

## Teaching Old Dogs New Luxuries

“How would you describe your dog’s temperament?” the representative from Caldecott Farms, a company that sells dog food containing horsemeat, asks two pet owners sitting in front of him. “She’s picky and nervous sometimes, but she’s very smart,” responds one potential customer. “He’s independent, knows what he likes. He’s pretty hard to fool,” responds the other. Watching this interaction, one employee from the Sterling-Cooper advertising industry remarks, “Oh my God, they’re describing themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

As portrayed in AMC’s hit television show, Mad Men, pet owners have long tended to project their own personalities, insecurities, or desires onto their dogs. The anthropomorphic tendency to assign human emotions and feelings onto our animals, is strong even today. Although this tendency has helped open the door to dog domestication and its benefits, it has also enabled media and the mad men of advertising to target and manipulate such human attachments when selling their products and services in the thriving pet pampering industry.

By giving dogs human emotions, people begin to view them as their own children, and thus are more willing to spoil and pamper them. I would argue that this bond between human and animal is reinforced during the twentieth- and twenty-first-century as people postpone parenting, have more disposable income and leisure time, or deal with empty homes and no one to take care of. In the process, these Americans redirect their energy and finances to their dogs by spending money on a variety of pet treats, clothing, services, and luxurious products to keep their furry babies happy inside and out. This idea is also shared by historian Jane Sook Jong Lee, who argues that the modern dog culture was created by a number of factors that range from the

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<sup>1</sup> "The Gypsy and the Hobo," Mad Men, first broadcast October 25, 2009 by American Movie Classics.

“influence of capitalism to the effects of living in an alienated, postmodern age.”<sup>2</sup> However, my paper differs from hers in that she focuses more on the psychological and philosophical effects pets have on their owners from around the world, and I focus more on analyzing how the rise of humanization, purchasing power and responsibilities of dogs have effected the trends and popularity of the pet industry.

Although pet-keeping in the West emerged in the nineteenth century, attitudes and sentiments toward pets were nowhere near what are seen today. As stated in Margo DeMello’s book, historian Harriet Ritvo argues that the modern pet industry emerged during a time where many Americans were indifferent to animal pain, and it was not until the “mid-twentieth century that the pet industry truly became a commoditized business.”<sup>3</sup> Author Katharine Rogers also believes that this increase in affection for dogs has intensified “the tendency to project human qualities onto these animals,” turning animals into *people*, and has caused pet owners to search in them the emotions and virtues missing in their own lives.<sup>4</sup> I support both Ritvo’s and Rogers’ arguments, but I would further focus on how the modern pet industry has developed into a more pampering, overindulgent, and luxurious one that has clearly stabilized during the early twenty-first century.

For Americans who are fortunate enough to engage and participate in this “Golden Age” or time of ideal living and prosperity for companion animals, they will feel more inclined to pamper and indulge their dogs. Supporters of this pet mania trend insist that dogs are being paid their dues for remaining loyal friends and for recognizing the increased demands placed on them. Domestic animals provide an outlet for feelings that may be unacceptable in human society, and

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Sook Jong Lee, “Both Ends of the Leash: Understanding Dog Culture” (MA thesis, Claremont Graduate University, 2006), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Katharine M. Rogers, *First Friend: A History of Dogs and Humans* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 153.

since people will never feel judged by their pets, this strengthens that bond. Also, unlike kids who will become independent and leave the home, dogs will always require protection, food, health care, and grooming their entire lives. There is a feeling of constancy in peoples' lives when caring for pets, and as a result, more willingness to spend and shower dogs with "gourmet and organic foods, spa treatments, state of the art medical care, luxurious vacations, and financial security."<sup>5</sup>

Author Elizabeth Anderson has questioned why companion animals have moved "from possession to family member," or "from the backyard to the bankbook."<sup>6</sup> She offers baby boomers, or pet owners who often tend to overindulge and have developed into empty nesters who wish to fill some sort of void in their lives, as a possible explanation for this change. As with Anderson, I believe that baby boomers played a significant role in the development of the modern pet industry, but I would further emphasize that as pet owners use animals to fill their void, they do not realize that they—not their dogs—are the ones who are actually vicariously benefitting from the thrill and enjoyment in the process.

Dogs are now also given indirect power where, through humans, they become purchasers in America. As author Kathleen Szasz argues, pets are now "the new consumers" to whom large corporations market their newest, trendiest, and healthiest array of supplies and products.<sup>7</sup> The pet products market relies on the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA) to monitor and evaluate consumer spending habits that "not only reveal how much we spend, but also the kind of people we are."<sup>8</sup> For example, as people become more health-conscious or want to look their best, they believe their furry companion needs and wants the same lifestyle.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, The Powerful Bond between People and Pets (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Szasz, Petishism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 192.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 84.

Businesses and corporations understand the profit in serving dogs through their humans and develop advertisements and luxurious products to audiences whose attitudes are reflected upon their pets. As a result, a profitable industry has grown and developed around human devotion to their companion animals, and marketers are sure not to miss a beat.

As Anderson questioned, I too want to understand the trends and reasons for the increased growth in this booming pet luxury industry that we witness in consumer America today. I would argue that the practice of anthropomorphism greatly enabled media and businesses to more easily promote, manipulate, and sell their products by portraying the needs and desires of humans onto their pets. I also believe that humans are actually the ones who are gaining enjoyment from all the pampering and purchasing, and that it is their needs and not the animals' needs that are being met. As Anderson remarks, "*who* enjoys buying the gifts? *Who* is always seen laughing at the dog park? *Who* is enjoying the drop off at the doggy day care so much?"<sup>9</sup> In this paper, I will emphasize not only the development of the modern dog industry from the 1960s to present-day, but I will also focus on the pampering, more luxurious side to the pet industry and will argue that media such as television commercials and advertisements online played and continues to play the biggest role in strengthening this pet-media frenzy.

### **The Rise of Pet-Keeping**

The role of pets has changed, and is constantly changing. Although dogs play the role of loyal best friends or loving members of the family for many Americans today, they were once regarded as living possessions, and as fighters, hunters or guards. Some dogs are still used for such purposes, and there are people who view them as simply commodities, but nevertheless they were always regarded as companions for humans. It is important to define what makes a pet

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 83.

and analyze how pet-keeping developed before the boom of the pet industry as seen in twentieth- and twenty-first-century America.

According to historian Keith Thomas, a pet during the nineteenth century was defined by three characteristics: “the animal was allowed into the house, it was given an individual name, and it was never eaten.”<sup>10</sup> However, author Katherine Grier argues that since the late nineteenth century, its definition has become more complex, that not all pets have names, nor do they all live indoors, and some do get eaten. I would argue that a pet is a companion animal that maintains a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the human. The human provides the animal with care by giving it food, contact, and shelter, where in return the animal provides the human with some function, which ranges from guarding and hunting, to being commodities that exhibit one’s wealth, to simply being companions or friends for the person.

Routines of daily life express behaviors that are rich with meanings. In the practice of pet-keeping, giving an animal special food, playing with it, taking care of it when it is ill, and allowing it to sit on a lap suggest feelings and attitudes of the owner. “So do the most momentous occasions, when pet animals are brought into the rituals of family life: having a portrait made, celebrating a holiday, or mourning a death.”<sup>11</sup> Thousands of objects that range from dog muzzles and licenses, to packages of patent medicine, to portraits and images not only “document the practice of pet-keeping but suggest a great deal about the range of relationships between people and pet animals in the past.”<sup>12</sup> Pet-keeping throughout the centuries has also helped define a pet and has, in the process, provided them with better treatment, opportunities, and rights.

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine C. Grier, Pets in America: A History (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Grier, Pets in America, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Grier, Pets in America, 75.

## *Closeness*

Advertisements and surviving artifacts signify that the ways people treated and thought about their pets have changed significantly during the modern period. For example, the first pet equipment, such as cages and collars, was primarily intended to control and restrain animals. There were also a few wealthy owners who were able to purchase decorative cages or handsome collars as a statement of their wealth. By the 1880s, pet stores, sporting good shops, and feed stores carried medicine, food, equipment, and special toys, beds, and carriers that were meant to enhance the interactions between pets and pet owners, as well as improve the lives of the animals themselves. These practices not only signify the companion animal's developing status by de-emphasizing pet items of restraint, but also signify that people interacted with their pets through their purchases.

As more people became involved with pet-keeping, they improved the animals' quality of life through their interactions. Pets have normally shared the living spaces of their owners and enjoyed the holding and cuddling and other intimate behaviors that provide closeness between pet animals and the people who own them. Such closeness is illustrated in popular photography and prints, which, since the 1880s, has made it easier to document family and friends posing, holding, or playing with animals in a family sitting room or on the front porch. The availability of new toys also reflected societal issues. For example, consumer prosperity rose and availability of once-scarce items such as rubber were renewed after World War II. Thus, by the 1950s, pet stores and department stores were carrying lines of imaginative toys made specifically for pets such as a tug-o-war exerciser, or rubber squeaky toys shaped like dog and cat heads, bones, fish, and rats.

### *Feeding One's Pet*

The practices associated with feeding pets illustrate the traditional roles they played in households to the developing new concerns of what was healthier and best for their needs. Some dogs owned by poor families were most likely as malnourished as they were, but others who were part of the middle-class family thrived on the same food that their owners had, either prepared as stews or thrown in as leftovers. Well into the twentieth century, pets were given table scraps so that no food would go to waste. Companies also began producing advertisements and booklets that informed dog owners about the consequences of bad diets and incorrect feedings. Animal welfare groups such as the American Humane Association provided free leaflets on recommended healthy dog foods. Authors such as Jacob Biggle warned readers to avoid feeding their dogs particular human foods, such as sweets or anything too greasy, but advised, as did most authors during the early twentieth century, that the best practice for dogs who had free range was table scraps.

During the early twentieth century, newspaper and magazine articles that were directed at middle-class women published information on how to improve family nutrition, which extended to their pets as well. As more women wanted to spend less time in the kitchen during the 1950s and desired canned or bagged dog food, more pet companies began targeting them, contributing to the popularity of pet food. Dog food companies knew how to appeal to women who were interested in easing the burden of housework, to the public's interest in the science of nutrition, and most of all, to the pet owners' pocketbooks and emotions. For example, Spratt's, a dog food company, contained the motto, "no trouble no cooking no mess," on one of its dog food boxes, illustrating that the early twentieth century was a time when American housewives were looking

for simplification and convenience of household routines.<sup>13</sup> Spratt's also published an advertisement that pictured a young girl feeding her German Shepherd dog. Underneath the title, "Dinner is Being Served," it describes how its dog cakes and puppy biscuits are a meatless, balanced, easily digestible, "safe, sustaining, and health-fortifying food"—qualities that are the best for a friend who is utterly devoted to the child.<sup>14</sup> Spratt's advertisement used the metaphor of the pet as being a friend, and the claim that meat-fed foods were unhealthy. By using a young girl and her dog however, the advertisement also emphasized that before the 1930s, women were the main figures to represent life at home where tasks included preparing meals for their families or taking care of their babies—fur or no fur. These examples help signify that, although advertisements were made to appeal to women based on their varying roles and expectations, routines regarding the newest member of the American middle-class family—the dog—were no different when it came to convenience, quality, and simplification.

### *Health Care*

Another way to compare pet-keeping practices over time is to examine people's efforts to maintain the general physical well-being of animals, which includes medical care. For pets that suffered from respiratory infections, pet owners were limited to home nursing or to guidance from pet shop owners. During the late nineteenth century, only a few animal specialists were concerned with the problems of "useless" pets. With limited options, pet owners were left to turn to pet shop owners, who often became the "doctors." They played the role of doctoring because they had greater experience with the diseases of small animals than vets did, and because they wrote advice and dispensed medicine for animals. Gradually, American pet owners began

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<sup>13</sup> Grier, *Pets in America*, 375.

<sup>14</sup> Advertisement for Spratt's dog food, *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 February 1927, pictured in Grier, *Pets in America*, 371.

engaging in more intensive routine care, where they increased their reliance on experts and specialists for information and the usage of commercial products to best preserve their pets' health and overall well-being.

### *Petiquettes*

Ideas of proper pet training and socialization developed alongside societal changes in American life. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s, America experienced suburbanization and women entered the workplace, causing the newly increased population of dogs to spend large amounts of time alone. Even the time they spent socializing with their owners had changed: more trotting out to a backyard, less walking on the sidewalks and experiencing new sights. During this time however, professional dog training was mostly limited to service animals, such as hunting dogs, Hollywood dogs, competition dogs, or seeing-eye dogs. Although most of these people during the 1960s had their dogs trained so as to take part in canine obedience shows and competitions, director of San Francisco's SPCA's Academy for Dog Trainers Jean Donaldson pointed out that pet training is not the same thing as competitive obedience. The idea during this time was, "once you amassed enough ribbons and trophies, you had credibility, and you proceeded to counsel people on house training or aggression."<sup>15</sup>

As seen with William Koehler, the most influential trainer of the postwar years, punitive disciplinarians and top-down approaches, or training where the human is at the highest rank and can assert dominance and command over the lesser-ranked dog, ruled the animal-training scene. His 1960s manual, Koehler Method of Dog Training, instructed people how to correct bad behavior before it became too late. One of his suggestions on how to teach a dog to heel was to "attach a fifteen-foot leash to the animal and then open the gate. If he dashes off without

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Schaffer, One Nation Under Dog, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2009), 190.

permission, run the other way. ‘He’ll come with you,’ Koehler writes, ‘if only to be near his head.’”<sup>16</sup> Donaldson observed that the top-down approach was being questioned everywhere else in America society but in the dog training world. In classrooms, critical thinking was in and rote memorization was out. During the upheavals of the 1960s, psychologists, educators, and parents increasingly realized that sparing the rod would not only help children, but also have such learning theories be applied to America’s four-legged creatures as well.

Berkeley-based veterinarian Ian Dunbar began applying this new critical framework and thinking to pets. Using B.F. Skinner’s ideas on behaviorism, Dunbar and other trainers began using positive reinforcement as the better alternative to shaping and correcting an animal. He argued that punishment was inefficient because dogs may not understand what the yank on the choke collar was supposed to mean or correct. Also, shocks to the collar were especially unsuited to an animal whose main job was to be living with the family. Dunbar took a different approach from Koehler’s and trained dogs off the leash, using the rationale that since dogs were off the leash at home, people should teach them that way as well. He wanted the training to be a fun experience, and his goal was not to teach drills, but to teach manners, which were rewarded by treats. More influential than his classes were the circulating videos that demonstrated how shock collars should be ditched and good deeds should be associated with swift rewards instead. “‘It was such a revolution,’ declared Donaldson, ‘positive training is such a juggernaut now, you don’t realize how new it was.’”<sup>17</sup> This new form of training and the rise in intensity of food and health care concerns for pets help illustrate that as people became closer to their companion animals through pet-keeping, they began to elevate their pets to higher statuses, standards, and expectations.

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<sup>16</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 189.

<sup>17</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 191.

## Pets Have Rights Too

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, authors of training advice used metaphors of “civilizing” and “educating” animals. The idea of civilization comes from one of the guiding principles of Victorianism in America, where the “raising” of an underdeveloped mind would in turn create better, more cultivated members of society. Popular writings demonstrated that this principle may be extended to pets, and that the best and happiest pets were those that were fully developed due to the “thoughtful cultivation of its physical characteristics and mental powers by a human being.”<sup>18</sup> Educating dogs was seen as the human’s duty and reflected not only credit, but also usefulness to his master.

Such mentality made it acceptable for people to view dogs as living possessions without relatable feelings or emotions. For example, when rabies among dogs became a public concern during the early nineteenth century, fear of this malady led to “campaigns every summer during which stray or wandering dogs were shot or clubbed by working class men or boys for bounty payments.”<sup>19</sup> Dog laws during this time also made it acceptable for police officers to shoot strays or dogs that bit anyone, where the only way owners could protect their dogs was by using muzzles and collars, signaling both harmlessness and ownership. However, such treatment, due to the gain in popularity of the Ethic of Kindness, which will be discussed in the next section, was beginning to be frowned upon.

### *Ethic of Kindness*

Author Lydia H. Sigourney published *Letters to Mothers* in 1838; this book included instructions on training young children through an ethical code of infancy and made them

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<sup>18</sup> Grier, *Pets in America*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Grier, *Pets in America*, 116.

directly responsible for the welfare and treatment of others. This lesson, which Sigourney called kindness to all, captured a complicated but powerful set of ideas that made a lasting impact on the history of family relationships in America, general animal treatment, and pet-keeping, where its rudiments are best taught by the humane treatment of animals. This kindness was a basic rule for living and was changing the way some people began treating animals in the nineteenth century, when cruelty was commonplace in everyday life. “Thoughtless cruelty to an animal was an outward expression of inward moral collapse, and if unchecked, would predictably lead to antisocial tendencies as an adult.”<sup>20</sup> The only cure was to socialize children to self-consciously practice humane treatment to animals.

The Ethic of Kindness’s second principle, that animals deserved special care because they were able to feel physical pain and could express feelings such as distress, joy, and love to any living being, helped foster and shape animal welfare organizations during the late nineteenth century. The Ethic increased people’s self-consciousness about animal treatment and care and justified new ways to interacting with animals. Even though it developed during a time when human life was dependent on animal labor and the products of their bodies, and during a time when almost everyone accepted that humans had the right and responsibility of being in charge of all the world’s creatures, the Ethic propelled that important step forward in the concern for animals’ well-being. Kind treatment included helping those that needed humane care to thrive, encouraging active stewardship and allowing families to express their kindness through pet-keeping. Most importantly, it allowed Americans to think and understand animals as individuals. By using metaphors of and giving animals voices, animal education programs and welfare organizations were able to transform them into identifiable victims who were also part of the family.

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<sup>20</sup> Grier, Pets in America, 165.

### *Humane Groups*

With the influence of the Ethic of Kindness, more humane groups and laws protecting animals were formed. The Animal Welfare Institute in New York, for example, specializes in lobbying and preparing animal protection bills. In 1966, sixty-two bills involving animals were introduced into the New York State legislature, where four were enacted as laws. One of those laws makes it unlawful for any laboratory or institution to purchase any cat or dog for experimental purposes unless that seller provides proof of ownership over the animal. Another law makes cockfighting, bullfighting, and dog fighting—highly popular and dangerous activities—illegal in New York. It further outlaws the baiting of an animal or the causing of it to be in combat either with another person or animal.

In 1981, psychologists were the first to create a professional organization that was dedicated to examining and improving the treatment and care of non-human animals. The Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PSYETA), renamed Society and Animals Forum in 2004, was responsible for the research publication, *Society and Animals Journal of Human-Animal Studies*. In 2005, it also merged with The Institute for Animals and Society to create The Animal and Society Institute, an independent, non-profit educational and research organization that promotes the study of animal-human relationships and the status of animals in public policies. Animal laws before the twentieth century tended to focus more on pets as property, but with the ideology of kindness that deemed animal cruelty as a bad example for kids and a blight on human morality, they were becoming seen as living creatures with an elevated status. The Ethic of Kindness not only influenced people to engage in better pet-keeping and

treatment but it also made it easier for pet companies to sell to customers through this newly developed and humanized mentality of companion animals.

### **Trading up: New Consumers**

As Americans continued to elevate the status of their beloved pets, they also increased their needs, desires, and privileges. Companion animals have not only worked their way into the hearts and homes of their owners, but also into their wallets as well. In a relatively short amount of time, America has become a land of doggie yoga, a world of frequent flier miles for traveling companions, and a society where one's inability to find a puppy sitter is a perfectly acceptable excuse to skip out on a dinner invitation. Every day luxuries that were once unimaginable now seem "de rigueur. Yesteryear's table scraps have been replaced by this year's home-delivered doggie dinners."<sup>21</sup> Welcome to the modern-day U.S., where pets have moved out of their backyard doghouses and into their bigger, American homes to be inside with their families.

When the editor of *Pet Dealer* magazine proclaimed its motto in the 1920s, "a pet in every home," he was not only thinking about the profit in the animals themselves, but also in the even more profitable aspects of its business in supplies and equipment. These were the products that capitalized on the desire of pet owners to care well for their purchased animals. Although there were a few items such as cages and dog collars that had been manufactured for centuries, Grier states that it was between 1840-1940 when "pet-keeping gradually supported production and sale of an elaborate array of products and a select group of services intended to enhance the experience of pet ownership and improve the well-being of pets themselves."<sup>22</sup> Pets were workers, family members, friends, and purchased goods, but through their owners, they also became American consumers.

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<sup>21</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Grier, *Pets in America*, 353.

## *Petpreneurs*

Because Americans today love and treat dogs as their own children, businesses are creating advertisements that target that specific audience. For example, pet food advertisements in the past were about the rational, economic benefits or the science behind the food, but now, they target that emotional connection. Due to the highly skilled brainwashing techniques that American advertising industries use as well as the affluence of the victims whose minds they subconsciously manipulate, American pet-lovers have the highest number of pets and invest the most on them, creating a new pet consumer. Through their owners, dogs are given indirect, spending power to purchase items and services that had once seemed foolish but are now considered commonplace. Just as humans, dogs are getting everything from frequent flyer miles to organic foods and snacks to pampering spa and hotel services. The pet consumer is a strong power that targets a specific audience as seen in America and illustrates that what people spend on their pets is a reflection of how far they are willing to go for those they love and care for.

Clever pet businesses not only help people find solutions to their problems with their companion animals, but they also make them aware of problems they did not even know existed. In order to help transform animals into conscious purchasers, America's advertising industry invented techniques that would make pet owners more inclined to buy their products. For example, electrical and synthesizing reproduction of the harmonies and tones of the dog whistle were used at the beginning of dog-food commercials. Although this sound is inaudible to most adults, "tests have shown that urban middle-class and alert country dogs react to it with tail wagging" and barking, causing pet owners, who witness them reacting happily or noisily to the commercial, to be more likely to purchase the product being advertised for their companions.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Szasz, Petishism, 208.

Such humanization of pets has brought this boom to the pet industry, and business leaders and marketers are doing all that they can through advertising and new products to encourage and maintain it. Manufacturers of pet services, foods, and accessories today have the same mentalities as those during the 1960s: “the more pets are humanized, the more they will become part of the family, and therefore the more their owners will presumably spend on them.”<sup>24</sup> This theory is seen most clearly in pet food advertisements and commercials, whose slogans are drilled into the viewers’ minds through repetition. Gaines Dog Food Company, for example, spent millions of dollars on advertising and scrutinized every word of its advertisements to ensure that its message was clear: “feed your dog like a member of the family.”<sup>25</sup> One of its 1970s commercials featured a young boy searching for a puppy to take care of, where the narrator says, “just an ordinary dog, until he becomes your dog, and then you want to do a little more for him.”<sup>26</sup> By emphasizing that the dog is *yours*, Gaines is able to make the product more personal and encourage the viewer to do something special for his or her dog by choosing Gravy Train dog food. Having the commercial feature a young boy not only symbolizes that he is training to take care of his future family by being able to provide for them, but it also relates back to the Ethic of Kindness where children are developed into better, moralistic beings through their treatment and raising of pets in a humane way.

### *Reflecting Americans’ Trends*

Almost any trend in human consumerism will find its way into the animal market. For example, the national fascination for puppy-toting celebrities became popular and pet carriers

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<sup>24</sup> Berkeley Rice, *The Other End of the Leash*, (Little, Brown and Company Limited, 1968), 237.

<sup>25</sup> Rice, *The Other End*, 237.

<sup>26</sup> “Vintage Old 1970’s Gaines Gravy Train Dog Food Commercial,” YouTube, last modified 23 July 2013, accessed 15 March 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOXSKR7wM2U>.

and pet strollers became the hottest rage in 2006 and 2007. One year after that, amidst fears about nutritional and environmental health, it was about going green, causing companies to label their food, treat, and toy brands with words such as natural, organic, or holistic. Advertisements used to promote pet supplies and equipment illustrate how the changing perception of animals' needs often paralleled humans' needs. By following human trends, the pet industry is able to anthropomorphize, or place human feelings and emotions onto companion animals, and better appeal to this target audience and make the pet industry an ultimately recession-proof one. Such ongoing conversations among consumers, manufacturers, and storeowners are best seen in the diet, medical, toy and accessory, and fashion industries.

The advertisements or commercials of pet foods and the nutrition behind them normally reflected the owners' personal diet efforts or new attitudes towards pet-keeping in America. As dog owner Jenny Schlueter remarked in 2011, as she became more interested in her health and healthy dieting, she also became interested in her pet's health. She tries to feed her pets organic whenever possible and avoids additives, by-products, or meats that would not be considered human-grade. Schlueter further concludes that "she spends as much on food for the dog and cats as she does on herself and her partner," illustrating that purchases for companion animals are not only a reflection of how much people are willing to spend on their pets, but also—and more importantly—a reflection of the pet owners' own needs and desires.<sup>27</sup>

Other examples of how human trends have made their way into the pet market include pill-popping and cosmetic purchasing. Improving the quality of canine diets encouraged advertising for food supplements and vitamins for dogs, sharing qualities with those that were intended for humans. As with pet owners, their pets have joined in on pill swallowing where they

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<sup>27</sup> Leonor Vivanco, "Top Shelf Pet Food: Some Chicago Owners are Feeding Pets as Well as—or Better than—Themselves," Chicago Tribune, 24 August 2011, 2.

receive their daily vitamins, their antibiotics and aspirins, their cough syrup and cod-liver oil pills, their sea and airsickness pills, and their calcium and digestive aids. They are provided with deodorants, shampoos, his and her perfumes, or hair coloring to give graying pets a younger look. Furthermore, some cosmetic companies such as “OPI, a manufacturer of premier nail products, and John Paul Mitchell Systems, one of the fastest growing privately owned hair care firms in the country,” have added pet products to their lines, offering either nail polish or grooming items for America’s dogs.<sup>28</sup>

### *Stylish Person, Stylish Pet*

Many trends in the pet business are about their humans, and when it comes to fashion, a stylish pet is a key accessory. Pet fashion week director Alexa Cach states that pets are styled based on trend visions, where what is going on in the fashion industry should also be reflected in what the pet industry should be doing. As seen in today’s fashion world of the pet industry, dog clothes normally followed the fashions in human outward. “The accessory dog needed its own accessorizing,” which was exemplified in the early 1960s by Chihuahuas and miniature poodles who wore faux fur coats, woolen coats with fur collars, and colored leather collars that were decorated with glass gems, “to parallel the clothing of a certain kind of fashionable woman to a remarkable degree.”<sup>29</sup>

Accessories that were initially meant to restrain and label dogs are now used to turn dogs into chic dressers, just like their status and fashion conscious owners. While many of the leashes, harnesses, and collars sold in pet stores are still practical and simple, many others are fashionable and decorative. Whether or not dogs enjoyed their new possessions, such purchasing was one

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Grier, Pets in America, 405.

way that some modern owners exhibited America's growing consumer society as well as expressed their feelings about their dogs, which includes their desire that pets be as fashionably dressed as their own selves.

Upgrading the American pet's wardrobe and accessories also demonstrates their upgraded status. Designers appeal to those who want their pets to be as stylish as they are. For example, Janet Lee creates pet carriers that look like high-end, couture handbags. These handbags are meant to appear more as pocketbooks than as pet carriers, further illustrating the idea that pets have moved from backyards to bankbooks and how much pet owners are willing to spend. Lee remarked that her business makes about \$1 million per year and further concludes that, "in a country living beyond its means, pets' accessories are part of the same spiral of human gluttony."<sup>30</sup> Not only does her statement signify the pet's upgraded status, but it also supports how America is a consumer society where many Americans excessively spend not just on themselves but also on their dogs to signify wealth and class. Lee's statement also reveals that celebrities help set pet trends. Ten years ago, people never thought about carrying their dogs around with them wherever they go, and especially not in a fashionable way where the dog's main role was as an accessory. When celebrities began carrying their dogs, everyone else began thinking about carrying them and taking part in the pet-friendlying of America as well.

Such examples demonstrate that dogs not only became involved with the fashion system and its trends, but were also treated as luxury consumer items. Sociologist and critic Thorstein Veblen criticized that the fashion and styles of companion dogs were due to affluent Americans participating in conspicuous consumption, a term he used to describe the way people spent money to socially compete with others in society, and to describe their ostentatious displays of wealth and status. This theory may certainly be applied to pet dogs, who, to Veblen, "take up

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<sup>30</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 62.

time and serve no useful purpose and, as a consequence, their value to their owners lie chiefly in their utility as items of conspicuous consumption.”<sup>31</sup> I agree with Veblen that the role of pets in this situation supports how Americans are guilty of conspicuous consumption, but I also feel that it also signifies a difference in the way people form their identities. During the nineteenth century, many people were identified by their families or by their communities, but now during the twentieth century, more people are breaking away to make new identities for themselves. Living in a consumer society, Americans are more inclined to purchase certain items or clothing for their companions in order to express some form of individuality and to make a statement about themselves to others. Although the role of pets has changed from function to more symbolic accessories, these dogs still play a psychological role for many people. Not only do the new outlook and use of pets demonstrate that the purpose and status of pets have changed, but they also support the idea that pets play the role of filling a void for some pet owners, where in this case would be to help them feel better about their public appearance and image and to present their status and wealth.

#### *Pampered Products for Our Pampered Pooches*

Carlos Tribino, marketing vice president for Isle of Dogs, a luxury brand company, stated that the industry is driven by high-income earners. The childless and wealthy are the market for new, fancy pet boutiques with names such as Rex and the City, Bonejour, or Chic Petique. Pet products that were considered “upscale” increased from 19% to 43% from 2002 and 2006, illustrating where things are headed for the pet market. In 2006, Craig Rexford, publishers of the trade journal *Pet Business*, went ahead of this trend by creating *Pet Elite*, a high-end and luxury spin off of his previous journal. While featuring a tiara-wearing French bulldog on one of its

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<sup>31</sup> Iris Nowell, *The Dog Crisis*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 16.

covers, the magazine declared itself as “the only business publication written exclusively for luxury pet product buyers.”<sup>32</sup>

Upscale firms are returning the favor through their branding and advertising efforts, which they hope, will pull more customers into the luxury-pet world. For example, groomers are encouraged to transform to survive. Women make most of the spending decisions today and, because they are used to going to spas, they will not want to take their pets to smelly, noisy groomers. In the process, groomers have been transformed into stylists, and pet boutiques have understood customers’ desire to stand out, as well as their desire to nurture. Marketing consultant Vicki Lynn Morgan understood that purchasing is “normally based on emotion, which is justified on logic,” and it is up to the companies to figure out and understand who the customer is and to provide him or her with the logic that fits.<sup>33</sup>

### *Buying Your Pet’s Happiness*

During the twentieth century, the U.S. developed into a consumer society, or a society where the purchasing abilities and needs of people drive the economy. This enabled practices of pet-keeping to help produce a trends toward growth and innovation in new objects, and other pet toys that reflected owners’ desires to give their animals happiness and pleasure. “The makers of these goods encouraged owners to give pets Christmas gifts of special foods, new clothes, and toys, just as they presented such gifts to family members,” revealing the increasing complexity of feelings and obligations that pet owners had toward their animals.<sup>34</sup>

At the Pet Food Institute in Chicago, it was stated in a study comparing 1957-1967 status pet foods demonstrated that the dollar value of pet foods grew by 85 percent and the number of

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<sup>32</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 69.

<sup>33</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Grier, *Pets in America*, 359.

new items by 61 percent. Also, “according to a 1966 compilation by the Chase Manhattan bank, New York, Americans spend over \$3 billion annually on their dogs: food, \$550 million; clothes and accessories, \$450 million; purchase of dogs, \$700 million; licensing fee, \$150 million; shots, \$150 million, vet fees, \$600 million; misc., \$400 million.”<sup>35</sup> The amount of pet products purchased has doubled between 1994 and 2004 from \$17 billion to \$34.4 billion, and approximately \$50 billion is predicted to be spent annually on these products. Furthermore, the APPMA website states that the total number of pet expenditures for 2014 in the U.S. is estimated at \$58.5 billion, with food expenditures being the highest at \$22.62 billion. When compared to the total pet expenditures at \$17 billion in 1994 to \$34.4 billion in 2004, the amount of money spent to comfort and keep pets happy will only be increasing.

### *Medical Care*

As proper pet-keeping and popularity in improving the treatment of America’s companion animals continued to rise, so did the veterinary and medical businesses. Many people are willing to risk so much on behalf of their canine companions, contributing to the growth and metamorphosis of the veterinary profession over the past generation. Even after the postwar pet boom, dog-oriented practices only represented a small piece of the business and veterinarians dealt with a largely rural lot. However, as the profession’s focus changed to pets, veterinarians understood that they were no longer dealing with clients who viewed their animals as economic units but instead dealing with those who “loved their animals for their own sakes and proved increasingly willing to act on that love by ordering up previously unimaginable medical interventions.”<sup>36</sup> As stated in a 2012 newspaper article, veterinarian Dr. Dick Patrick remarked

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<sup>35</sup> Szasz, Petishism, 194.

<sup>36</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 89.

that his profession was recession-proof because “people will starve before their animals starve,” and the owner of Patrick Veterinary Clinic stated that “money makes no difference when it comes to pets. We have become so attached to our animals, and we want to do everything we possibly can to keep them healthy and live longer.”<sup>37</sup> The success of veterinary medicine leads to even more growth opportunities since, like America’s humans, America’s pets are also living longer. Similar to the idea about dog behavior and dog food, now there is the question of why this type of care or treatment for people should not be made available for their pets as well.

The real drivers for this spending are the dogs’ owners, whose personal medical experiences shape what they feel is right for their dogs. Currently, American pet owners spend about \$10 billion every year on veterinary bills. The fact that veterinary health insurance plans for pets has increased by 27 percent each year between 2003 and 2008 is one example that demonstrates the upgraded status of pets that is closer to humans’. VPI, the largest pet insurance firm states that only 1 percent of pets had policies in 2000, but has grown to 5-7 percent by 2010. It also states that the pet insurance field has become crowded with competitors, including PetFirst in 2010, PetsBest in 2005, and Wharton School, Embrace Pet Insurance and Petplan USA in 2006 and 2007, solidifying the growth of the pet industry to include insurance plans and other services that are similar to those offered to people.

### *Hospitality*

Because pets are becoming substitutes for people, most services available to humans are now available to their furry companions. If pet owners need haircuts, clothes, schools, medical services, baby sitters, and hotels, so do their pets. America transformed into a service economy

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<sup>37</sup> John McDermott, “U.S. pet spending surpasses \$50 billion,” The Post and Courier, 17 June 2012, F1.

around the same time it became a land full of pet parents and fur babies. Between 1998 and 2006, the number of people working in the nonfarm animal industry had increased from 100,000 to 400,000. Customers have spent \$4 billion on services, up from \$2 billion in 2000. The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics Issued a report in 2007 that pet owners with disposable income are expected to increasingly purchase boarding services, training services, grooming services, and veterinary services, resulting in more jobs for animal services and care workers. Furthermore, as more pets are considered part of the family, the demand for luxury animal services and willingness of people to spend greater amounts of money on them should only continue to increase.

Taking dogs to the grooming parlors or having them smell pleasant signifies not just Americans' spending habits but also the changed place of animals in domestic life. It does not matter what the dog smells like outside in the backyard, but it becomes a different story once he moves into the home. Advertisements or comic strips from the 1920s, such as in the comic "Uncle Elby Befriends a Lonesome Dog," almost always displayed dogs outside near their doghouses or on leashes, but have gradually changed, with the biggest shifts occurring between the 1960s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> By 2003, about 47 percent of pet owners stated that their pets slept with them in their beds at night, and that about "13% of dogs were recorded to have spent their nights outdoors in 2006."<sup>39</sup> Also, in 2004 alone, 326 new grooming tools and products were released and, because washing one's dog's hair is considered more cumbersome than washing one's own, it also encouraged a spike in the industry for professional pet groomers.

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<sup>38</sup> Clifford McBride, "Uncle Elby Befriends a Lonesome Dog," Los Angeles Times, 12 May 1929, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 170.

## *The Pet Food Industry*

The first piece of the modern pet economy to solidify it as a truly significant business was the U.S. pet-food industry. “As early as 1941, though most pets still ate human leftovers, pet food sales amounted to \$50 million—\$731 million in 2008,” and by 2007, sales valued at \$16.2 billion.<sup>40</sup> The dog food industry began when a man named James Spratt traveled to England in 1850 and saw a group of dogs eating hardtack, the tough and cheap biscuits that were carried by sailors. While still in England, Spratt unveiled his patented Meat Fibrine Dog Cakes in 1860. These treats were made of vegetables, wheat, beef blood, and beetroot, ingredients that “embraced the dubious science and lightly regulated hucksterism of their era.”<sup>41</sup> He further counseled that meat would overheat the blood in dogs, ignoring that they were traditionally carnivores. Nevertheless, Spratt established patterns that hold true in today’s pet-food industry: pet food is a reflection of the era’s vogues in people food. For example, life after World War 2 brought on a TV-dinner era, so the selling point was shifted to convenience for housewives. As one Kasco advertisement questioned, why bother cooking special foods that were time-consuming and unnecessary when it takes less than one minute to prepare our dog food? In 1957, Ralston Purina released the first kibble called Dog Chow. This dry food “could now be sold in bulk and stored almost indefinitely and, as an indication of how pet food had become a middle class staple, it also became the first dog food sold in supermarkets rather than pet specialty stores.”<sup>42</sup>

As for our era, pet food has become “a front in the new diet wars” where the implicit messages carried by their packaging and advertising has created a “vehicle for social

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<sup>40</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 205.

<sup>41</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 205.

<sup>42</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 206.

differentiation among pet owners.”<sup>43</sup> No longer were there appeals to convenience, as witnessed during the 1950s, but instead promises of specific wellness and pure ingredients for pets. Beginning with the rise of Hill’s Science Diet and Iams brands in the 1970s, pet-food customers found themselves sorting through multiple upscale lines that offered lavish array of promises, ranging from hormone-free ingredients, to human-grade meat. With the passage of Florida’s “Doggie Dining Bill” signed in 2006, dog owners were now allowed to bring their pets to restaurants to dine alfresco. Dogs and dog lovers could now have “a brewski together, have a hot dog together, or whatever they want outdoors.”<sup>44</sup> The bill was a classic response to hospitality, where pet owners wanted to go everywhere with their animals.

The pet food industry may be fairly young, but it learned fast. According to *Pet Mass Marketing*, a trade magazine, “the manufacturing of pet foods today is a science. Not only did these manufacturers learn how to make the food, they also learned how to market and sell it.”<sup>45</sup> It is essential to find out not who uses the product, but who buys it, and for pet food, it is the pet owners whom the industry needs to appeal to. Food producers in turn have catered to peoples’ practice of attributing human tastes onto their pets.

### **The Real Beneficiaries of the Golden Age**

Some companion animals in America are living in a Golden Age period—a time of ideal living, good fortune, and prosperity. As the metamorphosis from animal to substitute human strengthened, many pets experience luxuries that make even some *people* envious. This development was, at first, slow and barely noticeable, but the three factors that sped this process up were affluence, leisure, and growing alienation of Americans living in the U.S.

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<sup>43</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 206.

<sup>44</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 230.

<sup>45</sup> Lee Edwards Benning, *The Pet Profiteers*, (New York, NY: The New York Times Book Co., 1976), 63.

There are multiple cultural and social factors that account for this burst of interest and attention in the ever-expanding pet industry. One reason includes changing demographics where pets are becoming child substitutes as many Americans postpone marriage or have children at a later time in their lives, as stated in a newspaper article: “young married couples are having children later. The dog is a child substitute...in the last twenty years, your dog has become more a part of the family.”<sup>46</sup> Another is that pets are filling voids as some Americans find themselves experiencing divorce, loneliness, or what is known as the “empty nest syndrome,” where people living in empty homes desire to care for other living beings. Prosperity and consumerism in America also lead both men and women to spend more on the things they care about, including keeping pets, and allow them to indulge on their animals just as they would indulge in nice shows or expensive restaurant meals.

The APPMA reported that pet industry sales for 2004 totaled \$34.4 billion, illustrating that pet-keeping today is shaped by our past history, by our ability to use our disposable income as we want, by demographic changes, and by our human desire for novelty. As stated by APPMA president Bob Vetere in a 2010 newspaper article, “we look to thank our pets in a way that is meaningful to us in human terms. That is reflected in the things we buy our pets.”<sup>47</sup> For many Americans, pet-keeping may reflect their desire not to be bored or to find pleasure in their daily lives, offering owners a special bond or contact that cannot be achieved or found elsewhere in modern-day America.

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<sup>46</sup> Peter Bothum, “Pet Project Owners Pamper their Pricey Pets,” York Newspaper Company, 19 September 2000, D01.

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Fleming, “Wealthy Minn. Residents Treat their Pets to Luxury,” St. Paul Pioneer Press, 10 September 2010.

## *Isolation*

Author Kathleen Szasz believes that alienation produced the rapid breakdown in human relationships and placed more value and emphasis on human-animal ones. University of Pennsylvania professor James Serpell argues that the increasing number of Americans who gets pets is due to the crumbling of other social support systems. “‘Social networks fragmented over forty years—there’s more living alone, more divorce, more childless people, fewer people living in close geographic range of their families, and less community involvement,’ Serpell says. ‘and there has been a dramatic increase in pets...as we lose social support, as our relations become fragmented, we are using dogs to fill the gap.’”<sup>48</sup>

Author Berkeley Rice points out that some of America’s most striking sociological characteristics are its fragmentation of family units and the mobility of its population. With the sharp rise in single family housing, with children no longer living near or with their parents, and with the average young couple moving every couple of years, it is no wonder that this increasingly mobile population finds it easy to substitute companionship in their pets. Also according to Rice, most of the pet activities during the late 1960s were in California, near fast-growing suburbs or near Los Angeles. By 1966, California itself had more pets, pet shops, kennels, and pet clubs than the rest of the Western U.S. combined, and more than half of the fifty largest dog shows took place there. Although there are many Californians and other Americans who are now using pets to replace human interactions and cope with loneliness, the majority of American pets still belong to families with children and friends as well. Either way, the humanizing trend in these animals is unmistakably clear, and there are few reasons to believe it will change anytime soon. By giving our companion animals names, we are able to speak to

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<sup>48</sup> Schaffer, One Nation, 33.

them as we would do with our friends and family, and strengthen that emotional attachment and interaction.

### *Anthropomorphism*

A 2008 article in Chicago determined that subjects who were not socially connected were more likely to anthropomorphize, or place human characteristics such as sympathy, thoughtfulness, and consideration, onto their pets. Such a tendency to anthropomorphize helps the industry sell everything from doggy sweaters to catered birthday puppy parties. Animals also provide humans a way to overcome modern isolation, by giving them the assurance that they will always be there to greet them at the door once they come home from work. There is no doubt that there are some Americans who have an “irrational desire to shower status symbols on animals who remain wonderfully unconcerned with any cosmopolitan pecking order.”<sup>49</sup>

Once large pet businesses realized that the human market of consumption could be extended to the domestic animal one, they were able to anthropomorphize, or place human feelings or emotions onto the pet. This allows pet companies and marketers to manipulate and make the consumer first purchase what he needs, second what he believes he needs, and third what to do to make him believe what he needs. Such techniques signify the deeper understanding that “beneath the interest in the industry and behind each company’s marketing strategies is Americans’ changing relationships with their pets” to one that is more humanized.<sup>50</sup>

Szasz also argues that many people will anthropomorphize a pet animal, but believes that parents are more inclined to do so when they are disappointed in their children and are unable to take responsibility for the way their children turned out. Widows and widowers or married

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<sup>49</sup> Schaffer, *One Nation*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Jo Feldstein, “When it comes to Making Pet Food...It’s Dog Eat Dog,” *Pulitzer, Inc.*, 14 January 2005, C1.

couples whose children have either grown up or left the home, “often adopt pet animals to fill their empty lives. If for one reason or other they feel guilty toward their children, they are apt to make up for their real or imaginary failures by overindulging, over-spoiling, their pets.”<sup>51</sup>

There are many people who have no children and desire parenthood, and many whose children have grown and left them only with the memory of and desire for small children in the house. This encourages Americans to adopt pet animals and promote them to the rank of children, developing a child-parent relationship between pets and humans—a phenomenon generally accepted in the western countries. Another reason that makes it easier for dog owners to anthropomorphize their pets is that “nothing people can do will embarrass their pets, and therefore people need not feel embarrassed themselves,” signifying that domestic animals have “no need for pretense and instead provide an outlet for feelings that are not fully accepted in human society.”<sup>52</sup>

### *Fur Babies*

Companion animals normally hold the specific role within the family—that of a young child or an infant. Companion dogs are well suited to be treated as a child because they are, for the most part, eternal “babies” who will require protection, healthcare, grooming, and food their entire lives. People coddle them as they would with children, appealing to their need to nurture. Author Alan Beck further makes the statement:

Family members are devoted to each other; we rescue our animals and we believe that our animals are capable of rescuing us. When the animal greets you at the door after work, sits with you on the couch to watch TV after supper,

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<sup>51</sup> Szasz, Petishism, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Szasz, Petishism, 211.

perhaps sleeps next to or near you, and is taken into consideration when you plan your vacations, grocery shopping, and daily routine, that animal is family.<sup>53</sup>

Many Americans also extend privileges or tolerate behavior from their animals that they would not offer to their children because dogs provide people with constancy. They will always be there when the human child is mad and not talking to his or her parents, or has left home. The animal baby will never grow up and leave home, nor will this baby ever withdraw or barter with affection. Instead, the human will always remain the center of this fur child's world, and that child will practically do everything he or she wants forever. With the fur baby, pet parents will experience true, unconditional love. As reported in a 2005 newspaper article, "Americans spent an estimated \$34.4 billion on products for their pets last year. That's more than they spent on candy or toys for their children."<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates how some American fur babies are given extended privileges and expenses that exceed those for American human babies.

Pets should enjoy a life full of attention and love, after all, the term "pet" does mean "spoiled child," deriving from the French term *petite* and developing to mean anything that was indulged. The fact that most Americans consider their dogs as their children may help explain some of the reasons why they pamper and spoil them to the extent that we witness today. A companion animal fulfills the function of providing social support and being a friend, and the dog has a legendary ability of being a friend to the friendless. "An extensive body of research, dating back to the late 1970s, documents the importance of social support, and for many people, an animal either is that support or supplements other social relationships."<sup>55</sup> Dogs have become so embedded into our world today that they do not have any other place to call home, so much so that the human world has become the dog's accustomed environment.

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Feldstein, "It's Dog Eat Dog," Pulitzer, Inc, 14 January 2005, C1.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 67.

## *Affluence and Leisure*

Dogs have easily become more embedded into the human world partly due to the rise of the American middle class and its values. This trend was slow and coming, but the mass interest in pet-keeping began after the First World War, with the change in family. When families began to disperse—grandparents sent off to nursing homes, children searched for fortunes out in the cities—pets began to play substitutes for the missing family members. Pets help people cope with changing lifestyles because they remain a constant, stable figure. For many, pets satisfy a person’s emotional needs and offer unconditional love and companionship. They offer the happiness of not having to come home to an empty house but to an eager welcome from a dog that demonstrates how much he or she has missed you.

It is important to note not just the money Americans spend on their pets, but also what they buy for them. As Anderson writes:

We shower our companion animals with gourmet and organic foods, spa treatments, state of the art medical care, luxurious vacations, and financial security. It is all part of the package that comes with being a member of the family, which is how 75% of people with dogs feel about their dogs, according to an American Animal Hospital Association poll in 2003.<sup>56</sup>

According to that same poll, 39% of companion animals have human names, reflecting their new status. One would most likely not be introduced to many Spots or Rovers anymore, but to a Madison, Ginger, Sam, or Cody instead. “Giving dogs human names also serves to de-animalize them, making it easier to assign them human-like characteristics and personalities.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *Powerful Bond*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Lee, “Both Ends of the Leash,” 16.

But why have we witnessed more companion animals moving from the backyard to bankbook, from possession to children, than ever before? One possible explanation is that this indulgent treatment of companion animals comes from “baby boomers—with all their famous boomer money and infamous reputation for self-(and extended self) indulgence and excess—are increasingly becoming empty nesters.”<sup>58</sup> People who postpone parenting or those without children also seem to be redirecting their time, energy, and income to their animals. They enjoy spending money on all kinds of things in order to keep their companion animals happy inside and out. Baby boomers are more easily targeted because they have the reputation of setting social and cultural trends and of unprecedented narcissism. Other proponents who support the dog pampering trend and industry also argue that companion animals, dogs in particular, are simply getting paid their dues. “They say it is high time we gave our companions the respect and privileges they have earned by being our constant companions and in recognition of the increasing demands that we are placing on them.”<sup>59</sup>

According to Vetere, the most dramatic and real boom in the pet industry came between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 2007, 70% of pet services and products were purchased by households without kids, an increase from 45% in 2000, and survey statistics from 2001 also show that 83% of American pet owners call themselves their animal’s “daddy” or “mommy,” jumping from 55% in 1995. Many baby boomers are getting pets to replace their children who have gone to college or have left home. Empty nests of baby boomers do play a significant role in the modern pet boom because they are searching for ways to gain the affection and love that they used to receive from their children. Veterinarian Dr. Jessica Vogelsang also

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<sup>58</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 83.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 83.

adds that “in the past, children were a reflection of us, and people are now extending that to their pets.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Reflecting American Consumerism*

A lucrative and expanding industry has developed around peoples’ devotion to their companion animals. Established businesses and those interested in the industry use the APPMA to monitor consumer habits. Since 1988, it has been publishing and collecting comprehensive consumer data, including buying habits, detailed demographics, and other characteristics of people with dogs, cats, birds, fish, reptiles, and horses. The data is compiled every other year into the *APPMA National Pet Owners Survey*, the most reliable and respected source of its kind. For instance, Anderson writes how it “reported that pet owners are health conscious, like to look our best, and like to exercise with our pet. We are also happy and maintain a well-organized home.”<sup>61</sup> Its survey from 2005 also found that 80% of dog people bought them gifts. These gifts were also not given just on special occasions but also given to them for no special reason at all, with the average price being about \$17. APPMA president Vetere also states that people felt it was not enough to reward and to refer to their animals as pets, that they needed to be rewarded as humans because that’s what makes *them* happy.

Although dogs are being pampered and treated to more luxurious services, their owners are actually the ones benefiting and having their needs satisfied. After all, dogs are simple creatures who do not *need* these pink sweaters, these over-the-top birthday parties, or aromatherapy. People project their needs onto their pets, and what they do has more to do with them than with their pets. Author Jon Katz warns Americans that they are “crossing a line that

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<sup>60</sup> Sue Manning, “Products for Pampered Pets,” [The Tribune San Luis Obispo](#), 15 March 2014, B5.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, [Powerful Bond](#), 84.

ultimately puts too much pressure on our companion animals to fill our emotion needs.”<sup>62</sup> In the process, they are damaging dogs by inhibiting them to be who they really are. Other experts agree with his criticism and fear that Americans are depending too much on their animals to be the *people* they treat and want them to be. Projecting peoples’ needs onto their pets can thus be attributed partly to our capitalist culture; a society that favors consumerism enables Americans to buy what they lack, be it shelter and food or—as is normally the case with pets and companion animals—identities and virtues. This further illustrates how increasingly alienated Americans have become from society, and how many of them rely on their pets now more than ever before in order to fill that sense of isolation and gain a sense of true companionship.

### **Conclusion**

Although practiced for many years, pet-keeping as we understand it did not really emerge until the nineteenth century, when enough people had the disposable resources to keep animals only for companionship. Even then, attitudes and sentiments towards animals during that time were nowhere near how Americans feel about them today. Pet-keeping emerged during a time of cruelty towards animals, but with the Domestic Ethic led to the popularity of humane treatment and humanization of companion animals, and to the increase of the animal welfare movements and medical practices that are still very much with us today. It has further been supported that only in the past thirty years or so, since Rice’s book was published, pet-keeping has exploded in the West, creating multi-billion dollar industries that are focused on caring for, producing, medically treating, dressing up, and feeding of animals per year.

As witnessed for many centuries and throughout America, the companion animal relationship can be one of the deepest, most fulfilling ways that animals and humans can interact

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<sup>62</sup> Anderson, Powerful Bond, 83.

and bond, providing enormous benefits to both pet owner and pet. The human-pet relationship is a unique one that is no longer based primarily on utility and is considered a two-sided relationship in which both parties play a major role in each other's lives. When people interact with companion animals, they are interacting with them on a human and individual level as they would a family member or a friend. Despite the variety of functions that pets serve, many scholars today would agree that people who live with animals and practice pet-keeping do so for a simpler reason—the concrete benefit of having companionship in our ever-growing society of isolation, affluence, and leisure.

As with the human world, the animal world also signifies this deeper middle- and upper-class divergence from the lower-class and the less fortunate. How is it that many Americans are able to partake in this overindulgence in pet pampering while neglect the other side to the pet world—the weak, the abused, the ones who need to be rescued? How can some people excessively cater to their pets' needs and give them the best of everything—food, shelter, services, toys—while they turn a blind eye to the other, less fortunate dogs who are barely given the basic necessities of life or are being euthanized due to their overpopulation, which humans are partly responsible for, by breeding dogs? These trends in divergence will neither stop nor slow down, and as seen in the human world, the pet world also illustrates how America is ironically both a society of unprecedented indulgence and consumerism on one side, and a society of those that are left out and struggling to survive on the other side.

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