More recently, he had begun to struggle with painful arthritis in his hands, shoulders and knees, rendering certain daily activities, like getting dressed each morning, difficult and painful ordeals.

Even so, aside from the occasional day when lethargy or pain prevailed, Hank's various health issues did not impede his daily routine where Jelly was concerned. Their day started early, with a quick drive to a half-hour walk around a nearby dog park, a spot where both were known and welcomed. In addition to regular, shorter jaunts through their own neighborhood, the two repeated this longer walk at least once, often twice more, each day and in all but the most inclement of weather. Most days, they also picked up two neighbors' dogs, who otherwise would not get out. Hank also lavished Jellybean with toys and treats, generous meals, and—most

importantly—attention. Jellybean responded with deep loyalty and affection for Hank in return. They were an inseparable pair.

Eventually, a third priority crept into Hank's life: trying to find a new home. An ominous 'for sale' sign had been placed in front of his building. And this was just one of the challenges that his current housing increasingly posed. His rent had been rising for years, as had the cost of his utilities. With his annual income falling well below the poverty line, Hank sublet a room to offset these expenses. His roommate, though, suffered from alcoholism, and Hank was often forced to track him down to collect the rent several days past-due. And with his own health diminishing, Hank increasingly struggled with the basic tasks required to keep his space livable. Around this time, and in an effort to cope, Hank added physician-prescribed antidepressants to his growing battery of medications.

Hank began to actively search his neighborhood for a new home that he could afford, and that would accept Jellybean. But even local landlords with whom he had become acquainted over the years would not budge on their 'no-dogs' rules. Hank reflected that "They look at you like you're from outer space, when you ask about the dog!" And indeed, several local community agencies have painted a similarly grim picture of the severe shortage of affordable housing in Calgary that allows dogs. Still, Hank was uncompromising when it came to his commitment to Jellybean. "That's why a lot of dogs and cats get abandoned!" he reflected. "It's because people get evicted, or they just have to move for some reason, and they got a pet, and they can't find a place. So the only way they can do it is they gotta abandon the-the—the—I'd never do that with him anyway. I'd live on the street first".

As time passed, however, the inevitability of their fate became more pressing for Hank. As did his frustration with his home's disrepair and neglect, a constant reminder of recurring challenges with his landlord. Hank was keenly aware that property values in his neighborhood had skyrocketed as it gentrified. The increasing shabbiness of his own complex, however, in conjunction with the fluctuating economy of the city, led to difficulties keeping tenants in the other three units, resulting in substantial rent reductions for those units subject to turnover. But not for Hank, whose monthly rent continued to reflect a time when the building was more desirable. Hank eventually went so far as to withhold his rent in an effort to convince his landlord do something, "...just brighten the place up a little". This act of resistance, however, was met with a curt eviction warning, swiftly taped to his front door within two days of the rent being due. The symbolism of

this gesture, alongside the tangible financial and physical struggles that Hank was enduring day in and day out, pushed him even further into a place of despondency and hopelessness. In essence, Hank found himself living daily with the conviction that he and Jellybean needed to leave, but they simply had nowhere to go.

In Hank's situation, we are confronted with the consequences that a scarcity of affordable housing options for older adults with pet dogs may have in relation to promoting ageing-in-place. Dog-ownership later in life appears to hold particularly promising health-promoting potential. Beyond companionship, dog-walking has also been shown to facilitate social engagement, sense of community and daily walking (Rogers *et al.*, 1993; Thorpe *et al.*, 2006; Knight and Edwards, 2008; Toohey *et al.*, 2013; Gardner, 2014), all of which may help to offset the growing risk of social isolation associated with older age (Cloutier-Fisher and Kobayashi, 2009; Newall and Menec, 2015). This was unquestionably the case for Hank. Yet as time progressed, Hank's experience of ageing-in-place gradually became characterized by struggle, dependency and a paucity of options, all of which served to undermine the health-supporting attributes that dog-ownership was otherwise contributing to Hank's life.

The shortage of dog-friendly housing in Calgary also served to create a unique dependency situation for Hank, thus amplifying landlord-tenant power arrangements. Hank's life, in his early 80s, was characterized by a powerlessness stemming from extreme poverty, deteriorating physical and mental health, eroded dignity and continual uncertainty in relation to both his own and his dog's fates. The treatment Hank received by his landlord was demeaning, and yet the absence of alternatives for keeping his relationship with Jellybean intact gave him little choice but to tolerate it. Renters are particularly susceptible to exploitation on the part of landlords, as property owners are advantaged by their combined cultural and material positions of power (Power, 2017). Based on his tenuous social position and lack of resources, Hank's autonomy was severely constrained (Baylis *et al.*, 2008), and his opportunities for agency were curtailed unless he was willing to dispense with his only companion in life. Instead, while struggling to maintain his home and continue to live independently, Hank was beholden to a landlord that was able to profit from the desperate shortage of dog-friendly housing by charging an unfairly elevated rent and allowing the unit to fall into untenable disrepair, even as it was steadily occupied.

As he reflected on the depth of his personal commitment to Jellybean, Hank's mindful and non-negotiable

solidarity with Jellybean embodies a willingness to carry costs and a recognition of similarity in needs (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012). Simultaneously, his perspective suggests a recognition that the differential treatment of non-human animals versus people leads to suffering on the part of both people and their pets, revealing a more generalized sense of normative moral values, in accordance with constitutional solidarity (Dawson and Verweij, 2012). Hank unequivocally viewed the lack of pet-friendly housing at a societal level as a troubling cause of pet-relinquishment, and (ultimately) suffering on the part of the animals themselves, which is also confirmed in the literature (Coe *et al.*, 2014). Ideally, this coalescing of more-than-human solidarity practiced at both individual (i.e. interpersonal) and organizational (i.e. communal or collective) levels, via an easing of dog-prohibitive housing rules, would ultimately extend the choices and decisions available to Hank and would ideally serve to leverage the health-promoting potential of dog-ownership. Even as Hank's own physical and mental health deteriorated, his commitment to Jellybean's well-being remained his top and defining consideration. And while affordable seniors' housing that banned dogs could have been attainable for Hank, his moral and emotional commitments to Jellybean rendered him both trapped and invisible (Leibing *et al.*, 2016).

Implications

In presenting these three accounts of ageing-in-place with pets, we have suggested that in situations where individual capacity is constrained by economic vulnerability, older adults may practice more-than-human solidarity by prioritizing both their moral and emotional commitments to their pets, even as these disrupt their own ageing-in-place needs and put their own health and well-being at risk. In failing to reflect older adults' values and moral commitments to their companion animals, the pet-prohibitive rules that often dominate affordable housing provision may render older adults more susceptible to, rather than protected from, deteriorating physical, mental and social well-being as they age.

In our estimation, the stories we have shared in this manuscript do not suggest that Alice, Jack or Hank's attachments to their pets were unusual or leaning toward being psychopathological (Beck and Katcher, 2003; Chur-Hansen *et al.*, 2009), even as each prioritized their commitment to their companion animal in a way that complicated and even eroded their own health and well-being. We suggest that each story reflects a series of

rational, deliberate decisions, shaped by individual capacities and commitments to care for their animal companions, but shaped as well by moral values, which we understood as more-than-human solidarity. Each honored their individual human–animal bond; recognized both similarity (in terms of needs and experiences) and difference (in terms of the diminished status of pets as subjects in their own right); and, finally, indicated a willingness to carry costs stemming from the belief that it is simply not 'right' to abandon a dependent creature to prioritize human needs and expectations.

We thus question the extent to which a constitutive form of solidarity (Dawson and Verweij, 2012) underscores collective commitments to provide affordable housing that enables disadvantaged older adults to age in place in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling, if it disrupts the choice to retain animal companionship. Within the prospective tiers of Prainsack and Buyx's (2012, 2016) conception of institutionalized solidarity (i.e. the housing rules established by housing providers and the absence of legislative protection for the rights of pet-owning tenants), housing opportunities in Calgary overwhelmingly fail to account for more-than-human solidarity practiced by many of the individuals whom affordable housing is intended to support.

The constraints imposed upon this population, as disadvantaged by economic vulnerability and rental insecurity, illustrate a tension around the expectations placed upon our ageing citizenry in return for the supports that are provided and the terms under which these are offered. Requiring an older adult to abruptly end a relationship with a companion animal also has social justice implications, as such situations are disproportionately experienced by the most economically and socially vulnerable older adults in our population, for whom a pet may arguably proffer the most benefit (Poresky and Daniels, 1998; Morley and Fook, 2005), and for whom autonomy is most constrained (Baylis *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, disrupting these relationships also harms the companion animals themselves and feeds into the human-caused problem of unwanted pets, contributing to millions of healthy animals being euthanized every year (Coe *et al.*, 2014; ASPCA, 2017).

Solidarity and the Evolution of Public Health Ethics

Our study has revealed an unwillingness at the institutional level (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012, 2016) to carry the perceived costs of accommodating human–animal relationships for the benefit of older adults themselves. In contrast, our three accounts highlight the lengths to

which some older individuals themselves are compelled to carry inordinate costs, in relation to their own health, well-being and quality of life. We have also argued that for individuals, what has traditionally been understood as irrational or psychopathological behavior (i.e. prioritizing responsibilities to a pet over one's own basic needs) may in fact be motivated by ethical values, as manifest in a form of solidarity. Recognizing these motivations as solidaristic may play an important role in addressing unfair stigmatization of older adults who are deeply committed to ensuring the health and well-being of an animal companion, and may also strengthen the case for creating legislated protections for human–animal relationships in housing. The more-than-human solidarity framing we have employed also captures evolving ethical views of the moral status of non-human animals and recognizes the potential contributions that relationships with companion animal species may make to an aging individual's quality of life and sense of both identity and autonomy. Beyond these outcomes, however, there are other ways that we feel our argument has helped to evolve conceptualizations of solidarity as a key value within the domain of public health ethics.

First, we propose that in exploring more-than-human solidarity, we have contributed to calls for the underpinnings of solidarity to shift away from expectations of reciprocity or mutuality of expectation (Dean, 1995), or hints of underlying self-interest and self-protection (as discussed by Baylis *et al.*, 2008), to more fulsomely account for collective welfare as the ends to which solidarity is a means. Our study has explored practices of solidarity aimed at non-human animals in particular, which interested us in relation to the health-promoting potential of human–animal relationships and ageing-in-place. And yet, beings toward whom we might practice solidarity—whether human or non-human—must not be held accountable to reciprocate in normative or traditional ways, if solidarity is to be truly ethically motivated. We propose, for instance, that solidaristic practices aimed at persons living with dementia must be robust to accounts of 'relational citizenship', which revises traditional notions of reciprocity in relation to the personhood of those living with advanced cognitive impairment (Kontos *et al.*, 2017). Solidarity, thus, cannot be reserved for those with whom we might 'stand together' (as discussed by Dawson and Verweij, 2012: 2) in normative ways, contingent upon a morally motivated reciprocity between an 'us' and a 'them'.

Second, our interest in exploring the need for congruence between individual and collective solidaristic practices, as argued by Prainsack and Buyx (2012,

2016), also helps to underpin a movement toward a public health ethics that is grounded in collective good and the reduction of socially patterned inequities in health (Baylis *et al.*, 2008). An institutional-level adoption of more-than-human solidarity in the form of inclusive affordable housing policy may involve the possibility of carrying costs in relation to property management. Yet in the absence of this solidarity, tangible costs are being born by oppressed citizens and their companion animals, and in ways that perpetuate socially patterned inequities in health and well-being. The collective interests of the aging population are not being well-served, as the right to affordable housing remains conditional upon the interests of those who are offering it, rather than the interests of those who need it. In light of our study, and in answering important conceptual questions posed by Dawson and Verweij (2012: 4), we therefore suggest that 'invoking solidarity in the right way', i.e. in a way that is morally congruent with the ethically motivated solidaristic practices of older adults themselves, may indeed shape policies and their implementation, and ultimately such practices will contribute to the collective good in ways that cross species boundaries.

Closing Considerations

The complex emotional and ethical relationships that many people experience with companion animals reflect individual views of companion animals as having a valued subjectivity (Fox, 2006; Rock and Degeling, 2013) and as having interests that merit the same consideration as would be granted a dependent (human) family-member. As cautionary tales, our three vignettes illustrate the extent to which an individual's own physical, mental and social well-being may become entangled with that of their pet. In light of these complex relational dynamics, we suggest that solidaristic practices at institutionalized levels, such as those that shape housing prospects for older adults in lower-income circumstances, must reflect and subsume the moral complexity of solidarity practiced by individuals. Congruency of moral values that underscore both interpersonal and institutional practices will be foundational to achieving fair and equitable promotion of ageing-in-place.

Supplementary Data

Supplementary material is available at *Public Health Ethics* online.

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