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Consumer Resistance in the Pet Marketplace

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Abstract

This study draws on Cherrier's (2008) concept of consumer-resistant identities together with the work of Beverland, Farelly and Lim (2008) on the dark side of pet ownership to shed light on consumer resistance in the context of the pet marketplace. The adopted research methodology utilises a photoelicitation technique known as autodiving, thus, helping to reveal in greater depth, the layers of heterogeneous meanings surrounding such resistance practices. The UK pet marketplace has become increasingly engaged with the marketing of luxury brands and designer breeds. However, our thirteen participants identified as pet owners were resistant to such luxury consumption practices, preferring to distance themselves from particular products and brands (including designer breeds) in the marketplace. The paper concludes with ideas for future research.

Keywords: consumers; resistance; companion animals; pet marketplace.

Introduction

The UK pet market has increased by 30% over the last six years, is currently worth £3.8bn and is predicted to reach £4.26bn by 2010 (Bolakee 2006). This may be considered minimal when compared to the \$36bn US market, a sector that has doubled over the last ten years and is currently overtaking the toy industry (Mosteller 2008). Much of this increased growth has arisen from pet owners spending more on special snacking gifts, pet accessories such as fancy collars, clothing and bedding and services such as cat and dog holiday care, doggie-daycare and dog-walking. Belk (2001) suggests that marketers have become very proficient at generating new luxuries and it would seem that the pet marketplace is no exception. For example, designers Ben de Lisi and Vivienne Westwood now offer a couture fashion line for dogs and Harrods hosts an annual dog fashion show (Bolakee 2006). In addition to new consumption experiences such as luxury hotels, 'Barkday Parties', 'Doga' (i.e. dog yoga) and 'Bark Mitzvahs' (Bolakee 2006), there are also pet brand parodies of well-known luxury brands such as Chewnel No 5, Chewy Vuiton, Dog Perignon and Pucci (Petty 2008). Another consumption practice recently observed is the increased interest in expensive canine hybrids such as the Labradoodle and the Cockapoo, as well as custom-made feline breeds such as the Ashera and the Toyger (Jacobs 2007). Beverland, Farelly and Lim (2008, 490) suggest that such "appearance-based aspects of pet related consumption" is driven by the need for status and distinction and/or domination and control and that this represents "a potential dark side to pet ownership". Beverland et al.'s (2008, 490) notion of the dark side to pet ownership is indexed by issues such as the morality of cross-breeding animals to make them more visually appealing to humans, the exploitation of animals, particularly the designer breeds mentioned above, being bred solely for profit and the treatment of animals "as designer accessories". One of the consequences of the latter concern being what happens to these animals when they are no longer in vogue. Observations have been made previously regarding the treatment of pets as toys (Belk 1996), as commodities (Hirschman 1994) and as self-extending possessions

(Holbrook et al. 2001). However, with the exception of the work of Beverland et al. (2008) few consumer researchers have analysed the significance of the potential dark side of pet ownership in any detail.

Drawing on the work of a number of anthropologists, Hirschman (1994, 623) argues that “pets reside in an intermediate position between nature and culture”. She goes on to say that as such they form “a mediating category between humans and animals, having aspects of both but being fully neither one or the other” (1994, 624). That pets reside somewhere between animals and humans is demonstrated in the use of the term ‘companion animal’ by some authors (see Hirschman 1994; Holbrook et al. 2001; Holbrook and Woodside 2008) and the continued use of the term ‘pets’ by others (see Belk 1996; Beverland et al. 2008). In defence of his stance, Belk (*ibid*, 122) argues:

“I realise that pets is no longer a politically correct term and that companion animals is more in vogue... Yet these animals, even when we treat them as quasi-human equals, did not freely choose to be with us. We chose them and most likely bought them in a manner similar to the way in which human slaves were once (and sometimes still are) bought... they are more dependent on us than we are on them. Keeping the term pets recognises this hierarchy of ownership... the pets versus companion animals metaphors reveal the dual ways in which we regard and treat these animals”.

We find the ambivalence contained in the use of the term pet versus companion animal very interesting. A number of authors have commented on the fact that many people view their pet as a friend, family member or as child substitute (a.k.a. “fur-baby”) or a substitute for a partner (Belk 1988; Greenebaum 2004, 117; Hirschman 1994; Holbrook 2008) and further that this may originate from our “tendency to anthropomorphise” (Belk 1996; Ellson 2008; Herzog 2004, 363). A condition which Caldwell (2008) suggests is increasing throughout the western world, especially amongst dog owners rather than cat owners (Albert and Bulcroft 1988; Dotson and Hyatt 2008). This treatment of pets as quasi humans may well account for the purchasing of presents to celebrate their birthdays and Christmas as well as

the dressing, decorating and extensive grooming of pets, consumption practices which clearly push pets even further from their animal nature and ever closer to the cultural aspect of Hirschman's (1994) nature-culture analytical framework.

The paper draws on the findings of a larger research project focusing on consumption in the context of consumers and their pets in which we found that most of our participants were extremely dismissive of the dressing and decorating of pets in clothing and other accessories and the pursuit of designer breeds, as outlined above. Indeed, these participants articulated clear disdain towards such consumption practices, the level of which suggests something more than straightforward dislike for a particular consumption style and something akin to "individual acts of resistance" (Penaloza and Price 1993, 123), which as these authors suggest "are rarely labelled or linked to resistance". In labelling the views of our participants as resistance, we argue that they are not only resisting the proliferation of pet luxuries and designer breeds but, perhaps more importantly, what these consumption practices signify. If consumer engagement in these consumption practices is motivated by the need for status and distinction and/or domination and control, i.e. the dark side of pet ownership (Beverland et al. 2008), then these consumption practices effectively signal what Cherrier (2008) calls 'positional consumption'. Analysing our participants in view of Cherrier's (2008) work, we aim to shed light on consumer resistance in the pet marketplace by adopting her concept of consumer-resistant identities to demonstrate the ways in which individual consumers resist positional consumption associated with the dark side of pet ownership. In so doing, this article contributes to current knowledge on the socio-cultural practices surrounding consumer resistance in the pet marketplace. The outline of this paper is as follows. Firstly, we begin by reviewing the literature on consumer resistance and relate this to the pet marketplace. Following this, we discuss the photoelicitation technique that we used to 'drive' 'long interviews' (McCracken 1988) with participant dog and cat owners, highlighting the distinct

value in utilising photographs to help reveal in greater depth, the “profound layers of consumption-related meanings” (Holbrook 1997, 218). After discussing the analysis of our participants’ stories, the conclusions and implications of this study are presented.

Consumer Resistance in the Marketplace

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) note the increased attention of scholars on the subject of resistance across the social sciences. However they argue that while this “rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance is both exciting and productive, different authors who use the language of resistance may not in fact be talking about the same thing” (2004, 533-534). This may be due in part to the fact that resistance has been used at a variety of levels within society from individual, through collective to institutional and in a variety of different settings from political systems, to entertainment, to the workplace. In view of this, they undertake a systematic review of cross disciplinary literature on the subject of resistance in order to produce a typology of resistance, which they trust will be useful within their own discipline of sociology. In so doing they identify two core elements in the various conceptualisations of resistance: the first is “a sense of action” and the second “a sense of opposition” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 538). They suggest that it may be useful to think of resistance in terms of seven different types: overt resistance, covert resistance, unwitting resistance, target-defined resistance, externally-defined resistance, missed resistance, and attempted resistance.

Efforts to conceptualise resistance have also been made within the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, a task which may be slightly less complex than that Hollander and Einwohner (2004) faced, given that here we are essentially focusing on one setting – the marketplace, though clearly this may be variously construed, and the participants to that setting (i.e. consumers), though once again they may be acting on different levels; as individuals or as formal or informal collectives. Fournier (1998) conceptualises consumer

resistance in terms of different objects of resistance; namely resistance to the marketplace as a whole, resistance to marketing activities and resistance at the level of the product or brand. Fournier presents Schor's (1998) work on "downshiffters" as an example of resistance to the marketplace as a whole. Downshiffters are individuals who having previously pursued a lifestyle of consumption and are now opting to reduce their consumption with a "less is more" attitude (Schor 1998, 88). Fournier presents Dobscha's (1998) study as an example of resistance to marketing. The participants in Dobscha's (1998) study are very critical of all aspects of marketing from product claims, to pricing policies, to advertising. One particularly interesting aspect of this study is the vehemence with which the participants attempt to resist being labelled as consumers. Dobscha informs us that "in order to remain true to their definitions of self, the women distanced themselves as far away from the marketplace as they could, understanding that full withdrawal was impossible" (1998, 93).

A number of authors acknowledge the impossibility of withdrawing or escaping from the market (Arnould 2007a, 2007b; Kozinets 2002). Kozinets argues that "notions of consumer emancipation and theatres of consumption are inspiring and visionary, but abstract. They leave as an open question the processes by which (and even the mere possibility that) consumers can find a way to leave the market" (2002, 23). Arnould (2007b, 103) contends that any idea of escaping the market is a "specifically Romantic response". He suggests that the Zinder people of Niger may provide an example of a people living outside the global market. He describes the desperate poverty in which these people live and concludes that "this kind of escape is clearly not the kind envisioned by the critics of market capitalism, and yet it is hard to imagine a realistic alternative" (2007b, 104).

Thus, while Dobscha (1998, 93) suggests that at times her participants are able to "live outside the marketplace" by "doing without many products deemed frivolous, unnecessary, or

detrimental to the environment”, this by no means constitutes “escape from the market” in Kozinets’ (2002) or Arnould’s (2007a, 2007b) sense of escape. In any case, Dobscha (1998) indicates that there are many instances in which “full avoidance” of the marketplace is impossible, thus substantiating the argument that Kozinets (2002) and Arnould (2007a, 2007b) would later make. In these situations her participants engage in practices such as using less and buying second hand goods, tactics which she labels as “living on the edge” of the marketplace (1998, 93). Finally, Dobscha informs us that when they are faced with no alternative but to engage in marketplace exchanges, her participants do so on their own terms; purchasing products such as vinegar and baking soda and using them as cleaning products. Following de Certeau (1984), Dobscha labels such practices “poiesis - a moment of production of making, doing...a moment of active recreation” (1998, 95). The creative and productive aspect of individual consumers’ engagement with the market as an act of resistance (i.e. making their own meanings) is widely acknowledged (Cherrier 2008; Close and Zinkhan 2008; Duke 2002; Kozinets 2002; Penaloza and Price 1993; Roux 2007).

With regard to consumer resistance at the level of the product or brand, Dalli, Romani and Gistri (2006) suggest that negative attitudes, whether developed for ‘individualistic’ (e.g. functional, egotistical) or ‘collectivistic’ (e.g. social, cultural, ethical) reasons could potentially translate into various forms of market resistance. Analysing consumer resistance to products and brands, Hogg and Savolainen (1998) suggest that aversion to certain products and brands may be understood in terms of distaste as much as taste. They explain this, quoting Bordieu, by arguing that tastes “are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by the tastes of others...an aversion to different lifestyles...they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes (Bordieu 1984, 56 cited in Hogg and Savolainen 1998, 89). In a later paper, Banister and Hogg (2001, 73) argue that it is via the “formation of distastes – and the associated consumer stereotypes – that consumers are able to identify the undesired end

state, and ultimately define themselves”. Hogg, Banister and Stephenson (2008) add that the factions that consumers endeavour to disassociate themselves from, represent the “navigational cues relating to the undesired selves” which consumers use to position themselves when conveying market resistance. Wilk (1997) concludes that avoidance behaviours such as distaste and refusal (and their associated rejected identities) may be more effective as social indicators despite being more difficult to communicate. The central role of identity in consumer resistance is further developed by Cherrier (2008) who proposes two types of ‘consumer-resistant’ identities; the ‘hero identity’ of the political consumer and the ‘project identity’ of the creative consumer. The former relates to “discourses against exploitative consumption”, and is “oriented towards an outer change” and the latter refers to “discourses against positional consumption”. Cherrier suggests that “along with conspicuous consumption, positional consumption intensifies the concept of narcissistic behaviour. Consumer culture, with its marketization of glamour and excitement, directs consumers toward narcissistic dreams”, and “to dream of an ever higher and more prestigious life” (2008). She views the creative consumption of the ‘project identity’ consumer as a response to positional consumption and argues that those who engage in creative consumption “no longer acquire, consume and dispose of material objects in response to others expectations ... they consume according to their own individual values and concerns” (*op cit*). Unlike political consumers, creative consumers do not seek to influence others, rather they personalise their consumption so as to construct and express their identity. Thus, in agreement with Dobscha (1998) and others (Close and Zinkhan 2008; Duke 2002; Kozinets 2002; Penaloza and Price 1993; Roux 2007), Cherrier also acknowledges the productive aspects of consumption.

There is some antipathy to positional consumption in the context of pet ownership in the academic literature on pets. In this regard, Holbrook et al. (2001) and Holbrook and Woodside (2008) are critical of authors such as Belk (1988) who have analysed pet ownership

from the perspective that pets may form a constitutive element of their owners' identity. These authors appear to suggest that to consider pets as extensions of self is perforce to treat animals as possessions to be manipulated. They argue that people love their animals and that this elevates them beyond mere possessions. Brockman, Taylor and Brockman adopt a slightly different perspective for they argue that pets serve different roles for different people. They suggest that this can be represented by an "emotional-attachment spectrum" (2008, 399), at one end of which are people who view their animals as objects or possessions and at the other end of the spectrum are those who view their animals as companions that are "truly extraordinary or even magical". Like Brockman et al. (2008), Beverland et al. (2008, 491) are also of the view that pets serve different roles for different people. They argue that people who tend to view their pets as possessions are more often extrinsically motivated whilst those "people who value pets as individual beings are more likely to be intrinsically motivated".

Beverland et al. (2008, 493) suggest that intrinsically motivated pet owners treat their pets as ends, rather than as a means to some other end, a viewpoint which allows such people to see past the breed of the animal and even to prefer stray animals and mongrels. These authors suggest that "consistent with their intrinsic love for their dogs as an end in itself" intrinsically motivated owners "do not ply their dogs with expensive toys or gifts such as designer doghouses, dog waters, doggiechinos, and dog clothes...such items are not only superfluous but represent an imposition of human standards and desires on the animal - a form of controlling behaviour whereby the dog is treated as a mere fashion accessory". By contrast extrinsically motivated pet owners focus on outward appearances. Here, "pets afford their owners status and are a means to attract love to oneself and to facilitate other desirable forms of social exchange" (ibid, 495). For Beverland et al. (2008), there is a definite judgement that with extrinsically motivated pet owners the welfare of the animal is somewhat secondary to the appearance related aspects of the relationship. However, in commenting on

their work, Ahuvia suggests that “a certain irony appears when some intrinsic anthropomorphise their dogs in ways that deny their doggy nature” (2008, 498). He goes on to argue that “respecting a dog for the hierarchical, pack-living creature that it really is and relating to its authentic doggy self...requires the imposition of hierarchy in which the dog bends to the human will” (op cit). The irony being that this view of dogs as subordinates in a hierarchical relationship is more typical of the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic pet owners.

Thus, while we recognise consumers’ cannot escape and/or resist the pet marketplace completely, it is feasible to recognise consumer resistance activities via the identification of both a “sense of action” and “a sense of opposition” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 538), either towards marketing activities and/or at the level of the product/brand (Fournier 1998). Moreover, in highlighting the role of pets as a constitutive element of the owner’s identity, we assert that our participants may resist positional consumption by engaging in individual acts of creative consumption. The next section outlines the methodological approach that we developed to elicit stories from our participants concerning their cats and dogs.

Adopted Methodology

As mentioned above, this research draws on the findings of a larger research project focusing on consumption in the context of consumers and their pets. This larger project drew on research methods from visual anthropology and utilised a technique known as autodiving (Collier 1967). Autodiving describes a particular photo-elicitation technique whereby visual and/or audio recordings of informants are taken by the researcher/participant and then used as projective devices for interviewing (Prosser and Schwartz 1998). Heisley and Levy (1991, 260) suggest that “to a certain degree, autodiving allows informants to interview themselves...and to raise issues that are significant to them”. We question this assertion however, for as Holbrook and Kuwahara (1998, 203) argue “one has no firm basis for

assuming that the photos taken or chosen by the researcher have a particular significant meaning or resonance in the lives of the relevant consumers”. A number of researchers have encouraged participants to take their own photographs (see Holbrook and Kuwahara 1998; Holbrook et al. 2001; Zaltman 1996, 1997; Zaltman and Coulter 1995). In a process he refers to as ‘auto-autodriving’ Morris Holbrook has taken his own photographs and then reflected upon their meanings (see Holbrook 1997, 1998). Zaltman (1997, 428) identifies a number of benefits in having participants exert control over the choice of stimuli used in the interview, not least of which is that “by affording participants time in advance of their interview to process implicitly the images they deem relevant, the pool of important constructs to be surfaced during the interview expands”. He also suggests that it may increase the chance that important issues that were previously unconsidered may be raised. Following Zaltman and Coulter (1995) and Holbrook et al. (2001), our participants took their own photographs. We offered each of our participants a disposable camera or, if they preferred and most did, they could use their own digital cameras to take photographs of their pets in whatever way they wished.

We initially contacted four people known to us as friends and neighbours or work colleagues to ask if they would be willing to take part in our study. Everyone agreed and, rather encouragingly, some of them even referred other members of their extended family and friends to us. Thus our initial convenience sample of four snowballed to a total of thirteen. We then invited our participants to use these photographs to tell stories about themselves, their families and their pets. All photographs were treated “as active witnesses, not passive or even accidental objects of evidence” (Banks 2001, 65). Thus, excepting that our interviews were ‘driven’ to varying degrees by the photographs that our participants had taken of their pets, in other aspects they followed what Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989) call the phenomenological interview and McCracken (1988) the long interview method. This style of interviewing is intended to yield a conversation and thus as Thompson et al. (1989) suggest

with the exception of the opening question, our interviews had no *a priori* questions concerning the topic. Of course questions and probes were used during the course of the interview but these followed the “course of the dialogue” and aimed to bring about “descriptions of experiences” rather than “confirm theoretical hypotheses” (Thompson et al. 1989, 138). With permission from the participants, interviews were audio-taped and lasted between one to three hours. A hermeneutical framework was adopted to interpret our participants’ stories, thus allowing us “to be open to possibilities afforded by the text rather than projecting a predetermined system of meanings onto the textual data” (Thompson 1997, 441). We wish to emphasise here that methodologically speaking the study was not designed to examine consumer resistance in this context, rather this aspect of consumption emerged as we examined the transcripts of our interviews.

The Nature of Consumer Resistance within the UK Pet Marketplace

Among the nine households, thirteen pets (five dogs, eight cats) were owned by the participants, two of which were purchased from a breeder and ten originating from animal shelters/friends. One exception to these acquisition circumstances and in contrast to owners taking the lead in choosing their pets, ‘DJ’ selected Simon by following him home one evening. The photographs played a key role in stimulating participants to tell stories about their pet’s character and behaviour as well as supporting information about their pet’s name(s), breed(s) and age(s) and their consumption practices. Table 1 illustrates the socio-demographic profile of the owners and their pets.

Insert table 1 about here

As indicated by Fournier (1998), our participants’ resistance is most clearly evident at the level of products and brands. Pet insurance is one of a number of product that elicited

mixed feelings from our participants. While most thought it safer and “*easier just to have the insurance*”, some felt it to be “*a costly thing*” and/or “*the biggest scam ever*”. Helen felt that “*they charge you more if you’ve got pet insurance. Maybe this is not true - I don’t know...They always ask you at the vets. They always ask you, have you got pet insurance? I’m presuming they put extra on. I don’t know. I don’t really know...That’s what I think*”. This clearly indicates a lack of trust in the organisations behind the marketing of this product.

Another product area that elicited mixed feelings among our participants is the toys that are available for pets. Our participants do seem to treat their pets as quasi humans (Belk 1996), to the extent that many buy presents (usually toys) for their pets at Christmas, though interestingly none of our participants celebrate their pets’ birthdays. Some participants recalled their pets’ love of the playful activities associated with unwrapping and playing with their Christmas presents. Judith mentions that Tessa “*likes her own presents ... she likes to unwrap them ... so all her wrapping paper is all over the garden.*” However, while some participants may buy toys for their pets at Christmas, at other times of the year, following Dobscha’s (1998, 95) “*poiesis*” and Cherrier’s (2008) creative consumption, others make do with toys they have devised out of various materials such as paper bags or boxes, some of which they feel their pets actually prefer. Thus, Millie referred to her cats’ nonchalance towards conventional toys, preferring to “*come over and play with the laces ... running up and down the garden chasing after a twig*” or playing with paper bags – “*they love it ... he’ll (Bobby) jump on her in the bag and then he’ll go in the bag and she’ll (Zeta) jump on him – hours of fun*” (see Appendix 1a). Helen and Stewart and their cat Brady play with a cardboard box that they have kept for this purpose for many years. Stewart inform us that they “*don’t get that many (toys) ... better off giving him (i.e. DJ) a little bottle top ... he’ll play with that more*”. Finally, Sheila mentioned their “*LED light, you know a red light on the night...god they love it, both of them run like kittens*”

In addition to the products discussed above, our participants are also clearly resistant to what we may consider quasi-brands, i.e. the designer breeds, which Beverland et al. (2008, 490) suggest are “indicative of a society that loves labels”. In this regard, none of the participants owned or aspired to own any hybrid/custom-made breeds. The only participant who even considered a designer breed was Mandy who informed us that they “*were going to get a Labradoodle ... for the hypoallergenic reasons ... but then we looked at more sites and some of them just looked like big perms really ... they looked awful ... utterly ridiculous ... I’d seen a Cocker Spaniel on the telly and I just thought ... it looked like a lovely dog and a nice size ... the face of the Cockers is just what I like*”. Similarly, Helen “*liked the Abyssinians, because they’ve got a pretty face ... quite normal ... not shoved out or pushed in*”. While Mandy and Helen do seem on the surface (see later for a different point of view) to be concerned with what Beverland et al. (2008) refer to as appearance-based aspects of the breed of their pets, most participants expressed a strong preference for cross-breeds compared to purebreds. Tom justified his preference by saying that “*moggies live longer than pedigrees.*” Similarly, Stewart said “*I think with pedigrees of anything, whether it’s a cat or a dog ... you are more likely to be going to vets all time ... if you get a moggy, you are not going to have as much trouble with it*”. These comments seem to echo the findings of Beverland et al. (2008) regarding intrinsic versus extrinsic dog owners. For they suggest that while extrinsic dog owners favour certain breeds as markers of status, intrinsic dog owners “see past the breed of dog”, in this respect, one intrinsic owner “prefers mongrels because she believes that they are healthier” and another “appreciates dogs for their intelligence and distinctive personalities, having no real preference for breed even though she owns a pure-bred Labrador” (2008, 493). With further regard to intrinsic pet owners, Beverland et al. (2008) suggest that “their love and appreciation of animals as distinctive entities with their own intelligence and personality leads them to value their dogs “warts and all.” This is clearly true for all of our participants and we have many examples to exemplify this. For example, Helen informs us that she is

unconcerned about the fact, that “*she (Agatha - Abyssinian Blue) should be cream under here and she stayed white*”. Similarly, Millie states that “*she’s (Blanche – cross-breed) still got quite a saggy belly if there was a side view ... and she’s only got bottom fangs, she’s never ever had any top fangs and consequently her lip curls up at the top*”. A related issue to our participants loving their pets “warts and all” is the way in which they tend to be somewhat scathing of people who competitively ‘show’ their pets (discussed later).

All our participants were resistant to ‘luxury products’ such as clothes and accessories and designer brands. This resistance resonates with Beverland et al.’s (2008) findings regarding intrinsic pet owners; in that “consistent with their intrinsic love for their dogs as an end in itself, [intrinsic owners] do not ply their dogs with expensive toys or gifts such as designer doghouses, dog waters, doggiechinos, and dog clothes. For these respondents, such items not only are superfluous but represent an imposition of human standards and desires on the animal – a form of controlling behaviour whereby the dog is treated as a mere fashion accessory...In contrast necessities such as healthcare and quality food are purchased” (2008, 493). Indeed, the comments from our participants seem to indicate that their resistance relates to what they feel these products and brands signify that is, the kinds of people with whom they do not want to be associated with as well as irreverence towards the *true nature* of animals (Hirschman, 1994). In fact, most of our participants ridiculed the idea of dressing animals in clothes. For example, Mandy asserted that she didn’t “*have an inner chav¹ to project onto the dog*” and wanted to buy “*just plain, tasteful dog stuff*” as opposed to a “*diamante chav thing that other people prefer*” (see Appendix 1b). Similarly, Judith felt that other “*sort of people might put bows in their hair or carry them in shopping bags*” but that she “*would never be someone that would put bows in their hair and put little coats and boots on*”. None of our respondents purchased nor aspired to purchase any well-known luxury pet brands (e.g. Chewnel No 5; Chewy Vuiton; Dog Perignon; Pucci etc). The imposition of

human standards on the animal nature (Hirschman 1994) may be seen in Simon's visible anger towards his partner for buying what he felt was a conspicuously coloured collar for DJ – *“Charlotte got him this one ... I wasn't keen on it cause it kind of shows ... I just go for a black one or something that can get lost in his coat colour type of thing but she came back with this blue one, I don't know why she did that...”* (see Appendix 1c).

Similar to Beverland et al.'s (2008) findings regarding intrinsic pet owners and as noted by Szmigin, Carrigan and McEachern (2007) and Roux (2007, 602), our participants were not in “in opposition to everything” associated with the pet marketplace. With regard to purchasing necessities such as food, many participants were interested in premium brands. Alison rationalised her behaviour in this context as pet nutrition was outwith her area of expertise and felt that *“it's important to take advice and give them optimum nutrition”*. Similarly, Millie changed her brand of petfood to a leading premium brand and now buys IAMS as they were *“recommended to me by a vet because they said that the biscuits were good for getting rid of plaque on their teeth”*.

We suggested above that our participants' resistance to luxury products and designer brands may be explained in part by what they feel that these products and brands signify. In this regard it appears that our participants were able to “identify the undesired end state, and ultimately define themselves” via the “formation of distastes – and the associated stereotypes” (see Banister and Hogg 2001, 73; Wilk 1997). For example they defined themselves in opposition to the types of people that competitively ‘show’ their animals. For example, Alison feels that *“people who show any animal ... they've just got that complete, obsessed passion for whichever breed or whichever animal and Patsy is just a pet ... we've got no want or need to show her at all, she is just our family pet”*. Similarly, Mandy says *“It depends if you're bothered about that stuff – that wouldn't mean jack shit to me – absolutely couldn't care less*

– *that’s why – you know if I had a mongrel dog that I thought was a really smashing dog and you could have a champion that wasn’t a very nice dog, you know in terms of personality – it just doesn’t mean anything to me whatsoever*”. In contrast, fun-based shows (e.g. ‘waggiest tail’, ‘gorgeous eyes’ competitions) were deemed acceptable. Here, Gordon’s family laughed as they recalled their pet’s inability to perform to an audience as in “*when he (i.e. Jake) was doing the waggiest tail he sat down and when he was doing the cutest eyes he wouldn’t sit!*”!

Further evidence of the “navigational cues relating to the undesired selves” (see Hogg et al. 2008) can be seen in Nathan’s comments towards those owners who simply buy “*dogs to perpetuate their image of their status*”. Here, he referred to having a chocolate Labrador as “*just like having a Ferrari or a Porsche*”. Further attempts to distance themselves from what Beverland et al. (2008) call extrinsic pet owners and what Cherrier (2008) terms positional consumption is demonstrated by Nathan’s noted pleasure in owning a cross-breed and feeling “*quite pleased that we walk through that estate with obviously something that isn’t anything and a bit scruffy*” (see Appendix 1d). Alison expressed a similar view when she talked about those dog owners that were “*not the usual dog walkers ... the designer ones in their sort of pink Wellingtons and designer outfits n’ the dog looks immaculate* (see Appendix 1e) ... *yeah, very different people*”. As Cherrier argues that the goal of creative consumption is about *being* rather than *displaying what one has*, our findings lend support to Cherrier’s (2008) ‘project identity’ rather than the ‘hero identity’. Our participants cannot be described as ‘political consumers’ keen to effect external change, rather they are best described as ‘creative consumers’, for it is clear that they “no longer acquire, consume and dispose of material objects in response to others’ expectations...[instead they] personalise their consumption lifestyle so as to express and construct their identity” (Cherrier 2008) in ways that allow them to resist positional consumption. This corroborates with Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) notion of covert resistance. However, as Wilk (1997) and Tormey (2007) indicate, these

resistance behaviours (and their associated rejected identities) are difficult to identify as no synchronisation amongst individuals takes place.

Conclusions & Avenues for Future Research

In conjunction with the fact that marketers attempt to generate new and luxurious consumption practices within the pet marketplace (Bolakee 2006, Mosteller, 2008), the consumers in this study are highly aware that “much of the world has become increasingly preoccupied with wealth, shopping and luxury” (Rose and De Jesus 2007, 93; Zavestoski 2002). While many treat their pets to toys and snacks at Christmas, for the most part they resist the products and brands (including designer breeds) associated with luxury consumption. Most importantly, their “individual acts of resistance” (Penaloza and Price 1993, 123) are against the “appearance-based aspects of pet related consumption” which Beverland et al. (2008, 490) suggest are driven by the need for status and distinction and/or domination and control otherwise known as the dark-side of pet ownership. Indeed, these consumers can be best described by Cherrier’s (2008) ‘project identity’ in that they consumed creatively “around subjective and personalised principles” rather than politically seeking socio-cultural change in the marketplace. As our consumers’ acts of resistance are neither vocalised nor actively communicated, this behaviour has yet to be exploited commercially by marketers.

The above discussion offers a unique insight into the socio-cultural practices of resistance among individuals with a range of dog/cat breeds. However, the study is limited in that there is little variation in the socio-demographic profile of the sample. Therefore, future research could address this limitation. A further challenge could be to explore more widely the covert resistant practices identified above, as marketers could face significant financial

losses if they continue to underestimate the impact of consumers' resistance practices in the pet marketplace.

Notes

- [1] Chav is English slang used to describe uneducated and ignorant people; a person from a lower class; or a person with bad taste mainly in reference to dress (e.g. baseball caps and/or famous clothing brands with conspicuous logos) and jewellery (e.g. flashy gold/'bling-bling').

Appendix

1 a) Millie's Bobby and Zeta playing with paper bag



1 b) Mandy's Becca being "plain and tasteful"



1 c) Simon's DJ with his conspicuous blue collar



1 d) Judith and Nathan's "scruffy" collie-cross (Tessa)



1 e) Alison's Patsy looking not so "immaculate"



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Table 1 A Socio-Demographic Profile of Owners & Their Pets

OWNER(S)	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	HOUSEHOLD SIZE	PET TYPE	PET NAME(S)	PET BREED	PET AGE
Sheila	35-44	Married	2 adults 2 children	Cat	Marmelstein	British Short-Hair cross British Short-Hair cross	17
Tom	35-44				Bryan		1
Millie	26-34	Married	2 adults	Cat	Bobby	British Blue	10
					Zeta	Persian-cross	12
					Blanche	Crossbreed	13
Mandy	35-44	Living with partner	2 adults	Dog	Becca	Cocker Spaniel (Blue Roan)	10 mths
Alison	35-44	Married	2 adults 1 child	Dog	Patsy	Labrador	4.5
Judith	35-44	Married	2 adults	Dog	Tessa	Collie-cross	13
Nathan	45-54						
Helen	55-64	Married	2 adults	Cat	Agatha	Abyssinian Blue Crossbreed	12
Stewart	55-64				Brady		2
Simon	45-54	Living with partner	2 adults	Cat	DJ	British Short-Hair cross	14
Jane	35-44	Married	2 adults 2 children	Dog	Jake	Bearded Collie-cross	9
Gordon	35-44						
Claire	45-54	Single	1 adult	Dog	Angus	Standard Poodle	4