

# Is It a Boy or a Girl: Constructing a Gendered Identity for Companion Animals

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper analyzes the role that gender plays in companion animals. It addresses the questions of how societal concepts of gender shape relationships that we have formed with our companion animals and how people display their genders through the companion animals. To answer these questions I interviewed 50 women between the ages of 18 and 50, who had a cat, a dog, or both. I then compared the answers between cat and dog owners to see if gendering practices differed. I found gender to be significant across the dog and cat keeper. However, in cat keepers, it is more a reflection of their genders and in dog, keeping gender played a role in forming a separate identity for the dog. This may be due to differences in the lives we construct for cats and dogs. This research gives a view into how gender shapes all of our relationships.

## Acknowledgments

I hope that I was able to portray the people I interviewed fairly and correctly, and I thank everyone who participated. Through this research, I met many amazing pet keepers, but I would especially like to thank the many who referred others to me. A few of my interviewees went far out of their way to help me and I greatly appreciate the help. I would also like to thank Dr, Bob Young and his patience with this project that has taken so long. Additionally, I would like to thank both Dr. Heather Jacobson and Dr. Beth Anne Shelton for their insight and editing.

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, who has sacrificed so much so that I may complete this degree. I would also like to dedicate it to all of the women who participated in my research. And finally, I would like to dedicate this to all of the cats and dogs that have graced my life, without them to inspire me, none of this would have been possible.

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Is It a Boy or Girl?: Constructing a Gendered Identity for Companion  
Animals

On a bone-chilling cold day in February, we got home from picking up the kids from school, and there on the front porch was a shivering puppy. She looked like a tiny little fox. We brought her inside and gave her some food and water. We walked the neighborhood to make sure that no one had lost her. We posted online and asked if she belonged to anyone, and we took her to the vet to make sure she was not chipped. We never found any people who were claiming her, which was fortunate because we had become attached to her.

Before the puppy showed up on our porch we had cats. I was a single mom with small kids and a full-time job, cats were a better fit for my life. I came from a dog-keeping background. When I was born my parents had a German

Shepherd and a cat. The German Shepherd became my first and best friend. My dog was the subject of most of the essays and creative writing I did in elementary school. One of the essays I wrote that my parents saved is called 'My dog Whiley,' and in it, I tell how he waves me off to school in the morning and how he licks my face when I come home. When I was ten they sent me to a summer camp so they could put my dog down, leaving me unable to say goodbye to Whiley. I still miss him.

I began to think of companion animals as an interesting topic as I began studying sociology. People have deep connections to their dogs and cats, and they are generally ignored in academic work. Although social sciences have tended to neglect animal-human relations in scholarship, recent works have highlighted how our views on gender can be examined through our interactions with companion animals and the practice of companion animal-keeping (Cerulo 2009).

While gender and gender identity has been a major topic in sociology, the practice of creating a gendered identity for our companion animals has not been well examined. Moreover, the literature that does exist on companion animals has focused primarily on dogs. This research, however, focusses on the ways we express gender through our relationships with both our dogs and cats. In addition, it addresses the questions of how societal concepts of gender shape relationships of humans and their companion animals as well as how individuals demonstrate their own gender identity through their non-human companions. As

a result, this project answers some of the unresolved questions left by the gaps in previous research, by highlighting differences in how we gender our dog and cat companions.

Research suggests that gender influences the sex, breed (Ramirez 2006, Ramón et al. 2010), and the name given to a dog (Abel and Kruger 2007). We also see gender influencing the lives of our companion animals in (1) our interactions with them, (2) how we describe them to others and (3) the decisions we make for them regarding their healthcare and possessions, as we organize their lives and ours (Ramirez 2006). This research confirms the findings of previous research and goes further to bring an understanding not only of how we are influenced by gender in our lives with our companion animals but also how these processes differ between cats and dogs.

Only within the last twenty-five years has sociology opened to the study of non-human actors, having historically exclusively focused on humans (Cerulo 2009). Wilkie (2015) argues that scholars have made “silent assumptions” that guide them in excluding our relationships with animals, and that these assumptions about animals legitimize and normalize the use of them for human purposes. Indeed, sociology has historically defined social relations in frames that deny the active participation of companion animals by defining only humans as active participants in their relations with other animals (Cerulo 2009). I hope that this research will contribute to the rapidly emerging work of human-animal scholars that seeks to rectify such traditional oversights.



When Butters first appeared at our door, I was searching for a topic that I could turn into a thesis. When people found out we had a dog I was surprised by both their excitement and the questions people asked of us. It felt as if we had a baby. They asked if it was a boy or a girl, a question I had never been asked about my cats. I was amused at the importance placed on knowing my dog's gender. I guess they wanted to know so that they could use correct pronouns when referring to my dog. This inspired me to find out more about our relationship with companion animals.

This thesis was inspired by my puppy Pickles, my dog Butters, and my cats Pepper, Sugar, and Cookie in the many ways they have shaped my life and my research. For this project, I contacted 50 women and performed in-depth interviews with them. I asked them about their pet-keeping history, how they defined the family, specific questions about how they acquired their companion animals, how they named and lived with their companion animal, and what pet-keeping looks like for them.

I asked specific questions about how they saw and understood gender and how gender relates to their companion animals. Then, I compared those answers to discover some of the differences in how we gender cats and dogs. I spoke with 12 people who keep cats, 16 people who keep cats and dogs, and 22 people who keep dogs. The women in my study were predominantly white women with 72 percent of my sample identifying as white, 20 percent identifying

as Latina, four percent of the sample identifying as black, and four percent identifying as more than one race.

Eighty percent of the women I interviewed made over a 100,000 dollars a year and most were married or partnered, with a college degree. Sixty-eight percent of my respondents did not have children and the majority were in their thirties. Many in my sample fostered dogs and cats and one is a dog breeder who also showed dogs and ran a dog boarding and daycare facility. Additionally, I spoke with a woman who ran a dog daycare and grooming business along with a dog hospice center.

In agreement with previous research, I have found evidence of the changing nature of pet keeping and the practice of seeing pets as family members, as outlined in the findings section of this work. In addition, I have found that how we name our cats differs from how our dogs are named and that gender influenced those choices. In my study, there are differences expressed between dog keepers and cat keepers when selecting a companion animal and in their daily routines. When accessorizing or buying collars and toys for cats and dogs there is also a variance in what we select. Further, I have found that among women the attitudes we hold about gender diverge between cat and dog keepers. Gender can even be found in the ways we say goodbye to our companion animals.

This paper is organized into sections. Firstly, I will briefly review some of the literature surrounding this study. Next, I have written about the study procedures in the methodology section. I will then explain what I discovered while doing this research and what I think it means in the finding's sections. Then I will discuss these findings and what I think it all means. Lastly, I will conclude the paper and outline further areas that deserve more attention.

### Literature Review

The literature on gendering pets is sparse, so I will outline the history of pet keeping illustrating how our views of petkeeping have shifted. Then, I will look at the current places in our lives and how companion animals have secured their place as a member of the family. Then I will outline some of the literature on gender roles and ideas of motherhood and how these are relevant to pet keeping. Finally, I will identify a few studies done on the topic of gender and petkeeping.

While the specific literature on pet keeping is sparse, the existing literature on gender is expansive. Thus, my review of the literature on gender focuses only on articles that relate directly to this research.

#### *Historical Petkeeping*

Pet-keeping has progressed throughout the span of human history, beginning as a way of making life easier for us by using these animals to perform tasks for us to giving them an honored place in our homes. Froma Walsh (2009) tells us that beginning roughly 9,000 years ago cats and dogs increasingly became more important to humans, in her article about human connections to animals. Dogs aided humans in hunting, herding, and farming. Cats were useful by killing rodents who could spoil a harvest and spread disease (Walsh 2009). Walsh (2009) also outlines the history of companion animals through various cultures and historical periods, highlighting how companion animals have been honored in worship, used to perform useful tasks, and kept as companions. In modern western society, people have prized companion animals less for utilitarian reasons and more as beloved companions and at times as status symbols (Walsh 2009, Ritvo 1987).

Harriet Ritvo (1987) in her book *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, theorizes that the place companion animals occupy in our lives began during the industrial revolution. Companion animals gained middle-class companionate status as we began distancing ourselves from our agrarian past and living in cities and suburbs. Ritvo (1987) ties our sentimentality to companion animals to the diffusion of status-based pet-keeping habits of the elites. Before the industrial revolution, petkeeping was a practice of the elites, where they served as not only companions but as status symbols, showing that you were able to care for something that had no other purpose

(Walsh 2009). These ideas about pet keeping progressed from simply using the animals for what they can do for us to giving them new jobs of just being our friends. As we have changed as a people so have our concepts of pet keeping.

Harold Herzog (2014) views petkeeping as evolutionary in that we have used companion animals to benefit our health and have adapted as a species due to this relationship. Herzog also states that companion animals are used to teach us to be nurturing. Using a graphing tool in google to measure changing companion animals' attitudes in literature, Herzog (2014) found that ideas and feelings about pet keeping have changed. Measuring the period of 1800-2000, the word 'pet' held stable until 1947 when the appearance of the word 'pet' increased by over 450 percent. This change, he argues demonstrates that over time our emotional attachment to companion animals have strengthened. Companion animals have grown from animals with a utilitarian usage to members of our family.

### *A Place in the Family*

Susan Cohen (2002) explored in her work whether companion animals can be family members. Cohen (2002) found that people cherish their companion animals and regard them above human strangers and that they think of them as members of their family. In 1996, John Archer looked at some of these same issues in family definition and found that people view companion animals as a source of unconditional and uncritical love; something that human relationships

rarely provide. Not only do companion animals have a place in the family, but they also often are cast into the role of a child.

In 2005, Diana Parry explored women's attitudes about infertility and how that affects their definitions of family. Parry found that women who were unable to conceive often found fulfillment in mothering companion animals. As women delay or choose not to have children, they face societal pressures of what women should be doing and are pressured to have children (Parry 2005). To counter this, these women elected to mother companion animals instead of human babies (Parry 2005, Laurent-Simpson 2017). While it is not the societal standard of motherhood, mothering companion animals illustrates the dominating ideas of gender and the roles of women. Showing that women must become mothers even if it is to a companion animal. These follow ideas of traditional gender roles as will be summarized in the next section.

### *Gender Roles in Pet Keeping*

In 1996 Sharon Hays wrote the *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* where she introduced the term intensive mothering. This idea of motherhood describes how to be a successful mother. Intensive mothering means one must focus all your attention on the emotional, psychological, and monetary needs of your child (Hays 1996). The needs of the child preclude your own needs and involve the mother being consumed with nurturing the child. This brand of mothering can be found in petkeeping and more intensively in dog care, as will

be described as one of the findings of this paper. Gender can be found in the roles we play to companion animals, as we step into being their mothers, and in the way we identify with the companion animal.

In 1998 Rose Perrine and Hannah Osbourne studied the personality traits of pet keepers. Perrine and Osbourne (1998) found that women were more likely to identify as 'cat people' whereas men and women were equally likely to identify as 'dog people'. Furthermore, Perrine and Osbourne found that people who categorized themselves as more feminine were more likely to identify themselves as 'cat people', and people who identified as more masculine were more likely to describe themselves as 'dog people'. Moreover, people who disliked cats ranked themselves low in femininity. The group that expressed the highest dislike of cats were men who ranked themselves as low in femininity.

When I began this study, I was hoping to find out why gender figured more prominently in dog-keeping than in cat-keeping. People perform or "do" gender with their dogs, and to a lesser degree with their cats (West and Zimmerman 1987). According to West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of gender, gender is not a trait inherent to individuals but rather is a performance that we as individuals put on demonstrate biological sex, and the roles that we take are defined by social conventions of how gender is understood. This difference in the performance of gender will be outlined further in this paper in the outline section. We will now look at some of the studies done previously on petkeeping and gender.

## *Gender and Companion Animals*

In 2006, Michael Ramirez interviewed men and women and asked them about their pet-keeping ideas, he found that people selected dogs based on gendered ideas about the dogs, size, breed, and sex. Ramirez discovered that participants in his study chose the dogs based on their matching sex, with men selecting male dogs and females picking female dogs. Matching their sex to the sex of the dog was thought to give them insight into the behavior of the dog like a female person would understand why a female dog act as she does. The people thought that their dogs would have defined gendered character traits and behaviors. Ramirez (2006) also found that the people in his study thought that male dogs were more aggressive and that a female dog would be a better fit for a family. Ramirez (2006) also observed that when his study participants selected breeds that did not 'fit' with traditional gendered expectations. For example, a man with a toy breed would emphasize that the dog was tough for his size, making some sort of concession to the societal expectations of his gender. The people in Ramirez's (2006) study also described their pets as having gendered traits. Ramirez also found that people identified some of the behaviors of their dogs as wrong, such as a male dog described as sweet, and nurturing was also described as acting feminine.

In 2016 Betsy Garner and David Grazian observed parents and their children at the zoo as parents gave specific gendered messages to their children. They first noted that boys were given more autonomy and freedom while in the



zoo, as they were allowed to run off and run ahead, whereas the girl children were kept closer to the parents. These gendered messages are reinforced by numerous children's books and programs that are often center on animals and involve human-like animals that give subtle gender messages (Garner and Grazian 2016). These messages were reinforced at the zoo by one mother who described the large hands of the gorillas to be like "Daddy's hands" and made sure that she always referred to the gorilla as male. Additionally, when traditional ideas were countered, such as prettier colored plumage in peacocks, parents would point this out as an oddity and remark how it was different with humans. These messages indirectly work to make gender seem more natural than a social construction.

Traditional gendered roles and divisions of labor were also imparted to the kids. For example, when looking at groups of animal's parents would call them families and point out what they thought was the mother, father, and children. One kangaroo exhibit had only one adult female kangaroo and then her children, a little girl asked her mother where the 'Daddy' was, and the mother replied that he was at work. Gender was also evident in how parents would describe the animals, with mothers more often pointing out how an animal may be cute or pretty while the fathers were more prone to descriptions of physical strength in the animal. Garnier and Grazian (2016) argue that adults perpetuated gender stereotypes by projecting them onto animals and using the animals as props for modeling their own genders.

At this time the literature on pet keeping is limited but is growing. The literature reviewed above, and some other relevant studies will be used throughout this work. We will now move on to how this study was performed. In the next section, I will outline all the processes and procedures used when conducting the interviews.

## METHODOLOGY

The names of all participants have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Additionally, I have also changed all the names of the companion animals. When changing the names of the companion animals I have attempted to get as close to the concept and construction of their names. I have made sure that if the name was a gendered human name that I chose a name that would follow the same structure. If the companion animals were named for a male sports figure, I chose a different but similar sports-figure name to substitute. Additionally, I made sure that the names I selected followed the same rules for gendered names, for example, if it was a female name ending in 'y' I made sure to choose another name ending in 'y'. At all times I tried to reflect a name that was like the companion animal's given name, both in gender, gendered naming practices, and reference to historical or popular figures. Keeping gender in the names was very important to the research, renaming was easy if those rules

were followed. However, obtaining the data proved to be more difficult, as I will illustrate.

Tatiana is a woman in her late twenties to early thirties who lives in Las Vegas with her cat. As a young girl in Brazil, she wanted a cat. Her mother had a poodle and that was the only animal allowed. Tatiana saw hundreds of cats on the streets, and she would beg for her mother to let her catch and keep one, but each time the answer was no. One day when Tatiana was older and did not need her mother's permission, she went out to get a cat from one of the many strays that she saw on the streets daily. Tatiana badly wanted one of these cats, but they proved to be difficult for her to catch. Although there were so many cats on the streets, they were too afraid of Tatiana and would not allow her to capture them.

There were three that she fed but none would come close enough to let her touch them. She was determined to have a cat of her own. She kept feeding them, making them more comfortable with her, and finally, after a great deal of time, she was able to touch and pet one of the cats. This cat kept coming for food and attention but one night did not come back. Tatiana decided then and there this was the cat that she had wanted, so the next day Tatiana looked for and found the cat and brought her inside. This cat became her companion and has lived with her for over ten years, traveling from Brazil to the US with her

. Tatiana, like many people who have cat companions, was reluctant to talk to me. I felt that I needed to take time to coax them into the interview and that they needed to know that I was a safe person to speak to, which made referrals from other people very important. I am a member of 4 cat groups that collectively have over forty thousand members. I made posts in all four groups with pictures of my cat and pleas for interviews. I got about three responses. By contrast, I made one post in one group of people with dog companions, with about 5,000 members, and received more than 40 responses. I never had to post in the other dog groups. I was only able to get as many people as I did who have cats as companions because they referred me to one another. After numerous referrals, I was able to round out the number of dog interviews in comparison to the cat interviews.

I have completed 50 interviews, 22 people with dogs, 12 people with cats, and 16 with both dogs and cats. I asked them a series of questions about their pet-keeping history, whom they lived with, and their attitudes and opinions about their cats and dogs. Many of these questions focused on gender and how they saw it for their dog or cat. I have a niece that works for a vet clinic, so I sent her a recruitment flyer with my information and asked her to post it in the veterinarian's office. I received about 3 interviews from there, they were all dog owners. I also posted in Fort Worth Dog Mom's, a group on Facebook, and received the rest of my dog sample.

For people who had dogs and cats, I relied on the Facebook group as some of the dog moms had cats and dogs. I received such a strong response that I did not post anywhere else. I then posted in Facebook groups related to cats, and after 3 posts I had about 3 people, luckily those three people were very nice about referring their cat-keeping friends. Thus, I was able to pull some more cat-keepers making the sample a little less dog heavy. But as I stated before the difference in the responses was surprising to me.

As I begged the interviewees to refer me to people they knew, they all laughed about how cat people were aloof, and I was certainly having trouble getting them to be interviewed. While it did seem that the women who keep cats were allusive, I wondered if the stigmatized identity of the “crazy cat lady” portrayed in popular culture had more to do with my difficulties. In the popular TV show the Simpson there is a character called Eleanor Abernathy who is known as the Crazy Cat Lady. Eleanor is highly educated obtaining both a medical degree and law degree from Harvard and Yale, respectively (Zachary 2020). Eleanor turned to alcohol and cat collecting to escape her high-pressure life. She then became homeless, she lives on the streets collecting stray cats, yelling gibberish, and throwing cats at passerby’s (Zachary 2020). This stigma to women and cat-keeping is pervasive in our society and is portrayed well by the Simpson character (Blakeley 2009). I did get more replies when one of the people I interviewed commented on my post telling them that I was respectful and that they enjoyed speaking to me. One of the women I interviewed told me that she

chose to do it because of the comment made by the other woman. Maybe once they were assured that I would treat them respectfully they would be more willing to speak to me, but that may not be the only reason.

I also thought that perhaps that the way we relate to our cats may have influenced the response as well. Cats are more private pets; we do not use them to socialize with. We do not, as a rule, take them on walks or us with us. Maybe the privacy and intimacy of this relationship is not one we are prepared to share with others. Perhaps, also we may think that no one is interested in hearing about it. It seems more acceptable to talk about your dog than your cats, why that is maybe tied to crazy cat lady stigmas also. All those things may have made the women with cat companions less likely to want to talk to me. As difficult as it was to find some of the cat-keepers I did have to place limits on my study on who could participate. I will outline some of the selection criteria.

Some of the following actions I took to limit this study are, what type of animal, where the animals were kept and the age of participants. While companion animals can theoretically be any sort of animal that is kept domestically, this research will consider only cats and dogs. The population of people that I studied are people who possess a domestic cat, a dog, or both. The focus will be on those people who have animals that are kept inside. Using existing data from the GSS and other sources, Catherine I. Bolzendahl and Daniel J. Myers (2004) found a shift in attitudes about gender roles in society with younger people being more supportive of feminist ideals. To limit the focus

of this research I only sought to recruit participants between the ages of 18 and 50. The selection of this age bracket is due to generational ideas about gender roles (Walter 2018).

The interviews were done in four weeks. I conducted all interviews over zoom, and in the beginning, I used Word to transcribe but I quickly found out that they have a limit on transcriptions and that they do not offer any more minutes, even for money. So, I switched to Otter.ai which was reasonably priced and worked well. This was a huge time saver and why I was able to do the number of interviews that I did, or I would likely still be transcribing. Once I uploaded them into the software, I put them in a Word document and wrote a blurb about the interview. Then I would print the entire document and code it, additionally, I typed up memos with thoughts and theories. Doing this work during an ongoing pandemic has given me new things to consider as my online persona and my home become the focus and presentation of myself.

Interviews while done through zoom were also done in my home, which was somewhat awkward. I thought about using some sort of background or blurring when I did the interviews. However, I decided to just keep my study clean and make sure that my David Bowie posters and other personal effects were not visible. It was just a shot of me in front of a glassed-in bookcase. I made sure that I looked neat and that I was not wearing things to betray my political positions. My house is open concept, and the study has no door, it is also directly by the front door. There were a couple of interviews that were derailed when

someone knocked on my front door and my dogs barked so loudly that it was difficult to continue, forcing us to wait until someone took care of whoever was at the door and to calm the dogs. This happened while I was interviewing a cat keeper, making me wonder if some of what she told about how she felt about dogs was colored by the knowledge that I had dogs. This was not the only problematic moment that I had with my companion animals.

Additionally, my cat believes that I need help any time I am at the computer so for almost all the interviews there was a black cat visible, possibly coloring dog keepers' answers. I may have been able to make a more professional appearance if I had conducted these interviews in a coffee shop, but I think it may have worked to let the people I was interviewing know that I have cats and dogs too and that I would not be judgmental of their pet-keeping practices and opinions. They also probably heard my family. I keep on headphones so that no one can hear the people I am interviewing, and I explain that to them, but they can hear the background noise of my house, just as I can hear theirs. Researchers have found that the interviews were of similar quality in videoconferencing and face-to-face interviews and that method of interviewing did not cause the interview to differ significantly (Gray et. al. 2020; Deakin and Wakefield 2013; Mabragana et. al. 2013). Although, it was found that people prefer videoconferencing to phone interviews as they prefer to "meet" the interviewer (Gray et. al. 2020). Interview participants were found to be "more



open and expressive” in online interviews (Deakin and Wakefield 2013; Mabragana et al. 2013).

This paper also includes my own experiences and thoughts about petkeeping. I have coupled this method with the interviews that I have conducted. I have peppered in stories that reflect my own narrative to give some insights into some of the issues in petkeeping. My autoethnographic accounts cover acquiring a companion animal and touch of some my experiences with loss. My introspection on these events was with me when I coded and analyzed my research, so it was important that they be included. While I am happy to share my own personal thoughts and knowledge, I found managing my online persona to be more difficult.

Recruiting participants on Facebook always poses a challenge, as I am always afraid that they will not do interviews with me because they do or do not agree with something I have posted, or they send me friend requests, which makes me nervous also. Not that I do not want to be friends with these women, but they may get offended, and it will color the research. So, I made sure to only accept friend requests after an interview. In Jennifer Reich’s 2015 article on how social media provides new complexities in qualitative research, she outlines how online personas can alter our ideas and perceptions of people and how this may create new challenges and implications for sociological research. We live in a time where getting information about a person is increasingly easy, as we post many things about ourselves voluntarily online. This creates issues as people

may wish to present themselves in ways other than how they appear online; this is true for both the researcher and the research participant (Reich 2015). While I worked to manage my identity as a researcher, I gave my participants their online privacy by not looking at their profiles or searching their names in google. While these data were readily available to me, I elected to allow them to present themselves to me as they chose. Additionally, as Reich (2015), has related in her article, there is no clean way to exit the field. I am replying to emails about when this work will be done, as I have told all who were interviewed that I would share if they wished. I am also still a member of these Facebook groups. I still see the people I have interviewed, and I could still interact with them. However, I have elected not to, until this work has finished. I do not want to color my research by interacting with participants until I am finished because I want my impressions to remain grounded in data, not my opinions of things unrelated to my data. Keeping these boundaries and maintaining them is not always easy.

Research changes one. I can remember when I began my thesis journey, I believed people who thought of themselves as 'fur parents' were sort of dismissive to parents and the challenges that parenting a human can bring. I felt like having a pet was in no way like having a child. This has changed for me. I find myself referring to myself as my dogs' mom, and we have a stroller for our smallest dog. I have fully embraced all the dog mom life, I take the dogs to the dog park, and not just to network and connect with other dog moms, but to socialize my dogs. I have taken my dogs to get pupa chinos, I have scheduled

playdates for the dogs, and I have thought about putting the dogs I have on raw food diets. I brush their teeth. I lotion their footpads and have thought about getting shoes for them. As my life has changed so have my attitudes, but I still understand the problems that are unique to human parenting.

My own affinity for companion animal parenting may be because my kids are getting older, and I need to focus my care on something. Also, the more you are exposed to a stimulus the more familiar and less abnormal it becomes. I found myself thinking that maybe I should be part of this study, which I think gave a good insight and some sensitivity to the topic. I noticed that when people realized that I had cats and dogs they would loosen a bit and tell me things, such as, when no one is there they allow the cats to eat at the table and that they talk to the dogs and use silly voices to answer for them. I thought a great deal about my status as a pet-keeping insider throughout the project.

Doing research that is personal and reflective of a person's social location may color the data (Almack 2008). This reflection may influence how data are gathered, analyzed, and the writing process. My insider status of having companion animals might limit my ability to see some of the elements of companion animal keeping with an unbiased eye, even as it might allow me to understand other aspects of the process at a deeper level. Kondo (2001; 192) argues that insider status is a misconception; she believes that the conception of selves as "seamless, bounded and whole are indeed illusions." Kondo (2001) describes the complexities that her varied identities and roles present in her

research, as she describes there is a fragmentation of the self, as she highlights aspects of her identity and downplays other traits.

I think being an insider allow me to access more data, because I was trusted to portray pet keeping fairly. I have used this empathy with and understanding of pet keeping in every stage of my research, while also trying to remain as objective as possible, and I hope to have drawn an accurate picture of the women in my study.

Interviewing 50 people can be unwieldy, to combat this I employed memo writing. While interviewing I wrote up memo's describing the women, I used both my impressions of them that I drew while conducting the interviews and answers to the demographic questions. I also wrote memos during the interview phase of interesting pieces that they relayed to me in the interviews. As I coded the data, I tried to let the data lead me. I always asked every question on the interview guide, however, sometimes they would tell me things that would lead to further questions. For example, the woman who ran a dog hospice was kind enough to allow me to ask her about the hospice, how she defined it, and how she operated the hospice. When the interviews were over I would make sure to get them transcribed immediately and then at the end of the day I would begin coding them.

To code the data, I used some general codes that I knew from what I was asking in the interview guide would be codes that would be important to my

research question. For example, one of the most important codes that I used that I knew would be important was gender, so any time a subject talked about gender, or anything related to gender I coded it. I also coded descriptions of the companion animals like calling a cat aloof, or a dog loyal. These codes I used frequently to highlight differences between attitudes about cats and dogs. Some of the other important codes I used were companion names, loss, other attitudes about expectations held for companion animals, and diet.

To guide this project, I used the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2001). As I collected and processed data, I was also analyzing it. I also used line-by-line coding, using codes that have been drawn from the data (Charmaz 2001). I then created memos as I interviewed and read through the data to direct my thoughts and to further my understanding of the data. While I was guided by some broad questions, I allowed the data to lead me to identifying patterns that may exist in the data itself. I also used this same approach for creating codes and drawing tentative conclusions.

Once the interviews were coded, I made coding memos. Then I compared them to one another, specifically looking for the differences in cat and dog keepers. I made further notes and memos, and these became the first draft of this writing. I then began pulling out useful quotes and interesting comments that people made to illustrate the points that I needed to make. From there I began connecting the notes, paying special attention to the agreements and disagreements among my respondents. Then, I began to develop ideas and

connecting those ideas to existing research. I then outlined areas that could be available for future research which I will detail in the conclusion.

This next section will detail the findings of the study and give an overview of what the participants shared with me. I provided a detailed table (see Table 1) with demographic information for all the women in my study. I trace and investigate the changing nature of pet keeping and how companion animals have become family. I will also discuss my finding on selecting a name for companion animals, focusing on how these names differ between cats and dogs and how they are gendered. Next, I look at the dissimilarities in how we select our companion animals, and how gender may influence those choices. Additionally, in the results section, I outline our day-to-day routines with companion animals, and how gender shapes these interactions, and the variances between cat and dog keepers. I then examine how we buy things for our companion animals and our ideas and attitudes about gender and spoiling our companion animals. Finally, I will discuss how we see goodbye to our companion animals and how this may be influenced by gender.

## Results

Table 1 below, details information about the women I interviewed. I have included what type of companion animal the participants have detailed, whether they had just a cat, a dog, or a cat and a dog. There are 50 women interviewed, 12 women who keep cats and 22 women who keep dogs, and 16 women who

keep both dogs and cats. The next column details the income bracket of the women in my study. Most of the women made more than \$100,000 a year. The next column looks at their race, with 76% of my respondents identifying as white. Lastly, Table1, will look at the marital status of the women I interviewed. Fifty-two percent of the women I interviewed were married, 30 percent were single, with the remainder indicating that they are partnered or separated. Other tables will be included throughout this section relating the educational attainment and how many children each of the women I interviewed have. Additionally, I have included some tables outlining the differences between naming cats and dogs. Following this table is a section tracing the changing nature of pet keeping.

Name	Type of pet	Age	Income Level	Race	Marital Status
Beth	Cat	46 and up	100,000 +	white	Single
Allegra	Dog and Cat	40-50	100,000 +	white	Married
Alyssa	Dog	18-25	25,000-49,999	latina	Partnered
Angela	Dog	20-30	100,000 +	white	Married
Anne	Dog and Cat	36-45	75,000-99,999	white	Married
Audra	Dog and Cat	26-35	100,000+	white	Married
Blair	Cat	36-45	100,000+	white	Married
Bonnie	Cat	46 and up	50,000-74,999	white	Single
Brittney	Cat	26-35	25,000-49,999	white	Single
Carol	Dog	40-50	100,000 +	white	Partnered
Claudia	Dog and Cat	36-45	100,000+	latina	Married
Danielle	Dog and Cat	26-35	100,000+	white	Married
Donna	Dog and Cat	46 and up	25,000-49,999	white	Married
Elizabeth	Dog and Cat	36-45	25,000 or less	white	Single
Emily	Dog	18-25	100,000+	white	Married
Erin	Dog	26-35	100,000 +	white	Married
Farrah	Dog	36-45	100,000+	white	Partnered
Harmony	Dog and Cat	46 and up	100,000+	latina	Married
Heather	Cat	26-35	25,000-49,999	white/native american	Single
Hillary	Dog	36-45	100,000+	black	Married
Holly	Dog and Cat	36-45	100,000 +	white	Partnered
Janie	Dog and Cat	40-50	50,000-74,999	white	Single
Janna	Dog and Cat	20-30	25,000-49,999	white	Single
Jaqueline	Dog	20-30	50,000-74,999	black	Single
Jillian	Cat	46 and up	100,000+	white	Married
Joy	Dog and Cat	46 and up	100,000+	white	Married
Julie	Dog and Cat	36-45	75,000-99,999	white	Married
Katherine	Cat	26-35	25,000-49,999	white	Single
Kathy	Dog	36-45	100,000+	white	Married
Kelly	Dog and Cat	36-45	100,000 +	white	Partnered
Kennedy	Dog and Cat	30-40	50,000-74,999	latina	Single
Lacy	Dog	40-50	50,000-74,999	white	Single
Lindsey	Dog	18-25	100,000 +	white	Single
Meagan	Cat	26-35	50,000-74,999	white	Married
Melissa	Dog	26-35	50,000-74,999	latina	Single
Miranda	Cat	46 and up	100,000 +	white	Married
Misti	Dog	26-35	25,000-49,999	white	Partnered
Morgan	Dog	26-35	50,000-74,999	white	Married
Penelope	Cat	26-35	100,000 +	white/latina	Married
Rachael	Dog	18-25	25,000 or less	white	Single
Rebecca	Dog	20-30	25,000-49,999	white	Single
Renee	Dog	46 and up	100,000 +	white	Married
Rhonda	Dog and Cat	46 and up	50,000-74,999	white	Married
Roberta	Dog	36-45	50,000-74,999	latina/Native American	Married
Roxy	Cat	36-45	100,000+	white	Married
Sophia	Dog	26-35	75,000-99,999	latina	Co-habiting
Suzanne	Dog	26-35	100,000 +	latina	Married
Sylvia	Dog	36-45	100,000+	latina	Married
Tatiana	Cat	26-35	50,000-74,999	latina	Divorced
Theresa	Dog	26-35	75,000-99,999	white	Separated

Table 1: Demographics of Study



### *Changing Nature of Pet Keeping*

Andrew Rowan and Tamara Kartel (2017) have studied changes in pet sentimentality in the United States from the 1970s to 2017. They have found that beginning in the seventies people began keeping their animals inside more often, sterilization increased, and companion animals were increasingly seen as members of the family. Rowan and Kartel (2017) tell us: "Responsible pet ownership and the perception that dogs are part of the family is a concept that has been growing over the last 30 years." Many of the people I interviewed expressed changing ideas about how to care for companion animals. People related to me that in their childhood it was common to have animals that spent their lives outside and that it was not common to have pets sleep in the bed with them. Hillary is a married woman in her late 30s- early 40s, she lives with her three teenaged children and two dogs, she told me how her mother would not allow dogs to sleep in beds and how she and her siblings would sneak the dog into their beds. She describes how companion animals would filter in and out of the house, many cats and dogs would be let in at bedtime and would then be let out during the day. Some of these companion animals were allowed to free roam through neighborhoods.

Kathy is a married woman and a health care professional who has three dogs, and she describes the changing nature of pet care, "It was kind of different back then, like, you would just let your dog out and then they would come back for dinner. I don't do that anymore. But we would be outside playing all day and

the dog would be with us without a leash or anything.” While it is difficult to pinpoint exact numbers Rowan and Kartel (2015), have estimated the amount of stray or street dogs from the number of animal intakes at shelters in the United States, although these numbers are also difficult to obtain as there is no national reporting system. Given these difficulties in getting exact numbers, free-roaming or street dogs have declined from roughly 25% of the total dog population in the US in the 1970s to tiny numbers of stray dogs currently, all while overall numbers of dogs have increased in the US (Rowan and Kartel 2017). The changes in the number of street dogs have changed inversely to the rates of neutering companion animals.

Not only are companion animals’ movements more restricted than they were in the past, but people also do more to control the sexual behaviors of companion animals than they did in the past. Anne who is married with children lives with two dogs and who fosters many kitties, speaks about her parents and contrasts the change in expectations in pet keeping: “My parents weren’t responsible when it came to actually getting them spayed or neutered so that we always had a lot of kittens and stuff that we were giving away for free and that kind of stuff so that we always have pets, but they were just different from what I expect from pets.” These changes in pet keeping have helped to shape our views as companion animals as family members. In 2001, Adrian Franklin and Robert White performed a content analysis on newspapers from 1948-1998 and found a significant increase in sentimentality towards dogs and cats. The women

in this study highlight the changing nature of pet keeping by outlining the changes they have seen in the practices of sterilization, which is more common now, and the tendency to keep pets inside. Additionally, changes can be seen in the commonality of allowing pets to live on furniture and sleep on beds. These shifts in pet keeping have allowed us to see our pets as more human-like. These are now expectations put on the pet-keepers and are framed as responsible pet ownership, which enhances the place of the companion animal in the family. This next section will address the influence of gender on attitudes and behavior relating to companion animals as family members.

*Gender and Companion Animals as Family*

Most of the women in my study (73%) did not have children (see Table 2). Many had issues with fertility and others made conscious decisions not to have children. Every woman in my sample considered their companion animals as part of the family and most saw their companion animals as their children, which aligns with other studies that have found the same phenomenon.

	<b>WITH KIDS %</b>	<b>WITH KIDS #</b>	<b>WITHOUT KIDS %</b>	<b>WITHOUT KIDS #</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	32%	16	78%	34	50
<b>CAT KEEPERS</b>	33%	4	67%	8	12
<b>DOG KEEPERS</b>	29%	5	71%	17	22
<b>DOG AND CAT KEEPERS</b>	36%	7	64%	9	16

Table 2: Participants and Parental Status

Susan Cohen (2002) surveyed 201 adults and found that people regard companion animals as family, she found that this was true for most respondents

regardless of marital status or whether a person had children. Cohen (2002) found that being a man and a higher education level made you less likely to consider companion animals family. Moreover, the higher your educational attainment the less likely you are to think of companion animals as family. This was not true of the people in my sample. Table 3 shows that 40 percent of my sample have attained a bachelor's degree. Table 4 shows that the cat keepers in my sample have achieved higher levels of education, and it shows that dog keepers have higher levels of educational attainment than do people who have both dogs and cats. No matter the education level, all my sample thought of their companion animals as a member of their family.

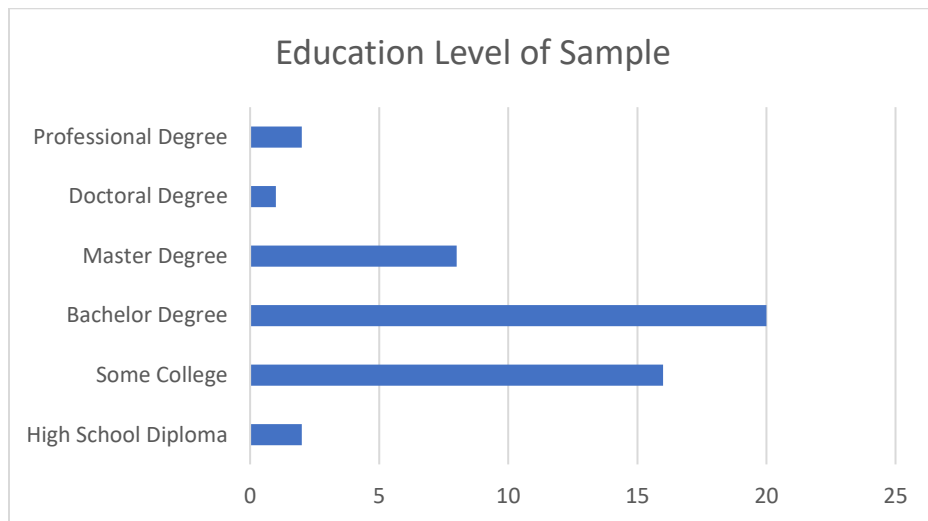


Table 3: Participants Education Attainment

	High School Diploma %	Some College %	Bachelor's degree %	Master's degree %	Doctoral Degree %	Professional Degree %	College Degree or Higher %
<b>Total</b>	6%	32%	40%	16%	2%	4%	62%
<b>Cat Keepers</b>	0	25%	33%	33%	0	8%	75%
<b>Dog Keepers</b>	9%	32%	41%	14%	0	4%	60%
<b>Dog and Cat Keepers</b>	6%	38%	44%	6%	6%	0	56%

Table 4: Educational Attainment by Type of Companion Animal

Of the 201 people studied by Cohen (2002) 16 were asked to participate in further questioning. Thirteen of the 16 people asked these questions said they would withhold a life-saving medication from someone they did not know and give it to their companion animal instead (Cohen 2002). These changing attitudes on the role companion animals play in the lives of people can be further illustrated in how people conceive of them as their children.

Jessica Greenebaum (2004) observed dog owners in an upscale pet bakery where she observed that the relationships between dogs and their keepers were more like a parent to a child than the traditional pet and owner relationship. Andrea Laurent-Simpson (2017), in her study of women without

children, found that many young women were purposely putting off or choosing not to have children and were instead electing to raise companion animals as their babies. John Archer (1997) also found that women used companion animals to fulfill the relationship of a child as he explored the relationship people have with their companion animals. One of my interviewees, Theresa, who is separated and who runs a dog hospice, described her problems with endometriosis and infertility and explained how she had always wanted a large family.

Having a big family was something that the both of us had always wanted with a lot of kids we used to joke, and we would say that we wanted five kids. It wasn't until a few years ago that I realized that we had five poodles it actually hit me that I had five kids. Now, I say, we should have specified human children. We got five kids just never expected to be the owner of five poodles. And so, it now has become a joke because we were just like sitting here randomly one night and I was watching them all play. And I was like, I have my five poodles. I have my five kids.

Theresa bred two of her poodles so that she could experience a pregnancy, "everything was planned, we were going to do newborn photos, first birthday photos, because this is likely our only chance to have a newborn with my health stuff." So, while she was unable to become pregnant, she was able to share the pregnancy with her dog. Even arranging for three sonograms of her pregnant dog and having newborn photo shoots for her twin poodles. These women have illustrated that the need to nurture can be enacted on a companion animal.

Diane Parry (2005) interviewed women and recounted their experiences with infertility and how they frame infertility and their ideas of womanhood and

family. She and others have found that women often feel pressured to become mothers as they delay or choose not to have children and they keep pets to counter this pressure (Parry 2005, Laurent-Simpson 2017). Other women that I spoke with described getting a small dog to have something to cuddle to help them through their pregnancy loss. Kathy who is a married woman in her mid-30's to late '40s and who has three dogs describes how she decided to get a new dog:

Me and my husband tried to have children and it just didn't work out. And so, at the time, I was going through a kind of depression and my two labs had passed, and so I told my husband I want a lap dog. I've never wanted a lap dog before. But you know, I just wanted something that could sit on my lap and cuddle with me.

Many of these women see their companion animals as their children. While they may not have children these dogs and cats exist in that role for these women.

They are not alone, the women with children also thought of the companion animals as their children. Many refer to companion animals as siblings to their kids. Referring to companion animals as members of the family involves other members of the family recognizing the companion animal as part of the family as well (Laurent-Simpson (2017a).

Some of the women I interviewed did not think of their pets as children, but rather as partners or friends. Miranda, a married woman with a cat and a ten-year-old, described how her relationship with her cat has changed. She described how they were single ladies together and how, as her cat has aged,

she has felt more like a mother and a friend to her. As she has had to care for her cat more she has felt more like a motherly figure to her cat.

I mean I guess it's maternal. You know, she's been low maintenance, and she has been on autopilot her whole life. I have never had to really do anything with her, just be in the same room with her. It's this friendship, but I think it probably grown in to more maternal maybe we were hanging out buddies before. Probably there was a time that we were just friends and chilling out and I would have parties and she would come out and sit in the middle of 15 people drinking and partying and having a good time. She has always been my girl, but I am probably more of a caretaker than I've been. I never really had to care for her, she was just like always good.

Penelope, a married woman who is in her late 20's to early '30s with two cats and three children, expressed a hierarchy within the family stating: "Now we would have gotten rid of the babies if they were allergic to the cat. We have a totem pole in our family and Duchess (the cat) is at the very top and the kids know it too. So, we all treat her like a queen." Statements like this, while certainly a joke, express the importance of the companion animals in the household and the importance these women place on the relationships that they have with their cats and dogs. All women I spoke with mentioned that family was not limited to humans and that family could be defined and arranged to suit whatever a person needed. Many of the women defined family as love or comfort. Audra, who is married and in her late 20's to early '30s, has two cats and two dogs. She described the family as

My theory on family is blood and marriage make relatives, love makes family. And there is no true definition of family. There is no conventional family, there is no true family. As long as there is love there is family and yes, pets aren't human. They can't communicate with me the way my



nephews do. But that doesn't mean that they are not part of my family because I love them. And I feel from what I can interpret from their behaviors that they love me too. They are my babies and my husband, and I are intentionally child free. We're not child less, because that implies that we want kids but don't have them. We are intentionally child free. Even for us, our pets are babies, we see them as our responsibility and our love and our joy, and they may not be human, but that does not make them our babies.

Companion animals can serve as fluid relationships, they have no strict definition or assigned role in the family, so they can fulfill whichever needs we have. Our relationship with them exists in a flexible space that allows us to construct whatever we need or are not getting from the existing human relationships in our lives. These women have used their own gendered identity to form complex ties resembling motherhood to their companion animals. When the women did not meet the societal expectations to become mothers to humans, these women created their way of mothering using their companion animals. Our relationships with companion animals have changed and both cats and dogs have become a part of the family.

### *Naming Companion Animals*

In most dog families, a dog's place is expressed through a human gendered name. "Having a name is the essence of being an individual and being a person" (Beck and Katcher 1996:11). Naming animals gives them a sense of self and distinguishes the companion animal from an animal without an owner and alters the behavior of the person giving the name (Arluke and Sanders 1996).

Some of the names given to the companion animals are family names. One woman that I interviewed spoke about how she and her husband never planned on having children, so they used a family name for the dog. Audra explained, “We gave her a middle name because my late mother-in-law shortly before she passed was like, hey if you ever have any kids, and you have a girl, please incorporate this name in there because it was her mother’s name. We are not having any kids, so we gave the name to the dog.”

Percentage	Companion Animal Name Type
27%	Non Human Dog Names
73%	Human Dog Names
28%	Human Cat Names
72%	Non Human Cat Names

Table 5: Percentage of Human Names given by Companion Animal

Seventy-three percent of my sample named their dogs after names traditionally given to people (See Table 5). In 2007, Ernest Abel and Michael Kruger conducted a study to compare gendered naming practices among dog and human names. The researchers found that both male and female dog names mirrored human gendered naming characteristics. Female names in English-speaking countries are more likely than male names to end in a vowel sound while male names are more likely to end in consonants. Abel and Kruger (2007) found that this pattern was mirrored when naming dogs. Additionally, in English-speaking countries, female names are typically longer and are less likely to have one syllable than male names, and this was also found to be true in the naming

database of most popular dog names (Abel and Kruger 2007). The finding also reflects the gendered naming practices that we follow for humans showing that gender is a salient factor in our treatment of dogs. The participants of my study followed gendered naming practice, agreeing with Abel and Kruger's (2007) study.

In my sample, I have found that how we name cats is different than how we name dogs. Seventy-two percent of the cat names in my study were given non-human names, like Sprinkles. Additionally, some of the names given to cats were misgendered and some were given without thought to the cats' sex. Meaning that they thought the cat was a boy or a girl when they were kittens and found out later that they were the opposite sex. Additionally, in another case, the cat was named without thought of the sex. They were unaware and did not care and then found out the sex after they had chosen a name. This gives evidence to the differences in cat-keeping and how cats are given less of a gendered identity than are dogs.

The cats in my study were more likely to be named for literary or movie characters while many of the dogs were named for sports teams and sports figures. This practice was used regardless of gender in the cats, but only male dogs were named for sports figures. I think this may be because when we name a dog we are giving it an identity that is generally gendered, but one that is meant to be their own. However, with cats, we are expressing parts of our own personality which may give us more room for creative expression. Just as most

people would not name a baby Gandalf, for the same reasons we may not name a dog that either. But we may name a cat Gandalf. The sex of a puppy is easier to determine than that of a kitten, but I think that people would be more likely to change the name of a misgendered dog. Largely because of morphological differences, no one in my study had a dog with a name that did not fit their gender while there were stories of cats and how they got their sex wrong. We can see how gender has shaped our ideas of pet keeping in our gendered naming practices, which can be seen especially in those who keep dogs.

### *Selecting a Companion Animal*

When selecting a dog, it is important to many of the women I spoke to that they are rescues. Ninety-nine percent of all women in my study framed their dog as a rescue, only one person spoke about buying her dog. This agrees with the existing research that has found that not only do women prize rescues they are the ones staffing rescue organizations (Greenbaum 2009, Markovits and Queen 2009, Bir et. al. 2017). In the Facebook pet groups, if you try to sell an animal you have bred, you will receive mass condemnation. The only acceptable way on social media to obtain your pet is through a rescue or a shelter. We adopt and rescue our companion animals now, not breed or buy them. Even when a person just gets a kitten from a friend or family member's litter it is framed as a rescue. Brittney a single woman who works as a researcher who has two cats described getting her cat as a rescue:

So, my sister's cat accidentally got pregnant, and she had a litter of kittens. She was trying desperately to get rid of them and my parents were like you don't need a cat, like, it's a lot of responsibility. You're in college, you know, you just wait. Well, it's in my nature to go against the grain. And I got her. That's how I got her. I just sort of rescued her from my sister's litter.

Even when a person is seeking a purebred puppy they will go through rescues for that breed. I spoke with only one woman who was a breeder of purebred Dobermans with America Kennel Club papers, and she stressed the importance of responsible breeding. The dogs in my study all were known breeds or mixes. Only one of the people I interviewed did not know her dog's breed, but even she came up with some dogs that she thought they might have been mixed with.

Many of the people I talked with had an idea of the breed of dog that they wanted before they got the dog. Not so with women who were choosing cats. Cats breeds are not known in the same way dog breeds are. Cat breeds are nebulous things that your cat may or may not look like. Tatiana who has no kids and has two cats exemplifies these thoughts in her comments "People are obsessed with dog breeds. They know everything about the breeds and the people are like who cares? This is just a cat, but I think that most cat owners go by color. What is your breed? Orange". The literature on cat characteristics based on color and breed is largely inconclusive and is focused on whether black cats are less likely to be adopted from the shelter (Carini et. al. 2020). When speaking with my sample it was clear that most were unaware of their cat's breeds and the idea of personality determined by breed or color was not strong.

When I asked most of the women if their cat conformed to its breed standards the idea was met with mirth. Jillian a married woman who has three cats laughed at the idea of cats conforming and sarcastically answered “Conform? Yeah, sure. They run this house.” While it is common among women who keep dogs to talk about the dog’s behavior due to its breed you never hear that same language spoken by the women who keep cats. When I asked about cat breeds most of the respondents said that their cats were not “fancy” or “purebred” that they were just everyday regular cats. While the idea of cat breeds was unsettled, in dog breeds very firm ideas of the dog’s appearance and behaviors are found.

Ideas about the breed of a companion animal and the social identity of the owner often cause some dogs to be viewed differently than others (Dickey 2017). In a comparative study of dog registration and licensing compared with traffic violations and criminal convictions, it was found that owning an aggressive breed dog, especially a pit bull was believed to be an indicator of criminal deviance (Barnes et al. 2006). Fratkin and Baker (2015) learned the shape of the ear and the color of the coat affect the way a person views dogs and the dog’s perceived personality. Dogs with black coats and pointy ears were thought of as aggressive while dogs with floppy ears and yellow coats were thought to be friendly.

These impressions are often salient considerations when individuals are choosing companion animals. The women I spoke to were very careful to make sure that they were obtaining their companion animals ethically and mentioned ideas of breed and how the breed looked as deciding factors in the choice of dog,

which further reflects a difference in companion animal keeping. While many studies exist on breeds of dogs and the impressions they make on other people, I was unable to find anything similar for cats. Cat-keeping not only differs in naming practices but in our ideas about cat breeds as well.

### *Routine with Companion Animals*

Cat-keeping is not filled with as many expectations of the cat's behavior or conforming to a daily routine or schedule as with dog-keeping. Dogs follow a more rigid routine than do the cats in my study. Cats only seem to require more routine as they age and there is more to their care. Several of the cats in my study were senior cats or had health issues that required more time and routine than was previously given to the cats.

Cats are more likely to sleep loose in the house, while dogs are crated or sleep with their people. Cats are more likely to be free fed, meaning that the person will just make sure that the food bowl is not empty. Dogs in my study are more likely to be fed three meals a day than are cats. People seem to worry more about the content, quality, and quantity of dog food. Forty percent of the dogs in my study were given three meals a day and some had meals cooked for them or ordered food that was fresh food for the dogs. Dogs were also given greater variety in their meals so that they would not get tired of the food. Treats were given to both cats and dogs; however, dogs were most likely to be given things like fruit or vegetables as treats while cats were given cat treats packaged

and bought from the store. Additionally, more thought was given to what dogs drank. Both cats and dogs were given water, however many of the dogs were given filtered water, often with ice.

Routine in feeding is not the only routine, often dogs are given puzzles to solve so that they can exercise their minds and attend doggie daycare when their people are at work. They are given more toys than cats with companions of dogs stating that they could not count how many toys their dog has, that they are in toy boxes and storage ottomans throughout the house. There are also doggie training classes and therapy work that the dogs do. A few of the people I spoke to have a service dog, and other dogs were volunteers helping to read books at libraries with children or work as therapy dogs to other dogs in a dog hospice. None of the cats in my study had their lives structured for them in those ways. The cats were allowed to lie around the house and sunbathe. Cats were not generally taken out which is different than dogs whose social appearance is more highly managed.

Dogs were taken to activities aside from being walked. They went to dog parks, on hiking trails, to bars and restaurants, and to many department stores. Additionally, people take their dogs on trips and stay in hotels with them. They go to special dog bakeries and get special treats, there is a very popular dog park/bar that many of the people I interviewed go to, and they take their dogs to grooming spas. It is important to the dog's companion that the dog be socialized,



and they get along with both other dogs and people. While they are taken places they are expected to behave and reflect well on their companions.

Garnier and Glazier (2014) argue that dogs work like avatars and that people can engage with their environment through their companion animal, with the dog becoming a social interactive reflection of the self. Dogs directly influence human relationships based on perceptions of the behavior of the dog towards other dogs and humans. Companion animals facilitate or hinder the building of community, as people form impressions of and choose whether to engage with dog owners based upon their dog's appearance and behavior (Graham and Glover 2014). Indeed, perceptions of animal breeds and dog behaviors can reflect badly on the owner, lessening their social capital (Graham and Glover 2017). When dogs are badly behaved in public it reflects on their companions.

Failure of the dog to properly socialize is a reflection on the owner and not seen as a failure for the dog. Cats are not expected or desired to socialize with each other or people. They are not generally out or visible in the house when people come to visit and they are not brought anywhere but the vets, or when their human must move. Many of the people I interviewed described how their cats' paws had never touched the ground that was outside. Although one of my respondents had built their cats a "catio" or a screened-in patio made for cats often with a screened-in bridge connecting it from a window, so that they could safely go outside, but most of the cats were indoor only.

Only a few of the respondents that I spoke with let their cats go outside.,, but they did not put leashes on the cats and walk them or push them in strollers at music festivals like some of their dog-keeping counterparts. Many of the people I spoke with would be willing to take their cats more places and do more with their cats, but those activities are not often offered to cats and, in general, cats seem unwilling to engage in shared outings. Routines that fill our day serve to solidify the place the companion animal as a member of our family. However, the routines that we have with cats are less involved than the ones with dogs. There are differences between dog and cat-keeping when selecting a name, knowledge of the breed, our expectations of the social behavior of the companion animal, and the accessories that we provide for our companion animals.

#### *Accessorizing for the Companion Animal*

Cat accessories are less likely to be gendered than are dog accessories. Cats in my study do not as a rule wear collars or harnesses. In cat-keeping we are more likely to display our own gender through the cat. Cats are not seen as tolerant of collars and are more likely to be “naked”. Roxy a balloon artist who has five cats and lives with her husband, explains it this way:

I don't think that we do anything that's like crazy over the top for them. I mean, you know, we buy them cat trees and things like that. But I don't think anything's like crazy extravagant. Not the way people do for dogs. I think people are more extravagant with their dogs than they are with cats. And maybe it's just because there's is more stuff to buy for dogs. Like I would buy some stupid shit for my cats if I thought they would like it, you know? So, we have not yet, but someone needs to figure out that market out.

Dogs wear collars, harnesses, and bandanas that match their gender. Most of the dogs in my study had a collar that was assigned to them according to their gender and their fur color. People wanted to make sure that the collar both reflected the dog's personality and would stand out against their fur. Emily who is a married woman and a safety specialist has three male dogs discusses how everyone thinks all her dogs are females. She has a Doberman, a Shih Tzu, and a standard Poodle.

So, everyone thinks that they are girls. It's not even the collars. So, Oscar has a pink collar because he is a dark color and that was the only color I could find that really stood out at the dog park. But even when I take his collar off people still think that he is a girl. I don't know why. Obviously my two fluffy things are mixed up too, because they're fluffy. Probably because he is cuddly and licky and sweet and not at all barking until he lifts his leg on like the stuff in front of them. And then, they are like. Oh! Okay! You're a boy! I think specifically because he is an aggressive breed, but he doesn't act scary or aggressive people think he is a girl. Just based on that.

Bandanas are very popular for dogs, many of them with gendered colors are special ordered from Etsy with their names embroidered on them. Cats are less likely to have clothes put on them. Although several people have reported putting Halloween costumes on their cats for a few minutes, they did not wear them and take them to trick or treat or have them help pass candy, as people do with dogs. Dogs are more likely to wear clothes every day, these clothes are always gendered. No one in my sample did things like put a dress on their male dog. Roberta who is a married woman, who has a Yorkie named Maggie and a

young son, devoted a closet to her dogs' dresses. She has the dresses tailor-made for her dog, she described it as her dog's personal seamstress.

She has more dresses than I do. By far, not even by a slim margin, like, a lot. Things started when she started doing therapy, I would start putting dresses on her, I only dress her up when she goes to therapy. So, she knows when she is wearing a dress that she's going to go volunteer. So, she loves it. She gets on a dress, and she starts running around in circles and it's like she is so excited to go somewhere. But she loves wearing her dresses. I feel like she loves the color pink. Maybe it's my head. But I feel like she does. She picks it out. She'll go and she'll pick it out, you know, she loves her pink bowls. And, you know, she definitely gravitates towards the color pink.

Many of the women that I spoke to seemed like they wanted to do the same for their cats, but there was not as much available, and they were afraid that the cats would not tolerate it well. But there was also some disapproval expressed by cat keepers towards the dog-keeping crowd and how they did not treat their cats like people. They claim to have more respect for their cats, and they would not dare try to make their cats more like humans. Jillian who is in her late forties and who has three cats talks about it like this "No, no, I would never do that. That would be purely for my benefit." This reluctance to buy gendered accessories for the pet may be due to our respect for the natural temperament of cats and the accompanying lack of social expectations for them.

In my study, I have found women were less likely to gender their cats through naming and accessories than women who have dogs. This may give the dogs more of a social identity, meaning that if cats are not given gendered accessories they do not have a recognizable gendered identity. Russell Belk

(1988) argues that our possessions contribute to and reflect our identities. Building on Belk's (1988) ideas of possessions as reflections of self, Jyrinki (2012) argues that pet consumption is a form of consumer construction of identity. Researchers have found that people who spend excessive amounts of money on themselves also spend excessively on their pets (Ridgeway et al. 2007). This reflects how people described whether they were like their pets, as dogs were given differing identities from their companions and cats were not.

When speaking with the women I asked them how they were like their cats or dogs. Dogs were given more autonomy to have their own personalities. Many women did not think that they had anything in common with the dogs. Sylvia who is a married nurse with four dogs describes the similar traits she feels like she shares with dogs, "I don't think we have a whole lot in common. I think that his is probably the sweetest dog I've ever had. It's just he's got no fight in him. He is just all love. Yeah. And that's not me. I am pretty spicy. And sassy." By contrast, women with cats felt deeply that the cats were an expression of themselves and that they share many common characteristics. Miranda, who is in her late forties and married with a son, describes the similarities that she shares with her cat in this way, "Very similar. She is as picky as I am. She's as discerning with the company she keeps as I am. She has minimal tolerance for bullshit like me. I think we're probably so much more alike than any difference we may have." This gives evidence to my argument that individuals express their own gendered identity through their companion animals. As pet keeping evolves,

we do things to solidify the place that the companion animal has in the family. We do this by naming them, buying them stuff, and being selective about how we get them. Once we have them, we make them part of our daily lives and devote time to them. In dog-keeping these phenomena are more prominent and more gendered. Although ideas of gender run through both dog and cat-keeping.

### *Gendered Ideas about Pet Keeping*

It may be that people identify more with the dogs bred and how they look and act than they do with the individual characteristics of the dog. This is not to say that women only described the dogs by their breed, they also attributed characteristics that were not part of their breeding, but these descriptions while not bound by breed and heredity were bound by gender. Elizabeth, who is single and has one dog and many cats under her care, described it this way:

But you know what, I think females in any species, in any breed, we have that extra heightened sense of lack of trust or fear you're gonna have to put more work in general because female has that fear and that lack of trust. We have got to protect our children and we have to be more protective of ourselves because there is more violence done to females.

Additionally, most respondents stated that the non-human males of every species were more affectionate and loving, although many also described their females as motherly or nurturing. This shows how we allow ideas of gender to affect our relationships with companion animals. In general, cats were seen to be more feminine, and dogs were perceived as more masculine. Jillian who is in her late forties, has three cats said, "And I don't know really why this is, but my kids all thought all cats were girls and all dogs for boys." Additionally, small dogs and

dogs with long hair were seen as pretty and feminine. Melissa who worked as a vet tech for several years described it this way:

Ah, now there's some dogs with long hair that I would not know (if they were male or female). Like you know the Australian Shepherds. There's some that looks even more female or male, and so it's just kind of it's really hard, especially working at a vet clinic. Right? You never know. You never know until you kind of mess with them.

I found that women thought that the larger breeds and breeds with short fur were seen as the most masculine dogs, although they did not always express themselves in traditional masculine characteristics. Melissa who is single and is a fundraiser, describes her dog as masculine but describes that he is in touch with his feminine side:

I don't know if this is appropriate to say, but I always just say that is kind of like my gay son. You know because he likes the finer thing in life. He knows what he wants, and he goes after it. And he's just does not like to be outside for long periods of time. Let me go back in or something. But he also acts very masculine. He's in protective guard dog mode, he is very like I'm the big dog here. I am going to be the person (talking about the dog) to stop you from getting close to my mom. And so, I think he's very macho in that way.

Despite having very defined ideas about the gender of the cats and dogs in their lives, defining gender for people or just, in general, was very difficult for people. This shows that while people are hesitant to apply definitions of gender to people, that displaying gender in our companion animals is less difficult.

Farrah who is partnered woman in her late 30 to early '40s and who has one dog, explains it like this: "you know it is really societal driven. I mean I see this shifting

culturally, this view of masculinity and femininity.” Sophia, who has two dogs.

also struggled with these definitions:

I guess I struggle with it. It's 2021 and it's always been ingrained in me, the very traditional roles. And so, it is really hard in today's new era, I guess I tiptoe that because it is so ingrained in who I am, kind of the roles of females and the male, even though I don't follow it. It's really hard for me to understand the new way. Not saying it's bad, but it's just that my parents were traditional Hispanic people. They're very much the wife stays home. The man makes the money he controls the money. He works and the wife takes care of the kids and takes care of the house, even though I am not like that. I like femininity is being able to feel independent but still carrying that soft essence about you and masculinity.... this is a hard one. I think it's being able to carry yourself and being able to hold your own, but I feel that could describe both. Like I said, it's a new era. It's a new generation coming through and so that word has many different probably one hundred percent. So that's a really hard question.

This expresses to me the changing nature of gender and how society is defining these terms. The women I spoke with were very careful with their definitions of femininity and masculinity and included that they could not really define it because it was changing, Roxy reacted to her inability to define the terms, “I think it's rapidly changing, which is awesome, because we have been fighting for that for a very long time. So, it's nice to see that it's changing. But it makes it very difficult to define, currently.”

While our attitudes about gender is changing rapidly in society, it seems that with animals we feel that it safer to express traditional ideas of gender. Perhaps while we give people the freedom to express themselves freely we attribute less freedom to animals. Blair who is married and does work in brand marketing, has two cats told this story that illustrates this idea:



Socks is such a boy and Scrunchy is such a girl. And I know I hate to assign like, you know, traditional gender to people or our cats, but you know what I mean, the traditional definition of masculine and feminine. They really do possess that, in fact, when we first adopted the kittens, the lady that was fostering them, she wasn't a veterinarian, right? And she told us that Scrunchy was a boy. And so, we thought actually, at first that we were getting brothers. And it was funny, because when we had them as kittens, and before we took them to their first checkup, we assumed that. And so, we have the two kittens. And we instantly saw the difference. Like if we were playing with them Socks was really aggressive jumping in and Scrunchy was kind of tender and really timid about it. And Kenny even said, He's like, wow, at the time we were calling her Adam, because that's what the foster called her, him when she thought it was him. I was like, Adam's kind of feminine, right? And then it was so funny, we took them for their first checkup. And they were expecting to see two boys. And she was like, um, that's not a boy. And so, we laughed and anyway we ended up naming her Scrunchy. And, yeah, I realized that she was a girl, but we instantly honestly did notice those differences.

Blair expresses gendered ideas about her cats' behavior and tells how she had to change the cats' name to reflect her cats' sex. My sample expressed opinions about how sex changes the behavior of a companion animal and expressed ideas of traditional gender roles placed on humans. While not able to verbalize how they would define masculinity and femininity in people, the women in my sample did see gender as relevant to their pets. As ideas of gender change in humans, we have not seen this shift in companion animals. Cat-keeping differs from dog-keeping in the way we name cats, think of the breed of cats, and how we arrange the lives of cats. Gender it is less pronounced in cat-keeping. We express our own genders through our cats while allowing dogs to display their own genders. We see additional differences in the ways we spoil our pets or our expectations of our pet's behavior.

### *Spoiling Companion Animals*

When I asked the women in my study who kept dogs whether they think that their dog is spoiled the answer they give is complicated, they want to make sure that people understand that while they work hard to provide their dogs with the very best lives they can afford, that their dogs have boundaries and manners. They stress that the dogs are only rewarded for good behavior. Rachael, a college student with one dog, explains it this way:

I think that she has what she needs. When I see spoiling I see it more as those badly behaved dogs that get to run the house. Because people joke that Lynn is spoiled. But I am like, actually, she gets like her really nice food because that's what she needs. She has her own space because she needs her own space. But at the same time, there is discipline in the house, there's order, there's routine in regard to like, how I feed her and things like that. But I see spoiling as more of the dog runs everything. Yeah, and I am not a big fan of that, I do pet sitting and most of them are like that. But within my house, we have a structure of I'm going to give you what you need, so that you can have a happy, fulfilled life, and we are going to work together as a team.

When I posed the same question to the people whose companions are cats, I am told the cat would say no, that they do not do enough. There is a general sense among these women that cats do not appreciate what they are given, and they always want more than you do. Penelope, who has two cats, answers whether or not she thinks her cats are spoiled, "Probably not. Yeah no, I think we assume that Duchess deserves more and that she expects more." And Roxy, who has five cats, talks about her five cats being spoiled:

No, not at all. I think they probably think they want for everything and that they are abused. Because it's 6:32. And they have not been fed when they

are supposed to be fed, which is 6:30. They have absolutely no idea. They are spoiled. No idea whatsoever.

The money spent on cats was much smaller than the amount that people on average spend on their dogs. People with both cats and dogs buy them food, vet care, and toys however people with dog companions spend more on training and amusements for their dogs. People with dogs take them to daycare, whether they are at work or not just so that the dog can get some socialization and burn off excess energy. There is no cat daycare in the same way that there is for dogs. You can board at a facility when you go away and I am sure that many people do, although the people in my study either had a person come stay with the cat or a couple of them traveled with their cats. But there is no place to take your cat for a day out of the week to allow them to play with other cats. Again, this relates to the ideas that we have as a society about cats and their independence and our expectations of cat behavior.

While many people talked about how social cats are and how they live in colonies, most people did not think a cat would enjoy going to a daycare-like facility. Few of the women I interviewed acknowledged that cat training was possible no one had any desire to train their cat and did not think it was important that their cat learned rules of behavior. Cats were allowed to exist as they were, and people had limited expectations of their behavior. Cats are not expected to perform socially.

Additionally, less was expected in cats having an existence outside of the home, while many dogs are brought on walks and are taken to visit family, only one person in my study had ever taken her cat to visit her family and no one had taken their cats on walks. Cats belong to the house almost exclusively and are therefore a more private relationship. Most of the people I spoke to said that their cats did not even come out from hiding when guests were present. This is in opposition to our expectations of dogs.

Dogs on the other hand are taken to family houses, not just on a trip but to visit on a day-to-day basis. Dogs are taken on walks often several times daily and they get in the car and are taken to dog parks, the store, drive-thrus to get a puppuccino, bars, and restaurants to hang out on the patio while their person has drinks with friends. Dogs are expected to behave when in these social settings and dogs are used to represent both their person and they express their genders through their collars, bandanas, harnesses, and often their clothing. Pet keeping has morphed over the years to make companion animals more a part of the family. As a part of the family the companion animals are given a gendered place and the role that the women play in their lives is also a reflection of societal ideas of gender. Another way that this shift is evident is in the grief we express over losing a companion animal.

*Saying Goodbye to the Companion Animal*

Many of the women that I interviewed expressed strong emotions about their dogs and cats. Many of them highlighted the temporary nature of the relationship, given the dogs' or cats' lifespan. Some women were in tears while they described the relationships that they had with dogs and cats from the past. Many women had senior dogs and cats and were facing the mortality of their little companions.

Theresa runs a dog hospice where she deals with dog death. She takes in the dying dogs from shelters and rescues and gives them comfort, and she hopes to give them a measure of happiness and peace. Theresa has five dogs of her own, runs a grooming and boarding facility, and opens her heart and her home to dying dogs who need some love. She describes it like this "hospice fosters are hard to come by. For good reason. It hurts saying goodbye. It is painful. No one wants to do it. And they are a lot of work and money. But it's one of those things, probably one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. Best decision I could have made was to forego doing adoptable dogs and just focusing on hospice."

Theresa makes a bucket list for every dog that comes in and she will only take in one or two at a time, to make sure that she can give them the care and attention that they need. She talks about how her five poodles work with her and how they work together to comfort these dying dogs, "If you ever want to see love in its purest form, look at the poodles with the hospice dogs. It's just unconditional comfort. It's something that, you know, as humans, we don't get to

experience a lot. And some people never do as sad as it is. And they just give it freely, without hesitation so it really is just love in its purest form.”

Theresa has a hospice dog currently. He has been with her for two years. She says he has almost flunked out of hospice and has just become hers. I can imagine that any dog would be inspired to live longer under the care of someone as loving as Theresa seems to be. Hospice is different for every dog, just as it is for every person, and sometimes Theresa must make tough choices. When I asked her to tell me about hospice for dogs this is how she found the difference between hospice for humans and dogs:

Very similar in the fact that's a lot of comfort care, a lot of managed for them and the biggest difference, you know, to me, the greatest gift in rescue but in pets in general is to be able to make the call so that they don't have to suffer versus you know humans. You're in it until the very, very end no matter how much suffering and how ugly it may get. And so that's the biggest difference, and also the hardest difference because you have to make the call.

Miranda is struggling with the idea of the mortality of her cat. During our interview, she was often brought to tears telling me about her fifteen years with her cat Pippa. Pippa had lived with Miranda since she was a kitten and has gone from being a cat of a single young woman in a New York apartment, who gave parties to living in a more suburban neighborhood and being part of a family with a son and a husband. Miranda described to me that Pippa did not like her husband at all and tolerated her son. Miranda in tears, expressed to me that she believed her cat may not have been able to live the life that she wanted, “ I feel

terrible saying this, because I have, you know....when you talk to people, like older people, people older than us in their 70's and 80's, like you know if I just done such and such I could have been blah, blah, blah, and they have a little regret, or things just didn't work our as planned. And I often feel that way for her, you know, that she didn't get to blossom." I then asked her what she thought Pippa would have wanted for her future:

Just to be me and her always. Yeah, I hear it, definitely moments where I wish that that was still my future. You know, I love my husband, I love my son. But my 30's and you know up until then, I had a great job, great apartment. Good times, good money, you know, living the life. And there were definitely times still and I'm married almost eleven years, I think, next week. I still think back, and I think that these were the best times, the bottle of wine and all of the friends over and all of that great stuff. She would have wanted to, you know, she might, she could have done without all of the cigarette smoke I was blowing at the time, right? Otherwise, I think she would be happy to still be there.

As Theresa and Miranda both struggle with mortality and caring for senior dogs and cats, they both express and grapple with complex emotions. Theresa, who is chronically ill herself, provides comfort and care to dogs who need it, she works to relieve their suffering and provide the comfort that she would want for herself. Miranda expresses through her feelings about her cat some feelings she may have about her own life. While it is not acceptable for women to feel even fleeting feelings of regret for the children they have had or for their marriage, they can express it through their cats'. While we express things like gender and make our companion animals extensions of ourselves, they can also be used to work

through more difficult emotions, like mortality and regret. I faced some of my own difficult emotions when we lost Sugar.

During this project, I have lost my own senior cat. Sugar was fifteen years old and had spent her entire life at my son's side. He got her when he was three and she slept with him every night. Saying goodbye to Sugar was difficult for us to do, we wanted to keep her in our lives for longer than she could stay. For me it was timed with a realization that my son is 18 and his childhood is over, bringing up some of my own feelings of mortality and impermanence. Pet loss is not given official recognition, although, it often feels just as painful as a human death. You cannot take off work and you likely will not be met with an outpouring of sympathy. While many aspects of pet keeping has shifted over the years pet loss has not changed as rapidly.

In the next section, I will explore some of these findings and give my ideas I will delve into why these gendered naming practices between dog and cat keepers may differ. Then, I consider the differences between cat and dog keepers in their routines, and they are dissimilar. I next, discuss some of the emotions pet keepers feel for their companion animals, and finally I discuss rescues.

## DISCUSSION

People use gender in the naming of their companion animals, although this practice is less evident in people who keep cats. People are also more likely



to have gendered accessories for dogs more so than cats. Additionally, dog keepers are more likely to describe their dogs in gendered terms. In my study I found gender to be more significant in dogs, while cats were gendered to a lesser degree. When keeping a cat, people are less likely to display the cat's gender and they are more likely to use the cat as a demonstration of their own gender. While in people who keep dogs are more likely to display the gender of the dog. The women I spoke to allowed cats to be more fluid, less tame, and less defined by gender, socially. Maybe this is due to the less social aspects of keeping a cat. Cats are not as easy to transport and take with us, while there are some exceptions, typically they do not readily walk on leashes. Cats are also more isolated to the outside world and are more likely to be less social with people visiting the house.

While cats do not seem to want to be with people as much as dogs do, cats are just as dependent on us. Although they can survive quite well outside, they would starve in our homes without us feeding them, They need us as much as dogs need us. We, as a society, tend to attribute more independence to cats than to dogs. Although many people think of cats as loners, cats live in colonies and rely on each other as dogs do in a pack (Alger and Alger 2003). Alger and Alger (1997) studied a cat shelter and argue that cats were able to socialize with other cats helping them to adapt to the shelter. They observed cats taking different roles and having memories of past events. Their research showed that the cats had developed a culture and that they were transmitting their culture to

other newly arrived cats. Thus, cats maybe just as social as dogs with one another, in the absence of intensive human care, and they are not as independent as we think of them.

Cats are less integrated into family routines, perhaps because we as consumers have not been told about cat needs and wants, and we have not been given subtle messages as in television commercials for cars where dogs replace the humans that they are like us. Cats are portrayed as lower maintenance than dogs, but this portrait may be one that we have created. As stated before cats have the same basic needs that a dog has, making the lower maintenance claim seem less than true.

Elizabeth who has both cats and dogs talks about how dogs can give a level of security to women living alone, “You know, knowing that whoever comes to that door, she’s right up there, just like having another person. Cats don’t do that. Cats are not people. But with dogs it’s almost like a person. Obviously, dogs are more equal partners than cats.” Audra who is married and has both cats and a dog describes the differences between cats and dogs like this, “Cats are very much more independent, self-sufficient. You’re there for them. Dogs, they’re there for you. There, you know, more excited to see you when you get home.” Roberta who does not own a cat describes it like this, “They (cats) seem to be more independent. I’m gonna do my thing. Just leave me alone, type of animals. Whereas with dogs I feel like they really enjoy human companionship.

Additionally, some of these thoughts about the independence of cats may be that cats are seen as more feminine and less childlike than dogs. Men and children are seen as needing more care than women, who are seen as providers of care. This is an example of the way we express our own genders through our companion animals. I found that the women in my sample were also more likely to care for the companion animal. Sophia a woman who is an operational supervisor for a waste company with two dogs relates her experience with men and animals:

Every female will say, I love my dog. I would do anything for my dog. I feel that men view dogs, I think men view dogs for what they are. You know, it's normally the man that is like, does this dog need to be inside? But the dog does not need this, so I think it is definitely emotional, like men are not really emotional like that. I think they view a dog as a dog. You know a dog is a protector, that's what they were born to do. We being women don't see that side. We are like, oh my gosh! It's so fluffy! It's so cute! It has emotions, it loves me! So, I just think that it is two different views of what a pet is. Same with like men who own cats, because I feel like their emotional connection, they're more sensitive than men who own dogs, in my opinion, and too because cats need a lot more attention that dogs don't need (litter box cleaning is the extra attention) so I feel maybe a cat dad would be more feminine.

In 1989 Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung coined the term "The Second Shift" to describe the lack of leisure time that women have because of gendered ideas of household responsibility. Hochschild and Machung (1989) described how after a full day of paid labor women came home to fulfill household duties and childcare. Hochschild and Machung (1989) found that when men were involved with children it was generally to play. I also found this in

my study as the women described doing most of the work and worry involved in pet keeping, while the men played with the pets. Kathy who is married with three dogs describes the division of labor like this, “Uhm, I would say that I do most of the caretaking. Ask him (meaning her husband), well you know, men always think that they do more than they do.” Jocelyn DeGroot and Tennely Vik (2019) performed an open-ended survey of one hundred and fifty women and found that with no clear avenue of equity coping solutions must be employed such as comparing one spouse’s actions or lack of actions to their own or internalizing ideas of gender and gender roles.

Many of the women that I spoke to exhibited intensive motherhood with their dogs (Hays 1996). Cats were not treated this way, although one cat owner had her cat on a special diet due to health, largely people did not adhere to the tenant of intensive mothering with their cats. Doggie daycare was provided to many of the dogs to ensure that that their dog receives proper socialization and stimulation regardless of price. Additionally, elaborate routines were followed to give the dogs more structure in their days. Most of the women in my study performed the care of their companion animals on their own, although, some had partners to help, many of the partners did not help with the care of the cats and dogs.

Gendering dogs and how this process shapes our relationships with them, could be seen in the expectations of dogs as well, for many of the unmarried younger women in my sample chose specific dogs and types of dogs.

They were looking for not just companionship, they were looking for protection.

These women chose large male dogs. Melissa who has lives alone with a Great Dane speaks about the comfort and protection she feels that her dog gives her:

Well, he is actually registered as an emotional support animal. I don't know if that really says anything, but he gives me the peace of mind for me to go to sleep like a rock. I have anxiety. I have developed anxiety over the past couple of years and he has really calmed me down. You know, since I live by myself, especially during this pandemic, it would have been very easy for me to just stay in. He keeps me going. He keeps me calm and whole. He gives me piece of mine, security and a purpose.

The women that I have spoken with illustrate the unconditional love that their dogs and cats feel for them. When I first began hearing this from respondents I dismissed it, because we have no way of knowing how a dog or cat feels and we have no way of knowing if the signs that they show are love and whether it is unconditional is also up for debate. However, as I write this and reflect on the interviews, I see people expressing that their companion animals are an extension of themselves. If a companion animal is an extension of ourselves then this means that the love we are calling unconditional, which we attribute to our companion animals, is really a love and acceptance of the self. Archer (1997) also found that people felt that their companion animals felt unconditional love from them because they did not feel criticized or judged as they do with people. Maybe when people say things like my dog does not care what I look like what we mean is I felt comfortable at that moment to let my guard down and really be my authentic self, and I loved myself while I was doing so. Often, pet-keeping

revolves around ideas of identity and individualism and illuminates how we as people display our own gendered identities through our companion animal.

These ideas can also be found in the concept of animal rescue. Every person I interviewed talked about rescue and how they had rescued their animals regardless of how they got them. Even when a person buys a dog from a website it is framed as a rescue. The term rescue implies that the person getting the animal has removed them from a situation that will lead to their death. When humans rescue animals they are usually rescuing them from other humans. We are not forced to kill dogs and cats, but we have decided as a society that they cannot or should not live outside of our control. The narrative of individual responsibility is also visible in how we discuss neutering animals and how we work to control the companion animal population. You are seen as irresponsible if you do not neuter a dog or a cat... Many people including I, have had problems finding a puppy. Most people now go through private animal rescues and shelters to get dogs and cats, or to public shelters. It is difficult to find small dogs and puppies at these shelters because they are in demand. Thus, most dogs available to adopt are older dogs, not puppies. The people given the dogs are screened, you cannot just go to one and pick out a dog. You must prove yourself responsible enough to be trusted to properly care for the nonhuman.

For both this research and because I wanted a puppy I went through four different rescues organizations' applications to adopt a puppy. None of the four had the type of puppy I was looking for, which was a smallish puppy that was good

with other dogs, cats, and good with kids. One of the benefits of getting your dog from one of these rescue groups is the fact that the dogs generally have been kept in homes rather than kennels. Such groups also provide more information, like how well they get along with other cats, dogs, and how they do with kids.

The first dog rescue organization we tried was one that everyone recommended to me, a few of my friends had adopted dogs from there. The adoptions fees were reasonable, so I put in an application. Some of the application's questions seemed to be unnecessarily intrusive. They wanted to know about my income, my dog and my cat's veterinarian history with phone numbers, so that they could verify and all their shot records. They wanted to know if we rented or bought our home, and they asked about the size of our yard and the status of fencing in the yard. The group was clearly selective about who they allowed to adopt a dog.

All four of the applications I submitted asked for the same information. I was only called by one of the organizations, and they only had larger and older dogs. So, I looked on Craigslist, and I found many people offering dogs. The language has changed around dog acquisition. You do not buy a dog anymore, you adopt, foster or rehome dogs. I searched craigslist for weeks, most of the dogs on there were expensive. People were charging thousands in adoption fees for puppies. Many of these were said to have papers from the American Kennel Club.

I finally found a woman that was offering smaller puppies for a reasonable price. And we went to meet her and the puppies. We met her at a parking lot, and she had two dogs with her. They were both cute, she said that they were beagle and chihuahua mixes. She said she had rescued them, but I am not sure. She told us nothing else about them. She reeked of dog and so did her truck and her little dog carrier that she had the puppies in. She handled the dogs roughly, and I felt like she was breeding them and selling them. We chose a puppy and gave her the money and we never heard from her again. She had said that she would text and see how this little guy was doing, but she never did.

We did not get a small dog as we wanted. We did get a puppy, but it weighs about 30 pounds, and it is far larger than we anticipated. We think he is a lab/corgi mix. But with these ideas of individuality and personal responsibility, we lose the ability to go to a pet store and buy a dog. We must be scrutinized and deemed deserving enough to buy a dog. I think I am an acceptable and responsible keeper of companion animals, but I have lapses in my dog's veterinarian care. Check-ups are expensive and so I opted to order the heart-worm medicine from amazon instead of going to the vet before.

Additionally, I have taken my dogs to get neutered at places beyond my vet's office because it is so expensive there. So, if they were to call our regular vet, they may not get the best report. And maybe that means I deserve to not have any companion animals in my life. Maybe I should not be a pet keeper because I rent my home and I am not always on time with the cats and dogs



check-ups. We have a fenced yard, but it is a metal fence that a small dog could squeeze out of if not supervised. This means that poor families who rent would have a problem getting a dog, through these private organizations. The people running the rescue organizations have the power to decide who will be able to get a dog and who will not. While am sure that people are acting in good faith our unconscious biases for race, class, and gender likely come into play. Which leads to people being systematically unable to get dogs and cats. If the goal is to home as many animals as possible then you would think most people willing would make the cut, but this is not the case. The result may be that pet keeping will become a practice of only the elite.

To conclude this section, the main difference between cat and dog-keeping is the routine, your relationship with cats is no different than it would be with dogs. But most people buy more and do more for and with dogs than cats. This act of making the dog a consumer with us, makes the dog seem more human. More human means it gets a gender and the ability to display that gender. This illustrates that how society thinks of gender shapes our relationship with our companion animals, it also shows how we as people display our companion animals' gender as way of displaying our own gender. More human also means more for us to control, we can control every aspect of their lives. I am not sure that dogs are unhappy about it, but we have no way of knowing.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have given a short review of the literature, detailed the procedures of my study, reported the findings of the study, and discussed the findings. The literature while brief discusses the history of pet keeping, the place companion animals have been given in our families, and the role that gender plays in our companion animals. Next, I outlined the procedures of the study in the methodology outlining my use of grounded theory to guide this project. I interviewed 50 women for this project. Twenty-two of these women had dogs, 12 had cats and 16 had both dogs and cats. All the women in the study were between the ages of 18 and 50 and were interviewed using the online platform Zoom.

In the next section, I outlined the results of the interviews. I looked at how pet keeping has changed and how my respondents felt about these changes. I explained how the women in my study felt about their companion animals and how they considered them to be a part of their families. I talked about how these women chose names for their companion animals and how they selected them. Additionally, I talked about the routines that these women have with their companion animals and the things that they bought for them and what it means to spoil a companion animal. I also related the gendered ideas about pet keeping that the women identified and held. Finally, I wrote about what the women had to say when saying goodbye to their companion animals.

In the discussion section, I talked about why there is a difference in how we name dogs and cats, how their routines differed, and the gendered roles and

attitudes we have about pet keeping. Finally, I discussed rescues and some of the complexities that they posed. This section will conclude this thesis while proposing additional areas of studies then I will offer acknowledgments.

This study shows that we do gender with our cats, we do it to a lesser degree than with our dogs. I propose that we display gender more prominently in our dogs due to how publicly visible the relationship is with a dog. Dogs are given more ability to be displayed in public whereas cats are generally kept at home. How societal conceptions of gender shape our relationships with our companion animals, and how people show gender and their gender identities through their animals also demonstrates the importance of the place of the companion animal in a family. It is important to feel accepted for who you are, and showing who we are indirectly through our companion animals might feel a bit safer than other forms of self-presentation. I think that this study shows that our ideas about gender, race, and social class can be seen clearly in our relationships with and actions toward our companion animals. However, it is clear that considerably more research needs to address the issues discussed here.

Ideas of breeding, heredity, and inherited traits and their implications for suggestions of scientific racism and deserve serious consideration. This research did not have a wide enough scope to give these issues the attention that is deserved. Moreover, elements of social class can be seen clearly in decisions about which animal a person selects, how they obtain the animal, and then the

care of the animal throughout its life. While this study touches on some of the ideas of pet keeping and social class, it also deserves more attention.

Finally, I think that men should be studied and compared to women. This would enable us to see if they keep companion animals differently and what their thoughts and attitudes on gender may be. Such comparison and analysis would give a more complete view of how gender is demonstrated in petkeeping. The ideas and habits of men who have companion animals would provide a more complete picture of how gendered identity is presented indirectly through our animal companions.

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