

Exploring the dark side of pet ownership: Status- and control-based pet consumption

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Abstract

Desire for status or control may motivate some consumers to own certain types of pets. In the light of recent debates surrounding “designer pets,” this article examines the dark side of pet ownership through interpretive interviews with dog owners. The findings compare and contrast two types of ownership motivation — pets as companions to love versus pets as toys, status markers, and brands. This latter category forms part of the dark side of pet ownership. Owners differ in their motivation for ownership, their appreciation of the pet, the nature of human–animal interaction, breed choice, and the purchase of pet-related paraphernalia.

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1. Introduction

Humans interbred dogs for functional and appearance-related needs (*e.g.*, the toy category of dog was bred in order to provide small, charming companions). Rare or unusual animals may be purchased to satisfy the consumer’s need for status, and pure breeds are often purchased because of their distinguished lineage (Hirschman, 1994). Study of the appearance-based aspects of pet-related consumption receives little research attention in contrast to research on pets as loved companions, relationship partners, and family members (Hirschman, 1994; Holbrook, 1997; Holbrook et al., 2001; Stephens and Hill, 1996). Yet the former theme is important because the need for status and distinction (Bordieu, 1984; Hirschman, 1994; Veblen, 1899 [1994]) or for control and domination (Belk, 1996) may drive this form of consumption, thus re-

presenting a potential dark side to pet ownership. Examining the nature of this dark side of pet ownership is the focus of this paper.

The focus on the dark side of pet ownership is particularly relevant given the current debate over designer pets. For example, “Crossing breeds, adding a fanciful name, and charging outrageous sums for these dogs (labradoodles can cost up to U.S. \$2,500) is a recent trend that’s only taken off in the last decade.... It’s indicative of a society that loves labels. Having a dog that is part spaniel and part poodle isn’t enough — it has to be a cockapoo” (Allan Reznik, editor-in-chief of *Dog Fancy* and *Dog World*, quoted in Anonymous, 2004, p. 1).

The debate over designer dogs focuses on the morality of cross-breeding dogs in order to make them more visually appealing to humans (thereby filling a market niche that pure breeds cannot satisfy). However, a number of concerns (over and above health issues) occur in relation to this new trend. The chief concern relates to animal exploitation and the belief that such breeds are being bred solely for profit (Brown, 2005). Humans may treat such animals as designer accessories. If so, what will happen to such animals when they are no longer fashionable? This line of inquiry raises concerns over

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throwaway pets (Brown, 2005; Salzman, 2000) and over pets being treated as material objects or toys (Belk, 1996; Holbrook et al., 2001).

This article has the following structure. First, the article presents the interpretive methods used in this study. Second, the article presents the findings obtained by comparing and contrasting two forms of pet ownership; in particular, owners motivated by intrinsic/extrinsic goals tend to relate to their pets differently. Finally, the article addresses theoretical contributions and limitations, as well as proposing directions for future research.

2. Method

Data were collected through long in-home interviews with pet owners. Interpretive methods are critical when seeking to comprehend consumers' relationships with their animals (Hirschman, 1994), and pet-related research includes ethnographic interviews (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994; Holbrook et al., 2001), providing rich insights into human–animal interactions. Given the focus here on the underlying motivations for pet ownership, long unobtrusive interviews (McCracken, 1988) with pet owners *in situ* were chosen to uncover owners' deep-seated values and beliefs in relation to their pets (Hirschman, 1994; Zaltman, 1997).

The sampling procedure was purposive (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The study includes interviews with eight dog owners (four owned pedigrees and four owned mongrels). Table 1 presents details of the pet owners and the dogs they owned. The reasons for studying dog owners reflect the debate over designer pets — primarily canines with an obvious potential for conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899 [1994]) and control (Belk, 1996).

The interviews involved grand tour questions and floating prompts. Examples include “tell me about your pet”; “tell us how you got your pet”; and “what made you choose this pet.” In keeping with previous research, the data includes responses from asking participants to bring and discuss photos of their pets (Holbrook et al., 2001). Such a process enables consumers to discuss aspects of their pets on their own terms, thus providing the basis for deeper probes into underlying motivations (Zaltman, 1997). Interviews averaged between 1 and 3 h, were recorded electronically, and were transcribed by an assistant (resulting in a total transcript of 217 single spaced A4 pages).

The authors (two of whom have several years of experience with qualitative data) did the analysis independently and then compared their interpretations. All disagreements were discussed and resolved. Theoretical categories were elaborated during open and axial coding procedures (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Throughout, the analyses tacked back and forward between the literature on pet ownership and the data (dialectical tacking), which led to developing a number of theoretical categories and sub-categories (Spiggle, 1994).

3. Findings

The analyses reveal two broad motives underpinning pet ownership — those valuing the pet as an individual being and

those seeking to own the pet as part of a personal identity project. Based on work by Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) involving a differentiation between intrinsic goals (guiding people toward activities that are more innately satisfying) and extrinsic goals (focusing people toward behavior that earns external rewards and acknowledgement from others), people who value pets as individual beings are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, whereas those who see pets as possessions are more likely to be extrinsically motivated. The label for this second motivation is the “dark side” of pet ownership because this label covers motivations such as status, control, and domination. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings.

3.1. Pets valued for themselves: the desire for the authentic dog

Several owners describe their pets as loved family companions that are valued for who they innately are. For example, “If you really get to know them and see them as an individual creature, not just as a little adjunct to yourself ... that’s when you realize what great personalities they have” (Margaret). Margaret identifies appreciating dogs for their distinct character traits rather than something that is solely an expression of the owner’s self (*cf.* Belk, 1996). An appreciation of the innate intelligence of dogs drives this view. For example,

We honestly believe he [Tessa] really understands everything we say. He will be fast asleep at the other end of the house; and he will hear you pick up a banana and break the skin of it; and before you’ve finished peeling off the first bit of the skin of this banana, he’s there next to you begging. He understands when you walk him that he’s not allowed to go near the road, even when he’s off the leash. Even if he runs ahead, he sits and waits for you to come and waits until you tell him that it’s okay to cross; and it’s sort of funny because, when you walk by yourself, you stop at a corner and think, “oh, safe to cross.” (Lizzy)

Table 1
Participant owner and pet details

Owner	Demographic information	Pet
Jodie and John	Asian female mid 20s Asian male mid 20s	Tyro (Maltese-Shitzu dog, aged 7).
Brett	White male mid 20s	Boxer (Pug dog, aged 3); Jolly (Pug bitch, aged 13 weeks).
Michelle (interviewed twice, once with partner Brett, and once separately)	White female mid 20s	Boxer (Pug dog, aged 3); Jolly (Pug bitch, aged 13 weeks).
Margaret	White female mid 50s	Jackson (mongrel dog, deceased at 13); three other mongrels (all deceased) also discussed.
Lizzy	White female early 50s	Tessa (Labrador dog, aged 5)
Angie	White female early 20s	Donkey (Pugaliere [Pug-King Charles Cavalier cross] aged 9 months).

Table 2
Summary of findings

	Intrinsic motivation; ownership as love; desire to provide animal with happy life	Extrinsic motivation; ownership as control/status
Owners	Margaret, Lizzy	Jodie, John, Brett, Michelle, Angie
Appreciate animal for...	Independent self (Margaret, Lizzy); innate intelligence (Margaret, Lizzy); loved companion (Margaret).	Self-enhancement (Jodie); ability to perform “tricks” (Jodie); something to protect/defend (Brett, Jodie).
Relationship direction	Two-way between two intelligent entities (Margaret, Lizzy).	Owner driven (Brett); dog must conform to desired role (Michelle).
Breed choice	General: With a preference for mongrels (Margaret); size not important (Margaret, Lizzy).	Particular: Designer dogs and purebreds (Brett, Michelle); preference for small, “cute” or “toy” breeds (Jodie).
Consumption practices in relation to pet	No non-essential doting (Margaret, Lizzy); takes responsibility for dog’s needs (Margaret, Lizzy).	Materialistic — dressing up and pampering to meet owners desired self-image (Michelle, Brett); adapt human items to dogs (Michelle and Brett); shirk responsibility for dog’s needs (Jodie).

Lizzy’s appreciation of Tessa’s abilities derives from a belief that he is an intelligent creature that understands more than he lets on and, as such, should be valued for his inner qualities. Lizzy also knows his friends by name (Barney, Riley, and Daisy) and believes Tessa does as well. Similarly, Margaret describes creatures as “amazing” while recounting a story she read about a dog that found its way home. The moral of such tales is that some pet owners believe that other persons underestimate the intelligence of animals.

There was a man who always had his dog with him on one of the big road transports and he’d stopped at Darwin. As usual, he just let the dog out to wander around. Now, they don’t know what happened, but it would seem that the dog might have spotted a rabbit and ran off. The man stayed there for hours calling the dog, and yet he couldn’t stay any longer because he had to make this delivery by the certain time. He had come from Adelaide, and he really was most distressed. Do you know it was a couple of months later that that dog – absolutely footsore and dehydrated – found its way back to Adelaide from Central Australia.... I feel we totally underestimate what animals are capable of and their intelligence and their instincts. (Margaret)

For Margaret and Lizzy, their love and appreciation of animals as distinctive entities with their own intelligence and personality leads them to value their dogs “warts and all.” Thus, these owners see beyond their pets’ surface characteristics to acknowledge the animals’ deeper qualities (which are often ignored by other people). For example, Lizzy identifies the eating habits of Tessa as “horrible” but appreciates that Labradors eat this way. Margaret describes Jackson as “funny-looking” because he was “short, fat, and unusual.” An appreciation of their dogs’ individuality, imperfections, and peculiarities contrasts sharply with Michelle and Brett (in the next section), who reject mongrel dogs on appearance-related grounds.

Margaret and Lizzy also draw great pleasure from knowing their dogs have the freedom to roam. For example, both owners prefer to allow the dogs off their leads (using leashes only in high traffic areas and to conform to local by-laws) because, as independent creatures, they should be free to act independently

from their owners, even though this entails some risk. Lizzy allows Tessa off the leash in the park so he can socialize and learn and because he loves to meet other dogs. Margaret also takes this view:

I suppose if a dog is on a lead, it feels very vulnerable when the others aren’t. It’d be great to get him used to being off the lead and playing with them.... I suppose it’s ... just a natural thing to do because I like them to be so that I can take them for walks.... I might have the lead around their neck just in case I’ve got to get hold of them but not have them always there so they can walk around and sniff around and do what they like.

Such dog owners view freedom from human standards and control as central to the dog’s well-being, including Margaret and Lizzy’s view of an authentic dog, with freedom from human intervention representing one form of authenticity (Beverland, 2006). Although they both recognize the dependent relationships pets have with their owners (for food, love, and shelter), they believe strongly in the dogs’ need to self-determine and are contemptuous of those who own pets for *purely* selfish reasons. For example,

In what ways was it rewarding? Well, the sense of having such a loyal and faithful friend for so many years; we had such a great rapport between us, Jackson and I. And I’d recommend it to anyone — Oh, who loves animals. I feel very strongly against people that just get an animal to ... well, for whatever ... all sorts of other reasons other than the animal itself. [Interviewer: But they won’t love him.] Oh yes, exactly, or they get one for the image of the dog because it adds to their image, and they don’t really, you know, think of the dog’s needs in any way. (Margaret)

For intrinsically-motivated pet owners, these pets become loved family members cherished by their owners for their own sake (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994; Holbrook et al., 2001; Stephens and Hill, 1996). This finding is consistent with Kant’s categorical imperative of treating others (including animal companions) as ends rather than means. The status they bring to the owner or their appearance does not influence their value.

This viewpoint also leads Margaret to see past the breed of dog and actually to prefer stray or impounded dogs. She also prefers mongrels because she believes that they are healthier. Likewise, Lizzy appreciates dogs for their intelligence and distinctive personalities, having no real preference for breed even though she owns a pure-bred Labrador. This conclusion contrasts with the findings from other interviewees.

Consistent with their intrinsic love for their dogs as an end in itself, Margaret and Lizzy do not ply their dogs with expensive toys or gifts such as designer doghouses, dog waters, doggiechinos, and dog clothes. For these respondents, such items not only are superfluous but represent an imposition of human standards and desires on the animal — a form of controlling behavior whereby the dog is treated as a mere fashion accessory or toy (*cf.* Belk, 1996). In contrast, necessities such as healthcare and quality food are purchased. Lizzy recounts one example when she tried to “impose” human standards on Tessa.

We got a kennel for him because Peter insisted that dogs should live outside. Of course, it had to be a big kennel and only the best for our puppy, and it was over \$200.... I don't think he ever set foot in it. He was scared as anything of it, apart from the fact that why should he sleep outside when the rest of us are inside? The only one that ever went in the kennel was Jane, my youngest daughter. She tried to teach him what the kennel was all about, and she was the only one who ever got in it, and he looked at her and said, “Well, you're an idiot” and walked away. And she's going, “Tessa, Tessa, this is for you.” “Well,” she thought, “Well, this isn't working.” So she got out, and the kennel sat there and sat there, never being used until we finally got rid of it.

For Lizzy, the lesson from the kennel incident is that dogs sleep wherever they choose, rather than in a special house (the imposition of a human standard on a freewheeling creature). Also, both owners recognize their obligations to take care of their dogs' needs — including food, healthcare, and emotional well-being. They ensure their dogs get a healthy diet, are regularly exercised, and are protected from dangerous situations such as heavily trafficked roads. For example,

It's a big responsibility, which I've always known. I think that the other family members don't take enough responsibility with him. It's good to take the responsibility of looking after a pet because he's totally dependent on us for his care. If we don't walk him, he doesn't get a walk; and if we don't feed him, he's not able to do it for himself. So it's a big responsibility, having a pet. (Lizzy)

4. The dark side of pet ownership

4.1. Pets as toys, status markers, and brands

In contrast to the owners above, other interviewees saw their pets as part of a self-project. In these cases, pets had a pre-conceived role in the owner's lives resulting in different human-pet interactions (Table 2). Such a view is similar to treating pets

as toys and involves a form of ownership that entails mastery over the pet. Related behavior includes dressing up animals, decorating them, and grooming them (Belk, 1996) or control-oriented behavior consistent with the concerns raised earlier about designer pets. Such behavior is also consistent with a desire for status and/or self-esteem. For example, Jodie chose a dog to bring out a more nurturing side: “Definitely, because I can't stand kids. I just think they're dirty, disgusting things.... Kids are annoying as well. And Tyro's like.... Your voice just changes when you speak to him. It's always a soft-spoken, sweet, kind voice. It's definitely made me into a nicer, more motherly, loving kind person.” Jodie's passage reveals the role her dog Tyro plays in her desire to transform herself into a “better person.” In this sense, pets may also be conceived as “love objects” that consumers use to express their actual or desired identities (Ahuvia, 2005).

Such self-relevant motives are typical of this group of consumers and contrast directly with those expressed by Margaret and Lizzy. For example, two separate sets of desires drove Brett and Michelle's decision to purchase their dogs. For Michelle, both pugs serve as props for her first novel. For example,

The whole idea was it was going to be like Harry Potter; so I could imagine Boxer in a Sherlock Holmes outfit and her [Jolly] being this little mischievous little female that loves to shop — little cowboy boots and tutus and everything, you know — just a fun little pair and him being the older, wiser one and her being the little mischievous little girl.

Michelle's desire to fit her pets into her proposed novel also prompted her to buy a second pug, this time a bitch (Jolly) because the story called for a female. A consequence of the desire includes the dogs being forced into pre-defined roles and a sense that they may not be happy in such roles.

All sorts of things — here's the wedding photo. Boxer is helping us cut the cake. I think he's got his paw on the knife, a little collar on. Again, he doesn't look that happy. (Brett)

This approach to owning the dog also results in the purchase of items such as doggiechinos and other human products targeted to satisfy the needs of animal owners. Michelle and Brett, for example, have been trying various brands of doggie breath fresheners, while Jodie purchases specially designed products for Tyro — including a carry basket, doggie treats, and clothes.

For Brett, the choice of dog relates to his need for attention. For example, “I like to be fatherly, a friend to the dog. I like to be liked.... They're always very forthcoming in giving affection which is nice.” Brett's passage differs subtly from Margaret's appreciation of Jackson as a faithful friend and companion. For Brett, ownership is purely a self-relevant act, whereas for Margaret the friendship she received from Jackson emanated in no small degree from observing the animal act of its own accord. In discussing why she likes her two pugs, Michelle recognizes that her motives were selfish: “That's quite a selfish thing in a way ... to have these two pets that I know will love me, whatever.” Michelle and Jodie both love their dogs because,

unlike children, they are undemanding and never “talk back” or “grow up to have drug problems.”

This motivation for ownership has further implications. Unlike Margaret and Lizzy, extrinsically-motivated pet owners do not appreciate dogs’ innate intelligence; rather, dogs are seen as “cute” and as a means for providing pleasure to the owner. For example,

If I were to get another one, I’d still get a little dog. I don’t know if I’d get a Maltese Shitzu because I want to try a shorthaired dog, like a pug, because they’re quite cute. They have to be cute – that’s the criterion – so that they can sit on the couch with you and snuggle up. (Jodie)

Cuteness is an aspect of appearance often associated with modern consumerism (Harris, 2000). Owners such as Jodie, Michelle, Brett, and Angie constantly refer to cute eyes, “big googly eyes,” cuteness, and the dog’s looks. On the contrary, Margaret and Lizzy include little mention of such factors — focusing instead on the dog’s personality traits, habits, idiosyncrasies, and achievements. In contrast to Margaret and Lizzy’s view that humans often underappreciate animals’ intelligence and that animals are capable of achieving many things, Jodie and Angie regale interviewers with stories of “tricks.” For example, “Yes, he’s very clever and we teach him to do tricks.... He’ll sit; he can shake hands, and he can beg; he can lie down, roll over.... [But] you have to do it with food, only for food.” (Jodie)

Jodie’s appreciation of Tyro’s abilities relates directly to the ability to perform a limited range of tricks on demand. The performance of such tricks also reinforces her perceptions of the dog’s cuteness — as well as representing a form of control, in that the tricks are the result of training, are initiated by the owner, and result in a reward. Jodie went so far as to question whether Tyro could really think at all. One result of this outlook is to view these dogs as helpless creatures that need confinement and protection. Brett admits to never letting Jolly off her lead and, as with both Jodie and Angie, prefers to carry the dog and hold him close or to place him in a specially designed carry bag. Brett sees his dogs as being defenseless:

What if the other dogs pick on him because he’s not a big dog? He’s not going to do anything, you know. He’s just going to get picked on — this poor helpless, defenseless little puppy. I was worrying about him. (Brett)

An outcome of this view includes the desire to place boundaries around the dog’s movements. Brett prefers strict training and control: “Boxer would do anything he wanted to; he wouldn’t know how to sit or anything like that. It’s some kind of a controlling. We’ve got to teach him to obey us; otherwise, it’s just out of hand.” Brett’s two dogs — Boxer and Jolly are kept mostly inside and are rarely taken for walks because of concerns about their breathing problems (typical of the breed). Likewise, Jodie is literally terrified to let Tyro off the leash.

He’s helpless; he can’t fend for himself. I watch over him a lot more, when crossing the road, because he’s defenseless.

He doesn’t know what he’s doing. He doesn’t understand that cars can hurt him, that eating certain things can make him sick.... When I take him for a walk, I bought a little foam basket so he can sit in the car, and I have a seatbelt for him. So he’s got the works in my car, and I have a little portable drink bowl so that — when we take him to the park — I can bring the drink bowl, and then he can have his drink. You see, some dogs — when the owners walk them — they don’t need a leash; the dog will just walk with them. But Tyro, if you let him off the leash, he makes a run for freedom. Sometimes — if we forget to close the back garage door — he’ll be in the garage, and he’ll just run. He just bolts for freedom. (Jodie)

Jodie’s statement identifies the relationship between her belief in Tyro’s innate lack of intelligence, his helplessness, and her need to control the relationship. Although she recognizes his desire to “run free,” Jodie construes this to be a further example of Tyro’s lack of awareness of the dangers around him. As a result, she rigidly controls Tyro’s movements and goes to great lengths to making sure he is safe by providing a customized seatbelt in the car and by making sure that he only drinks the water she provides.

The focus on outward appearances brought on by a desire for “cuteness” results in very particular choices of dog breed and individual dog. Whereas Margaret and Lizzy appreciated their dogs “warts and all,” the other interviewees had quite particular appearance-based criteria. For example,

Michelle: I can remember when I first got Boxer, and I had been told that he’s a good-looking pug. There are some funny-looking pugs out there. There’s a pug trait that we didn’t want to get with Jolly.

Brett: A more protruding face.

Michelle: Yes, because they’ve got quite a flat face, and we wanted something that looked like Boxer because we’d been told that Boxer had a good face. So that’s what I was looking at when we first got him. I said, “What are the other pugs out there like?” And, you know, sort of appreciating that Boxer is a good specimen of a dog, of a pug.

The above passage identifies the appearance-related criteria that governed Brett and Michelle’s choice of pet. Jodie also specified earlier that her dog had to look cute before she would select it. In contrast, Margaret took little notice of Jackson’s physical looks (a result of cross-breeding) and focused instead on his personality. This made Margaret less particular about breed choice (while her preference for mongrels builds on beliefs about their health and robustness), whereas the other interviewees (excluding Lizzy) showed a preference for designer dogs or pure breeds.

Michelle: I think, because I had seen quite a lot of pugs before at work, I like the pure bred look. And so we decided that we wanted to get a pug.

Brett: So our decision was to buy a pug, not a dog, essentially.

Interviewer: Not a dog?

Michelle: Yes, it was a pug. We looked ... for pugs only. There was no question on what sort of dog it was going to be. Remember, we went down to the beach, and there was a cross pug griffin. It was awful.

Interviewer: Awful?

Michelle: It was old. And its teeth were ... the jaws protruding ... and I didn't really like it.

Brett: It was like a gremlin.

Michelle: Yes, it was like a gremlin.

Brett: Too much like a gremlin.

Michelle: Yes. And, personally, I haven't seen any mixes out there that I like. I like pure-breds.

Interviewer: Purely for the looks?

Michelle: Yes, definitely.

The passage above further identifies the dominance of appearance-related criteria in the selection of a pet and the resulting preference for a pure-bred pug. For both Brett and Michelle, purchasing their pet was similar to a choice of a desired brand, whereby the prospective pet is examined on more materialistic grounds. The desire for cuteness also resulted in a preference for smaller dogs. For example,

I definitely like little dogs better than big dogs because I like the fact that you can pick them up and they're like a little toy. Some big dogs are cute, but then they just bounce around and stay outside. You can hug them and stuff. But, I don't know, I'd prefer little dogs. It's cute when my Mum bathes him, and they like to shake when they're wet. He's so cute; he looks like a drowned rat. (Jodie)

Small dogs reinforce perceptions of cuteness and helplessness. These dogs are also desirable because they are controllable, whereas some view large dogs as being too independent. Likewise, Jodie's identification of her pet as a little toy reflects the view that a critical role for the dog is to be there for her amusement. In contrast to Margaret and Lizzy, despite earlier suggesting that the dog brought out her nurturing instincts, Jodie also takes less responsibility for Tyro's needs — leaving difficult chores, such as bathing and grooming, to her mother.

My Mum does that. She'll feed and clean him and wash his blanket. And she took the day off work to take him to get

de-sexed, and she picked him up afterwards. I think — because that's just the motherly thing in her to do that — even though I'm the Mum, I just pay for him and play with him. I don't do all the hard stuff, like washing and feeding. And then, when he's sick, she'll give him the medicine every morning and things like that. And she's the one that lets him out in the morning to pee. (Jodie)

5. Discussion and conclusion

This article contributes in a number of ways. Most importantly, it examines non-loving motives underpinning pet consumption, adding to our knowledge of human–animal interaction (*cf.* Hirschman, 1994). This is the first article that examines this issue directly. Further, the article identifies a number of characteristics of the dark side of pet consumption, including consumption for status, self-relevant acts, control, and domination. The article identifies the links between such ownership motives and pet-related consumption behaviors — including choice of breed, pet appearance, responsibility for ownership, and purchases of pet-related objects. This article extends and complements existing pet-consumption research that focuses primarily on more positive aspects of animal–human interaction (*e.g.*, Hirschman, 1994; Holbrook, 1997; Holbrook et al., 2001; Stephens and Hill, 1996).

This study provides rich detail on the distinction between the pet as a being and as a possession and, in doing so, provides rich evidence of what Belk (1996) has described as the dark side of pet ownership. Although clear instances of *espoused* love for the animal and emotional attachment were observed in the latter cases (*i.e.*, pets as possessions), this love is possibly not for the pet *per se* but, to a larger extent, for features of the pet (such as cuteness) or for the self-relevant benefits that the pet brings to the owner. For such owners, dogs are possessions that enable their owners to exert various forms of control in an effort to instill self-belief. The pets afford their owners status and are a means to attract love to oneself and to facilitate other desirable forms of social exchange. In direct contrast to those finding pleasure in the dogs' individuality and self-determination, these pets play a passive role in the relationship because their personality is, to a significant degree, derived from owner-projected attributes and because perceiving the animal's level of helplessness confirms the need to exert control.

The findings also provide insights on three other issues of pet ownership — owning certain breeds to reflect status, inside versus outside categorizations of pets, and the cultural hierarchy of pets. In relation to status, the present article is consistent with Veblen's (1899 [1994]) view that some (rare) breeds of dogs serve little functional purpose and that ownership of such breeds represents conspicuous consumption. For owners like Angie, Michelle, Brett, and Jodie, their pets add to their status among friends and strangers (who make them feel liked and give attention to their owner via their “cute” pet), although this view is primarily self-referenced rather than other-referenced. Such a perspective perhaps represents a more post-modern view of status, given the increased solipsism associated with post-modern consumption (Guignon, 2004). The appreciation of

pedigree and rarity is less important in status-enhancing pet consumption than consumerist appearance-related attributes such as cuteness and quaintness (*cf.* Harris, 2000).

Hirschman (1994) suggests that consumers categorize pets as inside or outside, depending on the level of anthromorphization of the animal. Inside pets are seen as more human and thus have permission (or are forced) to be inside (with some boundaries). The findings from the present study offer a different view. Owners such as Margaret and Lizzy recognize and indeed celebrate the wildness of their pets. But, unlike Hirschman's owners, they allow their dogs to move between the outside and inside at their leisure because this best reflects the nature of the animal. For Margaret and Lizzy, the outside may contain some dangers but is a vital part of the dog's experience if the dog is to live a full life. Likewise – though where the dog can go inside includes some boundaries – boundary enforcement rarely occurs, as this would run counter to the owner's beliefs about what dogs should do and would treat them as something less than a loved family member. The other interviewees' responses best reflect Hirschman's outside categorization, given their belief that outside is full of dangers. As such, owners place substantial controls upon their animals, resulting in their being kept close and mostly inside. Together, the findings in this study suggest that the line between outside and inside is not as clear-cut as previously thought.

The findings also offer insights on the cultural hierarchy of pets. Based on the degree to which pets can be humanized, Hirschman (1994) identifies a hierarchy of pets ranging from cold-blooded vertebrates such as reptiles and fish at the bottom of the order to birds and rodents in the middle to cats and dogs at the top. The findings from the current study suggest that the cultural hierarchy can be refined by considering the motives of pet owners. Specifically, our findings suggest that – compared to intrinsically-motivated pet owners, who see their pets as unique beings possessing human characteristics – owners motivated by a desire for control, domination, and status are more likely to treat their pets as objects for their own pleasure. For example, Jodie's dog Tyro is seen more as a toy than a human and receives little attention to its needs. This animal–owner interaction and its effects on pet-related consumption is an intriguing area for future research.

The present study has a number of limitations. First, the findings pertain to a small sample from one Western country and cover just two cultural groups and only one species of pet. Future research should examine the motivations for ownership of other species such as rare cats (many of which fetch very high prices), birds, and fish. Further, future researchers may probe deeper into the dark side of pet consumption by interviewing owners of designer breeds to understand the motives guiding their adoption of designer pets. Also, future research should examine these issues across different cultures and age groups. For example, though the two cultures studied both exhibit the dark side motivations, intrinsic ownership motives were only observed in one (Western) culture. In addition, the dark side motivations are more prevalent in younger owners than in older ones. Thus, future research should examine both cultural and age differences in pet-ownership motivation. In addition, future research should consider how individual differences moderate

the ways people relate to pets. Indeed, people who are more domineering may exert more control over their pets, whereas someone who is more nurturing may exhibit greater acceptance of who the pet is (inherently). Quantitative research could also examine the relationship between pet-ownership motivation and consumption habits, including breed choice, appearance-based features, and the consumption of pet-related paraphernalia. The findings here are unlikely to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dark side of pet ownership, and future research should explore this issue in more detail.

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