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From Fur Baby to Chick Magnet: A Sociological View of Dogs and Their People

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FROM FUR BABY TO CHICK MAGNET: A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW OF DOGS AND
THEIR PEOPLE

By

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From Fur Baby to Chick Magnet: A Sociological View of Dogs and Their People

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Since their domestication, dogs have played an important role in human society. People put them to work hunting game, herding livestock and guarding the home, and also keep them as companions. As dogs increasingly occupy a meaningful position in the lives of their owners, the startling lack of research on dog-human interaction becomes increasingly apparent.

This research discovers different ways people relate to their dogs, and the meaning dogs hold for their owners. While conducting observations, I identified and interviewed owners who exhibited an emotionally meaningful attachment to their dogs. I then used Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory approach to analyze the data. The observations and in-field interviews I collected in public, dog-friendly places allowed me to gain insight into the relationships between dogs and their people.

Owners in my study tended to adopt their dogs for a variety of reasons, including for companionship, as a replacement dog, and as a precursor to parenthood. Dogs also provided access to meaningful relationships with others, as when owners stated they often socialized with other dog people. They also described structuring their lives and everyday routines around their dogs. Through the language they used, owners conveyed a sense that their dogs were members of the family and had individual desires, preferences, and rights not unlike those we ascribe to humans. The idea that dogs possess rights similar to those of humans suggests that some dog owners hold a worldview akin to deep ecologists: that humans are equal, rather than superior, to other animals.

Pets are everywhere in the U.S., numbering around 360 million (Hoevel 2006). Of that number 72 million, or one in five, are dogs (American Veterinary Medical Association 2007). While 59.5% of American households have a pet of some kind, only 35% have children (Weise 2007). In addition, yearly spending on pets is up to \$41 billion, suggesting the emphasis now placed on treating pets to the finest in life (Brady and Palmeri 2007). These statistics illustrate a significant shift in the way we think about and treat pets. They are no longer simply animals we use to carry out work-related tasks, but are family members and important companions. This is especially true for *Canis familiaris*, the domestic dog. Because of this paradigm shift, it is important to understand the roles dogs now play within our social structure. Are they friends, children, protectors, social lubricants or some combination thereof?

There is very little sociological research focused on the relationships between dogs and people, and what does exist is often either embedded within a larger work on pets in general or takes the form of an experiment that cannot be generalized to a larger population (e.g. Albert and Bulcroft 1988; Anderson 2008; Guéguen and Ciccotti 2008; Wells 2004). To address this lacuna, I am investigating how individuals interact both with and through their dogs. My research will reveal more of the overall picture than previous studies and offer further insights that could pave the way for a more generalizable study.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research (e.g. Archer 1997; Cain 1983; Guéguen and Ciccotti 2008; Veevers 1985; Wells 2004) describes the different types of bonds people form with their dogs, as well as the roles of dogs under different circumstances. These include the role of child or other family member, the role of protector, the role of friend, and the role of “social lubricant.”

Dogs are attributed many different roles within the family structure. The most common, however, is that of a child. Researchers (e.g. Albert and Bulcroft 1988; Archer 1997; Cain 1983; Greenebaum 2004; Veevers 1985) have divided individuals who treat their dogs like children into three categories: single individuals or individuals otherwise incapable of having children through traditional means (such as women who have had hysterectomies), young couples, and older couples whose children have moved out, commonly referred to as “empty nesters.” Still, data shows that more people are raising dogs alongside their children than replacing children with dogs. As such, it is not unusual for children, especially those without siblings, to consider a dog to be a brother or sister (Anderson 2008).

Another function of dogs is that of a protector. The word “protection” stirs images of a guard dog warding off others with a frightening bark. But sometimes, protection can be emotional as well. For children, dogs may become a parent figure who is always there and always has enough time to spend (Veevers 1985). In adults, dogs have been shown to significantly decrease emotional trauma. For example, Bolin (1987) found that dog owners experienced less deterioration in their health after the death of a spouse when compared to non-dog owners.

Anthropomorphism, or “[the attribution of] human mental states (thoughts, feelings, motivations and beliefs) to nonhuman animals,” can help explain the bonds formed with dogs (Serpell 2003:83). For example, Anderson (2008) proposes that pets satisfy an innate and biological need to nurture. Additional research shows that anthropomorphism is highest among divorced or never married individuals or those in a second or subsequent marriage, and individuals who have less than two children (Albert and Bulcroft 1988). Other researchers propose that pets are, in essence, social parasites who manipulate our general dispositions (Archer 1997) and utilize the “cute response” to endear themselves to us (Serpell 2003).¹ Because young animals exhibit many of the same features as babies, including large foreheads, large eyes, chubby cheeks, short and thick limbs, and clumsy movements, it is believed that people are, by nature, inclined to care for animals as they do for children (Serpell 2003).

Perhaps the most common way for people to view their dogs is as “man’s best friend.” This is not surprising considering the interactions that dogs can facilitate, explaining why they are sometimes referred to as “social lubricants.” In an experiment measuring receptiveness to social interaction in public, Guéguen and Ciccotti (2008) found that strangers were more likely to offer assistance to or comply with a request from a confederate if the confederate was accompanied by a dog. Another study found that social lubrication is not generic, but dog-specific, and that the age and social desirability of the breed of dog can be contributing factors to social interaction (Wells 2004). It is believed dogs make such good social lubricants for a variety of reasons. First, pets attract attention and alter the perceptions of others. For example, students perceived an office to be more comfortable and a professor to be friendlier when a dog (or a cat) was present (Wells and Perinne 2001). Dogs can also act as an “ice breaker” in social situations,

¹ It is important to note, as Archer (1997) did in his research, that these behaviors are innate and do not imply conscious intent on the part of the animal.

thus creating the perfect context for strangers to make initial contact with one another (Veevers 1985).

Attachment theory, as proposed by Bowlby (1969/1982) can offer insights into the relationships between dogs and their owners. When an individual is attached, Bowlby says, “he is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure” (371). When children exhibit attachment behaviors, mothers respond in-kind with maternal caregiving behaviors such as maintaining proximity and retrieving the infant should he wander off (Bowlby 1969/1982). Woodward uses attachment theory to help explain the bonds between humans and their pets, supporting the theory that the way people behave towards their pets is really a form of parenting behavior (2007).

People show that their dogs occupy a meaningful role in their lives through their actions. Some do this by talking “motherese” (baby talk) to their dogs, referring to them as “my baby” or “my child” and holding them the way one would hold an infant (Archer 1997). Another example can be seen in Greenebaum’s 2004 study of Yappy Hour, a weekly canine social event at Fido’s Barkery in Hartford, Connecticut. The following is her description of Fido’s Barkery:

The first thing one notices when entering the store is the pastry cases full of treats, freshly baked and dipped on the premises, reminiscent of a European pastry shop. [...] One case is full of dry cookies and the other case consists of refrigerated gourmet cakes and pastries. [...] Nothing is too indulgent for these pampered pets, including the high quality toys, collars, beds, and bowls that also sell for premium prices. (P. 118)

With this research, I expand on Greenebaum’s study of human-dog social interactions in order to better understand the bonds between people and their dogs.

METHODS

Field observations and brief in-field interviews were used to understand the experiences and truths of dog owners. Because of the nature of my study, a statistical method of sampling was not necessary. In order to identify participants, I observed at public dog training facilities, specialty pet boutiques, parks that dog owners frequent, and in the common area of a Rocky Mountain University. While observing at these locations, I approached people who exhibited behavior indicating they might be a good fit for my study and asked if they would consent to a brief in-field interview. This design enabled me to obtain first-hand accounts of human-dog interactions. Examples of behavior which lead to interviews included sitting on the ground with the dog, talking to the dog, engaging in activities with the dog, and allowing the dog to lick or

climb on them. Upon agreeing to the interview, participants were given a handout for them to keep which explained my study and provided contact numbers should they have any follow-up questions (Appendix A).

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and were designed to gain insight into the different ways people relate to their dogs, as well as the impact this has on their interactions with society in general. Not only did I record what was said in interviews with participants, but I also observed and photographed interactions between non-participant owners and their dogs. Interview questions included basic demographic and background information, and can be found in the interview schedule (Appendix B).

During my interviews and observations, no identifying information was collected from the participants. This project received IRB approval before any interviews were conducted, and all guidelines were followed throughout the research process to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and well-being of my subjects. The identities of participants were kept anonymous and cannot be determined from the data collected. All names of participants used in this paper are pseudonyms.

After my data was collected, I transcribed all interviews and notes. In total, I conducted interviews with 24 individuals over a two-month period. My sample consisted of 12 males and 12 females ranging in age from 19 to 69. I made observations at six different locations, including a breed-specific social club for dogs and their owners. To identify and code common themes in the data and formulate conclusions, I used the NVIVO 9 software and Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory approach (1967).

FINDINGS

Adopting a Dog

Participants chose to adopt their dogs for a wide variety of reasons. When asked why they wanted a dog, many participants said they wanted a companion. Bryan, a 19-year-old who spent his interview wrestling with his wolf/border collie mix name Sheila, elaborated on this idea:

I wanted a dog because it was something like, someone who could be my companion, but someone who I could choose to be my companion. It's family-like, but it's like a family you almost choose.

Other people spoke of wanting a dog for a companion because they were lonely or lived by themselves. For some, companionship meant being with their dog as much as possible, even making arrangements to bring them to work.

Other dog owners indicated wanting their current dog as a replacement for a dog they had had before. For example, several people mentioned choosing their dogs because they were raised with dogs and were used to having them around or wanted a dog similar to one they remembered from childhood. This was especially true for young college students who lived on their own. Other dog owners indicated specifically that they got their dog after the death of their old dog. A few people discussed wanting a dog to replace one they could no longer have for some reason. This ranged from having to give the dog up due to a lack of space, to losing their dog in a break-up, to having a child take the dog with her when she moved out. One couple even adopted their standard poodle Chica before their other dog had passed on. As John, age 69, put it, “Our other dog was getting old and we were looking for a younger dog for when she passed on.” This family planned in advance for the loss of their dog so there wouldn’t be a period without one. This attitude suggests how important having a dog is to this family.

People also got their dogs to show who they are or who they want to be. Many dog owners I spoke to discussed the importance of being responsible for their dogs, as well as adopting dogs to give them a sense of responsibility. Alicia, a 30-year-old, told me that she and her husband had wanted a dog while the couple was living in Washington, D.C. but they never felt they had adequate space for one. After they moved to Missoula, one of the first things the couple did was adopt Blue, a McNab cattle dog. As Alicia put it, “we just finally found a place where there was an outlet to exercise the dog.” Others said how adopting a dog was a means to make themselves be more responsible. Again, this response was more common among younger people living away from their families for the first time. Such was the case with Bryan, who said, “I just needed something to make me more responsible, and [Sheila, my dog] has definitely helped a lot with that.”

Another group of participants used their dogs as a measuring stick to gauge whether they were ready to be parents yet or if they (both dogs and people) could function as a family. These individuals, both women and men, referred to owning a dog as “a step in the direction of having kids” and like having a “pseudo-kid at the moment since we don’t have them yet.” Jenny, the latter participant who owned a mixed-breed named Sasha, even went on to describe their cat as the dog’s sister. Another young couple who were in the process of moving in together discussed how they transitioned Denali, Richard’s huskey/shepherd mix, to Amanda’s presence in the

family. To accomplish this, Denali lived with Amanda for part of the summer. This arrangement made Amanda “feel like she [the dog] is partly mine”

Several owners got their dog for protection. Sometimes, this protection was for property or livestock, but more often it was to protect small children. Brad, age 40, described protection as one of the reasons the family decided to adopt Nuna, a German shepherd, after their son was born. During the course of the interview, Nuna’s inclination to protect became obvious. As Brad’s son wandered too far away, Nuna would become visibly agitated and whine or bark until Brad went to retrieve him.

Some participants became dog owners to change or affect other family members’ lives. For one family, the decision to get a dog was motivated by the fact that both the children and Seth, the father, have autism. The family did a lot of research on dog breeds to make sure they chose a dog with the right temperament and energy level, and eventually ended up with Savali, an American Staffordshire terrier. As a companion animal, Savali helps calm the anxiety of both the kids and Seth and is “just like another member of the family.”

Kyle, age 27, adopted Carlos, a toy Chihuahua, in an attempt to thwart his wife’s “baby fever.” As he puts it:

And this dog, the little Chihuahua, I picked up in Tacoma when we were back visiting our family for my wife’s birthday. It was basically because she had baby fever, and I thought a little Chihuahua would hold that off for a year or two.”

Clearly, Kyle utilized the “cute response” of Carlos as a puppy as an alternative for his wife’s desire to have a baby (Serpell 2003).

Sometimes, the addition of a new dog was intended to change or affect non-human family members. Several participants either adopted or were planning to adopt a second dog for their first dog. Tanya, a 26-year-old recent mother, described adopting Ash, a pointer/lab mix because of their German shorthair pointer Lua:

We had Lua but she was so high energy she needed someone to play with for her, and it’s actually easier to have two dogs then it is to have one [...] The reason for getting Ash was to keep the one dog we had happy or make it a little easier for us since [Lua is] a little bit hyperactive.

Similarly, Blue’s owner Alicia discussed the possibility of adopting a second dog:

[Blue] will basically be the deciding factor on the dog that we get because we want our family to still function how it does now. We think we have the space and capacity to have another rescue dog, so we’re doing that.

Clearly, the decision to adopt a dog is one that must be considered by the whole family, be they two-legged or four.

Impact on Owner's Daily Life

Participants used their dogs to both socialize with other people, and as a motivating factor in everyday decisions. Several of those I interviewed at a local dog park commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to talk to other dog owners. In fact, during my observations, it was rare to see owners off on their own when their dogs were off leash. The dog owners would stand in a group or circle and make small talk, often dog-related. One participant even said, “We have friends here who we don’t know outside the dog park but we see here with their dogs all the time.”

Part of my observations at the dog park included a meeting of the Missoula Pug Club. At this particular meeting, there were around 15 dogs in attendance, but I was told that after the local newspaper ran a story about the club, membership peaked at 52 pugs. During this meeting, I observed owners petting, loving, and even cradling other people’s dogs in their arms. The conversations mostly focused around dogs and pugs in general, such as when one owner posed the question, “How much do they weigh?” to which another owner replied, “It depends on how much you love them.” It was clear from their laughing, joking, and general friendliness that these people enjoyed the opportunity to socialize with other pug owners.

My observations suggest that dog owners like to socialize with other dog owners. Perhaps it is because, as one participant put it, “Everyone I know has dogs and I naturally just trust other people who have dogs more. It’s kind of a lifestyle.” In fact, on several occasions during my interviews, I was asked if I had a dog. When I replied that I had a golden retriever, I was met with stories about personal experiences with goldens and comments about what good dogs they were. Further, dogs encourage interaction between dog owners and those who like dogs. As Kelly, a 24-year-old who owned a German shorthair pointer named Bella, said:

Usually, [having a dog] is a conversation starter, like “oh, what’s your dog’s name?”, “what kind of dog do you have?”, “I used to have that kind of dog when I was little,” or something like that. They’re more likely to approach you than if you were by yourself, I guess.

At several points during my interviews, people would come up and ask to pet the participant's dog, and the same kind of conversation as Kelly described would take place. Thus dogs do act as social lubricants between people.

The dogs I met attracted people and acted as social lubricants. Puppies, however, are a special case. They are "chick magnets." During my observations, I followed Sandy and her 10-week-old St. Bernard puppy named Geneva on a walk across campus. During this time I observed people speeding to catch up so they could pet her, squealing when they saw her approach, taking pictures, bending down to be on her level, talking in motherese, and asking her name so they could address her directly. When I asked Sandy about it, she remarked that it was common, and sometimes made it difficult to take the dog out for a quick walk because everyone had to stop and say hello. Similarly Jeff, a 54-year-old married participant with a young puppy (this one a border collie/miniature schnauzer cross), commented on the "chick magnet" phenomenon:

If I were dating, the puppy would definitely be an advantage to me. When we've had puppies, I've actually had a friend come over one time to take our puppies for a walk so he could meet girls in Bozeman. I don't know if it worked or not, but the puppies got walked.

Regardless of whether people are intentionally using them as social lubricants, it is undeniable that a cute puppy attracts people.

In addition to being social lubricants, dog owners often structured their daily lives and everyday routines around their dogs. For example, they brought their dogs to the interview locations because it was part of the dog's scheduled exercise or activity time. As Denali's owner Richard put it, "We were going for a run and [...] and it's always nice to go to the dog park to let her off the leash to run around." Participants also discussed tailoring their lives to fit their dog's routine. As Seth's wife Amy described it, "[Savali] has certain times he eats, certain times he goes out." Helen, a 69-year-old retiree, had this to say about her daily routine with Princess, her bichon frisé, "By 8:30-9'oclock at night she's ready to go to bed, she wants to go to bed. And [...] you have to tell her to make her get up at about 8:30 or 9'oclock, because that's what time we get up." Dogs are also a big part of Jessica's daily routine. A 22-year-old college student, she said "My daily routine has revolved around taking care of a dog to some extent." A few participants described their dogs as being a motivator to go outside or to socialize with others. Jessica has even trained Arrow, her boxer, as a service dog. Arrow and Jessica often work with

children who have autism or are otherwise disabled. As she puts it, “It’s neat. She gets me out there.”

Humanizing Dogs

The data shows that people humanize their dogs. For example, participants used specific language to let me know that their dog should be treated like a human. Stacey, a 36-year-old single owner of Gemma, a mixed breed herding dog, said “I talk to her more than a person who thought of her as a dog would.” Kevin (age 32) also explicitly describes how he treats Greta, his heeler mix, like a person. As he said:

[I interact with her] like a kid. [...] I don’t think dogs should be dogs, I think they should be your kids, so I talk to her regularly, like “don’t do that” even if she doesn’t understand fully what I’m trying to say. I talk to her like “let’s go,” I don’t say “come.” “Load up” when we go in the car. So, I just like using plain language and I don’t like separating human from dog. I treat her like a kid, even though she’s not. She’s like a one and a half, two-year-old kid.

The idea that how one talks to their dog is important was reflected in comments from other dog owners as well. Additionally, participants talking to their dogs was a common occurrence during the interviews.

Owners also humanized their dogs through the names they gave them. Many of the dogs had names more commonly associated with people than with animals. This was especially true of the pugs I met, who had names like Sadie, Otis, Cecil, Warren, Trixie and Petunia. Owners who gave their dogs “people names” often used personifying language and spoke to their dogs directly during the interview. For example, when I gave Beth her dog’s treat to thank them for completing the interview, she turned to her black lab Oscar and asked him if he wanted it. He did and she referred to Oscar as a cookie monster as she gave it to him. However, not everyone who personified their dog gave them people names. Inca Doodle’s parents Martha (age 62) and Andy (age 60) repeatedly mentioned what their standard poodle liked to do, including going on vacation, watching the parade, and “talking” to people when they go into town.

I also observed owners humanizing their dogs by using baby talk and referring to dogs as their kids and treating them as such. During the interviews, dog owners used words like “spoiled,” “communication” and perhaps most often, “family.” To these people, the idea that their dogs were members of the family was hugely important and was repeated time and time again. The association between dog and family was especially strong for Tanya, owner of Lua

and Ash, who stated, “I feel like a dog absolutely completes a household, and I have to have one to feel like I’m in a family.” This sentiment was reflected at the beginning of many of the interviews, when participants included their dogs when asked to list the members of their household (e.g. Helen’s list: “My husband and I. And Princess”).

Another way participants conveyed the humanity of their dogs was how they talked about them. The dog owners often perceived their dogs in specific ways, and ascribed to them wants, desires, and preferences. This anthropomorphic behavior manifested itself differently throughout the interviews. Most common were owners describing their dogs as having feelings in response to certain situations, such as loving to give kisses or being jealous of another dog. Sometimes, the participants would ask their dogs outright how they felt, as was the case with Kelly when she asked Bella, “Oh, are you chilly?” Other dog owners ascribed human terms to behaviors they observed in their dogs, such as having a collection of stuffed animals or an obsession with a particular type of ball. Kyle anthropomorphized his other dog Monte, a pit-weiler, by using his time at the end of the interview to dispute the bad reputations of pit bulls and rottweilers. He portrayed Monte as a marginalized citizen who is discriminated against because of commonly held stereotyped.

Perhaps the most interesting manifestation of anthropomorphism is the belief that dogs have the capacity to respond to the emotional needs of their owners. As Rebecca, a 26-year-old who owned a black lab named Annie, put it, “And definitely [dogs] have healing properties about them, so when you’re sad and stuff they’re always there. No complaints, no talking back, they’re just there to be there for you.” If it could be shown through further research that dogs do possess the capacity to react to their owners’ emotional states, the implications could be relevant to the mental health field.

Owners further humanized their dogs by exhibiting and discussing the physical nature of their relationship. When answering the question “what do you like to do with your dog?” the most common responses were physical activities. These included outdoor sports such as hiking, camping, walking, jogging, and biking, but also included more relaxing activities such as cuddling, taking naps, and just hanging out. In fact, many of the owners mentioned letting their dogs sleep in bed with them, usually in reference to them being members of the family. Interestingly, all of the pug owners admitted to sharing the bed with their dogs. This is not surprising, given that 42% of dogs share the bed with their people (Brady and Palmeri 2007).

Owners also stated that they not only played with their dogs passively, such as throwing a ball for them, but often got on the floor and actively wrestled or played games like tug-of-war. Rebecca even described a game she and Annie created together, “We like to play no-touch tag, where basically I run around and pretend like I’m going to touch her but I don’t because she’s still a little bit weird from some things that happened to her before the shelter, so we’re still working on that.”

The emotional relationships dogs and their owners share was made clear in the way people described their canine companions. As Beth put it, “[Oscar]’s my best friend, and I hope we’re together for a long time.” Rebecca sees her dog Annie as “a sister and a child at the same time.” It became clear that the people I interviewed enjoyed physically, mentally, and emotionally close relationships with their dogs. In fact, to many of the people I interviewed, dogs are close friends and even members of the family.

DISCUSSION

This research adds to the current research on dogs and their people by illustrating the important roles dogs play in the lives of their owners. Instead of focusing on only one aspect of dog ownership, this study tried to present an overall picture of what life is like for these dog owners. This kind of in-depth study has added to our understanding of the social phenomenon that is dog ownership.

The findings from this research were consistent with prior studies of the social lubrication function of dogs (e.g. Guéguen and Ciccotti 2008, Wells 2004, Veevers 1985). Dog owners tended to socialize with other dog owners, even when the activities were not explicitly dog-related. The general sentiment I heard repeated was that Missoula is a great place to own a dog, not because of services or amenities provided by the city, but because so many people own dogs and are dog-friendly.

I met dog owners from all stages of life. There were singles (both young and old), young couples, married couples with children, and “empty nesters” whose children had moved out. Many of these individuals referred to their dog as a child, or treated them as such. This is in line with the previous research of Albert and Bulcroft (1988), Archer (1997), Cain (1983), Greenebaum (2004) and Veevers (1985). All of the dog owners exhibited anthropomorphism of one form or another. This was true regardless of their marital status or the number of children they had, contrary to Albert and Bulcroft’s findings (1988).

One of the overarching themes I encountered was dog owners' desire to do right by their dogs. Owners discussed the importance of giving a home to a shelter dog or a rescue over buying one from a breeder or the pet shop. As Rebecca, Annie's person, put it, "Adopting a pet from the humane shelter instead of going to a store is probably one of the best things you can do, especially [for] older dogs. I just would say do that before you [...] go and buy a puppy from some store." Owners also stressed the importance of having enough space for their dogs, and many waited to become dog owners until they had adequate space. This shows that dog owners are aware of the best interests of dogs and try to act in that interest, despite their own desires. The dog owners I spoke with were very aware of their dog's health, safety, and wellbeing. Beth listed Rimadyle, a medicine for treating arthritis in canines, when asked about what she usually buys for her dog Oscar. She also mentioned that Oscar had ACL surgery on both of his knees, a procedure with an average cost of \$2,680 per knee (Colorado Canine Orthopedics 2011). This level and quality of care is becoming more and more common, as Americans now spend \$9.8 billion per year on veterinary services (Brady and Palmeri 2007). Owners are also concerned with how their dogs are socialized, and often list the opportunity to be around other dogs as a reason for going to the dog park. Adam, a 28-year-old, expressed his desire for his boxers Zoe and Mogli to become more comfortable around other dogs at the dog park:

Zoe isn't [...] very friendly around other dogs, and so I'm trying to get her used to dogs. That's why I'm not in the dog park yet. And that's the same with Mogli, he's still really young, so I'm getting him used to it while he's young so [he's] easy to train.

It was clear from his actions that Adam knew his dogs well. When I approached him for an interview, he was waiting outside the gate of the dog park, trying to calm Zoe and Mogli down before they went inside to meet the other dogs.

More than just attempting to explain this all-too-often overlooked phenomena, this paper poses some interesting questions. What is it about dogs that leads people to believe that they deserve to be treated well? Does this trend point to a widely-held perception that dogs have individual agency? Rights? A self? This line of thought undoubtedly needs further research to support, but one thing is clear: dog owners take the responsibility of dog ownership very seriously.

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Appendix A – Handout

From Fur Baby to Chick Magnet: A Sociological View of Dogs and their People

I am conducting in-field interviews to gather information about how people and dogs interact. This study is beneficial because it seeks to fill the lacuna in the current research by discovering the different ways people relate to their dogs, and the impact this has on their interactions with society. It will also allow you to reflect on the bond you have with your dog. This research is being conducted through the University of Montana, Department of Sociology.

With your permission, I would like to ask you a few questions about your dog. This will take approximately 15 minutes. To ensure your anonymity, I will not be asking you to identify yourself in any way or to reveal any other personal information. You are free to discontinue the interview at any time. If you have no objections, I would like to tape your interview so that I can accurately record your response. Once the responses have been transcribed and my research is completed, the tape with your recorded answers will be destroyed.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Your participation is very helpful to my research. If you have any follow up questions after the interview is over, please feel free to contact me or my faculty supervisor at any time.

Ariel Petersen
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(408) 802-8202

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Appendix B – Interview Schedule

Introduction:

Hi, my name is Ariel Petersen and I am doing research on human-dog interactions for the University of Montana, Department of Sociology. I hope to get a better understanding of how people socialize both with and through their dogs. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me.

Ask if participant is age 18 or over.

If no: Alright, thank you for your time.

If yes: Go over information sheet

(Begin recording)

Questions:

I am going to ask you some general questions. You can refuse to answer at any time.

- Let's start with some information about you. What is your age, and who are the members of your household? What is your dog's name? What kind of dog?
- Why did you bring your dog to [location] today?
- Describe the process of getting your dog.
- Why did you want a dog?
- Tell me what you like to do with your dog.
- What kinds of things do you typically buy for your dog?
- How do you feel your dog fits in to your life?
- How do you interact with your dog?
- How do other people react to you when you're with your dog?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about your dog?

I have a dog biscuit to thank you for participating. **Give biscuit to dog (with permission).**