So You Don't Own Any: Attitudes towards Pet Ownership

Kirstin Ketcham

Indiana University - Purdue University Fort Wayne

Follow this and additional works at: http://opus.ipfw.edu/stu_symp2002

Recommended Citation
http://opus.ipfw.edu/stu_symp2002/28
Pet ownership in the United States has undergone a transformation over the past century. Pets are becoming increasingly popular and the roles of these pets are changing. While in the past pets primarily provided services such as protection and labor for families, today pets are kept primarily as childlike household companions. Because of this increased popularity in pet ownership, the image of an individual as either one who owns a pet or one who does not is becoming an important way in which identities are shaped. As pets are viewed in a more anthropomorphic manner, often as children within the family, attributes of non-pet owners should become increasingly similar to those attributes associated with childless couples. It is, therefore, appropriate to examine the negative images of non-pet owners by comparing these images to those presented in literature regarding childless couples. Because individuals who voluntarily remain childless are viewed as being more selfish, irresponsible, and less nurturing than their childbearing counterparts, it becomes important to assess if such characterizations are also applied to pet-less individuals.

In order to explore this research hypothesis, a two-page questionnaire was administered in conjunction with seven introductory sociology classes at a midwestern university. A total of 184 completed responses were returned. This questionnaire was designed to compare attitudes between non-pet owners, former pet owners, and current pet owners, towards pet owners and non-pet owners. Implications for differential attributions based upon pet ownership are discussed.