

Dogs, Cats, and Their People:
The Place of the Family Pet and Attitudes about Pet Keeping

by

Jill Johnson

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfilment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Public Issues Anthropology

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2009

©Jill Johnson 2009

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

The perception of pets as ‘family members’ is an important area of research in the study of human-animal relationships. The objective of this thesis is to assess the ways in which pets are integrated into the home, and to explore how pet owners regard their dogs and cats within their constructed circles of kinship and social bonds. This research also examines a sample of attitudes toward some important issues with pet keeping, from what constitutes responsible pet guardianship to modern issues in animal welfare. Thirty-four participants were recruited, and data was collected through individual qualitative interviews. Data analysis shows the level of integration of the pet into the family has some correlations with the gender of the primary pet caretaker, and shows the impact of individual experiences of participants, particularly in childhood, which strongly influenced preferences of pet type, and their view of the role of animals in the home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors and committee members for their vast amounts of guidance, encouragement, and patience with this project, Dr. Anne Zeller, Dr. Maria Liston, and Dr. Frans Schryer. This thesis would not exist without your commitment to this research.

Many thanks go to Dr. Harriet Lyons, for being a constant source of support for all of us graduate students in the first year of the Public Issues Anthropology Program. She, along with the professors at Guelph who taught my graduate courses, offered a different way of looking at and researching anthropological issues.

I am sincerely appreciative to the Department of Anthropology and the University of Waterloo for the generous scholarships I received while working towards my Master's Degree.

I would like to thank all of the other graduate students, especially the other 'first years' for offering interesting discussions during rides to Guelph and for always having a listening ear when I needed to bounce off ideas or vent some stress! I would also like to thank the department of Anthropology secretary, Allyson Rowat, for all of her assistance with forms, deadlines, notices, etc. and helping to keep me in the loop about things!

I must thank my parents, Nancy and Ron, for all of their encouragement and love. Even though we live thousands of kilometres apart, it was always a comfort to know you were thinking of me, and that a simple phone call could lift my spirits.

I owe an absolute mountain of thanks to my boyfriend, Louis. You were there pretty much from the beginning when I moved to Waterloo and met you in a matter of days. You've been there through the good and bad, and working on this master's degree would have been a different story without your constant rock solid support and ability to make me laugh and have fun even when I thought I would go insane! People often forget how the little things make a difference, so thank you for all of the suppers you cooked, the endless dishes you washed, and all the other little things you did so I could work. I love you.

Finally, I must dedicate this work to all of the companion animals in my life, past and present, who have been true family and friends.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: From Then To Now: Rise of the ‘Family Pet’	6
Early Domestication and History of the Dog and Cat.....	6
From the Middle Ages to the 19 th Century	11
A Snapshot of Pet Statistics and Welfare Issues.....	16
Transformation from Nature to Culture: Pet Roles, Metaphors, and Reasons for Pet Keeping.....	19
Neoteny and Anthropomorphism.....	22
Pets, People, and Accepting Animal ‘Kin’	26
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	31
Setting.....	32
Recruitment and Informants	32
Qualitative Method.....	34
Ethics and Risks to Participants.....	34
Coding and Classifying of Data.....	35
Methodological Limitations.....	36
Chapter 4: Data	38
Where Do People Find Pets?	41
The Roles of Pets and Relational Degrees.....	44
Opinions on Elective Surgeries.....	46
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	49
A Word On Gender and Age	50
Interaction Between Pet Roles and Participant Demographics.....	52
Emotional Support and Strong Family Bonds	57
Effect of Past Pet Experience.....	58
Influences on Pet Choice	60
Responsibility, Veterinary Care, and Cost	62
Elective Surgeries.....	66
‘Too Many Pets’?.....	68
Directions for Future Research	70
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	74
Appendices.....	79
References.....	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Participant Age Groups	39
Figure 2: Participants By Household	39
Figure 3: Pet Distribution By Participant Age.....	40
Figure 4: Pet Distribution By Household.....	40
Figure 5: Cat Sources.....	43
Figure 6: Dog Sources.....	43
Table 1: First Degree Terms.....	44
Table 2: Second Degree Terms.....	45

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Animals are an integral part of the human cultural world. We use them in a variety of practical and non-practical ways. Some of the main ways in which they are used include food, materials, test objects, entertainment, and sport. They are a large focus of the art world as well, with artists, sculptors, writers, and photographers having animals as the centre of their work. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we come into contact with animals every day. One of the most popular, and sometimes the most obvious way we interact with animals on a more intimate level is through having pets. Dogs and cats appear to be the most popular pet animals in North America, with nearly 60% of households having a dog or cat or both. There is now a significant body of work on the subject of pets in human society and this thesis will present some exploratory paths for anthropological studies of pets, or ‘companion animals’¹.

This popularity of cats and dogs presents a very complex human-animal relationship. Although this topic has received much study in the social science fields of psychology and sociology in the past two decades, it has yet to be thoroughly researched in the field of anthropology. Our relationships with animals, such as the deep emotional bonds people form with dogs and cats, is a very important topic for the study of human culture, as animals play very integrated roles in our society.

One of the common ways to describe pets is that they are ‘members of the family’. Dogs and cats have been integrated into the household, and the pet’s ‘owners’

¹ I use the terms ‘pet’ and ‘companion animal’ interchangeably as the term companion animal has become the preferred term in the literature. I will be using the term ‘owner’ more than the term ‘guardian’ but the latter has become more preferred in the literature and animal welfare circles, as ‘owner’ acknowledges animals as ‘property’, but it is still commonly used, hence my use of the term in this thesis.

have made a commitment to take care of the animal for the rest of his or her life, so they become an important part of the person's family and social circle. My research focuses on interviews with individuals who owned either a cat or dog or both, in order to find out their reasons for choosing these particular animals to live with, and what kind of relationship they have. There are positive and negative aspects of the 'pet industry' as a whole, as well as with our relationships with our pets. Identifying these aspects, how they relate to social behaviour and self-image, and how pets are perceived and constructed in the pet owner's mind, is a reflection of our culture, or perhaps, the subculture of the human/pet relationship.

In the wide-ranging literature on the subject of pets and their people, there is the argument that pets serve as substitutes for people who may or may not have fulfilling human relationships. Other studies indicate that pets are another level of social support that leads to better human well-being among all kinds of people with strong social networks and kin relationships. There is academic support for the mainstream media idea of pets as "family members"; in advertising, in books, magazines, and television shows, we are encouraged see pets as family members, which may be a positive thing for the animals. My research question is: Do people see their pets as family members? What language do people use to describe their pets' roles, and what are the major themes that exist in the pet-human relationship? Secondly, how do the roles pets play fit with attitudes toward prevailing welfare issues?

This research is significant for several reasons. In researching people's attitudes toward companion animal issues using the variables of gender, age, and family structure in pet ownership, I aim to evaluate the important role that pets play in social networks of

adults of various life stages. I also aim to help bridge the gap between feelings of attachment and 'kinship' with companion animals and important welfare issues affecting pets today. Such a study can benefit the community by improving education and awareness campaigns by animal rescue groups about the well-being and proper care of companion animals, and could also aid in communications between veterinarians and clients when the subject of cosmetic surgery is raised. It is possible that this study will aid in changing social and/or health policies (for both people and pets); for example, veterinarians could become more aware of the lack of information the general public has about common unnecessary procedures.

Pets play many different roles for families, adults, children, couples, etc. The roles of pets are important to document as more research could lead to better support for the use of animals in hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions where animals are seldom allowed. Companion animals can offer something different to people than other humans can replicate in terms of emotional connection. The importance of pets among the single and senior population should be emphasized as well, and community policies on rented properties or assisted living residences may be reviewed. By using short questionnaires for recruitment and semi-structured, open-ended interviews for my data, I have gained insight into how people value animals in their lives and in the community, the reasons why they chose (or did not choose) particular surgeries, and how the age and family situation of the owner might have influenced their decisions. The importance of pets as family members and 'kin' cannot be underestimated, as it affects the animal and the person in many ways.

Theoretically, my research contextualizes new meanings of kinship and new formations of family across species boundaries. This could be applied to several different academic fields, including anthropology, sociology, and psychology studies relating to kinship, family, personal relationships, emotional and mental health, or consumer research. My research may also make a contribution to the field of applied animal welfare by informing both academics and people working in this field (i.e. veterinarians, animal behaviourists, animal shelter staff) of a small sample of attitudes present in this area of Canada, and could give ideas of further research on a larger scale; to identify factors or differences that may exist in attitudes of pet ownership, between men and women, singles, couples, and families. My research may also influence new campaigns to help foster more community involvement in issues of pet animal welfare, from local adoption drives at humane societies, to gaining more support among pet owners to pressure the government for stricter, more effective cruelty legislation.

The next chapter offers a review of the literature regarding pets and the relationship with humans in the Western world. It begins with the domestication of dogs and cats, and their positions in society through history. The development of the ‘pet industry’ became evident in the 19th century, and attitudes to animals changed with the creation of humane organizations. The academic analysis of pets in sociology and psychology works will be examined, with some theories on why pets are so popular, and the roles they often play for their owners. I also describe some of the welfare issues affecting pets today, which were part of my research. The last part of the chapter explores pets as ‘kin’ and some of the research that has been done on this emerging topic.

The chapters that follow describe the research I conducted, and offer a sample of attitudes some pet owners hold, and offer many directions for future studies. This thesis shows the place of the pet in the family system, and their figurative role for anthropological studies of animals that exist between nature and culture, and their position as family members.

CHAPTER 2: FROM THEN TO NOW: RISE OF THE ‘FAMILY PET’

We cannot begin to understand and research the complexities of the human-pet relationship until we look at the history and evolution of such a relationship through time. This chapter can only briefly outline the topics of such a broad undertaking. The link between humans and companion animals is a large part of our culture and is one of its most complicated relationships. One cannot simply ask: ‘Why are domesticated animals, primarily dogs and cats, such an integral part of our cultural image?’ and expect to find a short answer. There seem to be several different avenues for looking at the relationship; my work will chiefly focus on a bio-social standpoint and a symbolic-cultural one, which leads to interesting developments for studies in new meanings of kinship, as well as important insights for animal welfare studies.

Early Domestication and History of the Dog and Cat

In researching the history of companion animals in the Western world, much evidence points to its contemporary origin with the development of agriculture and industrialization. With the domestication of various species and crops, our relationship with animals was forever changed. The attitude of human domination over nature became more pronounced as years passed and new ideas in religion and philosophy would intensely affect our attitudes to animals up until today.

The domestication and subsequent development of dogs and cats as the most popular companion animals in the Western world evolved in different ways for each species. Our attitudes toward them have fluctuated between positive and negative over the years depending on social, cultural, or religious trends at various points in history.

The domestic dog is one creature that has been integral to human society for thousands of years and has taken on many different roles, often simultaneously. While archaeological evidence suggests that wolves (*Canis lupus*) have been associated with humans since the Pleistocene period (more than likely in overlapping hunting pursuits), and was the first animal to be domesticated, remains of the first domesticated dog, *Canis familiaris*, have been found in parts of Europe and Asia as far back as 14,000 BP (Clutton-Brock 1995: 8,10; Serpell 1996:4). For thousands of years, humans lived a hunter-gatherer way of life, obtaining all the necessities for survival from wild animals and plants. After the end of the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago, there was a massive cultural change - the domestication of animals and plants occurred. (Serpell 1996: 3-4). Although archaeological evidence is at times difficult to interpret, one important archaeological find from 1978 points to a possible companionship between a human and a dog from about this same time. In northern Israel, a burial was found showing the remains of a human and a dog with the person's hand over the dog's shoulder. Whether arranged in that way after death or not is unclear, but it could mean they had a close relationship in life and wanted to remain that way in death (CSS Working Party Report 1988: 8). More remains of the domestic dog have been found in North America from the Holocene period (Clutton-Brock 1995:13). Dogs most likely remained chiefly hunting partners and draft animals for many years, while roles of companionship or as a food source were secondary.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, dogs were the only domestic mammals to fill these roles for the Aboriginals of North America and Australia (Clutton-Brock 1995: 15). For many native peoples, animals were used both for food and material needs, but also as

spiritual symbols (Irvine 2004). Aboriginal peoples of North America had interesting relationships with animals as well outside of the dual roles of material and cosmological positions. According to Grier (2006: 20): “Native Americans’ dogs occupied the most complex position of any animal in indigenous cultures.” They “were sources of muscle power pulling travois and sleds, representatives of cosmic forces that were sometimes sacrificed in religious ceremonies, fellow hunters, livestock herders, sources of protein, playmates for children, and beloved companions.” For most North Americans today, dogs do not occupy all of these varied roles simultaneously.

While natural and artificial selection resulted in dogs of varying size and shape in the prehistoric period, unique ‘breeds’ did not emerge until 3000-4,000 years ago (Harcourt 1974, Clutton-Brock 1984 in Clutton-Brock 1995:16), with hunting dogs, such as the greyhound type, appearing to be “one of the most ancient of the foundation breeds,” (Clutton-Brock 1995: 16). During the time of Roman rule over much of the Western world, many of the breeds we know today were already established, with hunting or guard dogs, sheepdogs and even lap dogs, and these dogs became powerful symbols during the Middle Ages and during the subsequent years of European colonization with respect to class divisions and religious positions.

The development of the domestic cat we know today, *Felis catus*, has had a more tumultuous history with humans than the dog. Attitudes toward them have gone from worship to hatred at various points in time. Even today, as the cat has surpassed the dog as the most popular pet (Messent & Horsfield 1985; Serpell 1996 cited in Serpell 2000: 190), the place of cats in human society remains mysterious and ever changing.

While there has been some debate on the exact origins of the domestic cat, the African wildcat, *Felis silvestris libyca*, seems to be the most likely ancestor, based on archaeological evidence as well as behavioural and DNA research (see Serpell 2000: 179-192 for a more detailed discussion). Domestication for the cat, as we try to understand them today, was very different than for the dog as Serpell (2000: 181) makes clear:

...it could be argued that the cat was only fully domesticated during the last 150 years, although it is probably more accurate to view *Felis catus* as a species that has drifted unpredictably in and out of various states of domestication, semi-domestication, and feralness according to the particular ecological and cultural conditions prevailing at different times and locations.

An archaeological discovery of a cat's jaw on the site of a human settlement in Cyprus suggests people may have been associating with wildcats well before their defined domestication. The site, dated roughly 6000 BCE, is interesting because there is no evidence of wildcats in this area before that, so humans must have captured and brought them on the voyage (Davis 1987; Groves 1989 in Serpell 2000: 181).

Interpretation of archaeological relics suggests that the cat reached full domestication in ancient Egypt approximately 2000 BCE (Serpell 2000: 182), although another source claims the "deification" and domestication of cats began around 5000 BCE (Clutton-Brock 1981 in Irvine 2004: 16). Cats not only carried a religious impression, they were also highly valued for their hunting skills, and protected grain stores from rodents (Irvine 2004: 16). Cats were associated with Egyptian life well before this occurred in other areas of the world, probably because animals in general were a principal symbol in their society and religion, with many different species believed to take the form of gods and goddesses (Smith 1969 in Serpell 2000: 183). Male cats were thought to be representing the sun god, Ra, while female cats represented the sexual power of the goddess Hathor, or Nebethetepet. It was not until around 1000 BCE that the

association between domestic cats and the fertility goddess Bastet (or Bast) became an important religious cult (Malek 1993 in Serpell 2000: 183). During this period, many households had pet cats, and people would show their grief after a cat's death by shaving their eyebrows, and some would have their cats mummified or cremated. Death was the punishment for anyone who caused the untimely death of a cat (Serpell 2000: 185).

However, this law did not extend to the caretakers of sacred catteries, where research shows some mummified cats were strangled, possibly for temple sacrifices (Armitage & Clutton-Brock 1981 in Serpell 2000: 185).

Despite Egypt's attempt to restrict the export of its precious cats, they eventually spread across the globe; by the tenth century, domestic cats were common across Europe and Asia (Zeuner 1963 in Serpell 2000: 186), but did not reach North America until the arrival of European settlers (Irvine 2004: 16). However, the widespread expansion of Christianity caused a sharp decline in cats' popularity as pagan worship of multiple deities was eradicated. "From being essentially benevolent symbols of female fertility, sexuality and motherhood, they became, instead, the virtual antithesis: malevolent demons, agents of the Devil, and the traitorous companions of witches and necromancers." (Serpell 2000: 186). During the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, both women and cats were persecuted, tortured, and killed, often together if the suspected witch was thought to have a feline 'familiar'. Festivals encouraging the capturing and killing of cats, especially black ones, abounded, and cats became a "universal scapegoat" for people's misfortunes (Serpell 2000: 189).

Fortunately, attitudes toward cats have changed for the better, but this took many years and was a relatively recent change. It was not until the 19th century that cats became a subject of admiration once again.

From the Middle Ages to the 19th Century

There are several very important events in Western history that influenced the way cats and dogs were treated in society during the Middle Ages to the 19th century. Religion, philosophy, social pastimes, class divisions, and superstitions all played roles in determining the treatment of animals.

Monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, gave rise to very different views of animals known as “dominionism”; that humans have a god-given right to rule over nature and its animals. However, as Irvine (2004: 37) points out, animals were needed to achieve this ‘dominion’ over nature, so some species acquired special status, but this also led to questions about their treatment. Aristotle had great influence on the Christian view of animals as ‘lesser beings’; animals (and also slaves) were believed to lack the intellect, reason and rationality that ‘more perfect’ humans had, so they were ‘naturally’ made to serve (Irvine 2004: 38; Zeller 1984: 84). Thomas Aquinas was a key figure in setting the tone for the Christian attitude to animals during much of the middle ages, or as Irvine (2004: 39) writes, “rationalist, anti-animal, Catholic dogma.” Aquinas preached that animals’ souls died with their bodies, because they lacked reason, and would not have an afterlife. There were some early Christians of this time who preached kindness to animals, most notably St. Francis of Assisi. However, the prevailing attitude was to dominate and subdue nature, and cruelty to animals was not a moral concern (Serpell 1996: 151).

The Inquisition was also a fundamental part of early attitudes to animals at this time and it investigated all forms of heresy, which in the view of the Catholic Church, took the form of practices or people that conflicted with the prevailing teachings of the time. Such teachings emphasized a male hierarchical order, as well as a sharp division between man and animal (Serpell 1996: 155-156; Irvine 2004: 39). Indeed, companionship with animals was seen as perverted, and accusations of bestiality and witchcraft were widespread and maintained for many years during the course of the Middle Ages. It was not just cats that were subject to disdain; dogs too were cast out of human regard, despite their long association with domestic life, as ‘filthy’ and ‘unclean’ (Irvine 2004: 41). However, many animals of all kinds were nevertheless kept by monks and nuns for company, despite the high risk of heretical accusations (Irvine 2004: 42; Ritvo 1987: 85).

While ‘frivolous’ associations with animals were few, dogs were used in the sport hunting activities of the nobility; these upper class men were somewhat exempt from religious judgement. Since hunting became associated with courage and valour, dogs gained a high status among animals, as they were necessary for a successful hunt (Menache 2000 in Irvine 2004: 42). Around the 15th century, royal portraits were beginning to feature small non-hunting dogs as well as those valued in outdoor pursuits, although the view of dogs as servants to people remained. Smaller dogs had duties like food tasting to check for poison, catching rats, or serving as an early alarm system to prowlers in sleeping quarters, alongside their roles as companions. As these smaller dogs became known as ‘lap dogs’ and were popular among women, their transformation

invited the harsh criticism that they were symbols of feminine futility and impotence (Irvine 2004: 43).

The influence of mathematician and philosopher Rene Descartes cannot be underestimated. During the 17th century, he was a major force influencing the attitudes toward animals, especially in the field of science. His theoretical position, which gained widespread approval was that animals were ‘soulless machines’ incapable of feeling or reason; cries of pain were simply automatic reflexes (Zeller 1984; Irvine 2004; Serpell 1996). This belief was used as a justification for vivisection, although by late in the century, and certainly by the 18th century period of the Enlightenment, the Cartesian view began to face criticism. Animals continued to be considered distinct and inferior making their use in experimentation by early (male) scientists common because they were different and ‘less than human’. However, it became evident that animals and humans were similar in response to pain, leading to some ethical concerns (Irvine 2004: 47).

As the decades passed, society continued to question the place of animals and the morality of their use. This is especially evident in the nineteenth century, as this period witnessed major changes in attitudes to animals, and yielded the definitive “Victorian cult of pets” (Ritvo 1987: 86). This is the period where the modern practice of pet keeping emerged; from more specific breeding practices and shows, to pet shops and accessories. Several authors have written extensively about pets in this period, in England, France, and North America (See Ritvo 1987, Kete 1994, and Grier 2006 respectively). During this time, there was a tendency to make an association between pets and other animals with social and economic class, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. This

century was a time of progressive social movements as well, for humans and animals alike.

In Katherine Grier's *Pets in America* (2006), she discusses the popularity of natural history books during the 18th and 19th centuries. This very common social pastime of reading about nature and its inhabitants no doubt aided in the popularity of pet-keeping across class divisions. Designed with scientific information as well as stories about human-animal interactions, natural history books provided stories of both exotic and common animals, and were a fascination for both children and adults (19). With the groundbreaking publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871, there were significant challenges to the idea of man's traditional place in nature above animals, and the anthropocentrism of the time.

Influenced by the undeniable similarities between humans and animals, and outraged by the intense cruelty inflicted against animals in society, especially working animals, several animal protection groups were developed. Several of the first animal protection groups began in Britain, with the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals founded in 1824 (obtaining the "Royal" prefix in 1840), and the Protection of Animals Act in 1835 (Irvine 2004: 9; Zeller 1984: 85). Around the same time, the anti-vivisection movement was gaining ground, along with organized groups for the protection of children, the abolitionist movement, women's rights, and suffrage.

While we may associate pet keeping with the upper classes during this time, as the century continued, keeping dogs and cats as companions became a staple of the middle class. In her book *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (1994), Kathleen Kete contextualizes the pet keeping of the bourgeoisie as a

representation of and response to ideas of modernization. Initially, animal protection groups in France were not quite as successful as organizations in Britain, but they eventually garnered more support for their cause when they associated the inhumane treatment of animals, such as cows and horses, to the lower working classes, emphasizing that the social, physical, and economical health of French society was in jeopardy if such conditions continued. For the most part, the upper and middle classes did not want to associate with the cruel behaviour and social pastimes of the poor and working population.

In England, dog breeding became a very popular hobby, and was associated with the elite classes as wealthy sportsmen and hunters began breeding dogs with more enthusiasm. As Ritvo (1987: 84-85) points out, dog breeding at this time was not always the most lucrative practice, but with the rise of the middle class came a need for its members to bolster their position in society by participating in such upper class pastimes. As people began to associate with dogs and cats on a more emotional level, street vendors used this chance to capitalize on people's emotions and the popularity of pets; there were an estimated 20,000 sellers of dogs or other animals and accessories in London by the middle of the 19th century (Ritvo 1987: 86).

The 20th century saw further developments with humane societies and animal shelters at the federal, provincial, and city level. Pets remained popular, and pet products steadily increased profits in the economic sector after the two world wars. The population of dogs and cats continued to grow, and as the next section shows, there are some concerns with this popularity.

A Snapshot of Pet Statistics and Welfare Issues

Statistics on pet populations in Canada, and across the globe are difficult to estimate for many reasons. Survey responses can only estimate the numbers of pets for those that answer and return the questions, and there are thousands of companion animals, especially cats, living as strays and in feral colonies that may not be counted. However, it seems that in Canada and many other Western countries like Australia, Britain, and the United States, pet ownership rates are currently very high, at approximately 50%-59% of households (Marsh 1994 in Bonas et al. 2000; Podberscek 1997; Tuan 1984; Ramirez 2006), with many of these homes having a cat or dog or both. According to a 2007 statistic from the Humane Society of Canada website, there are an estimated 7.3 million dogs, and 8.3 million cats in Canadian households.

Irresponsible breeding is a major issue today that has a serious negative impact on animal welfare. While both dogs and cats can be victims of an inhumane breeding operation, it seems that people are more likely to get a 'pure' or 'full-bred' dog than a cat. Large-scale breeding facilities known as 'puppy mills' or 'kitten mills', and smaller private homes, which practice 'backyard breeding' provide many of the pets available for people to buy. The people who operate these facilities are driven by profit, and frequently show no concern for the proper care and housing of the animals. Pet stores carrying kittens or puppies (which are not part of an adoption program with a rescue group or shelter) are very likely to have bought them from these inhumane sources. Not all breeders of purebred animals are inhumane; however, many people are unaware of the importance of researching for a reputable humane breeder.

Some breeders of purebred animals still attempt to exaggerate and modify physical features, as early fanciers did during the 19th century. Dogs and cats can also be inbred to conform to human standards of what the breed 'should' look like. However, changing the shape and size of dogs through genetic control can have terrible consequences including nerve damage, mental impairment due to the shrinking of the skull, blindness, deafness, respiratory difficulties, severe skeletal malformations, and a host of other health problems (Derr 2004: 201-212). "Too often, breeders choose to hide behind scientific uncertainty to justify practices they know to be damaging to the dogs they claim to love." (Derr 2004: 207).

There are several established procedures for pets that are not medically necessary, which may be called 'cosmetic' or 'convenience' surgeries (Swabe 2000). These include tail-docking, ear-cropping, de-clawing, and de-barking. The last procedure, which involves the surgical removal or severing of a dog's vocal chords, is rare and did not become apparent in my research. I am particularly concerned with the following descriptions of alterations (all surgical procedures), with descriptions of tail docking and ear cropping taken from the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) website, and declawing from the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) website:

Ear cropping involves cutting off up to two thirds' of the earflap and is done when the dog is 4-6 months old. After the procedure, which requires full anaesthesia, splints and tape are used to hold the ear in an upright position. Ear cropping is not always successful and at times only one ear will stand erect, while the other flops back. There is a risk of infection after the surgery, and the dogs' behaviour is sometimes negatively affected. The puppy will likely experience post-surgical pain.

Tail docking has also been performed for centuries and although it may cause pain, it is often done without any anaesthetic. Tail docking is performed when the puppy is only a few days old and involves removing the hair from the tail and then clamping the tail with a rubber band at the desired length, at which point it is

cut with a scalpel or cutters, stitched up, and bandaged. In the process, muscles, tendons, nerves, bone, and cartilage is severed.

Declawing traditionally involves the amputation of the last bone of each toe and, if performed on a human being, it would be comparable to cutting off each finger at the last knuckle. Declawing can leave cats with a painful healing process, long-term health issues, and numerous behaviour problems.

During laser surgery, a small, intense beam of light cuts through tissue by heating and vaporizing it, meaning there's less bleeding and a shorter recovery time. But the surgical technique itself is similar to the traditional method (or "onychectomy"), with the laser simply replacing a steel scalpel blade. So while the use of a laser may slightly reduce the duration of the healing process, it does not change the nature of the procedure.

These procedures are done often for cosmetic or convenience reasons, and can cause intense physical and emotional pain to the animals, resulting in some veterinarians' refusal to perform these surgeries and the banning of these procedures in many parts of the world. However, a veterinarian does not always perform the procedures described above, and laypeople will sometimes invent cheaper and usually more painful ways of manipulating animals' bodies. According to position statements on their website, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) does not support the cosmetic practices of tail docking or ear cropping of dogs as both procedures are not medically necessary. Yet, tail docking remains very common, despite veterinary opposition. This suggests it is the breeders who are perpetuating the practice to maintain a certain image and some pet owners remain unaware of the welfare issues at stake (See Noonan et al. 1996). As for declawing: "Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when clawing presents a zoonotic risk for its owner(s). The CVMA believes it is the obligation of veterinarians to provide cat owners with complete education with regard to feline onychectomy." (CVMA website). It is unclear whether people actually attempt other

methods of discouraging scratching, or whether their furniture takes precedence over patience (See Landsberg 1991). Additionally, pet-owners may be unaware of the actions of the operation and its risks before the surgery (See Atwood-Harvey 2005). Any search on the Internet or in conversations with other pet owners will find opinions at two extremes, some people agreeing with and promoting these procedures, and some vehemently opposed. Others remain indifferent or oblivious to the debate. These operations were not the chief focus of my research, but they are an important issue of animal welfare, and investigation into participants' attitudes toward them was necessary.

Transformation from Nature to Culture: Pet Roles, Metaphors, and Reasons for Pet Keeping

The study of people and companion animals is full of complex meanings. According to symbolic interactionists “all meaning is a product of social interaction rather than a quality inherent in the objects themselves.” (Arluke and Sanders 1996: 9). Social interaction between human and animal is necessary for a ‘pet’ to exist. Animals have a physical existence and taxonomic identity, but it is humans that give them a *cultural* identity. Their lives, their personalities, and their meaning and value are dependent on us. In this way they are *transformed* from an object of nature into a cultural being. Companion animals are perhaps the best example of this as they are transformed from unknown animals to loved family members. However, according to Tuan (1984), dominance and power are the key factors in this transformation; human dominance combined with cruelty produces a victim, while dominance combined with affection produces a pet. Pets serve as a boundary between human civilization and nature for most people in an industrialized Western setting, but this boundary is flexible and the animals

become socially and culturally constructed in ways that are beneficial or detrimental to animals and their human guardians.

Both cats and dogs have had an intricate role in world history, and as Serpell (1996) and Irvine (2004) argue, they each have features which seem to have pre-disposed them to evolve with us and to become an essential part of our cultural framework. In researching how cats and dogs became a fixture in industrialized countries, especially in North America's cultural representation, one may ask the question: why do people have pets? There have been several studies about the pet-human relationship from different perspectives, which analyze the how and why of the many different roles pets play, the reasons for pet ownership, and what it all means for future studies. In the context of "post-humanism", the place of humans in the world is questioned, and the relationship between non-human animals and people is increasingly complex, leading to the creation of inconsistencies and new definitions (Fox 2006).

The treatment of pets can fall into a wide spectrum. Some of the welfare issues I am concerned with were discussed in the previous section, but it is also worthy to note the many benign or even strange 'humanizing' practices of modern pet-keeping, that also bring them into the realm of 'family membership'. Some of these practices may seem quite ordinary; however, when we think about how we treat other animals in society (for example, food animals), it is more perplexing. Pets (more often than not of the dog and cat variety) are given names, photographed in family portraits, brought to the doctor for checkups, given toys, treats, protection, and usually grieved for when they pass away. This may be quite common for everyday companionship with a pet, but on another level, pets are thrown birthday parties, given elaborate funerals, and even participate in

weddings (Hickrod and Schmitt 1982: 59). There are now clothing and accessory stores for pets that go beyond a winter coat; some provide animals with swimsuits, leather jackets, tuxedos, evening gowns, jewellery, and nail polish. When human owners are away or busy, pets can be enrolled in day care, hotels, and summer camps, with descriptions and services that would attract human occupants as well (Serpell 1996: 28-30).

Today, the transformation of animals into ‘pets’ has led to many different relationship forms and changing roles. In his study of committed pet owners, Belk (1996) found that the predominant descriptions established in these relationships are pets as family members, pleasures, problems, toys, and parts of self. Pets can also function as fashion items, objects of recreational or ornamental value, and status symbols (Brown, 1985), taking on all sorts of metaphoric meaning.

Beyond simply metaphors, numerous studies show that pets can be beneficial to humans in physical and emotional ways; they can reduce stress, encourage exercise and improve cardiovascular health, while also providing friendship, company, affection, and love, improving both physical and psychological well-being (Podberscek 1997; Belk 1996). In their study of the benefits of dog ownership among older people in the UK, Knight and Edwards (2008) let their focus group participants speak for themselves and discuss the benefits of pet ownership. Participants said they felt a variety of psychological and physical benefits; dogs were a motivation for exercise, they improved quality of life and provided comfort and companionship, they acted as social facilitators to meet other people, and were a mode of therapy because they could talk to them about problems and not be judged. Dogs also provided feelings of safety, security, and protection. These

benefits led participants to describe their pets as irreplaceable family members, and surrogate children or grandchildren.

In addition to that list of benefits, animals serve a variety of therapeutic services, including helping the blind through the use of guide dogs, and being used in animal-assisted activities and therapy (AAA/T)². In turn we provide our pets with love and affection, as well as a caring home with food, shelter and medical care, suggesting a reciprocal exchange between humans and animals. There are different ways to interpret the relationship between humans and pets, and this is where pet keeping is an important area of further anthropological study.

Neoteny and Anthropomorphism

In examining the evolution of dogs and cats into the cultural world of ‘pets’ and why they ignite such a response in people, we must briefly note the concepts of neoteny and anthropomorphism in the study of pets and people. Several authors have written on the connection between people’s attachment to their pets (mainly cats and dogs) and neoteny (Lawrence 1986; Hirschman 1994; Serpell 1996). Neoteny refers to the retention of immature or youthful features into adulthood, which is also a human biological characteristic (Lawrence 1986: 40). This can also extend into “behavioural ‘neoteny’ – that is, the retention of infantile or juvenile behaviour patterns into adulthood.” (Serpell 1996: 82). Since humans maintain juvenile features of primates into adulthood (a flat face, large eyes, and a high domed skull), we are a “neotenized” species (Desmond 1979: 160 in Lawrence 1986: 43). The juvenile qualities of humans and dogs and cats result in

² This area of the human-companion animal relationship has its welfare concerns as well; See Serpell et al. 2003.

a mixture of feelings that cross the species boundary. Lawrence (1986: 52) argues that we are a “youth-oriented culture” which in turn may lead to a “fairy tale view” of animals. Pet animals, cartoons, and stuffed toys often have neotenous features, such as high, slightly rounded foreheads, large round eyes, chubby cheeks and short limbs, which, according to Lorenz (1981: 164-165 in Lawrence 1986: 44), brings about an adult nurturing reaction. Dog breeding in particular has resulted in a plethora of different species with unique appearances. “Man-made” dogs such as the Pekinese or the Boston Terrier certainly look the part; with large, nearly bulging eyes, and their body size makes them quite easy to pick up and cuddle like a human baby (Lawrence 1986: 44). Behaviourally, some dogs have been selectively bred to have a gentler, more obedient temperament, which has great relevance when we return to Tuan’s (1984) equation of dominance and affection producing a pet; for Lawrence, this is a form of control. Some pet animals’ value depends on that very compliance, and animals who may not measure to up to such expectations may be discarded (Benson 1983: 82 in Lawrence 1986: 50).

This literature review can only provide a brief introduction to the concepts of neoteny and anthropomorphism in the human-companion animal relationship, but it is worthy to note some of the bio-psychological motivations some people hold for explanations of pet keeping. Anthropomorphism is “*the attribution of human mental states (thoughts, feelings, motivations, and beliefs) to nonhumans.*” (Serpell 2005: 122, italics in original). Serpell discusses how anthropomorphism is a useful concept when studying the popularity of pets for human society. He examines anthropomorphism and pet ownership and how the interplay can be positive or negative. According to Mithen (1996: 224-226 in Serpell 2005: 124), animal domestication and the transformation to

keeping pets would not have happened without the evolution of anthropomorphic thought, as certain animals began to join the human cultural world.

Interacting with a cherished pet may have a strong anthropomorphic aspect, which can sometimes be used as a negative argument against pet keeping and its benefits, as if our relationship with companion animals is based upon the projection of human traits. However, as Serpell (2002) and Harbolt (2003) make clear, anthropomorphism is necessary in this kind of relationship in order for it to occur at all and to have people develop an emotional connection. Anthropomorphism can be an important and necessary perception for pet owners, rescue groups, as well as those working in the fields of animal health, behaviour, and psychology; it allows us to assess the animals' feelings to work with them effectively and be responsible pet owners (Harbolt 2003). Animals have capacities and emotions proven by scientific methods, which are not related to anthropomorphism, but as Irvine (2004) discusses, it cannot be completely discounted when we are trying to understand the intimate relationships we have with our pets.

John Archer, author of an article entitled "Why Do People Love Their Pets?" (1997) published in the periodical *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, has examined various studies regarding human attachment to pets and pet bereavement and tries to examine the question from an evolutionary and critical perspective. Human bonds with companion animals can be very strong; the connection we have with them can often imitate the strong bonds we have with cherished human friends or members of our own kin. Archer discusses several studies showing that human relationships with children reflect characteristics many people have with their pets as well, for example, speaking to them in "motherese" or 'baby-talk' (Hirsh-Pasek and Treiman 1982 in Archer 1997:

241), or using terms like “my baby” and cuddling and holding them like infants (Carmack 1985; Serpell 1986 in Archer 1997: 241). However, there is also evidence of the reverse, that pets can be seen as substitute parents or partners as well, giving a sense of security (Albert and Bulcroft 1987 in Archer 1997: 241). Archer explores and rejects three potential answers to why people love their pets: 1) that pet-keeping is a practice by people with psychological difficulties; 2) that it is the result of the modern Western environment; and 3) that pet ownership is beneficial and therefore, adaptive (in an evolutionary sense) (242-243). There are several studies indicating that in fact, many people who live with pets have strong human relationships and “positive personality characteristics” (Joubert 1987; Kidd and Feldman 1981; Paden-Levy 1985 in Archer 1997: 242). There are strong indicators that having pets in one’s life is an extension of an individual’s social network and support system. Yet, Archer does not accept the argument of the adaptive quality of pet keeping, and examines the possibility of pets as ‘social parasites’, and discusses the host-invasion activities of certain birds and insects. It seems odd to compare the strong emotional bond between pets and their humans to these instinctual activities. The main difference is that humans *choose* to have animals in their home, love them, and take care of them, which is the point Serpell makes against this argument (2005: 124-125).

In relation to Archer’s sceptical work, earlier studies of the pet phenomenon credited the stand that pets served as *replacements* for other relationships; for instance, a pet serving as a surrogate child or sibling (Szasz 1969; Feldmann 1977). A study by Harker et al. (2000) on the influence of current relationships in acquiring a pet found that people had a desire to *extend* their network of relationships, rather than use pets as

replacements for other social interactions that were lacking in the owner's life. Another study, which researched the role of pets in the network of family relationships, found no support for the idea that pets serve as a compensation for inadequacy in other human relationships, but rather pets were acquired to add to a positive network of social bonds (Bonas et. al 2000).

There is evidence of pet keeping across different cultures, geographic regions and periods in history, so it cannot be adequately argued that pet keeping is only a 'modern, Western phenomenon'. Current living arrangements and social conditions in the West may emphasize or strengthen the bonds we have with animals (Archer 1997: 244). There are fewer extended family networks, family sizes are smaller, and more people are living alone in urban areas than in the past. James Serpell has done years of work on many aspects of pet keeping, especially the benefits of such a relationship, and argues that pet-keeping is "adaptive" in evolutionary terms, which Archer rejects on the basis of the lack of data linking pet ownership to reproductive success, and whether the amount of time and money spent on pets would be better spent on relatives and offspring (1997: 246). Whether or not the practice of pet keeping can be defined as an 'evolutionary adaptation', it is an interesting way of looking at the Western 'subculture' of pets and their owners.

Pets, People, and Accepting Animal 'Kin'

As more studies about the benefits and meanings of companion animals emerge, one thing is certain: many people view their dogs and cats as "members of the family". What does this mean for anthropology and kinship studies? What does the term 'family' mean for studies of animals in human culture? What does this strong bond mean for our treatment of animals in society as a whole?

Kinship studies have undergone some major changes in the past two decades as new studies appeared and people challenged the fixed kinship (and gender) categories of the past. Issues affecting the subject of kinship today range from biological to socio-cultural, from new reproductive technologies to new formulations of family ties not related to blood or marriage (See Stone 2001). The concept of “suffusion” is important here as well, which describes the apparent overlap in conceptions of friendship and family relationships (Spencer and Paul 2006 in Allan 2008: 7). This trend correlates with the concept of ‘fictive kinship’, where kinship does not necessarily incorporate notions of blood or marriage, but is more associated with ‘relatedness’, or as Maddy (2001: 286) simply defines: “Fictive kinship systems are those relationships that are not characterized by consanguinity.” In her ethnographic work on the definitions of family in the social networks for gays and lesbians, Weston (1991) discusses the concept of “fictive kin” and its theoretical problems. The assertion that fictive kinship derives from an inherent need for families, and is based upon a hierarchical understanding of nuclear family ties, is problematic. She views gay ideologies of kinship as “historical transformations”, rather than imitations of the “American kinship system” (Weston 1991: 106-107). Family members are not simply about blood and marital relationships, but people who are “there for you,” (113); the same can be said for many pet owners’ descriptions of their animal companions.

The language of kinship has changed over time as well, and it is common to hear expressions of kinship terminology when highlighting a non-typical friendship or kinship bond, i.e. A friend is described “like a brother” or “sister”, or “my mom is my best friend” (Allan 2008: 7). These concepts and trends can be very important in new

understandings of the human-companion animal relationship, in the way one might say “My cats are my babies,” or “My dog is my best friend”. Allan (2008) writes that we have more choice in the broadening of social relationships due to the impacts of increased industrialization, urbanization, social and economic change, advanced technologies, and globalization. These developments have had an influence on community and family ties, and the ‘traditional’ concept of the (human) family. Changes to understandings of gender roles, sexuality, childbirth, divorce and other trends have led to greater multiplicity in social connections and its definitions (Allan 2008). The concept of fictive kinship is not new; there are earlier examples of the practice in other cultures and societies as well. It is the extension of kinship terms to companion animals that appears to be a relatively new development.

More recent studies about pets have emerged using qualitative data that open up further dialogue about the different avenues human-animal relationships can take in the context of family/kin relationships. The cultural definition of companion animals is changing as they come to be constructed as ‘persons’, ‘kin’, who are remembered by different generations of the family (see Charles and Davies 2008; Downey and Ellis 2008). Although it has been speculated that pets are simply substitutes for human relationships, other studies show that pets fill a specific role, or many roles. Knight and Edwards (2008) discuss the many benefits of dog ownership for example, among an older population (which was earlier discussed). Another recent study actually compared the relationships people had with their pets and those with their romantic partners, and found that participants felt more secure in their relationships with their animal companions than their partners (Beck and Madresh 2008). The authors offer several possible reasons for

this; the pet-human relationship is usually less complicated, can be very fulfilling, and pet owners can exert more control over their pets. There are also many animal shelters in North America full of once-loved companions, suggesting it is easier to abandon the pet relationship than the human one.

There are different levels of affection and respect that people have for their pets, but the term “family members” is used quite often. Cohen (2002) explores this trend in three different ways: “(a) Pets are like human family; (b) pets are part of a broader social network system but not family; (c) pets are family members only in a linguistically playful way.” (621). The third option makes an interesting point, because as I have discussed earlier, not all pets are treated in the same ways as human family members, especially when their welfare is concerned. People (or pets for that matter) who are described as family, but are not related to the person through blood or marriage (fictive kin) may also be called “functional kin”, meaning those who provide alternative or additional support to one’s genetic family (Pattison, DeFrancisco, Wood, & Crowder, 1975 in Cohen 2002: 624). Another term for pets, which Cohen considers, is “psychological kin” (Bailey 1988; Bailey & Nava 1989; Nava & Bailey 1991 in Cohen 2002: 624). This “psychological kinship” is defined as “feeling and behaving toward others as family, irrespective of actual genetic relatedness.” (Bailey 1988 in Cohen 2002: 624). In her research in determining feelings of family and kinship among people, she found that terms for pets were a product of their function in the household, and feelings of intimacy or “psychological kinship” were not affected by demographics such as age, living alone or with a spouse, or having children. This suggests it may be more difficult to pinpoint a pattern among people who see their animals as kin, and those who do not.

Human actions and feelings regarding pets may suggest similar attitudes toward animals and nature as a whole, in that it is something to be taken care of but at the same time controlled. If neotenization does affect our attachment to dogs and cats, this still does not ensure a lifetime commitment to the animal. Many people will only form a temporary kinship bond with an animal. This is a key point; not all human-animal bonds within the pet world end naturally. Often, family and kinship terms are used loosely, and millions of dogs and cats every year are relinquished to shelters or abandoned. This is not the focus of my research, but it brings up an interesting question when discussing the meaning of pets, kinship, family, and attachment. The meaning of kinship in anthropology may also change as more and more research is done in the area of Anthrozoology (the study of human-animal relationships).

I have reviewed a number of important works for this chapter, and there are many other paths for research on pets and their guardians to take. The following chapters describe my research, the methods I used, my findings, my interpretations of the data, and where to go from here in the field of companion animal research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

While the human-companion animal relationship has been a topic of considerable interest in other social sciences for the past two decades, it is still relatively new in anthropology. A large number of studies that address human attitudes toward animals have relied on quantitative, statistical data. While quantitative questionnaire and survey methods are useful and allow for a larger sample of participants, the concerns regarding the relationships between pets and people are complex, and it is hoped that my research, using qualitative interviews, and a largely inductive approach, will complement the existing quantitative studies.

During the initial stages of developing this research, my intent was to study a sample of pet-owners and analyze their responses to my interview questions from a demographic point of view. I wanted to chiefly examine differences in pet owning patterns relating to the participants' gender, family status, and age. However, there were a few limitations with the sample size (discussed below), and I decided to focus on another emerging theme from my interviews: the use of family and kinship terminology, and the data surrounding its use. The disadvantages of using qualitative interviews for my data collection were mainly related to recruitment. It took longer than expected to recruit participants, especially men. I had envisioned an easier recruitment, as many people I have spoken to inside and outside of academia over the years have not hesitated to discuss their pets. Using flyers and the snowball recruitment method left me reliant on others to contact me. However, this led to interesting findings in itself. Interviews began in July 2008, and ended in November 2008 with a total of 34 participants.

Setting

My observations that there are many pets in the city of Waterloo is supported by searches in the local phone book and internet research on animal shelters in the community. Waterloo and the surrounding areas have many veterinary clinics, pet stores (some serving as satellite adoption centres for animal shelters), and several parks frequented by dog owners, all of which suggests many people own pets, and may have valuable opinions about the important issues I wished to investigate. A look in a Waterloo Region and Area phone book shows there are over 40 veterinary clinics in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, and 4 pages under “Pet” for groomers, trainers, and pet shops. Also, there are several animal shelters and rescue groups in the area, from the large and recognizable, to the smaller all-volunteer groups. According to Statistics Canada, the Waterloo Regional Municipality has a population size of 478,121 as of 2006 (www.statscan.gc.ca). The city has several universities and colleges with many student residents, as well as broad cultural diversity. This led me to believe it would not be difficult to get a varied sample of people to interview.

Recruitment and Informants

To recruit participants for my research, I employed two main methods. First, I posted flyers at various locations in Kitchener-Waterloo with a brief description of the study, its purpose, my contact information, and the necessary elements informants had to have to participate. Participants needed to fulfil several criteria. They needed to be over the age of 18, currently living in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, and have at least one dog or cat (See Appendix 1). Several participants had multiple pets of different species

(including but not limited to birds, fish, or reptiles), which was perfectly acceptable, and noted.

I posted flyers in several different locations to ensure visibility. I approached approximately 6 pet stores/pet supply shops, 9 veterinary clinics, 3 campus locations, and 1 health food store. Seeking the permission of managers and personnel, the response was positive, and very helpful. I chose the locations mainly through my own experience (as I had one cat at the time of recruitment and knew about local veterinary clinics and pet stores), and through recommendations by friends, acquaintances, and my supervisors.

I also used the ‘snowball sampling’ method to recruit my interview participants. I approached people I knew with pets who might be interested, and participants whom I did not know passed on my study information to co-workers, friends, and other people they thought might assist in my research. Before interviews were scheduled with participants, I asked them to answer a short questionnaire in order for me to keep track of the gender, age, and family status of informants, and also to keep track of the types and number of pets informants had, so I could monitor the differences among participants (See Appendix 2). Non-pet owners, meaning those without a current pet, but who had a dog or cat in the past, were welcome to participate, but for this study I focused my research on current pet owners. Two of the participants in my study did not have current pets, but were very interested in assisting in my research, and I used the information they provided about their last or favourite pet in the tables I will present.

After choosing my interviewees and obtaining informed consent, qualitative semi-structured, open-ended interviews followed. With participant consent, I used a digital voice recorder to ensure the accuracy of recording interviewee responses. Depending on

the location, there were several interviews I chose not to record even with participant consent, simply due to noise. In these cases, detailed notes were taken during the interview.

Qualitative Method

In order to assess feelings of attachment, emotional bonds, and attitudes toward pets, I conducted qualitative interviews to answer my research question, using nine questions (See Appendix 3). Qualitative interviews were the best choice in conducting this study, as they allowed the informants to speak freely. Though the interviews were semi-structured, other related issues came up that were important to discuss, so my interviews were also open-ended, allowing participants to express any opinions they had on various subjects. Interviews also allowed the participant to speak about their personal experiences with acquiring their pet, their relationship, their association with their veterinarian, and some relayed experiences of their friends and acquaintances. Pelto and Pelto's 1978 work describes key anthropological methods, including the use of structured interviews, along with their advantages and disadvantages. Interviews proved to be a useful method in my study, in order to get a small cross section of Waterloo's pet owning community.

Ethics and Risks to Participants

There were no anticipated risks to the physical or psychological health of participants, deception was not used, and therefore no on-going monitoring of informants was required. However, the subject of present or past pets can be an emotional subject, as well as a very personal one. Qualitative interviews are not as anonymous as mailing in a

questionnaire or survey, and in some cases participants felt uneasy or guilty about a particular procedure their pet experienced (ie. declawing their cat), especially if they were not well informed of the details or the risk of complications before the surgery.

Interviews were completely confidential and no real names are used in any part of this thesis. Participants were fully informed of their right to terminate the interview at any time, or withdraw from any question. Interviews were conducted in casual environments, including campus locations at the University of Waterloo, the interviewee's home, and coffee shops. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and all participants were also sent personal notes of thanks and a feedback letter reminding them of this study, and asking if they would like a summary of my study at the end of its writing and defense.

I did not perceive any significant power imbalances between participants and myself, the researcher. Participation was not coercive; interested informants were given a detailed information and consent form to read and sign before the interview began. I answered any questions or concerns as fully as I could, and participants were also given the contact information of my supervisors and the University's Ethics office.

Coding and Classifying of Data

In order to attain a clear picture of the patterns and themes that materialized out of my qualitative interviews, it was necessary to analyse the data. After interviews were completed, I typed the transcriptions and notes I made during the interviews, and I kept the personal information and interview data in the order that I conducted the interviews, in order to help jog my memory of the person when reviewing the data. I reviewed the tracking questionnaires and divided participants by age and household type (family status), and the numbers and types of dogs and cats were compared against this data in a

table. While reviewing transcriptions and notes, I searched for similar themes in the answers to each interview question, paying special attention to Questions 1, 2, 3, and 7, and highlighted these themes. These themes are interpreted and discussed in Chapter 5.

As discussed in Chapter 4, I highlighted the words and phrases people used in describing the role that their animals have in their life, and why they choose to have pets. I grouped similar words and also divided terms into one of three different degrees or levels of ‘relational closeness’, and looked for patterns among those using certain terms. I used bar and pie graphs to classify and illustrate the data, employing the Microsoft Excel program to create the graphs.

Methodological Limitations

There were several limitations with my methodology, and with my resulting sample size. In the recruitment of participants, although I did contact a few people I knew to take part, I was mainly dependent on the public to contact me. Using flyers can be difficult if people are in a hurry, or they might take the information and forget about it later. I did not have as much control over the sample size and types of people as other methods might have allowed, and towards the end of the data collection I was apprehensive I would not have enough participants. Additionally, though I used tracking questionnaires to follow how many of each type of participant I was getting (men, women, age, household type, pet type, etc.), my recruitment strategy left me with an unbalanced number of women and men, and half of my sample is dominated by one age group. With unbalanced numbers, it leaves my analysis somewhat restricted, as it is not representative of a wider population.

The issue of representativeness is not the only problem to be aware of when conducting qualitative research. Quantification of descriptive data can be difficult, and it is dependent upon the researcher to identify certain themes and patterns and to group them in a specific way. Additionally, when interviewing a cross section of people in a particular social group (in this case, adult dog and cat owners), we must remember that “...individuals vary a great deal with regard to their knowledge and interpretations of their own social and cultural systems.” (Pelto and Pelto 1978: 72). In many ways, pet owners can be seen as belonging to a ‘subculture’ with particular knowledge, customs, and rules, yet not every individual follows the same route in the treatment and social view of companion animals. It is hoped this research will lead to further avenues to studying the modern view of the human-pet relationship.

CHAPTER 4: DATA

The analysis of this study is divided into three main sections. The first will illustrate important participant demographics as well as the numbers, types, and sources of companion animals to provide a baseline of information. The second will focus on the data relating to the terms and descriptions used by people to describe their pets, the roles their animals play for them, and why they choose to have pets in their lives. Assessing how people view their pets and the terms they use is an important practice in identifying the cultural image of companion animals in Canadian society. The third section will examine the attitudes expressed toward several animal welfare issues. Some of the interview questions will be addressed separately in the discussion section, and some of my results will have accompanying graphs to illustrate quantitative findings.

The socio-economic background of participants was not thoroughly examined, but all participants could be generally described as lower to upper middle class. The recruitment methods I used resulted in 23 women, and 11 men (67.6% and 32.4% respectively). The majority of people who responded to my flyer were women in the 40-64 age group; 15 female participants were married or living with their long-term partner, and 12 female participants had children. Gender analysis is not a focus of my work, but the response brings up an interesting point, that will be addressed in the discussion section.

The graphs that follow illustrate the age (Fig. 1) and household (Fig. 2) demographics and the numbers and types of pets participants had in these two groupings; participants either had one dog, one cat, or multiple cats and dogs, or a combination of both species (Fig. 3 and 4).

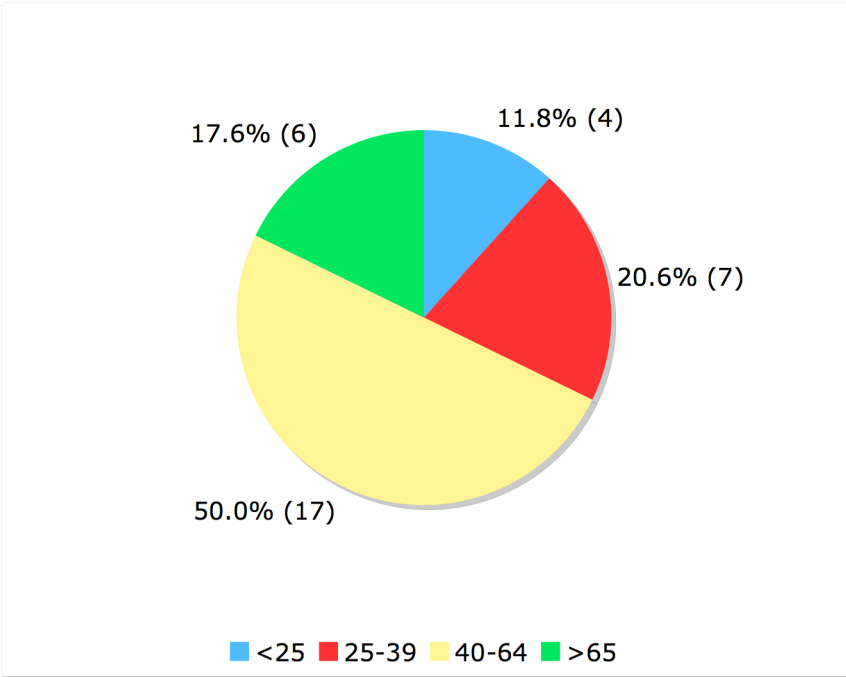


Figure 1: Participant Age Groups

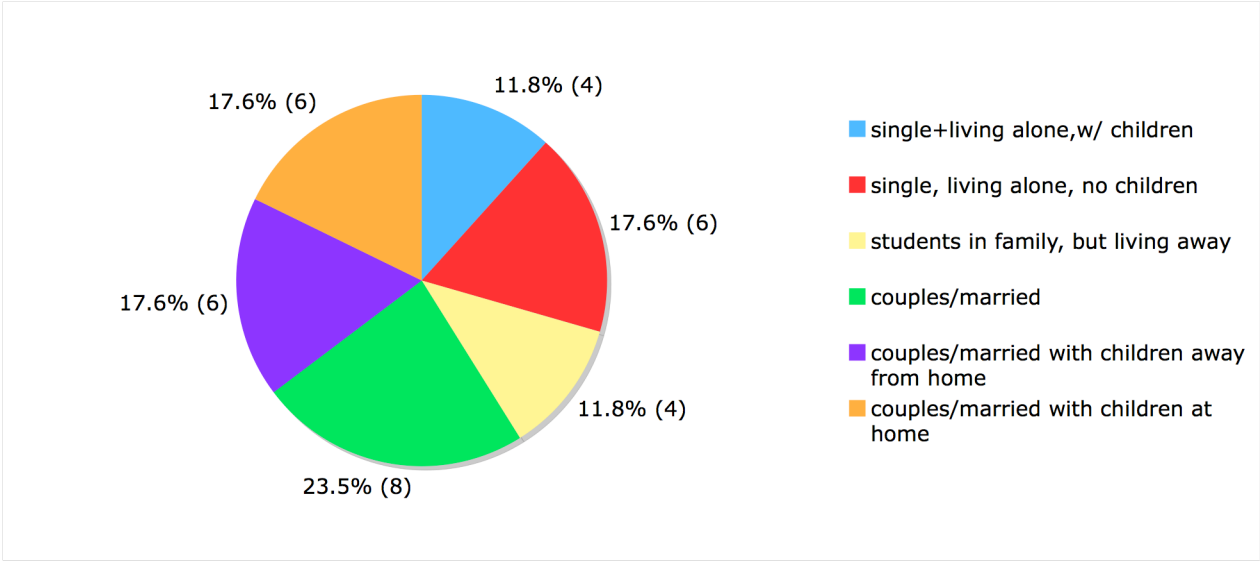


Figure 2: Participants By Household

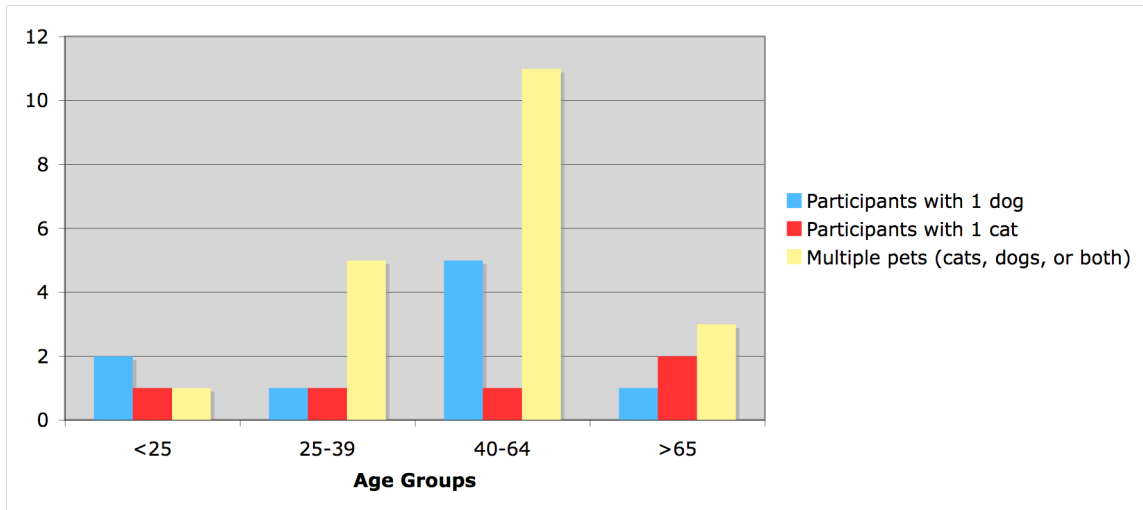


Figure 3: Pet Distribution By Participant Age

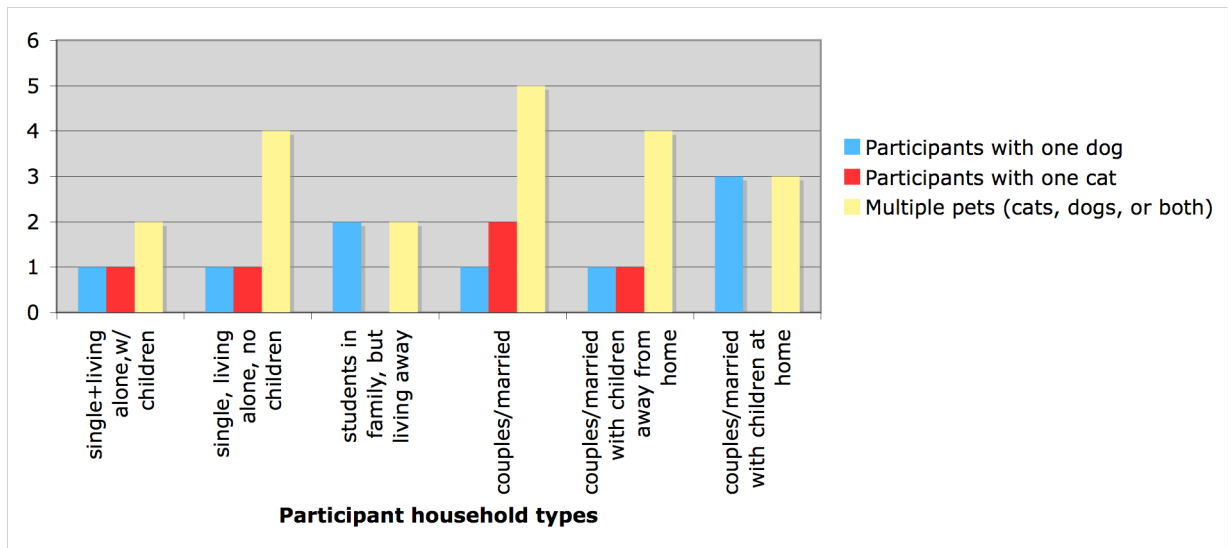


Figure 4: Pet Distribution By Household

As indicated in the graphs, the majority of participants had more than one pet. Twenty out of 34 people had multiple pets, 10 of them having both a dog and a cat (usually more than one of each) together. It should be noted that 6 participants told me about other pets they had such as fish, hamsters, birds, etc. but I am only discussing the dogs and cats in my study. Interestingly, it was more common to have more than one cat rather than multiple dogs, regardless of whether there were also dogs in the home; 13 participants had between 2 (the most common number) and 4 cats, while 6 participants took care of more than one dog, and 5 of those people also had cats.

Where Do People Find Pets?

After the data collection was complete, I divided the methods of pet acquisition into 6 categories:

“Adopted/Rescued”: Animals that were adopted from an animal shelter or rescue agency (including SPCA groups, humane societies, or independent volunteer groups); animals who were found as strays outside, given care, and kept as pets; animals who were adopted from veterinary clinics.

“From a breeder”: (this includes both unregistered and registered breeders) Animals were purchased from a farm, home, or kennel where the property or person is advertised as a purveyor of particular purebred dogs or cats, or mixtures of certain breeds.

“Internet or Newspaper Classifieds”: Animals were found through newspaper or Internet advertisements, either selling or free. Note that animals in this group were casual sellers or people who could no longer keep their pet, and not private

breeders advertising in the classifieds. They were still put in the “breeder” category above.

“Pet Store”: Animals bought from pet stores (in malls for example) that sold animals from private or unknown breeders. An important note: Some pet stores work with local rescue groups and serve as satellite adoption centres which provide increased visibility for homeless animals, so animals bought from a pet store but which were from a shelter were put in the “adopted/rescued” category.

“Free-Family/Acquaintance”: Animals were given to participants from family members, friends, or acquaintances who perhaps could not care for their pet any longer, or whose pet had a litter of puppies or kittens and were looking for homes for them.

“Other”: If a participant’s pet did not accurately fit into any of the other categories they were put in this category. For example, one dog was a ‘drop-out’ from a police training program.

There were significant differences between cats and dogs according to the source of pet acquisition. There were a total of 39 cats and 30 dogs owned by individuals in the sample. As shown in Figures 5 and 6 below, the majority of cats were in the “Adopted/Rescued” category, while the majority of dogs were in the “Breeder” category. There was a mix of smaller and larger dog breeds present, but several breeds came up more than once: Bichon Frisé (sometimes called simply Bichon), Shih-tzu, Poodle crosses and Lab crosses. Most cats were domestic shorthair types.

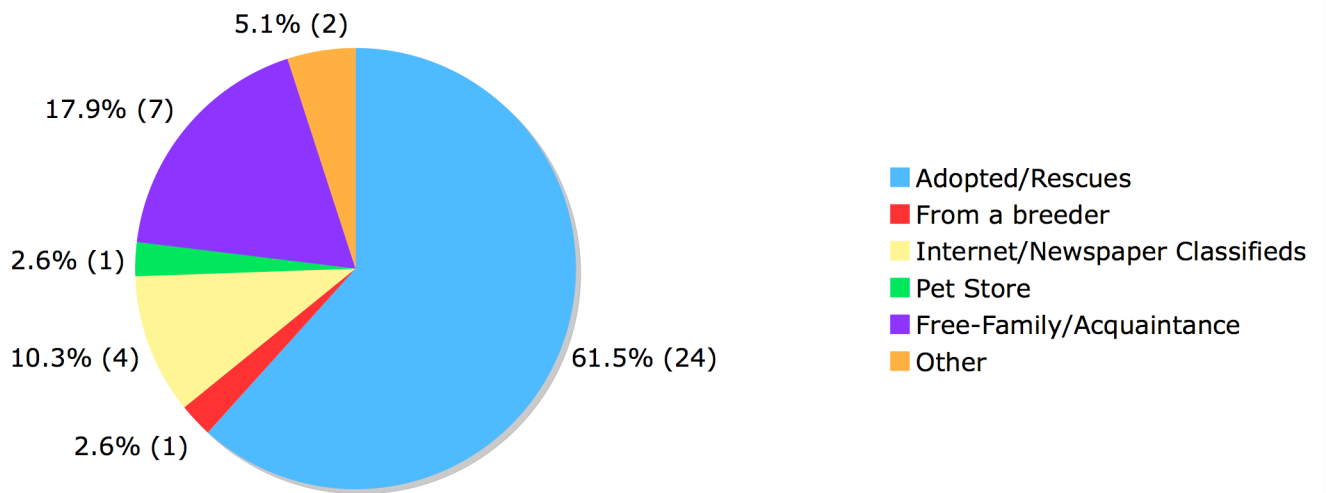


Figure 5: Cat Sources

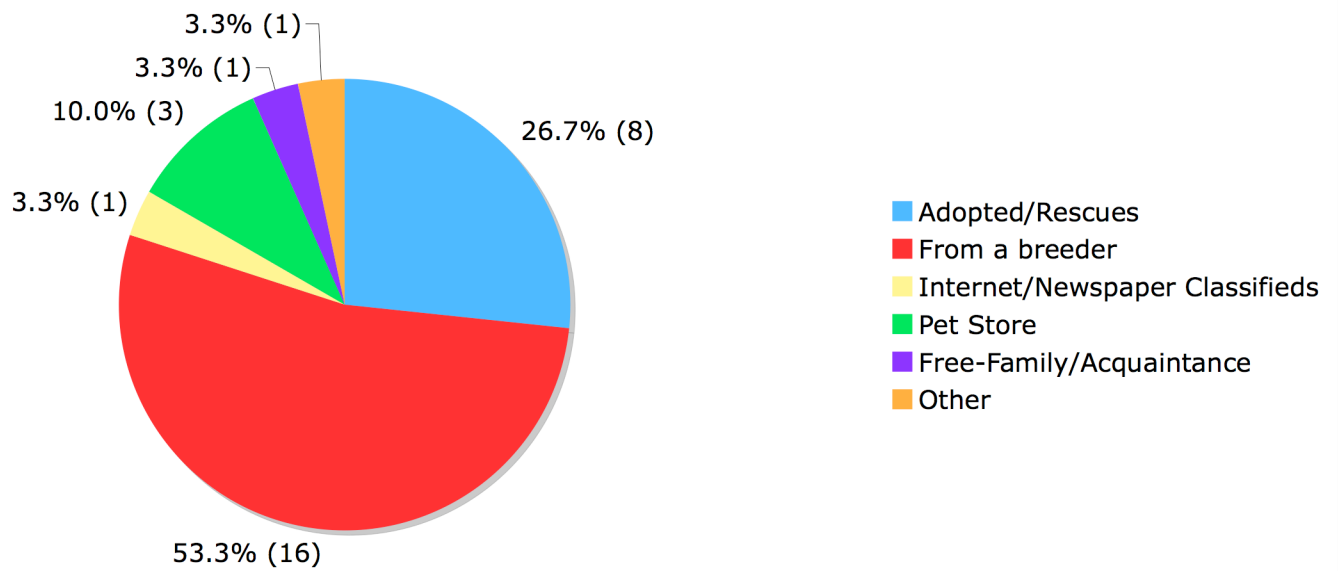


Figure 6: Dog Sources

The Roles of Pets and Relational Degrees

When the data analysis was completed, one of the most interesting findings was the way people described their pets, how they see the relationship, and the roles their pets play for them. Participants were divided into three different ‘degrees’ of relational terms based on an assessment and count of the terms used by them to describe the role their pets play. This was an open question, so most participants used these words themselves first, but a few participants needed clarification, in which I gave them suggested words like ‘companion’ and they would pick up on the idea and offer additional terms.

“First degree” terms refer to the words with a direct human kinship association, and describe how people see their pets, and how they see themselves in relation to their pets.

“Second degree” terms are words used to describe a very close relationship; usually the pet holds a specific beneficial position in their life.

“Third degree” terms refer to other ‘secondary’ roles that pets play, and include adjectives and qualities that describe the pet.

Table 1: First Degree Terms

Pet As ‘Child’	Daughter-2, Granddaughter, Child-2, Kid(s)-5, Baby-3, My mom’s babies*, Baby-sit, My Special Little Guy, Offspring
Pet Owners as ‘Parents’	Mom, Mother, Mothering, Mummy-cat, Mothers, Dad, Parenting, Parenthood, Empty-nesters*
Pet As ‘Sibling’	Little sister

*In these cases, 2 participants aged 18-25, and attending university were talking about their parents and pets at home.

There were a total 27 first degree terms used, some of which had many variations and were repeated by several people. For instance in Table 1, “daughter” was used twice, “kid” or “kids” was used five times, and so forth. Fourteen participants used first degree terms when I asked them what role their pet played and we discussed where they fit in

their life. Of the 15 people who used these terms in discussing how they view their pets (or how they are viewed in the family), 12 were women, representing all four age groups, and across varying household groups; some participants using these terms had children, some did not, some were married/had a partner, and some were single and living alone. Only 3 men of my sample used first degree terms, one was in the 18-24 age group, one in the 25-39 age group and one in the 65+ age group. 52.2% of the women in my sample used first degree terms (12 out of 23), while 27.3% of men did (3 out of 11).

There were many more second degree terms used by participants than first and third degree terms. Most of the participants fell into this category, which represented most age and household types and both genders. There were a total of 75 terms.

Table 2: Second Degree Terms

Family	Member of the Family-4, Part of the/my Family-7, My Family-3, Family Member(s)-6, Extended Family, Family-3, Part of my Life, My life
Friend	Friend-3, Friendship, Close Friend, Confidante, Big ol' Buddy
Companion	Company-5, Companion(s)-7, Companionship-5, Loving Companions
Therapy/Emotional	Lifeline-5, Therapy, Comforting/Comfort-4, Unconditional Love, Emotionally Soothing, Heart-warming, Emotional Relationship, Emotional Bond, Close Bond, Close Relationship, Emotional Comfort, Desire to Take Care of Other Things, Good to Come Home to, Someone to Come Home to, Good to Talk to, Someone to Talk to, Closer to her [dog] than Family

There were a total of 50 third degree terms used. Several participants used adjectives describing their pets, the qualities they found appealing in their pets, along with additional roles they play. The words used in the third degree category were more

difficult to group into 3 or 4 categories, so the list is as follows: Routine (3), Rituals, Exercise (5), Activity Partner (3), Personalities, Easier to Care for, Fun, Social factor, Entertainment (4), Aesthetically appealing, Soft, Cuddly, Cute, Sweet, Interesting, Cozy, Affectionate (2), Comical, Nice (2), Clean, Snuggly, Safe, Humanitarian role, Play (2), Unique Individual Personalities, Independent (2), Protector(s) (2), Protective, Watch Dog, Mirrors, Facilitates Family Time, Sociability, Binding for the Family, Living toy.

According to the types of terms people used, and the frequency of each type of term, participants were divided into a First Degree group, Second Degree group, or Third Degree group. Although there were 14 participants who used First degree terms, most also used second and third degree terms, so I assessed how often they were used and the ensuing descriptions people used to describe their pets, and divided them into one of the three relational levels. Eight people were grouped into the 1st degree set, 21 people in the 2nd degree set, and 5 people in the 3rd degree set. In each set, all age groups were represented, except in the third degree group where there were no seniors represented.

Opinions on Elective Surgeries

The interview question regarding elective surgeries (tail docking, ear cropping, and declawing) yielded some strong responses with the overall majority disagreeing with both practices. There were three possible answers into which participants were grouped into: A-they agreed with the practice; D-they disagreed with the procedure, or I-they did not have an opinion (indifferent), or they did not know about the procedures. When interviewees were asked if they agreed or disagreed with tail docking and ear cropping:

28 Participants disagreed with tail docking and ear cropping (this includes one person who was indifferent to tail docking, but disagreed with ear cropping)

4 Participants had no comment or did not know about the procedures

2 Participants agreed with the procedures.

In regards to declawing:

23 People disagreed with the procedure

5 People disagreed with it if the cat was going to go outdoors, and agreed with declawing if the cat was indoor-only

3 People had no opinion or did not know about the procedure

3 People agreed with declawing

Of the participants who answered Agree or No Opinion/Do not know to the question about tail docking/ear cropping (7 people), 5 of them owned dogs from breeders. Several participants had unexpected and seemingly contradictory answers. As evidenced in the numbers above, many people who disagreed with one procedure also disagreed with the other, on the grounds that it is “unnecessary” and “cruel”. One person, with two undocked dogs, agreed with the cosmetic procedures for dogs, but disagreed with declawing, despite owning a declawed cat for whom she requested the procedure. Another participant agreed with declawing, and owned 2 declawed cats, but disagreed with tail docking/ear cropping, yet the ears of her two purebred dogs were glued down to look a certain way. Many participants had strong comments on these issues, and will be addressed further in the discussion section.

Although it was not an explicit interview question, all 34 participants told me they “grew up with” or “always had” pets; there were no pet owners in my sample who had their first pet when talking to me. Only one person did not have pets as a child, but

remembers always being “fond of animals”. Additionally, all of the 39 cats and 26 out of 30 dogs who were spoken about in the interviews were spayed or neutered, or were just about to be. All participants except two agreed with and discussed the importance or benefits of spaying and neutering animals, and the majority of people stated it was their own decision to have the pet altered, but there were different primary reasons for this. Some people cited multiple benefits, but the most common primary reason to have animals spayed or neutered was to prevent pregnancy and breeding, followed closely by a desire to control behavioural problems such as spraying, roaming, aggression, etc.

In the next chapter, all interview questions will be discussed, along with my interpretations of the data, additional topics that participants brought to my attention, and the public issues contributions of this study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This thesis is an exploratory study of the way people view and construct their pets, and an investigation of some of the ways pets benefit a person's quality of life through the owner's personal descriptions. This thesis also explores a cross section of some of the pet owners' opinions on elective surgeries for pets and the animals' welfare, and some other issues related to keeping pets. The sample was small, but the qualitative data is indicative of emerging trends and interesting findings. In this chapter I will answer my research questions: How do people define and construct their pets, what language do people use to describe their pets' roles, and what are the major themes that exist in the pet-human relationship? Secondly, how do the roles pets play fit with attitudes toward some prevailing welfare issues?

Through my own experience, and the studies I had reviewed, I had hypothesized that I would encounter people who would define their pets as "family members", but I did not expect people to use expressions parallel to human kinship associations. These terms were used by a variety of different household types and age groups which suggests the stage a person is at in their life cycle does not have as large an impact as once thought. Pets provide many positive feelings for their owners, which was shown in the previous chapter. Pets as 'substitutes' for humans is not necessarily a negative thing, even though the idea of animals taking human positions might induce embarrassment for the owner, and derision by others. We have seen how strongly companion animals can be used as an outlet for nurturance and care, while providing social support, comfort, company, and a feeling of being needed, all of which contribute in positive ways to a person's well being.

Along with trying to identify a deeper meaning of pets for people of various backgrounds, I investigated people's attitudes toward elective surgeries for pets, including the controversial cosmetic procedures of tail docking and ear cropping of dogs, and the declawing of cats. I asked people if they had their pets spayed or neutered and their reasons for making that decision in order to gain a sense of the effectiveness of education programs by humane societies about preventing overpopulation, which remains a problem especially for cats in most Canadian communities. More extensive studies must be conducted in order to accurately analyze wide-ranging opinions and the extent of public knowledge of the issues. If pets are commonly identified as close family members, friends, and even like human 'children', these attitudes of care may be extended to the wider view of 'animals' as a whole.

A Word On Gender and Age

As shown in the previous chapter, 50% of my sample were between the ages of 40 and 64, and 67.6% were women. Sex differences have been demonstrated in a number of studies about attitudes to animals, from laboratory sciences to animal rights, often with women showing more empathy toward animals than men (Gunter 1999). In a recent internet based study by Beck and Madresh (2008), they had a wide gender difference with 168 women and 24 men who responded to their study of pets and attachment theory. Without doing the research, I cannot speculate very far on the reasons for this. My initial reaction to this response was that women are more open to talk about their feelings, and may be more apt overall to have a pet. From my observations volunteering in an animal shelter, there were noticeably more female volunteers and staff than male, a trend also seen in Harbolt's work (2003).

In the case of my study I think my recruitment strategy may have played a role in the disproportionate number of older women among the participants. Women are often the primary caregivers of children, and may also have more responsibilities with household duties and finances, regardless of whether there are children in the home. If companion animals are included in the definitions of children and family members, it is conceivable that women living with others (spouse, children, etc.) may also be the main caregivers of the animals, including responsibilities of buying pet food and supplies, or taking them to the veterinarian, which were two chief places where I posted recruitment flyers. Although I did ask participants who shared the responsibilities of taking care of the pet in question, it was not always immediately clear that women were generally the ones taking care of those types of responsibilities. In a study with a larger sample of women pet owners asking specific questions about duties of care, it would be clearer to determine if that were the case.

In this case of 50% of my sample falling into the 40-64 age group, it may be due to the specific stage of life people this age are in. Most people in this age group had children who were older (teenagers and adults) who had moved out of the home, perhaps giving the parents more motivation (and perhaps time as well) to take care of a pet, or multiple animals. The majority of people in my study had had different pets over the course of their lives, and they had not thought about 'taking a break' from having pets. Pets are a significant responsibility, and cost is a major issue (in more ways than one when we think of the time investment as well); older people with or without children may be more financially and residentially stable. This conclusion may also be applied to the

fact that it was the 40-64 age group were much more likely to have multiple pets rather than single pets. (See Figure 3).

Interaction Between Pet Roles and Participant Demographics

The data I collected addressed the role of pets in the family. I found that most people exhibited no hesitation when defining their pets as ‘children’, ‘daughter’, ‘companion’, or ‘friend’; clearly, pets have a significant impact on their owners’ lives. Participants mainly used second degree terms when speaking about their pet, but 15 people also used first degree terms, usually in conjunction with second and third degree terms. Twelve of the 15 people were women, which was the only discernable characteristic of this group. There were several references to pets using variations of “baby”, or “kids”, and this could be tied with the possible theory that women are more likely to be the primary caretakers of pets in a multi-person household. It is harder to determine if women have a ‘closer’ or more meaningful relationship with their pets based on the categories I created to divide the types of language people used when describing the role of their pets. It is possible that more women than men are likely to use those types of terms based on their stronger association with children and care-giving in society. Pets are treated as family members, and are bought specific food, dishes, treats, toys, and brought to the veterinarian for checkups and medical treatment, so it is conceivable that pets are thought of as children because of the added household expenses and responsibilities that resemble those of children. Aside from economic similarities, Beck and Katcher (1996) emphasize the ‘pets as children’ metaphor through human behaviour toward our pets. For example, we limit their movement to protect them from toxic substances or injury, we shield them from adverse weather; we clothe them in

functional and non-functional attire; we show love and affection with stroking and touching at our own will; and we control their sexuality. For Beck and Katcher, “the act that critically defines a pet as a child is our willingness to put up with the excrement of cats and dogs—to handle it, to permit it in the house, to accept it in the streets.” (1996: 42). So there are many activities and behaviours toward pets that parallel those with one’s children. Although, it has been said that pets never really grow up and ‘mature’; often, dogs and cats will continue to play and act like they did when they were puppies or kittens, but to a lesser degree. Their behaviour remains somewhat constant and predictable. In fact, the website of the Montreal SPCA makes the commitment to a new pet, the similarities to children, and the level of responsibility very clear in the adoption section of their website: “Last, you must accept that an animal’s behaviour will forever be like that of an 18-month-old child.”

In some cases, when people did use first degree ‘human’ terms for their animals, especially “baby” or “kids”, it was accompanied by joking and laughter, as if the person thought it was silly to identify with their pet in such a way. Informants may have also been aware of the social stigma that exists about what might be labelled as the ‘overindulgence’ of some pet owners (of course, that term is subjective, as what may be indulgent to one person may be perfectly normal to another). A similar practice became apparent in Charles and Davies’ (2008) study of families and kinship, where they found pets to be a significant part of the kinship diagrams, which participants’ created. According to those authors, “These kinds of responses, either attempting to lessen with laughter the impact of including animals as family or using joking references to introduce them into the discussion, seem to reflect the ambivalence of human-animal relations

discussed earlier and the awareness that having too close a relationship with animals may be viewed negatively.” (Charles and Davies 2008: ¶ 5.6).

Whether people joke about their pets as children or not, the idea of companion animals as specific kin or generic family members is becoming much more accepted in western cultural systems, and we have to pay much more attention to it. If we do not recognize the intense emotional bonds people have with animals, we risk damaging both the human and the pet’s well-being when they are forced to separate for various reasons (housing, illness, family disputes). Beyond psychological issues, if we discount or ignore the importance of pets in the kinship network in anthropological studies, we risk missing out on a rich area of human relations, which will enrich the field of cultural anthropology.

When looking at the number of second degree terms used (which was the majority of participants representing all demographic categories), two patterns appear. The terms that were the most common were related to the categories of “Family” and “Therapy/Emotional”. Companion animals were most often described as an *additional* part or member of the family, rather than a ‘substitute’ as earlier works on the pet-owner bond indicated. Both men and women with immediate family members living at home (children, spouses), people who were part of a couple, or people living alone used the terms relating to family membership. I did not specifically ask questions about participants’ other human relationships, but most people offered this information. People living alone for example still discussed activities with their friends, their volunteer work, their community involvement, or their hobbies or sports interests that they shared with other people. Pets are a neutral and generally pleasant topic of conversation, which some people emphasized as an enhancement to their social interactions with others. As more

research on pets in human social networks is conducted, it is becoming clearer that pets can be an additional and valuable form of support, and pet keeping provides an intimate connection with another sentient life that humans cannot replicate. This research shows that household type, age, or gender did not influence who viewed their pets as family, which supports the findings of Cohen's (2002) study which found that a person's attachment to their pet does not suggest they have a lack of close human bonds, and that household (living alone or with a partner/children) and age demographics did not influence feelings of kinship or intimacy. The terms in the categories of "Family", "Friend", and "Companion" all connote a level of equality between the human and the pet, whereas the "Therapy/Emotional" category has terms which describe a more specific type of quality or service that pets provide their owners (See Table 2, page 45). Of course, a fair number of participants used both of these types of terms. The fact that pets are part of a 'normal' life for some people, it seems their treatment as family members (protection, nourishment, affection, etc.) seems to occur regardless of the animal's 'services' to the owner; the fact that pets are "someone to talk to" when no other human is around may seem like a substitute type of role, but a common assertion from participants was that pets were family first, and the emotional comfort they provided was something that developed later in the relationship, and was an additional benefit. However, some people do get animals with the purpose in mind of having company and someone to take care of. Usually, family members communicate with each other, and having similar communication with pets is part of viewing them as family. Pets respond through vocalizations and gestures, which are understood by their owners, sometimes in

special ways. Some people prefer the intimate communication they share with their pet over conversations with humans.

The current image of pets in the media (especially dogs and cats) has probably had a significant influence on the widespread use of the term ‘family’ or ‘friend’ to describe animals. Search any bookstore or peruse animal magazines and the image of the pet as part of the family portrait is normal, but also, ‘right’. Animals used in advertisements, television shows and commercials and movies often portray dogs and cats as ‘members of the family’, and a natural concept. This section cannot discuss the vast topic of animals in the media, but the fact that there is a large body of popular literature putting pets into the family realm offers some insight into why people are so accepting of pets as family members in the home.

Third degree terms provided interesting insight into some more specific qualities that drew participants in selecting a cat or dog, and some of the additional reasons why they like them (the species or the individual animal). Participants used a variety of adjectives to describe their pets (see page 46); including physical attributes, personality traits, or behaviours. These types of terms showed the multiple roles that pets play for most people.

Visual and tactile descriptions were interesting to note as reasons for loving a particular pet. Terms like “soft”, “cuddly”, “cozy” all imply feelings of comfort and pleasure. There have been studies suggesting that stroking an animal’s fur lowers a person’s heart rate and blood pressure (Gunter 1999). The benefits of touch are probably heightened when petting and stroking one’s own pet due to the increased emotional bond and intimacy.

Emotional Support and Strong Family Bonds

Several exchanges I had with participants were quite touching, especially when they spoke about pets who had passed away, or how current pets helped them through life's ups and downs. Several participants relayed how they had suffered physical, mental, and emotional struggles and how their pets, past and present, helped them cope with everyday life and keep their minds and bodies healthy. While this research did not exclusively address the health of participants and the effects pets may have on their guardians, it certainly cements the therapeutic importance of animals for people who may need additional support. Several participants, whether suffering a particular ailment themselves or not, also brought up the importance of animals for those who are more vulnerable in society and may need more support, such as seniors. The subject of pets in nursing homes and visiting therapy dogs was raised, suggesting some degree of public knowledge of studies touting the benefits of seniors having pets. Two very recent studies regarding pets and seniors illustrate important points. A study in the UK among dog owners of different ages (with an average age of 60) using a series of focus groups found support for the many roles dogs play for an aging population. To pet owners in the study, dogs provided physical health through exercise motivation; comfort and companionship; an avenue for dog owners meet new friends, support and love as family members; a listening ear as therapists, and a feeling of protection and safety when out walking (Knight & Edwards 2008). However, with all of these benefits for the elderly and non-elderly alike, attention must be paid on the reasons why seniors may not own pets. In one small study of non-pet owners, Chur-Hansen et al. (2008) found that all of the interviewees (all 70+ years) had past pets, and they all spoke of the advantages to having

animals at home, much like the ones mentioned in the previous study. While reasons not to own a pet varied, several identified a pet as having as many responsibilities as a child. A large reason for not owning a pet was the grief and worry associated with having to give up a trusted companion or the pet outliving the owner. The seniors who participated in my study did not bring up these kinds of issues, but a few acknowledged that health and place of residence would dictate whether or not they would continue to have pets.

Effect of Past Pet Experience

While it might have been expected that middle-aged couples either with or without children may be more likely to use first degree kinship terms, my research shows various age groups and household types represented use these terms, as shown in the previous chapter. Individual experience is also a relevant factor as well as how people may have related to pets when they were young. I think a person's life history may have more to do with how they view and 'construct' their pets, rather than where a person is in the life stage. Intergenerational influence plays a large part, as evidenced in the work of Downey and Ellis (2008) and the experiences they and immediate family members had with integrating new felines into the family network. From the youngest age group to seniors, first degree terms were used, often in conjunction with second degree terms, showing that it may not just be an 'empty-nester syndrome'. The point is that animals are continually being defined in new ways that contradict the traditional human/animal dichotomy. Pet keeping may or may not be an *evolutionary* adaptation, but may be closer to 'social adaptation' in the modern world. With the advent of industrialization, there are more people living in urban spaces, spending their working lives not in contact with nature, and more people are living alone or with a partner and no children. Adults with

little contact with animals or the outdoors may feel a need to expand their social network through companion animals. Once animals enter a household and become a pet and family member, there are two sides of the relationship that make it attractive to people. On one hand, pets are animals and maintain animalistic behaviours that are controlled through training, the removal of reproductive organs, and other methods. They have interesting features that humans do not have (such as heightened senses of smell and hearing, and other physical abilities like speed and agility) and it can be an education in animal behaviour and the individual personality of an animal. On the other hand, there is the social aspect of the relationship that dogs and cats have been sharing with people for thousands of years. There are many anecdotes about people and their pets, which show the strong bonds that each species feels for the other, from animal heroics, to speculations of dog and cat intelligence and humour.

One of my important findings in this vein was that all participants had previously owned pets; there were no pet owners in my sample who were new to having an animal companion. The majority of people commented that they “grew up with” or “always had” pets throughout their lives, except for one participant who did not because he grew up in an apartment, but still remembered being “fond of animals”. Many of my informants offered stories of pets they had long ago, and remembered the personalities and quirks of animals they had known as children. Growing up with animals seems to make people desire them in our adult lives, regardless of human demands or relationships. Perhaps we want to relive the amusing and rewarding kinship bonds we had as children and teenagers through our own decision to establish another kin relationship with another pet. Hirschman (1994) makes the valuable observation that people “who had been socialized

to care for a particular type of pet as children often continued to seek out that same type of pet throughout their lives (623)... essentially, the children in such homes come to view the people-plus-animals family structure as *normal* and *right*.” (628, italics in original). As my findings show, childhood socialization with animals seems to have a profound effect on them and their choice to keep animals as adults. As most participants echoed, pets were a part of their life as long as they could remember; the rewards of pet keeping often outweigh the negatives, including the grief suffered by owners for animals who passed away over the decades. Perhaps early family influence has an effect on the locations for acquiring a pet as well, which is discussed in the following section.

Influences on Pet Choice

How people acquire their pets is an important factor in this study, and can show the history, personality, and preferences of the person, and how each piece comes together in pet ownership. From my data on the numbers, types, and sources of pets in the sample, there are a few important points of discussion. First, there is the significant difference between cats and dogs and where guardians obtained them; 61.5% of cats owned by informants were rescued and/or adopted from animal shelters, while 53.3% of dogs were purchased from breeders. There are several points that may account for this difference. According to the Canadian Kennel Club’s website, they currently recognize 175 dog breeds. The selection for and advancement of certain traits over many years has led to an extensive variety of dogs of different sizes, proportions, hair texture and colour, and skeletal structure. Along with the diverse appearances of dogs today, there are differences in temperament and behaviour patterns; this coupled with a preference for a certain appearance probably leads to greater consideration in selecting a type of dog. A

person's individual preferences are important in dog selection, as are their specific needs and lifestyles. For example, a senior or less able person is probably not going to select the larger, more powerful breeds, or the high energy ones either. Likewise, there were several people in my study who were actually allergic to pets, and carefully chose dogs said to be "hypoallergenic" like poodle-crosses. The differences between dog breeds are much more pronounced physically and behaviourally, whereas differences between cats are less so. There are approximately 40 cat breeds recognized by international cat associations (Davis 2007: 20), and while the Canadian Cat Association's website does not have a specific number of recognized breeds, I counted a list of 48 breeds under the "Breed Descriptions" section. The differences between dogs are most noticeably their size and overall shape, but with cat breeds, the most significant differences lie in the appearance of the head and face. A cat can have a very flat face such as the Persian, or have a more elongated muzzle like a Seal Point Siamese. It is unclear how much of a role appearance plays in the choice of dog or cat, but the fact that more dogs were from breeders and more cats were rescued suggests people may prefer particular characteristics in their dogs rather than their cats. There are more responsibilities in taking care of a dog than a cat, and lifestyle, mobility, and place of residence are all factors in choosing a pet. Also, I think it is becoming more evident to people that there is a problem with stray cats in both urban and rural settings, and that animal shelters never have a shortage of cats for adoption. It seems most people acknowledge a welfare issue with the abundance of cats in shelters, but are less aware of the welfare issues present in dog breeding operations and pet stores, so perhaps they are more willing to go out and get a cat from a shelter, but prefer to go to a breeder for a dog. Additionally, the history of the owner in terms of

where they typically acquired pets played an important role in this area of my study. Usually people would continue a familiar trend. If they had several cats in the past who were rescued, they had a tendency to continue that, or if they were particularly fond of a certain breed of dog, they were more apt to continue going to breeders. (Although there are exceptions: for example, one participant had experience with stray cats and expressed her desire for a purebred Ragdoll cat).

Most cat owners mentioned the easier care of cats, so this may be a strong influence in pet choice as well, and a reason for having multiple cats. Another point mentioned was the fact that they can be left alone for longer periods during the day in that they do not need to go outside to relieve themselves, and may appreciate the company of other cats during longer periods alone. Despite the common assertion of the independence of cats, which is true to an extent, they are also very social animals, and often enjoy the company of other cats (and people) (See Alger and Alger's 2003 book *Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter*). Dogs are social as well in that they are 'pack animals', but may require more attention, as several dogs may be more of a physical and financial burden than multiple cats (i.e. walking more than one dog several times a day, greater consumption of food (and probably toys), requiring additional medicines because they go outdoors like flea and heartworm treatments, may require obedience classes, etc.); one dog per household seems quite common, and was reflected in my study.

Responsibility, Veterinary Care, and Cost

Interview questions on these topics did not yield as much data as other questions, but they did spur some interesting discussion about related topics. In terms of

responsibility, participants living with others usually shared responsibilities, or divided them according to what had to be done (taking the dog out or emptying a litter box). It was not common for people living with others for the responsibility to fall completely one-sided; however there were some participants who said they did more than their fair share. One thing that stood out, perhaps not surprisingly, was that parents often carried out notably more pet duties than their children at home, even when their children were in their late teens or early twenties. When thinking about companion animal research, and the widespread connection of pets as children, perhaps the parents are more involved from the start and the human children never get a full chance to participate in taking care of the pet; walking the dog or feeding the cat is not really enough to invoke a real sense of the responsibility and commitment to another life.

Veterinary care is an important aspect of having a pet. Keeping the animal healthy by treating and preventing illness is imperative for the animal's quality of life and is also important for the pet-human relationship to be a longer-lasting positive experience. Most participants in the sample took their pet to the vet for annual check-ups and vaccinations, and some took their dog for annual visits but not their cats, and a few people had the initial check-up and vaccinations, but then only took their pets to the vet if something was changing with the pet's health. Several people brought up issues that I had not given much thought to. A few participants felt that some of the recommendations by veterinarians (like annual vaccinations) were not quite imperative. These pet owners were unsure if yearly vaccinations were even necessary, and did their own independent research and discovered that some vaccines last several years. It was not so much that these people distrusted veterinarians, but were more concerned with their pet's actual

needs and the risks involved with vaccinations. One participant had a previous dog suffer greatly and die after getting a rabies vaccine, which made him feel uneasy about getting vaccines ever since.

A few other pet owners had either visited or brought up the subject of holistic veterinarians, which is a relatively new field of mainstream animal medicine. According to the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, founded in 1982, the organization “explores and supports alternative and complementary approaches to veterinary healthcare, and is dedicated to integrating all aspects of animal wellness in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.” (www.ahvma.org). According to one Canadian holistic veterinary directory website (pets4life.com), the practice is more widespread in the U.S. than Canada, with eight provinces able to offer holistic vet care (although Saskatchewan and Manitoba cited only one holistic veterinarian each). There are some other branches of veterinary care related to holistic medicine, including the Association of Veterinary Acupuncturists of Canada (www.avac.ca), and the Canadian Animal Chiropractic Certification Program (www.veterinarychiropractic.ca). A discussion of the field of holistic veterinary medicine will not be attempted here, but the fact that it is becoming more attractive to people is an interesting parallel to the field of naturopathic medicine for people.

The cost of a keeping a pet is very significant for the study of pets and people, especially when we think about the different levels of income in society, and the fact that the ‘pet industry’ brings in millions of dollars every year to the North American economy, and is a billion-dollar industry globally. There is some estimation on the Internet about approximate yearly costs of caring for a dog or cat, with a cat costing

slightly less than a dog. The annual cost of keeping a pet however is different for everyone based on a variety of factors, from the type and size of the pet, to the quality of food and accessories to the person's ability and willingness to treat chronic health problems. The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA) website has a breakdown of approximate yearly and one time costs of different types of pets, with cats and dogs costing in the vicinity of \$1000 a year. The main reason I wanted to ask people how they felt about the costs of pet keeping was to determine any negative feelings toward the cost of certain items or services, and whether this prevented people from providing optimal care. The majority of my participants said something to the effect that they "hadn't thought about it [the cost of pets] much", or "it's just one of those things you do", or "they're worth it". Some participants brought up the point that, for the most part, choosing and keeping a pet is one's own choice, and a lifelong one, leading some to question why anyone would get a pet in the first place if they knew they could not afford to properly care for one. The subject of pet insurance emerged in my interviews as well, and a few participants had it, but most did not, but knew about it. Some informants also expressed that there were a few aspects of pet keeping that raised eyebrows from a cost perspective, from 'high-tech' veterinary advancements like laser surgery for spaying and neutering (the possible benefit being faster healing, but not absolutely necessary), to the marketing of fashionable name-brand pet carriers running \$150 or more. With improvements in veterinary technology, there are the expected escalations in costs, which will not only hurt pet owners, but rescue organizations as well, that rely on public and business donations to operate.

The subjects of veterinary care and cost were joined together when the subject of saying goodbye to a pet was discussed and the issues with “heroic” procedures. Making the decision to euthanize one’s pet is a very difficult and emotional one, especially if there is a treatment that could be successful, but is either very expensive into the thousands of dollars, or intensive and could cause the pet to suffer. For most people, these two issues went hand in hand, with the question of animal suffering at the forefront.

Elective Surgeries

In my interest in researching aspects of the pet-human relationship, I had always found cosmetic surgeries for animals to be very contradictory to the idea of pets as ‘part of the family’. With the parallels between companion animals and human children, one has to wonder where the lines between them are drawn. Cosmetic surgery or ‘mutilations’ as they are sometimes called brought up strong opinions among informants. Most of the people in the sample absolutely disagreed with declawing and tail docking/ear cropping (67.6% and 82.4% of the total sample respectively), the main reason being they thought it was “cruel” to the animals to put them through something that was unnecessary. Years ago, the practice of tail docking dogs was believed to protect dogs from collecting burs in the woods and to protect them from injury and bites from other dogs when used in sports and hunting. Attitudes toward the practice have been changing over the past few decades, and it remains a controversial issue today, with some countries and organizations completely banning the procedure due to its ‘cosmetic’ function for house pets today. Now, the procedures of tail docking and ear cropping have more to do with a particular image of what a dog should look like. Several of the participants in the study (on both sides of the issue) acknowledged that dog owners in general probably have a particular

picture in their minds of what a traditionally docked dog ‘should’ look like. Reasons to support this looks-based image mainly rest on the argument that it is a tradition, one which some believe should continue.

The subject of declawing cats touched a nerve with many of my participants, usually those who had cats and were well aware of the surgery, its possible consequences, and the justifications for it. People who had the procedure done, and those who are against the practice both cited that the main motivation for the surgery was to protect furniture from being scratched. Only one person cited an additional reason, which was to protect her young child from being scratched. There were some complications that came up for people with currently declawed cats, mainly that the cats had trouble jumping up on furniture or maintaining as much balance as before. A few people who were very opposed to the practice had had declawed cats in the past, and proceeded to tell me about some severe complications to the procedure, such as extended periods of pain and sensitivity, and how they expressed much regret in having it done. In these cases, I asked them if they were informed beforehand of the possible complications and what the procedure actually entailed, and for the most part they were not, and they conducted their own research afterward. This presents an area of future research in the role of education about medically unnecessary procedures by veterinarians, which would build on the work of Atwood-Harvey (2005).

When we think about tail docking, ear cropping, and declawing, each procedure has a different purpose, but a similar symbolic theme. With cosmetic procedures for dogs, it is more about achieving a certain look, however one of the functions of a dog’s tail is to express emotions, like happiness, fear, or curiosity. These procedures to control the look

and function of companion animals may be a way to exert cultural (and physical) control of animals and their bodies. This could be a way to assert dominance over the pet and have more control of the household by taking away some of the natural features of the animal.

‘Too Many Pets’?

A large number of the companion animals in my study were spayed and neutered or just about to be (26 out of 30 dogs, 4 were used for breeding, and all cats); nearly all participants agreed with spaying and neutering their pets, but their primary reasons for it were different. Only one participant did not agree with spaying/neutering on the grounds that it was interfering with their natural functions. For the 33 participants who did have spayed or neutered pets, the majority of them made the decision themselves, outside of their veterinarian’s recommendation. Many people stated something like “It’s just something you do.” The most cited reason to have the surgery was to prevent breeding, whether because the owner did not want to have to take care of and find homes for the litters, or to not contribute to the number of unwanted populations living outdoors or in shelters. The second most cited reason (which was often mentioned along with preventing breeding) was to prevent or correct the pet’s behaviour, for example, to prevent male indoor cats from spraying, or female cats from yowling when in heat, and to prevent aggression or roaming in dogs.

It was interesting to hear pet owners speak about why they got their pet spayed or neutered, and especially how it seemed to be almost an automatic step after getting a pet. Spaying and neutering has many benefits to the pet’s health, and most importantly, prevents unwanted litters. It is usually recommended by veterinarians to have pets fixed,

and humane societies usually will spay or neuter animals before they are adopted out to new homes, or they will offer incentives to have the pet fixed by the person's own veterinarian by offering to cover all or most of the cost. Although spaying and neutering may be grouped as an elective surgery like the other procedures I discussed, I would not place spaying and neutering in the same realm as cosmetic/convenience surgeries because of the added weight of the benefits; lessening the chance of reproductive cancers is a clear health benefit, but the fact that spaying and neutering prevents a large amount of suffering of future offspring is reason enough to consider it part of responsible and humane pet keeping. The situations of animal shelters with full cages, stray and feral cats, or pet abandonment were often described as a "people problem" according to many informants, but there is still a general lack of awareness of the problems with too many animals and not enough homes for them. Roughly half of the people in my sample told me they did think there was a problem with pet overpopulation or at least acknowledged there was a problem with pets not having homes, i.e. animal shelters. The other people in the sample had a number of answers; either they did not see a problem with too many companion animals here in Waterloo or elsewhere, or they acknowledged a problem with stray cats, but not issues affecting dogs (for example, poor breeding practices, or shelter relinquishment) or did not know if there was a problem and declined to comment much on that question.

One of the reasons why people are not aware of such issues may be generational gap, and the differences between rural and urban upbringing. For example, older people in my sample who grew up on farms were used to unaltered cats running around the barn and property. Many farms had a dog or several keeping watch on the farm as well, who

might have slept with the horses or cows. There are welfare issues whether cats or dogs are living outdoors in a rural or urban setting, ranging from food supply, shelter, and cruelty from people, but it seems that older generations are not as worried about these topics as younger generations of pet owners.

Income level was a subject brought up by some participants when speaking about some of the reasons for pet relinquishment or why people may not spay or neuter their pets. Some people may not be able to afford to spay or neuter their animals and there is no 'low-cost' assistance program that I was aware of to help with the expense. Another issue was that despite behavioural issues with unfixed animals, some participants acknowledged that some people may want to keep their pets 'natural' and 'intact'; for example, as I mentioned previously, one participant disagreed with spaying and neutering because it was preventing natural functions of mating (the person was unaware of any overpopulation problem with domestic pets). It seems for the most part, that unless one is active 'in the field', meaning with independent or organized animal rescue, veterinary care, etc., the welfare issue of stray and feral animals may be a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

Directions for Future Research

There are numerous paths for further research in the subject of pets and people to go, which my work has touched on. If a gender based study was conducted, it could start by observing the number of women and men that enter pet shops to pick up supplies, or the number of men and women who bring their pets to the veterinarian. Another place to conduct observational research would be obedience schools and dog parks. The research could add to studies of the division of labour. Are women the primary caretakers of pets?

What effect does this have on their lives in terms of stress and time management, and their bond to the pet? In relation to the finding that more women responded to my study, and many were more open and likely to have a longer interview, a study could be conducted on the pet-owner bond and the language people used as shown in my study, asking: Do women typically have a closer relationship with their pets? How does this affect their human social networks, or does the death of the pet affect them more severely than men?

There has been much research on pets and older populations, but more studies would be useful, looking at the practical and emotional costs and benefits of pet keeping, and relating this to possible policy changes. (See Chur-Hansen et al. 2008; Knight and Edwards 2008). The subject of children and pets was not a specific topic in my research, but the fact that nearly all of the participants had pets when they were younger and led them to see pets as a 'normal' part of life is interesting. A research question in this area of work could be: Are people who have pets in their younger years more likely be responsible pet owners in adulthood? (In regard to spaying or neutering, veterinary care, lifetime commitment, etc.).

I would like to see more academic investigations about the awareness of and educational efforts toward the problem of puppy and kitten mills, buying animals from pet stores, and irresponsible breeders. Although they were very few pets bought from pet stores, the fact remains that some people remain uneducated about choosing their pets from reliable, humane locations.

Some people in my study were unsure of the many functions of humane societies besides "dropping off" unwanted pets or strays. Animal shelters often do much more than

give refuge to homeless animals and adopt them out to loving homes. Education, active rescue, cruelty investigations, and pushing for legislative change are just some of the features of many of Canada's animal shelters, and they need more community support and government attention. Along the same line, there is the overpopulation problem, especially with cats. Most people were unaware of the problem, but as several participants pointed out, outdoor cats are nocturnal, small, fearful of humans, and are especially good at hiding, so unless a person is relatively active in the field (from feeding feral colonies or the occasional stray to doing active live trap rescues), most people seem unaware of the large problem of too many cats, both in outdoor colonies, and in crowded animal shelters.

Looking at my recruitment strategy and the kind of information I was interested in, I had somewhat expected to receive responses from people who love their pets, and care for them as much as family members; they are "self-selected" 'good' pet owners, who obviously love their animals and treat them well. It would be interesting, albeit difficult, to look at the other side of pet ownership, as one of my informants asked me. To study and interview people who have animals but primarily see them as 'property' (which animals remain as under the law) and do not treat them well; for example, there are many cases of dogs who live their entire lives on the end of a chain, with little if any shelter from the sun or the cold, and yet when approached by animal welfare officers, they are reluctant to relinquish the animal. The issue of animal cruelty, especially to pet animals, makes many people upset, and understandably so. Canada's animal cruelty laws are behind many other countries. Most of the current laws in Canada are the same as they were in 1892 (CFHS); however, there have been some minor upgrades province to

province. Awareness is an issue here as well; for example, during the writing of this thesis, I was unaware that the abhorrent practice of dog-fighting is still legal here in Canada. The subject of animals and the law is a massive topic, but I had several participants who were passionately vocal about the subject, and recognized the immediate need to improve animal cruelty laws for all animals, not just for dogs and cats.

Clearly, there are many paths yet to be taken for this kind of research. I think it is important to research areas of the pet-human relationship not only because it is such a multi-branched subject, but also because the research could lead to positive changes for both people and animals. I think the development of Anthrozoology and the study of human-animal relationships in general will get larger and more recognized as time progresses.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis has identified some of the ways people describe and relate to their companion animals, and opinions pet owners have about various issues in pet keeping and animal welfare. The data analysis focused on interpreting my informants' responses in light of past research, and in the context of Public Issues Anthropology.

I reviewed previous work that identified the place of dogs and cats at key points in history, and how they developed as the most popular pets in the home. I also looked at some theoretical work in the field of the pet-human relationship, the meaning they have for their owners, and the place of pets in society as a whole. The latter is particularly important when we consider the benefits of companion animals for people. Likewise animals can benefit from their portrayal and treatment as family members. In evaluating the role of pets in human society, there are animal welfare issues to consider, including the production of pets, the medically unnecessary surgeries they endure, and the large number of dogs, and especially cats that are fending for themselves outdoors and filling animal shelters. There is a growing body of literature on the changing types of relationships we have, and how we come to define 'kinship' and family; this applies to pet animals as well, and the view of these animals as family may influence a number of policy changes, and studies in social science.

My analysis work showed that people in different age groups and household types express their relationship with their pets in varying ways. In each group, some individuals used first-degree terms to express this relationship, but the second and third degree terms were more commonly used in defining their pet's role in their lives. With first-degree terms used by a variety of people in my study, the theory of pets as 'substitutes' for

people of certain demographic categories (for example, a married couple without children) may not be a correct interpretation. My interviews with pet owners also revealed the strong influence of childhood pet experiences on adults' preferences and opinions on issues of pet keeping. All of the participants except one had pets in childhood, and often they had pets throughout their teenage and young adult years as well. Having a cat or a dog to take care of was 'normal' and natural for them to continue, even if the person suffered deep grief over the loss of previous pets. The connection that people feel with companion animals is one of the relationships that can be expressed in different ways, and the fact that specific kinship terms are being used shows there can be something deeper than perhaps we previously thought.

This connection with companion animals and opinions about their treatment became evident when I found that many participants in the study disagreed with the procedures of tail docking/ear cropping of dogs, and the declawing of cats based on the idea that it was "cruel" and "painful". These procedures are still legal and practiced in much of Canada. Further study could contribute to attempts to change laws to reflect the opinions of the public. At the very least, greater public awareness could educate pet owners about the possible complications of these practices.

This research also provides a number of exploratory paths for further research, many of which I discussed in the previous chapter. More anthropological research could examine the relationship of gender differences and roles in pet keeping. There were several indications that women may be more likely to have pets, or at least respond to questions about them, and it would be interesting to examine why this might be the case. Studying the trends of pet keeping among more specific populations could also be a rich

area of data; for example, it would be interesting to study the ‘family dynamics’ of couples or singles with multiple pets. Using the classic techniques of ethnography and participant-observation would be useful in studying segments of the ‘pet subculture’. For example, it would be interesting to study a family or group of families with children in the home who are getting their first ‘family pet’ and see the growth and development of the dog or cat into a family member, friend, or sibling to the children. The same could be done on different types of participants who have never had a pet before and are having their first experience with a companion animal.

There are several anthropological connections to pet keeping that this research has uncovered. First, there is the place of pets in a ‘liminal’ state between nature and culture. The place of companion animals in a state of ‘liminality’ is also discussed by Sanders (1995:196) who writes that pets “exist in the liminal space between object and individual being, between the culturally constructed statuses of nonperson and unique person.” The nature/culture dichotomy has been a feature of anthropology for decades; pets may be an ideal representation of that dichotomy, as they exist in a state of animal/human. Cats and dogs are animals, representing the ‘wildness’ of nature, having instinctual natures which may not always be acceptable to people. When they are made into ‘pets’ and eventually ‘family members’, there is a process to that labelling, from choosing and naming the pet, to acknowledging his or her value in a person’s life plans.

In the same vein, this topic of creating a pet and family member from ‘just an animal’ could take another form in anthropological studies of rites of passage. I have discussed earlier the transformations that must take place before a pet can be part of the household and family, and these should be analyzed in terms of different levels of

‘culturization’. Choosing and naming the pet are important first steps. Eventually the pet shows his or her personality, and this gives the pet an identity for the pet owner to interpret. As the pet is acknowledged in family rituals and daily practices, like taking pictures alongside human family members, dressing up the pet for holidays, and buying special treats, beds, and personalized dishes and toys, the pet becomes a solidified part of the owner’s life. Cutting off this bond by unnatural means (for example, giving the pet away, abandonment, or relinquishment to a shelter) presents a perplexing transition, which Harbolt (2003) and Irvine (2004) touched on in their ethnographic work in animal shelters.

Anthropological studies on kinship and family are changing. How people define kinship is subjective, and though practices of kinship and definitions of family differ depending on the cultural group, adding animals to the definition adds another dimension to the mix because we are crossing the species barrier. My research suggests that pets represent a new kind of fictive kin. This is indicated by the fact that we are extending our use of kinship terms to them; the fact that they are animals does not make their place in the family and contributions to the happiness of their human companions any less real. The concept of “functional kin” (Pattison, DeFrancisco, Wood, & Crowder 1975 in Cohen 2002: 624) is useful here, because, as I found in my study, all of the pets had some kind of ‘support position’ for their human owner. This was most evident with the large number of second-degree terms that many of the people in my sample used with the categories of family, friends, companions, and therapy/emotional. Even if people see their pet as their ‘baby’ primarily, usually the human makes the choice to start the

relationship by choosing and purchasing the animal, sometimes with a specific idea in mind of whom that pet will become.

Language plays an important role in how we define people. This is clearly also true of our perceptions of animals, because the terms we use to create an image in the human mind of what something is, and what it is supposed to be is influenced by how we speak about it. For example, when we speak of companion animals, we often use “he” or “she”, and not “it”, like we do with other animals. The relationship between humans and their pets is another complex system where anthropology can offer new insights. The use of kinship terms for pets creates an interesting paradox when we think of the borders between humans and animals, and the meanings of pets in our culture.

Appendix 1: Information Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD COMPANION ANIMALS

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the opinions people hold regarding pet animals (dogs and cats) and their welfare. The study will also focus on the role pets play for people of different ages and genders.

As a participant in this study, you may be asked to answer a short screening questionnaire. After this, you may be asked to participate in an interview, which will be approximately 20-30 minutes, or longer depending on the interviewee. A detailed information letter will be provided prior to the interview.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Jill Johnson
Department of Anthropology
at
(Email) (Phone #)

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. If you have any questions or concerns you can contact Dr. Susan Sykes at the Office of Research at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Tracking Participants for Interviews

How many pets do you have, if any? _____

What type? (Dog, cat, rabbit, etc.) _____

I am a man woman

*Age range: 18-39 40-64 65+

Current family status (check all that apply): single
long-term partnership/married
Parent
Multigenerational household

Where were you born and raised? in Canada Outside Canada (please specify)

*Originally I had these three categories, but I later divided them into four groups: 18-24, 25-39, 40-64, and 65+. These are reflected in the data section.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions for Participants

1. Why did you decide to get a pet? b) Why that breed/sex?
2. How did you acquire your pet? b) How long were you considering getting a pet? Did you consider other locations for finding a pet? c) If from a breeder, were they registered with the Canadian Kennel Club, or another regulatory organization?
3. What role does your pet play? (For you and/or your family? Companion? Exercise Partner? Etc.)
4. Who shares the responsibilities in taking care of your pet?
5. Does your pet have annual vet care? (Check ups/vaccinations?) Do you have a regular veterinarian?
6. Do you find the cost of caring for your pet(s) significant?
7. Could you list the treatments and/or surgeries your pet has had?
b) Why did you decide to get said procedures done? Why did you decide against others?
*If interviewee has not had any elective surgeries performed on their current pet (besides spaying or neutering): What is your opinion of physical alterations of dogs or cats that changes their appearance or behaviour such as tail-docking or ear cropping dogs, or declawing cats?
8. Do you think humane societies/animal shelters play an important role in the community?
9. Do you think there is an overpopulation problem with companion animals? (For example, among cats and dogs?) If yes, what do you think is contributing to the problem?
If no, are you referring to just Waterloo, Ontario, or Canada? Do you think there are problems elsewhere with unwanted pets?

References

- Alger, J. M., & Alger, S. F. (2003). *Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Allan, G. (2008). Flexibility, friendship, and family. *Personal Relationships*, vol. 15, 1–16.
- American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from <http://www.ahvma.org/>
- Archer, J. (1997). Why Do People Love Their Pets? *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 18, 237-259.
- Arluke, A., & Sanders, C. R. (1996). *Regarding Animals*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Association of Veterinary Acupuncturists of Canada (AVAC). Retrieved April 15, 2009, from <http://avac.ca/site-eng.html>
- Atwood-Harvey, D. (2005). Death or Declaw: Dealing with Moral Ambiguity in a Veterinary Hospital. [Electronic version]. *Society & Animals* 13(4), 315-342.
- Beck, A., & Katcher, A. (1996). *Between Pets and People: The Importance of Animal Companionship*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Beck, L. & Madresh, E. A. (2008). Romantic Partners and Four-Legged Friends: An Extension of Attachment Theory to Relationships with Pets. *Anthrozoös*, 21(1), 43-56.
- Belk, R. W. (1996). Metaphoric Relationships with Pets [Electronic version]. *Society & Animals*, 4(2). Retrieved March 20, 2008, from <http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa4.2/belk.html>
- British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA). What's Having a Pet Going to Cost? Retrieved April 28, 2009, from <http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/AnimalCare/petcost.asp>
- Bonas, S., McNicholas, J., & Collis, G. M. (2000). Pets in the network of family relationships: an empirical study. In A. L. Podberscek E. S. Paul, & J. A. Serpell (Eds.), *Companion Animals & Us: Exploring the relationships between people and pets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, D. (1985). Cultural Attitudes Towards Pets. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 15(2), 311-317.
- Canadian Animal Chiropractic Certification Program. Retrieved April 20, 2009, from <http://www.veterinarychiropractic.ca/>

Canadian Cat Association. Breed Descriptions. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://www.cca-afc.com/en/showcase/desc/index.html>

Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) Ear cropping and tail docking. Retrieved February 18, 2008, from http://cfhs.ca/athome/ear_cropping_and_tail_docking
Regarding Canadian Animal Law, see http://cfhs.ca/features/a_disappointing_day_for_animals_in_canada/

Canadian Holistic Veterinary Directory. Retrieved April 4, 2009, from <http://www.pets4life.com/en/research/VetDirectory.aspx>

Canadian Kennel Club (CKC). Homepage. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://www.ckc.ca/en/>

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), website: <http://canadianveterinarians.net/>. Position Statements retrieved February 12, 2008.
Onychectomy (Declawing) of the Domestic Feline <http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=28>
Cosmetic Surgery, <http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=46>

Charles, N. & Davies, C. A. (2008). My Family and Other Animals: Pets as Kin. *Sociological Research Online* 13(5). Accessed online Feb. 24, 2009.
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/5/4.html>>.

Chur-Hansen, A., Winefield, H., & Beckwith, M. (2008). Reasons Given by Elderly Men and Women for Not Owning a Pet, and the Implications for Clinical Practice and Research. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 13(8), 988-995.

Clutton-Brock, J. (1995). Origins of the dog: domestication and early history. In James Serpell (ed.) *The Domestic Dog: its evolution, behaviour and interactions with people*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Susan P. (2002). Can Pets Function as Family Members? *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 24(6), 621-638.

Davis, Karen L. (2007). *The Everything Cat Book* (2nd ed.). Avon, MA: Adams Media. (Original work published 1997).

Derr, M. (2004). *Dog's Best Friend: Annals of the Dog-Human Relationship*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Downey, H. & Ellis, S. (2008). Tails of animal attraction: Incorporating the feline into the family. *Journal of Business Research* 61, 434-441.

- Feldmann, B. M. (1977). Why People Own Pets: Pet Owner Psychology and the Delinquent Owner. *Animal Regulation Studies*, 1, 87-94.
- Fox, Rebekah. (2006). Animal behaviours, post-human lives: everyday negotiations of the animal-human divide in pet-keeping. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(4), August, 525-537.
- Grier, Katherine. C. (2006). *Pets in America: A History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gunter, Barrie. (1999). *Pets and People: The Psychology of Pet Ownership*. London: Whurr Publishers Ltd.
- Harbolt, T. L. (2003). *Bridging the Bond: The Cultural Construction of the Shelter Pet*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Harker, R. M., Collis, G. M., & McNicholas, J. (2000). The influence of current relationships upon pet animal acquisition. In A. L. Podberscek E. S. Paul, & J. A. Serpell (Eds.), *Companion Animals & Us: Exploring the relationships between people and pets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hickrod, L. J. H. & Schmitt, R. L.(1982). A Naturalistic Study of Interaction and Frame: The Pet as "Family Member". *Urban Life* 11(1), April, 55-77.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1994). Consumers and Their Animal Companions. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (4), March, 616-632.
- Humane Society of Canada (HSC). Rescue Me. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from http://www.humanesociety.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=789&Itemid=173
- Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Declawing Cats: More Than Just a Manicure, Retrieved April 30, 2009, from http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/cat_care/declawing_cats_more_than_just_a_manicure/
- Irvine, Leslie. (2004). *If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Animals*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kete, Kathleen. (1994). *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knight, Sarah & Edwards, Victoria. (2008). In the Company of Wolves: The Physical, Social, and Psychological Benefits of Dog Ownership. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 20(4), June, 437-455.

Landsberg, G.M. (1991). Cat Owners' attitudes toward declawing. *Anthrozoos*, 4(3), 192-97.

Lawrence, Elizabeth A. (1986). Neoteny In American Perceptions Of Animals. *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* 9 (1), Winter, 41-54.

Maddy, Richard E. (2001). Fictive Kinship in American Biomedicine. In Linda Stone (ed.), *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Montreal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Adoption. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from <http://spcamontreal.com/apropos5a.php?lg=en>

Noonan, G. J. et al. (1996). Tail docking in dogs: A sample of attitudes of veterinarians and dog breeders in Queensland. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, 73, 86-88.

Pelto, P. J., & Pelto, G. H. (1978). *Anthropological Research: The structure of inquiry*. (2nd ed.). Binghamton, NY: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1970).

Podberscek, A. L. (1997). Illuminating Issues of Companion Animal Welfare Through Research into Human-Animal Interactions. *Animal Welfare*, 6, 365-372.

Ramirez, M. (2006). "My Dog's Just Like Me": Dog Ownership as a Gender Display. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(3), 373-391.

Ritvo, Harriet. (1987). *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Sanders, Clinton R. (1995). Killing with Kindness: Veterinary Euthanasia and the Social Construction of Personhood. *Sociological Forum* 10(2), June, 195-214.

Serpell, James. (1996) *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships*. (Canto ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1986).

———. (2000). Domestication and history of the cat. In Dennis C. Turner & Patrick Bateson (eds.), *The Domestic Cat: The biology of its behaviour*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. (2002). Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection Beyond the "Cute Response". [Electronic version]. *Society and Animals* 10(4).

———. (2005). People in Disguise: Anthropomorphism and the Human-Pet Relationship. In Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (Eds.), *Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Serpell, James & Coppinger Raymond, & Fine, Aubrey H. (2003). *The Welfare of Assistance and Therapy Animals: An Ethical Comment*. In Susan J. Armstrong & Richard G. Botzler (Eds.) *The Animals Ethics Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Statistics Canada. www.statscan.gc.ca. Waterloo Community Profile. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3530&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Waterloo&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>
- Stone, Linda (2001). *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship*. Editor. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Swabe, J. (2000). Veterinary dilemmas: ambiguity and ambivalence in human-animal interaction. In A. L. Podberscek E. S. Paul, & J. A. Serpell (Eds.), *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the relationships between people and pets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Szasz, K. (1969). *Petishism: Pets and Their People in the Western World*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Tuan, Y. (1984). *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*. New Haven And London: Yale University Press.
- Weston, Kath. (1991). *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Working Party Council for Science and Society (1988). *Companion Animals in Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zeller, Anne C. (1984). Thoughts on the Moral, Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Teaching Language to Non-Human Forms or What Do You Do When Your Chimpanzee Says “No”. *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 4(1), Summer, 83-87.